

# Holy Wisdom

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Peace: Showing that Others Matter!

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Publication of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America on United Nations Affairs. In fulfilling the UN Mission of SOCA, both Orthodoxy and Ecumenism are involved. SOCA is an NGO associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information. This publication is disseminated to the entire membership of the Church throughout the world on a quarterly basis. Please bring this information to the attention of your parishioners and all those under your care. The Earth is holy and a manifestation of God. Pray for peace and the UN.

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

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## Inside This Issue

Our Work at the United Nations.....	4
The destruction of Eastern Aleppo A photo story .....	4
November Briefing and Notes from October Briefing .....	5
CRNGO Briefing and Business Meeting, Nov 21, 1:15pm-3:15pm .....	33
December Briefing and Notes from November Briefing.....	34
SOCA Representative Joseph Cannizzo works on the following issues for our NGO at the UN. ....	60
Fall Assembly Dinner of the Staten Island Council of Churches .....	61
Monthly CRNGO UN Thematic Business Meeting .....	61
CRNGO Resource Centre role of health NGOs in advancing SDGs #3, #5 .....	62
Portugal's Antonio Guterres elected UN Secretary-General .....	63
Achievements Of Ban Ki-moon , Secretary General United Nations .....	64
Global Issues Overview .....	65
Monthly CRNGO UN Thematic Business Meeting .....	66
2016 in Review: Youth Highlights at the United Nations.....	67
January Briefing and Notes from December Briefing .....	76
Report - Sept 2016 .....	77
Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events .....	79
UN DESA Voice December 2016: Promoting disability rights, Internet governance, International tax cooperation.....	79
Guidance Note Secretary-General-Designate Antonio Guterres.....	81
Remarks by Ambassador Power at a GA Tribute to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, December 12, 2016 .....	82
Remarks by Ambassador Power at SC Stakeout on the Situation in Syria, December 19, 2016 .....	84
Other Related News.....	90
UNICEF Chief Decries Attack on Syrian School .....	90
Was there a deeper network behind the 'Catholic Spring'?.....	90
Christian women in India take steps to address clerical abuse cases.....	92
The power of religion over women in India.....	98
The Future for Christians in the Middle East .....	101
Ransomed: Race to free 226 Christian hostages in Syria.....	109

The Predicament of Egypt’s Copts ..... 110  
November-December 2016 United Nations Academic Impact Newsletter..... 113  
Year in Review..... 113  
Christian persecution watchdog releases 2016 Hall of Shame Report..... 115

## Our Work at the United Nations

### The destruction of Eastern Aleppo A photo story

Lund, Sweden, December 27, 2016

Of course you have seen media images of the destruction in Syria. But not these taken in mid-December when Eastern Aleppo was liberated.

We live in a time when images - real and fake - influence perceptions more than ever.

My photos are real. Documentary. They reflect my role as witness on the spot at a time when only a handful of Westerners were present.

At a time, too, when all the mainstream media were conspicuously absent - as were the dual-purpose White Helmets who have delivered quite a few of the theatrical images from this war.

As a conflict and peace researcher and photographer I take pride in using not only analytical texts but also the medium of photography.

I am anyhow unable to describe just in words what I have seen.

Thanks to modern technology the small, smart, independent and truthful of this world can compete, to some extent, with the multi-billion dollar marketing and propaganda machines.

This is the first of a series to appear in weeks to come that will give you an impression of both life in Damascus, Eastern Aleppo's destruction, the destruction in Aleppo's old town, the human victims of this horrific war on Syria, the celebrations at the liberation of Aleppo etc.

I do not believe that pictures of wars and victims will, in and of themselves, lead people to think of peace. Hiroshima films have done little to eliminate nuclear weapons.

But in this particular case I do believe it is necessary to document just how big, systematic and unjustified the destruction of Aleppo has been - not only for those who built it and lived there over 7000 years but also to humanity, to all of us.

With what right did all the parties contribute to this utterly heartless and meaningless destruction?

How did it come to this surreal level of violence wrought upon a historic cultural and industrial city and its vast majority of innocent fellow human beings?

Will we ever learn - not only that war is stupid but also that this type of destruction cannot conveniently for some be blamed on one single side?

All parties who used violence have blood on their hands.

Aleppo's blood.

This is the first of a series of stories that I must tell as a witness to an event that more intelligent and civilised generations in the future will have nothing but contempt for.

And if you ask me which side I am on, the answer is simple:

I'm on No government's. No military's. No leader's.

I'm on the side of the tens of thousands of innocent, suffering Syrian citizens. Nobody deserves this!

I am on the side of the underlying, perfectly legitimate conflicts and not on the side of anybody's violence.

And I do admit to have a particular problem with those - many - who interfered violently in the internal affairs of Syria and did only harm and no good.

Syria's future is for the Syrians - all of them - to decide.

[Photo Story: The Destruction of Eastern Aleppo, Syria December 2016](#)

Further information on Syria may be found in section 5

[November Briefing and Notes from October Briefing](#)

17 January 2017 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

Panel Discussion: Education for Global Citizenship: Religious, Spiritual and Ethical Moorings

- **Carl Murrell, Principal Representative, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States United Nations Office**
  - Introduction of Speakers
- **Dr. Catherine A. Honeyman, Managing Director of Ishya Consulting and Visiting Scholar at Duke University's Center for International Development**
  - Speaking from a professional perspective as a researcher for education in developing countries; also speaking from personal and spiritual perspective as a Baha'i
  - Three topics would like to address: the rise of a global movement for moral empowerment; the exploration of human purpose; service as a role in quality education
  - Current education includes reading, writing, geography and a push for science and math; these are taught in schools without religion as a source of knowledge
  - Students learn about human rights, etc. but by and large religion and spirituality are not taught in formal schooling; those convinced that religion is superstition are happy to keep it this way
  - There is growing agreement that the ethical treatment of others must be addressed in the general school curriculum

- Education is focused on access with some focus on quality; but there is nothing of what should be learned other than literacy and life skills, etc.
- Target 7 of SDG 4 includes global citizenship for sustainable development – this is unprecedented; amounts to an agenda that includes moral security by 2030
- Youth need to be empowered to uphold human rights, gender equality, skills to promote peace and mitigate forms of violence they see; they need to see themselves as global citizens
- Questions that remain: How much attention will Target 7 receive? How much do we really know about how to build these capabilities in our youth? Is moral empowerment a form that should be integrated and how can that be accomplished?
- At the core of such an endeavor is two spiritual concepts: purpose and service
- Children are told they must learn to read to pass to the next grade; they must earn a diploma to attend college and get a good job; but the goals of obtaining power and making money are empty statuses; it's no wonder they don't seem motivated in school
- We pay teachers according to what we think their purpose is
- Many holy writings speak to the purpose of life as glorifying God - to fully develop our potential; *“Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”* – From the Baha’i Writings; *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”* – From Christianity
- How much more significant it would be for our young people to link their learning to their purpose; what if they were to see themselves with spiritual capacity; would this not give them a deeper sense of purpose?
- Giving of oneself is seen as a core human characteristic
- We are told to *“be anxiously concerned with the day and age ye live in...”* – Baha’i Writings
- The purpose of the candle is to give light and it weeps its life away drop by drop; the purpose of water is to give itself away and then be refilled; if we do not give and serve others, we are lifeless. By serving others, we also give; we find purpose in our lives and we grow
- Questions to consider for community discussion:
  1. A major reason why many formal education systems take a secular approach is the desire to safeguard religious freedoms for a potentially diverse student body. Are there ways to give greater spiritual and ethical moorings to formal education while still ensuring freedom of belief?
  2. How could an ongoing exploration of the source and purpose of human life, integrated throughout the curriculum, impact the educational experience?

3. What effects would an orientation of service towards others, integrated throughout the curriculum, have on teachers and students?
4. What other spiritual and moral concepts, beyond purpose and service, do you think should be at the core of our educational systems?
5. What would it look like to integrate these and other profound spiritual considerations fully into all aspects of a curriculum? Have you seen such a spiritually integrated education system in practice?

- **Dr. Jeffrey Haynes, Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion, Conflict and Cooperation at London Metropolitan University**

- Would like to talk about political problems related to global citizenship and the role of governments and states in both aiding and developing a global ethos
- How do we get from where we are today to where we would like to be for humanity's survival?
- There are a great deal of commonalities between nations but that isn't always helping us in creating common goals with one another
- Globalization over the past 20-30 years, is a good example. The UK has been a member of the EU for 50-65 years; the EU has grown into 27 countries; ethos came from a Christian foundation – in order to avoid war, you have to work together
- The EU is a major political group and also a civilization group; EU seems disuniting on economic growth; now the UK is about to leave (Brexit)
- We need to learn to develop characteristics that help us learn to live together
- Strongly applaud the SDG's, but , how do we develop a global citizenship ethos as we are divided politically?
- National interest concerns take paramount right now; the ideals and desires to develop a common citizenship are likely to be overridden by the self interest goals of states
- The history books are being re-written; not sure that working towards common goals is going to be a powerful thing on Agenda 2030; climate change, for example, is going to be a key issue – we're seeing very little work addressed towards global concerns

- **Questions:**

- *How would you define global citizenship?*

**Jeff:** At the very least it's a sense of belonging to a broader community and sense of a common humanity.

**Catie:** In addition, it's emphasizing interconnectedness between local, national and global; having core capabilities including being informed and critically literate; ethically responsible and engaged

- *How do we reconcile some of the issues at the UN (LGBT, for example) and incorporate that kind of discussion stopping issue when there is just no agreement?*

**Catie:** If we were to introduce the question of who we are and what is our proper relationship to others and turn it into a moral responsibility to the other, it gives a basis for conversations about what global citizenship means and beliefs about how our behavior should be, even though we have different religious beliefs.

- *How do we explain global citizenship to a citizen who is trying to get a good education and job?*

**Catie:** The question about purpose is a common question not addressed in schools. It's possible to address these – What is justice? Why is honesty important? These are not too complex to address. It's more challenging to address with policy makers than with average citizens.

**Jeff:** People are beset by multiple concerns; how we prioritize and privilege our ideas in the face of counter ideas is the key problem we face

- *There are privatized faith-based schools so spiritually can be taught without government restrictions. Do you agree with this approach?*

**Catie:** It's so important to continue our religious discourse and not limit it to the political. Need to have profound spiritual questions that lead to a profound spiritual conversation that goes into the core of our beliefs.

- *Regarding helping college students learn what citizenship is from the very local (town, city-how politics is structured and what religion may have to do with that) - What might be the potential of US based models of combining service (for example, AmeriCorp)?*

**Catie:** It's a question of gathering together cases that deeply show how spirituality is being integrated into formal education and showcases the diversity of beliefs behind it. Find those examples and explain to the world how the integration has been done. We currently don't have that much research from a multi-diverse perspective.

**Jeff:** The problem is that there is no definitive voice; there are many voices. How do we come up with a model with a universal focus and dimension?

- **Comments:**

- Global citizenship belongs more to political discourse than religious discourse; from being to becoming to belonging, the notions come into clash; the notion of Brexit speaks to an anti-globalism that is happening around the world
- We need to be looking at the targets and saying what is our part in that? Awareness to advocacy to action is what we need to do – Think locally and act globally
- We can reach millions of people in the world, but how can we connect? Are we using technology to be more connected, or are we more far away from each other?



- Grew up with the philosophy of negritude – developed in the 20's and of interest to African diaspora for the well-being and understanding of where we can from; understanding the common good from our ancestors
- There are similarities between faith-based organizations – it's the same ultimate truth, which is service to people in need; religious leaders can set an example for others to follow
- Questions to consider: What kind of civic engagement is needed in our schools? How do you address multiple allegiances? Allegiances is critical to the work of CRNGO@UN – allegiance to those we are engaged in work with and allegiance to God

Committee Meeting Notes:

- Registrants:
  - Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church – President of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
  - Alfred Lindberg, WFUNA
  - Celine Paramunda, Medical Mission Sisters
  - Eileen Reilly, School Sisters of Notre Dame
  - Cecilia O'Dwyer, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary
  - Justine Gitanjali Senapati, Congregations of St. Joseph
  - Victoria Edmonds, The Salvation Army
  - Margo LaZaro, NGO CSD-NY, Huairou Commission, ICW
  - Doyeon Park, Won Buddhism
  - Beth Begley, Pax Christi International
  - Julia Gooding, Woodenfish Foundation
  - Celia Liu, Woodenfish Foundation
  - Rebecca Rios-Kohn, Arigatou International
  - Beth Blissman, Loretto Community
  - Bernadette Wall, GRAIL
  - Janet T. Stovin, WUPJ
  - Laxmi Shah, Temple of Understanding

- Swami Parameshananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Rabbi Roger Ross, United Religions Initiative (URI-UN)
- Joni Carley, CSVGCNY

**Membership:**

- To become a member of CRNGO@UN, please contact Beth Begley, Treasurer, at paxchristiunny@gmail.com for a membership form.
- CRNGO members may also wish to become members of the NGO Committee on Learning and Literacy and Coalition for Global Citizenship 2030

**Upcoming Briefings:**

- February 21 – Religion, Reconciliation and Forgiveness
- March 15 – Religion & Gender Equality: SDG 5
- April 18 – Religion & SDG 16: Justice, Peace, and Strong Institutions
- May 16 – Religion, Ecology and Environmental Justice
- June 20 – Annual Luncheon Meeting – by the March meeting we will have announcements from the Nominating Committee

**Interfaith Harmony Week:**

- We need volunteers who will be part of the Committee to plan an event during Interfaith Harmony Week.
  - Volunteers:
    - Carl Murrell – will lead the Committee
    - Christina Wright
    - Dionne Boissiere
    - Swami Parameshananda
    - Farida Ali
    - Bernadette Wall
    - Celia Liu
    - Julia Gooding
    - Joni Carley

- Roger Ross
- Monica Willard
- Deborah Moldow

**Third Symposium: Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Peace:**

- We are co-sponsoring this event on January 23, 2017 from 9:00am-5:45pm at the UN Headquarters, Conference Room 11. The event is full, but there is a wait list. To add your name to the waitlist, visit the Eventbrite page: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/symposium-just-inclusive-and-sustainable-peace-registration-30244911344>

**Treasurer's Report:**

- We have one new membership in the last month
- Currently there are 38 NGO's as members

**Request for Membership Feedback:**

- How do the Committee members like what we are doing this year? What can/should we be doing differently? Please write to [religiousngo@gmail.com](mailto:religiousngo@gmail.com) with your feedback.

16 December 2016 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

Panel Discussion: *Religion & Human Rights: In Celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

- Swami Parameshananda, UN Representative, Bharat Sevashram Sangha
  - Thank you to Rev. Farida Ali for her assistance in helping to plan the briefing and to Major Victoria Edmonds for bringing refreshments.
  - Anything that comes our way just brings us closer to the God we believe in. When we do things, we shouldn't think we are doing it for ourselves, but rather we are doing it for others. Thanks to individuals such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ghandi for all they have done.
- Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG) | High Level Global Independent Advocate
  - Work is in the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children
  - UNICEF has been sending many messages talking about all of the children being affected by the war and evacuations in Aleppo

- Every day is an opportunity to make a difference and make the world better
- This year has been an important year - we are celebrating 10 years!
- Most of the time the same child is affected by multiple forms of violence and it affects the way they view others and their relationships with others
- Study presents a number of ideas, including that all states should have legislation that ill-treating a child is unacceptable
- There is an interfaith declaration which recognizes the sanctity of all children and the role religion can play on the development of the child; tension and conflict can be dealt with through a model of respect and mutual understanding
- The declaration reminds us that there is no religious script that says violence against children is acceptable. In Islam, nothing apparent may award his or her child better than a good upbringing and violence is not a part of that
- We need to encourage religious communities to cooperate amongst themselves. Three things they can do:
  - build capacity for all churches to promote the exploitation of children
  - promote child friendly churches
  - churches can consult with children
- Call from Kyoto declaration - we use religious days to promote positive attitudes to our children
- New global development agenda 2030 - for the first time we saw the recognition of violence against children as a major thing that needs to be prevented.
- This problem is global and knows no borders. The most recent study was issued in the Philippines. The survey was conducted amongst young people. The majority of violence happens in the home. We see that repeated over and over again throughout the world. Because it happens in the privacy of the home and something seen as disciplining children, it isn't seen as a large problem
- The large majority of families use non-violent disciplinary practices. The totality of families surveyed say they don't want to use corporeal punishment, but don't know what to use instead as an alternative
- Sexual abuse - the use of the internet, mobile phones, etc. are used to take advantage of and exploit children. There is a change in the values that have led us for years
- What does bullying mean to you - 2/3 said they have been victims in the past; many say it happens because adults don't see it; they confess to a friend, but not an adult. They are fearful

- Religious communities have an influential capacity which can bring the support of people to break the silence surrounding violence against children
- There are deeply rooted social conventions. We need to work for change to come from within. Laws are not enough, because they are not followed. We need to overcome false perceptions and educate families. We also need to introduce practices of what positive discipline is
- Pope Francis gave a call to the international community that we all need to ensure the right of every child to grow up serene and with confidence in the future
- There are so many children who feel alone and abandoned. They are displaced and then seen as a danger to their new society. What kind of messages are we transmitting to these children?
- High Time to End Violence Against Children movement - recognizes that not only states, governments and organizations are working on this issue, there are individuals, athletes, celebrities, etc. who can join us.
- Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn J.D., Director, Arigatou International New York Office and Leader of Prayer and Action for Children
  - In work at Arigatou, they are inspired by faith leaders and secular experts to improve the situation of children. But, there is so much work to do, it feels overwhelming
  - The Convention on the Rights of the Child is 27 yrs old!
  - How can we work together? How can we get involved regardless of our work agenda? We can join, even in a small way
  - All human beings are born free and deserving of equal rights. We are still battling the same war. Today it is more crucial than ever for NGOs that are faith based to take on more of these issues. It was not like this 20 years ago. There was not as much interest or belief that religious orgs could do much, but now they are viewed as critical to achieving the SDGs
  - Arigatou is an international faith based organization dedicated to creating peace and a world better for children. They established 4 initiatives: global network of religions for children, the prayer and action for children, ethics education for children and ending child poverty
  - As reported by the global partnership to end violence against children, there is overwhelming data of children living in war torn countries that indicates we aren't doing enough; we need to do more and we need to get faith based organizations involved
  - Interfaith dialogue is taboo in some places
  - Arigatou brought together an eager group of people to tackle this issue. Many are from Columbia and had their own horrific experiences as children
  - Arigatou tries to bring the messages to the community level

- Kyoto declaration - we need to revive this document. What can be done in terms of action?
- Mr. Rick Chavolla, Educational Consultant | Board Chair for the American Indian Community House of New York (AICH)
  - Offer blessings to elders and ancestors for guiding our lives
  - Will go to Standing Rock in late January once the Presidency changes over
  - Always ambivalent when speaking with religious organizations; historically they have been very supportive in our life here on Earth, but the first encounters weren't so good. There were doctrines imposed and indigenous persons were viewed as less than human. Struggle comes up to modern times. Boarding schools were nothing short of horrendous and violence occurred. They were designed from the very beginning to create an atmosphere of assimilation. Many have had to deal with displacement, territorial displacement, forced adoptions and it's something that hasn't been fully recognized in the U.S.
  - Other examples such as the colonial states of California – Father Junipero Serra canonization
  - This isn't a condemnation of the work of religious NGOs who have worked closely with indigenous persons. But, there is still room for more collaborative work to be done
  - Oftentimes, as indigenous persons, we have unfortunate circumstances with housing, education, etc. Have the highest community violence and suicide rates
  - There are indigenous persons who serve at the UN, but there is no Nation for indigenous persons at the UN
  - In Article 18 it says everyone has a right to religion, but our spiritual existence is denied everyday. It's not just about prayer and ways in which we worship. Every step of every day is part of our spiritual existence. We need to have a certain amount of freedom and sovereignty to do that
  - Standing Rock - most of how we understand our own rights is that they're fundamental. The existence of sovereignty. Standing Rock is a confluence of all those things. It has brought hundreds of native states together; we have to demand and expect that people will honor their relationship with land, water and sky - Mother Earth - who we believe is living. Our identity needs to be recognized by all, not just by us. It isn't just our land, it's for all of us. So, we all have to make sure it is protected
  - Prayer - this is the first act we do when we're at Standing Rock
- Comments:
  - We don't have to leave the lessons of structured religion
  - There is a need to teach morality in schools and to include parents in that discussion

- There are a number of religious bodies that have entered acts of repentance. One is the United Methodist Church. Organizing a meeting in February 2017 for the Jubilee of the 100 years of the subjugation of the Suomi people
- The biggest response from the religious right in the U.S. is that the main rights of the child belong to the parents and not the child. The building up of the moral agency of every human being needs to be empowered to recognize those same rights in every person
- Human rights is humanity's response to the divine gift
- Questions:
  - *For this group, what are the expectations of us? Actions you would want from this group?*

**Rick:** Whatever sphere we are in and feel we have some influence and voice, we should bring attention to these issues we have discussed. We need to remove the Doctrine of Discovery from the Catholic Church. The day to day work we are doing to improve housing and education should remind everyone that indigenous persons are in challenging situations. At the center of education for us, is morality. Now a new educational system has been imposed on us that we have to survive in. It is hard to retain the education system we started with.

- *What methods do you use to communicate with children?*

**Martha:** Communicating with children is something they really expect from us. They want to tell their stories and be listened to. We need to learn how to create the environment they need. If you want to help the child, help the family together. Drama is used; blogs; discussion and role of schools where parents, teachers and students are engaged in a reflection that helps each group feel they can be part of the solution. The role of schools and the role of legislation - We have seen the law being used to create capacity building experiences to explain the psychological affect of corporeal punishment.

- *As you try and take this important project to the point of implementation, how are you working with religious organizations to declare that corporeal punishment is a form of violence against children?*

**Martha:** There is little knowledge of the data/studies. How can we make sure we give to all countries the gathering of the data, the tools to analyze it and helping them put it into practice? What has been encouraging is that it isn't only the data people like to look into, but it provokes a response to join hands and do something against it. Departments of government are working with civil society and faith based organizations are also getting involved. In July there will be a high level forum.

**Rebecca:** We address this with faith based communities and bring as much evidence of the scope of the magnitude of the problem. But, it's an ongoing dialogue to convince people it should end. It's a challenging issue. We bring academics and faith based organizations together to address things like positive parenting so a different picture can be presented. There is a wonderful methodology called Learning to Live Together (UNESCO and UNICEF) which teaches how to respect each other and speak with others who are different, speak with empathy, and includes ethical values inherent in many religions. It's being introduced in schools globally.

Committee Meeting Notes:

- Registrants:
  - Ulf Aberg
  - Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista
  - Beth Begley
  - Raj Bhushan
  - Veronica Brand
  - Roberta Brangam
  - Jin Chacko
  - Robert Cohen
  - Kay Dundorf
  - Iman Habib
  - Anele Heiges
  - Karam Jai chan
  - Richard Jordan
  - Dr. Abraham Joseph
  - Erik Larson
  - Mahesh Persaud
  - Lila Prounis
  - Ricknauth Ramsingh
  - Rabbi Roger Ross
  - Gitanjali Senapati
  - Rev. Scott Stearman
  - Dileepkumar Thankappan
  - Alison Van Dyk
  - Ellen Weiss
- Event Save the Date:



- 23 January 2017 will be the Third Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs. The thematic focus is Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Peace. Program details and information on how to register are forthcoming.
- Membership:
  - To become a member of CRNGO@UN, please contact Beth Begley, Treasurer, at paxchristiunny@gmail.com for a membership form.

21 November 2016 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

*Panel Discussion: Religion and Difficult Topics: Briefing on Challenges to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance & Discrimination Based On Religion or Belief*

- **Rev. Scott Stearman, Ph.D., Pastor, Metro Baptist Church and Liaison for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship**
  - Developed a course on the pros and cons on God. Then later did a follow-up class on the pros and cons of religion. Is religion a good thing or not? It was fascinating to contrast the visceral reaction of students with the good and bad things happening in the world.
- **Mr. Michael De Dora, Director, Office of Public Policy, Center for Inquiry and Main Representative to the United Nations, President, NGO Committee for Freedom of Religion and Belief**
  - One of the first committees got involved with was Freedom of Religion and Belief. Offered to do a lot of tasks and worked way up to being President of the Committee.
  - This topic is big!
  - The first global statement was on universal declaration. It doesn't create a legal basis, it creates a moral basis. All individuals are free and should interact in a spirit of brotherhood.
  - The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) treaty prohibits religious discrimination.
  - The UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief is of fundamental importance. It spells out a comprehensive list of the range of human activity that is protected. Nothing is said in the Declaration to overturn anything stated in ICCPR.

- There is a massive gap between what we see on paper verses in the world. People are still living in areas with religious restriction laws. One of the biggest challenges is the misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of what freedom of religion or belief is. One of the biggest debates is that freedom of expression extends rights to express and defend beliefs.
- Clearly there is a lack of respect for guidelines at the international level. There are different cultural views of what it is/should be. The affect that society creates can help to lead to structures where its used as a pawn in a political gain. Creating a civil society space to counteract that narrative of violent non-extremism is important. But, they aren't being created.
- Another challenge is that there's no enforcement mechanism. Only member states are pressured to call out other member states. But, there isn't a space for civil society organizations to engage in creating that pressure. And member states don't always want to call each other out because of political interests, etc.
- It's not a mainstream human rights issue. It's left to religious organizations because their organizations are being violated by the government.
- The UN Declaration makes efforts to advance freedom.
- **Ms. Christen Brocker, Associate Director AJC and Director of Research, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights**
  - There are enforcement mechanisms at the UN for making the UN Declaration a reality. In the human rights realm, the resolutions that have been adopted are a statement of member states to respect freedom of religion or belief. There are UN Special Rapporteurs.
  - We have become paralyzed being able to promote and combat religious intolerance. In the General Assembly, there are dueling resolutions to combat religious intolerance and freedom of religion or belief. The original refers back to a 1981 declaration. But, the member states deal with this issue in very different ways. There are tools available to help, but they are not always used. What isn't being criminalized is insults and that has been an issue.
  - There was a report on Pakistan that singled out the blasphemy laws against the Ahmadis. Pakistan reacted to it saying that the international community doesn't do enough to promote the discrimination of Muslims. In 1999, at the urging of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Pakistan brought before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights a resolution entitled "Defamation of Islam". The Commission accepted the proposal, and changed the title of the resolution to "Defamation of Religions".
  - After the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005, more resolutions were adopted that include the criminalization of insults to faith. The problem is not that there isn't law, it's the fact that the law isn't being implemented.

- The Defamation of Religions resolution came to a head in 2011 and a new treaty was agreed by all for Combating Religious Intolerance. There are annual implementation meetings which sends a message of common commitment.
- Maybe we've hit a threshold at the UN and need to find other spaces outside.
- **Comments:**
  - We try to go through the government system, but by the time it filters down, more problems are created in the process. We need to work with local authorities to help resolve issues.
  - The protection of these resolutions is not to protect the religions; it's to protect the individuals who practice religion. It's when religion is married to national identity that tensions are created.
  - There are strategies to close the gap and it requires a complex way of thinking. Tried to engage in conversations to create a unified front. Can we put pressure on the UN to put pressure on the governments? But, the problem is the major division that exists. We should continue to build coalitions to stand against what governments are trying to do.
  - Responses are shaped by what you believe. There needs to be a way to include a common language that everyone can use.
  - We are very intellectual about something that is very emotional.
- **Questions:**
  - *What/How was the threshold to violence defined?*

The Rabat Plan of Action is a non-binding document and it does include extra guidance on violence.

- *In terms of strategy, what relationship do you see with the corporate world?*

Have noticed in a lot of foreign diplomacy that freedom of religion is not a high priority (looking at economics, trade and counter-terrorism). We face challenges promoting the relationship of freedom of religion or belief to societal flourishing. It's incredible to see what corporations are concerned about that they weren't before.

- *How do you move forward when you don't agree and butt heads?*

Whether you belong to a religious or a non-religious community, there is still a small expectation of how you should treat someone with respect.

#### Committee Meeting Notes:

- Roll Call:
  - Rabbi Roger Ross, United Religions Initiative (URI-UN)

- Swami Parameshananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
  - Chavie Sharfman, Independent
  - Anele Heiges, International Public Policy Institute
  - Veronica Brand, Religious and Sacred Heart of Mary
  - Iman Habib, Religious and Sacred Heart of Mary
  - Jin Chacko, Syrian Orthodox Church of America
  - Deyanira Garcia, UNANIMA International
  - Julie Colton, Ids Charities
  - Dave Colton, Ids Charities
  - Daniel Hoffman, Philadelphia Ethical Society
  - John A. Wagner, International Humanist and Ethical Union
  - Ellen Fawer, Jewish Women International
  - Michael Gottsegen, Temple of Understanding
  - Rev. Fardia Ali, All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
  - Christian Broecker, Jacob Blaustein Institute
  - Rev. Scott Stearman, Kirkwood Baptist Church
  - Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church – President of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
  - Christina Wright, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States – Aide to the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Event Save the Date:
    - **23 January 2017** will be the **Third Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs**. The thematic focus is Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Peace. Program details and information on how to register are forthcoming.
  - Membership:
    - To become a member of CRNGO@UN, please contact Beth Begley, Treasurer, at [paxchristiunny@gmail.com](mailto:paxchristiunny@gmail.com) for a membership form.

18 October 2016 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

Panel Discussion: In the Name of Religion: How is Religion and Sacred Texts Co-opted and Instrumentalized in Acts of Violence, Including Terrorism?

