

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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Catholic News Service has just posted a wonderful 3-minute video on the visit of Pope Francis to
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Our Work at the United Nations

UN DPI/NGO Conference National Organizing Committee

<http://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/conference-2016/about/co-chairs/>

Winter/ Spring Briefings and Events Calendar



Working Together: Making a Difference.
Department of Public Information Non-Governmental Organizations

[f](#) UNDPINGO [t](#) @undpingo #DPINGO outreach.un.org/ngorelations

Winter/ Spring Briefings and Events Calendar January - June 2016

28 January

Opening Session and UN DPI/ NGO
Conference Update (10 am- 11 am)

The Future of Holocaust Education
(11 am-12:30pm)

*Organized in observance of the International
Day for Commemoration in Memory of the
Victims of the Holocaust (27 January)*

4 February

Focus on Faith Series:
Promoting Peace and Reconciliation to Counter
Violent Extremism

18 February

The Refugee Crisis: Rethinking and
Strengthening Response

3, 4 March

Orientation Programme- DPI Associated NGOs

17 March

Women and Girls: from Adversity to Hope
(10 am-11:15 am)

Happiness and Gender Equality in the SDGs
(11:30 am-12:45 pm)

*Organized in observance of International Day of
Happiness (20 March)*

24 March

Mentoring Girls and Boys for Sustainable
Communities (10 am- 11:15 am)

Gender and Education in the 66th UN DPI/NGO
Conference (11:30 am- 12:45 pm)

7 April

NGO Communications Workshop: Learning
with Technology in the 21st Century
*Organized in cooperation with the NGO/DPI
Executive Sub-committee on Communications*

14 April

Briefing in commemoration of the International
Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery
and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

21 April

Youth Pre-Conference Session: Education in the
Sustainable Development Goals

28 April

Drug Trafficking, Small Arms and Conflict

5 May

Access to Information and Fundamental
Freedoms: This Is Your Right!
in observance of World Press Freedom Day

19 May

DPI/NGO Pre-Conference Briefing

30, 31 May and 1 June

66th United Nations Department of Public
Information/Non-Governmental Organizations
Conference, Republic of Korea

16 June

A briefing on the Outcomes of the 66th United
Nations Department of Public Information/Non-
Governmental Organizations Conference

30 June

End of Season Briefing

Please note that the calendar is subject to change
Webcast may be available, UN Web TV: webtv.un.org
For inquiries, email: undpingo@un.org

Last Updated 23 February 2016

Remarks at the Coordination and Management Meeting of ECOSOC on the adoption of the NGO Committee Report

Ambassador Sarah Mendelson

U.S. Representative for Economic and Social Affairs

U.S. Mission to the United Nations

New York City

April 5, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thank you Mr. President.

The United States is alarmed at the increasing trend of global restrictions on civic space, both within countries and through limiting civil society's participation in the UN system. President Obama has spoken of this issue numerous times including during high level week. In just the past three years, we have seen more than 50 countries introduce or enact measures to restrict civil society. This is a matter of great, great concern to the United States, and I know it concerns many of you in this room.

ýIn 2016, we recognize development as something that is done in partnership with government and civil society. As governments, we can only achieve our best outcomes with the help, and engagement of our civil society partners. In the United States, civic participation is part of our very fiber; it's not just a tool but an ethos, a spirit that infuses our daily practice of citizenship. We believe that all civil society representatives should have a voice, regardless of their views.

In the United States, civil society partners are among our best advocates, and yes, on occasion, constructive critics and always push us to strive harder to improve our own domestic situation. We believe in giving civil society voice to participate in the United Nations system, and to this end, strive to accredit as many NGOs as possible through the NGO Committee's accreditation process.

The United States is deeply concerned by the attempts of members of this committee to restrict civil society participation by blocking or deferring applications of NGOs on the basis of their work to improve their own domestic situations, whether on issues related to freedoms of expression or peaceful assembly and association, or fighting for religious or linguistic freedoms for minority groups that have been marginalized or even oppressed by the very government that is supposed to be protecting them.

We are also concerned that during this last session, the NGO Committee for the first time refused to allow an NGO to speak before the Committee before denying its application. This silencing of civil society should be of grave concern to ECOSOC and all those who seek full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for which civil society will be critical to implementation. This recent episode was an unacceptable restriction on free speech at the United Nations.

When joining a body such as the NGO Committee, each Member state makes an implicit commitment to respect the original intent of that body. It disappoints us greatly—and so many of our partners in civil society around the world—to see members of this Committee not only failing to meet their duties but

also using this body to subvert the purpose of the NGO Committee by further restricting civic space at the UN and blocking or deferring NGO applications on non-substantive grounds and by attempting to silence NGOs here at the UN. This attempted silencing won't work. Thank you.

###

SOCA NGO Rep Wins 1st Place At USA Judo National Championships

Date: April 9th-10th, 2016

Judo (meaning "gentle way") was created as a physical education as well as a mental and moral pedagogy in Japan, in 1882, by Kanō Jigorō . It is generally categorized as a modern martial art which later evolved into an Olympic sport. The overall aim of Judo is to perfect yourself and contribute something valuable to the world in a communal Utopian effort.

In the spirit of Judo and the upcoming 2016 Olympics, our NGO Joseph Cannizzo traveled to Irving Texas and competed in the USA National Championships on April 9th-10th 2016. He won 1st place in the Masters (30-34 years old) National champion of the 66 kilogram (145 pounds) division. He also won 5th place in the Senior (19-29) year old division. He is now eligible to represent USA in international Judo competition in both the Masters and Senior Divisions.

"I've been practicing with my students from my dojo and that has helped me immensely," explained Cannizzo. "Some of those kids are Junior Olympic competitors and that has kept me on my toes. Facing those kids has been the secret to my success.

Event reported by Joseph Cannizzo, SOCA Representative to UN DPI

http://www.silive.com/recsports/index.ssf/2016/04/staten_island_judo_sensei_clai.html

Annual Commemoration Of The International Day Of Reflection On The Genocide In Rwanda, April 11, 2016

The International Day of Reflection 2016 began as the candles were lit by all Excellencies present for a moment of silence before the program started. H.E. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary General, opened the remembrance with the words: "We remember all who perished and renew our resolve to prevent anywhere in the world genocide...and the spread of hate speech...and to promise a life of dignity and security for all." He was followed by H. E. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly, who said: "Today, we honor the memory of those whose lives were taken...we promote peace and reconciliation across cultures and generations." Ms. Frida Umuhiza, a Tutsi survivor and author of "Frida: Chosen to Die, Destined to Live," saw her family slaughtered at the age of 14. She too, was clubbed and left for dead. None of her 18 family members had money to pay to be killed by bullets, so they were clubbed and hacked to death. Frida tells her story so that "We can remember those who were killed," and because, "If God gives you another chance, you have to make the best of it and try to do good for others, become better, not bitter." Ms. Nelly Mukazayire, Deputy Director of the Cabinet in the Office of the President of Rwanda described the shock of learning that, even though her father was a Tutsi, her mother was a Hutu and a member of the dreaded Interahamwe, a paramilitary group which slaughtered Tutsis and moderate Hutus without mercy. Her mother was sentenced to life in prison. Nelly was now a child of a survivor as well as a child of a perpetrator. It took her a long time to realize she was not responsible for her mother's crimes and to learn about the role of forgiveness for children. After

many years she was able to meet her mother in prison. There was a musical performance by Pauletta Washington and the Mamazband. Attended and reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli SOCA Representative to UN DPI.

[Special session on the World Drug Problem](#)

Ambassador Deluca attended the session on-site.

Journal No.2016/78, Thursday, 21 April 2016

Posted: 21 Apr 2016 05:00 AM PDT

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND AGENDA

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[[English](#) (934K) | [French](#) (715K)]

[SI Council of Churches Dinner](#)



By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On Thursday April 7th the SI Council of Churches hosted an annual awards church dinner at the Old Bermuda Inn on Staten Island. Many people attended from various churches on the Island. They had representatives from various different denominations. The event was hosted by Deacon Paul Kosinski, President of the SI Council of Churches. Reverend Matt Schaeffer started with a word of prayer and we heard speeches from the different awards recipient.

There are about 43 churches that are members of the SI Council of Churches. About 23 recipients received awards from the various member churches that night. It was an overall good atmosphere the food was good and it was a great time to socialize and meet other Christians. I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Rosalie Valenti who is the Outreach coordinator and her husband Mr. Pasquale Valenti who helped with coordinating the event.

The SI Council of Churches has a members meeting once a month. I attended the meeting on April 14th it was to speak about various topics one of which to an event at Sight and Sound in Lancaster. They also wanted feedback on the awards dinner and how it can be improved next year. At the meeting they had

talked about the funds they had raised for a scholarship program that they collected from the awards dinner.

[Korea Press Center event 7 April 2016](#)

<http://www.asiatoday.co.kr/view.php?key=20160407010003145>

English caption for above photo link from Asia Today newspaper:

7 April 2016, Seoul, Korea

Pictured left to right at the Korea Press Center in Seoul are: Hawa Diallo, UN DPI Public Information Officer; Jeffrey Brez, Chief, UN NGO Relations, Advocacy and Special Events; Dr. Soon Hueng Chang, President of Handong Global University and Co-Chair of the Korean National Organizing Committee for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference; popular Korean singer-songwriter and humanitarian Lee Seung-chul, newly appointed promotional ambassador for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference; Maher Nasser, Director Outreach Division, UN DPI; Dr. Scott Carlin, associate professor of geography at Long Island University and Co-Chair of the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference. All are gathered for a press conference on Thursday 7 April 2016, to announce the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference, the first ever to be held in Asia. The theme of the conference is: "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together." The city of Gyeongju, Republic of Korea will host the conference from 30 May- 1 June, 2016. Several thousand representatives from non-governmental organizations from around the world are expected to attend this conference.

