

Holy Wisdom

Peace: Showing that Others Matter!

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

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

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Our Work at the United Nations

Patriarch Consecrates Father Anthony DeLuca As Chorbishop.

His Holiness, Ignatius Aphrem II consecrated Father Anthony DeLuca as Chorbishop assisted by Archbishops, Bishops, Chorbishops in the presence of many priests, deacons, choir and a full congregation at St. Mark's Cathedral, Teaneck, New Jersey on Sunday May 3, 2015. Archbishop Titus also participated.



Father Anthony entering the sanctuary of St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral, Teaneck, at beginning of consecration as Chorbishop, Sunday May 3.



His Holiness, Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, has placed a consecration veil over the head of Father Anthony.



Veil covering remains in place during entire liturgy. Patriarch preparing incense.



Father Anthony being escorted by chorbishops to the Patriarch to begin consecration.



Bowing before Patriarch as consecration prayers begin.



Patriarch praying over Father Anthony



Patriarch instructing Father Anthony



Father Anthony kneeling before Patriarch to receive Chorbishop ordination.



Patriarch praying the rite of consecration over Father Anthony.



Continues rite of consecration with choir responding.



Patriarch continuing rite of consecration .



Book of the Gospels placed on head of Father Anthony.



Chorbishops holding the Book of the Gospels over Father Anthony's head while Patriarch prays.



Continued Book of the Gospels.



Patriarch prays and does imposition of hands on head of Father Anthony.



Patriarch ordaining.



Chorbishop Joseph reading the rite to the congregation.



Patriarch instructing.



Patriarch reading prayers of ordination.



Continues



Patriarch blessing the purple sash as insignia of Chorbishop.



Patriarch placing the purple sash on Chorbishop Anthony.



Attaching the purple chorbishop sash.



Patriarch signing forehead of Chorbishop Anthony with three crosses.



Patriarch vesting Chorbishop Anthony with cope.



Patriarch blessing pectoral cross,



Patriarch praying over Chorbishop Anthony with pectoral cross.



His Holiness laying on of hands in consecrating Chorbishop.



Patriarch placing of pectoral cross on Chorbishop Anthony



Completion of consecration.



Chorbishop Anthony presented to congregation. Axios, Axios, Axios.



Chorbishop Anthony delivering Reflection to congregation.



Patriarch enthroned.



Holy Communion presented to congregation



Post-communion



Patriarch and Chorbishop greeting congregation



Archbishop Titus, His Holiness, Chorbishop Anthony.



Family of Chorbishop Anthony: son-in-law Charles, daughter Helena, grandson Luke Anthony, [Archbishop Titus, His Holiness], Chorbishop Anthony, presbytera Andrea, grand daughter Lillah, sister Angela, daughter Antoinette.



Far right: Father Anthony under veil till time of consecration



Under veil



Fr. Anthony brought to altar by two chorbishops.





His Holiness reads prayer of consecration of Chorbishop







Reflection Given By Chorbishop Anthony De Luca

Chorbishop, May 3, 2015

Your Holiness, Archbishop Titus, Archbishops, Bishops, Chorbishops, priests, deacons, religious and all the faithful without whose generosity there would be no place to hold this gathering, thank you. I thank the whole church for the consecration as chorbishop: to be ordained by the successor of St. Peter is beyond all my prayers. For the Bible tells us that it was at Antioch that they were first called Christians and that Peter was the first Bishop before going to Rome.

Nearly 55 years since my priesthood ordination is a long time but we will only dwell briefly on the last quarter century and my ministry with the Syriac Orthodox Church.

I really don't know what inspired me to go to the United Nations nearly 25 years ago to establish the Syrian Orthodox Church as a Non-governmental Organization accredited to the UN Department of Public Information.

Why of all the churches in the world, I find myself in the one now suffering the greatest persecution in the world. I do not know.

We have had the Armenian Persecution, the Jewish Holocaust and now the Christian Genocide, created by collective indifference and complicit silence.

The forces of evil that have been unleashed are diabolical. There is a perverted pleasure, madness and frenzy in destruction and Sarin gas from hell.

In view of the persecution of our church in Syria and the Middle East, our visible presence at the UN is most necessary. We need to post one of our Representatives (and we have 6 now) to exclusively direct attention to the situation of the church in the Middle East. This Representative will network with other UN NGOs, pertinent departments in the UN Secretariat and will become personally acquainted with the Ambassadors of all the countries where our church has a presence.

When personal relationships are set up with diplomats, it is harder to turn a deaf ear to our cause. You never know where friends turn up. Some years ago, I became friends with the Ambassador of A.; he ate at my home; he came to our parties. A few years later, he was appointed to the UN Security Council. I could then approach him with a current problem and he would not turn me away. Just be open to the Spirit and you will find yourself at the right place at the right time.

When I was thinking about this, I asked myself, "Why do you want to do this?" What is your motivation? Now as a psychologist-psychoanalyst, I have been asking my patients and myself these same questions everyday for the last 40 years So it's automatic.

At that moment, I don't know if I was drifting into sleep but I saw a procession of martyrs - infants, toddlers, children, teenagers, young and old people processing before the wounded Lamb, Christ. And as they processed before the Lamb, each showed his / her martyrdom. And they chanted and sang, " We are not dead, we are alive. We still walk among you in the streets and alleys, villages and cities and among the burnt homes, buildings and ruins." And they asked, "Don't you pray in the creed: I believe in the Communion of Saints. We are alive. We are the martyrs - the Church Triumphant and you are the Church Militant still struggling on the way but we are all in communion. Do not forget us, as we do not forget you."

In the 70s, everyone sang this song and it proves prophetic today:

But February made me shiver,
With every paper I'd deliver,
Bad news on the door step,
I couldn't take one more step.

Oh, and while the king was looking down,
The jester stole his thorny crown,
And we sang dirges in the park,
The day the music died.

Cause fire is the devil's only friend,
Oh and as I watched him on the stage,
My hands were clenched in fists of rage,
No angel born in Hell,
Could break that Satan's spell.

And as the flames climbed high into the night,
To light the sacrificial rite,
I saw Satan laughing with delight,
The day the music died.

I went down to the sacred store,
Where I'd heard the music years before,
But the man there said the music wouldn't play.

And in the streets the children screamed,
The lovers cried and the poets dreamed,
But not a word was spoken,
The church bells all were broken.

And the three men I admire most,
The Father, Son and the Holy Ghost,
They caught the last train for the coast,
The day the music died.

They were singing bye, bye, Miss American Pie,
Drove my Chevy to the levee, but the levee was dry,
Then good old boys were drinkin,
And singin this'll be the day that I die.
This'll be the day that i die.

Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago, who died two weeks ago, once said: " I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison, his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history,"

So my friends, certain priests wear purple or red always as a reminder of the blood of martyrdom.

God Bless America

Christ save your church.

Mother Mary, pray for us.

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle.

Amen. +

His Holiness thanked Chorbishop Anthony for all his service to the Church, especially his work at the United Nations and Ignatius University.

Nuclear Weapons And The Moral Compass

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND THE MORAL COMPASS was the title of a conference held on April 9, 2015 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The event was sponsored by The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See and the Global Security Institute with the support of the NGO Committee on Sustainable Development and the Committee of Religious NGOs. The United Religions Initiative, Religions for Peace and the World Evangelical Council were supporting organizations which helped make the conference possible. The event opened with “A Prayer for Those Whose Hearts Carry the Weight of Nuclear Weapons,” followed by a special performance of a musical prayer, “Invocation for Peace” by world-renowned cellist Michael Fitzpatrick. Hosted by H.E. Archbishop Bernadito C. Auza, Permanent Representative Observer Mission of the Holy See, who described the Holy See’s history of raising a voice against nuclear weapons. He cited the paper, “Nuclear Disarmament: Time for Abolition,” a contribution of the Holy See which was presented during the December 8, 2014 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, as offering a moral perspective against nuclear weapons during a time when more non-state actors present the threat of total destruction. He said: “We appeal to the conscience to work for the ban of nuclear weapons. No one can say the pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons is easily achievable. It is extremely arduous.” Conference Chair Jonathan Granoff of the Global Security Institute urged those present to write to Pope Francis, thanking the Holy Father for taking a leadership role in ridding the world of nuclear weapons. He said that “not one head of state challenged the world to get rid of nuclear weapons,” only Pope Francis. There were a total of ten speakers at the conference, including Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, from the Parliament of the World’s Religions, as well as H.E. Bishop Oscar Cantu, of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Ms. Virginia Gamba, Director of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, discussed the survivors of Nagasaki saying that the message of nuclear weapons is that “people are expendable.” H.E. Ambassador Libran Cabactulan, of the Permanent Mission of the Philippines, flew in from Manila for the conference. He described both the professional and human responsibility of those present “trying to achieve the total elimination of nuclear bombs.” He described nuclear bombs as an instrument for mass murder and asked: “Who is to carry the moral weight of the elimination of all mankind?” Bishop William Swing of the United Religions Initiative flew in from California to be present. He spoke of an 11-year old girl who survived Hiroshima in 1945 and described her life of suffering, asking: “Who makes the decisions to have more nuclear weapons? What do they know about a nuclear degraded life?” Dr.