- Rev. Dr. Liberato C. Bautista, President, CRNGO@UN; Main Representative, Church and Society—The United Methodist Church
  - Introduced the discussion with background on the topic.
  - What do we do when “sacred text” fosters hatred and violence?
  - Governments at all levels cannot afford to be in silo. We need global institutions and mechanisms (multilateralism) looking at global solutions. But, we also need interrelations of people, not just of governments and institutions.
  - Religious texts are instrumentalized towards violence. What happens then to the role of religions and values?
  - Our frustrations are going to be increasingly stated when it is life that is sacrificed. A third entity that is crucial in social dynamic is people! It has to be a triad among religion, state and people.
- Rev. Farida Ali, Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau; Principal Representative, All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA) to the United Nations; President Emerita, Islamic Heritage Society, New York; Honorary President, Religions for Peace
  - The UN is as strong or as weak as the member states want it to be. Then there is the part of the people at the local level. How do we break the barriers to empower them?
  - We have learned how to exist in this world by walking a parallel path.
  - Poverty and lack of education are causes of violence and extreme terrorism. These are other bridges we need to build.
  - Introduced the panelists.
- Mr. Leon Siu, Hawai’ian, diplomat, musician, recording artist, composer, teacher, analyst, & activist
  - Serves as minister of foreign affairs for the Hawaiian Kingdom.
  - It’s been a long battle for the past 122 years since the U.S. acted to take over the country. We are facing some big challenges, but doing quite well in gaining traction in the public arena.
  - Doctrine of Discovery/Papal Bulls - In the 15th century as explorers went into Europe they requested several edicts by the Pope, to gain support for what they needed to do to discover countries and use these countries resources. Series of edicts granted explorers to appropriate land as if they were empty. Basically, if you're not a Christian, you're not a person. Papal bulls started to give license to take over countries and nations and peoples and to subject them to their will. Papals considered the natives of these countries to be sub-humans that have no right to the land. To native people it was

a matter of stewardship and exploitation of resources. At the root, it was the scriptures and edicts by Rome that promoted greed on the part of those able to claim rule and dominion over the lands and exploit and take everything they could. Decided in many cases to commit genocide. This process was so vicious and repulsive that many who participated in it ended up writing letters of protest. This process happened in America, Africa and parts of Asia. The only thing standing in their way were the people, so they were either eliminated or subjected and subdued.

- This history is documented but often forgotten. In recent years, among indigenous peoples, there has been a movement to look at these edicts and get the Vatican to admit they were misappropriated and misapplied and caused much bloodshed and death amongst populations. They have asked the Vatican to acknowledge what occurred, take responsibility for it and apologize. But, the Vatican has been resistant. Their response is “We don't do that anymore so let's move on.” But, this past May there was an indication that they may want to sit down and talk about this. A group traveled to meet with the Pope and they had a major breakthrough.
- These types of incidences are not just part of history, however, they are also happening in a new form in the present day. It's not as overtly violent, but we still see people continuing milder practices. It's still embedded in the trade society that has moved throughout the world. Power and trade are more important and it has created a modern day extension of the doctrine of discovery. Transnational corporations actually have dominion and they think it gives them justification to move into a new space.
- The northwestern Hawaiian Islands have been moved into. For example, President Obama issued a Presidential order to take over the marine resources claiming that the U.S. federal government knows how to better use them. Corporations and governments think they can secure resources for the betterment of the wider population. A lot has to do with a religious excuse used to misapply the taking of lands.
- We should be horrified by the actions of ISIS, but we should apply that same reaction to what else is happening under a legal cover from the international community.
- Ms. R. Evon Idahosa, Esq., Barrister | Founder & Executive Director, Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Co-Founder, Bring Back our Girls, NYC
  - Had been a lawyer for 14 years. Started feeling more urgency about what was happening to women's bodies in the US. One out of three women have been affected by violence. Started a non-profit organization and now works with survivors of women and girls who have been affected by violence.
  - Nigeria is a country split equally between women and men and it's 90 percent religious. The implication is that religion plays a large role in Nigerian society. Organization work with faith based partners as their work reflects the work they do. Congregations put their faith blindly in leaders. It's important we work with them because they can amplify the work we do.

- Doesn't consider justice work as part of the work we should be doing. We're living in a society where religion has been used to inflict violence against women and girls. Boko Haram is the most violent terrorist group that has ever existed. They consider Western education simple and their two aims are to eradicate Nigeria from western ideas and eliminate the Islamic State. They've killed over 20,000 people and displaced over 2 million. Became most widely known in 2014 when they kidnapped 276 school girls which created international outrage. They claimed that Allah told them to sell the children and then strap with bombs to force them to go. Many were sold into child marriage, many were stoned and many were forced to convert. Modern Muslims say they disapprove of these practices.
- There are other parts of Nigeria where religion is being used to cause violence and damage to women and girls. Marital rape is not illegal in Nigeria, because women are considered property, based on their biblical interpretation. They say that a dowry implies ownership and there is legal backing of assault in the country's penal codes. Child marriage is practiced and is based on specific passages of the Quran.
- Working with several other NGO's to get the laws to change. An equal rights bill was brought to the Senate, but it was rejected. They claim that we are trying to impose Western ideas, but the response is No, these are fundamental human rights!

\* *dowry - true intention is that the bridegroom is committing to take care of his wife.*

- Mr. Muhammad Rafi-ud-din Shah, Team Leader and Senior Political Officer, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
  - Having worked in the army in Pakistan and at the UN, can share what is being done to tackle terrorism.
  - All of modern society has started to look at religion in different ways. Terrorism and violent extremism is one of the most serious threats and challenges of our time. People who have lived together for centuries are now looking at one another differently and being treated differently. The very core of the approach is drawn by terrorism and violent extremism.
  - Geographically - Middle East and Africa - material changes bring about political changes. The 911 attacks led to new political thinking in the U.S. The Iraq War also resulted in people there starting to think differently. When the Soviet Union came to Afghanistan, they started looking at warfare with the prism of religion.
  - There are push and pull factors – Individuals are pulled towards terrorist actions and there are individuals pushing them to be soldiers. Two of the big issues that need to be addressed are poverty and lack of education. The foot soldiers are less educated and come from poor classes, while the leaders come from middle classes.
  - We should not ignore there are places in the world where people, particularly youth, cannot express themselves. Freedom of expression is restrained and it creates

conditions conducive to terrorism. Lack of education, respect of human rights, etc. play a very important role.

- Without discussing religious ideology, you can't talk about the push-pull factor. Thinking about religion without spirituality - religion can't exist!
  - What is the UN doing to address this? The General Assembly adopted the following strategies unanimously:
    1. conditions that lead to terrorism
    2. conditions related to prevention
    3. capacity building
    4. respect or human rights and law
      - Need to give voice to youth and address them. Also, can't ignore gender issues.
      - Create more education that can give an individual skill sets in the global economy.
      - Communications strategies - how should we communicate and be sensitive to others?
      - The UN has tried to look at whole issue of terrorism and violent extremism in a comprehensive way that is strongly supported by Security Council. A combination of factors who help promote law enforcement where we respect rule of law is needed.
      - We have succeeded and not succeeded. Have been working on this issue for the last 10 years. Now people are looking into a more comprehensive approach.
- Questions:
    - *Recent news accounts of Obama's decision said it was protecting the marine land. Can you please clarify your earlier comment?*

Mr. Siu: It's great to protect it, but our people were already taking care of it. It needs protection because of misuse from corporations, politicians, etc. We see it as another encroachment from the government because they never asked us what we thought. It's another example of an outside force taking over and saying that they can do it better. If we were in charge, we would kick the military out.

- *Do you think the sacred text was destined to be warped after being viewed as religious documents for so many centuries?*

Ms. Idahosa: Part of the beauty of God's creation is that we get to choose and it is inevitable that people will interpret sacred text differently, primarily because of control and power. It's a shame that people have taken advantage of it, because people suffer as a result.

- *Are texts becoming a tool, rather than an object to bring people towards God? In the absence of a prophet we all become a prophet in how we look at them. Have we created our own form of idolatry.*



Mr. Rafi-ud-din Shah: Most of the time, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, etc. tries to pick a part of the scripture free of its full context. In Syria, when we were monitoring terrorist actions, many of the foot soldiers were using the Quran without a basic knowledge of it. They created six established schools of thought and said the schools will have exhaustive books on legal aspects. Groups came in and said they wouldn't accept any one of them. In the 18th Century, with new movements in the Middle East, their people started this approach. If the context is there, the answer will be different.

- *What is the strategic approach to intervene? How do you decide on what interventions to take on cultural change?*

Ms. Idahosa: For us, in the context of Nigeria and West African culture, a major way we attempt to get cultural change is to get people to realize we are all connected. A lot of focus is on men and boys and changing the way they view women and girls. One of the platforms helps men to understand that anytime you inappropriately touch women you give permission to let others do that to your mother or sister. Also, we're very specific in targeting community leaders because they have such a big level of influence in Nigerian societies. Also need to create a sense of ownership. Youth are feeling marginalized and that created a vacuum with Boko Haram in 2002 (at the time there were 3.5 unemployed youth). Now working with survivors of violence and allowing them to create their own rehabilitation plan.

- *Regarding terrorist groups: What about the governments when they break human rights? The U.S. government broke human rights after 911 through allowing torture, discrimination to Muslims, etc. to occur. How do you bring accountability to governments and how do you prevent them from violating the rights of other people?*

Mr. Rafi-ud-din Shah: This is a very difficult process. The UN is based on 193 member states with voting rights. The Security Council and General Assembly try to push governments that don't abide by rules of law to do so. It's a critical platform. When you are dealing with dictators and corrupt governments, there is no end to what they do.

- *Regarding religious extremism and youth empowerment - Can you speak to this?*

Mr. Rafi-ud-din Shah: Need to give advice to the youth and give them a sense of community; an environment where they can express themselves. Recent research shows most of the foot soldiers were recruited through small social groups, not the internet.

Mr. Siu: There are mitigating factors. A lot of good has come out of the principles of our religions. But, individuals have cherry picked what they could use to justify their actions. Most was done for commercial purposes and that is what we face today. The reality today is that even governments are being manipulated by corporations.

#### Committee Meeting Notes:

##### Roll Call:

- Swami Parameshananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Maj. Victoria Edmonds, The Salvation Army - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Lila Prounis, Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council

- Alison VanDyk , Temple Of Understanding
- Grove Harris, Temple of Understanding
- Kusumita Pedersen, Interfaith Center of New York, Parliament of the World's Religions
- Rev. Scott Stearman, Kirkwood Baptist Church
- Shekufeh Zonji, FEZANA
- Anele Heiges, International Public Policy Institute
- Rev. Dionne Boissiere, Church Center for the United Nations - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Beth Begley, Pax Christi International – Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Rev. Fardia Ali, All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church – President of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Christina Wright, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States – Aide to the CRNGO@UN Bureau

#### Calendar of Substantive Briefings:

- The Bureau has rearranged the way the work of the Committee as a whole and its Bureau is done. . The first portion of the meeting is devoted to a substantive briefing. The next 8 months of programming has been decided so all members can know in advance what is coming down the pipeline.
- Looking for collaborators to assist with the briefings. If you want to participate, please volunteer by approaching the lead organizers.
- The Dec 20 briefing was moved to Dec 16
- The next briefing is: *Religion and Difficult Topics: Briefing on Challenges to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance & Discrimination Based On Religion or Belief*
- It would be great if we can secure space at The Salvation Army, the Church Center and the Baha'i International Community to rotate locations for the briefings/meetings -- Victoria to check on SA availability and Christina to check on BIC availability

#### Treasurer's Report:

- There is a negotiation in progress for a nuclear ban treaty. If it passes, there will be an opportunity for CRNGO to participate meaningfully. A subcommittee is currently working on an interfaith statement.

#### Membership Report:

- 6 new members signed up today

#### Other Upcoming Events:

- Next week there is an event titled: Roots of Change: Food Sovereignty, Women & Eco-Justice hosted by The Temple of Understanding. The event will include a panel and screening of a 10 min video which they are hoping will be a starting piece for conversation.

#### Livestream of Briefings/Meetings:

- There were two livestreams of the briefing; one generated 97 views and the other generated 237 views for a total of 334 people watching online.
- It would be great to upload the livestream to our website.

#### 29 September 2016 – General Meeting Notes

#### Welcome and Moment of Silence

#### Roll Call:

- Dr. Abraham Joseph, Senior International Advisor at Public Service Institute, University of Oklahoma – currently focusing on SDGs in Education, Health and Disaster Risk Prevention
- Rev. Fardia Ali, Principal Representative of the All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA) to the United Nations - currently focusing on preventing war between India and Pakistan
- Rev. Scott Stearman, Senior Pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church and serves as a presence for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Baptist World Alliance at the United Nations
- Clifford Polly, The United Methodist Church, UN & International Affairs – provides admin support to Levi Bautista
- Swami Parameshananda, United Nations NGO Representative, Bharat Sevashram Sangha – currently focusing on the SDGs
- Hikiro Sakurai, Representative, Soka Gakkai International – previous CRNGO President
- Marta Benavides, International Institute for Cooperation Amongst Peoples
- Martha Gallahue, Ethical Culture Leader representing United Religions Initiative
- Rebecca Rios-Kohn, Director of Arigatou International New York Office – currently working on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children
- Nur Gorayeb, Intern for the Congregation of the Mission

- Masue Suzuki, Program Officer, Arigatou International New York Office – currently working on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children
- Michael Gottsegen, Temple of Understanding and political scientist
- Maj. Victoria Edmonds, Representative to the United Nations at The Salvation Army - member of the CRNGO Bureau
- Beth Begley, Pax Christi International Delegate at the UN – member of the CRNGO Bureau
- Ces Martin, UNANIMA International
- Stacey Hanrahan, Representative for NGO relationships with United Nations, Congregation of Notre Dame – currently reaching out to the people who are most excluded in our society
- Noeli Maria Massoni
- Ms. Garcia
- Christal Christian, Tzu Chi Foundation
- Doyeon Park, Minister at Won Buddhism of Manhattan
- Jin Chacko
- Rev. Dionne Boissiere, Chaplain of the Church Center for the United Nations
- Daniel Perell, Representative, United Nations Office, Bahá'í International Community – previous CRNGO Secretary
- Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, Asst. General Secretary, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church, UN and International Affairs – Chair of the CRNGO Bureau
- Christina Wright, Aide to the Principal Representative, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States – Aide to the CRNGO Bureau

#### Announcements:

- Need to fill the vacancy on the Bureau left by Rev. Emeka Obiezu. If anyone has recommendations for a replacement, please contact Rev. Dr. Levi Bautista, Chair, at [LBautista@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:LBautista@umc-gbcs.org).

#### Agenda:

- Agenda was reviewed and approved

#### Treasurer's Report:

- Dues are \$25 dollars a year
- The fiscal year starts in June

- The Committee meets every month concluding with a luncheon in June
- There is currently \$1,025 in the CRNGO account

Proposal of Monthly Briefing Themes:

- We must take opportunities to attend briefings seriously because they open spaces for regular voices to be heard. We need to be vigilant in making those spaces available as provided in the UN Charter. Please participate in the next 10 months of programming. The core mandate of CRNGO looks into moral, ethical and spiritual dimensions. We can weigh-in in a manner that builds empowerment and strives for hope to become visible.
  - There is very little awareness; we need heightened awareness.
  - How do we engender through global citizenship so that international becomes of higher importance than national? Interactions between member states and the wider society should be a bridge in terms of noting where the gaps are.
  - There has been less and less accompaniment from religious bodies. Accompaniment of people's movements is what is needed.
  - Planetary concerns of sustainability should not just be about our own planet, but others as well – interplanetary!
- In all panels for each briefing, there should be no more than three speakers:
  - a member of your organization
  - a representative from a member state
  - a UN functionary
- Time:
  - 1 hour and 15 mins for briefing; 30 mins for Q&A
- Review of suggested briefings:
  - **October** – *In the Name of Religion* – Focus: The connection between religion and violence
    - The Bureau will plan this briefing
  - **November** – *Religion and Difficult Topics* – Focus: Discuss some of the challenging aspects of the discrimination of religious belief. This will be our contribution to the annual celebration of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance & Discrimination Based On Religion or Belief. Want to invite as many like-minded NGOs and NGO committees to co-sponsor this event.
    - Sign-Ups:

- Rev. Farida Ali will be the lead Bureau member; will work with the NGO Committee on the Freedom of Religion or Belief
  - Rev. Scott Stearman
- Topic should also include sexual minorities
- **December** – *Religion and Human Rights* – Focus: In celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Swami Parameshananda will be the lead Bureau member
    - Rebecca Rios-Kohn
  - This would also be a good time to give focus to one of the three objectives of the UN based on the Charter – Human Rights and Dignity; Peace and Security; Preserving the Integrity of Sovereignty
  - Concern raised that Dec 20 is too close to the holidays
    - Bureau decided to move briefing to Fri Dec 16
- **January** – *Religion and Education for Global Citizenship* - Focus: spiritual and ethical values. What is in the sacred text of the religions we represent? What do they say about engendering a global citizenry? On the one hand we continue to challenge the notion of sovereignty. But on the other hand, we give sovereignty to engender people worldwide; to give us a sense of common humanity.
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Carl Murrell will be the lead Bureau member with Christina Wright assisting
    - Martha Gallahue and Hiro Sakurai (CGC2030 Steering Committee)
    - Rev. Farida Ali
    - Michael Gottsegen
    - Rev. Dr. Levi Bautista
- **February** – *Religion, Reconciliation and Forgiveness* – Focus: Two days ago a UN expert group made a determination that the U.S. government is liable for slavery lawsuits. After 10 years there is reason for descendants of slaves to sue the government for making slavery possible. Where do acts of repentance begin to become acts of justice? Levi is organizing this same topic at an international conference in Norway.
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Levi Bautista will be the lead Bureau member

- Doyeon Wong
  - Jin Chacko
- **March** – *Religion and Gender Equality* – Focus: SDG5. This briefing coincides with CSW and will be offered as a panel session.
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Maj. Victoria Edmonds will be the lead Bureau member
    - Dionne Boissiere
    - Hiro Sakurai
    - Doyeon Wong
- **April** – *Religion and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* – Focus: SDG16. No eradication of poverty can be durable, lasting and sustainable without peace. The role of religious leaders and institutions on the ground in signing on to achieve the 169 targets and 270 indicators is crucial.
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Rev. Doug Hostetter will be the lead Bureau member
    - Martha Gallahue
    - Hiro Sakurai
    - Dr. Abraham Joseph
    - Rev. Dr. Levi Bautista
    - NGO Committee on Peace and Disarmament should be there
- **May** – *Religion, Ecology and Environmental Justice* – Focus: Sustainability isn't just about my town or the air in my town, it's about the entire planet.
  - Sign-ups:
    - Dr. Kusumita Pedersen will be the lead Bureau member
    - Martha Gallahue
    - Rev. Scott Stearman
    - Hiro Sakurai
    - Swami Parameshananda
  - SDG15 is very important and primarily also focused on the Group of Seven (G7). Can we inform G7 in advance about the briefing and request their presence?
- **June** – Annual Luncheon

- Question for consideration: Would the committees be interested in a presentation from U.S. Cardiologists? A group is working with Rev. Abraham Joseph at University of Oklahoma on a project in Haiti related to SDG3.
  - The group can come to the April 18<sup>th</sup> briefing to give examples of how a variety of institutions can support the work of the SDGs.
- Suggestion to have a child come to a briefing to speak about engagement in the arts
- All CRNGO members are encouraged to contact the Bureau if any of the proposed dates fall on or close to religious holidays.
- A grid will be sent to all CRNGO members to invite them to sign up to help plan a briefing.



## **RELIGION AND DIFFICULT TOPICS: BRIEFING ON CHALLENGES TO THE UN DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE & DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF**



### **VENUE:**

**Church Center for the UN  
10<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room  
777 United Nations Plaza  
(Corner 44<sup>th</sup> St. and First Avenue)  
Manhattan, New York City**

### **DATE:**

**21 November 2016, Monday**

### **TIME:**

#### **BRIEFING**

**1:15 PM to 2:45 PM**

#### **CRNGO@UN BUSINESS MEETING**

**2:45 PM TO 3:15 PM**

Business Meeting presided over by:

**Rev. Dr. Liberato C. Bautista**  
President, CRNGO@UN; Main  
Representative, Church and Society  
—The United Methodist Church

The **Committee of Religious NGOs at the U.N. (CRNGO@UN)** and the **Committee on Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB)** are pleased to invite you to a **SUBSTANTIVE BRIEFING** featuring:

### **PANELISTS:**

#### **Mr. Michael De Dora**

Director, Office of Public Policy,  
Center for Inquiry and Main  
Representative to the United Nations  
President, NGO Committee for  
Freedom of Religion and Belief

#### **Ms. Christen Brocker**

Associate Director AJC and Director of  
Research, Jacob Blaustein Institute for  
the Advancement of Human Rights

#### **Mr. Ravi Karkara**

Strategic Adviser, UN WOMEN

### **MODERATOR:**

#### **Rev. Scott Stearman, Ph.D.**

Pastor, Metro Baptist Church and  
Liaison for the Cooperative Baptist  
Fellowship

## December Briefing and Notes from November Briefing

17 January 2017 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

### Panel Discussion: Education for Global Citizenship: Religious, Spiritual and Ethical Moorings

- **Carl Murrell, Principal Representative, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States United Nations Office**
  - Introduction of Speakers
- **Dr. Catherine A. Honeyman, Managing Director of Ishya Consulting and Visiting Scholar at Duke University's Center for International Development**
  - Speaking from a professional perspective as a researcher for education in developing countries; also speaking from personal and spiritual perspective as a Baha'i
  - Three topics would like to address: the rise of a global movement for moral empowerment; the exploration of human purpose; service as a role in quality education
  - Current education includes reading, writing, geography and a push for science and math; these are taught in schools without religion as a source of knowledge
  - Students learn about human rights, etc. but by and large religion and spirituality are not taught in formal schooling; those convinced that religion is superstition are happy to keep it this way
  - There is growing agreement that the ethical treatment of others must be addressed in the general school curriculum
  - Education is focused on access with some focus on quality; but there is nothing of what should be learned other than literacy and life skills, etc.
  - Target 7 of SDG 4 includes global citizenship for sustainable development – this is unprecedented; amounts to an agenda that includes moral security by 2030
  - Youth need to be empowered to uphold human rights, gender equality, skills to promote peace and mitigate forms of violence they see; they need to see themselves as global citizens
  - Questions that remain: How much attention will Target 7 receive? How much do we really know about how to build these capabilities in our youth? Is moral empowerment a form that should be integrated and how can that be accomplished?
  - At the core of such an endeavor is two spiritual concepts: purpose and service

- Children are told they must learn to read to pass to the next grade; they must earn a diploma to attend college and get a good job; but the goals of obtaining power and making money are empty statuses; it's no wonder they don't seem motivated in school
- We pay teachers according to what we think their purpose is
- Many holy writings speak to the purpose of life as glorifying God - to fully develop our potential; *“Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”* – From the Baha’i Writings; *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”* – From Christianity
- How much more significant it would be for our young people to link their learning to their purpose; what if they were to see themselves with spiritual capacity; would this not give them a deeper sense of purpose?
- Giving of oneself is seen as a core human characteristic
- We are told to *“be anxiously concerned with the day and age ye live in...”* – Baha’i Writings
- The purpose of the candle is to give light and it weeps its life away drop by drop; the purpose of water is to give itself away and then be refilled; if we do not give and serve others, we are lifeless. By serving others, we also give; we find purpose in our lives and we grow
- Questions to consider for community discussion:
  1. A major reason why many formal education systems take a secular approach is the desire to safeguard religious freedoms for a potentially diverse student body. Are there ways to give greater spiritual and ethical moorings to formal education while still ensuring freedom of belief?
  2. How could an ongoing exploration of the source and purpose of human life, integrated throughout the curriculum, impact the educational experience?
  3. What effects would an orientation of service towards others, integrated throughout the curriculum, have on teachers and students?
  4. What other spiritual and moral concepts, beyond purpose and service, do you think should be at the core of our educational systems?
  5. What would it look like to integrate these and other profound spiritual considerations fully into all aspects of a curriculum? Have you seen such a spiritually integrated education system in practice?
- **Dr. Jeffrey Haynes, Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion, Conflict and Cooperation at London Metropolitan University**
  - Would like to talk about political problems related to global citizenship and the role of governments and states in both aiding and developing a global ethos

- How do we get from where we are today to where we would like to be for humanity's survival?
  - There are a great deal of commonalities between nations but that isn't always helping us in creating common goals with one another
  - Globalization over the past 20-30 years, is a good example. The UK has been a member of the EU for 50-65 years; the EU has grown into 27 countries; ethos came from a Christian foundation – in order to avoid war, you have to work together
  - The EU is a major political group and also a civilization group; EU seems disuniting on economic growth; now the UK is about to leave (Brexit)
  - We need to learn to develop characteristics that help us learn to live together
  - Strongly applaud the SDG's, but , how do we develop a global citizenship ethos as we are divided politically?
  - National interest concerns take paramount right now; the ideals and desires to develop a common citizenship are likely to be overridden by the self interest goals of states
  - The history books are being re-written; not sure that working towards common goals is going to be a powerful thing on Agenda 2030; climate change, for example, is going to be a key issue – we're seeing very little work addressed towards global concerns
- **Questions:**
    - *How would you define global citizenship?*

**Jeff:** At the very least it's a sense of belonging to a broader community and sense of a common humanity.

**Catie:** In addition, it's emphasizing interconnectedness between local, national and global; having core capabilities including being informed and critically literate; ethically responsible and engaged

- *How do we reconcile some of the issues at the UN (LGBT, for example) and incorporate that kind of discussion stopping issue when there is just no agreement?*

**Catie:** If we were to introduce the question of who we are and what is our proper relationship to others and turn it into a moral responsibility to the other, it gives a basis for conversations about what global citizenship means and beliefs about how our behavior should be, even though we have different religious beliefs.

- *How do we explain global citizenship to a citizen who is trying to get a good education and job?*

**Catie:** The question about purpose is a common question not addressed in schools. It's possible to address these – What is justice? Why is honesty important? These are not too complex to address. It's more challenging to address with policy makers than with average citizens.

**Jeff:** People are beset by multiple concerns; how we prioritize and privilege our ideas in the face of counter ideas is the key problem we face

- *There are privatized faith-based schools so spiritually can be taught without government restrictions. Do you agree with this approach?*

**Catie:** It's so important to continue our religious discourse and not limit it to the political. Need to have profound spiritual questions that lead to a profound spiritual conversation that goes into the core of our beliefs.

- *Regarding helping college students learn what citizenship is from the very local (town, city-how politics is structured and what religion may have to do with that) - What might be the potential of US based models of combining service (for example, AmeriCorp)?*

**Catie:** It's a question of gathering together cases that deeply show how spirituality is being integrated into formal education and showcases the diversity of beliefs behind it. Find those examples and explain to the world how the integration has been done. We currently don't have that much research from a multi-diverse perspective.

**Jeff:** The problem is that there is no definitive voice; there are many voices. How do we come up with a model with a universal focus and dimension?

- **Comments:**

- Global citizenship belongs more to political discourse than religious discourse; from being to becoming to belonging, the notions come into clash; the notion of Brexit speaks to an anti-globalism that is happening around the world
- We need to be looking at the targets and saying what is our part in that? Awareness to advocacy to action is what we need to do – Think locally and act globally
- We can reach millions of people in the world, but how can we connect? Are we using technology to be more connected, or are we more far away from each other?
- Grew up with the philosophy of negritude – developed in the 20's and of interest to African diaspora for the well-being and understanding of where we can from; understanding the common good from our ancestors
- There are similarities between faith-based organizations – it's the same ultimate truth, which is service to people in need; religious leaders can set an example for others to follow
- Questions to consider: What kind of civic engagement is needed in our schools? How do you address multiple allegiances? Allegiances is critical to the work of CRNGO@UN – allegiance to those we are engaged in work with and allegiance to God

Committee Meeting Notes:

- Registrants:
  - Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church – President of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
  - Alfred Lindberg, WFUNA
  - Celine Paramunda, Medical Mission Sisters
  - Eileen Reilly, School Sisters of Notre Dame
  - Cecilia O’Dwyer, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary
  - Justine Gitanjali Senapati, Congregations of St. Joseph
  - Victoria Edmonds, The Salvation Army
  - Margo LaZaro, NGO CSD-NY, Huairou Commission, ICW
  - Doyeon Park, Won Buddhism
  - Beth Begley, Pax Christi International
  - Julia Gooding, Woodenfish Foundation
  - Celia Liu, Woodenfish Foundation
  - Rebecca Rios-Kohn, Arigatou International
  - Beth Blissman, Loretto Community
  - Bernadette Wall, GRAIL
  - Janet T. Stovin, WUPJ
  - Laxmi Shah, Temple of Understanding
  - Swami Parameshananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
  - Rabbi Roger Ross, United Religions Initiative (URI-UN)
  - Joni Carley, CSVGCNY

**Membership:**

- To become a member of CRNGO@UN, please contact Beth Begley, Treasurer, at [paxchristiunny@gmail.com](mailto:paxchristiunny@gmail.com) for a membership form.
- CRNGO members may also wish to become members of the NGO Committee on Learning and Literacy and Coalition for Global Citizenship 2030

**Upcoming Briefings:**

- February 21 – Religion, Reconciliation and Forgiveness

- March 15 – Religion & Gender Equality: SDG 5
- April 18 – Religion & SDG 16: Justice, Peace, and Strong Institutions
- May 16 – Religion, Ecology and Environmental Justice
- June 20 – Annual Luncheon Meeting – by the March meeting we will have announcements from the Nominating Committee

**Interfaith Harmony Week:**

- We need volunteers who will be part of the Committee to plan an event during Interfaith Harmony Week.
  - Volunteers:
    - Carl Murrell – will lead the Committee
    - Christina Wright
    - Dionne Boissiere
    - Swami Parameshananda
    - Farida Ali
    - Bernadette Wall
    - Celia Liu
    - Julia Gooding
    - Joni Carley
    - Roger Ross
    - Monica Willard
    - Deborah Moldow

**Third Symposium: Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Peace:**

- We are co-sponsoring this event on January 23, 2017 from 9:00am-5:45pm at the UN Headquarters, Conference Room 11. The event is full, but there is a wait list. To add your name to the waitlist, visit the Eventbrite page: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/symposium-just-inclusive-and-sustainable-peace-registration-30244911344>

**Treasurer's Report:**

- We have one new membership in the last month
- Currently there are 38 NGO's as members

**Request for Membership Feedback:**

- How do the Committee members like what we are doing this year? What can/should we be doing differently? Please write to religiousngo@gmail.com with your feedback.