<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160407000650>

Above photo link and story from the Korea Herald are written in English.

Additional information for photo link: pictured in the Korea Press Center in Seoul on 7 April 2016, are Dr. Soon Heung Chang President of Handong Global University and Co-Chair of the Korean National Organizing Committee for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference and popular Korean singer-songwriter and humanitarian Lee Seung-chul, who was named promotional ambassador for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference, the first ever to be held in Asia. The conference, titled "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together," takes place in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea from 30 May - 1 June, 2016. The ancient city of Gyeongju has many archeological and cultural sites which have been named World Heritage sites by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

[Defending Religious Freedom And Other Human Rights: Stopping Mass Atrocities Against Christians And Other Believers](#)

Conference sponsored by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, UN Headquarters, ECOSOC Chamber, Thursday, April 28, 2016 10 AM -1 PM

On April 28, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN, together with co-sponsors CitizenGo, MasLibres and In Defense of Christians, hosted a conference dedicated to defending the right to religious freedom (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18*), to hearing first-hand testimonies of the atrocities being committed, and to mobilizing the international community to "do all that it can," in the words of Pope Francis, "to stop and prevent further systemic violence." The event took place at UN Headquarters in the ECOSOC Chamber. Opening remarks were from Archbishop

Bernadito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, who said the purpose of the day was “to raise awareness of suffering.” They were followed by a welcome from H. E. Ufuk Gokcen, Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the UN and a citizen of Turkey, who offered “Greetings in the name of peace.” He told the audience they were witnesses to “a struggle between humanity and the enemies of humanity,” who commit “atrocities under the false pretense of acting in the name of Islam.”

The first panel of the day focused on protecting victims of persecution and fostering religious freedom worldwide. Mr. Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, the world’s largest Catholic organization, with 1.9 million members worldwide, spoke about the report submitted to the US Secretary of State on *Genocide against Christians in the Middle East*. “We face the very real prospect of extinction of many cultures indigenous to the region,” he said describing the undeniable evidence contained in the report submitted to the US Congress which resulted in the US State Department Declaration (HCR75) of ISIS attacks against Christians and other ethnic minorities in the middle east “genocide.” “What we know is merely the tip of the iceberg...a frontal assault on human rights and freedom...religious minorities have an indisputable right to live in their homeland.” The Hon. Lars Adaktusson, Swedish Member of Parliament and initiator of the historic European Parliament unanimous resolution recognizing ISIS’s systematic killing of Christians and religious minorities in the middle east as genocide said, “We live in a world of political correctness where Christians are considered colonialists and oppressors and Muslims the oppressed.” Dr. Thomas Farr, Director of the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University said what is needed is “strategic thinking for a post ISIS future.” He added that “the US declaration was not a certainty until the Knights of Columbus produced a massive legal brief with incontrovertible evidence which could not be refuted.”

The second panel of the day presented victims and eye witnesses of mass atrocities against Christians and other religious minorities by ISIS in Syria and Iraq and by the Boko Haram in Nigeria. Mr. Ignacio Arsuaga, President of event co-sponsor, Madrid-based CitizenGo, a global community of active citizens working to ensure that those in power respect human dignity and individual rights, chaired the second panel. H. E. Joseph Danlami Bagobiri, Bishop of Kafanchan, Nigeria, spoke of the dual ideology of democratic values and those of Islam and sharia. He said that “Boko Haram is the most deadly terror group in the entire world. They are against non-Muslims and moderate opposing Muslims.” He continued saying “the deaths of every 100 Christians include those of 64 Nigerian Christians in the northern part of Nigeria where 30 million Christians live.” As a witness to the horrors perpetrated on “non-believers,” he urged “Muslims all over the world to condemn those who carry out these atrocities.” Carl and Marsha Mueller, parents of Kayla Mueller, a young aid worker and ISIS/Dahesh hostage, spoke of their daughter’s enslavement to an ISIS “Caliph,” of her torture and murder saying “We know what is happening, but the world is not listening.” Fr. Douglas Al-Bazi, a Chaldean Catholic Priest who runs a Christian refugee center in Erbil, Iraq, was kidnapped by ISIS in 2006. He was tortured and released after 9 days after terrorists used a hammer on his face and knees and back. “Genocide is a polite word for what is happening to Christians here, but it is a first step. Friends, I am a priest, I cannot abandon hope...(but) my people are losing hope, we are disappearing...we are living, breathing human beings, not museum pieces.” In 2003 there were 1.5 million Christians living in Iraq, today there are 300,000. Fr. Al-Bazi concluded in the ancient Aramaic language: “May the peace of the Lord be with you.”

Sr. Maria de Guadalupe, who spent 18 years as a missionary in the middle east, most recently 4 years in Aleppo, Syria, spoke of no resources at all: water for 2 hours every 10-15 days, and electricity for 1-2 hours a day. She said: "They are allowing us to die of hunger and thirst and the world does not know it." In Syria, children are filled with fear for their safety, children should not have to live with this fear. Everywhere in the world children have rights, but not in Syria where Isis closed the schools.

The third panel detailed the sexual abuse suffered by Christian and Yazidi women and girls in the middle east. Kristen Evans, Executive Director, In Defense of Christians, an international advocacy group based in Washington, DC, which fights for the protection of Christianity in the Middle East, chaired the third panel. First to speak was Samia Sleman, a 15 year old Yazidi girl, a witness kidnapped by ISIS/Daesh. Between fits of sobbing she told of children separated from parents, all women and children as young as 7-8 violated horribly, over and over again. Older women were killed as ISIS only wanted girls. She was a captive of the Islamic State for 6 months and 12 days. At the UN, she gave her voice to those who have none. Ms. Jacqueline Isaac, an American-Egyptian humanitarian attorney and Vice President of the NGO, Roads of Success, described her eyewitness visits to the mid-east. "Many prefer to commit suicide, rather than be tortured and violated by ISIS." She described the atrocities committed against women and children and said they keep asking the world: "Where are you, where are you?" The final speaker, not listed on the program, Melkite Catholic Archbishop Jean Clement Jeanbart of Aleppo, Syria also spoke on the genocide against Christians, "We have seen people killed, slaughtered, women violated, priests and bishops kidnapped, houses destroyed, churches and convents invaded. We persist with the help of God." Aleppo, the largest city in Syria has been shattered by the civil war. Aleppo's Syriac Orthodox and Greek Orthodox archbishops were kidnapped in 2013 and have not been heard from since. Pope Francis called these events "inhuman acts," and called upon international leaders "to protect innocent people," and asked the world to come together "in solidarity with those who suffer."

Reported by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli, SOCA representative to UN DPI.



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

(CRNGO) is pleased to invite you
to a **SUBSTANTIVE BRIEFING**

VENUE:

**Bahá'í Offices
866 UN Plaza, Suite 120
corner of 48th Street & 1st Ave**

DATE:

Thursday, 12 May 2016

TIME:

1:15 - 2:45 PM

MODERATOR:

Dr. Kusumita P. Pedersen

Vice Chair, Parliament of the
World's Religions | Professor
Emerita of Religious Studies, St.
Francis College

**Co-sponsored with The Parliament
of the World's Religions**

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
IN THE PARLIAMENT OF
THE WORLD'S
RELIGIONS**

Speakers:

**Chief Oren Lyons
(Onondaga)**

Faithkeeper, Onondaga Nation

Lewis Cardinal (Cree)

Chair, Indigenous Task Force
Parliament of the World's
Religions

**Iriama Margaret Lokawua
(Karamoja)**

Women's Environmental
Conservation project
(WECOP), Uganda

**The Reverend Andras
Corban-Arthen**

Vice Chair, Parliament of the
World's Religions |
President, European Congress of
Ethnic Religions

RSVP:

Religiousngo@gmail.com

Turkish Cultural Center Holds Annual Celebration



[On the right: Dominic Zmarliki, Youth Rep for Syrian Orthodox Church in America]

A Turkish community group reached out to the larger community with an annual celebration Thursday night.

The Turkish Cultural Center of Staten Island held its Friendship Dinner and Award Ceremony. The dinner is the group's largest annual event. It brings together non-profit organizations, business owners and community leaders from Staten Island. Organizers say the group aims to share its accomplishments and learn about new ideas from guests.

“What they've really shown Staten Islanders and especially people in education, is the incredible value of international friendships,” said Robert Fanuzzi, Associate Provost for St. John's University.

“What we want is, we want to be friends and we want to integrate ourselves to the community,” added Zafer Durmaz, Outreach Coordinator for The Turkish Cultural Center of Staten Island.

This was the seventh year that the organization has held the event.

<http://www.ny1.com/nyc/staten-island/news/2016/04/8/turkish-cultural-center-holds-annual-celebration.html>

Celebration of the 75th Birthday and 25th Priesthood Anniversary of Rev. Dr. George McBride, associate and former UN Representative of SOCA.