William Vendley of Religions for Peace called for a global ethic, asking: “Do we have the right to impose collective suicide?” Tyler Wigg Stephenson of the World Evangelical Alliance, a group with 650 million members, said: “God in heaven is at war against nuclear weapons.” Rabbi Peter Knobel of the Central Conference of American Rabbis urged all to “Work together for a less dangerous and morally responsible human future.” Attended and reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli, SOCA representative to UN/DPI.

[DPI/NGO Announcements for the week of 13 April, 2015](#)

Link: <http://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/files/2015/04/DPINGO-Announcements-13-April.pdf>

[DPI/NGO-led Briefing "Educational Technologies Available for Primary and Secondary Schools"](#)

THURSDAY APRIL 16, 2015

The goal of this briefing was to present the various forms of educational technologies available at primary and secondary school levels, which facilitate learning, critical thinking and self actualization in the lives of children.

Primary and secondary school children are introduced to information research, computer science and product development at a very young age. They learn mobile application development such as MAD-Learn¹, which help them to become intellectually curious, innovative and entrepreneurial right at a tender age.

We live in a technologically driven world today, and so it is expedient for learning institutions to tap into children’s passion for technological advancement. Education is key in this light; it offers hope to the under privileged and becomes the impetus to break the cycle of poverty in developing countries.

--Veronica Sandra Addae

[UN Special Envoy For The High Commisioner For Refugees, Angelina Jolie Addresses The Security Council On The Middle East \(Syria\) On April 24, 2015](#)

UN Special Envoy, Angelina Jolie, briefed the Council on April 24, 2015. She began by describing her 11 visits to Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Malta since the Syrian conflict began in 2011: “I spoke to a mother whose young daughter was ripped from her arms by armed men and taken away to be a sex slave; to Hallah, an 11 year old, the eldest of 6 orphans, who takes care of her siblings since her mother died and father went missing; to a man who saved his family only to lose them all in a life boat attempting to reach safety.” She described the 4 million Syrian refugees, victims of a conflict they had nothing to do with, that left them “stigmatized, unwanted and regarded as a burden. I am here for them, because this is their UN.” She said the purpose of the UN is “to end conflict, and we are failing in Syria.” When she visited the refugees in February, their anger had turned to resignation and misery: “Why are the Syrian people not worth saving?” they asked her. “I’ve been part of the UN system for 13 years,” she added, “Not everyone realizes how many people are fed, sheltered and protected by the UN.” While in Syria laws are flouted, chemical weapons are used, the international community stands by, Ms. Jolie made a plea for unity, that the Security Council would work as one, that

“members would visit the refugees and see for themselves the suffering and its impact on the region.” Without political will and unity, there will not be a diplomatic solution for the 52 million people in the world forcibly displaced into exile and statelessness. She concluded her address: “Our times will be defined not by the crises themselves but by the way we pull together as an international community to address them.” Reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli, SOCA representative to UN/DPI, from the UN webcast of the 7433rd meeting of the United Nations Security Council.



Angelina Jolie and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres to accompany most recent UN Report

Discussions to Ensure Political Stability in Syria

Earlier today, United Nations officials met with Syrian diplomats to regain political stability in Syria. The conflict is now in its fifth year and violence is still widespread throughout the country. In order for the violence to cease, diplomatic discussions have begun, planning the road ahead in Syrian politics. Over the years, UN and Syrian officials have met in Geneva to resolve the conflict. These talks have not had the desired effects, and this third round of discussions are more comprehensive than the first two.

“These are closed, low-key, separate, structured discussions with the parties, to consult on the current crisis in Syria, the road ahead and the final destination of a Syria at peace with itself. This is the necessary ground work before we even get to a negotiating table.” UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Misutra stated. These talks include over forty different Syrian organizations, including the current government, as well as twenty other international powers. The goal is to ultimately establish a transitional government, composed of these forty groups in order to regain peace within the nation.

Although these discussions are not formal, they bring together key officials involved in the conflict. The talks will bring these officials closer together, paving the way for a formal agreement to be reached. Groups represented at these meetings do not have the luxury of time to resolve the conflict. Ideally, the talks will spark the necessary flame to see to the end of the violence. If these discussions proceed as planned, a formal declaration will be issued more quickly. The faster the declaration is issued, the more lives will be saved, and Syria will begin to rebuild itself behind a stable government.

Future Psychologists: Impacting the Sustainable Development Goals

Future Psychologists: Impacting the Sustainable Development Goals and Global Issues

Thursday, 14 May 2015
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

RSVP

This Briefing will explore youth perspectives on psychology – what their concerns are in today’s world, what global problems their research is tackling and how it is relevant to the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

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Organized in partnership with the American Psychological Association

Saji Thomas, Child Protection Specialist, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support and Community Based Child Protection in Emergencies, UNICEF

Jin Hashimoto, Master’s Candidate in Psychological Counseling

Roxane Caires, Master’s Candidate in Human Development and Social Intervention

Dalal Alhomaizi, Master’s Candidate in Global Mental Health and Trauma

Leah Kaylor, Master’s Candidate in Forensic Mental Health Counseling

Eri Imahori, Master’s Candidate in Clinical Psychology

Attended by representatives of SOCA.

Finding Ssecurity In Unsafe Passages

United Nations, May 7, 2015 3-6pm

In commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, the International Federation of Journalists and the Communications Coordination Committee for the United Nations with co-sponsors the National Writers Union, the Metro New York Labor Communications Council, and the PEN World Voices Festival produced the United Nations event about protecting journalists safety and rights: *Finding Security in Unsafe Passages*. Moderated by Jon Williams, ABC News Managing Editor for International News, the event featured as keynote speaker H.E. Ms. Benedicte Frankinet, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations who addressed those gathered: “the question we’re asking ourselves is how we can ensure the safety of journalists while they are doing their job for us.” She went on to

highlight the “three elements that are the essence in this debate: the contribution of journalism to democratic values in our society, the right to freedom of expression and the responsibility of States and non-state actors.” She urged “global action to protect journalists.” The keynote was followed by H.E. Mr. Francois Delattre, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, who described this vital cause and concluded: “we will not give up.” Others who spoke included journalists, scholars and human rights activists. They offered physical safety tips, strategies for dealing with trauma, contract advice for protecting sources and copyrights and advice for identifying cyber-security risks. International efforts to promote freedom of the press and end impunity for crimes against journalists were also discussed. Attended and reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli, SOCA Representative to UN/DPI.

PHOTO EXHIBITION: **“THE LAST WORLD WAR: REMEMBERING FOR PEACE”** United Nations Delegates Entrance Lobby, April 30, 2015 – May 14, 2015

On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the photo exhibit titled *“The Last War: Remembering for Peace,”* organized by the permanent UN Missions of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan shows the faces of World War II. Stark black and white photographs showed Soviet soldiers, civilians, and workers from all over the Soviet Union who were caught up in the struggle and who faced and defeated Nazism in WWII. The display also features iconic moments from the war.

“If you look at the pictures, they reflect the challenges which the generation of the victors were facing, and which they were able to meet with such distinction and heroism,” said Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s envoy to the UN. Among the exhibits are fifteen photos of Heroes of the Soviet Union, representing the “courage, dedication and sacrifice of people from all fifteen Soviet Republics, in what came to be known as the Great Patriotic War.” As many as 27 million Soviet citizens perished during the conflict. Viewed and reported by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli, SOCA Representative to UN/DPI.

UN Report - May 29 2015

Over the past week, the United Nations has been kept busy by the world's events. First, the UN has adopted a resolution working to end the killing and abuse of journalists. Reporters in violent conflicts throughout the world have been killed for carrying out their duties. This resolution condemns the harming of journalists, and aims to see to the end of these actions, as journalists are vital to the world and the reception of news. Media officials will now be protected worldwide, and perpetrators will be punished.

In other news, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has reached out to European countries to address the issues migration to the continent. In the past year, twenty times the amount of people have drowned on the journey across the Mediterranean than last year. Many of these migrants are fleeing war, genocide, and other human rights abuses, and are able to be classified as refugees. Mr. Ban has given responsibility to European nations to accept these refugees. Saving lives is a top priority, and after that these refugees are to be accepted into society. He believes European economies will benefit, by diversifying the pool of workers, which has decreased with the decrease in population growth across the continent.