16 December 2016 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

Panel Discussion: *Religion & Human Rights: In Celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

- Swami Parameshananda, UN Representative, Bharat Sevashram Sangha
  - Thank you to Rev. Farida Ali for her assistance in helping to plan the briefing and to Major Victoria Edmonds for bringing refreshments.
  - Anything that comes our way just brings us closer to the God we believe in. When we do things, we shouldn't think we are doing it for ourselves, but rather we are doing it for others. Thanks to individuals such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ghandi for all they have done.
- Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG) | High Level Global Independent Advocate
  - Work is in the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children
  - UNICEF has been sending many messages talking about all of the children being affected by the war and evacuations in Aleppo
  - Every day is an opportunity to make a difference and make the world better
  - This year has been an important year - we are celebrating 10 years!
  - Most of the time the same child is affected by multiple forms of violence and it affects the way they view others and their relationships with others
  - Study presents a number of ideas, including that all states should have legislation that ill-treating a child is unacceptable
  - There is an interfaith declaration which recognizes the sanctity of all children and the role religion can play on the development of the child; tension and conflict can be dealt with through a model of respect and mutual understanding
  - The declaration reminds us that there is no religious script that says violence against children is acceptable. In Islam, nothing apparent may award his or her child better than a good upbringing and violence is not a part of that



- We need to encourage religious communities to cooperate amongst themselves. Three things they can do:
  - build capacity for all churches to promote the exploitation of children
  - promote child friendly churches
  - churches can consult with children
- Call from Kyoto declaration - we use religious days to promote positive attitudes to our children
- New global development agenda 2030 - for the first time we saw the recognition of violence against children as a major thing that needs to be prevented.
- This problem is global and knows no borders. The most recent study was issued in the Philippines. The survey was conducted amongst young people. The majority of violence happens in the home. We see that repeated over and over again throughout the world. Because it happens in the privacy of the home and something seen as disciplining children, it isn't seen as a large problem
- The large majority of families use non-violent disciplinary practices. The totality of families surveyed say they don't want to use corporeal punishment, but don't know what to use instead as an alternative
- Sexual abuse - the use of the internet, mobile phones, etc. are used to take advantage of and exploit children. There is a change in the values that have led us for years
- What does bullying mean to you - 2/3 said they have been victims in the past; many say it happens because adults don't see it; they confess to a friend, but not an adult. They are fearful
- Religious communities have an influential capacity which can bring the support of people to break the silence surrounding violence against children
- There are deeply rooted social conventions. We need to work for change to come from within. Laws are not enough, because they are not followed. We need to overcome false perceptions and educate families. We also need to introduce practices of what positive discipline is
- Pope Francis gave a call to the international community that we all need to ensure the right of every child to grow up serene and with confidence in the future
- There are so many children who feel alone and abandoned. They are displaced and then seen as a danger to their new society. What kind of messages are we transmitting to these children?
- High Time to End Violence Against Children movement - recognizes that not only states, governments and organizations are working on this issue, there are individuals, athletes, celebrities, etc. who can join us.

- Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn J.D., Director, Arigatou International New York Office and Leader of Prayer and Action for Children
  - In work at Arigatou, they are inspired by faith leaders and secular experts to improve the situation of children. But, there is so much work to do, it feels overwhelming
  - The Convention on the Rights of the Child is 27 yrs old!
  - How can we work together? How can we get involved regardless of our work agenda? We can join, even in a small way
  - All human beings are born free and deserving of equal rights. We are still battling the same war. Today it is more crucial than ever for NGOs that are faith based to take on more of these issues. It was not like this 20 years ago. There was not as much interest or belief that religious orgs could do much, but now they are viewed as critical to achieving the SDGs
  - Arigatou is an international faith based organization dedicated to creating peace and a world better for children. They established 4 initiatives: global network of religions for children, the prayer and action for children, ethics education for children and ending child poverty
  - As reported by the global partnership to end violence against children, there is overwhelming data of children living in war torn countries that indicates we aren't doing enough; we need to do more and we need to get faith based organizations involved
  - Interfaith dialogue is taboo in some places
  - Arigatou brought together an eager group of people to tackle this issue. Many are from Columbia and had their own horrific experiences as children
  - Arigatou tries to bring the messages to the community level
  - Kyoto declaration - we need to revive this document. What can be done in terms of action?
- Mr. Rick Chavolla, Educational Consultant | Board Chair for the American Indian Community House of New York (AICH)
  - Offer blessings to elders and ancestors for guiding our lives
  - Will go to Standing Rock in late January once the Presidency changes over
  - Always ambivalent when speaking with religious organizations; historically they have been very supportive in our life here on Earth, but the first encounters weren't so good. There were doctrines imposed and indigenous persons were viewed as less than human. Struggle comes up to modern times. Boarding schools were nothing short of horrendous and violence occurred. They were designed from the very beginning to create an atmosphere of assimilation. Many have had to deal with displacement, territorial displacement, forced adoptions and it's something that hasn't been fully recognized in the U.S.

- Other examples such as the colonial states of California – Father Junipero Serra canonization
- This isn't a condemnation of the work of religious NGOs who have worked closely with indigenous persons. But, there is still room for more collaborative work to be done
- Oftentimes, as indigenous persons, we have unfortunate circumstances with housing, education, etc. Have the highest community violence and suicide rates
- There are indigenous persons who serve at the UN, but there is no Nation for indigenous persons at the UN
- In Article 18 it says everyone has a right to religion, but our spiritual existence is denied everyday. It's not just about prayer and ways in which we worship. Every step of every day is part of our spiritual existence. We need to have a certain amount of freedom and sovereignty to do that
- Standing Rock - most of how we understand our own rights is that they're fundamental. The existence of sovereignty. Standing Rock is a confluence of all those things. It has brought hundreds of native states together; we have to demand and expect that people will honor their relationship with land, water and sky - Mother Earth - who we believe is living. Our identity needs to be recognized by all, not just by us. It isn't just our land, it's for all of us. So, we all have to make sure it is protected
- Prayer - this is the first act we do when we're at Standing Rock
- Comments:
  - We don't have to leave the lessons of structured religion
  - There is a need to teach morality in schools and to include parents in that discussion
  - There are a number of religious bodies that have entered acts of repentance. One is the United Methodist Church. Organizing a meeting in February 2017 for the Jubilee of the 100 years of the subjugation of the Suomi people
  - The biggest response from the religious right in the U.S. is that the main rights of the child belong to the parents and not the child. The building up of the moral agency of every human being needs to be empowered to recognize those same rights in every person
  - Human rights is humanity's response to the divine gift
- Questions:
  - *For this group, what are the expectations of us? Actions you would want from this group?*

**Rick:** Whatever sphere we are in and feel we have some influence and voice, we should bring attention to these issues we have discussed. We need to remove the Doctrine of Discovery from the Catholic Church. The day to day work we are doing to improve housing and education should remind everyone

that indigenous persons are in challenging situations. At the center of education for us, is morality. Now a new educational system has been imposed on us that we have to survive in. It is hard to retain the education system we started with.

- *What methods do you use to communicate with children?*

**Martha:** Communicating with children is something they really expect from us. They want to tell their stories and be listened to. We need to learn how to create the environment they need. If you want to help the child, help the family together. Drama is used; blogs; discussion and role of schools where parents, teachers and students are engaged in a reflection that helps each group feel they can be part of the solution. The role of schools and the role of legislation - We have seen the law being used to create capacity building experiences to explain the psychological affect of corporeal punishment.

- *As you try and take this important project to the point of implementation, how are you working with religious organizations to declare that corporeal punishment is a form of violence against children?*

**Martha:** There is little knowledge of the data/studies. How can we make sure we give to all countries the gathering of the data, the tools to analyze it and helping them put it into practice? What has been encouraging is that it isn't only the data people like to look into, but it provokes a response to join hands and do something against it. Departments of government are working with civil society and faith based organizations are also getting involved. In July there will be a high level forum.

**Rebecca:** We address this with faith based communities and bring as much evidence of the scope of the magnitude of the problem. But, it's an ongoing dialogue to convince people it should end. It's a challenging issue. We bring academics and faith based organizations together to address things like positive parenting so a different picture can be presented. There is a wonderful methodology called Learning to Live Together (UNESCO and UNICEF) which teaches how to respect each other and speak with others who are different, speak with empathy, and includes ethical values inherent in many religions. It's being introduced in schools globally.

#### Committee Meeting Notes:

- Registrants:
  - Ulf Aberg
  - Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista
  - Beth Begley
  - Raj Bhushan
  - Veronica Brand
  - Roberta Brangam
  - Jin Chacko

- Robert Cohen
- Kay Dundorf
- Iman Habib
- Anele Heiges
- Karam Jai chan
- Richard Jordan
- Dr. Abraham Joseph
- Erik Larson
- Mahesh Persaud
- Lila Prounis
- Ricknauth Ramsingh
- Rabbi Roger Ross
- Gitanjali Senapati
- Rev. Scott Stearman
- Dileepkumar Thankappan
- Alison Van Dyk
- Ellen Weiss
- Event Save the Date:
  - 23 January 2017 will be the Third Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs. The thematic focus is Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Peace. Program details and information on how to register are forthcoming.
- Membership:
  - To become a member of CRNGO@UN, please contact Beth Begley, Treasurer, at paxchristiunny@gmail.com for a membership form.

21 November 2016 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

Panel Discussion: *Religion and Difficult Topics: Briefing on Challenges to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance & Discrimination Based On Religion or Belief*

- **Rev. Scott Stearman, Ph.D., Pastor, Metro Baptist Church and Liaison for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship**
  - Developed a course on the pros and cons on God. Then later did a follow-up class on the pros and cons of religion. Is religion a good thing or not? It was fascinating to contrast the visceral reaction of students with the good and bad things happening in the world.
- **Mr. Michael De Dora, Director, Office of Public Policy, Center for Inquiry and Main Representative to the United Nations, President, NGO Committee for Freedom of Religion and Belief**
  - One of the first committees got involved with was Freedom of Religion and Belief. Offered to do a lot of tasks and worked way up to being President of the Committee.
  - This topic is big!
  - The first global statement was on universal declaration. It doesn't create a legal basis, it creates a moral basis. All individuals are free and should interact in a spirit of brotherhood.
  - The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) treaty prohibits religious discrimination.
  - The UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief is of fundamental importance. It spells out a comprehensive list of the range of human activity that is protected. Nothing is said in the Declaration to overturn anything stated in ICCPR.
  - There is a massive gap between what we see on paper verses in the world. People are still living in areas with religious restriction laws. One of the biggest challenges is the misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of what freedom of religion or belief is. One of the biggest debates is that freedom of expression extends rights to express and defend beliefs.
  - Clearly there is a lack of respect for guidelines at the international level. There are different cultural views of what it is/should be. The affect that society creates can help to lead to structures where its used as a pawn in a political gain. Creating a civil society space to counteract that narrative of violent non-extremism is important. But, they aren't being created.
  - Another challenge is that there's no enforcement mechanism. Only member states are pressured to call out other member states. But, there isn't a space for civil society organizations to engage in creating that pressure. And member states don't always want to call each other out because of political interests, etc.
  - It's not a mainstream human rights issue. It's left to religious organizations because their organizations are being violated by the government.

- The UN Declaration makes efforts to advance freedom.
- **Ms. Christen Brocker, Associate Director AJC and Director of Research, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights**
  - There are enforcement mechanisms at the UN for making the UN Declaration a reality. In the human rights realm, the resolutions that have been adopted are a statement of member states to respect freedom of religion or belief. There are UN Special Rapporteurs.
  - We have become paralyzed being able to promote and combat religious intolerance. In the General Assembly, there are dueling resolutions to combat religious intolerance and freedom of religion or belief. The original refers back to a 1981 declaration. But, the member states deal with this issue in very different ways. There are tools available to help, but they are not always used. What isn't being criminalized is insults and that has been an issue.
  - There was a report on Pakistan that singled out the blasphemy laws against the Ahmadis. Pakistan reacted to it saying that the international community doesn't do enough to promote the discrimination of Muslims. In 1999, at the urging of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Pakistan brought before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights a resolution entitled "Defamation of Islam". The Commission accepted the proposal, and changed the title of the resolution to "Defamation of Religions".
  - After the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005, more resolutions were adopted that include the criminalization of insults to faith. The problem is not that there isn't law, it's the fact that the law isn't being implemented.
  - The Defamation of Religions resolution came to a head in 2011 and a new treaty was agreed by all for Combating Religious Intolerance. There are annual implementation meetings which sends a message of common commitment.
  - Maybe we've hit a threshold at the UN and need to find other spaces outside.
- **Comments:**
  - We try to go through the government system, but by the time it filters down, more problems are created in the process. We need to work with local authorities to help resolve issues.
  - The protection of these resolutions is not to protect the religions; it's to protect the individuals who practice religion. It's when religion is married to national identity that tensions are created.
  - There are strategies to close the gap and it requires a complex way of thinking. Tried to engage in conversations to create a unified front. Can we put pressure on the UN to put pressure on the governments? But, the problem is the major division that exists. We should continue to build coalitions to stand against what governments are trying to do.

- Responses are shaped by what you believe. There needs to be a way to include a common language that everyone can use.
- We are very intellectual about something that is very emotional.

- **Questions:**

- *What/How was the threshold to violence defined?*

The Rabat Plan of Action is a non-binding document and it does include extra guidance on violence.

- *In terms of strategy, what relationship do you see with the corporate world?*

Have noticed in a lot of foreign diplomacy that freedom of religion is not a high priority (looking at economics, trade and counter-terrorism). We face challenges promoting the relationship of freedom of religion or belief to societal flourishing. It's incredible to see what corporations are concerned about that they weren't before.

- *How do you move forward when you don't agree and butt heads?*

Whether you belong to a religious or a non-religious community, there is still a small expectation of how you should treat someone with respect.

Committee Meeting Notes:

- **Roll Call:**

- Rabbi Roger Ross, United Religions Initiative (URI-UN)
- Swami Parameshananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Chavie Sharfman, Independent
- Anele Heiges, International Public Policy Institute
- Veronica Brand, Religious and Sacred Heart of Mary
- Iman Habib, Religious and Sacred Heart of Mary
- Jin Chacko, Syrian Orthodox Church of America
- Deyanira Garcia, UNANIMA International
- Julie Colton, Ids Charities
- Dave Colton, Ids Charities
- Daniel Hoffman, Philadelphia Ethical Society
- John A. Wagner, International Humanist and Ethical Union
- Ellen Fawer, Jewish Women International



- Michael Gottsegen, Temple of Understanding
- Rev. Fardia Ali, All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA) - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Christian Broecker, Jacob Blaustein Institute
- Rev. Scott Stearman, Kirkwood Baptist Church
- Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church – President of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Christina Wright, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States – Aide to the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Event Save the Date:
  - **23 January 2017** will be the **Third Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs**. The thematic focus is Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Peace. Program details and information on how to register are forthcoming.
- Membership:
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18 October 2016 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

Panel Discussion: *In the Name of Religion: How is Religion and Sacred Texts Co-opted and Instrumentalized in Acts of Violence, Including Terrorism?*

- Rev. Dr. Liberato C. Bautista, President, CRNGO@UN; Main Representative, Church and Society—The United Methodist Church
  - Introduced the discussion with background on the topic.
  - What do we do when “sacred text” fosters hatred and violence?
  - Governments at all levels cannot afford to be in silo. We need global institutions and mechanisms (multilateralism) looking at global solutions. But, we also need interrelations of people, not just of governments and institutions.
  - Religious texts are instrumentalized towards violence. What happens then to the role of religions and values?
  - Our frustrations are going to be increasingly stated when it is life that is sacrificed. A third entity that is crucial in social dynamic is people! It has to be a triad among religion, state and people.

- Rev. Farida Ali, Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau; Principal Representative, All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA) to the United Nations; President Emerita, Islamic Heritage Society, New York; Honorary President, Religions for Peace
  - The UN is as strong or as weak as the member states want it to be. Then there is the part of the people at the local level. How do we break the barriers to empower them?
  - We have learned how to exist in this world by walking a parallel path.
  - Poverty and lack of education are causes of violence and extreme terrorism. These are other bridges we need to build.
  - Introduced the panelists.
- Mr. Leon Siu, Hawai’ian, diplomat, musician, recording artist, composer, teacher, analyst, & activist
  - Serves as minister of foreign affairs for the Hawaiian Kingdom.
  - It’s been a long battle for the past 122 years since the U.S. acted to take over the country. We are facing some big challenges, but doing quite well in gaining traction in the public arena.
  - Doctrine of Discovery/Papal Bulls - In the 15th century as explorers went into Europe they requested several edicts by the Pope, to gain support for what they needed to do to discover countries and use these countries resources. Series of edicts granted explorers to appropriate land as if they were empty. Basically, if you're not a Christian, you're not a person. Papal bulls started to give license to take over countries and nations and peoples and to subject them to their will. Papals considered the natives of these countries to be sub-humans that have no right to the land. To native people it was a matter of stewardship and exploitation of resources. At the root, it was the scriptures and edicts by Rome that promoted greed on the part of those able to claim rule and dominion over the lands and exploit and take everything they could. Decided in many cases to commit genocide. This process was so vicious and repulsive that many who participated in it ended up writing letters of protest. This process happened in America, Africa and parts of Asia. The only thing standing in their way were the people, so they were either eliminated or subjected and subdued.
  - This history is documented but often forgotten. In recent years, among indigenous peoples, there has been a movement to look at these edicts and get the Vatican to admit they were misappropriated and misapplied and caused much bloodshed and death amongst populations. They have asked the Vatican to acknowledge what occurred, take responsibility for it and apologize. But, the Vatican has been resistant. Their response is “We don't do that anymore so let's move on.” But, this past May there was an indication that they may want to sit down and talk about this. A group traveled to meet with the Pope and they had a major breakthrough.
  - These types of incidences are not just part of history, however, they are also happening in a new form in the present day. It’s not as overtly violent, but we still see people

continuing milder practices. It's still embedded in the trade society that has moved throughout the world. Power and trade are more important and it has created a modern day extension of the doctrine of discovery. Transnational corporations actually have dominion and they think it gives them justification to move into a new space.

- The northwestern Hawaiian Islands have been moved into. For example, President Obama issued a Presidential order to take over the marine resources claiming that the U.S. federal government knows how to better use them. Corporations and governments think they can secure resources for the betterment of the wider population. A lot has to do with a religious excuse used to misapply the taking of lands.
- We should be horrified by the actions of ISIS, but we should apply that same reaction to what else is happening under a legal cover from the international community.
- Ms. R. Evon Idahosa, Esq., Barrister | Founder & Executive Director, Pathfinders Justice Initiative, Co-Founder, Bring Back our Girls, NYC
  - Had been a lawyer for 14 years. Started feeling more urgency about what was happening to women's bodies in the US. One out of three women have been affected by violence. Started a non-profit organization and now works with survivors of women and girls who have been affected by violence.
  - Nigeria is a country split equally between women and men and it's 90 percent religious. The implication is that religion plays a large role in Nigerian society. Organization work with faith based partners as their work reflects the work they do. Congregations put their faith blindly in leaders. It's important we work with them because they can amplify the work we do.
  - Doesn't consider justice work as part of the work we should be doing. We're living in a society where religion has been used to inflict violence against women and girls. Boko Haram is the most violent terrorist group that has ever existed. They consider Western education simple and their two aims are to eradicate Nigeria from western ideas and eliminate the Islamic State. They've killed over 20,000 people and displaced over 2 million. Became most widely known in 2014 when they kidnapped 276 school girls which created international outrage. They claimed that Allah told them to sell the children and then strap with bombs to force them to go. Many were sold into child marriage, many were stoned and many were forced to convert. Modern Muslims say they disapprove of these practices.
  - There are other parts of Nigeria where religion is being used to cause violence and damage to women and girls. Marital rape is not illegal in Nigeria, because women are considered property, based on their biblical interpretation. They say that a dowry implies ownership and there is legal backing of assault in the country's penal codes. Child marriage is practiced and is based on specific passages of the Quran.
  - Working with several other NGO's to get the laws to change. An equal rights bill was brought to the Senate, but it was rejected. They claim that we are trying to impose Western ideas, but the response is No, these are fundamental human rights!

\* *dowry - true intention is that the bridegroom is committing to take care of his wife.*

- Mr. Muhammad Rafi-ud-din Shah, Team Leader and Senior Political Officer, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
  - Having worked in the army in Pakistan and at the UN, can share what is being done to tackle terrorism.
  - All of modern society has started to look at religion in different ways. Terrorism and violent extremism is one of the most serious threats and challenges of our time. People who have lived together for centuries are now looking at one another differently and being treated differently. The very core of the approach is drawn by terrorism and violent extremism.
  - Geographically - Middle East and Africa - material changes bring about political changes. The 911 attacks led to new political thinking in the U.S. The Iraq War also resulted in people there starting to think differently. When the Soviet Union came to Afghanistan, they started looking at warfare with the prism of religion.
  - There are push and pull factors – Individuals are pulled towards terrorist actions and there are individuals pushing them to be soldiers. Two of the big issues that need to be addressed are poverty and lack of education. The foot soldiers are less educated and come from poor classes, while the leaders come from middle classes.
  - We should not ignore there are places in the world where people, particularly youth, cannot express themselves. Freedom of expression is restrained and it creates conditions conducive to terrorism. Lack of education, respect of human rights, etc. play a very important role.
  - Without discussing religious ideology, you can't talk about the push-pull factor. Thinking about religion without spirituality - religion can't exist!
  - What is the UN doing to address this? The General Assembly adopted the following strategies unanimously:
    1. conditions that lead to terrorism
    2. conditions related to prevention
    3. capacity building
    4. respect or human rights and law
      - Need to give voice to youth and address them. Also, can't ignore gender issues.
      - Create more education that can give an individual skill sets in the global economy.
      - Communications strategies - how should we communicate and be sensitive to others?

- The UN has tried to look at whole issue of terrorism and violent extremism in a comprehensive way that is strongly supported by Security Council. A combination of factors who help promote law enforcement where we respect rule of law is needed.
- We have succeeded and not succeeded. Have been working on this issue for the last 10 years. Now people are looking into a more comprehensive approach.
- Questions:
  - *Recent news accounts of Obama's decision said it was protecting the marine land. Can you please clarify your earlier comment?*

Mr. Siu: It's great to protect it, but our people were already taking care of it. It needs protection because of misuse from corporations, politicians, etc. We see it as another encroachment from the government because they never asked us what we thought. It's another example of an outside force taking over and saying that they can do it better. If we were in charge, we would kick the military out.

- *Do you think the sacred text was destined to be warped after being viewed as religious documents for so many centuries?*

Ms. Idahosa: Part of the beauty of God's creation is that we get to choose and it is inevitable that people will interpret sacred text differently, primarily because of control and power. It's a shame that people have taken advantage of it, because people suffer as a result.

- *Are texts becoming a tool, rather than an object to bring people towards God? In the absence of a prophet we all become a prophet in how we look at them. Have we created our own form of idolatry.*

Mr. Rafi-ud-din Shah: Most of the time, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, etc. tries to pick a part of the scripture free of its full context. In Syria, when we were monitoring terrorist actions, many of the foot soldiers were using the Quran without a basic knowledge of it. They created six established schools of thought and said the schools will have exhaustive books on legal aspects. Groups came in and said they wouldn't accept any one of them. In the 18th Century, with new movements in the Middle East, their people started this approach. If the context is there, the answer will be different.

- *What is the strategic approach to intervene? How do you decide on what interventions to take on cultural change?*

Ms. Idahosa: For us, in the context of Nigeria and West African culture, a major way we attempt to get cultural change is to get people to realize we are all connected. A lot of focus is on men and boys and changing the way they view women and girls. One of the platforms helps men to understand that anytime you inappropriately touch women you give permission to let others do that to your mother or sister. Also, we're very specific in targeting community leaders because they have such a big level of influence in Nigerian societies. Also need to create a sense of ownership. Youth are feeling marginalized and that created a vacuum with Boko Haram in 2002 (at the time there were 3.5 unemployed youth). Now working with survivors of violence and allowing them to create their own rehabilitation plan.

- *Regarding terrorist groups: What about the governments when they break human rights? The U.S. government broke human rights after 911 through allowing torture,*

*discrimination to Muslims, etc. to occur. How do you bring accountability to governments and how do you prevent them from violating the rights of other people?*

Mr. Rafi-ud-din Shah: This is a very difficult process. The UN is based on 193 member states with voting rights. The Security Council and General Assembly try to push governments that don't abide by rules of law to do so. It's a critical platform. When you are dealing with dictators and corrupt governments, there is no end to what they do.

- *Regarding religious extremism and youth empowerment - Can you speak to this?*

Mr. Rafi-ud-din Shah: Need to give advice to the youth and give them a sense of community; an environment where they can express themselves. Recent research shows most of the foot soldiers were recruited through small social groups, not the internet.

Mr. Siu: There are mitigating factors. A lot of good has come out of the principles of our religions. But, individuals have cherry picked what they could use to justify their actions. Most was done for commercial purposes and that is what we face today. The reality today is that even governments are being manipulated by corporations.

#### Committee Meeting Notes:

##### Roll Call:

- Swami Parameshananda, Bharat Sevashram Sangha - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Maj. Victoria Edmonds, The Salvation Army - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Lila Prounis, Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council
- Alison VanDyk , Temple Of Understanding
- Grove Harris, Temple of Understanding
- Kusumita Pedersen, Interfaith Center of New York, Parliament of the World's Religions
- Rev. Scott Stearman, Kirkwood Baptist Church
- Shekufeh Zonji, FEZANA
- Anele Heiges, International Public Policy Institute
- Rev. Dionne Boissiere, Church Center for the United Nations - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Beth Begley, Pax Christi International – Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Rev. Fardia Ali, All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) - Member of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church – President of the CRNGO@UN Bureau
- Christina Wright, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States – Aide to the CRNGO@UN Bureau

#### Calendar of Substantive Briefings:

- The Bureau has rearranged the way the work of the Committee as a whole and its Bureau is done. . The first portion of the meeting is devoted to a substantive briefing. The next 8 months of programming has been decided so all members can know in advance what is coming down the pipeline.
- Looking for collaborators to assist with the briefings. If you want to participate, please volunteer by approaching the lead organizers.
- The Dec 20 briefing was moved to Dec 16
- The next briefing is: *Religion and Difficult Topics: Briefing on Challenges to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance & Discrimination Based On Religion or Belief*
- It would be great if we can secure space at The Salvation Army, the Church Center and the Baha'i International Community to rotate locations for the briefings/meetings -- Victoria to check on SA availability and Christina to check on BIC availability

#### Treasurer's Report:

- There is a negotiation in progress for a nuclear ban treaty. If it passes, there will be an opportunity for CRNGO to participate meaningfully. A subcommittee is currently working on an interfaith statement.

#### Membership Report:

- 6 new members signed up today

#### Other Upcoming Events:

- Next week there is an event titled: Roots of Change: Food Sovereignty, Women & Eco-Justice hosted by The Temple of Understanding. The event will include a panel and screening of a 10 min video which they are hoping will be a starting piece for conversation.

#### Livestream of Briefings/Meetings:

- There were two livestreams of the briefing; one generated 97 views and the other generated 237 views for a total of 334 people watching online.
- It would be great to upload the livestream to our website.

29 September 2016 – General Meeting Notes

Welcome and Moment of Silence

Roll Call:

- Dr. Abraham Joseph, Senior International Advisor at Public Service Institute, University of Oklahoma – currently focusing on SDGs in Education, Health and Disaster Risk Prevention
- Rev. Fardia Ali, Principal Representative of the All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA) to the United Nations - currently focusing on preventing war between India and Pakistan
- Rev. Scott Stearman, Senior Pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church and serves as a presence for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Baptist World Alliance at the United Nations
- Clifford Polly, The United Methodist Church, UN & International Affairs – provides admin support to Levi Bautista
- Swami Parameshananda, United Nations NGO Representative, Bharat Sevashram Sangha – currently focusing on the SDGs
- Hikiro Sakurai, Representative, Soka Gakkai International – previous CRNGO President
- Marta Benavides, International Institute for Cooperation Amongst Peoples
- Martha Gallahue, Ethical Culture Leader representing United Religions Initiative
- Rebecca Rios-Kohn, Director of Arigatou International New York Office – currently working on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children
- Nur Gorayeb, Intern for the Congregation of the Mission
- Masue Suzuki, Program Officer, Arigatou International New York Office – currently working on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children
- Michael Gottsegen, Temple of Understanding and political scientist
- Maj. Victoria Edmonds, Representative to the United Nations at The Salvation Army - member of the CRNGO Bureau
- Beth Begley, Pax Christi International Delegate at the UN – member of the CRNGO Bureau
- Ces Martin, UNANIMA International
- Stacey Hanrahan, Representative for NGO relationships with United Nations, Congregation of Notre Dame – currently reaching out to the people who are most excluded in our society
- Noeli Maria Massoni
- Ms. Garcia
- Christal Christian, Tzu Chi Foundation
- Doyeon Park, Minister at Won Buddhism of Manhattan
- Jin Chacko



- Rev. Dionne Boissiere, Chaplain of the Church Center for the United Nations
- Daniel Perell, Representative, United Nations Office, Bahá'í International Community – previous CRNGO Secretary
- Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista, Asst. General Secretary, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church, UN and International Affairs – Chair of the CRNGO Bureau
- Christina Wright, Aide to the Principal Representative, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States – Aide to the CRNGO Bureau

#### Announcements:

- Need to fill the vacancy on the Bureau left by Rev. Emeka Obiezu. If anyone has recommendations for a replacement, please contact Rev. Dr. Levi Bautista, Chair, at [LBautista@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:LBautista@umc-gbcs.org).