Very Rev. Chorbishop Anthony DeLuca, Father McBride, Dr. Andrea DeLuca



Doctors Andrea DeLuca, McBride, Angela DeLuca

UN Meeting on Indigenous Peoples in the Parliament of the World's Religions

By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On May 12, I attended a meeting at the Baha'i offices at the United Nations Plaza on the Indigenous Peoples in the Parliament of the World Religions. The meeting was moderated by Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, Vice Chair of the Parliament of the World's Religions. Mr. Lewis Cardinal from the Cree Nation of Canada and Chair for the Indigenous Task Force Parliament of the World's Religions was the first speaker. Mr. Cardinal spoke about being involved in the Inter-faith movement with Native Americans and the struggles they faced. In 1893 Native Americans were not invited to the first Parliament meeting in Chicago until 1993 in Chicago was the first meeting for Native Americans. Mr. Cardinal also spoke about his connections with Mother Earth and story of the prophecy of Turtle Island.

The second speaker was Iriama Margaret Lokawua from the Karamoja tribe of Uganda. She is involved with the Women's Environmental Conservation project. She spoke about how her tribe and Indigenous people are peacemakers. They pray on sacred sites under trees and they recite the values of their elders and nature. She uses her faith as solitude of unity and brings pieces of religion for the environment and peace.

The third speaker was the Reverend Andras Corban, President of European Congress of Ethnic Religions. Mr. Corban is from Spain he primarily told about the Christian colonization of Europe. Many Indigenous people of Europe such as Celtic, Germanic, Scandinavian and Baltic were forced to convert to Christianity and many were massacred while their sacred sites were destroyed and women were legally raped to bear Christian children during the crusades.

The fourth and final speaker was Mrs. Mary Lyons the wife of Chief Oren Lyons of the Faithkeepers, Onondaga Nation. Mrs. Lyons talked about how her people were mistreated in the Americas they were being killed and imprisoned for their faith and forced to convert to Catholicism and Episcopalianism. She had mention in 1978 President Carter signed an act for the Native Americans can freely practice their faith with no more persecutions.

The speaker's agenda and the meeting overall are to see unity and to value humanity of all Indigenous Peoples all over the world. They wish to give a voice to all Indigenous Peoples it is considered they have quiet voices but are loud thinkers and are now starting to speak to the world. The question they would like to see answered is how well we address Humanity and Mother Earth.

Update on ECOSOC NGO Committee

Colleagues –

Thanks to those who went to the NGO Committee yesterday for CPJ. I hope that you will be able to try to make it this afternoon. It is really important to watch the work of this Committee and CPJ is a very important NGO.

I am pasting a link with the UN's reporting on yesterday's NGO Committee session below. I would like to flag that CPJ did indeed go up and present its case, but then had to respond to questions from China, Cuba, Iran, India, South Africa, Russia, and Sudan, mainly about its activities and finances. CPJ had to submit responses to open questions, and thus the committee did not take action on its application yesterday.

CPJ will be reviewed again by the committee either this afternoon, at 5:30 p.m., or tomorrow morning, near the top of the session. If there are any remaining objections, the group's application would likely come to a vote by the committee at that time.

Aside from the overall numbers of yesterday's session, which saw 33 groups approved and 45 deferred, it is important to note the overall tone in the committee is hostile to the work of civil society organizations. When the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) delivered a statement expressing concern over NGO committee member states' use of procedural maneuvers to stymie the accreditation and work of NGOs in the UN context, a number of NGO committee member states expressed serious, loud, and often rude, misgivings about the role that civil society organizations play, including from Russia and from Syria.

Your continued attention to this developing story is appreciated.

<http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/ecosoc6760.doc.htm>

UN meeting of the 2016 International Vesak Day



By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On May 20th, I attended a meeting at the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations Headquarters of the 2016 International Vesak Day. This holiday is where all Buddhists celebrate the birth of the Buddha and some Buddhists such as Theravada Buddhism celebrate the Buddha's enlightenment on the same day. His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki Moon the Secretary General of the UN spoke briefly on this occasion. He had talked about his mother being a Buddhist and how Buddhism influenced him growing up.

There were many people from different countries that had attended the event. A UN representative of each of the Buddhist countries took turns to speak. One speaker from each of the Buddhist countries gave a speech at the event there were about 14 speakers total. Speakers from India, China, Japan, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, South Korea, Bhutan and many other countries all spoke at the event.

The UN representatives of Thailand and Sri Lanka helped to organize and coordinate the events for Vesak Day. A video and slideshow was shown to the audience of different countries celebrating International Vesak Day. Overall Buddhists seek unity and peace and bring the teachings of the Buddha to value. Vesak Day is a very important day for all Buddhists but not just Buddhists but for everyone around the world it's a message of love and peace.

Statement on the Orlando Tragedy and Suffering

Religions for Peace USA

June 12, 2016

On behalf of our 50 national religious member communities, *Religions for Peace USA* lifts up prayers and sends our deepest condolences to the victims of the sickening attack this morning in Orlando, Florida, that left 50 people dead and 53 injured. We especially stand with LGBTQ people who were the target of this vicious attack.

There is no excuse for such brutality.

We thank all those who have responded to this tragedy with courage, compassion and healing.

Such attacks wound our shared humanity and confront us with a stark choice: to mimic the hatred we see or to make a bold commitment to overcome it. For *Religions for Peace USA*, the interconnected nature of our world means simply this: we must *all* become peace-makers now. For, if we respond to every act of violence with a thirst for yet more violence in revenge, we will undoubtedly succeed in little more than inflicting unspeakable suffering on one another. There must be a dedication to seeking and building a future in which the chains of suffering and violence are broken.

Religions around the world call us to our highest and best values — values which lead us to courageous peace-making on every level. We, therefore, urge people everywhere, to make a fresh commitment to building a world of peace and justice and doing all we can to renounce violent language and actions wherever they arise. This requires that we must reach beyond and across lines of human difference — religion, race, nationality and sexual identity — to form active relationships that honor and protect the lives, humanity and dignity of all.

We urgently call on people of faith and goodwill everywhere to recommit ourselves to peacemaking, to heal all wounds of violence and injustice; to build bridges of hope and to bring down walls of fear and hatred. Cruel suffering like we see inflicted on people in Orlando demands that we become more determined than ever to enter places where violence has already left deep pain and suffering, and in their place bring healing, justice and peace.

What Can We Do Now?

- Calls, letters and emails of support from individuals and organizations to people in the communities affected by this tragedy are an important way to convey your concern.
- Many communities are holding community-wide, multi-religious vigils. We encourage everyone to attend or organize one in your area.
- Remember that faithful Muslims and Muslim organizations are incredibly horrified and distressed by actions like this, as any of us would be if the person perpetrating such crimes claimed to be acting in the name of our group. Help amplify the voices of those who seek to heal wounds, build bridges and bring down walls of hate.
- You can find links to more statements about the Orlando tragedy on our website: www.rfpusa.org. Please note that Muslim organizations are again speaking out very clearly about their repudiation of such actions in the name of their religion.

UN Meeting on Interfaith Prayer Service on ending Aids

By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On June 7th, I attended a meeting at the United Nations Church Center on the eve of the United Nations High Level Meeting on ending Aids. People of different faiths gathered in New York to pray together for a strong political declaration on Aids and to strengthen the engagement of faith communities in the comprehensive response to HIV. Much has been achieved in the past 35 years yet there is more that needs to be done. What the world does by the year 2020 will determine if Aids will be eliminated as a public health threat by 2030.

There were a total of 13 speakers. The first speaker that spoke at the event, Mrs. Sandra Thurman, Chief Strategy Officer to the United States President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief had stated that religion has been hijacked dealing with Aids. A point she made was, who is the leper? Society considers them not human so too people who have Aids are considered not human. The second speaker was Ms. Jessie Fubara-Manuel from Nigeria. She had said the Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and has the 2nd most HIV in the world. Poverty is known to create a fertile ground for HIV in her country.

As world leaders will meet at the UN and talk about ending the Aids epidemic by 2030. Many speakers stated that we need to be a voice of reason when society says Aids is not an epidemic anymore. Cultural and Religious empathy are needed and every child in the world should have access to treatment. Every person is of equal value and no one should be shunned. That is the goal primarily for this meeting finding a cure and treating societies where HIV and Aids is common even with the LGBT communities. It doesn't matter the persons sexual orientation, race, gender or age it has affected our world and many people have lost their lives let us reflect on those who lost their battle with Aids.

What Role for Religion in a World of Turmoil

The Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations



is pleased to invite you to its
Annual Luncheon
on the theme of

What Role for Religion in A World of Turmoil?

Thursday, 30 June
12:30 - 2:30 PM

777 United Nations Plaza,
First Ave & 44th Street
2nd Floor

RSVP to ReligiousNGO@gmail.com by Monday, 27 June

Lunch is included for one representative per paid membership. For additional guests and friends it is \$15.

Asian Media Outreach Success Story For Conference In Korea

One day in late March, a senior diplomat from Myanmar told a DPI official how delighted he was to find on the UN website a translation in Burmese of the press release announcing the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference in Korea. Even in the multilingual culture of the United Nations, it's rare that many of the estimated 4,500 world languages with over 1,000 speakers are highlighted. The addition of several languages on the UN DPI/NGO Conference website is a positive result of one of the Media Subcommittee's strategies: to focus on the Asian region, including translations, media outreach and on-line exposure.