Finally, Friday May 29th marked the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. There are currently over 120,000 “blue helmets” stationed throughout the world, trying to end violent conflicts.

Over the past year, more peacekeeping troops have lost their lives more than ever before, demonstrating the need for peace worldwide.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

Food Security and the Sustainable Development Goals

04 June 2015 – More than thirteen experts gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, where they engaged in a discussion entitled “Addressing Food Security, Nutrition, and Sustainable Agriculture through the Prism of the SDGs.” The SDGs, or Sustainable Development goals have recently been released, and will shape UN policy until the desired completion year, 2030. Ambassadors from Italy, Georgia, Ecuador, and South Africa were on hand to discuss the importance agriculture has played in the elimination of hunger both in their nations and abroad, addressing SDG 2. SDG 2 reads “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.”

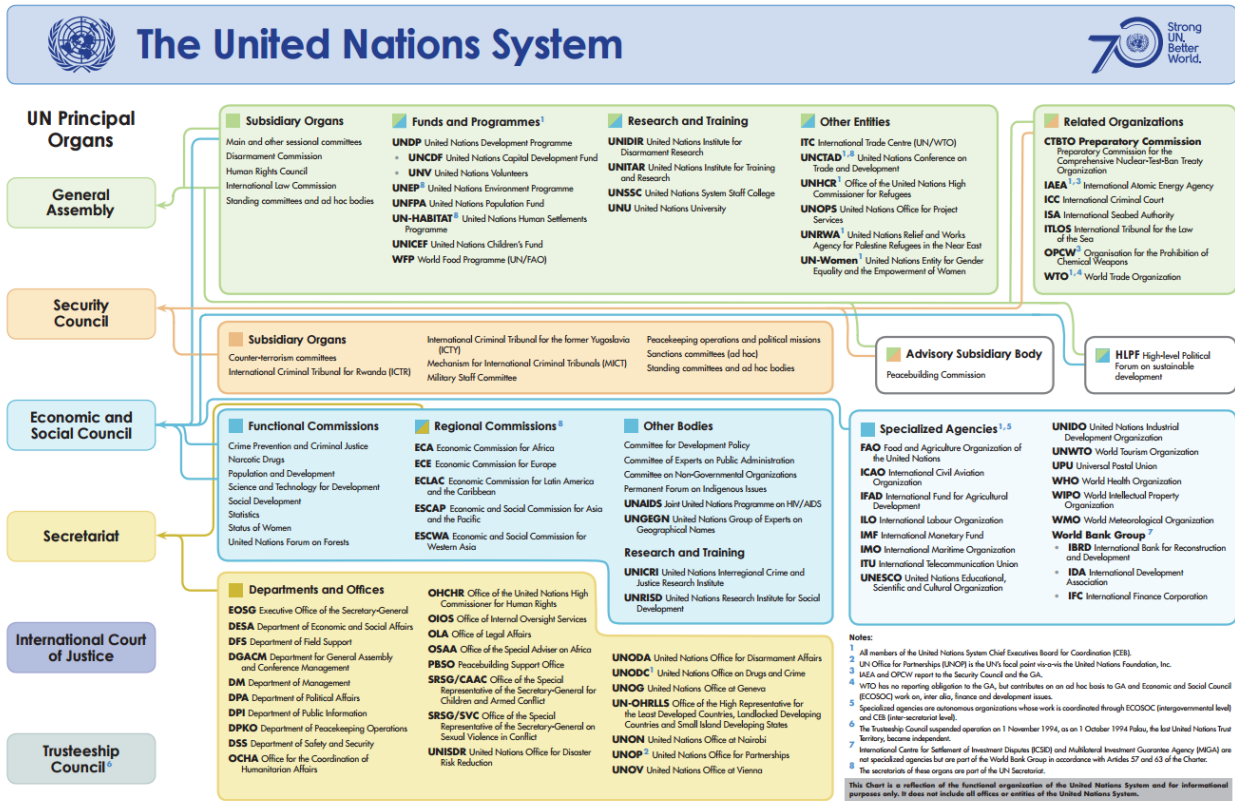
Officials from the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme, and the Global Compact were also present, and discussed with how their organizations are working to achieve MDG 2. Finally, representatives from various corporations, organizations, and backgrounds provided case studies of successful campaigns to end hunger.

As discussed in the meeting, effective strategy in solving hunger include the forming of public-private partnerships or co-operatives, where governments give way to privately owned companies to empower the hungry. Since the rural impoverished and hungry are completely reliant on agriculture, companies have offered higher and fair compensation for their crops. An example of this is chocolatier Ferrero paying the cacao farmers of Ecuador and the hazelnut farmers of Georgia near market price for their crops. Although former subsistence farmers of these countries no longer grow their own food supply, they are paid enough to purchase foods with the necessary nutritional value to live healthily.

In the past, governments, international organizations, civil society, social enterprises, and the private sector have worked inefficiently and independently to combat hunger and food insecurity. In the future, and in order to achieve MDG 2, they need to work together to ensure food security, and eliminate hunger altogether.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

The United Nations System



The Big Trends Shaping The World Today – June 17, 2015

The Women's International Forum at the United Nations, whose patron is Mrs. Ban Soon-taek, presented on Wednesday June 17th, Mr. Thomas Freidman of the New York Times, an internationally known author and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist. Mr. Friedman spoke on "The Big Trends Shaping the World Today." He described the paradigm shifts facing the world right now. His most recent book, his award winning sixth (co-written with Michael Mandelbaum), is "That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World We Invented and How We Can Come Back." His audience included women of the international community in New York, members of the Women's International Forum and invited dignitaries and members of civil society. In her message from the Patron, Mrs. Ban Soon-taek said of the lecture series, "The Women's International Forum's lecture series grants its members the unique and valuable opportunity to interact with leaders in the fields of international development, science, human rights, the arts, legal affairs, peacekeeping and more. I always learn so much from these lectures and cherish the chance they provide us to explore important issues in an inviting and thought provoking setting." Reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli, SOCA Representative at UN/DPI.

UN Charter Day – June 26, 2015

A special event at United Nations headquarters on Friday, June 26, marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. The event also launched the 70th anniversary edition of the United Nations Charter, with a new introduction, exclusive archival photos and the Statute of the

International Court of Justice available in the six official United Nations languages. Opening remarks were made by Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, followed by a live webcast from San Francisco, Rotunda, City Hall. The Oakland Youth Choir performed for the assembled guests and dignitaries in New York and San Francisco. Opening remarks were made by Charlotte Shultz, Chief of Protocol for the state of California and the city of San Francisco, as well as by Edwin Lee, Mayor of San Francisco. Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader of the United States House of Representatives also made remarks, followed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon. Closing remarks were made by Stuart Milk, LGBT human rights activist. A performance by the Oakland Boys' Choir concluded the historic event. Reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli, SOCA Representative at UN/DPI

Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events

'Limited prospects' for ICC probe into ISIS leaders

The ICC [will not](#) open a preliminary examination into alleged crimes of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for the time being due to a lack of jurisdiction over its leadership, Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said in a statement this week.

Bensouda explained that while the Court has "personal jurisdiction" over ISIS militants from ICC member states, those most responsible for the group's alleged crimes are believed to be from Iraq and Syria, neither of which is party to the ICC Rome Statute.

The prosecutor said that as the policy is to focus on those most responsible, she has determined that at this stage "the prospects of my Office investigating and prosecuting those most responsible, within the leadership of ISIS, appear limited."

Bensouda went on to say that she remains committed to working with states to support domestic investigations and prosecutions of their nationals suspected of committing grave crimes. Under the Rome Statute, states have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute.

She also emphasized that any decision of non-ICC member states or the UN Security Council to confer jurisdiction on the ICC is "wholly independent of the Court."

Earlier in the week, the New York Times called on the UN Security Council to [refer](#) ISIS's alleged crimes to the ICC, reporting that France is preparing a resolution that would do so. International law expert William Schabas told the newspaper that there is [no rule](#) preventing an organization from being referred to the Court, even if it operates in countries that haven't ratified the Rome Statute.

On Opinio Juris, Academic Kevin Jon Heller [argued](#) that governments should "do the job themselves" in response to a former US government officials' call for an ICC referral.

The Kurdistan Regional Government established a commission to [document](#) ISIS's alleged crimes against Kurdish Yazidi civilians.

Robert Serry interview on Security Council resolution 242 and peace efforts in the Middle East

After three inconclusive peace initiatives and three devastating wars in Gaza during the past several years, Robert Serry considers that the Israelis, Palestinians and the international community, including the Security Council, need to do some soul searching and come up with a fresh approach to Middle East peace efforts.