#### Agenda:

- Agenda was reviewed and approved

#### Treasurer's Report:

- Dues are \$25 dollars a year
- The fiscal year starts in June
- The Committee meets every month concluding with a luncheon in June
- There is currently \$1,025 in the CRNGO account

#### Proposal of Monthly Briefing Themes:

- We must take opportunities to attend briefings seriously because they open spaces for regular voices to be heard. We need to be vigilant in making those spaces available as provided in the UN Charter. Please participate in the next 10 months of programming. The core mandate of CRNGO looks into moral, ethical and spiritual dimensions. We can weigh-in in a manner that builds empowerment and strives for hope to become visible.
  - There is very little awareness; we need heightened awareness.
  - How do we engender through global citizenship so that international becomes of higher importance than national? Interactions between member states and the wider society should be a bridge in terms of noting where the gaps are.
  - There has been less and less accompaniment from religious bodies. Accompaniment of people's movements is what is needed.

- Planetary concerns of sustainability should not just be about our own planet, but others as well – interplanetary!
- In all panels for each briefing, there should be no more than three speakers:
  - a member of your organization
  - a representative from a member state
  - a UN functionary
- Time:
  - 1 hour and 15 mins for briefing; 30 mins for Q&A
- Review of suggested briefings:
  - **October** – *In the Name of Religion* – Focus: The connection between religion and violence
    - The Bureau will plan this briefing
  - **November** – *Religion and Difficult Topics* – Focus: Discuss some of the challenging aspects of the discrimination of religious belief. This will be our contribution to the annual celebration of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance & Discrimination Based On Religion or Belief. Want to invite as many like-minded NGOs and NGO committees to co-sponsor this event.
    - Sign-Ups:
      - Rev. Farida Ali will be the lead Bureau member; will work with the NGO Committee on the Freedom of Religion or Belief
      - Rev. Scott Stearman
    - Topic should also include sexual minorities
  - **December** – *Religion and Human Rights* – Focus: In celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
    - Sign-Ups:
      - Swami Parameshananda will be the lead Bureau member
      - Rebecca Rios-Kohn
    - This would also be a good time to give focus to one of the three objectives of the UN based on the Charter – Human Rights and Dignity; Peace and Security; Preserving the Integrity of Sovereignty
    - Concern raised that Dec 20 is too close to the holidays
      - Bureau decided to move briefing to Fri Dec 16

- **January** – *Religion and Education for Global Citizenship* - Focus: spiritual and ethical values. What is in the sacred text of the religions we represent? What do they say about engendering a global citizenry? On the one hand we continue to challenge the notion of sovereignty. But on the other hand, we give sovereignty to engender people worldwide; to give us a sense of common humanity.
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Carl Murrell will be the lead Bureau member with Christina Wright assisting
    - Martha Gallahue and Hiro Sakurai (CGC2030 Steering Committee)
    - Rev. Farida Ali
    - Michael Gottsegen
    - Rev. Dr. Levi Bautista
  
- **February** – *Religion, Reconciliation and Forgiveness* – Focus: Two days ago a UN expert group made a determination that the U.S. government is liable for slavery lawsuits. After 10 years there is reason for descendants of slaves to sue the government for making slavery possible. Where do acts of repentance begin to become acts of justice? Levi is organizing this same topic at an international conference in Norway.
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Levi Bautista will be the lead Bureau member
    - Doyeon Wong
    - Jin Chacko
  
- **March** – *Religion and Gender Equality* – Focus: SDG5. This briefing coincides with CSW and will be offered as a panel session.
  - Sign-Ups:
    - Maj. Victoria Edmonds will be the lead Bureau member
    - Dionne Boissiere
    - Hiro Sakurai
    - Doyeon Wong
  
- **April** – *Religion and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* – Focus: SDG16. No eradication of poverty can be durable, lasting and sustainable without peace. The role of religious leaders and institutions on the ground in signing on to achieve the 169 targets and 270 indicators is crucial.
  - Sign-Ups:

- Rev. Doug Hostetter will be the lead Bureau member
- Martha Gallahue
- Hiro Sakurai
- Dr. Abraham Joseph
- Rev. Dr. Levi Bautista
- NGO Committee on Peace and Disarmament should be there
- **May – Religion, Ecology and Environmental Justice** – Focus: Sustainability isn't just about my town or the air in my town, it's about the entire planet.
  - Sign-ups:
    - Dr. Kusumita Pedersen will be the lead Bureau member
    - Martha Gallahue
    - Rev. Scott Stearman
    - Hiro Sakurai
    - Swami Parameshananda
  - SDG15 is very important and primarily also focused on the Group of Seven (G7). Can we inform G7 in advance about the briefing and request their presence?
- **June – Annual Luncheon**
- Question for consideration: Would the committees be interested in a presentation from U.S. Cardiologists? A group is working with Rev. Abraham Joseph at University of Oklahoma on a project in Haiti related to SDG3.
  - The group can come to the April 18<sup>th</sup> briefing to give examples of how a variety of institutions can support the work of the SDGs.
- Suggestion to have a child come to a briefing to speak about engagement in the arts
- All CRNGO members are encouraged to contact the Bureau if any of the proposed dates fall on or close to religious holidays.
- A grid will be sent to all CRNGO members to invite them to sign up to help plan a briefing.

SOCA Representative Joseph Cannizzo works on the following issues for our NGO at the UN.

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution 69/6. As requested in that resolution, the report contains a discussion of specific initiatives undertaken by Member States and entities of the United Nations system to promote sport for development and peace since the issuance of

the previous report on the subject in 2014, and contains an updated action plan on sport for development and peace.

Pursuant to resolution 67/296, the present report also includes a summary of the implementation of that resolution, elaborating, inter alia, on the evaluation of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace.

Source: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/179](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/179)

## Fall Assembly Dinner of the Staten Island Council of Churches

By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On November 3 2016, I attended the fall assembly dinner of the Staten Island Council of Churches at the All Saints Episcopal Church on 2329 Victory Blvd. The dinner was opened with a welcoming remark from Deacon Paul Kosinski, President of the Staten Island Council of Churches. The program was led by an invocation from the Rev. Janet H. Jones.

While the dinner was going on the Presidents report was read by Deacon Paul and the 2015 budget was read by Deacon Frank Ali. The first Honorees award of the night was given to Rev. David Biedel who is the founder and lead Pastor of New Hope Community Church in West Brighton. Rev. Biedel makes an effort to engage with the at-risk youth in the neighborhood with positive programs and messages, helping them to stay away from drugs, gangs and other bad influences.

The second honorees award was given to Mr. Edward Craig. He served on the Congregational Support and Outreach Committee for many years with the SI Council of Churches. Mr. Craig was also heavily involved in education where he worked as a paraprofessional at Rocco Laurie Intermediate School IS 72 in New Springville. The third and final honorees award was given to Monsignor Peter G. Finn who served as a Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church since 2007. Monsignor Finn was a rector of St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, from 2001-2007. He was the director of the Archdiocese Office of Communications from 1983-1989 and served as principal of Monsignor Farrell High School.

The meeting ended with the new committee officers for 2017 of the SI Council of Churches having a special installation ceremony performed by Rev. N.J. L'Heureux Jr. An opening and closing hymns were sung at the beginning and end of the event. There are currently 48 active paid church members and organizations in the SI Council of Churches.

## Monthly CRNGO UN Thematic Business Meeting

By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On November 21st, I attended a monthly business meeting of CRNGO at the United Nations Church Center. Rev. Scott Stearman, a committee member of the monthly CRNGO discussion gave his welcome

remarks and led the meeting. The meeting was discussed on religion and difficult topics: briefing on challenges to the declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

Mr. Michael De Dora was the first guest speaker at the meeting he is the director of the Center for Inquiry's Office of Public Policy and the organization's main representative to the United Nations. He mentioned that universal declaration on thoughts rights and religion creates a moral basis that all human beings are created with equal rights. A point was brought up that we need to look around the world there are obligations between member states and freedom with religious beliefs more obvious member states such as countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh restrict laws of diversity of religious practices. There is a misunderstanding of religious beliefs there's not widespread knowledge or perceived tensions but new area of rights and the UN freedom of expression extends those rights. Currently there is no enforcement mechanism for the treaty calling out violations for member states.

Ms. Christen Brocker, Associate Director AJC and Director of Research of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights was the second guest speaker. She stated that there is an extreme long and complicated history on the UN treaty on how to make the declaration a reality and consequences for decades on human rights and the general body in Geneva. Creating a mechanism on religious beliefs what are we stuck with rights resolution of religious beliefs and combating religious intolerance.

How does one combat intolerance or religious belief not criminalizing insults to one's deity or cultural views some states say nasty things there are laws that are against it. In 1996 UN special representative on religious intolerance went on a trip to Pakistan there were blasphemy laws criminalizing Ahmadis it was used against Christian and Hindus abusively. The secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation brought in good points one of which is to allow speech on religion. Both countries USA and Pakistan were having private talks in 2011. USA, Pakistan, EU and UK met together and came to an understanding of compromised religious tolerance. A small minority of Hindus live in Bangladesh they try to work in situations where a person from Bangladesh can work with local authorities. They try to get to work with people who know what they are doing. A final point was stated that ones religion is married to ones cultural identity.

## CRNGO Resource Centre role of health NGOs in advancing SDGs #3, #5

By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On November 16th, I attended a meeting called the NGO Resource Centre Chat Series at CRNGO resource center on the role of health NGOs in advancing SDG#3 and SDG#5. The meeting was led by Dr. Padmini Murthy of the Medical Women's International Association and Mrs. Connie Sobon Sensor of Sigma Theta Tau, National Honorary Society of Nursing, Inc. and a professor at Rutgers School for Nursing. At the chat series they stated they would like to have it twice per quarter and is a great place to network and know who is out there. The meeting was discussed with certain topics and agendas.

Dr. Murthy had started the discussions and mentioned that her organization the Medical Women's International is 97 years old and was started at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel. The organization fights for gender equality for women to be in the same standing as men. They want to help more women get into

male dominated fields like surgeons. She had mentioned that a friend of hers didn't want to bring her sick child to see a female doctor. They try to develop friendship and understanding through safe motherhood project. When women deliver babies in third world countries they are usually wrapped in paper, they don't have the supplies needed so they give blankets, scalpels and blades for these women. Afia is an organization collecting supplies and shipping it from the hospitals to the places in need there is a lot of wastage like bed sheets. Medications were being collected from HIV patients that no longer use it and are given to other patients who needed it. Grenada had the chicken guineu virus and they collected over 500 bottles of Tylenol because there was a shortage of it in that country. Wigs without borders is partnered through the organization and helps people who lost their hair due to cancer and they collect hair from people who donate and make it into wigs they then ship it to places like Grenada. Soap with hope is where they collect and donate soap in third world countries. They also deal with women and domestic violence in where they train medical students to see abuse in women as well to notice women trafficking how to identify it, torture clinics and dealing with victims of torture.

Some questions were asked in how do supplies get to the right people? Ambassadors will say if they receive it or not and Afia tells them where it's going. Unicef also tells where their supplies goes. Some organizations send actual reports and have built in monitoring. The wigs they get the pictures back of women wearing them.

Mrs. Connie Sensor has stated there she was looking for more women in a board leadership only 19% of women are in the boards in the US and sought essential and critical equality for both genders. She had mentioned that Norway has the most women in the boards followed by Sweden then Finland. France has passed the pink laws to get more women on the board members. Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland have most women on boards and these countries seem happier. They believe that shareholders can be pressured into putting women onto their boards.

## Portugal's Antonio Guterres elected UN Secretary-General

By Jin Chacko

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-37648265>

The world's most powerful organization is tasked with ending the world's most punishing war in Syria. A country has been destroyed due to violence and now the new UN Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres says that ending the conflict in Syria is his top priority and is tasked with bringing peace to this war torn country. Mr. Guterres was elected from thirteen candidates seven of them who were women and will start the position on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. He is a former Portuguese Prime Minister from 1995-2002 and previously led the UN refugee agency UNHCR from 2005-2015.

As the head of the UNHCR he tried to get the richest countries in the world to do more for the conflicts and disaster around the world. He stated that we are living in a world where we see many new conflicts arising and you see enormous difficulty in solving these conflicts. The world is living in dangerous times and we need to see people working together across the globe to achieve a better future. He hopes that people can put aside different opinions and interests and come to an understanding of putting a common and vital interest in place to end these conflicts. There seems to be a lack of capacity in the international community to prevent and solve conflicts. It is absolutely necessary if you want to live in a world where less security is needed and a place where people can live normal lives. In a BBC news interview, Mr. Guterres stated the role of the Secretary-General is trying to

be an honest broker, a messenger for peace and a bridge builder. For years he berated the world to do more for refugees, now he must focus on stopping the wars and prevent refugees from being forced to flee their homes. A few questions were asked to Mr. Guterres, does he fear that there will be more wars in Syria?, that we haven't seen the worst yet and it's his job to end the conflicts now?. His answer was he hoped not to see such a terrible level of suffering enough to even think it will get worse. He believed it's the international communities' first priority to be able to end this conflict and then use the momentum created by it to try to address all the other conflicts that are linked together.

At the general assembly Mr. Guterres stated that "The dramatic problems of today's complex world can only inspire a humble approach", one in which the Secretary-General doesn't have all the answers or seeks to impose his views. The task for him is now to bring the UN's role to bring stability to Syria when the Security Council is utterly divided on the conflict with two permanent members Russia and the United States no longer talking about a ceasefire. A role to tackle terrorism and conflicts elsewhere in the world often where the UN's 100,000 peacekeepers are struggling to keep any peace and human rights are often being abused. The countries of this world hear reflecting the longings and urgent needs of our citizens and are calling on the UN with the extensions to the Secretary-General to do more than this institution has ever done before. They are all backing him now but he knows his big battles lie ahead.

## Achievements Of Ban Ki-moon , Secretary General United Nations

by Jin Chacko

Interview with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

<http://www.euronews.com/2016/06/18/interview-with-un-secretary-general-ban-ki-moon>

Isabelle Kumar from Euronews, met with Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki-moon at the European Developmental Days in Brussels, Belgium this June. There were many things Mr. Ban Ki-moon achieved during his tenure with the United Nations. He was asked what the proudest moment was for him during his tenure as Secretary-General it was the Paris climate change initiative. When he first came into office there was not much discussion on climate change. One of the few times the world has been unified was with the Paris climate change agreement which is the greatest achievement in his mandate. Asked of the climate treaty was at being risk with Mr. Trump being elected to the President of the United States who is against the Paris agreement, he stated that the debate whether climate change is happening or not is over now. We don't have plan B or a planet B the world has made it clear that climate change is happening quite in effect.

The world seems to be in a state of paralysis, bombarded with crisis and events feels like we are navigating through uncharted waters. Mr. Ban Ki-moon has stated its true we are living in a world of peril and mess with many challenges, the movement of migrants and refugees and terrorism in the world. In the same time we should have a positive future and world leaders have to set out a vigilance and commitment. In the case of violent extremism the UN can play a role in dealing with this phenomenon. It seems the Islamic terrorist groups are stealing that hope but in 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a UN global counter-terrorism strategy and his job and first priority was to make it work. The plan of action to prevent violent extremism is now in the hands of member states hopefully it will be adopted soon by them. War in Syria continues and the UN is caught between USA and Russia. Mr. Ban Ki-moon has asked both countries to co-chair the International Syrian Support



Group (ISSG) to do much more and address all of these issues through political negotiation. Europe is being torn apart by many problems. There is enormity of challenges, Europe is failing there is a massive movement of refugees and migrants with a thousand to tens of thousands of people in Europe it seems global solidarity is lacking. On September 19<sup>th</sup> there was a summit meeting at the UN. World leaders were asked what the root causes of this, to protect human rights of refugees, how to have them integrate to society and how the value of migrants and refugees can provide to the communities.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon was asked finally to rate his term in office and if he thinks he has been a good UN Secretary-General. He stated that he will be judged by historians and by the world, devoting all his time and energy and passion to work together with the member states to make the world better, through terms of sustainable development, climate change, gender empowerment and youth empowerment. This is what he has been doing and been meeting with all sorts of different people. In helping others he is trying to be the voice of the voiceless and defender of the defenseless people around the world.

## Global Issues Overview

By Jin Chacko

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/global-issues-overview/>

The United Nations is the world's only global organization and is at the forefront of addressing many issues beyond national borders which cannot be resolved by one country alone. The outgoing UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon has said that climate change is at the top of the list but there are a total of eighteen issues on the list of global challenges facing the UN in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The overview of challenges are Africa, Ageing, Aids, Atomic Energy, Children, Climate Change, Decolonization, Democracy, Food, Health, Human Rights, International Law and Justice, Oceans and the Law of the Sea, Peace and Security, Population, Refugees, Water and Women. In each of these different challenges the UN has made a significant impact on helping people on a global scale resolve these issues.

In one of the key goals out of many that the UN has successfully established in all of these issues such as Africa Day an annual commemoration of the establishment of the Organization of African Unity on May 25, 1963. In 1982, the General Assembly first convened and produced the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, which helped with health and nutrition of the elderly. On the topic of AIDS in 2000, at the General Assembly's Millennium Summit specific goals were set to stop and reverse the spread of HIV through the Declaration of Commitment. The General Assembly established the UN Atomic Energy Commission to deal with the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy. In 1959 the General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which defines children's rights to protection, education, health care, shelter and good nutrition. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was set up by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program and the Kyoto Protocol was established to legally bind developed countries to emission reduction targets. Decolonization, which changed the face of the planet, was born with the UN and represents the world body's first great success. The General Assembly, in 1960, adopted its landmark Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The UN as an institution has done more to support and strengthen democracy around the world than any other global organization from fostering good governance to monitoring elections, from supporting civil society to strengthening democratic institutions and accountability. The dramatic rise of global food prices and the

crisis led the United Nations in April 2008 to establish a High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. The United Nations, since its inception, has been actively involved in promoting and protecting good health worldwide. Leading the effort within the UN system is the World Health Organization. One of the great achievements of the United Nations is the creation of a comprehensive body of human rights law a universal and internationally protected code to which all nations can subscribe and all people women, children, disabled people, minorities and other vulnerable groups now possess rights.

Among the greatest achievements of the United Nations is the development of a body of International Law and Justice with conventions, treaties and standards central to promoting economic and social development. The 1982 Law of the Sea Convention stands as a defining moment for the UN in the extension of international law to the vast, shared water resources of our planet. Over the decades, the UN has helped to end numerous conflicts, often through actions of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security. When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is brought before it, the Council's first action is usually to recommend to the parties to try to reach agreement by peaceful means. The United Nations system has long been involved in addressing complex issues with population notably, through the work of the UN Population Fund and the UN Population Division, which pulls together information on such issues as international migration and development, urbanization, world population prospects and policies, and marriage and fertility statistics. People fleeing persecution and conflict have been granted asylum in foreign lands for thousands of years with the help of UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR which was established on December 14, 1950 by the UN General Assembly. The United Nations has long been addressing the global crisis caused by insufficient water supply to satisfy basic human needs and growing demands on the world's water resources in particular it helped some 1.3 billion people in developing countries gain access to safe drinking water. Within the UN's first year, the Economic and Social Council established its Commission on the Status of Women, as the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women.

## Monthly CRNGO UN Thematic Business Meeting

By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On December 16th, I attended a monthly thematic business meeting of the CRNGO at the Baha'i Center. The meeting was moderated by Swami Parameshananda, a UN representative of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha. The meeting was discussed on the topic of Religion and Human Rights: In Celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mrs. Marta Santos Pais, a special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children was the first guest speaker at the meeting. As a special representative in this post she has tried to prevent and eliminate the violence on children. UNICEF did a study that more than half of the children in the world are exposed to violence either, physically, sexually or emotionally. It's the UN plan by the year 2030 to end all violence of children in the world. Violence of children knows no borders or cultures in some countries more than 90% of kids suffer from violence. There are nine in ten kids that are bullied, adults don't see it or not aware of it. Most kids would confide in a friend or sibling rather than an adult.

There needs to be an initiative to end violence on children not only states, government or organizations but mothers, athletes and artists should use their talents to support the movement.

The second speaker was Rebecca Rios-Kohn, Director of Arigatou International whose organization is an NGO international faith-based committing to building a better world for children. An initiator and sustainer of partnership-based initiatives to secure child rights and foster children's well-being, strives to empower and involve children and youth. She had mentioned that every five minutes a child dies in the world, four out of five children are exposed to violence in homes. There are about 240 million children in armed conflict at their homes.

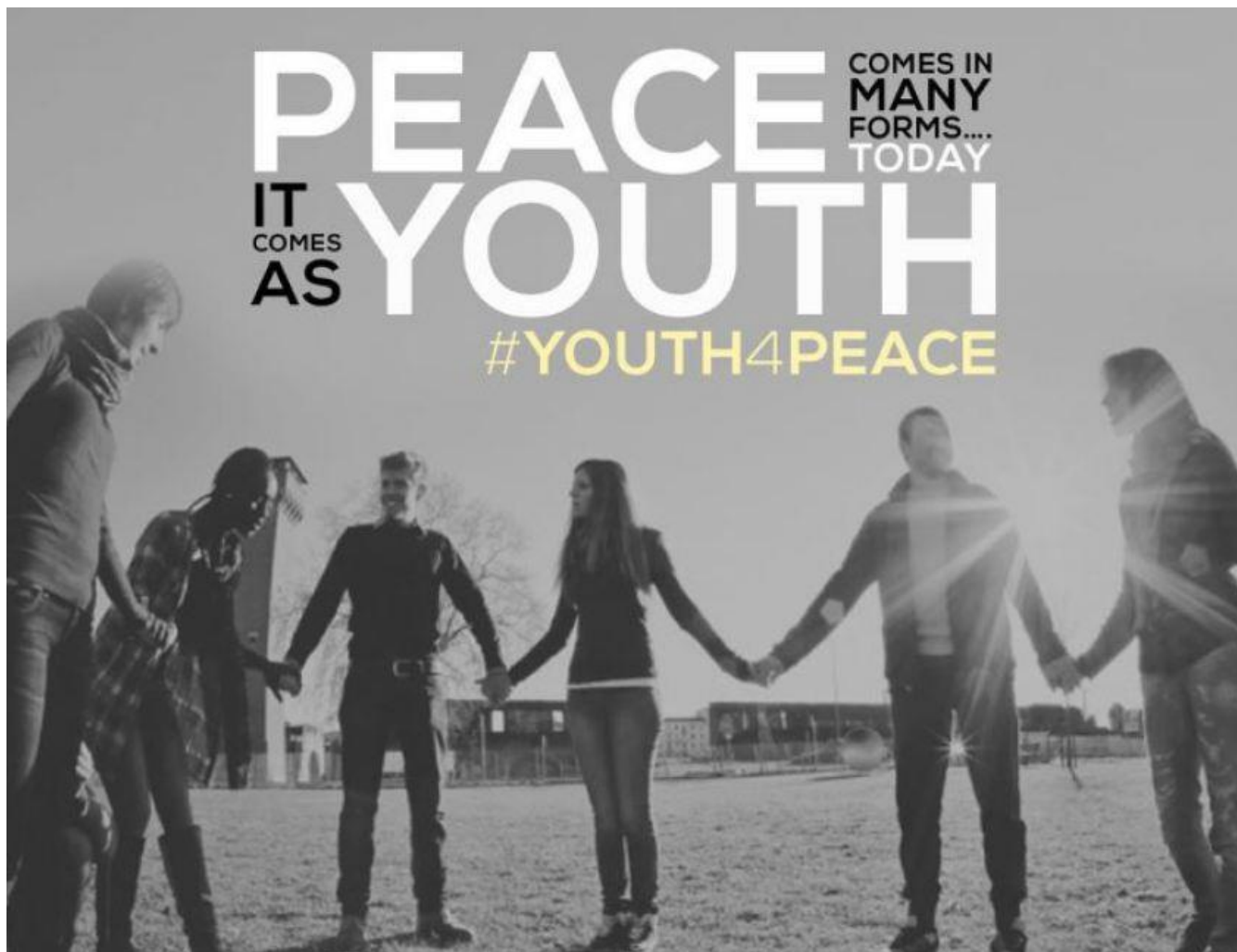
The third and final speaker was Mr. Rick Chavolla, a Native American from the

Kumeyaay Tribe. Rick served as an Assistant Dean at Yale University and was an Associate Director at the American Council on Education in Washington D.C. According to Rick many Native Americans first encounter with religious people were not positive many Native American kids were put into boarding schools in which they dealt with abuse. He claims his mother had to endure abuse when she was a kid at boarding schools. Many kids faced trauma when they were put up for adoption and territorial displacement. Most Native Americans are known to have the lowest standards of living and education and the have the highest suicide rates. The discussion was ended with a few questions from the people to the panel of speakers. Swami Parameshananda closed out the meeting with a statement saying that we have to transcend religion when we have that then all human rights will be met.

## 2016 in Review: Youth Highlights at the United Nations

### **Rise of Youth Rights at the UN Human Rights Council**

2016 has been a critical year in making the shift from youth issues to youth rights with the adoption the first [Human Rights Council Resolution on Youth and Human Rights](#) and the convening of the first forum on [Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law](#). Both the resolution and forum were important steps marking a transition around the needs and priorities of youth from talking about youth issues to talking about youth rights.



### **Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace & Security from Adoption to Implementation**

2016 marks the first year after the [adoption of Security Council Resolution 2250](#) on Youth, Peace, and Security. In this short time, we have witnessed important momentum and progress in implementing the resolution. On International Youth Day, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of an [Advisory Group](#) to document young people's contribution to peace-building world-wide. The [first regional consultation](#) was held in Amman in December to contribute to the Resolution's Progress Study. Also, the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund allocated [\\$5 million to youth-focused projects](#) across the world as part of its commitment to inclusive peacebuilding and as a recognition of the central role of young people to the peacebuilding portfolio.



### **First Global Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action launched at the World Humanitarian Summit**

One of the key outcomes of the first [World Humanitarian Summit](#) was the launch of the [first Global Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action](#). This commitment responds to the needs and demands of young men and women to put mechanisms in place to guarantee that the priorities and participation of young people are addressed by the humanitarian system. The Summit brought together over 9,000 participants from 173 Member States, including 55 Heads of State and Government, making the Global Compact a commitment of global leaders of all ages. Less than two months after the launch, the [first meeting on implementation](#) took place in New York to put the compact into action.



### **New Initiative Launched to Tackle Youth Unemployment**

A new system-wide initiative was launched in February in efforts to tackle the challenge of youth unemployment worldwide. [The UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#) was put into motion this year by the UN system and entities and coordinated by ILO, sending a clear message to the global community that success in fighting poverty, inequality and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will largely depend on young people as a driving force. In August, the UN Secretary-General took an important step in [appointing Mr. Werner Faymann as his Special Envoy on Youth Employment](#), raising the profile of youth unemployment and calling for action at all levels of governance.



### **Young People Convene at the United Nations Headquarters for the Fifth and Largest ECOSOC Youth Forum to Date**

Young people stole the limelight at the UN this year with over 800 young leaders, policy makers, and Ministers of Youth attending the [5<sup>th</sup> annual ECOSOC Youth Forum](#), the largest convening to date of the event that targets youth rights and priorities. The annual forum provides the largest platform at the UN for young people to engage in dialogue with Member States and other stakeholders on concrete commitments and actions to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and contribute to its implementation and follow-up.



### **Young People Took Center Stage at Major Global Events**

2016 saw some of the first and largest convenings of youth at major global events than ever before and across all fields. UN Women and its partners held the first-ever [Commission on the Status of Women Youth Forum](#), providing a platform for the inclusion of young women and men in advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality. Following this important gathering, a youth representative made a statement at the opening session of CSW60 for the first time in the Commission’s history.

In the field of trade and development, the [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development](#) launched its first [UNCTAD Youth Forum](#) at the 14<sup>th</sup> session of the conference both online and in Nairobi to kick-start a discussion on education, decent jobs, and government accountability. The forum was convened under the theme “Shaping the World We Want” in an effort to empower the generation that will be at the helm of achieving the SDGs.

On the occasion of the [134<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the IPU](#), not only was the [3rd Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians](#) convened in Lusaka, bringing together 140 of the world’s youngest parliamentarians, but the IPU Assembly itself was convened on youth under the theme “Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth”, emphasizing the leading role of young people in forming and upholding democracy.

And at Habitat III, a [Children and Youth Assembly](#) was organized as an inter-generational forum to ensure that young people play meaningful roles in the implementation, follow-up, and review of the



New Urban Agenda, highlighting the importance of young people in equitable, inclusive, and sustainable infrastructure.



### **Young People in the Spotlight at the 71st United Nations General Assembly**

At this year's [UN General Assembly](#), almost 60 heads of state [specifically referenced young people](#) and youth issues at the iconic podium, marking a powerful acknowledgement of the contributions of young people to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to international peace and security. Not only were young people represented in the speeches, but the annual gathering saw a record number UN Youth Delegates in attendance. Young people were also engaged in over 50 side-events, including the high-level [Young Leaders x World Leaders breakfast](#), which brought young leaders and world leaders to the same table to discuss the role of youth in the implementation of the SDGs.



### **Launch of the Inaugural Class of Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals**

On 19 September, the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth Ahmad Alhendawi [announced the inaugural class](#) of Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals at the Social Good Summit. The [17 Young Leaders](#) come from many different backgrounds, represent every region in the world and help activate young people in support of the Goals. They were selected from a pool of more than 18,000 nominations, a major indication of what it looks like when young people take the lead.



### **Not Too Young to Run Campaign Brought to the Global Level**

Starting in Nigeria and taken to the global level, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth with partners a launched the global [Not Too Young to Run](#) campaign to challenge the barriers that prevent young people from running for public office. Young people currently make up over 50 percent of the world's population, but less than 2 percent of elected legislators are under 30.

“ We must build on the work that has been done with the support of Member States, the Youth Envoy and civil society. But this cannot be an initiative by old people discussing the younger generation. The United Nations must empower young people, increase their participation in society and their access to education, training and jobs. ”

UN Secretary-General-designate António Guterres  
Swearing-in Ceremony, UN General Assembly  
New York, 12 December 2016



### Commitment to Youth by new UN Secretary-General António Guterres

In December, UN Secretary-General-designate António Guterres delivered a powerful speech at his swearing-in ceremony at the General Assembly in New York, highlighting the need to continue supporting youth empowerment and participation. Young people will continue to be a key priority for inclusion in all areas of the work of the United Nations.