With a tight deadline of four months to generate interest in and attendance at the Conference in Korea, the co-chairs of the Media Subcommittee, asked the representatives of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) to form a network of public relations professionals that could handle media coverage in the Asian region. Barbara M. Burns, one of the IPRA reps and member of the Subcommittee, reached out to the Mileage Communications Group, headquartered in Singapore, Chairman Yap Boh Tiong. The result was formation of the IPRA Asian Task Force.

Mileage Communications agency members in Shanghai, China; Jakarta, Indonesia; Korea, Myanmar and Vietnam, volunteered to translate documents and contact media on behalf of the Conference. You can see their translations into Burmese, Chinese, Indonesian and Vietnamese on the UN website.

The Media Subcommittee sent out press releases and news items to IPRA Asian Task Force as well as IPRA membership and associates (10,000 people) around the world. Meanwhile, Jim McQueeny, IPRA's other rep and member of the Subcommittee, and his company provided podcasts of interviews with the Conference Co-Chairmen and NGOs for distribution via the UN networks.

According to all the members of the IPRA Asian Task Force, interest among local media ran high, including several first-tier media in all the countries. Most of the media coverage of the Conference was on-line. To illustrate the outreach, China reported articles on news outlets as well as those focused on education, business, lifestyle and the economy. Shortly before the Conference opening, a press release receiving wide attention in China was entitled, "World NGOs to Participate in Dialogue on 'Role of Education for Global Citizenship' at UN DPI/NGO Conference in Korea."

The IPRA Asian Task Force made a substantial contribution to informing NGOs and others about the upcoming Conference, a fact that is reflected in the excellent participation from the region: 3,750 attendees most of them from Asia, The strategy of reaching out to media audiences by local/regional public relations professionals is certain to be considered for other important NGO events.

The Co-Chairs of the Media Subcommittee are Fannie Munlin, National Council of Negro Women, and Anne Marie Riccitelli, Syrian Orthodox Church in America.

Xxx June 30, 2016

2016 UN Dpi/NGO 66th Conference Report

2016 UN DPI/NGO 66th CONFERENCE REPORT

Media/Press Subcommittee

Co-Chair Fannie Munlin, National Council of Negro Women

Co-Chair Anne Marie Riccitelli, Syrian Orthodox Church in America

Media/Press Sub-Committee Members:

Jim McQueeney, Barbara M. Burns, International Public Relations Association (IPRA)

IPRA Asian Task Force Media/Press Subcommittee Members: Mileage Communications Group

Yap Boh Tiong, Patsy Phay, Singapore

Ms. Wang Ling, Shanghai, China

Mr. Aubrey Siahainenia, Jakarta, Indonesia

John Kim, Korea

John Jun, Myanmar

Ms. Pham Nhat Nga, Vietnam

Long Island University Office of Communications and Marketing

Jennifer Carpenter Low

Elliot Olshansky

February 2016

23 January, *Holy Wisdom*, the (winter) quarterly newsletter of UN Affairs for the Syrian Orthodox Church in America, reports on the December 17, 2015 UN DPI Town Hall Meeting and announcement of upcoming UN DPI/NGO Korea conference (Google: Syrian Orthodox Church in America at United Nations Newsletters)

Created Media/Press Subcommittee 1) Statement of Purpose and 2) Media Strategy Overview

Contributed to 2016 DPI Conference Communications Strategy

Interviewed Conference Co-Chair Dr. Scott Carlin and created DPI approved pitch bio for use by editors interviewing Dr. Carlin and reporters writing about event; Dr. Carlin's bio was also distributed to 5000 members of the UN NGO community through online NGO Reporter

Subcommittee Co-Chairs Fannie Munlin and Anne Riccitelli as well as subcommittee members Barbara Burns and Jim McQueeney met at UN with DPI Chief of NGO Relations and Advocacy, Jeff Brez, who approved suggestions for working with IPRA lists of members and associate members (10,000 in total)

Media Subcommittee members Jim McQueeney and Barbara Burns personally contacted IPRA colleagues in key countries, especially Asia, to request their cooperation for contacts with local media and feedback. Media subcommittee member Barbara Burns sent out a short version of the February 5th general conference press release to IPRA membership and associates (10,000 people) and to members

of the IPRA Asian Task Force, all of whom distributed a translated release to their contacts and social media. “News from the UN,” sent to network between 1 March and 10 May.

March 2016

14 March: IPRA Asian Task Force members translated UN Conference press releases for the local press and media in their regions into Indonesian, Burmese and Vietnamese. Story was picked up throughout the region and published locally online in China, Vietnam, Myanmar, Jakarta and Korea. Translations and published stories were acknowledged, posted on UN DPI/NGO Conference website and credited: “unofficial translation courtesy of...”

15 March: American Geographic Society sends out post through Facebook and Twitter to their 50,000 members which includes screen shot of Dr. Carlin, quotes from Conference bio and link to conference website. (Google: American Geographical Society...Long time AGS member Dr. Scott Carlin

16 March: Video podcast taping from Winning Strategies offices in Newark, NJ. Jim McQueeney interviews via skype with Dr. Soon Heung Chang, Co-Chair, National Organizing Committee for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference and Dr. Scott Carlin, Co-Chair of the Planning Committee, 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference; in person interviews with Bruce Knotts, Chair NGO/DPI Executive Committee and Fannie Munlin, Co-Chair Media/Press Subcommittee.

18 March: Co-chairs Munlin and Riccitelli teleconference with LIU Director of Operations Jennifer Carpenter Low and Elliott Olshansky, LIU Assistant Director of Communications to discuss plans to pitch Dr. Carlin and conference to Long Island media.

23 March: Podcasts posted to Dropbox include:

Bruce Knotts - <https://www.dropbox.com/s/tigr8b0516yhaiz/BruceKnotts-2016-03-16.mp4?dl=0>

Fannie Munlin – <https://www.dropbox.com/s/1tk3eekgp4fu0m6/FannieM-2016-03-16%20%281%29.mp4?dl=0>

Dr. Chang – <https://www.dropbox.com/s/78b90m5wjja1xfj/live-shchang.mp4?dl=0>

Dr. Carlin - <https://www.dropbox.com/s/k2jxl1mqtov8ysc/scott.carlin.ny.mp4?dl=0>

23 March: *The Pioneer*, LIU Student newspaper publishes front page news feature “Carlin Co-Chairs Sustainability Conference,” by Brain Foley

24 March: Huffington Post publishes online conference blog by Dr. Scott Carlin: “Why We Need Education for Global Citizenship” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-carlin/why-we-need-education-for_b_9543390.html?1458855530

31 March: Fox-WWOR-TV Channel 9 public affairs program “New Jersey Now” tapes UN DPI’s Jeff Brez and Felician University’s Dr. Mary Norton in conversation about Korea Conference with host Jim McQueeney; show to air 10 April

31 March: Photos of Dr. Mary Norton, Jeff Brez, Jim McQueeney, taken at FOX-WWOR-TV taping distributed to media-at-large.

April 2016

6 April, "Dr. Mary Norton Interviewed for Television Program," story and photo posted on Felician University website, <http://felician.edu/>

7 April, feature story Korea Herald: "Singer Lee Seung-chul to perform at U.N. Conference in Gyeongju" <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160407000650>

7 April, Asia Today newspaper story on UN conference organizers and appointment of popular singer-songwriter and humanitarian Lee Seung-chul as Promotional Ambassador for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference in Korea <http://www.asiatoday.co.kr/view.php?key=20160407010003145>

8 April UN DPI/NGO sends out alert advising NGO Colleagues to watch "Sunday, April 10, at 12 noon, on WOR-TV, Channel 9, the public affairs program, "New Jersey Now," hosted by media subcommittee's Jim McQueeney ... (with) featured guests Jeff Brez and Dr. Mary Norton.

11 April, American Association of Geographers newsletter publishes story, "Scott Carlin of LIU Post to Co-Chair UN Conference," reaching 10,000 geographers in 60 countries

12 April, *Holy Wisdom*, the (spring) quarterly newsletter of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America, publishes press releases and several status reports on the work of the planning committee for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference in Korea (Google: Syrian Orthodox Church in America at United Nations Newsletters)

19 April, UN DPI tweets AAG story and sends out on NGO list serv, <http://news.aag.org/2016/04/scott-carlin-of-liu-post-to-co-chair-un-conference/>

21 April, Southampton Patch, reaching an online audience of 12,000, publishes story by Donald Wimmer, "LIU Post Professor Named Co-Chair of Prestigious UN Conference on Sustainable Development," <http://patch.com/new-york/southampton/liu-post-professor-named-co-chair-prestigious-un-conference-sustainable-development>

22 April, PACIE, The Pennsylvania Council for International Education newsletter publishes, "Student Determination – Pathways to Gyeongju," by Dr. Bill Hunter, Lehigh University Representative to the UN

22 April, follow-up phone conversation from 18 March with LIU-Post communications team

28 April, two conference YOU TUBE posts by Media Subcommittee member Jim McQueeney: Host Jim McQueeney interviews Fannie Munlin, UN Representative for the National Council of Negro Women, and Co-Chair of the Media Subcommittee for the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference 2016 in Korea <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbCaxSixSq8&feature=youtu.be> and: Host Jim McQueeney interviews Bruce Knotts, UN Representative for the Unitarian Universalist Association, and Chair of the UN NGO/DPI Executive Committee, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnEGeH3UNeQ&feature=youtu.be>