“You cannot repeat the same experiment time and again,” Mr. Serry, the outgoing UN Special Coordinator ([UNSCO](#)) for the Middle East Peace Process, said, referring to Albert Einstein’s definition of insanity as doing something over and over again and expecting a different result.

“I am not saying that we are insane, but after 20 years of trying to make peace based on the Oslo Accords and failing to reach it, there is time for some introspection by everybody concerned, first and foremost the parties themselves,” he said.

Mr. Serry (centre, in blue tie) surveys the damage during his visit to Gaza in November 2012. Mr. Serry toured parts of Gaza following hostilities with Israel, which ended in a 21 November ceasefire. UN Photo/Shareef Sarhan

Mr. Serry greets a Palestinian boy during a 2012 visit to Gaza. UN Photo/Shareef Sarhan

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (third from right), Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, and Mr. Serry (closest, right) meet with Avigdor Liberman (second from left), Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, November 2012. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Since 2012, Mr. Serry – who led UNSCO for the past seven years – has cautioned that the peace efforts in the Middle East were no longer heading in the right direction towards a two-State solution with an independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, but towards what he could only describe as a “one-State” reality outcome.

“It’s not that I think that in the coming months they may only be there, in fact we have already been heading into that direction for in effect a dangerous time,” he told *Politically Speaking*.

Mr. Serry (front, right) goes over notes with Secretary-General Ban before his meeting with the Quartet in Munich, Germany, in February 2011. UN Photo/Mark Garten

“I still remember that as the United Nations, we gave the Palestinian state-building efforts the certificate of having passed the threshold of a functioning state. That happened in May 2011,” continued Mr. Serry. “At the same time, what happened already then was that there was no political convergence. As if we were building a Palestinian house without a roof, without a political roof.”

The framework for the peace effort is set out in [Security Council resolution 242 \(1967\)](#) which was adopted following the Six-Day War and embodies the principle of land for peace, and resolution 338 (1973) calling for a ceasefire in the Yom Kippur War.

The preamble to resolution 242 notes “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security.”

The conflict in the Middle East, however, has been before the United Nations for far longer. In December 1948, the General Assembly adopted resolution 194, which defined the principles for reaching a final settlement to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, building on efforts by UN Mediator Folke Bernadotte. At the time it was adopted, the UN General Assembly had 58 Member States; today there are 193 Member States.

Why then is peace in the Middle East so elusive?

In his [last briefing](#) to the Security Council on 26 March 2015, Mr. Serry urged the international community to define a new framework for negotiations. He noted that resolution 242 is almost 50 years old. The Council added two resolutions during the first year of his tenure, resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), but he said neither gave him much guidance.

Mr. Serry speaks to journalists following his last briefing to the Security Council in March 2015. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

“Peace is first and foremost the responsibility of the parties to the conflict. But that reality cannot absolve international institutions of their responsibilities,” he said, adding that the Quartet “largely failed to live up to expectations.”

“It remains the primary responsibility of this Council to play its role in developing a new peace architecture for resolving the conflict at long last... Hasn’t the time come, Mr. President, for the Council to lead?”

Any new strategy must prioritize Gaza, he has stressed.

“I am a bit devastated that I leave my position with Gaza in even worse situation than before I started in 2008,” Mr. Serry told *Politically Speaking*.

He boiled down the underlying political issues in Gaza to two main points – the need for a more stable ceasefire and an empowered Government of National Consensus.

Mr. Serry has called for a “reconstruction hudna”: a freeze of all military activities above and below ground over at least a three-to-five-year timeframe. This would allow time and give donors confidence for large-scale, accelerated reconstruction.

“Otherwise you are investing again maybe in a political black hole. And as our Secretary-General [Ban Ki-moon] has been saying during the war emotionally, and I think he captured very well the mood of everybody: Are we going to reconstruct Gaza for the third time for it to be destroyed again?”

The construction and reconstruction effort in the Strip is overseen by the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, a temporary agreement brokered by the United Nations in September 2014 between the Government of Palestine and the Government of Israel.

As of 23 March, almost 80 per cent of damaged shelters have been processed through this mechanism, with over 61,000 individuals having procured construction materials to carry out home repairs.

In addition, the mechanism is ready to process large-scale reconstruction according to the latest figures. Over 40 international and private sector projects have been approved and five are already underway – including Qatar’s first major housing project to construct 1,000 housing units.

A Palestinian man salvages items from the rubble of his home destroyed by Israeli strikes on a building in northern Gaza Strip, August 2014. UN Photo/Shareef Sarhan

Mr. Serry has spent much of the last months working to have construction materials brought in, but cautioned that the work is “going too slow”.

“If we don’t change the dynamics in Gaza then I am worried, again, pessimistic, that what we have seen happening every time and again that Gaza explodes, that it could happen again,” he said in reference to the latest fighting in July and August 2014. The 51-day conflict saw neighbourhoods flattened, with nearly 2,200 Palestinians and some 70 Israelis killed.

Seven dwellings used by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)) to house internally displaced persons were shelled during the conflict.

Impartial, not neutral

As the UN Envoy, Mr. Serry said he tried to be fair and consistent, but said that does not mean that he was neutral. Headquartered in Jerusalem, he could meet on any given day either in Ramallah, talking to Palestinian interlocutors, or in the afternoon in Jerusalem or in Tel Aviv talking with Israeli interlocutors.

“I cannot but conclude that on many issues, when it comes to the settlement issue or to the house demolitions, and other things that are taking place, that the international community has an issue with Israel. And then of course I also have to speak up when necessary,” he said.

“When it comes to the Palestinians, I feel that as much as, in my view, settlements are an impediment, an obstacle to peace it is of course also Palestinian division. It is difficult to work towards peace in a situation where the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have different philosophies about how to reach that peace,” Mr. Serry added, stressing the importance of reconciliation and a Government of National Consensus.

Despite his pessimism about the lack of progress, he suggests that things would have been far worse without the United Nations.

“Gaza has been a top priority for the United Nations and for me. And again, I can’t say that my legacy now is that things have improved in Gaza in terms of the politics but I do feel that the United Nations has been up to the plate, so to say, in trying to help people in Gaza, in brokering ceasefires,” he said.

“Three times the Secretary-General came out also to stop the war. In particular during the second war in 2012 we were able to actually shorten that war, so that is a little bit my, if you want to talk about my legacy, that’s maybe how I look back at it. It’s not for lack of trying that the United Nations actually has been involved,” Mr. Serry [added](#).

Mr. Serry plans to return to the Netherlands where he might write a book about his seven years in the

Middle East and spend more time with his family. His position will be taken up by Nickolay Mladenov, who had led the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq ([UNAMI](#)).

Source: <https://un-dpa.atavist.com/robertserry>.

Remarks by Ambassador Power at a UN Security Council Debate on the Middle East, April 21, 2015

Thank you, Minister Judeh; thank you for chairing this session. Your presence testifies to the huge significance of the issues before us.

On April 8th, two Israeli soldiers – a medic and a paramedic – were stabbed in the West Bank by a Palestinian man. On April 20th, a 28-year-old Arab municipal worker was stabbed in Herzliya, north of Jerusalem, by an Israeli who reportedly screamed, “Death to Arabs.”

These are just two of the recent attacks which reflect the persistent and deadly tension between Israelis and Palestinians. It is critically important that leaders urgently reengage in efforts to achieve peace, which is the most effective way to prevent such tension from escalating, as it has too many times before.

The United States remains committed to a two-state solution that results in a secure Israel alongside a sovereign and independent Palestine, and that can bring lasting peace and stability to both peoples. A two-state solution is the only way for Israel to ensure its future as a Jewish and democratic state. And it is the best path forward for Israel’s security, for Palestinian aspirations, and for regional stability.

It is important that both sides refrain from any actions that could further destabilize the situation in the region and undermine the prospects of reaching a two-state solution.

It is good that the parties have reached agreement on the transfer of Palestinian clearance revenues, an important step that will benefit the Palestinian people and help stabilize the situation in the West Bank.

We welcome the arrival of the new UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, who brings with him deep diplomatic experience in the region and has already been meeting with key figures since he arrived on the ground about a week ago. We encourage all sides to work closely with him.

We also strongly support UN efforts to encourage donors to disburse funds as soon as possible to meet the commitments they made in Cairo in October 2014. To support that effort, the United States has disbursed more than 95 percent of our Cairo pledges and provided additional money above our original pledge amount. However, though up to 100,000 Palestinians reportedly remain displaced in Gaza, only a fraction of the funds pledged in Cairo has been released. UN Member States must step up and UN agencies must be able to carry out their operations in Gaza without disruption.

Let me now turn to Syria.