### January Briefing and Notes from December Briefing

Dear Friends,

Our next CRNGO@UN substantive briefing and business meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 17, from 1:15pm-3:15pm at the Baha'i Offices (866 UN Plaza, Lobby 120 @ the corner of 48th St. and 1st Ave). The theme will be "**Religion & Education for Global Citizenship: Spiritual and Ethical Moorings**". Please see attached flyer (in pdf and JPEG format) for more details.

Please RSVP for this event to ensure access to the building: <http://bit.ly/2iAW5st>

Also, here is the link to view the notes from the December briefing and business meeting: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1b7n6u5l\\_2fXrdfrphXfZSqoO2BS3TCPiRy3Pv2EHBfY/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1b7n6u5l_2fXrdfrphXfZSqoO2BS3TCPiRy3Pv2EHBfY/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs)

Warm regards,

Christina Wright

on behalf of the Bureau

## Report - Sept 2016

by Joseph Cannizzo, Youth Representative, SOCA

**Date: September 26th, 2016**

**Length: 52 Minutes**

**UN Item: 9 General Debate - 30th Meeting, 33rd Regular Session Human Rights Council**

Slovakia (on behalf of European Union), Mr. Martin Kabác

Pakistan (on behalf of OIC), Ms. Tehmina Janjua

South Africa (on behalf of African Group), Ms. Tsholofelo Glenda Tsheole

Sudan (on behalf of Arab Group ), Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail Elamin

Russian Federation, Mr. Sergeev Kondratiev

Ecuador, Mr. Luis Espinosa

Cuba, Ms. Anayansi Rodríguez Camejo

Algeria, Mr. Zoheir Kherrou

Venezuela, Mr. Jorge Valero

China, Mr. Duan Jiang

Namibia, Ms. Sabine Böhlke-Möller

Bolivia (Plurinational State of ), Ms. María Natalia Pacheco Rodriguez

Turkey, Mr. Hasan Emre Uygun

Sierra Leone, Ms. Yvette Stevens

Greece, Mr. Michail Manousakis

Sudan , Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail Elamin

Iran, Mr. Amir Abbas Lotfi Sarabi

Bulgaria, Ms. Deyana Kostadinova

Bahrain, Ms. Budoor Abdulaziz Ahmed

Egypt, Mr. Hesham Mohamed Elsaeed Ahmed

Azerbaijan, Mr. Elchin Guliyev

### Summary

The meeting was held to discuss the support of the UN initiative against racism, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and to discuss the follow up each nation would take on behalf of that initiative. Speakers addressed various actions their nations were taking against racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and related forms of intolerance. Possible expansion of the ideas contained within the Durban Declaration into future initiatives were also discussed, and the majority of nations pledged their support to the idea of reducing racism within their borders.



## Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events

### UN DESA Voice December 2016: Promoting disability rights, Internet governance, International tax cooperation

#### [Disability rights are human rights](#)

With the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the world started a new chapter for the one billion people living with a disability. It formalized the obligation of Member States to guarantee the rights of persons with a disability, and provided a framework for people to claim their equal human rights and inclusion in society.

#### [Enabling inclusive and sustainable growth](#)

Today, the Internet seems to have an impact on just about every walk of life. It has undeniably sparked innovation and entrepreneurship, created new forms of public engagement and economic activity that helps people connect, organize and act towards a common purpose. However; two out of three households in developing countries lack Internet access and 200 million fewer women than men have access to browse the web. Security, privacy and human rights online need to be protected.

#### [Moving forward on international tax cooperation](#)

The 13th session of the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters will be held in New York from 5 to 8 December 2016, followed by the ECOSOC special meeting on international cooperation in tax matters on 9 December. This upcoming session of the Committee will focus on the issues related to the next update of the United Nations Model Double Taxation Convention between Developed and Developing Countries.

#### [Help us turn the tide – engage in the 2017 UN Oceans Conference](#)

During one full week in June 2017 (5-9 June 2017), the United Nations will devote special attention to the health of our oceans and seas by organizing a Conference dedicated to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

#### [Protecting the rights of persons with disabilities](#)

In December 2016, the world will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). We spoke with Daniela Bas, Director of UN DESA's Division for Social Policy and Development, on the impact that the CRPD has had for people with disabilities worldwide.

#### [“Sustainable transport solutions are key to leaving no one behind”](#)

The first-ever United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference concluded in the Turkmen capital on 27 November, with more than 50 countries endorsing the “Ashgabat Statement on Commitments

and Policy Recommendations,” with a [view](#) to supporting cleaner, greener transportation – from local transit systems to worldwide multimodal networks.





### Why a new Secretary-General?

A Secretary-General's term lasts five years and can be renewed. Though there is no limit to how many times a term may be renewed, no Secretary-General has held office for more than two terms. Ban Ki-moon, the outgoing Secretary-General who served ten years, will end his second term on 31 December 2016. He used his two terms in office to promote Sustainable Development and launched the crucial 2030 Agenda. Over this summer the Security Council reviewed potential candidates who had been nominated by their home governments. For the first time in history, the selection process was held in a transparent manner, including public debates. After several secret straw polls by the Security Council, Antonio Guterres of Portugal emerged as the preferred candidate and was affirmed by the General Assembly as the ninth United Nations Secretary-General. Mr. Guterres will start his term on 1 January 2017.

### Who is Antonio Guterres?

Antonio Guterres entered politics in 1976 when he was elected to the Portuguese Parliament in the first democratic election in Portugal after 50 years of dictatorship. From 1995 to 2002 Guterres was Prime Minister of Portugal and in 2005 he was named United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), where he oversaw some of the world's largest refugee and internally displaced people crises since World War II. He worked to deploy more United Nations staff closer to refugee hotspots and tirelessly pressed wealthy nations to do more about the refugee crisis and take more refugees in. He says that his work as High Commissioner has prepared him well to be Secretary-General.

### What is his vision for youth and young people?

Under his leadership, in 2015 UNHCR adopted the global theme "Make Education Safe for All" that has placed a special focus on young people. Guterres was specifically concerned about how displacement affects young people and limits their access to education. UNHCR also made significant efforts to reach out to children and young people and include them in informal discussions and activities. Guterres is passionate about education, believing that access to safe and quality education can have a long-lasting, positive impact on the lives of children and young people, their families and communities.

### Follow the new Secretary-General



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## Remarks by Ambassador Power at a GA Tribute to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, December 12, 2016

### **Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a UN General Assembly Tribute to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, December 12, 2016**

Before I begin, let me join the President of the General Assembly and others in thanking the Deputy Secretary-General for his truly remarkable service. We have every expectation that you will continue to carry the UN Charter in your pocket for the rest of time and continue to do as you have done your entire career, which is to advance the principals within it. We thank you. [Applause]

Let me also thank Mrs. Ban for her exemplary service, or the compassion that she exudes everywhere she goes, and also – perhaps less heralded – for her sacrifice and that of her family. It’s not easy to marry into a job like this one, but you have shown nothing but grace from the beginning. Thank you. [Applause]

Now, if one were to have bet on the likelihood of a child becoming Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon would have been a long shot at best. Ban does not speak often of himself or of his upbringing, but his journey to this position was a remarkable one.

He was born in May 1944 in Sangdong Number 1, a village of approximately one hundred people, named to distinguish it from nearby Sangdong Number 2, another tiny, rural village. To this day, Secretary-General Ban does not know his exact birthdate. His parents had lost infants before him, so they decided they would not get a birth certificate unless he survived his first month.

Secretary-General Ban was born into a world torn apart by conflict – first as a baby at the end of the Second World War, and then, of course, as child during the Korean War, which erupted when he was just five years old. Months into the fighting, Ban’s parents fled with him and his newborn sister to a remote home that Ban’s grandparents had in the mountains. It was January – the peak of winter – and the house was only reachable by foot. The family trekked for miles through the snow, without boots or warm clothes, until they eventually reached the secluded house. From there, a young Ban watched as fighter jets bombed nearby towns and cities. “We were safe,” he would later recall, “but we were poor and hungry.”

When the war ended and Ban’s family returned to their home village, he saw a UN flag for the very first time. Upon returning to school, he was given a textbook created by the UN Korean Reconstruction Agency, as well as food and clothes, which helped his family as they struggled to get back on their feet. He would later say that he remembered feeling as though “the United Nations was a beacon of hope for all Korean people.” That idea – that the United Nations should serve as a beacon of hope for the world’s most vulnerable people – has clearly never left him.

In 1962, when Ban was just 18 years old, he won a competition organized by the American Red Cross to tour the United States with a group of international students. Ban at that time had never left the rural area where he had grown up, never mind his country, but that August he boarded his first flight to America. On August 29, he and students from 41 other countries visited the White House, where they were greeted on the South Lawn by then-President John F. Kennedy. It was a tense time in the world, as the United States and the Soviet Union were competing for primacy, yet Kennedy told the young representatives that he felt a great sense of hope in seeing this global mix assembled there together.

“I think it’s most encouraging,” Kennedy told young Ban and the others, “to have people from so many different countries, including countries where the government leaders don’t always get on, but the people do.” Kennedy encouraged the students to dedicate themselves to serving those in need, a cause in which, he said, “there are no national boundaries...only a question of whether we can extend a helping hand.”

Secretary-General Ban would later say of that meeting, “Even as a young man who didn’t know much about the world, I was able to understand something crucial about the values of humanity from President Kennedy.” It was a turning point, the Secretary-General Ban would later write, “Kennedy’s words that day on the South Lawn sparked my decision to become a diplomat and dedicate myself to public service” – this is a path from which the Secretary-General has never strayed.

I share these moments from Secretary-General Ban’s early life today because, in them, we can see at least the origins of so many of the qualities that would define him as a leader – someone who, in one of the most tumultuous periods in the UN’s seven-decade history, has continued to try to strengthen this institution and has championed the cause of solving the world’s problems together. Let me touch very briefly on three of those qualities.

First, is the abiding belief that nobody anywhere should be left behind. We are all equal. We are all equally entitled to our rights. Secretary-General Ban made this part of his core argument for the Sustainable Development Goals – one of the most important achievements of his tenure – which he said are in fact “all based on a single, guiding principle: to leave no one behind.” His own upbringing taught him the importance of giving people, particularly young people living in places ravaged by war and poverty, hope – hope of being able to improve their lives. The Secretary-General understands this because he lived it, experiencing first-hand many of the hardships that we diplomats here can only imagine – such as true hunger, cold, and the deep-seated fear of being obliterated by an airstrike or picked up by enemy soldiers. And that, I believe, is why he takes it personally when he believes that we here at the UN are not doing all we can to, as he put it, “extend a helping hand” to people in such desperate situations. He can see himself in those in need because he has been there. There but for the grace of God go I. Do unto others as you would have done unto you.

The second is the idea President Kennedy planted that day in 1962 of service – serving others, the ultimate calling. You see this unflagging devotion across Secretary-General Ban’s work, but perhaps none so much as in his determined relentless effort to curb climate change. After all, what is a true reform of being for others than convincing people around the world to make changes that will preserve our planet for future generations? Not only did he possess absolute clarity about the existential threat that climate change poses, and the urgent need to take action to stop it; he also invested all of his diplomatic energy in persuading countries to negotiate and then to sign onto the Paris agreement, helping it cross over the threshold to come into force far swifter than any of us had thought possible. On behalf of our children and our children’s children, we will never be able to thank the Secretary-General enough for those efforts, and we owe to those generations to ensure that the agreement is implemented in full by all countries.

The third is the way Ban has defended the dignity of the most vulnerable and marginalized among us. Examples of this abound. Others have touched on many, including the unprecedented decision under his leadership to open the gates of UN bases in South Sudan to admit thousands of civilians fleeing mass atrocities. But none is more ground breaking than the stand he took on behalf of protecting the equal

rights and dignity of LGBTI people. Ban Ki-moon did not come into the job of Secretary-General as a champion of LGBTI rights. As he said himself, “Growing up in the Republic of Korea, we didn’t talk about sexual orientation or gender identity.” But, when he heard the way LGBTI people were discriminated against because of who they are and who they love – bullied by classmates and neighbors, fired from jobs, denied basic services, and physically attacked or even killed – he became a zealous defender of their rights. He spoke out against leaders who fanned hatred, and he spoke directly to LGBTI people who were under attack, telling them, “You are not alone...Any attack on you is an attack on the universal values the United Nations and I have sworn to defend and uphold.” This wasn’t popular with some – with many in fact – but it mattered enormously to real people facing real and sometimes mortal threats.

These achievements show what a difference the leadership of a Secretary General can make when it comes to tackling some of the gravest threats and most intractable-seeming problems. We are fully confident that António Guterres will build on these efforts as the UN’s new Secretary General, and we congratulate him on his imminent swearing in today. He is the man for the job in such challenging times.

Let me conclude. In 1962, speaking to that group of international students on the White House lawn, President Kennedy said, “What hopes we can have for the future are in all of you.” Who could have thought that among those kids was an 18-year-old from South Korea who, in his first trip outside the country, would find the inspiration that would set him on a path to one day becoming the Secretary-General of the United Nations? A boy who had grown up in poverty, in a war-torn country, whose circumstances otherwise gave no indication that he would have the chance to play such a leading role in addressing the greatest challenges of our time? It is a trajectory that affirms why we do what we do at the United Nations.

It is remarkable to think how many kids there are out there – whether it is the girl in a rural village who, as a result of the Sustainable Development Goals, will be the first in her family to finish secondary school; or the boy living on a Pacific Island, whose home may not be now submerged in water in the future, as a result of the Paris climate agreement; or the LGBTI teenager who – in spite of what her parents and her classmates and her government tell her – believes for the first time that she is entitled to be treated with the same basic dignity as everyone else, and to have the same rights – imagine all of those children out there who, as a result of this man’s leadership – Ban Ki-moon’s leadership – over the last decade, who will have hope that they otherwise would not have had. And just think what a difference that hope – their hope – our hope – will make in shaping the future of our world for the better. We are so grateful to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his service and for doing so much to make the United Nations into the beacon of hope he has always seen it to be.

I thank you. [Applause]

## Remarks by Ambassador Power at SC Stakeout on the Situation in Syria, December 19, 2016

***Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the UN Security Council Stakeout Following the Adoption of Security Council Resolution 2328 on the Situation in Syria, December 19, 2016***

Hi everybody. So, as you know, people in eastern Aleppo for months have faced the most heinous choice – the choice of staying and being subjected to regime and Russian bombardment; death from starvation, as some have undergone, or they lately have had the chance to try to get out and the evacuations have been chaotic. They have been brutal. People have waited out in the freezing cold to eat. Overnight, we received reports of death by overexposure as they wait for their besiegers to deign to give them license to depart. Today's resolution, I think, is significant in the sense that, at least we now have the Council finally agreeing that people who want to leave eastern Aleppo should be able to monitored by the United Nations, the ICRC, the Syrian Red Crescent, and others. And, with that presence, there may be some deterrence of what happens along the journey out of eastern Aleppo. There are even people fortunate enough, as they see it, to get on busses. We have seen people pulled off busses, their valuables stolen, and, of course, many reports of men and people of fighting age range being either detained or just never heard from again. So, getting these monitors into eastern Aleppo, onto the busses, at the points of egress from the besieged part of eastern Aleppo – that is now very small but has in it tens of thousands of people still – that urgent implementation of this resolution is everything. Right now it's an important step that I think, until a couple of days ago, people would not have thought the Russian Federation would allow to go through the Council. But until it is implemented, it's just a piece of paper. And it is our job as a UN community to ensure that those monitors get deployed urgently and that the risks that family who have lost literally everything – the risks that they undertake en route out of the besieged last part of eastern Aleppo – is mitigated by the deterrent presence.

Some of you have asked in recent days about the possibility of an emergency special session. That is still very much a possibility. Here, we have a lot of Member States in the UN who feel just as revolted and horrified as the American people – as people around the world – by what Syria, Russia, Iran, and proxy militia have done to the people of Aleppo and beyond, of course, to other besieged areas. And we are going to be looking to see what implementation looks like, how expeditious it is. The UN has 113 people ready to perform monitoring tasks alongside those of the ICRC who, in a peaceful way, I think, have been able to station themselves in a manner that has offered some help to people who arrived into western Aleppo. But what we've seen up to this point is woefully insufficient, and all of that now has to change with this resolution.

The other thing the resolution does is it allows for UN presence inside those parts of eastern Aleppo that have been conquered by these brutal militia and by the brutal government, and I think that's also a significant measure: if you actually had a monitoring presence out and about in eastern Aleppo. The districts, which, until very recently, were opposition-controlled – the districts have been bombed to smithereens, but where some people were either too sick, too old, or too hopeless to have boarded those busses and who are actually just going to stay in their homes – they are, of course, at great risk to the coming of criminality and bloodlust that has characterized this offensive from the outset.

I do want to note that, while the focus has been on Aleppo regularly because of the savagery of the offensive and the pain of the people living inside eastern Aleppo, we cannot lose sight of all the places where people are also living exposed to brutal winter cold, without food, without water, without medicine. The regime allowed the UN to send only four convoys in the month of November – four – to

besieged and hard-to-reach areas. That is a paltry amount, and recall again besieged means besieged. People can't get in, they can't get out, and we have seen starvation deaths reported from many pockets. The fact that this is happening in 2016, again, should continue to shock the conscience, even if we've been watching this brutality now for far too long.

This resolution does not address with the kind of specificity it does for eastern Aleppo, those other populations. And I'll just give you one example here: 50,000 people are besieged in Al-Wa'er in Homs, and hospitals there report they're a week away from running out of medical supplies, including surgical supplies and antibiotics. More than 46,000 people are besieged in Madaya and Zabadani, who faced starvation a year ago, are at the brink again by all accounts. And almost 500,000 people are besieged by the regime in east Ghouta and rural Damascus and have no idea when they can expect their next food delivery.

I am eager to take your questions on the resolution and on Syria, but if I may first, though, I just want to say a word about South Sudan, as well. We are going to be having consultations later today. The situation in South Sudan has deteriorated from an already horrific baseline, further, since our visit as a Council in August. You have, in the last three months alone, the mobilization of some 4,000 militia in Central Equatoria. You have the destruction, which we've seen through satellite imagery, of more than 1,900 structures. And all of this occurs with ethnic hate speech on the radio by government officials and by opposition officials. And you have all heard in the last month Adama Dieng, the Secretary-General's Special Advisor for Genocide, warning of a potential genocide in South Sudan. Humanitarian aid, which gets less attention in South Sudan than it does in Syria, but basically have the government, at will, by fiat, deciding who gets food and who doesn't, and on the basis of political and military designs. It's an outrage.

We support imposing an arms embargo and imposing targeted sanctions against those who are most responsible for spoiling the effort at the implementation of the peace agreement, but also stoking the ethnic dimension of the conflict, demonizing UN peacekeepers – thus putting peacekeepers' lives at risk. We think this is very straightforward. We are surprised, frankly, that something as basic as reducing the arms flow into South Sudan and designating people who have lengthy resumes of fueling hate and violence, that that is controversial. The fact that it is controversial in 2016, I think, says a lot more about the state of the functionality of the Security Council than it says about the state of events, and affairs, and lives in South Sudan. So, we are going to use today's briefing to try to bring home just how serious the situation is and just how necessary the steps are. And we are going to need to vote this resolution, and countries are going to need to raise their hands and decide where they stand on issues of life and death as it relates to the people of South Sudan. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Madam Ambassador, we just heard the Syrian ambassador say that UN personnel is already in eastern Aleppo, that it's already in Aleppo, and that there will be no additional personnel from outside. Are there going to be more personnel from outside? Do we have enough people to observe this evacuation process in eastern Aleppo? And also, it looks like Idlib will become the next eastern Aleppo. What is this Council doing to prevent that disaster from coming? Thank you.

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** Thank you. I would caution you with regard to anything the Syrian ambassador says. I think, just like on cigarette boxes there's, like, a smoker's warning, you warning, "This may be

hazardous to your health.” There should be a smoker’s warning here every time he opens his mouth, because almost nothing that he has said over the life of this conflict has been true. Now, of course, the Syrian government doesn’t want the monitors. They don’t want the crimes of their soldiers, of their intelligence officials to be known. They have brought to this conflict a horrific, sectarian agenda, and that nobody doing bad things – we don’t want monitors around to watch you do them. So it doesn’t surprise me at all that that’s his objective. I think the measure of this resolution is, is the Russian Federation serious about seeing it implemented? The text is plain. We were here for three hours yesterday negotiating every comma. It is very clear what is intended by the resolution, and that is not only to get UN monitors present to do direct observation – neutral monitoring, as the text says – but also to have a UN presence inside the eastern districts of Aleppo, more broadly. And that is something that has never existed there because it’s been a besieged area and the UN hasn’t been able to get in. So I think that the letter of the resolution is clear, the spirit is equally clear, and the question for Russia, really, after a year and three or four months of being an active belligerent on the side of the Syrian regime is: are they serious about what they vote in the Security Council as a permanent member, and are they prepared to deliver a regime that would never have taken eastern Aleppo but for the offensive fire power that the Russian Federation brought to bear. And if I may just – as a factual matter also, in the resolution we call for the personnel that the UN already has in the area to be deployed and used urgently, but there’s also a provision that calls on the Secretary-General to increase the personnel on the ground as appropriate. So I think we’ll be looking also very eagerly to see how Stephen O’Brien, Staffan de Mistura, and the Secretary-General are thinking through what the life of this presence should look like.

I think your point on Idlib is a version of the point that I was making at the outset which is we can’t lose sight of what’s next, but not even just what’s next – what’s now. The people in so many parts of Syria – any territory that is opposition controlled is being attacked, it’s being starved, medical provisions and medical supplies are being taken off of any convoy that goes anywhere near it. And I think we have every reason to believe that the regime will continue to pursue a military solution despite fictional claims that it wants to be part of a political process.

Our job as a Council and as an international community, united, is to call for a country-wide cessation of hostilities and to get a political process back on track. And the United States will never give up – I talked to Secretary Kerry just before coming over here – we will continue to push that agenda until our very last day in office, and I know there are other countries out there that are doing the same. If we can get the Council to rally behind that agenda, all the better. But we have plenty of Council resolutions that say what the sequence needs to be for this conflict to end, the problem is the perpetrators and the allies of the regime have not seen fit to implement those resolutions.

**QUESTION:** Madam Ambassador, can you tell us please about the modalities for these monitors? How are they going to work on the ground? Do you believe that they should be able to talk to people, to visit people in their homes and places, and are they going to be escorted by the Syrian government forces or militias? Can you give us some more details? And maybe this is something to be determined by the SG, but I’d like to know your position.

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** Yeah. Look, as of 24 hours ago, we and the UN, I think, thought that they were looking at a Russian veto. So we have the clock on the ground moving very quickly – people out in the cold, people being pulled off busses and potentially having their valuables taken, so we have to move

urgently. That said, the UN, I think, is scrambling now to develop those modalities. The first priority is to be relevant and present on these evacuations where it appears civilians have had a horrific time of it, even as they've sought to even do something horrific which is to leave the homes that they've lived in for generations. So I don't have any specifics for you. I know, for instance, that the ICRC has its own modalities that it is very faithful to, regardless of the circumstance. I know that de Mistura and O'Brien have been working the last 24 hours on the heels of knowing this was likely to pass today to determine what more staff need to go in and under what ground rules. So I think I would check with the UN on where we are, but all of that needs to be developed in the snap of a finger in order to be relevant for those who are still trying to get out and still vulnerable.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. On South Sudan, Japan and others have been reluctant to support an arms embargo and the sanctions because they're concerned that all this at once could just cause the government to not cooperate at all. What do you think about this reluctance to support those measures, and anything you can comment on how those consultations and negotiations are going?

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** Thank you. Well let me first say that we think it's extremely important that Japan has invested itself in peacekeeping, taken the steps that it has to be part of the South Sudanese mission, and we really commend the government for doing that. The arms embargo is a tool not only for protecting the people of South Sudan, it's also a tool for protecting peacekeepers. We saw on our visit the very observation post where Chinese peacekeepers were killed, we heard the literally almost implausible account of how the government blocked the medical evacuation of Chinese peacekeepers. So I think it's a highly questionable logic to think that the way to keep your peacekeepers safe is to not support an arms embargo. I mean, why would it be good for your peacekeepers to have a government whose people are starving spend what little money it has on weapons – large weapons systems – instead of on food? It is in everyone's interest to discipline the government's decision-making process and it is in everyone's interest, including the peacekeepers, for there to be fewer heavy weapons inside South Sudan.

Similarly, on the designations, again, I definitely hear the argument that Japan and other countries have made about the designations and their concern about what it will mean for their people on the ground. But how is it good for their people on the ground to have someone like Paul Malong, who is stoking ethnic conflict, militarizing the country, sending government militia out to kill civilians, not disciplining his forces in a manner that causes them to actually allow peacekeepers to move freely and be able to help deliver humanitarian aid and protect civilians – how is allowing him to live with a sense of impunity, which is what he feels when the Council blocks action to designate him – how is that good for Japanese peacekeepers? How is it good when the information minister in South Sudan – who is one of the individuals that we want to designate – how is it good when he opens his mouth, he basically does so in order to say that UNMISS is a party to the conflict, that peacekeepers are belligerents in the conflict, that they're allies of the opposition? When he does that, how is that good for Japanese peacekeepers? And how is it good that he knows that countries here on the Council are prepared to, in effect, cover for people who are posing a day-to-day threat to peacekeepers?

Similarly, the last designation is Riek Machar, the opposition leader who was part of the political process, is of course somebody who we have thought needs to be part of the solution. But with him out there ginning up his supporters and still saying that he's going to take power back using military force – how is him living with a sense of impunity good for peacekeepers? I just don't understand the logic.



**QUESTION:** Thank you. On the resolution – on the Aleppo resolution – you said that the UN is scrambling to figure out the modalities. But can I clarify – how soon do you think these monitors should be there? Tonight? Tomorrow night? Evacuations have resumed. And just a second question: how quickly are you prepared to bring the South Sudan arms embargo and sanctions resolution up for a vote?

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** How soon? Our objective is immediately. As a Council, that was the spirit of what we were doing was to get them in and make them relevant while these busses are moving, as you say, as we stand here this morning. Having 118 people in western Aleppo, those are people we have been told are on standby and the UN has known that we were seeking to make this happen. They have been asking for this – Stephen O’Brien came to the Council and said, “we want to monitor, it is unacceptable that we are not in a position to monitor.” So they need to get in there and be relevant on those green buses, along with other humanitarian actors.

Additionally, they’ve been given a new assignment, which is to determine how they operate within eastern Aleppo for those districts that have been conquered by the regime and where people are very vulnerable to reprisals. So on that, again, I know they’re trying to work as quickly as they can, but that is a forward-looking task that stretches well beyond the next few days, by which time we hope everyone who wants to leave eastern Aleppo will have been able to leave.

On South Sudan, I don’t have a precise timeline for you beyond saying that I think people’s voices and their votes and their stances on what the UN Special Adviser for Genocide said could be genocide, need to be counted. We need, each of us, to make our positions clear on how we feel about reducing the arms flow into the country, how we feel about designating people who have been stoking ethnic hate and political violence. And we don’t think it’s appropriate to wait until the New Year, whereby which time we’ll have new Council members who legitimately will need to come up to speed on the issues before us, across the board. We think it’s extremely important to vote on this by the end of the year.

## Other Related News

### UNICEF Chief Decries Attack on Syrian School

An air strike on a school that reportedly killed twenty-two children and six teachers in Syria's rebel-held northern Idlib province may have been the deadliest attack on a school in the war, according to UNICEF. The UN agency's executive director, Anthony Lake, called the air strikes an "outrage" and said that if found to be deliberate, they would constitute a [war crime \(AP\)](#). A report on Syrian state TV said militants had been killed in the area but [made no mention of the school \(Guardian\)](#). Estimates of [civilian deaths \(NYT\)](#) in Syria's civil war range from 300,000 to 470,000. On Wednesday Russia announced it had withdrawn a request for its Syria-bound warships to refuel in [Spanish ports \(BBC\)](#) after NATO countries had raised concerns with Spain, a member of the alliance.

#### ANALYSIS

"It wasn't clear whether Syrian government or Russian warplanes were behind the strikes. Russia has conducted an air campaign in Syria to bolster the regime of President Bashar al-Assad for the past year. [Schools have become common targets](#) in the conflict, alongside hospitals and marketplaces. The bombings have driven some classrooms underground for protection," Mohammad Nour Alakraa and Raja Abdulrahim write for the *Wall Street Journal*.

"The 'failure of the hands-off approach' is abundantly clear, but even as the devastation continues, the policy community remains bereft of ideas to stop it. This is not a failure of leadership or the result of misbegotten retrenchment, but rather the hard realities of devising a plan that simultaneously serves U.S. strategic interests, restores Washington's moral standing, and [relieves Syrian suffering](#) without burdening Americans with another potentially decade-long fight in the Middle East," CFR's Steven A. Cook writes for the War on the Rocks blog.

"For us, as Syrians, let me be frank: ISIS is the lesser evil. They have killed maybe 10,000 people, whereas Bashar al-Assad has killed hundreds of thousands. Ask yourself how anyone could [tolerate such a situation](#). Could you imagine that in 10 or 15 years, after crushing all opposition, perhaps the son of Bashar al-Assad will proceed to rule the country after him?" activist Yassin Al-Haj Saleh said in this interview with the *Intercept*.

### Was there a deeper network behind the 'Catholic Spring'?

By [Kevin J. Jones](#)

Washington D.C., Dec 28, 2016 / 04:02 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- A reputed "Catholic Spring" surfaced in the news this fall, after hacked emails from John Podesta, Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, indicated plans for an effort to sow revolution within the Church.