28 April, Media Subcommittee member Barbara Burns sends out UN DPI Conference press release to IPRA Global membership of 10,000. Release also posted on IPRA social media and IPRA website

May 2016

1 May, Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) newsletter publishes news of conference and link to website

7 May, Southampton Press reporter Amanda Bernocco interviews and photographs Dr. Carlin for feature story in paper set to appear on May 26

13-17 May, Barbara Burns sends out press release: *“World NGOs to Participate in Dialogue on Role of Education for Global Citizenship at UN DPI/NGO Conference in Korea”* sent to IPRA network and IPRA Asian Task Force. Prominent mention of Co-Chairs Dr. YuKang Choi and Dr. Scott Carlin. Translated into Chinese and appears on seven online Chinese media outlets

30 May, Arirang TV News, a Korean English language network based in Seoul, South Korea, covers the opening of the 66th Conference and Secretary General Ban Ki-moon opening address to delegates:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2FwSM6dR4A>

June 2016

1 June, Southampton Press, *“Hampton Bays Professor Speaks About Climate Change, Global Education in Korea,”* <http://www.27east.com/news/article.cfm/Hampton-Bays/481856/Hampton-Bays-Professor-Speaks-About-Climate-Change-Global-Education-in-Korea?&tc=eml>

8 June, The Diplomatic Courier, *“Breaking Down the UN’s Gyeongju Action Plan,”*

<http://www.diplomaticcourier.com/breaking-uns-gyeongju-action-plan/>

9 June, Sag Harbor Express, *“Southampton Sustainability Member Chairs U.N. Conference,”*

<http://sagharboronline.com/southampton-sustainability-committee-member-chairs-u-n-conference/?tc+eml>

24 June, Long Island Herald Newspapers, interview with Dr. Scott Carlin, to be published on Thursday 9 July (will send link when published)

Annual CRNGO UN Luncheon



By Jin Chacko

Associate of SOCA and connected with the UN

On June 30th, I attended the annual luncheon of CRNGO at the United Nations Church Center. Rev. Dionne Boissiere, Chaplain of the Church Center of the UN led the invocation and Rev. Liberato Bautista,

President of the CRNGO gave his welcome remarks and review of the annual report. After the luncheon each table had a table talk which was facilitated by Mr. Daniel Perell, Secretary of the CRNGO. The topic of discussion was What Role for Religion in a World of Turmoil?

In an open discussion one of the points that was brought up by Rev. Bautista he said he took a trip to Norway and saw very less security and the monarchy was out in the public shaking hands with the citizens to him this is how calm and peace in a country looks like as opposed to what happened with the bombings in Turkey. He also mentioned when he went to DPI/NGO conference in Korea this year that one of the viewpoints from the conference was that we are all common and one with humanity. It was stated that anyone that is born with dignity in them we become what we are because of that dignity in us.

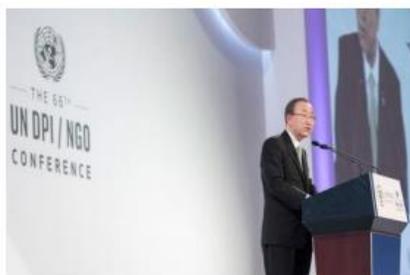
Each person sitting at the table had a group discussion and gave their viewpoint on how religions played a role dealing with situations in the world. The time is now was one of the first viewpoints discussed. As an interfaith community we have the ability to build one of the strongest avenues for peace in the world but to avoid disagreements we have swept controversial issues under the rug and proclaim now is not the right time but when will the right time come? The time is now to discuss these issues. The second viewpoint was the root of the problem. CRNGO recognizes that the root of suffering is seeing ourselves being different from other people or groups based on their religion and cultural differences. The third and final viewpoint was the role of religious organizations. About eighty percent of the world's population self-identifies as religious. Religion is at the root of the world's moral systems but it is sometimes ignored out of fear and hatred that has been brought out in its name.

The talk was concluded with three questions that were to be answered a summary of what each group had discussed. As an interfaith organization the CRNGO commits to showing the world that all religions stand united in their differences and are working together toward the common goal of overcoming barriers to love. We must remember that however different from one another we may appear we are connected and must move forward as one. Hatred is our enemy and no one should live in fear of difference. Reaching out to different religious leaders and communities can encourage the voice of love and beacon of hope.



May - June 2016

DPI/NGO: 'Let us work together to foster education for global citizenship,' Ban tells UN conference



The 66th United Nations Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organizations (DPI/NGO) Conference took place from 30 May until 1 June in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea, with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighting the vital role that NGOs, academia and youth play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A series of roundtable discussions, workshops and youth caucuses with civil society representatives focused on education as an entry point toward realizing the SDGs.

Organized in cooperation with the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, the NGO community, the Government of the Republic of Korea and the National Organizing Committee of Korea, the Conference was held under the theme "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together". It was the first time the DPI/NGO Conference was held in Asia.

"Education is critical to nurture global citizens who can rise to the challenges of the 21st century," declared Mr. Ban, encouraging young people everywhere to be global citizens and governments and NGOs to boost youth participation in civic and public life.

"Let us work together to foster education for global citizenship – education that empowers people to contribute to our common future," he said.

The Conference provided a unique opportunity for members of civil society, the diplomatic community, UN officials, policy experts, scientists, educators, the private sector, trade unions, parliamentarians and local authorities from around the world to discuss key issues relating to the 2030 Development Agenda, with a focus on the creation and strengthening of global partnerships in support of the recently adopted SDGs.

"The support of civil society as a whole, and NGOs and academia in particular, will be key to our ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," said Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division of the United Nations Department of Public Information. "We are very proud of our partnership with NGOs and universities and believe that the Gyeongju Conference offers a great opportunity to mobilize civil society's creative talent and energy to support Agenda 2030 and beyond."

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Kyo-ahn Hwang, reaffirmed his country's commitment to fostering global citizenship. "Global citizens need to fulfil the basic values of humanity. They need to be proactively involved in solving global issues," he noted. "This conference, under the theme of 'Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together' will encourage people to become involved."

The conference also examined the role of formal education, informal education and training, and advocacy and public information as means to eliminate inequalities that create or perpetuate marginalization and exclusion.

Crosscutting themes such as gender equality and climate change were discussed and learning was

examined from the perspective of marginalized and vulnerable groups, including indigenous people, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons (LGBT).

The event culminated in the [Gyeongju Action Agenda](#) for NGOs and academia to harmonize and catalyze efforts for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events

Syria: War Crimes and the Pursuit of Justice



INVITATION

The Permanent Missions of France, Denmark, Germany, Liechtenstein, Kingdom of the Netherlands, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States to the United Nations in New York, have the pleasure to invite you to attend a timely event on:

Syria: War Crimes and the Pursuit of Justice

Thursday, 14 April 2016, 15:00 – 16:30pm

Conference Room 11, United Nations, NY

The event will provide an opportunity for Member States, UN entities and civil society to discuss how issues of redress for the victims of the Syria conflict, justice, and accountability should be featured in the ongoing political negotiations and in the ensuing political transition, as the basis for sustainable and durable peace in Syria, in the region, and beyond.

The event will take one hour and half and will consist of a key note speech by **Ms. Navi Pillay**, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. It will be followed by interactive panel with **Ms. Sima Nassar**; and **Mr. Mazen Darwish**, Syrian human rights lawyer, activist, former detainee, and President of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM.) **Mr. Ayman Mohyeldin**, NBC News Foreign Correspondent, will moderate the subsequent discussion.

We would encourage attendance at the Event at the Permanent Representative level to demonstrate a strong message on the key importance of this issue.

Please tweet about the event using the **hashtag #JusticeForSyria**

Week in Review: Yemen, Open Debate on Countering Terrorism, Syria, Visit to Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan

News and developments over the past week on issues under the purview of the Department of Political Affairs.



15 April - Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed briefed the Security Council on the situation in Yemen and his efforts to restart peace talks. Watch his briefing.



14 April - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the Open Debate of the Security Council on Countering Terrorism stressed the need to address the drivers of violent extremism. Read his remarks.

13 April - UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura held a press conference in Geneva to update on the restart of the intra-Syrian dialogue process. Watch his remarks here, or read the transcript. One day later, he addressed the media again after meeting the Humanitarian Access Task Force.



12 April - Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman concluded his two-day visit to Armenia, where he underscored the imperative of stabilising the situation irreversibly and preventing a return to military action in Nagorno-Karabakh. Our note here. He continued his travels to Georgia and Azerbaijan.

[Enhanced Transparency and Participation to Catalyze National Climate Action](#)

22 April 2016 1:15-2:30pm

UN Headquarters

On 22 April, world leaders will meet at UN Headquarters in New York for the Signing Ceremony of the historic Climate Agreement adopted in Paris in December last year. The signing event will take place on the first day the agreement will be open for signature, which coincides with the UN observance of International Mother Earth Day.

To promote better understanding of the new Climate Agreement, multi-stakeholder engagement is key, including transparent, inclusive and accountable processes to prepare appropriate national climate actions and ratchet up their ambition. This will take sustained effort and comprehensive planning with the involvement of civil society, the private sector, legislatures and government, with a clear priority to address the needs of the most vulnerable. It will be important to support capacity building, improve models and tools facilitating access to information and data, and promote inclusive stakeholder participation both in addressing climate change and its effects, and in developing adequate responses and accountability mechanisms.