In the weeks since ISIL, with the support of the Nusra Front, advanced on the besieged community of Yarmouk – the already desperate situation of its estimated 18,000 residents, most of them Palestinians, has gotten even worse. People long deprived of food, potable water, medical supplies, and other vital humanitarian support now find themselves trapped between warring parties, which show a callous

disregard for the welfare of civilians. Residents have reportedly been barrel-bombed by the regime from the air, and shot at by ISIL and other armed groups from the ground. While thousands appear to have escaped, many thousands are still trapped.

In Tadamoun, a neighborhood bordering Yarmouk, some of those who have managed to escape are sheltering in a school. Last week, a man there said of the Assad regime siege in Yarmouk, “We lived inside a disaster. We were dying there. Two years and six months. No water, no electricity.” Another escapee said, “We got out just as you see us, with nothing else. We ate animals and leaves.” A woman named Fatima stood cradling her baby boy, born less than two weeks earlier in Yarmouk. Fatima told the officials she had fled because she feared her son would die if they did not get out.

Siege is a tactic we see applied across Syria by both the Assad regime and terrorist groups. Last month, Under-Secretary General Amos told this Council that the UN estimates 440,000 civilians are living in besieged areas, meaning most people cannot get out and assistance cannot get in. Some aid groups estimate the total is much higher. In Deir ez-Zour, another besieged city, ISIL has systematically blocked humanitarian access and even cut off the water supply for months at a time, while regime forces have prevented residents from leaving. The Assad regime and the terrorists use the suffering of Syrian civilians as just another tool to advance their position or undermine that of their enemies.

This must stop. All parties have an obligation to protect civilians, and all parties have an obligation under resolution 2165 to enable the immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance directly to people throughout Syria by UN agencies and implementing partners. All civilians who want to leave besieged areas must be allowed to do so safely, without being detained, interrogated, or separated from their families. The Assad regime’s assurances count for nothing, so international supervision for any relocation from Yarmouk is necessary, urgently necessary.

We members of the Security Council have an obligation, as well – to ensure that the reported use of chemical weapons is investigated thoroughly and promptly, and that those responsible are held accountable. Since members of this Council adopted resolution 2209 on March 6th, 2015, condemning the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon, we have seen allegations of at least a dozen attacks involving the use of chlorine or other chemical agents.

Last week, Council members heard first-hand from Dr. Tennari, who works in Sarmin’s field hospital, which received more than 120 victims of just one of those attacks – so many victims, he said, that they were piled on top of one another on the floor. He told us about how he and his colleagues did everything they could to save three siblings – age 1, 2, and 3 – with the hospital’s paltry resources; he told of the doctors and nurses’ sense of helplessness as they tried to pump oxygen into the delicate chests of these small children; and he told of his unspeakable grief as he washed their tiny, lifeless bodies.

If we members are appalled upon hearing such accounts – and I do not believe there was a person in that meeting who was not shaken by Dr. Tennari’s experience – we must channel our indignation into stopping more attacks like it from occurring.

That begins with the Council enforcing the resolutions it has already adopted, such as 2209 and 2118, which the Assad regime has repeatedly ignored. Ending these attacks also requires countries to stop

propping up and arming the regime, and instead use their leverage to help stop Assad from gassing, barrel-bombing, torturing, and starving Syrian civilians.

Countries in the region, and those with influence, must come together to press for a political solution, which is the only way to end this wretched conflict. To that end, we welcome the renewed push by Special Envoy de Mistura to expand ongoing dialogue efforts, and the Secretary-General's robust support for those efforts. As President Obama has said repeatedly, the only viable political solution is one without Assad in power; he has no legitimacy and no role to play in Syria's future. Partnering with Assad will not help us defeat violent extremist groups, it will only make them stronger.

One reason it is so important to reach a political solution is the deeply destabilizing effect the conflict is having on Syria's neighbors, such as Lebanon, where one in four of the country's residents is now a Syrian refugee. Since the influx of refugees began, Lebanon's unemployment has doubled, and its schools have taken to teaching double shifts. The crisis in Syria has also exacerbated Lebanon's security challenges, particularly those posed by violent extremist groups. The Lebanese security and armed forces have played a crucial role in countering these threats and defending the state's authority. We also commend the ongoing effort by UNIFIL and Special Coordinator Kaag to prevent any escalation in hostilities along the Blue Line – an effort made all the more challenging by Hizballah's dangerous actions, such as its acquisition and evident willingness to use weapons in UNIFIL's area of operations.

Resolving the Syria crisis and mitigating the unrivaled suffering caused by the conflict inside Syria and in the neighbors – and Minister Judeh, I thank you for Jordan's generosity in sheltering so many refugees from Syria – resolving this crisis could not be more urgent. Thank you.

[KAICIID, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Launch Partnership to Counteract Violence in the Name of Religion](#)

Jeddah, SAUDI ARABIA: The Secretary General of the Vienna-based International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), Faisal Bin Muaammar, and the Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, today formalised the cooperation between the two organisations through a Memorandum of Understanding on 3 June 2015.



Through this Memorandum of Understanding, KAICIID and the OIC commit to working together on integrating dialogue in interreligious and religious education to promote respect for diversity, to explore possibilities of combating incitement to religious hatred, intolerance, and negative stereotyping, including Islamophobia; to support human rights education, and promote tolerance and intercultural skills.

The two organizations will exchange expertise and enhance each other's capacity to design and implement dialogue, especially at the policy level.

KAICIID Secretary General Faisal Bin Muaammar welcomed the cooperation agreement with the leading intergovernmental body in the Islamic world, and emphasised the commitment of both organisations to interreligious dialogue. "This agreement strengthens both our organisations, and our shared commitment to dialogue among religions as the route to peace."

OIC Secretary General Madani emphasized that "Interreligious and intercultural dialogue is an integral part of the OIC's strategy to foster respect, cooperation and peace. This partnership between the OIC and KAICIID will support international efforts to resolve conflict and foster reconciliation."

The OIC and KAICIID work together on building peace through dialogue in conflict zones, in particular, lending expertise and facilitation in intra-Muslim dialogue. For instance, KAICIID and the OIC are cooperating on initiatives in Myanmar, the Central African Republic and Nigeria to strengthen the ability of Islamic religious leaders to speak out against the marginalisation of minorities, and to use interreligious dialogue to prevent conflict. Our cooperation with OIC in these conflict areas aims to strengthen the capacity of intra-Muslim dialogue and recognize the constructive contribution that religious and Interreligious actors can make in supporting peace and reconciliation.

KAICIID also works with ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), a specialised organ of the OIC, to support policy makers and experts in several countries to strengthen their interreligious education curricula. Most recently, in April 2015, ISESCO hosted a meeting of the KAICIID policy network on interreligious education at their headquarters in Rabat, Morocco.

Source: [http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/06/03/kaiciid-organisation-of-islamic-cooperation-launch-partnership-to-counteract-violence-in-the-name-of-religion/#h\[\]](http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/06/03/kaiciid-organisation-of-islamic-cooperation-launch-partnership-to-counteract-violence-in-the-name-of-religion/#h[])

Religious News from Around the World

"With Love for Truth and Justice"

In a touching gesture of solidarity with the 100th year of remembrance of the Armenian Genocide, His Holiness Pope Francis will celebrate a special Mass in memory of the Armenian martyrs of 1915. The leader of the Roman Catholic Church will celebrate the Mass this Sunday, April 12, at the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome.

His Holiness Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and His Holiness Aram I, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, will both be present for the liturgy, as will Armenian Catholic Patriarch His Beatitude Nerses Bedros XIX, and other Armenian religious dignitaries. Armenia's President

Serzh Sargsyan and officials of the Republic of Armenia will also be in attendance.

Also on hand for the special Mass will be a group of Armenian-Americans from the Eastern and Western Dioceses of the Armenian Church of America. Their “spiritual journey” to Rome has been organized under the auspices of diocesan primates Archbishop Khajag Barsamian and Archbishop Hovnan Derderian. Archbishop Barsamian will lead the group in Rome.

In a statement this week anticipating Sunday’s liturgy, Pope Francis praised the fidelity showed by the Armenian Christian martyrs of 1915, and prayed that God’s mercy “might help us all, in love for truth and justice, to heal every wound and to hasten concrete gestures of reconciliation and peace among the nations that have not yet reached a consensus on the reading of such sorrowful events.”

Sunday’s Mass in memory of the Armenian martyrs is one of several acts of recognition to issue from the Vatican this year. In March, the [Vatican archive](#) released historic documents pertaining to the Genocide period. And in February came the announcement that the great Armenian mystic [St. Gregory of Narek](#) would be designated as a “doctor of the church,” joining Augustine of Hippo, John Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas and 32 others who are considered to offer key theological insights for the faith. The doctoral status will be officially conferred on Narek during the April 12 liturgy.