But grants to the think tank Podesta founded also suggest links to other efforts targeting religion. The Center for American Progress appears to be part of an influence network that advocates restrictions on religious freedom while promoting dissent within Christianity on sexual morality, especially LGBT issues.

Podesta co-founded the Center for American Progress in 2003 after serving as White House Chief of Staff in President Bill Clinton's final term. He served as the center's CEO until 2011. He became a special adviser to President Barack Obama in 2013, and joined the Hillary Clinton campaign in early 2015.

Two six-figure grants to the think tank from the Arcus Foundation seem to place it within a multi-million dollar campaign targeting religious freedom protections that conflict with LGBT political issues and the provision of abortion and contraception.

The Arcus Foundation in 2013 gave \$400,000 to the Center for American Progress' Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative in order to "articulate and disseminate a socially progressive framework of religious liberty." A \$250,000 Arcus grant in 2016 backed the center's Reclaiming Religious Liberty as a Progressive Value Project "to promote religious liberty as a core progressive American value that includes LGBT equality and women's reproductive health and rights," grant listings on the foundation website say.

On the Center for American Progress website, the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative described religious liberty as "a core American value." But it added caveats.

"Unfortunately, many opponents of marriage equality and women's reproductive health claim that religious liberty allows them to opt out of laws to which they object," it said. "We work to raise the voices of faith-based leaders and advocates to promote an inclusive vision of religious liberty – one that supports human and civil rights and does not use religious liberty to discriminate or coerce others to abide by beliefs not their own."

The initiative opposes "policies with overly broad religious exemptions that cause harm to others" and supports policies it said "promote religious liberty for all, rather than a favored few."

The Arcus Foundation describes its strategy for "fair and non-discriminatory religious exemption policies" on its website in a section labeled social justice. It is among several wealthy funders backing various groups to oppose religious freedom exemptions. These groups include the ACLU, a project at Columbia Law School, Planned Parenthood, the Movement Advancement Project, and Podesta's Center for American Progress.

The Arcus Foundation also pursues a strategy of cultivating allies among religious groups. It provided financial support for Center for American Progress senior fellow V. Gene Robinson, whose controversial election as the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 helped split the Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion.

In 2011 and again in 2012, the Arcus Foundation provided \$30,000 to Podesta's think tank in order to "amplify on a national level the voice and impact of the progressive social justice advocacy of Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Episcopal bishop," the foundation's tax forms show.

Robinson is currently listed as an expert in the Center for American Progress' Religion and Values section.

Podesta is now listed as a member of the board of directors of the Center for American Progress, alongside names like Secretary of State Madeline Albright, former U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle, and billionaire hedge fund manager Tom Steyer.

A February 2012 email exchange involving Podesta concerned the religious freedom controversy over a new federal rule that required employers to cover sterilizations and contraceptives, including abortifacient drugs, even if doing so would violate their religious beliefs.

Podesta's interlocutor, progressive leader Sandy Newman, noted Catholic bishops' outspokenness and discussed the possibilities of a "Catholic Spring," similar to Arab protests, to lead Catholics to demand "the end of a middle ages dictatorship and the beginning of a little democracy and respect for gender equality in the Catholic church." Newman wondered how one would plant "the seeds of revolution."

Podesta responded that he and his allies had created Catholics United and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good for a moment like the one Newman saw. At the same time, Podesta suggested the groups lacked the leadership to do so. He suggested consulting with former Maryland Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend.

The Center for American Progress and the Catholics United Education Fund are among the many partners the Arcus Foundation lists on its website. Among its other grantees are Catholics for Choice and Dignity USA, a group that rejects Catholic teaching on homosexuality.

The Arcus Foundation helped fund Dignity USA and its aligned Equally Blessed Coalition "to influence and counter the narrative of the Catholic Church and its ultra-conservative affiliates" ahead of the Synod on the Family.

The foundation also funded a project through the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups to counter the influence of African bishops at the synod by documenting and circulating the stories of people from their countries who identify as LGBT. That project was funded in collaboration with the Swiss bishops' development charity Fastenopfer, known as the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund.

The Arcus Foundation was founded by billionaire heir Jon Stryker, a major Clinton donor. Its executive director is Kevin Jennings, a former Obama administration Department of Education official. The foundation is a prominent partner of the U.S. State Department's Global Equality Fund, which promotes LGBT advocacy worldwide.

CNA contacted the Arcus Foundation and the Center for American Progress for comment but did not receive a response by deadline.

Source: [http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/is-there-a-deeper-network-behind-the-catholic-spring-56682/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=email](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/is-there-a-deeper-network-behind-the-catholic-spring-56682/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email)

### Christian women in India take steps to address clerical abuse cases

After efforts to persuade the Catholic church in India to deal with sexual abuse of women by clergy, and upset over the church's slow progress, a group of Christian women, mostly Catholics, announced steps for addressing the issue on their own.

"We should move outside the church to seek answers to abuse cases. We should treat this problem as a crime and take recourse to the law," said Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, a lay woman theologian.

Gajiwala, who heads the women's collective Satyashodak (meaning "seekers of truth"), made these remarks at a recent national seminar that studied the impact of religion and culture on the empowerment of women from an Indian perspective.

About 50 people, including a few men, attended the Sept. 23-26 meeting in Hyderabad, the capital of the southern Indian state of Telangana. The meeting was organized by Streevani ("voice of women"), an NGO managed by the Holy Spirit nuns, along with Satyashodak and three other groups engaged in women's empowerment.

The seminar coincidentally began on the same day the Standing Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India ended a three-day bi-annual meeting at Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), 355 miles south of Hyderabad. There the committee approved a set of guidelines to tackle clergy abuse cases. The guidelines have yet to be released.

But attendees of the Hyderabad seminar aren't waiting.

Gajiwala chaired a session on the last day that drafted a plan of action for the organizers in the year ahead. It decided to form a working group to deal with sexual abuse in the church.

The meeting attendees decided to analyze the 1983 Code of Canon Law in the light of the International Bill of Human Rights and Indian civil law.

They also want to facilitate the gender sensitization of men, particularly bishops, priests and seminarians, as proposed by the bishops' 2010 Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India. Participants stressed the need for developing a campaign to change the overall mindset of men in India.

The women decided to set up a legal subcommittee, to deal with the abuses under the [Indian Christian Women's Movement](#), an ecumenical forum that strives to bring equality for women in their churches. The subcommittee will study guidelines existing within certain congregations and regions that deal with these cases. The group also will continue to accompany and support victims of sexual abuse



Participants at the Hyderabad sessions celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights, in advance of its Oct. 30 observance. The scarf, painted pot and candles symbolize the cosmos. (Provided photo)

The attendees set up a two-member committee to draft a followup on the decisions of the Hyderabad meeting that will encompass measures to prevent and redress sexual abuse, as well as protocols and structures to ensure justice, healing and sensitive treatment of victims. Their deadline for the report is March 8, 2017.

The group wants to collaborate with the Conference of Religious India, the national forum for major superiors of both men and women congregations, in matters of common concern.

Another committee will compile and study abuse cases within the church reported from various parts of the country and note the church's response to them. It will also provide English translation of the reports that originally have been written in various Indian languages.

The seminar participants suggested formation of a pan-India network to deal exclusively with clergy sexual abuse cases. This solidarity group working under the Christian women's movement will become a pressure group to encourage church authorities to act. It will work on two levels — as an ecumenical forum dealing with cases in all churches, and for Catholics to deal specifically with abuse cases involving women religious.

Some participants remarked that several religious congregations have not even heard about a gender policy the bishops' conference implemented in 2010. They noted that each congregation dealt with abuse cases differently in the absence of a clear policy in the church.

The women also stressed that counseling support be offered to the victims of abuses. They called for unconditional support to the victims and proposed starting a website to disseminate information about

the cases among those associated with the Hyderabad meeting, the Christian women's movement, and people working on abuse cases.

Christian women first became concerned after a media expose of the sexual abuse in the Catholic church led to an "unprecedented crisis," Gajiwala said. A group of 24 women under Streevani met in August 2010 and sought to initiate a dialogue with the Indian bishops to provide a safe and secure environment for children and women in church institutions. They recommended a code of professional ethics for pastoral workers, including priests, and a policy to address sexual abuse for every diocese and religious congregation.



The group photo of the Hyderabad meeting. (Provided photo)

A year later, another consultation was organized with 43 men and women to move the effort ahead. They studied structural implications for the church in promoting gender justice, the moral and legal consequences of sexual abuse, and the psycho-sexual paradigm that supports clergy sexual misconduct. They then advocated a code of conduct for church personnel. They drafted a "Policy regarding sexual misconduct, sexual harassment and sexual abuse" and submitted it to the bishops on January 18, 2012, a month ahead of the prelates' biennial plenary. But the bishops ignored the policy, Gajiwala said.

The gang rape, and resultant death, of a 23-year-old woman on [December 16, 2012](#), in New Delhi shocked the Christian women as it did other Indians. They convened another consultation in August 2013, and invited bishops, priests and religious. Participants revised the earlier policy as "Norms for dealing with cases involving sexual abuse by church personnel." The women then presented the norms to the bishops' standing committee that met in September 2013. They requested the bishops take it up at their next plenary in 2014.

The women also noted that the norms would stress the bishops' seriousness about implementing the "zero tolerance" of violence against women as enunciated in their "Gender policy for the Catholic Church of India, 2010."

Gajiwala said the norms would help reduce abuse offenses, bring speedy justice for abuse victims, and act as a deterrent. Publishing them would also clarify the church's intentions to deal with the issue and avoid confusion that would lead to negative publicity, she added. "If the structures are put in place for implementation of these norms, they will provide religious authorities with the support and guidance needed for making difficult decisions," Gajiwala asserted in her foreword to the norms.

However, Gajiwala and Virginia Saldanha, another laywoman theologian, who were part of the team that has assisted the women's council of the bishops' conference to draft the guidelines, said they were not privy to the final draft presented to the bishops in September.

The bishop's conference has not divulged the guidelines. "Though the guidelines have been passed, the CBCI Council for Women has been asked to cross-check them for some technical and legal questions. It will be circulated as soon as the council ascertains certain parts," the conference's Secretary General Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas told *Global Sisters Report* in early October.



Release of the book, "Women as Equal Disciples: Unfinished Task of the Church. From left to right are Virginia Saldanha, editor of the book; Sr. Julie George, head of Streevani; Kalpana Kannabiran, director of the Council for Social Development, Hyderabad; Brother B Pratap Reddy, Montfort provincial, and Brother Varghese Theckanath, director Montfort Social Institute, Hyderabad. (Provided photo)

### **Drafting a resolution**

Meanwhile the organizers of the Hyderabad meeting released its [final statement October 24](#).

The 1,407-word document challenges the millennia-old perception that men are the "sole recipients and transmitters of divine message," and the women's role is to "passively accept religious teachings as interpreted by men." Such interpretations, Hyderabad participants said, have led to removing power from Indian women, reducing them to second-class citizens.



The women noted that many religions emerged from protests against established exclusionary and oppressive religious structures. "The institutionalization of religious movements with their unchangeable dogmas, however, develops a fissure between the original episteme, or way of understanding these movements, and the way they are practiced," the statement says.

"The challenge is to preserve the voices of prophetic dissent and foster the freedom necessary for change. Women have the most at stake in this process since they are the ones crushed by the life-negating dogmas and conservatism of traditional religions," it adds.

The women also oppose the frequent manipulation of religion to monopolize power through homogenization and ritualization. "Any agenda for change must, therefore, pluralize religious practices to capture the original thrust of the episteme. Thus, spaces must be created in our social imagination to accommodate not just a recovery of the past but also an innovation of new liberating symbols, language and imagery that challenge authorized canons," the Hyderabad statement asserts.

The Hyderabad group also noted that societal views about the nature of a woman's body can obstruct her access to her religion.

"Women in fundamental ways are locked in their bodies, and their exercise of power is at the pleasure of men, whether in the family or in the religious sphere. Thus, religion is not just about spirituality, beliefs and practices alone, but it is also political. These political practices, however, belong to structures of the mind that are not inviolable. They can be broken by recovering the spiritual and humane. It is on this recovery that women's survival and unfolding as humans hangs," the statement says.

The Hyderabad body acknowledged violence to women has become "a disturbing issue" in India. Violence is an expression of hegemonic power and is used to control, dominate and enforce a system of power entrenched in cultural, religious, political and economic spheres, they concluded. "Laws prescribed to protect are often manipulated to inflict violence."

For Catholic women, the meeting participants found a major discrimination in their exclusion from ordination and other offices. "The maleness of Christ rather than his humanity is emphasized, putting women on a plane lower than men," the statement says.



Participants dance to light music at Hyderabad gathering about gender and abuse. (Provided photo)

[Jose Kavi is the editor-in-chief of [Matters India](#), a news portal focusing on religious and social issues in India. This article is part of a collaboration between GSR and Matters India.]

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### The power of religion over women in India

Men have been dominant as recipients, interpreters and transmitters of divine messages, while women have largely remained passive receivers of teachings and ardent practitioners of religious rituals. Attitudes developed around patriarchal interpretations of religious belief have defined and shaped the social and cultural contexts of Indian women resulting in their disempowerment and second-class status.

In India, where politics uses religion as a tool to manipulate the masses, women bear the brunt of the consequences of cultural attitudes and the impact of religion and politics in their particular milieu. Recognizing the influence of religion and culture on Indian women's lives, [Streevani](#) (which means "voice of women") took the initiative to organize a national consultation on the theme "Impact of Religion and Culture on Women's Empowerment – An Indian Perspective." About 50 people — women and men religious, theologians, professionals and a diocesan priest — attended the September 23-26 meeting in Hyderabad, India.

Within the overarching framework of patriarchy in the religious and social sphere, the core issues that emerged were: one, violence against women and, two, sexuality and the politics of gender.

"Women have internalized patriarchal Christianity. They are comfortable with just a little space that is given to them," said Presentation Sr. and theologian Shalini Mulackal. The language, symbols and culturally conditioned interpretation of religious scriptures have evolved a practice that alienates women and even influences exploitation and violence towards them.

Lubna Sarwath, a social activist and scholar in Islamic economics, declared that Islam has moved away from God and the teachings of the Quran. Usha Rani Vongur, a Marxist feminist, said, "Religion controls our thoughts. It distorts reality and obstructs us from questioning." Manusmriti, the divine code of conduct for Hindus, depicts women in a very poor light and is full of derogatory statements about them. It advocates total control of women by the men in their lives. It also divided Indian society into castes, granting privilege to the higher castes and penalties to the lower ones.

"Religion is not a given, it is a negotiated reality," Kalpana Kannabiran, a Hindu woman and director of the Council for Social Development in Hyderabad, said in her keynote address.

In India, violence to women, the marginalized sections of society, and minorities is a disturbing issue. Violence is prevalent in the family and expands to a woman's circle of known persons, even those she is taught to revere and confide in, like religious leaders, and in public spaces.

Cyrylla Chakkalalal, a Franciscan Sister of St. Mary of the Holy Angels, narrated experiences of pain in the lives of nuns arising from patriarchal attitudes. Referring to the murder of two sisters from her congregation in 1990, she narrated how the character assassination of the sisters in the media turned public attention to the sexuality of the sisters and detracted from the who or why of the murders. The leaders of the Catholic community failed to take a stand. Their apathy and silence was painful. Were they being held back by other powers? The suffering that the congregation went through has only abated with time.

Religious structures have a negative impact on victims of sexual abuse, too. Women internalize scriptural interpretation that describes woman as sinner, manipulator and temptress. This contributes to their silence on abuse. Seeing the priest in the place of God compounds the confusion and guilt. As a result, the psychosocial and spiritual impact of abuse committed by the clergy is immense on women victims.

The bodies of women from the Dalit or outcast community are seen as "available," the women portrayed as characterless, so they are exploited for sex. Atrocities to Dalit women are very visible and committed with utter impunity. The internalization of their social status renders them voiceless. The mindset of caste underpins culture in all religious groups, including Christians. However, Dalits have become aware of their status and value in recent times. They comprise 17 percent of the Indian population, so politicians endeavor to reach out to them with various political gimmicks often resulting in splitting the community. Shyamla, a Dalit woman, proposed the articulation of feminism from a Dalit perspective.

Violence to women in the family cuts across all religious and caste groups in India and has its roots in cultural attitudes of male superiority. Narrations of stories of violence to women in the family can only be described as horrendous. One is left wondering how women continue to survive and take care of their children and home. The stories are similar — beating, smothering, choking (even during pregnancy), sexual violence, emotional violence, violence done to the girl children. But with the

existence of a strong women's movement that helped bring changes in the law, women have access to legal help to file cases against domestic violence.

### **Sexuality and the politics of gender**

Kochurani Abraham, a feminist theologian, pointed out that, in all mainstream religions and cultures, the politics of representation is at work mainly by casting humans in a gendered mold. The definition of masculinity places men at an advantage while women, defined as weak, sensitive and dependent, are highly disadvantaged. Ironically Pope Francis too is stuck in the complementary gendered mindset, even though he talks about expanding the roles of women. His otherwise progressive encyclicals refer to gendered roles for women, neglecting qualities like intellectual agency, theological expertise, organizational abilities and leadership skills, Abraham observed.

There is a need to break gender binaries as power is hegemonic and prescribes violence to control, dominate and enforce a system of rule. The gendering of body and sexuality does great violence to women and LGBTIQ persons. The male is considered the norm, and scriptures are used to define women as defective, sinful, needing to be controlled, even by using violence. LGBTIQ persons and their subjectivities are by and large excluded by authorized canons of religions. The issue of LGBTIQ persons is still nascent in India. The person scheduled to talk to us about this topic did not show up but they are included in the program for change.

Church teaching, while professing the equality of women, promotes the notion of complementarity assigning fixed roles to women and men, with women usually in passive and subservient positions, as Fr. Shaji George Kochuthara of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate pointed out. With regard to sexuality, he said, procreation is the center of the marriage relationship, the leader in theological ethics. Love, equality, respect and mutuality that contribute toward strengthening the marriage relationship are ignored. This, he said, has led to the active/passive paradigm that legitimates violence, such as marital rape, but also emotional, psychological and financial violence that covertly controls women's sexuality. Church leadership remains silent on the issues of domestic violence and dowry but stresses a morality that condemns abortion and contraceptives and glorifies fidelity in marriage and motherhood no matter the circumstances, Kochuthara concluded.

In India, gender justice is manipulated for political gain. The government has created a controversy over a Uniform Civil Code to divide people on religion and gender. In the name of gender justice, it is fueling Muslim women to stand up against polygamy and the triple talaq as it is practiced in India (where the man says "talaq" three times to divorce his wife). But women's rights lawyer Flavia Agnes, who has taken up several cases of Muslim women's divorce in court, finds that Muslim law can indeed give justice to women, especially to obtain alimony for them, while women in other traditions continue to struggle for those rights. Second wives in the Muslim tradition have full rights, while in other traditions they have no rights. Polygamy is more prevalent in other religious traditions than in Islam. She emphasizes, "We need equality of rights and not equality of the law."

For Catholic women governed by the Code of Canon Law, the major discrimination based on gender is their exclusion from ordination and all the offices contained therein. The maleness of Christ rather than his humanity is emphasized, putting women on a plane lower than men. Even within the category of the non-ordained, women and men do not enjoy equal rights. Only men, including married men, can be ordained deacons and be installed as lectors. As Montfort Br. Varghese Thecknath offered, "The

ontologically different character attained by men at ordination becomes a source of power that is sacramental and hierarchal and creates unequal people. This becomes an impediment to the realization of human rights in the church."

Without altering mindsets, very little can change. Hence at this September meeting, an action plan was drawn up for collaborating with male theologians to construct a campaign to boost awareness and create gender sensitivity programs; to form a solidarity group to strengthen the outreach to women victims of sex abuse in the church; and to fortify the [Indian Christian Women's Movement](#). While a more concrete strategy was worked out for the second and third phases of the action plan, the first part needs to become reality. The participants departed with a lot of enthusiasm to go back to their respective ministries and work towards a church that reflects Jesus' call to be a community that believes and lives the "Kin-dom" values of love, justice, equality, peace, reconciliation and communion.

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## The Future for Christians in the Middle East

The title of the discussion here today is, "Do Christians in the Middle East have a future?" What a depressing title. Even posing it as a question, regardless of how one answers it, is a sad thing to do, but sad times these are indeed.

The train of destruction that is the Islamic State, ISIS, as people know it, has taken Middle East Christians in Syria and Iraq by storm. In Lebanon, the ruling formula that the country has adopted for so many years is crumbling, strained by the growing Sunni/Shiite war raging in neighbouring Syria, leaving the fate of Lebanon's Christian, as a question mark.

In Egypt, the hopes of deliverance at the hands of the newest military ruler have not materialised with the situation of Christians in that country continuing to deteriorate. These times are indeed depressing, where hardly any corner of the Middle East brings any good news, about the region as a whole or about the region's Christians in particular. But before we talk about whether Christians have a future in the Middle East, it is perhaps important and necessary for us to begin by talking about their past. About who those people are, about how they survived for such a long time, and about why this moment in time might be so different.

Christianity was born in the Middle East. For many centuries, in late antiquity, Christianity was largely a Middle Eastern story. That fact seems to be forgotten today. Perhaps it is because of the years of isolation of Middle Eastern Christians from the rest of Christendom. Perhaps it is the decline of Middle Eastern Christianity, no longer the centre of Christendom that drove people to forget that, for many centuries, the centre of the world of Christianity was in the Middle East.

Of the four churches, or the four pillars of Christianity in late antiquity, three were in the Middle East; Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople. The early ecumenical councils of the churches – were all held in the Middle East. The leading figures in those early debates and schisms were all Middle Eastern Christians. Arius, Athanasius, Nestorius and Cyril, these were all Middle Eastern Christians, fighting,

debating, defining for us what it meant to be Christian and what we believe, until today, the Nicene Creed was formed by these Middle Eastern Christian men.

The school of Alexandria, renowned for its theological acclaim, producing men like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, set the date of Easter for the rest of Christendom. To its west, in Tunisia, it was Saint Augustine whose writings defined Christianity. To its east were the Cappadocian Fathers; pillars of the church until today were Basil and Gregory. In the deserts of Egypt, monasticism was born, at the hands of Saint Antony the Great.

Now this important role that the Middle East played – in world Christianity, began to end by the fifth and sixth centuries. Two phenomenon led to this. The first was that the growing fights within Eastern Christianity had bloodied it, had torn it apart with the growing schisms inside of it. In 431 AD the Church of the East, or the Assyrian Church as it is known today, broke from the rest of Christianity following the Council of Ephesus. Twenty years later, it was the turn of the Copts in Egypt to break, following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. These were followed by the Syriacs and the Armenians who formed what we know today as Oriental Orthodox to distinguish it from the Eastern Orthodox of Greece, Russia, Serbia and other countries. The second major event was of course the coming of the Arabs and Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula, creating a geographic border, a wall of separation between Eastern and Western Christianity, a wall of separation that continued very much until our modern times.

Under the Arab-Muslim rule, many factors formed the role of Christians and are important for us to highlight as they continue to shape the way Middle Eastern Christianity behaves and is formed. The first is the framework. In the West, the struggle was between popes and rulers, between Fredericks and Henrys and the popes who had the power in Europe at the time. In the East, the Middle Eastern Christians and their churches had to live under the framework of a different religion, of rulers that came from a different religion. That did not mean that they were isolated completely from politics. In fact, it meant that these churches often acted as representatives of their community.

Eastern popes became leaders of Christian communities, both internally and in front of the state. A pope was expected to collect the jizya, the money that the Christians were supposed to be paying for the state, and was punished by the state if he didn't. That role of the popes, of the clergy, as leaders of their community, continued until today. Naturally it meant, with the church playing such an important role, that the state, the Caliphs, the rulers, would find it important for them to interfere in church affairs; to try to appoint bishops or popes, to try to medal in church affairs.

The legal framework or the framework that Middle Eastern Christianity lived under – the rule of Islam – was that of Dhimmitude. Dhimmitude took two forms. The first is the legal framework, meaning that Christians were protected second class citizens, expected to pay the jizya, a certain amount of money, not serve in the military, and not able to carry arms and to protect themselves. But it was not only a legal framework but also a social one. The verse in the Quran that was the basis for that formula stated that until Christians paid the jizya, they were in a state of subjugation, of inferiority, until they recognised that they are inferior. This was the land of Islam; Islam was to be supreme in that land and, as such, Middle Eastern Christians needed to acknowledge this. This applied not only to Christians but, of course, also the Jews that lived in that time in the land of Islam.

What this meant, in practice, were restrictions on their lives that were intended to make them feel inferior, to make them acknowledge the superiority of Islam in its own land. Such citizens were not able

to ride horses, for example. This was written in the codes of the time; not being able to have any Muslim servants, certain dress codes they were supposed to wear at certain times; hazel clothes at certain times, black, blue. The colour itself might change but the idea that they were different and needed to be identified as different was constant throughout those years. The command that no new churches to be built in that land, all of this was framed under a pact invented in the Middle Ages but given a heritage, a frame of history, called the Umar Pact, supposedly conducted between the Second Caliph of Islam, Omar bin Khattab, and between the Christians of Syria or of the Levant.

That framework, of course, necessitated a response by Middle Eastern Christians. The first response of these people pertained to language. These people talked a variety of languages, Coptic in Egypt, Aramaic, the various languages of the region. Arabic became the dominant language and naturally these Christians had to adopt to become civil servants, not high ranking ones, such places were not always open to them, but to survive in that state they needed to learn the language of the rulers – and they did. Naturally, what followed was the continued decline of Middle Eastern original languages. Copts in Egypt today no longer speak Coptic, for example, they don't even what it means. A few clergymen might know the language but, for the rest of the population, the religion itself became Arabized; the language of prayers became largely Arabic in their churches.

Conversion was naturally the second. We don't have accurate figures from the time of when conversion happened, of when the Middle East became majority Muslim. It was a slow process. Sometimes it was through violence, often it was simple assimilation; following the people – your neighbours – and becoming like them, step by step throughout the centuries. Sometimes it was the poor segments of the Christian population that could not afford to pay the *jizya* and at other times it was the top levels who thought to acquire the benefits of becoming Muslims by rising up in the bureaucracy and the civil service. The fate of Middle Eastern Christians in those years was often a twin face story of survival and decline, of endurance and of decay at the same time. Years of persecution were followed by years of peacefulness, of tolerance. This up and down continued until modern times.

Modernity was brought to the region by a curious man. A French officer, quite ambitious, by the name of Napoleon Bonaparte, decided to come to Egypt. The land of the pharaohs was a curious place to start an empire for the French in the East. He arrived in Alexandria on the 1 July 1798. When the news of Napoleon's arrival came to the Mamluks, the rulers or the ruling fighting class of Egypt at the time, a Mamluk replied, "Let all the Franks come and we shall crush them beneath our horses hooves." The use of the word "Franks" and not "Frenchmen" is of course interesting, and reflects the mentality of the time. The last time the East, the world of Islam, had met the West was during the Crusades, when the Franks and all the other Europeans had come and had occupied the land for two centuries. In the end, Islam had won – the "Franks" had been kicked out.

The idea that something had happened in between, that the Franks were no longer Franks but modern Frenchmen, was completely absent. When the two armies finally met in the Battle of the Pyramids 20 days later, the hooves of the horses did not exactly crush the Frenchmen. The Mamluks were slaughtered as they faced the modern weapons of the time, the cannons of the modern French army. This, of course, brought the crisis of modernity to the Middle East. The question, as acclaimed historian Bernard Lewis put it, was what went wrong? Why had the Franks turned into Frenchmen? What had happened to them that made them now more successful, superior, technologically advanced, and so on? And the more important question how to catch up. How could the East become like them?

Modernity gave birth to a number of important phenomena. First, European involvement in the region increased. The French were kicked out, in three years, by a combined British and Ottoman military campaign, but the British themselves occupied the country eighty years later. In the Levant, however, French influence grew and in the Maghreb in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, countries quickly fell to French rule. Hardly any place in the Middle East was completely isolated from this growing European influence.

Modernisation at the hands of the rulers quickly followed. Native ones and occupiers brought modern schools, modern ideas. Christians largely benefited from this. They were more willing, by virtue of being Christians, to become or to join the modern schools that were being opened by both the modernising rulers and by the missionaries at the time. They were more willing to take the opportunities that modern education offered them. Besides education, modernisation and modernity brought the question of nationalism to the region for the first time, the question of who the people were, how to identify themselves, was brought to the region. Before that everyone was an Ottoman subject, the Ottoman Empire ruled from Morocco until Iran. It had reached the gates of Vienna twice, it had been one of the grandest empires of the Muslim world.

Suddenly, that empire was falling apart, and people began asking, Are we Muslims, are we Christians? Are we Ottomans? Are we Arabs? Are we Egyptians? Are we Syrians? What do these all mean, who are we? That questioning began in the western provinces of the empire, in Serbia and in Greece where there had been the Greek revolt of 1821, but it quickly spread to the east, where the question of identity would dominate the region.

Ethnic wars grew. In 1860, came the famous massacres of Christians by their Druze and Muslim neighbours, giving birth to immigration. Islamism was also born at that time. The answer by some Muslim intellectuals, to the question of what had gone wrong and how to catch up, was to advocate a return to earlier days when Islam was dominant. By returning to those older days, by returning to the Salaf, the devout predecessors or ancestors, a return to Muslims being supreme and successful in the world.

For Middle East Christians, the impacts of modernity were varied. First, it made them a bridge between the East and the West with one leg in each world, the necessary bridge between the two civilisations. Often it was Greeks and Armenians that acted as ambassadors, emissaries, translators for the Ottoman sultans in the court. Other Middle Eastern minorities began to follow the same route, becoming traders with the representatives of Western government, taking that role as a link between two civilisations. It gave them opportunities of advancement, better education, made them more equipped for the challenges of this modern world.

It also opened the door for the foreign missionaries to come to the region. Protestantism began to reach the region, often with a mixed result. My favourite story of Protestant missionaries was of a missionary reaching Asyut in the south of Egypt in the 1860s. On meeting the local bishop, he informed him that he had come to bring Copts to live with Christ. The confused bishop replied that his community had been living with Christ for 1800 years. He asked the missionary when had he got to know him. Such missionaries had a variety of impacts, challenging the authority of the local churches and taking some of their members, but also bringing modern education and advances to Middle Eastern Christians.