This side event will provide a space to discuss a range of participatory approaches, transparency tools, and other sets of policies for addressing implementation, and to frame concrete deliverables for governments to support early and ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Programme

Welcoming remarks, Moderator

Ms. Yamide Dagnet, Senior Associate, World Resource Institute

Panelists

- * Ms. Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim - Association des Femmes Peules Autochtones du Tchad (AFPAT) - Chad; Civil Society speaker selected through a transparent and participatory process for the opening ceremony of the Paris Agreement signing ceremony
- * Dr. Roberto Dondisch, Director-General for Global Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico
- * Mr. Jacob Werksman - Principal Advisor to the Directorate General for Climate Action (DG-CLIMA), European Commission
- * Ms. Alyssa Johl, Senior Attorney, Center for International Environmental Law

Respondents

- * Mr. Xiuhtezcatl Martinez - Youth Director of Earth Guardians
- * Member States: Share experience on type of commitments that could be made in the context of the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals

Interactive Discussion

Member States, UN partner and Civil Society will be asked to share reactions and thoughts on the best ways to increase ambition through greater transparency and participation.

Closing Remarks

Ms. Susan Alzner, Head of the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service NY Office

The full concept note for the event is available here:

http://bit.ly/22April-Transparency_Participation_Climate_Action

[World Leaders to Sign Climate Deal in New York](#)

Top officials from more than 130 countries gather at UN headquarters in New York Friday to sign the Paris climate treaty. Countries agreed in December to work to limit global warming to below two degree Celsius, aiming for [1.5 degrees Celsius \(UN News Centre\)](#), and today's gathering marks the largest one-day signing of [an international accord \(AFP\)](#). Most countries need a [parliamentary vote \(Reuters\)](#) to ratify the agreement, and the deal will go into effect when at least fifty-five states representing 55 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions ratify it. The target year for implementation is 2020.

[Weekend Reads: Latest from Politically Speaking](#)

[Protecting Iraq's Minority Communities](#)

[Towards a More Inclusive Approach of Peace Processes: Looking at Tradition- and Faith-Based Internal Mediators](#)

[Northern Iraq After ISIL's Rampage: The Way Forward](#)

[Week in Review - Syria, Middle East, Equatorial Guinea-Gabon Border Dispute, Yemen](#)

[Statement by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on China's Foreign NGO Management Law, April 29, 2016](#)

I join Secretary Kerry and other Administration officials in expressing deep concern over China's new Law on the Management of Foreign NGO Activities. We greatly value the people-to-people ties forged between the United States and China, and we believe civil society organizations are doing very important work with and for the Chinese people.

Unfortunately, Beijing's new law threatens to weaken these vital ties. The law is part of a larger Chinese crackdown on civil society that is increasing in severity and causing growing alarm in China and around the world. By establishing intimidating registration and reporting requirements and formally granting China's security apparatus broad oversight powers to manage the foreign NGO sector, the law will further restrict foreign NGOs operating in China, including U.S. organizations.

Strong, vibrant countries require strong, vibrant civil societies. As President Obama has said, "Human progress has always been propelled at some level by what happens in civil society – citizens coming together to insist that a better life is possible, pushing their leaders to protect the rights and the dignities of all people." We urge the Chinese authorities to protect the ability of foreign NGOs to continue their long-standing work with the Chinese people.

Intervene in Christian genocide: 400,000 bring plea to UN



United Nations Headquarters in New York City. Credit: UN Photo/John Isaac.



By [Matt Hadro](#)

New York City, N.Y., Apr 30, 2016 / 04:39 pm ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- Advocates delivered hundreds of thousands of signatures to the United Nations on Friday, calling on the body to declare that genocide is occurring against Christians and other religious minorities.

“We’re here at the United Nations headquarters to file more than 400,000 signatures from citizens from all over the world asking the Security Council of the United Nations to declare what’s happening right now with ISIS in Syria and Iraq a genocide,” Ignacio Arsuaga, president of the advocacy group CitizenGO, stated at a Friday press conference outside the United Nations headquarters in New York City.

The petition asked the U.N. to “take a step forward to protect Christians and other religious minorities that live there,” so that “religious freedom may prevail in that region of the world.” It was delivered to the office of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Friday.

Religious leaders like Nigerian Bishop Joseph Danlami Bagobiri and Archbishop Jean-Clement Jeanbart of Aleppo, Syria joined representatives of CitizenGO outside the U.N. The event was part of a three day-long conference on international religious freedom, #WeAreN2016, or “we are all Nazarenes.”

ISIS members had spray-painted the Arabic letter “nun” standing for “Nazarene” on the homes of Christians in Mosul, Iraq, targeting them specifically for persecution.

Specifically, the petition asked the office of Ban Ki-moon to press the U.N. Security Council to declare genocide for Christians and other religious victims of ISIS, and to enforce “mechanisms” to protect genocide victims and prosecute the perpetrators.

It also called for member nations to act “to stop the war in Syria” as well as help internally-displaced persons in Iraq and Syria return to their homes. “Safe havens” for internally-displaced persons should be created, as well as an “action plan to rescue kidnapped and enslaved Christian and Yazidi women and girls.”

Christians have left Iraq and Syria in droves in recent years, and make up 80 percent of minority victims of religious persecution, the “Call to Action” said.

Christians, Yazidis, and other minorities “are victims of the deliberate infliction of life conditions that are calculated to bring about their physical destruction by the so-called ‘ISIS/Daesh’: They are being murdered, beheaded, crucified, beaten, extorted, abducted, and tortured,” the petition added.

In addition, women and children have been enslaved, women have been raped and trafficked, children have been “forcibly recruited,” and churches and communities have been destroyed.

Christians in Nigeria have also been targeted by the terror group Boko Haram. According to the group Open Doors, there were over 4,000 Christians killed and almost 200 church attacks in Nigeria in 2015.

The U.S. State Department, the British House of Commons, and the European Union Parliament have already declared that genocide is taking place in Iraq and Syria. Multiple U.N. advisory bodies have already stated that genocide may be taking place, the petition noted.

“So we are here to support our brothers and sisters, Christians and other believers that are suffering persecution, that are suffering killings, that are suffering discrimination in this part of the world, the Middle East,” Arsuaga announced at the press conference.

After the press conference, Archbishop Jeanbart explained to CNA why it is so important for the U.N. to take action on the issue.

“We are undergoing a real genocide,” he said of his diocese in Aleppo, “and we are afraid that they want to take us out of our life, but also of our country, of the place where we were born, where the Church was born.”

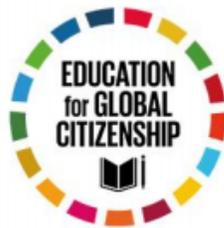
“There are two kinds of genocide, human genocide and Church genocide,” he said. Not only are people dying, but the Church itself is “disappearing” from Syria.

“The Church of the first Christians is now collapsing,” he said, noting that the first Syrian Christians were Jews from the Diaspora who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost, and were among the 3,000 baptized by Peter and the Apostles.

“They went back to their cities and they began Christian life there,” he continued, and they ministered to St. Paul when he converted to the faith. “That’s why it’s very important to keep this Church alive,” he said.

http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/intervene-in-christian-genocide-400000-bring-plea-to-un-94515/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email

66th UN DPI/NGO Conference



Achieving
the Sustainable
Development
Goals Together



Top News:

- A Youth Pre-Conference Event took place on 28 April 2016 at the UNHQ. The event featured speakers, including DPI/NGO Youth Representatives, an SG's Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) Youth Ambassador, academia, Co-Chairs of the Conference and a video message from the SG's Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi. The social media excitement caused the Conference hashtag, #UNNGO2016, to trend on Twitter. For more information please visit [Youth Pre Conference](#)
- Thirteen time zones and 6,922 miles aren't enough to keep a group of Lehigh University students from attending the upcoming 66th UN DPI/NGO conference in Gyeongju. Danielle and Erin are two of Lehigh's students who have signed up for the conference. According to Dr. Bill Hunter, the schools' Director of International Outreach, the confluence of young people who define themselves as global citizens will provide the momentum to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030. For more information please visit <http://undpingo.tumblr.com/>

Update about the Conference

Draft Outcome Document

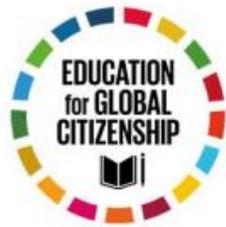
The deadline for providing your input to the draft outcome document is **10 May 2016**. We invite you to comment and make your voice heard! This is a great opportunity for civil societies to contribute to the conversation on the crucial role that education plays in the implementation of the #Agenda2030 and the #SDGs. Please visit the following link for more information [E-Consultation](#)

Exhibits:

As of today, a total of 48 exhibit proposals have been received. The Exhibit Subcommittee is reviewing applications and sending acceptances on an ongoing basis. Please note each exhibitor can request up to 2 booths or the equivalent amount of space. The deadline for application is **10 May 2016**! If your proposal has been accepted please make sure to make your payment by **15 May 2016**. Hurry up and sign up! [Exhibits](#)

Workshops:

May 16 is the deadline for workshop payments from the New York side. Please be sure to make your payment on time to secure acceptance of your proposal. [Workshops](#)



Achieving
the Sustainable
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Media Accreditation:

Registration for Media accreditation is now open. Please visit the following link to learn more [Media Accreditation](#)

Registration:

The deadline to register for the 66th UN DPI NGO Conference is **20 May 2016**. As of today there are **1718** representative pre-registered, from **512** organizations. Please check out updated information about the registration guidelines for students and faculty members on our website: [Registration Guidelines](#)

Outreach: Please help us promote our conference by using **#unngo2016** in your tweets and posting comments about it on your Facebook!