While in Italy, His Holiness Karekin II will visit the city of Naples, where he will participate in the re-opening of the Chapel of St. Gregory the Armenian, and will bless a *khatchkar* to honor the centennial of the Genocide. That service will take place on April 11.

[Joint Statement of Faith Groups Calling for Nuclear Abolition Shared at UN during NPT Review Conference](#)

Over 30 faith groups indicate their support

New York, April 30, 2015: “Nuclear weapons are incompatible with the values upheld by our respective faith tradition—the right of people to live in security and dignity; the commands of conscience and justice; the duty to protect the vulnerable and to exercise the stewardship that will safeguard the planet for future generations [Continue Reading »](#)

[Indian Christian and Muslim Victims of Forced Conversions Approach US Court Against Hindu Supremacist Group](#)

NEW YORK — The victims of forced conversions from India joined the pending lawsuit with US Federal Court seeking “Foreign Terrorist Organization” (FTO) status for a Hindu supremacist group.

DCFKSDOPEN

**U.S. District Court
Southern District of New York (Foley Square)
CIVIL DOCKET FOR CASE #: 1:15-cv-00433-LTS**

Sikhs for Justice "SFJ", Inc. v. Kerry
Assigned to Judge Laura Taylor Swain
Case: 28 1331 Fed. Question

Date Filed: 01/21/2015
Jury Demand: None
Nature of Suit: 899 Other Statutes;
Administrative Procedure Act/Review or
Appeal of Agency Decision
Jurisdiction: Federal Question

Plaintiff

Sikhs for Justice "SFJ", Inc.

represented by: **Babak Pourarood**
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LEAD ATTORNEY
ATTORNEY TO BE NOTICED

v.

Defendant

John Kerry
in his official capacity as U.S. Secretary
of State

represented by: **Christopher Kendrick Connolly**
United States Attorney's Office
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80 Chambers Street
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Date Filed	#	Docket Text
05/26/2015	43	FIRST AMENDED COMPLAINT amending 1. Complaint against John Kerry. Document Filed by Sikhs for Justice "SFJ", Inc. Related document: 1. Complaint Filed by Sikhs for Justice "SFJ", Inc. (Pourarood, Babak) (Entered: 05/26/2015)
04/23/2015	22	REVISED SCHEDULING ORDER granting 11. Letter Motion for Extension of Time to Amend (Amended Pleadings due by 5/23/2015.); granting 11. Letter Motion for Conference (Initial Conference set for 5/26/2015 at 10:00 AM before Judge Laura Taylor Swain.); Consent for the parties having met via telephone conference on April 23, 2015, the following is established on consent: 1. The time to file Plaintiff's amendment to the complaint be extended to May 23, 2015. 2. The initial judicial conference that is currently scheduled for April 26, 2015 at 12:15 PM be continued to July 24, 2015, at 10:00 AM. (Signed by Judge Laura Taylor Swain on 04/23/2015) (kenned, 04/23/2015)
04/23/2015	21	FIRST LETTER MOTION for Extension of Time to Amend Complaint addressed to Judge Laura Taylor Swain from Babak Pourarood, Esq. dated 4/23/2015. FIRST LETTER MOTION for Conference convened date addressed to Judge Laura Taylor Swain from Babak Pourarood, Esq. dated 4/23/2015. Document Filed by Sikhs for Justice "SFJ", Inc. (Pourarood, Babak) (Entered: 04/23/2015)

In November 2014 a forced conversions campaign called “homecomings” was launched by powerful Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist group that is the ideological wing of the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and that once employed the prime minister, Narendra Modi. India’s 1.2 billion people are predominantly Hindus but there are also about 160 million Muslims and a small proportion of Christians.

The lawsuit pleads that “RSS along with its affiliates and subsidiaries be designated as an FTO, in accordance with Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and designate RSS as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224”.

37 seven page complaint filed by Micheal Masih, Hasim Ali and Kulwinder Singh, the named plaintiffs belonging to Christian, Muslim and Sikh faiths allege that since election of 2014, ruling party BJP’s ideological mentor RSS is attempting to forcibly convert their families into Hinduism.

One of the Plaintiffs, Masih, alleges that “in November 2014, workers of RSS party invaded Plaintiff’s home in India and told his wife that they have received orders and directions from the headquarter of RSS to warn all the Christians in the area to be prepared to convert to “Hinduism” or get ready to die. The RSS workers harassed, menaced, abused, and threatened Plaintiff’s wife and told her that she and her family must be prepared to convert to Hinduism or die”.

May 26 complaint filed before Judge Laura Taylor Swain cites 2015 report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) that “in December 2014, Hindu nationalist groups announced plans to forcibly “reconvert” at least 4,000 Christian families and 1,000 Muslim families to Hinduism in Uttar Pradesh on Christmas day as part of a so-called “Ghar Wapsi” (returning home) program. In advance of the program, the Hindu groups sought to raise money for their campaign, noting that it cost nearly 200,000 rupees (US \$3,200) per Christian and 500,000 rupees (US \$8,000) per Muslim”.

“In the amended complaint, we have invoked International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998 which was enacted to express United States foreign policy with respect individuals persecuted in foreign countries on account of religion and to authorize United States actions in response to violations of religious freedom in foreign countries, stated attorney Gurpatwant Singh Pannun legal advisor to rights group.

“Based on the evidence and recent report of USCIRF, Obama administration is bound under law to declare organizations like RSS as terror groups”, added Pannun.

The case against Hindu supremacist group was originated by rights group “Sikhs For Justice” (SFJ), requesting the US Court to declare RSS as “terror group” for “believing in and practicing a fascist ideology and for running a passionate, vicious and violent campaign to turn India into a “Hindu” nation with a homogeneous religious and cultural identity”.

Source: <http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/05/28/indian-christian-and-muslim-victims-of-forced-conversions-approach-us-court-against-hindu-supremacist-group/>

India's minority Christians struggle against violence and persecution



The shrill sound of his car alarm awoke Fr. Eugene Moon Lazarus around 3 a.m. on March 16. As he rushed out of his room, three other priests living in the presbytery also came out with puzzled looks.

They found some strangers running away from Lazarus' car, which was parked inside the church premises. The car doors were open. They also found at least four broken statues of Mary and one of baby Jesus.

In the report he filed with local police, Lazarus said what pained them most was seeing a dog leash tied to the neck of life-sized statue of Mary.

"The attackers have not only broken the images inside the church, but they have played with the sentiments of Christian community," he said.

Lazarus is the parish priest of St. Mary's Church in Agra, a city in Uttar Pradesh state famous for the Taj Mahal.



Check out our [readers' guide to *Laudato Si'*](#).

Such incidents have been reported from various parts of India over the past few months.

A month earlier, [a Catholic nun in her 70s was gang-raped](#) and a convent was looted in Ranaghat town in West Bengal state.

Before that, five churches and a convent school were targeted in New Delhi, the nation's capital. The first was on Dec. 1, 2014, when [a mysterious fire gutted St. Sebastian's Church](#) in Dilshad Garden, an eastern suburb.

[A statement from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India](#) after the Agra attack said such incidents are not "mere acts of vandalism, but well planned dastardly acts, aimed at deeply wounding the religious feelings and creating a feeling of insecurity among the minorities." The attackers, the bishops said, wanted to inflict "maximum shame and disgrace" on Christians. The bishops demanded swift action against the culprits.

In a week, police [arrested three people](#) -- all Muslims -- in connection with the Agra incident. They said April 24 that the incident was the result of [unrequited love between a Muslim boy and a Catholic girl](#).

Those arrested in the nun's gang rape case were Muslim, which caused some Christian leaders, who say the incidents have been carried out by Hindu radical groups, to believe the incidents are deliberate attempts to put India's two prominent religious minority groups -- Muslims and Christians -- at loggerheads.

According to John Dayal, a Catholic lay leader and former member of the prime minister's National Advisory Council, the police seemed to take special care not to identify any Hindu as a suspect.

"Criminals can come from anywhere," he told *NCR*. "They can be hired by anyone. The police are often wrong. They arrest Muslim youth for being terrorists but have to release them because their version is rejected by the court."

The arrests of Muslims help the government not to act against the Hindu radicals, he said.

Dayal and others say Christians have faced persecution since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to office a year ago.

Modi is a former member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, a national volunteer organization), the umbrella organization blamed for a wide range of sectarian riots in India. It was founded in 1925 to unite Hindus, counter British colonialism in India, and suppress Muslim separatism. The British colonists had banned it once and the Indian government three times, first in 1948 when [a former RSS member](#) assassinated Mahatma Gandhi.

Dayal said while many see RSS cadres' hands in the recent attacks on churches, the RSS is keen to prove the Christian complaint of persecution as false and that no Hindu is involved. They want to show that the allegation of Christian persecution is a ploy to collect funds from within and outside the country, he said.