Some Middle Eastern Christians benefited from the idea of foreign protectors, of foreign powers, being interested in their fate. Russia quickly became the protector of the Orthodox in the region; France acted as the protector of the Catholics, especially the Maronites in Lebanon. In other cases, the foreign occupiers were actually not favourably disposed towards the minorities, such as in the case of Egypt where the British thought that dealing through the Muslims was much better than dealing with the Christians whom they tended to discriminate against in the civil service.

In general, modernity offered Middle Eastern Christians an opportunity to change their reality. They began to take that opportunity. For many of them, it was a demand for equality. Modern ideas were coming from Europe – not only nationalism but ideas from the French revolution, of being equal citizens, of citizenship itself. So we see a growing tendency for Middle Eastern Christians to demand the removal of the legal framework of Dhimmitude. To be allowed to serve in the military, not to have to pay the jizya. Such reforms came to the Ottoman Empire in the 1850s and 1860s. But also there was emigration – Lebanese and Syrian Christians emigrated to the West, to North America and South America after the 1860s massacres of Christians in the Levant.

And then there was Arab nationalism, curiously born at the hands of Middle Eastern Christians in the Levant, who thought that an Arab identity could become a suitable identity to bring Christians and Muslims together, instead of the religious divide. So, in a curious twist of fate, Arab nationalism was born at the hands of Middle Eastern Christians – on one side, the leader of the Syrian National Socialist party in Lebanon, at the hands of Michel Aflaq, another Christian in Syria, the Ba'ath party, George Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh of the Palestinian Christians. Middle Eastern Christians championed that idea in its original form.

But the dreams of independence were quickly turned into nightmare. Instead of independence bringing more equality for Middle Eastern Christians, it brought more challenges for them. First was the forced Arabization of the schools, of education, of every aspect of life. Arabization meant the removal of the uniqueness of cultures; the Aramaic, the Syriac, the Copts could no longer find their place in the public square. Everyone had to adopt the collective identity of being Arab. In the Middle East, identity is always dealt with as a hat. You can either be a Christian, or an Arab, a Muslim or a Syrian. You cannot be both; you cannot wear two hats at the same time. So the forced identity, the forced Arabization of those societies, posed a challenge to the local communities, with that conformity being forced on people. Often Arabization was not that different from Islamization. In the case of Egypt, for example, where the Free Officers Movement, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1952, began an Arabization and Islamization of the educational system; excluding Copts, reinforcing the idea that Egypt is an Islamic country despite maintaining a secular framework.

Independence also brought authoritarian rulers to power such as after coups in Syria and Iraq, and with Nasser in Egypt. These authoritarian rulers affected everyone; they brought about the notorious intelligence services, police states, torture affecting both Christians and Muslims throughout the region. But the fight with the West and Israel especially touched Christian lives – as non-Muslims, their loyalty was often suspect. If the West was the enemy, no differentiation could be made between the West and Christianity; it was all one thing. And if Israel was the enemy, and the Jews were the enemies, then Middle Eastern Christians were also suspect. Where did their loyalty stand? Was it with the West or was it with the Arab countries themselves?

The fight with the West brought that pressure on Middle Eastern Christians, a pressure that continued with all the horrors of the Lebanese civil war from 1975 until 1992. Islamism grew as a threat in the region, in Egypt in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in Syria until the massacre of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama in 1982. But the Islamists were not the only threat to Middle Eastern Christians. Often, it was the states themselves. Claiming to be secular, they had to out Islamize the Islamists, they had to enforce their own discrimination on Christians in order not to allow the Islamists to take the high ground in that fight

Restrictions grew on the building of churches in Egypt where, in order not just to build a church but even to build a bathroom in a church, you needed the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, to sign a piece of paper allowing it. That restriction remained until 2005 when, for the first time, building bathrooms was something that the president no longer had to deal with and it was left to local governors.

Immigration to the West was naturally an answer for many Middle Eastern Christians. But the decline of Middle Eastern Christianity is not only a story that began with ISIS or with the horrors that we see in Syria or Iraq, but came with economic constraints with persecution and discrimination. It is an ongoing story. You have here in Australia, in Canada, in the United States, growing Middle Eastern Christian communities. They have grown from the 1970s and the 1980s, people fleeing those threats in the region.

Lastly, it was the relationship with rulers that many Middle Eastern Christian churches developed. Perhaps it was a lesson of minorities throughout time; the ruler can protect, the ruler can stop the pogrom from taking place, the ruler can offer some sort of protection in the face of the Islamist threat. So it's no surprise, given the role that the churches had played historically, from the start of the rule of Islam, as representatives of their community, that these churches would develop close relationships with the ruling regimes, as these were their protectors.

And then came the Arab Spring.

Christians were hardly fooled by the promise of the Arab Spring. True, some of the youth thought that in a moment of enthusiasm change can take place. But for many of those minorities it was again the eternal lesson of minorities; a lesson learned by Jews throughout the Middle Ages in Poland, for example. Better the persecuting tyrant than the mob. With the tyrant, you can buy him off, you can use international pressure, you can persuade him. With the mob you stand no chance.

The Arab Spring brought three challenges, three frameworks, three fault lines to the region. The first was that the collapse of regimes was often occupied by the collapse of the state itself. This was true in countries that had no real basis for their identity, no collective identity. Where the borders had been arbitrarily drawn by the occupiers, the French and the British or the Italians, and where no basis for a collective identity had been developed. This is true of Libya, for example, where the collapse of the Gaddafi regime was not only a collapse of a regime but meant the collapse of the very idea of a Libyan state. It is true in Syria, in Iraq following the fall off Saddam Hussein, in Yemen. That collapse of the state meant a collapse in basic law and order, security, any form of protection that existed for people.

It meant not only the growth of Islamists on the national level but also the growth of Islamists power on the local level, where you have local Islamists in a small remote village in Egypt attempting to enforce their views on the local Christians; forcing young Christian girls to be veiled for example and a growth in

kidnappings of Middle Eastern Christians in Egypt, in Syria, in Iraq. There has been a growth of blasphemy accusations on the local level, where a Christian would suddenly find himself accused of insulting Islam for posting something on Facebook. There is a case in Egypt where someone received 6 years in prison for being tagged in a photo on Facebook. Anyone who uses Facebook knows being tagged is not something you actually do in the first place. Such accusations have grown.

The second problem the Arab Spring introduced was that by removing the power of the dictators, by removing the police state, it brought to the forefront the hatreds that had been brewing for centuries between ethnic and religious groups. These hatreds are not the creation of those regimes and are not the creations of the West; they've been there for centuries. But by removing the dictator, in the case of Iraq at the hands of the American invasion in 2003 or in the case of Syria at the hands of the people rising in rebellion against the dictator, those ethnic and religious divides became a clear divide that people now are fighting over. The major fault line has been the Sunni/Shiite divide. In Iraq this began with the Americans removing the largely Sunni regime of Saddam Hussein, and Shiites gaining power as the majority. In Syria, a Sunni majority had been, for decades, persecuted and dominated by an Alawite minority. Once the regimes fell, the Sunni/Shiite divide became the most important, with Sunnis and Shiites fighting in the region and with the regional protectors and finances both in Iran and Saudi Arabia using Syria or Iraq as a proxy war. The Sunnis and the Shiites have their own armies and their own battles, the Christians have none of these. They are caught in the middle.

Lastly there is the rise of the Islamic state, of ISIS, of its specific kind of horror, different from all the horrors that we had seen before. It's remarkable that fourteen years after 9/11, we're now thinking about Al-Qaeda as the lesser of the evils, because we've seen the worse evil in the form of ISIS. God knows what we might say in the next ten years or so.

So where does this leave Middle Eastern Christians?

This brings us back to the question, do Christians have a future in the region or not? Unfortunately, the answer is not that optimistic to say the least. It is important to mention that even before the rise of ISIS, Middle Eastern Christianity was in decline. In 1910, greater Syria, the Levant, was about 30 per cent Christian. Syria, before the revolution, was about eight per cent Christian. If there's a Syria in the future there is no telling what the Christian percentage would be. This is true across the region. Iraqi Christians, before the American invasion, numbered 1.5 million; today they are less than 300,000. So that decline has been going on for a while and is not only the result of the growth of ISIS today.

Certainly ISIS is the latest threat. Unfortunately it's a threat that we don't seem to have an answer to. Despite a military campaign, led by the West for the past year, ISIS has not been defeated and, in fact, it's growing. Not only is it now in control of a major piece of territory, stretching from Iraq to Syria, it also has the allegiance of various groups from Boko Haram in Nigeria, from three Libyan affiliates in Libya, from a local presence in the Sinai of the Wilayat Sinai, and even in Afghanistan there is an affiliate of the Islamic state, ISIS. Its threat does not seem to be about to be defeated.

This means that Middle Eastern Christians who are threatened, specifically those of Iraq and Syria, are not likely to be able to go back home anytime soon. Even if we are able to defeat this threat, perhaps in five years time, to end the horror that the Islamic state represents, the natural question is – if they go home, will they find their homes empty? The answer is unfortunately, no. Like Polish Jews survivors of the Holocaust returning to their homes in Poland to find other Poles living there; people that lived there

for five years during World War II and its aftermath are not willing to give up those places. Returning to homes, to neighbours that to say the least would not open their mouths when they saw you rounded up, did not open their mouths when they saw the letter 'N' in Arabic being written on your homes, did not open their mouths when you were being slaughtered. How would you live again with these neighbours in the same place? And if that was to happen, who guarantees that you will be protected in the future, that this will not happen again?

Today many Middle Eastern Christians have escaped to Lebanon. Lebanon was a country originally conceived for Middle Eastern Christians, for the Maronites specifically, and it's now home to over one million Syrian refugees, many of them Christians. But the solution is not always a happy one. Iraqi Christians escaped to Syria following 2006 when the sectarian horrors were real, and the Chaldean Christians had no protection.

In Syria, they thought they had a safe haven, only for them to be joined by the Syrian Christians themselves, escaping from the horror that became Syria. Is Lebanon's stable? For how long can Lebanon sustain itself while the Sunni/Shiite divide and the Sunni/Shiite civil war is raging on in its neighbour Syria? Is Jordan -another place that has been welcoming to Christians – stable? How long can Jordan sustain the fact that it has one million refugees are adding to the divide in the country between the East Bankers and the West Bankers. Regional migration might be a temporary solution but it's unfortunately not a permanent one.

Others might believe that the solution is allowing the Christians to protect themselves by giving them arms. In the modern Middle East, the only minorities that have managed to survive as my colleague Walter Russell Mead has pointed out, are those who have acquired military capabilities, the Jews, the Kurds and the Maronites. These are the minorities that were able to defend themselves; by either creating a complete state – in the case of Israel – or by creating a semi-autonomous state as for the Kurds, or at least by protecting their own mountains, as the case of the Druze and the Maronites. Unfortunately there is no longer any Christian presence in a specific geographic location that would allow the creation of a safe haven or of a country of their own. There is simply no place for them, no mountain for them, that would protect them. And the geography, that for so many centuries favoured the minorities, whether it was the south of Egypt away from the centre of authority in Cairo allowing a huge Christian presence continuing in that place, or the mountains in Levant that allowed the Maronites to survive, geography is no longer able to protect them from modern weapons and technology.

For many Middle Eastern Christians, the only answer is emigration, to pack their bags, to pack 2000 years of history and leave the lands of their ancestors and go to the West, hoping for an open door there. The Middle East will lose a lot by their emigration. The rich historic mosaic that is the Middle East will no longer be there. Instead, it will be a Middle East that will no longer have the Maronites, the Melkites, the Yazidis and the Mandaeans, the mosaic that for so long survived. It will no longer have those communities that were the bridge between the East and the West. The Jews were kicked out of the Middle East leaving Egypt, for example, losing 100,000 Jews who were forced out of that country. Recently a cure found for Hepatitis C was discovered, and the inventor of the cure is an Egyptian Jew who escaped in the time of Nasser. He found refuge in the United States and at Emory University researched the cure that is one of the most needed in Egypt which has one of the highest hepatitis C rates in the world. In this exodus of minorities, the Middle East will not only lose a number of its citizens,

large or small, it will more importantly lose many of its best educated people, the minds that would be able to build those countries.

I'd hate to end on a pessimistic note. I have talked about history under the Muslim and Arab rule as a twin story, of survival and decline. If the fate of Christians in the Middle East, in their own homelands, is one of decline, it is one of flourishing in the West. In 1971, when Pope Shenouda became pope of the Coptic Church in Egypt, there were seven Coptic churches worldwide outside of the Middle East – two in Australia, one in Sydney and one in Melbourne. When he died in 2012, there were more than 50 Coptic churches in Australia and a total of more than 600 churches around the world. There are more than 200 in the United States, 60 in Canada, there are Coptic churches even in Latin America, in places where you wouldn't imagine you'd find the Copts. Copts are living, they are flourishing, and are acquiring new converts. The Coptic church today is a growing phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa where half a million Africans find this church appealing given the lack of history of colonialism associated with it. And it's an African church which began in Alexandria.

While the story in the Middle East might be one of decline and decay, the story of Middle Eastern Christians in the land of immigration is flourishing and is one of survival.

Source: <http://www.hudson.org/research/11840-the-future-for-christians-in-the-middle-east>

### Ransomed: Race to free 226 Christian hostages in Syria

SAARLOUIS, Germany — Deep inside Syria, a bishop worked secretly to save the lives of 226 members of his flock from the Islamic State — by amassing millions of dollars from his community around the world to buy their freedom.

The Assyrian Christians were seized from the Khabur River valley in northern Syria, among the last holdouts of a minority that had been chased across the Mideast for generations. On Feb. 23, 2015, Islamic State fighters attacked 35 Christian towns simultaneously, sweeping up scores of people.

It took more than a year, and videotaped killings of three captives, before all the rest were freed.

Paying ransoms is illegal in the United States and most of the West, and the idea of giving money to the Islamic State is morally fraught, even for those who saw no alternative.

“You look at it from the moral side and I get it. If we give them money we're just feeding into it, and they're going to kill using that money,” said Aneki Nissan, who helped raise funds in Canada. But “to us, we're such a small minority that we have to help each other.”

The Khabur families trace their heritage to the earliest days of Christianity. To this day, they speak a dialect of Aramaic, believed to be the native language of Jesus.

When the villages were attacked, fleeing residents phoned cousins, sons, daughters, friends — Assyrians who had left the region in waves for the West. In the chaos, no one was sure how many were taken captive — but everyone was certain they were going to die.

As days stretched into a week, it became clear Islamic State had other plans.

The group told the 17 men captured from one village, Tal Goran, they could have their freedom but with a catch. Four female captives would remain, and one of the men had to deliver a message to their

bishop in the town of Hassakeh about 40 miles away, and return with an answer. The extremists demanded \$50,000 per person for the whole group.

It took the bishop, Mar Afram Athneil, three days to make a decision, as he consulted with members of the church around the world on what to do.

Athneil then began secret negotiations for the remaining captives.

When word filtered down about the ransom, the price was daunting. Islamic State's starting demand of \$50,000 a person would mean more than \$11 million for the remaining captives.

The calls for donations went out across social media.

The Islamic State has made a fortune off the desperation of hostages. A U.N. resolution from December 2015 called on governments "to prevent kidnapping and hostage-taking committed by terrorist groups and to secure the safe release of hostages without ransom payments or political concessions."

But while no government appeared to stop the fundraising, the Assyrians say no country stepped in to free the captives either.

Source: <http://www.sfgate.com/world/article/Ransomed-Race-to-free-226-Christian-hostages-in-10772542.php>

## The Predicament of Egypt's Copts



The December 11<sup>th</sup> bombing of the St. Paul and St. Peter Church in Cairo, which abuts the seat of the Coptic Orthodox Church, St. Mark's Cathedral, resulted in 25 deaths and over 50 injuries. The attack on el-Boutrosiyya, as the church locally known, was later claimed by the Islamic State's affiliate in mainland Egypt, signaling a potentially ominous turn in the country's years-long struggle against Islamist militancy.

The attack was generally framed as a shift and an escalation, as militant violence has largely taken on and targeted symbols of the Sisi regime and the Egyptian state. Whether this attack represents a sustained shift in tactics and targeting will be borne out in the future. In the Sinai Peninsula, the Islamic

State affiliate has recently undertaken specific but limited acts of violence against Copts. But in targeting a congregation of women and children and seeking to maximize harm to civilians, the Islamic State has eschewed its previous tactical reticence and adopted a more spectacular and indiscriminate mode of violence.

That previous reticence is largely rooted in the failures of Egypt's low-level insurgency of the 1990s, which foundered in the face of limited popular support and unstinting state repression following indiscriminate attacks on civilian and economic targets. However, the shift to targeting Egypt's most vulnerable community should not be seen in isolation as a mere tactical innovation. Instead, the vulnerability of Egypt's Christians should be understood more broadly, as a function of their status as second-class citizens in their own country. In practice and form, Sisi's Egypt offers the Copts a paternalistic form of Islamism that largely avoids top-level stigmatization and indulges in the rhetoric of national unity without offering them equal protection or equal rights.

Pervasive sectarianism is grounded not primarily in the most violent and intolerant visions of Islamist militancy, but instead in the much more ubiquitous forms of non-violent bigotry and religious supremacism that mark much contemporary Egyptian thought. The normalization of notions of second-class citizenship, even through non-violent ideologies or practices, creates a more permissive environment for sectarian violence.

For Islamist militants, Copts have long represented an inviting target; violence against them requires no additional political motivation and little in the way of ideological or theological adaptation. Over the years, particularly during the 1990s and in the post-Mubarak era, the community has suffered from regular attacks, although this past weekend's bombing marked the most significant such attack.

In the present context, any attack on Egypt's Christians is bound to both embarrass the government and its pretense to restoring law and order and erode popular support for the Sisi regime. But more importantly, those effects can be achieved while not risking broad-based backlash, with Egypt's ingrained sectarianism insuring that outrage remains real but limited. It is that sectarianism that enables more virulent forms of hatred for Christians. It should not be at all surprising that a society that views and treats a segment of its population as less than fully equal is also society that produces violence and terrorism against it, often in unaccountable fashion. Such attacks should serve as an indictment of those social and legal constructs and not simply the most malignant and militant such expressions of those underlying sentiments.

Egypt's Christians do not share in equality of citizenship. That inequality is expressed in both de jure and de facto ways. As a matter of law, Copts remain less than full citizens in the realm of church construction, religious discrimination, and religious conversion. Whether Copts could ever share in equality of citizenship in a legal and constitutional system in which the principles of Islamic sharia serve as the main source of legislation is questionable at best, but as applied by Egypt's current legal system the answer is unequivocally no.

Copts also face pervasive de facto discrimination in both public and private employment. Nowhere is that discrimination more acutely felt than within the upper reaches of the security establishment, but lack of public representation remains a far-reaching and persistent phenomenon. But discrimination takes more subtle forms in the realm of public education and civics, where Copts, their history, and contributions to Egyptian society are marginalized and overlooked. Various press outlets and religious

institutions regularly indulge in scurrilous attacks against Christians, often overlaid with conspiracy theories about Copts and Egyptian politics.

Perhaps most consequentially, violence against Copts, particularly at local levels, is rarely punished. This unaccountability for sectarian violence offers a stark display of the weakness and vulnerability of Christians and the lack of concern of organs of the state for the well-being of a segment of its population. Copts represent a communal issue to be managed to insure basic stability and not individuals deserving and worthy of redress, justice, and accountability.

A state and society that tolerates and normalizes bigotry and sectarianism will also engender more malicious expressions of that hatred. This point is not intended to be hyperbolic and polemical. In fact, its lessons apply well beyond contemporary Egypt and its burgeoning proto-insurgency. As the wave of demagogic and bigoted populism has taken root in mainstream politics throughout the West, it is nearly inevitable that the normalization of even non-violent forms of bigotry will similarly lead to discrimination and in certain circumstances, actual violence. In their rightful empathy for their targeted co-religionists, Egypt and the Arab World should begin to understand the fundamental hypocrisy at the heart of their current complaints about the treatment and perception of Muslims in the West.

Egypt's gathering violence will continue and may even expand further beyond its current boundaries, but this latest tragedy is the most malignant expression of a much more broadly held prejudice, namely, a society that sees its Christians as less than fully equal.

*Michael Wahid Hanna is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation. He is also an adjunct senior fellow at the Center on Law and Security at New York University School of Law.*

**Please join us on Monday, February 6, 2017 at Fordham University's Lincoln Center campus for "Out of the Flames: Preserving the Manuscript Heritage of Endangered Syriac Christianity in the Middle East," a lecture presented by Columba Stewart, OSB.**

Source: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/12/14/cairo-bombing-copts/>





NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2016

Partnership with MIT Solve Announced!



United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) has officially partnered with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on their first ever Solve Challenge. Solve is a new initiative from MIT that aims to tackle some of the world's greatest challenges by bringing people from various backgrounds together in order to come up with solutions and create projects. By crowdsourcing ideas, Solve hopes to build a community of technologists, researchers, business leaders, social entrepreneurs, change agents, and policy makers to support the selected projects throughout all stages until their implementation, by providing feedback and mentorship.

MIT Solve is based on four pillars:

**Learn** – to provide quality education by 2050 to anyone anywhere who wants to learn

**Cure** – to leverage innovations in healthcare delivery and medical research to make care affordable and universally available

**Fuel** – to double energy and food production and halve carbon output by 2050, setting a path to net-zero carbon emissions by the end of the century

**Make** – to provide the infrastructure and economic opportunity to support a world population of nearly 10 billion by 2050

Solve's active challenges this year are:

**Refugee Education** (Learn pillar and Sustainable Development Goal 4) – How can we improve learning outcomes for refugee and displaced young people under 24? Click [here](#) to view the challenge.

**Carbon** (Fuel pillar and Sustainable Development Goal 7) – How can individuals and corporations manage their carbon contributions? Click [here](#) to view the challenge.

**Chronic Diseases** (Cure pillar and Sustainable Development Goal 3) – How can we help patients and caregivers prevent, detect, and manage chronic diseases, especially in resource-limited settings? Click [here](#) to view the challenge.

Submit your solutions for the chance to pitch your ideas to a Solve panel of judges at the United Nations Headquarters in March 2017. Finalists will be selected and provided with mentorship, training, and networking opportunities to make their ideas a reality. The deadline for submissions is **20 January 2017**.

Visit <http://solvecolab.mit.edu> to participate!

The TOGETHER Campaign



TOGETHER is a global campaign that is geared towards changing negative perceptions and

Source: <http://academicimpact.us12.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=8572b4cc1ffd18424c6e34975&id=2936fbbfb3&e=ee54ceb241>

Year in Review

Religion and Foreign Policy Year in Review



GARY HERSHORN/REUTERS

The December Religion and Foreign Policy Bulletin highlights CFR analysis and commentary on foreign policy challenges of the past year. Read CFR Director of Studies **James M. Lindsay's** perspective on the [ten most significant world events of 2016](#), and consider how these issues will evolve in the year to come.

#### [Will the Liberal Order Survive? The History of an Idea](#)

In this *Foreign Affairs* article, **Joseph S. Nye Jr.** of Harvard Kennedy School examines America's historic role in the liberal international order. He warns that the security and prosperity that the liberal order provides may disappear should the United States choose to back away from its global leadership role. [Keep tabs on the world order with \*The World This Week\* »](#)

#### [Preventive Priorities Survey: 2017](#)

A serious military confrontation between Russia and a NATO member state or a crisis in North Korea are among top international concerns for 2017, according to the ninth annual Preventive Priorities Survey. Each year the Center for Preventive Action evaluates ongoing and potential conflicts in terms of their likelihood of escalating in the coming year and their impact on U.S. interests. [Explore this year's findings »](#)

#### [Why Trump Should Support a Probe Into Russia's Hacking](#)

The president-elect's foreign policy will likely make enemies abroad by the end of his first term, writes CFR's **Robert K. Knake**. It would be in Trump's best interest to conduct a thorough investigation into any Russian interference and respond forcefully before Trump himself becomes the target in 2020. [Listen to experts discuss the president-elect's priorities on Russia. »](#)

### [Confronting the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Putting Faith in Humanitarian Aid](#)

Experts from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, HIAS, and Islamic Relief USA discuss the role of faith-based organizations in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis, as well as the challenges of aiding and resettling refugees in the United States and abroad. [Examine this timeline of the Syrian Civil War »](#)

### [Repairing the U.S.-Israel Relationship](#)

“The U.S.-Israel relationship is in trouble,” warn CFR’s **Robert D. Blackwill** and **Philip H. Gordon** in this new Council Special Report, where they offer six policy proposals to repair, redefine, and invigorate the relationship in both countries’ mutual interest. [Read more »](#)

### [Ending South Sudan’s Civil War](#)

Following its independence in 2011, three years of civil war have left South Sudan on the cusp of full-scale genocide and its sovereignty discredited and undermined by warring elites. **Katherine Almquist Knopfof** of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies argues that an international transitional administration is the only viable solution. [Read the report »](#)

### [Christian persecution watchdog releases 2016 Hall of Shame Report](#)

**WASHINGTON** (International Christian Concern) – Persecution watchdog and aid organization International Christian Concern (ICC) today released its annual “[Hall of Shame](#)” report for 2016, highlighting the world’s 12 countries that are the worst persecutors of Christians.

The report divides countries into three categories – “Worst of the Worst,” “Core Countries” and “New and Noteworthy,” which includes the United States, as well as Russia and Mexico. This is the first time the Washington D.C.-based organization, which has assisted persecuted Christians since 1995, has included the United States in its annual “Hall of Shame.”

*“We felt it was very important this year that we highlight three countries where religious discrimination and persecution are deemed unusual but have reached a certain threshold of concern. These are Mexico, Russia, and sadly, the United States,”* said Jeff King, ICC President. *“While conditions in the US are in no way comparable to other countries on the list, a certain segment of the culture and the courts seem to be intent on driving faith out of the public square. There have been too many court cases with bad decisions to miss the clear trend line.”*

Exit polls made it clear Supreme Court nominations and religious liberty were two driving forces in the outcome of the 2016 U.S. election. President-elect Trump promised to place conservative justices who would uphold issues important to people of faith on the Supreme Court, and he promised to protect the First Amendment and religious freedom.

Many voters heard these promises, and according to a CNN exit poll, 56 percent of Trump supporters said Supreme Court nominations was their main reason for voting. Additionally, 56 percent of Protestant Christians (80 percent of White Evangelicals) voted for Mr. Trump.

*“The Founders carefully and deliberately placed religious freedom as the first liberty because it encompasses several fundamental rights including thought, speech, expression and assembly,”* the “Hall





of Shame” states. *“The First Amendment explicitly grants freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. The essential aim is to protect the right of citizens to practice religion in the public square.”*

ICC’s [15-page report](#) also highlights conditions for Christians in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, North Korea, Egypt, and Pakistan, among others. Featured prominently in the report, Saudi Arabia takes the “lead place” in the “core of the Hall of Shame” largely due to its decades-long funding of radical Islamic movements globally. According to the report, Saudi textbooks “can be found in schools across the Muslim world” and “teach discrimination against Christians and Jews while encouraging the spread of Islam through jihad as a religious duty.”

The 2016 report also includes a case study on India which examines an “escalation of attacks on Christians in India coinciding with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party.” ICC recorded over 272 attacks on Christians and their places of worship in India in the first nine months of 2016, marking a “dramatic escalation” over 2015.

Jeff King stated, *“The amount of violence, imprisonment and discrimination against Christians being reported to us by our networks around the world is simply catastrophic. The report calls out and shames governments who allow rampant attacks on believers to take place or are directly involved in prosecuting Christians for their faith. It also warns of countries where religious freedom is deteriorating rapidly and serves as a wake-up call for churches around the world, regardless of denomination, to come to the aid of our brothers and sisters who suffer so much for the cause of Christ.”*

[Click here to download](#) the complete 2016 “Hall of Shame” report.