[UN Condemns Orlando Massacre, Despite Resistance From Russia, Muslim Nations](#)

The UN Security Council overcame resistance from Russia, African, and Muslim states on June 13 and condemned the mass shooting at a Florida gay nightclub.

The council denounced the attack "targeting persons as a result of their sexual orientation" in a U.S.-drafted resolution. A gunman pledging allegiance to Islamic State carried out the mass shooting on June 12, killing 49 people.

Rights groups say IS has executed dozens of gay men by throwing them from buildings or stoning them and then posting videos of the murders online.

"If we are united in our outrage by the killing of so many -- and we are -- let us be equally united around the basic premise of upholding the universal dignity of all persons regardless of who they love, not just around condemning the terrorists who kill them," Deputy U.S. Ambassador David Pressman said in urging support for the resolution.

Being gay is a crime in at least 74 countries, the UN has said. The issue of gay rights usually sparks heated debate at the UN. Russia joined recently with Muslim countries in barring gay groups from attending a UN conference on AIDS.

The International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

Dear UNAI Members,

On Tuesday, 21 June at UN Headquarters in New York the Permanent Mission of Argentina, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict will hold an event to commemorate the first-ever International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

The newly established international day is observed on Sunday, 19 June and aims to raise awareness of the need to end conflict-related sexual violence, to stand in solidarity with the survivors of sexual violence around the world – be they women, girls, men or boys – and to pay tribute to all those working on the front-lines, often at great personal risk, to eradicate this scourge.

Please join us on Tuesday, 21 June if you are in New York (RSVP here: <https://goo.gl/6syJDI>), or watch the event live via webcast at webtv.un.org.

Best Regards,
Your UNAI Team

Civil society seeks progress with historic ICC outcome

In Global Justice news last week: ICC sentences Jean-Pierre Bemba to 18 years in prison; former UPC fighter accuses ICC suspect Ntaganda in alleged ethnic killings; Mexico and the EU strengthen cooperation in human rights field; and much more.

Civil society has reacted to last week's International Criminal Court (ICC) sentencing of Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) ex-commander, Jean-Pierre Bemba, to 18 years in prison.

In March 2016, the ICC found the Congolese politician and former rebel leader guilty of rape and murder as crimes against humanity, and rape, murder and pillaging as war crimes – committed by troops under his command during an unsuccessful 2002-3 anti-coup operation in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The verdict simultaneously gave the ICC its first sexual and gender-based crimes and command responsibility convictions. The sentence, meanwhile, was the longest so far in ICC history.

Read statements on the historic judgment from the International Federation for Human Rights, the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, No Peace Without Justice and other civil society organizations that have been supporting the ICC case and working for years towards complete justice for communities affected by the 2002-3 conflict.

[Click through to read more of last week's #GlobalJustice news.](#)

Religious News from Around the World

The Orthodox “Diaspora”: Mother Churches, Mission, And The Future

by [Rev. Dr. Radu Bordeianu](#), [Will Cohen](#), [Rev. Dr. Nicholas Denysenko](#), [Brandon Gallaher](#), [Rev. Dr. D. Oliver Herbel](#), and [Kerry San Chirico](#)

Among the issues to be heard by the Orthodox Churches at the June 2016 Great and Holy Council in Crete is the situation of the Orthodox diaspora. The Council will be working with the document on the diaspora promulgated by the fourth pre-conciliar gathering in Chambésy in June 2009. This document called for a swift canonical resolution to the current organization of the Church in the regions of the diaspora so it accords with Orthodox canon law and ecclesiological principles. The 2009 pre-conciliar gathering implemented a temporary solution by creating episcopal assemblies (2a) in regions of the diaspora to promote common action and witness to the unity of Orthodoxy without depriving the member bishops of their “administrative competencies and canonical character” (5). It is not immediately clear whether the June 2016 council will propose a permanent canonical solution or bless the continued work of the regional episcopal assemblies. In order to arrive at the canonical and ecclesiological ideal envisioned by the bishops in 2009, several issues and potential actions should be considered.

The first matter is the one of nomenclature. The notion of an Orthodox diaspora is questionable. Some Orthodox faithful retain strong connections to their native countries and Churches, but large numbers of the Orthodox faithful in these regions are either converts or are far removed from the identities of their immigrant forefathers. Inscribing a uniform diasporic identity upon all Orthodox of these regions may be convenient for summarizing their relationships with mother Churches, but it is problematic when one considers the reality of evolution in identity. The identities of many constituencies of these Churches are in a complex process of evolution. Many immigrants established deep roots in their new homes as citizens of their new countries who had arrived with a commitment to settling permanently and did not seek to return to their ancestral homelands. An honest assessment of diasporic Church life will also demonstrate development in congruence with local culture.

The reality of organic ecclesial development in regions outside the territories of the mother churches poses two immediate implications for the deliberations of the June 2016 council. First, there is a need to address the assumption of a kind of ecclesial “satellite” status of the Churches in the so-called diasporic regions. If these Churches have experienced organic internal development since their original establishment, one can surmise that their conformance to the liturgical traditions of their respective mother Churches has also changed. The second implication is a product of the first: if one accepts the thesis that the regional Churches continue to adapt and grow organically, then continued acceptance of interim canonical remedies for their organization compromises mission. In other words, the perception of diaspora Churches as satellite entities which depend on the mother Churches results in the absence of an anchor in mission, since the regional Churches must continue to propagate the mission of the mother Churches without reference to the conditions of local culture.

Furthermore, a continuation of reliance on the mission of the mother Churches contributes to the hegemony of ethnic identity outside the context of the mother Church and therefore opens the door to ethnophyletism within Orthodoxy.

The 2009 pre-conciliar decision to organize the regional Churches into episcopal assemblies was designed to propel movement towards the emergence of permanent regional structures. Practically speaking, the regional assemblies call for the bishops to meet and work together, which requires them to rehearse the processes of formulating unified responses to local issues. This kind of local collaboration is an important aspect of being a local, canonical Church. Individual bishops are not free to act in ways that would compromise collaborative measures, and perhaps this was a healthy suggestion to promote synodality and cross-ecclesial accountability among the bishops (compare 2c with 5). Such efforts fall short of achieving the ideal, though, since the work of the episcopal assemblies lacks authority on account of the provisional status of the regional structures caused by the continued dependence of individual bishops on their mother Churches (5 and 6).

Here are five suggestions presented to the June 2016 council for the Orthodox Churches of the diaspora to take the next logical step towards the establishment of canonical structures. First, we encourage the bishops to consider discarding the word “diaspora” in describing Orthodoxy in these regions. Removing “diaspora” from the description of these Churches simultaneously honors their ongoing formation of identity and provides the space to end their dependence on mother Churches. Second, we hope the bishops will encourage the regional Churches to articulate their own specific missions which meet the demands and realities of their local contexts. While the mission of a regional Church should continue to attend to the pastoral needs of new immigrants, who remain connected to their mother countries and Churches, the freedom to formulate a mission which does not impose the cultural context of a mother Church on an Orthodox minority could contribute to the catalyzing of an emerging local Church appropriate for its region. Third, the mother Churches should allow for increased participation of the smaller regional structures in the life of global Orthodoxy. The regional Churches cannot rely solely on the deliberations of mother Churches external to their local contexts on pastoral and canonical matters. The particular evolution of Church life in these regions demands their participation in constructing their own futures. Fourth, we urge the Council to consider the potential benefits of reciprocity. Orthodox Churches who are minorities in these regions might contribute perspectives to the mother Churches in unexpected ways. Last, the Ecumenical Patriarch himself should oversee the process of transforming the current diasporic structures into united and canonical local Churches. The Ecumenical Patriarch’s exercise of primacy has the capacity to ensure participation and reciprocity to integrate the regional Churches into global Orthodoxy more fully.

The forthcoming Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church has an opportunity to definitively address the situation of the Orthodox diaspora. By enabling and encouraging the Orthodox bishops and faithful of these regions to articulate and fulfill their own missions while continuing to minister to immigrants, the Council can enrich global Orthodoxy’s unified witness, diminishing ethnophyletism and encouraging the renewal of mission.

This essay was sponsored by the Orthodox Theological Society in America’s Special Project on the Holy and Great Council and published by the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University.

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Kerry San Chirico is Assistant Professor of Interfaith and Interreligious Studies at Villanova University.

Please join us June 23-25 for our [“Tradition, Secularization, Fundamentalism”](#) conference.

<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/04/22/the-orthodox-diaspora-mother-churches-mission-and-the-future/>

Crucifix smashed in attack on emblematic Chilean church

Santiago, Chile, Jun 14, 2016 / 06:39 am (CNA).- In what is being lamented as a heinous act of desecration, an emblematic Catholic church in Santiago de Chile was brutally attacked after a recent student march, with masked individuals stealing and smashing a large crucifix from the building.