But many academics, social activists and political leaders blame the Hindu radicals for the attacks.

A group of them drawn from all religions [staged a protest](#) in New Delhi on March 19, the day the Modi government completed 300 days in office. They labeled the church attacks as part of Hindu radicals' systematic attempts to intimidate Christians under the new government.

They released [a report](#) that listed at least 43 deaths in more than 600 cases of violence, 149 targeting Christians and the rest targeting Muslims, during those 300 days. The group said India witnessed several cases of desecration of churches, assault on pastors, and illegal police detention of church workers in the same period.

Dayal, who helped write the report, said the actual number of anti-Christian incidents is higher because many cases go unreported. The RSS and organizations affiliated to it became more active after Modi came to power, he said.

"There is also impunity," he added.

Speeches by Hindu leaders and some ministers against Christians and Muslims give credence to such a view.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat often says that every Indian is a Hindu, and minorities will have to learn their place in the country. "Hindutva [Hinduness] is the identity of India and it has the capacity to swallow other identities," [he said in August](#). "We just need to restore those capacities."

On April 20, Munna Kumar Shukla of the Hindu Mahasabha (the grand council of Hindus) [justified the attacks on churches](#), saying such acts do not violate law because churches are no more places of worship, but factories for converting Hindus to Christianity. In fact, he said the federal government should protect and award those targeting churches.

Shukla's remarks not only disproved the police and government stand on those incidents, but unnerved the Catholic bishops. They issued [a statement April 24](#) condemning Shukla's remarks as "highly insinuating and derogatory," saying they contribute to an increase in violence against Christians and other minorities.

"All such attacks indicate a sinister pattern and evil design calculated to denigrate and defame the Christians, peace-loving and law abiding citizens of India," the statement said.

R.K. Chattree, a Hindu social activist who attended an April 23 protest rally against the Agra incident, said all attacks in the past six months had the same modus operandi, which he said "indicates the role of the same group in all incidents."

[The Indian Constitution allows](#) citizens to profess, practice and propagate the religion of their choice. The constituent assembly that drafted the constitution from 1948 to 1950 rejected Hindu nationalists' demands to make India a theocratic nation, like neighboring Pakistan. The drafters chose secularism as the national identity to allow equal respect and treatment for all religions.

This was done despite India being overwhelmingly Hindu. The national census in 1951 recorded 84.1 percent Hindus in a population of 361 million. Muslims were 9.8 percent, Christians 2 percent and Sikhs 1.9 percent. The rest were Buddhists, Jains, animists and atheists. Half a century later in 2001, Hindus were 80.5 percent of just over a billion Indians. Muslims were 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent and Sikhs 1.9 percent.

RSS and other groups say that the Hindu population has gone down partly because of Christians indulged in fraudulent conversion of the poor and gullible Hindus. So much so, its chief found fault even with Mother Teresa.

Bhagwat [told a meeting Feb. 23](#) that the world-renowned nun's prime motive for service was to convert the poor and destitute to Christianity and that her selfish aim devalued the virtues of a noble cause. He also said he had seen forced conversion of tribal people by Catholics when he was working in India's northeastern region.

Such statements have emboldened people to organize religious rituals to convert Christians and Muslims to Hinduism through what they call "ghar wapsi" (homecoming) at various places in the country.

The 300-day report says these divisive activities have diverted the government from fulfilling its election promise. Modi, the report notes, came to power riding a promise of development. Development remains a mirage even after 11 months, but the hate has spread across the country, it adds.

Navaid Hamid, general secretary of the Movement for Empowerment of Muslim Indians, [said at the March 19 protest](#) that Hindu radicals and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian people's party) "do not believe in diversity and wish to have everyone follow their own dictates." This has brought the basic tenets of the Indian Constitution -- secularism and pluralism -- "constantly under attack, and minorities are a part of that," the Muslim leader said.

Prime Minister Modi's initial silence on the attacks baffled many because when he took the oath of office, he called for a 10-year moratorium on sectarian violence. He not only refused to reprimand his Cabinet colleagues for making anti-minority remarks, the 300-day report says, but [declared Christmas as a "Good Governance Day"](#) to honor former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was born Dec. 25.

Some Christian leaders at the March 19 protest told *NCR* that Modi reprimanded them for being misled by newspaper reports when they complained about the church attacks. They said he refused to acknowledge Christians were under attack.

However, he relented after his party suffered a defeat in the election for Delhi legislative assembly. (The BJP could win just three seats in the 70-member house.) [Modi addressed Christians for the first time](#) Feb. 17, nearly nine months after he took over as a prime minister.

"We cannot accept violence against any religion on any pretext, and I strongly condemn such violence. My government will act strongly in this regard," he said.

But Modi's assurance seems to have little impact as the attacks on churches continue and the Hindu hard-liners indulge in hate speeches.

Meanwhile, people such as Jayanta Roy Chowdhury, a New Delhi-based journalist and a Hindu, urge Christians not to become defensive because India will remain a secular country. Chowdhury told *NCR* that Modi and his cohorts do not have the support they think they have because Indians generally do not like radicals.

Chowdhury, however, wants all religions to curb "crazy evangelists" among them.

Nirendra Dev, also a Hindu journalist in the capital and an admirer of Modi, said he does not believe Christians are being targeted. The attacks are incidents with a peculiar pattern, he told *NCR*. He said he blames Christians and Hindus for the present situation.

Hindus, as the majority community, should have acted more responsibly, he said, adding that a substantial section of Christians had turned anti-BJP and backed the opposition Congress.

Fr. Ajay Kumar Singh, a social activist in Odisha, an eastern Indian state, said anti-Christian violence is not a recent phenomenon. Odisha witnessed one of the worst attacks against Indian Christians: An estimated 100 Christians were killed and some 50,000 rendered homeless in [monthslong violence](#) that began Aug. 24, 2008, a day after Maoists killed a 90-year-old Hindu sage and his five companions.

It was also in Odisha that Hindu radicals burned to death Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines and his two sons, ages 10 and 6, in January 1999. A few months later, the same radicals killed Fr. Arul Doss of Balasore diocese.

Singh said he blames the early RSS leaders for such "alarming situations" by identifying Muslims and Christians as internal enemies for subjugation and elimination.

"I am concerned about the India's survival as a secular and democratic nation," the priest told *NCR*. "It is not just the minorities' life at stake, but the very fabric of the nation."

[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 *National Catholic Reporter* and *Matters India*.]

Source: <http://ncronline.org/news/global/indias-minority-christians-struggle-against-violence-and-persecution>

Other Related News

[Live Broadcasts of Genocide Centennial Services](#)

On Thursday, April 23, at the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia, the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 will be canonized as saints of the Armenian Church, in a history-making Divine Liturgy.

A live broadcast of the service will be shown at St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral in New York City, beginning at 9 a.m. (EST). All local parishes are encouraged to participate in this live broadcast at the cathedral with their communities. Parishioners outside the greater New York metropolitan area will be able to view the live broadcast online at www.agbu.org or at www.armeniangenocide100.org (the AGBU is sponsoring the broadcast).

On Sunday, April 26, an Episcopal Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral, beginning at 10 a.m. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian will celebrate the Divine Liturgy; Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan will deliver the sermon.

Every Armenian in the greater New York region needs to be a part of the centennial observance of the Armenian Genocide in New York City on April 26. For Armenian communities in other parts of the country, a live broadcast of the April 26 service will be available [online here](#).

A procession to Times Square will depart St. Vartan Cathedral at 12 p.m. The program in Times Square will begin at 1:45 p.m. The 2015 Genocide Commemoration in Times Square is organized by the Mid-Atlantic Knights and Daughters of Vartan, in affiliation with the Armenian Genocide Centennial Committee of America (Eastern Region). [Click here](#) to view a flyer for information on the April 26 events.

Additional events in observance of the 100th year of remembrance of the Armenian Genocide are being organized this weekend, both in New York and in our local parishes. For information, visit the Diocese's "[Events Calendar](#)," or [contact your local parish](#).

Please forward this message to others who wish to view the live broadcasts on April 23 and 26.

[Houses with Hope Challenges American Christians to Join Together in Aiding Survivors of Terror Attack in Kenya](#)

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico – In response to the April 2, 2015 attack on Christian students at Garissa University College in Kenya, Houses with Hope, the U.S.-based non-profit dedicated to assisting needy individuals and families in Africa, has launched a GoFundMe campaign entitled "[United4Kenya](#)" to aid in providing immediate relief for the survivors and families of those killed.

The "United4Kenya" campaign's goal is to raise \$200,000 to provide emergency medical care, grief counselors and funeral expenses for victims and their families.