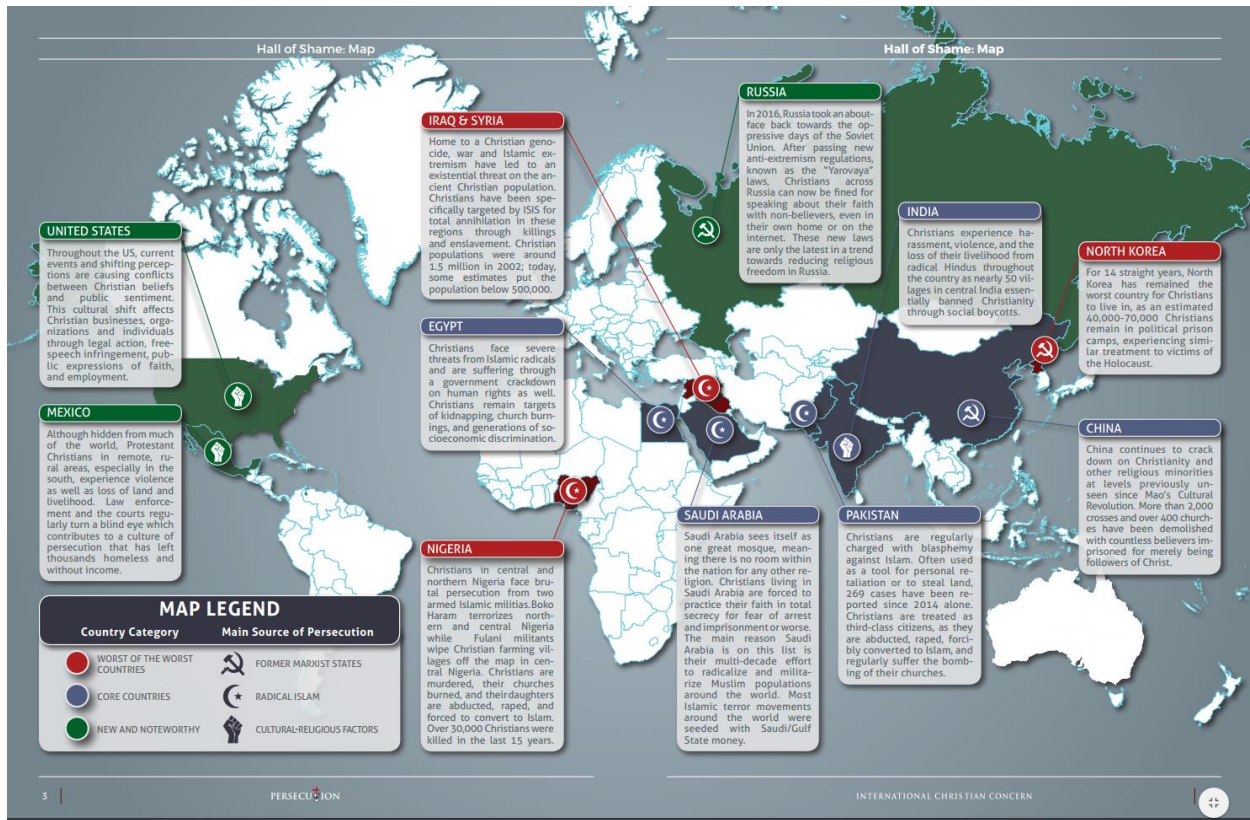
<b>Table of Contents</b>	
2 Hall of Shame Introduction	
3 Hall of Shame Map	
5 Worst of the Worst Countries	
7 Core Countries	
9 Core Case Study - India	
11 New and Noteworthy Countries	
13 Major Stories of 2016	
15 Our History	
16 ICC's Three A's	

# Hall of Shame

From the “Worst of the Worst” to the “New and Noteworthy”

**E**ven if I face death, I will follow Jesus.” Kim Eun-Jin still remembers the day, more than 20 years ago, when her father uttered those fateful words. A leader of an underground Christian church in the world’s most hostile anti-Christian regime, Eun-Jin’s father would soon after become one of the estimated 400,000 followers of Christ believed to have given their lives for their faith since the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK – North Korea) was founded in 1948. Eun-Jin would, many years later, escape North Korea, leaving behind tens of thousands of her fellow Christians who remain in prison camps to this day, forced to work in horrific conditions because they chose to follow Christ instead of the State. To remember the world’s forgotten martyrs as well as the living victims of persecution, International Christian Concern (ICC) releases this Hall of Shame report that details the world’s worst persecutors and countries that are regressing in religious freedom. This year, however, we’ve changed the format from our usual structure. Rather than using a straight 1-10 ranking of the worst countries, we’ve broken our report into three categories. The “Worst of the Worst” (North Korea, Iraq and Syria, Nigeria) looks at the most egregious state persecutors. Our second category, “Core Countries,” contains nations that are less egregious, but are perennial abusers of religious freedom (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, China, India, and Egypt). Our third and most exceptional category is “New and Noteworthy.” The persecution in these countries is not anywhere near the same level of persecution as those in the rest of the list, but events in these countries indicate declining religious freedom and are cause for alarm. According to the latest report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 74 percent of the world’s population lives in countries with high or very high levels of government restriction and/or social hostility towards religion. The same report estimates that Christians were harassed in 108 countries around the globe. While this is by no means a comprehensive list, our newly introduced 2016 Hall of Shame highlights 12 of these countries, shedding light not only on those who are the “worst of the worst,” but warning of nations where religious freedom is in decline.

For more than 20 years, ICC has existed to relieve the suffering of the persecuted Church and has spent countless hours conducting research regarding the nature of the persecutor and the countries that persecute. ICC has developed networks on the ground made up of indigenous representatives with first-hand knowledge and experience, giving breadth and depth to the reporting that you will find in this Hall of Shame.



Hall of Shame: Worst of the Worst Countries



## North Korea

North Korea's (DPRK) persecution of Christians has condemned hundreds of thousands of Christians to death over the decades. It is estimated that they currently have 30,000 to 70,000 Christians imprisoned for their faith. Christians not in captivity remain in hiding. DPRK is the world's worst human rights violator and the most violent persecutor of Christians.

The Kim family's communist government is the source of this persecution. The Kims have defied themselves and will allow no other god in the land. Each successive Kim demands complete loyalty to himself. Putting anything or anyone else above the State is considered treason. Since Christianity elevates God over the State, North Korea sees Christianity as a dangerous movement that challenges their power and must be silenced. North Korea persecutes Christians using three primary tools: *songbun* system, civil and political police, and *gulags*.

*Songbun* is a three-tier (first = core second = working third = hostile) societal classification system that rewards and punishes citizens based on their ancestral and personal loyalty to the State. Disloyalty in the lower categories eliminates the opportunity to achieve the highest *songbun*.

Those in the hostile class only make \$3-\$5 per month. Sadly, all Christians are classified as "hostile."

The State devotes massive resources to the monitoring of its citizens. Speaking of the conditions in DPRK, one former citizen said that the State "was always watching what we were saying [and] doing."

The final tool of the North Korean security apparatus is the *gulags*, or labor camps, loosely based on Stalin's prison system. *Gulags* exact severe and effective punishments that hinder movements considered

"anti-state," like Christianity. While the government denies the existence of these prisons, satellite images and former prisoners' testimonies affirm the camps' continued use as well as the guards' inhumane treatment of prisoners.

Massive workloads, starvation, extreme isolation, torture, and the casual murder of prisoners define North Korean *gulags*. One former child prisoner described how prisoners were forced to stone each other to death in a camp. Another prisoner reported seeing the execution of whole families in gas chambers.

"I witnessed a whole family being tested on suffocating gas and dying in the gas chamber," he said. "The parents, son and a daughter. The parents were vomiting and dying, but till the very last moment they tried to save kids by doing mouth-to-mouth breathing." (BBC: Access to Evil).

High level defectors are leaving North Korea like never before, an indication that the government's consolidation of power may be waning. Also, external information is flooding into North Korea disrupting the narrative of the Kim regime of the DPRK being a worker's paradise.

Kim Jong-un is desperately trying to control the situation and hold power. There is evidence of more arrests, expanding prisons, and increased torture. As a result, Christians are at a greater risk for persecution during North Korea's hour of desperation.

In 1907, Pyongyang experienced one of history's greatest revivals and was dubbed the "Jerusalem of the East" as a result. With the continued influx of outside information, religious freedom may flourish again.

Hall of Shame: Worst of the Worst Countries

## Iraq and Syria



On October 26, 2013, 18-year-old Ranim was murdered as ISIS invaded his hometown of Sadad, Syria. Ranim, a first-year university student and Syrian Orthodox Christian, was thrown down a well along with his grandparents, 16-year-old brother, and his other members of his family. At least 24 other Christians would be massacred by ISIS that week, and hundreds of Christian families would be used as human shields to protect ISIS fighters from counterattacks.

In August 2014, ISIS attempted to reestablish the Islamic caliphate based on Sharia law. They gained control of Syrian territory with roughly 10 million inhabitants. Among their more sinister acts was to begin enslaving Christian and Yazidi women. In 2015, ISIS published a pricing guideline for sex slaves, starting with "200,000 dinars for a woman aged 1-9 (Yazidi/Christian)" and ending with "75,000 dinars for a woman aged 30-40 (Yazidi/Christian)." ICC estimates that ISIS has taken at least 433 Syrian Christians hostage over the past several years, sometimes demanding as much as \$100,000 a

head for their return. On September 23, 2015, ISIS brutally executed three of these hostages to pressure the Syrian Church for payment. Today, Christianity in Iraq and Syria is on the verge of extinction as a result of atrocities by ISIS, other militant Islamic groups, and a widespread increase in radical Islamic thought.

In Iraq, the Christian population is believed to have dropped by 80 percent in just 13 years—from approximately one million in 2003 to no more than 275,000 Christians today. In Syria, Brentnall reported that the Christian population has shrunk from 1.5 million people in 2011 to approximately 500,000 people, a 66 percent reduction.

While substantial military efforts now appear to be driving ISIS out of Iraq, and perhaps eventually out of Syria, the vast majority of Christians who have fled their countries may never return. Many of those who remain fear trying to rebuild their lives anywhere with Muslim neighbors, knowing that much of the radicalism and persecution they face does not end with ISIS.

## Nigeria



Although Nigeria's population is almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims, the Christians in the North and Middle Belt regions face brutal daily persecution for their faith from the Islamic extremist groups Boko Haram and the Fulani militias.

Known for the 2014 kidnapping of almost 300 girls from Chibok, Boko Haram is an Islamic extremist group established to turn Nigeria into an Islamic caliphate. Their early attacks featured indiscriminate killing of all Nigerians who opposed an Islamic state, regardless of religious beliefs. In 2015, Boko Haram declared allegiance to ISIS, but a leadership crisis refocused Boko Haram's attacks. Today, militants focus almost exclusively on Christians and their communities through surprise bombings and raids.

The Nigerian government's military campaign against Boko Haram has been

a massive failure overall. They have been able to apply some pressure to Boko Haram, but it has only refocused them on attacking Christians.

Armed Fulani militias constantly attack Christian farmers. In the first five months of 2016, Fulani militias killed over 800 Christians and injured 800 more. They displaced 21,000 victims, and destroyed over 100 churches and 700 homes. Incidentally, the Nigerian government has not attempted any military action against them.

Since Christians cannot rely on government protection from persecution, they are left in an untenable position. As would be expected, Christians are starting to arm themselves, but this is a grassroots movement without funding or coordination.

Unfortunately, there is little reason to assume that the situation will change anytime soon.

Hall of Shame: Core Countries



**Saudi Arabia**

Across the Middle East, and even the world, there are few nations where religious freedom is as completely restricted as it is in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Only Sunni Islam may be practiced publicly and any Saudi citizen who converts to Christianity or another faith is immediately guilty of apostasy, punishable by death. Even non-Saudi Christians living in the Kingdom risk imprisonment and deportation if they attempt to meet privately to pray or read the Bible. For over a decade, the US State Department has designated Saudi Arabia as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its egregious restrictions on religious freedom.

At the turn of this century and by their own admission, the Saudis had invested \$100 billion over three decades recruiting imams across the globe, building mosques and madrassas (boarding schools), and providing seed funding, guidance, and assistance to Sunni Muslim communities.

In India alone, between 2011 and 2013, Indian intelligence officials believe that approximately 25,000 Saudi clerics arrived in the country, bringing in over \$250 million to build mosques and universities.

Saudi Arabia is also responsible for sending 15 of the 19 hijackers of September 11, 2001 to the US, more suicide bombers to Iraq after 2003 than any other nation, and has supplied at least 2,500 fighters to ISIS, more than any other country except Tunisia. ISIS even adopted Saudi textbooks as official textbooks until they began publishing their own in 2015. These textbooks, which can be found in schools across the Muslim world, teach discrimination against Christians and Jews while encouraging the spread of Islam through jihad as a religious duty.

Ms. Farah Fandihi, the first US Special Representative to Muslim Communities at the US State Department, visited with Muslims in 80 countries between 2009 and 2014. She found that Saudi influence was "pernicious and universal," an "insidious presence" in each place she visited.

Today, with new technological developments in oil extraction, Saudi Arabia may be facing a permanent economic downturn, which could eventually result in less funding for radical Islam around the world. For now, however, Saudi Arabia deserves its well-earned lead place in the core of ICC's Hall of Shame report.

Hall of Shame: Core Countries



**China**

China frequently uses intimidation, arrests, destruction of church property, and church closures to persecute Christians. China has exercised increased persecution towards Christians in 2016. For instance, in November, 30 Chinese police officers surrounded a house church before ending the service. In 2016, the Chinese government destroyed or tore down approximately 1,200 crosses from churches in President Xi Jinping's ongoing crackdown on the Church.

The government is the primary persecutor of Christians in China as it seeks to consolidate power over the people.

China attempts to corral Christians into their government-sanctioned and controlled denominations: the Three Self Patriotic Movement Church for Protestants and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association for Catholics which is loyal to the State rather than the Vatican.

Despite the government's efforts to control and stifle the Church, Christianity continues to explode. Estimates show that China will have the largest Christian population of any nation by 2030. It is thought that President Xi Jinping perceives this as an existential threat to the government by and it is assumed that his multi-year program of church destruction and cross removal will continue.



**Egypt**

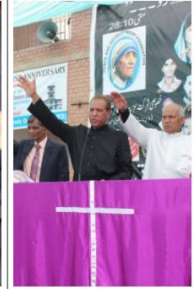
December 11, 2016, marked a heartbreaking moment for Egyptian Christians as a bomb ripped through a Cairo church during a Sunday service, killing 27 and injuring at least 47 others. ISIS claimed responsibility after the blast.

Authorities were quick to act and arrested four connected with the suicide bomber. However, this is not always the case for Christian victims when attacks are perpetrated by Muslims. Tragically, Christian women are regularly abducted, raped, and forcefully married and converted. Often, police either ignore or will even assist the perpetrators in these cases.

Egypt's 10 million Christians have endured persecution for 1,400 years since Islam arrived. They are treated as second-class citizens and forced to list their religion on their national ID cards which facilitates discrimination. While Christians can change this religious ID to "Muslim," the reverse is illegal.

The government often acts as an ally and tool of the Muslim populace, enforcing persecution. For instance, they place restrictions on the building or renovation of churches, while these regulations are not imposed on the building of mosques.

Although Egypt is seen as a moderate Islamic country, the truth is that it is a very fundamentalist country which continues to oppress its Christian citizens and intentionally keeps them as a permanent underclass. Unfortunately, we don't see this changing in the near future.



**Pakistan**

Christians account for 1.6 percent of Pakistan's population, but endure intense persecution from both the Muslim-majority culture and government that severely restrict their religious expression and practice.

Pakistani Christians suffer from rigid job discrimination, parent blasphemy laws, abductions, and forced conversion and marriage, as well as bombings and terror attacks from Islamic radicals.

Blasphemy laws usually carry the death penalty, are arbitrarily administered, and are easily falsified. Common motivations for false blasphemy accusations include score setting, financial gain, and religious hatred.

Christians women are targeted for forced conversions and marriage. Peace Foundation Pakistan estimates that 700 Christian women between the ages of 12 and 25 years old are raped, kidnapped, and forcibly converted to Islam every year.

Terror attacks against Christians have been increasing over the last several years. ICC has assisted Christians after attacks like the All Saints Church bombing and Peshawar attacks.

Finally, Muslims subject Christians to general discrimination with the aid of the lagging case system. Christians are relegated to the lowest caste and considered unclean. Menial and low-paying jobs such as street sweepers, house-maids, etc. are reserved for Christians.

Hall of Shame: Core Case Study - India

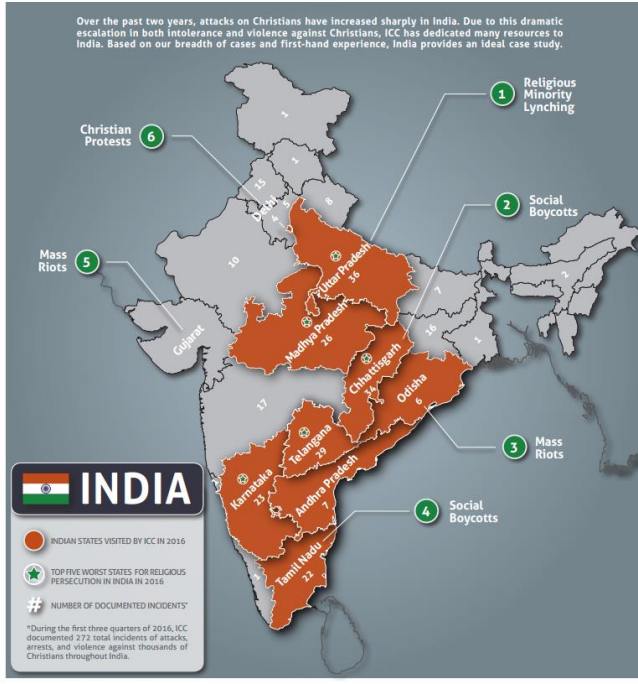


**India**

The escalation of attacks on Christians in India coincides with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the ascension of their candidate, Narendra Modi, to Prime Minister. Founded on a Hindu nationalist platform, the BJP often employs religiously divisive political strategies that incite Hindu radicals against the country's religious minorities. Unfortunately, Modi and the BJP deny that persecution is taking place and allow the persecutors to go unpunished, implicitly approving of the anti-Christian violence.

In the first nine months of 2016, ICC recorded 272 attacks on Christians and their places of worship, indicating a dramatic escalation over the 177 attacks reported in 2015 by the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

Most concerning is the continued assault on Christians in the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh State. In June 2014, over 50 villages passed resolutions banning the practice of non-Hindu religions, effectively making Christianity illegal. Beyond these resolutions, Hindu radicals orchestrated assaults and social boycotts (denying them public services, jobs, and goods) against hundreds of Christian families living in Bastar. Despite a High Court ruling that declared the resolutions unconstitutional, banning Christianity and social boycotting Christians remain widespread in Bastar.



Hall of Shame: Core Case Study - India

Noteworthy Religious Minority Events in India

- 1 DADRI MOB LYNCHING**  
Location: Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, India  
Date: September 2015  
Description: On September 28, 2015, Mohammad Akhbar Saifi, a 52-year-old Muslim, and his 22-year-old son, Danish, were attacked and severely beaten by a mob of Hindus who accused the Muslims of slaughtering a cow, an animal considered sacred by Hindus, and consuming beef. As a result, Mohammad died after being beaten to death with bricks and Danish was left with permanent brain injuries. The attack sparked international outrage against the rise of extreme Hindu nationalism and led to several protests by Muslims and other minority groups across India.
- 2 VILLAGE RESOLUTIONS & SOCIAL BOYCOTTS IN BASTAR**  
Location: Bastar District, Chhattisgarh State, India  
Date: June 2014 - Present  
Description: In June 2014, more than 50 villages in the Bastar District of India's Chhattisgarh State banned the practice of non-Hindu religions, effectively outlawing Christianity. This resolution remains in place, forcing many Christians to choose between converting to Hinduism and leaving their village.
- 3 ANTI-CHRISTIAN RIOTS IN KANDHAMAL**  
Location: Kandhamal District, Odisha State, India  
Date: August 2008 - October 2008  
Description: Christians in the Kandhamal District were wrongfully blamed for the assassination of a Hindu monk. As a result, enraged Hindus attacked Christians, destroying homes and places of worship. More than 100 Christians were killed and 56,000 people displaced in what has been called India's worst instance of Christian persecution.
- 4 VILLAGE RESOLUTIONS & SOCIAL BOYCOTTS IN TAMIL NADU**  
Location: Nagapattinam and surrounding villages, Tamil Nadu, India  
Date: July 2015 - Present  
Description: In July 2015, a social boycott was initiated against Christians in an estimated 11 villages near the town of Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu. This boycott restricts an estimated 6,000 Christian families from collecting water from village wells, talking to their Hindu neighbors, engaging in commerce, using the communal fishing boats, or even burying their dead.
- 5 ANTI-MUSLIM RIOTS IN GUJARAT**  
Location: Gujarat State, India  
Date: February 2002  
Description: Following the Godhra train burning, in which 59 Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya were killed, anti-Muslim riots broke out across India's Gujarat State. Hindu radicals incited anti-Muslim violence, resulting in the deaths of 990 Muslims. Prime Minister Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat State during the riots, was accused of initiating and condoning the violence that took place.
- 6 SERIES OF CHURCH ATTACKS IN DELHI**  
Location: New Delhi, Delhi, India  
Date: December 2014  
Description: Starting in December 2014, five churches were attacked and destroyed in India's capital of New Delhi. Among these churches was St. Sebastian's Church, which was burned on December 1, 2014. The series of church attacks in Delhi sparked protests by Indian Christians calling for Prime Minister Modi to do more to protect their community and places of worship.



**UNITED STATES**

**O**n June 11, 2016, Omar Mateen, a US-based radical Muslim, attacked a gay nightclub in Orlando, killing 49 and injuring 53 more. In a call to 911, he clearly laid out his motivation. The attack was driven by his allegiance to ISIS and desire for retribution for attacks on ISIS. Incredibly, after the attack, numerous high profile media outlets blamed the attacks on what they perceive as the anti-LGBTQ atmosphere that Christians have created.

In short, Christians in the US are facing constant attacks in the media, where they are portrayed as bigoted, racist, sexist, and close-minded. The characterization in the media may be translating into direct attacks as well. The First Liberty Institute, the largest legal organization in the US dedicated exclusively to protecting religious freedom, documents such actions and reports that attacks on religion doubled between 2012 and 2015.

More importantly, Christians and all religious people are being marginalized through the law.

From the case of a Christian football coach suspended for praying at the 50-yard line, to Christian business owners forced to pay a \$135,000 fine for declining to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding, the number of troubling cases directed towards Christians has exploded.

In 2011, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship lost their official recognition as a student organization in all of their respective chapters across 23 California public colleges. This occurred because the Christian organization required their respective leaders to uphold a doctrinal statement of Biblical principles, which allegedly conflicted with California State universities' policies. After four years of embattled negotiations, InterVarsity regained their official recognition in June 2015.

In 2014, Eric Walsh was terminated one week after being hired by the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH). The basis of termination was alleged undisclosed income from prior employment in California. However, the Georgia DPH knew that Walsh was a Christian preacher out of work and went to great lengths to review and investigate the content of his sermons posted on YouTube. Georgia officials have even

requested copies of Walsh's sermons, despite prior statements that the termination had nothing to do with his religious views or affiliations. Walsh is currently suing the Georgia DPH for wrongful termination.

The rise of these cases stems partly from a broad cultural shift towards secularism. The Pew Foundation found that those identifying as non-religious in the US rose by seven percent, to 23 percent of the total US adult population within just seven years (2007 to 2014). Anti-Christian entities have been able to leverage the growing secularization of society and culture to their advantage, utilizing the courts as a preferred venue to gradually marginalize and silence Christians. Using the cudgel of "equality," secular forces in and out of the courts have worked to create a body of law built from one bad precedent after another. Claims of intolerance and inequality are used to fundamentally distort the clear intent of the First Amendment.

The Founders carefully and deliberately placed religious freedom as the first liberty because it encompasses several fundamental rights including thought, speech, expression, and assembly. The First Amendment explicitly grants freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. The essential aim is to protect the right of citizens to practice religion in the public square.

Decades of accumulated poor judicial decisions and precedents have twisted the First Amendment so that the courts, in defiance of the Founders, are pushing religion out of the public square, and into the small space of private expression. In essence, the courts are deciding that you only have full religious freedom and expression in the church and your home. In the public domain, your religious views and thoughts must be restrained and controlled.

This trend is extremely worrying in the country that has long held the ideal of religious liberty.

While there is no comparison between the life of a Christian in the US with persecuted believers overseas, ICC sees these worrying trends as an alarming indication of a decline in religious liberty in the United States.



**Russia**

**I**n 2016, Russia regressed in its protection of human rights by passing what are called the "Yarovaya" laws. The laws, which on the surface are designed to counter violent extremism from Islam, in fact place incredible restrictions on Christians and other religious minorities who are not a part of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Yarovaya laws are just the most recent crackdown in a trend of stifling religious expression.

In addition to the 2016 Yarovaya laws, a 2013 blasphemy law criminalized disrespecting or insulting religious beliefs, while a 2012 anti-extremism law made illegal any materials stating that one religion is truer than another. A 2014 "public order" law requires prior official permission to

conduct prayer or worship meetings, even in privately owned spaces.

Pastor Donald Ossewaarde was the first American citizen to be charged under the Yarovaya laws, which included a ban on missionary activities in settings that are not explicitly religious. Under these laws, anyone who shares their faith outside of a church could face stiff penalties. Ossewaarde was arrested for holding worship in a private home and allegedly posting information about worship times on bulletin boards in nearby housing blocks. He is one of several Christian missionaries who have been fined for everything from conducting baptisms to preaching over the last few years.

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**Mexico**



**D**iscrimination against Christians in Mexico runs rampant in rural villages and other local communities, with little to no government intervention. Although Mexico's population is very religious, only five percent are evangelicals and this minority faces widespread persecution.

ICC has documented more than 150 cases of persecution against Protestant Christian communities. In rural communities, minority Christians are often told that they must participate in and pay for local village festivals that they consider to be either pagan or even satanic.

This typically sets up a point of conflict between evangelicals and town leaders that ultimately results in heavy fines, imprisonment, beatings, eviction from their communities, or in the most extreme cases, rape or murder. In January 2016, 30 evangelical Christians in the state of Chiapas were expelled from their village and their homes were destroyed.

Laura Pérez Núñez, a Mexican evangelical Christian, was imprisoned several times after publicly proclaiming his faith. Village authorities demanded that he deny his beliefs, which they claimed were contrary to their "custom" of communal faith. Núñez was told that he must leave the community or face a longer imprisonment. When he tried to return

to his village to visit his family in March, he and his family were brutally attacked and he and his cousin were imprisoned. They have since been released.

Although Mexico's constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the persecution of minority Christian communities has continued without prosecution of perpetrators from the Mexican government. Additionally, provisions in the constitution which guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples are often used to justify persecution against Christians who disagree with the "traditionalist" religion. Because of these provisions, government apathy, or even collusion, perpetrators operate freely without fear of consequences.

The international community has failed to hold the Mexican government accountable. However, back channel discussions between the US and Mexican governments on this issue have yielded some fruit.

The Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, David Saperstein, visited Mexico to speak with activists and members of religious minorities. In September, 13 members of Congress joined ICC in writing a letter to the Mexican attorney general, calling for the prosecution of individuals guilty of religious freedom violations.

**Major Stories of 2016**

<p><b>Pakistan:</b> During Easter, a suicide bombing in Lahore killed at least 70 people and wounded more than 300, becoming the second deadliest attack on Christians in Pakistan's history, following the 2015 bombing of All Saints' Church. Christians have suffered much due to the Pakistani government's unwillingness to protect them.</p>	<p><b>United States:</b> The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) terminated Dr. Eric Walsh, a leading public health expert who also serves as a lay minister, due to the content of his sermons. The DPH sent workers to investigate his sermons on issues of health, homosexuality, and other topics, and subsequently retaliated.</p>	<p><b>Saudi Arabia:</b> A Tunisian religious affairs minister was ousted from his governmental position after linking Saudi Arabia's religious ideology with extremism. The government claimed that the minister's remarks were an attack on the country's diplomatic values. Historically, Saudi Arabia has played a behind-the-scenes role in radicalizing the global Sunni Muslim body.</p>	<p><b>Nigeria:</b> Boko Haram carried out several attacks where they beheaded a village chief and his son, killed eight Christian villagers returning from church, and ambushed a convoy under military escort. Boko Haram has vowed to persecute and kill Christians because of their faith.</p>	<p><b>North Korea:</b> Amnesty International reports that prison camps in North Korea continue to grow. The reports have documented severe human rights violations for up to 120,000 people being held in political prison camps. Christians comprise a large percentage of prisoners, with an estimated 30 to 70 thousand being held prisoner.</p>						
1/4/16	3/27/16	4/14/16	4/20/16	6/30/16	8/5/16	8/26/16	9/18/16	10/21/16	11/24/16	12/11/16
<p><b>Mexico:</b> 30 Protestants in Chiapas were expelled from their homes by community members and forced to watch as their property was destroyed. This incident is one of a series of hostilities targeted at Protestants in rural Mexico. Government officials chose to ignore the pleas for help from Protestant villagers.</p>	<p><b>China:</b> A church leader and his wife were buried alive while trying to prevent the destruction of their church because a developer wanted control of the property. The leader escaped, but his wife suffocated to death under the rubble. One member of the demolition crew said, "Bury them alive. I will be responsible."</p>	<p><b>India:</b> Evangelical Fellowship of India issued a report showing that incidents of violent attacks on Christians increased dramatically during the first half of 2016. There were 134 reported incidents during this period versus 147 incidents of violence in 2014 and 2015 combined. Most volatile regions remain in northern India; however, Tamil Nadu in the south contributes to the violence.</p>	<p><b>Russia:</b> The first American citizen, Pastor Donald Ossewaarde, was charged under Russia's new "anti-terror" laws for conducting missionary activity. The new law was implemented in July and targets those who evangelize in public, threatening freedom of religion. Pastor Ossewaarde joins three others who have been charged under the "anti-terror" law.</p>	<p><b>Iraq/Syria:</b> As a coalition of forces advanced on Mosul, ISIS forced 200 families from a neighboring town into the city, possibly intending to use them as human shields in the forthcoming battle. It was feared that ISIS may kill another 350 families who were moved into the city from Nijafa.</p>	<p><b>Egypt:</b> A bomb exploded during Sunday Mass, killing 27 Christians inside a Cairo church and injuring at least 47 others. The explosion occurred at a chapel on the St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral grounds, home to another 350 families who were moved into the city from Nijafa.</p>					



International Christian Concern briefs the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on religious persecution in Mexico.

### ICC's Three A's

**ADVOCACY**

Advocacy is at the core of our mission. We regularly work with members of Congress, the State Department, and the White House. We receive timely reports of persecution from our field network stationed throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Following these updates, we offer policy recommendations to the executive and legislative branches of government.

**AWARENESS**

A massive gap exists between the frequency and severity of worldwide persecution of Christians and the international media's level of attention to this issue. Our organization stands in this gap by offering a number of educational resources. These include daily news posts, periodic press releases, and monthly newsletters, which can be found or requested through our website, [www.persecution.org](http://www.persecution.org).

**ASSISTANCE**

Practical assistance to persecuted Christians is a crucial aspect of our work. Our financial and material gifts to suffering Christians include education, job training, microfinance, medical care, and construction projects.

**Ignatius University with Sofia University offers degree programs in Theology, Philosophy, Psychology and Diplomacy.**

**International School for Mental Health Practitioners offers programs in Pastoral Counseling and Psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic program leads to NYS License.**

**American Institute for Creative Living offers the Credentialed Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor program (CASAC). This program leads to NYS License (OASAS)**

<http://IgnatiusU.org>

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