Just three weeks ago, on April 2, 2015, Al-Shabaab terrorists stormed the Garissa University College campus in Kenya, killing 148 people and injuring 79 more. Attackers singled out students who identified themselves as Christian, shooting them on-sight. This attack is officially the second deadliest attack in the country's history.

"While this massacre happened three weeks ago, the lingering needs of victims and their families still remain," said Houses with Hope's Founder and President Ronna Jordan. "The surviving students that were wounded in the attacks were taken to the only public hospital in Nairobi, which unfortunately, isn't equipped to handle that amount of people, Funds are needed now to help transfer these patients to

private hospitals where they can receive adequate treatment for their injuries. Additionally, the families of the deceased, most of whom are extremely poor, can't even afford to bury their precious children."

The brutal attack at Garissa University College is only one of many against Christians around the world in recent days.

"It is our dream that the faith community in the U.S. come together and show their love and support for these people who had their lives turned upside down by such an act of violence and hate – all because of their faith in Jesus," said Jordan. "If only a small portion of the more than 200 million Christians in America would donate \$5 for what they might typically spend on coffee or \$1 that would be spent on a download from iTunes, it would make an incredible difference."

To donate to the "United4Kenya" campaign, please visit <http://www.gofundme.com/united4kenya>.

Houses with Hope has worked to help Kenyans in need since 2000. The organization, whose signature issue is providing housing for disadvantaged families in Africa, also provides assistance to humanitarian crises victims around the world. For more information on Houses with Hope, please visit, www.houseswithhope.org.

About Houses with Hope: Founded in 2003, Houses with Hope is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in the United States. Since its inception, the organization's primary focus has been helping orphans and disadvantaged families in Africa. The organization has built homes for families in need, provided assistance to orphans, schools and medical clinics, and has also helped fund local water projects. Houses with Hope also provides assistance for victims of humanitarian crises around the world, as well as disadvantaged U.S. families.

Source: [http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/04/23/houses-hope-challenges-american-christians-join-together-aiding-survivors-terror-attack-kenya/#h\[AHwf,5\]](http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/04/23/houses-hope-challenges-american-christians-join-together-aiding-survivors-terror-attack-kenya/#h[AHwf,5])

Turkey's 'Hidden Armenians' Break Silence Of The Past

Armenia is marking the 100th anniversary of the start of the World War I-era massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, widely recognized as the first genocide of the 20th century. The nature of the tragedy continues to be disputed by Turkey, which says that civil strife claimed lives on both sides. In this documentary, RFE/RL's Armenian Service investigates the stories of Turkey's "hidden Armenians" -- families whose forebears converted to Islam, or were forcibly converted, and concealed their background to escape persecution. They describe a slowly changing atmosphere in Turkey that has made it possible, after decades of silence, to live openly as Christians and Armenians.

Video: <http://www.rferl.org/media/video/turkey-armenia-1915-anniversary/26972513.html>

Live Broadcasts of Washington Genocide Centennial Services

The Armenian-American community will gather in Washington, D.C., this week for the national observance of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. Special events are scheduled for May 7 to 9— including an ecumenical prayer service at the National Cathedral, a Pontifical Divine Liturgy, a memorial concert, and an awards banquet honoring those who helped the survivors.

His Holiness Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and His Holiness Aram I, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, both will be in the United States to lead the Washington

commemoration. They will be joined by Armenians from across the U.S., under the auspices of the Eastern and Western Dioceses, and the Eastern and Western Prelacies.

Both the ecumenical prayer service—scheduled for May 7 at the National Cathedral—and the Pontifical Divine Liturgy—scheduled for May 9 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception—*will be broadcast live online*.

Thursday, May 7, 2015

The broadcast of the ecumenical service from Washington National Cathedral will begin at 7 p.m.(Eastern Standard Time). [Click here to view it](#).

Saturday, May 9, 2015

The broadcast of the Pontifical Divine Liturgy from the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception will begin at 10 a.m. (EST). [Click here to view it online](#). (Please note: The May 9 service will also be broadcast live at 10 a.m. over the EWTN television network; check your local listings or cable provider for the channel in your area.)

Both the May 7 and May 9 services may also be viewed through the website of the National Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide Centennial. [Click here to view](#).

Please forward this message to others who wish to share in the live broadcasts on May 7 and 9.

[Religion and Foreign Policy Bulletin May 2015: Religious Identity](#)

This issue of the Religion and Foreign Policy Bulletin examines the interplay between religious identity and geopolitics, with a particular focus on Asia and the Middle East. Included are links to CFR Backgrounders to provide context, interactive media, and expert testimony.

Religion in Asia

[Christianity in China](#)

This CFR Backgrounder examines the rise of Christianity in China, over the past four decades and discusses the country's stance toward recognized and nonrecognized religions. [Explore this CFR Backgrounder »](#)

[Political Polarization and Religious Extremism in Bangladesh](#)

In her testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, **Alyssa Ayres** argued that the United States has good policies in place to cooperate with Bangladesh, including training and technical cooperation, but given the fragile situation in Bangladesh, additional assistance is necessary to combat political polarization and religious extremism. [Read the full testimony »](#)

[Islam, Women, and Public Policy in Indonesia](#)

Bernie Adeney-Risakotta and **Siti Syamsiyatun** of Gadjah Mada University's Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies discuss the role of gender and Islam in Indonesian public policy, as part of CFR's Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative. [Listen to the audio »](#)

Religion in the Middle East

[From Calvin to the Caliphate](#)

In this *Foreign Affairs* article, University of Virginia's **John M. Owen IV** compares Europe's religious wars with today's Middle East. [Read more »](#)

[Decades of Deadly Conflict Will Spread Across the Middle East](#)

Yemen is the latest Middle East state to become enmeshed in a costly political and religious conflict that spans borders. The region's struggles could well last for three more decades, writes CFR President **Richard N. Haass**. [Read the op-ed »](#)

[Religion and Foreign Policy Conference Call Audio: Countering Violent Extremism](#)

As part of CFR's Religion and Foreign Policy Conference Call series, CFR's **Ed Husain** leads a conversation on why promoting an alternate narrative for young Muslims is critical to countering violent extremism. [Listen to the audio »](#)

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About CFR's Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative

The [CFR Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative](#) connects religious and congregational leaders, scholars, and thinkers with CFR's resources on U.S. foreign policy and provides a forum for this community to discuss a broad range of pressing international issues. For more information, please contact Lizzy McCourt, associate director for the National Program & Outreach, at [212.434.9848](tel:212.434.9848) or outreach@cfr.org.

About the Religion and Foreign Policy Portal on CFR.org

CFR's Religion and Foreign Policy Portal, www.cfr.org/religion, is a "first stop" on the internet for members of the religious community seeking information on and analysis of U.S. foreign policy and global developments. In addition to a wide range of CFR materials—including work from the think tank, interviews with experts, meeting transcripts, and new backgrounders—users will find analysis and documents from other sources that have been carefully selected by the website's editorial staff for their relevance and quality.

A Net Assessment of the Middle East

By [George Friedman](#)

The term "Middle East" has become enormously elastic. The name originated with the British Foreign Office in the 19th century. The British divided this region into the Near East, the area closest to the United Kingdom and most of North Africa; the Far East, which was east of British India; and the Middle East, which was between British India and the Near East. It was a useful model for organizing the British Foreign Office and important for the region as well, since the British — and to a lesser extent the French — defined not only the names of the region, but also the states that emerged in the Near and Far East.

Today, the term "Middle East," to the extent that it means anything, refers to the Muslim-dominated countries west of Afghanistan and along the North African shore. With the exception of Turkey and Iran, the region is predominantly Arab and predominantly Muslim. Within this region, the British created political entities that were modeled on European nation-states. The British shaped the Arabian Peninsula, which had been inhabited by tribes forming complex coalitions, into Saudi Arabia, a state based on one of these tribes, the Sauds. The British also created Iraq and crafted Egypt into a united monarchy. Quite independent of the British, Turkey and Iran shaped themselves into secular nation-states.

This defined the two fault lines of the Middle East. The first was between European secularism and Islam. The Cold War, when the Soviets involved themselves deeply in the region, accelerated the formation of this fault line. One part of the region was secular, socialist and built around the military. Another part, particularly focused on the Arabian Peninsula, was Islamist, traditionalist and royalist. The latter was pro-Western in general, and the former — particularly the Arab parts — was pro-Soviet. It was more complex than this, of course, but this distinction gives us a reasonable framework.

The second fault line was between the states that had been created and the underlying reality of the region. The states in Europe generally conformed to the definition of nations in the 20th century. The states created by the Europeans in the Middle East did not. There was something at a lower level and at a higher level. At the lower level were ...

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