“This is not the first time that they've attacked a church in downtown Santiago. Violence leads nowhere, it is very painful for us that they would attack the symbols of our beliefs, the symbols of our faith,” said the Vicar of the Downtown Area of the Archdiocese of Santiago, Father Marek Burzawa.

The attack took place after a student march last week, called by the Confederation of Chilean Students to protest for improvements in the current educational system in the country. The march ended near The Church of National Gratitude.

Masked individuals, who have not been identified, forced open the side door to one of rooms in the church, which is normally used for wakes. They stole various items and took a large statue of Christ crucified out into the middle of Bernardo O'Higgins Avenue. There they raised it up and slammed it against the ground to destroy it. Part of the attack was caught on camera.

Father Galvarino Jofré, director of the Alameda Salesian Educational Center located next to the desecrated church, warned that protection for churches is inadequate before such events.

“We hope there'll be better protection and hopefully these demonstrations won't end in the same location. We're looking into legal action,” he said.

Hours after the attack, the new Minister of the Interior Mario Fernández went to The Church of National Gratitude to express his solidarity, and announced that the administration will file a complaint, because “these are very troubling signs and the Government is not going to skirt them.”

“I want to express the government's condemnation of such acts, regardless that it has to do with religious worship, it's a very troubling symptom,” the official told the media.

“I'm not speaking as a Catholic, I'm speaking as the Interior Minister of Chile...in this situation, all Chileans need to work to prevent our young people from going around spreading this kind of behavior,” he said.

The Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, Fernando Ramos, thanked Fernández for his visit and stressed that “our churches are open, they are places of worship to come and praise God and we don't want to lock

ourselves in so those who want to terrorize Chileans with violence achieve a success they don't deserve."

http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/crucifix-smashed-in-attack-on-emblematic-chilean-church-37674/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email

Papal trip to Armenia a moment for Orthodox friendship, political rapprochement

Joshua J. McElwee | Jun. 22, 2016

Francis in Armenia

Editor's note: NCR's Vatican correspondent Josh McElwee will be reporting on the ground during Pope Francis' visit to Armenia, June 24-26. Catch all of McElwee's reporting at [feature series page Francis in Armenia](#). [1]

As Pope Francis prepares to embark on a three-day trip to Armenia this week, experts and church leaders are hoping the visit both highlights strong ties between Catholic and Orthodox Christian communities there and brings about opportunities for political rapprochement in its continent-straddling region.

One of the leaders of the Armenian Apostolic church, an Oriental Orthodox community that includes 93 percent of Armenia's population of three million, hopes that the pope might help encourage friendlier relations with neighboring countries Turkey and Azerbaijan.

"My prayer is that the Holy Father, because of his strong leadership, will help [in] creating better relationships," said Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, the primate of the Armenian church's diocese for the eastern half of the U.S.

"Sometimes, religious leaders ... can play a stronger role than political leaders, whose interests are different," said Barsamian. "The interests of the Holy Father are for peace in the world, reconciliation."

Armenia, a former Soviet republic in the Caucasus region, is located between the Black and Caspian seas, with Turkey to its west and Azerbaijan to its east. Its position places the country between Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Russia.

Francis will visit the country June 24-26 for the first part of a wider tour of the Caucasus region. He will visit Azerbaijan and Georgia later in the year, Sept. 30-Oct. 2.

At the center of the Armenia visit stands a complex political relationship with Turkey. The two countries, both former members of the Ottoman Empire, do not have formal diplomatic relations, and their shared border is closed with barbed-wire fencing.

The pope also caused a diplomatic stir with Turkish leaders last year when he described the World War I-era killings of 1.5 million Armenians as the first genocide of the 20th century, a description Turkish leaders have long resisted.

The killings started in 1915, when the Ottoman government began rounding up and arresting Armenian community leaders. Turkey, the successor state to the empire, claims that the word "genocide" does not accurately describe the killings.

In one of the most anticipated moments of the Armenian visit, Francis will visit a museum dedicated to the memory of the killings on June 25. One Turkish observer and policy expert said reaction to the trip by his government will likely depend on what the pope chooses to say when he visits that museum.

"I don't think that will be a problem because any state leader who goes to Armenia visits the genocide memorial," said Aybars Görgülü, an expert at Public Policy and Democratic Studies, an Istanbul-based research and advocacy think-tank.

But, Görgülü added: "It depends on what he will say."

"If he repeats what he said last year, making another strong statement, then Turkey will have a reaction," he said, mentioning that the country temporarily withdrew its ambassador to the Vatican after the pope's words in 2015.

Barsamian, whose diocese ministers to about a million members of the Armenian church in the U.S., said Francis' visit is a "great opportunity for the Armenian people to also express their gratitude" for his description of genocide.

"It was such a very clear, very pastoral, very strong message to the world, saying that this is the first genocide of the 20th century and it's important we recognize the mistakes of the past," said the archbishop.

"This will be a great opportunity for the Armenian people to express their gratitude, their appreciation to the Holy Father for such a courageous step and for a strong spiritual leadership," he said.

Beyond the political dimension of the genocide issue, Barsamian said Francis also has an opportunity in Armenia to model ecumenical leadership and friendship during his visits with the Orthodox community.

The Armenian Apostolic church, which traces its founding to the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus, is one of six churches that form Oriental Orthodoxy. Those churches, which have about 84 million members together, recognize only the first three ecumenical councils, breaking off from the other Christian churches in the fifth century.

The Armenian church is led by its chief bishop, Karekin II, known as the Catholicos.

Francis will spend time with Karekin upon landing in the country June 24, host an ecumenical prayer for peace with him June 25, and participate in an Armenian Orthodox liturgy June 26 before signing a joint ecumenical declaration that day.

Paulist Fr. Ronald Roberson, associate director of the U.S. bishops' secretariat of ecumenical and interreligious affairs, said Catholics and Armenian Orthodox have a "very close" relationship.

Roberson mentioned Pope John Paul II's visit to Armenia in 2001, when the pontiff celebrated a Mass for the local Roman Catholic community using the same altar that the Orthodox use in their celebrations.

"It's a classic example of the 'almost-perfect' communion that exists between the Catholic church and many of the eastern churches," said Roberson, adding that there is a "very high level of mutual respect."

Barsamian said he hoped meetings between Francis and Karekin would help Catholics and Orthodox at local levels around the world practice greater friendship.

"Such meetings send a great message to the people, to faithful everywhere, so that locally laypeople and clergy see that on a higher level there is such a connection and communication," said the archbishop.

"When the pastors, the faithful, see that on this level there is such a warm, brotherly relationship, then on a local level people become closer," he said.

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* Vatican correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org [2]. Follow him on Twitter: [@joshjmac](https://twitter.com/joshjmac) [3].]

Local Ecclesiastical News

Live broadcast of upcoming Armenian Genocide prayer service in Boston



Watch Live from Boston

The Catholic Archdiocese of Boston will host a commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on Saturday, April 23, beginning at 4 p.m.

Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, the Catholic Archbishop of Boston, will host a prayer service at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese, will participate in the service. [Click here](#) to view a flyer for information.

The service will be broadcast live online (beginning at 4 p.m. Eastern Standard Time) at the following link: www.catholictvlive.com.

[WCA Report on Neglected Case of Kidnapped Bishops in Syria](#)

Today it is three years since, on April 22, 2013, the two archbishops of Aleppo, the Syriac Orthodox H.E. Mor Gregorius Yuhanna Ibrahim and the Greek (also called Rum or Melkite) Orthodox H.E. Boulos Yazigi, were kidnapped by unidentified armed men in the north of Syria.

Since their abduction, we are still no closer to knowing what really happened to these prelates. Neither are we closer to confirming the identity and motives of the kidnapers. There has been no progress on this question and many people around the world, notably the Arameans (Syriacs), continue to think and ask about the whereabouts of their religious leaders. In light of the increasing victimization and decline of the Middle Eastern Christians, it is remarkable that this case has hardly received the necessary attention of governments and mainstream media alike.



Therefore, this report will first briefly summarize what reportedly has happened three years ago, then sum up the noteworthy chronological developments of this case, review the role of politicians and media, and end with some remarks and questions that still demand answers.

[Click here to read and download the 6-page summary Report \(.PDF\), published today and titled "22 APRIL 2013-2016: The Neglected Case of the Two Kidnapped Archbishops of Syria" on:](#)

- I. The abduction of the two archbishops of Aleppo, Syria
 - II. Noteworthy Chronological Chain of Events
 - III. The Role of the International Political Community
 - IV. The Role of the Mainstream Media
 - V. Final remarks: Abduction case a prelude to end of Aramean Christianity in Syria?
- ENDNOTES**

[Click also here for the WCA file of the kidnapped archbishops](#)

[Read More](#)

[Old Wound, New Pathway](#)

Sunday, April 24 is being observed as the “Feast of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide.” Parishes across the Eastern Diocese will perform a special service following the Divine Liturgy on this occasion.

To prepare for that service, view the latest episode of "Bread and Salt: Stories from the Armenian Church," which revisits last April's canonization service, and explains what has shifted in the way we now regard the Holy Martyrs of 1915. [Click here](#) to view the video.

And please forward this message to share this video with your friends and family.

* * *

A Prayer of Intercession

Christ our God, you crown your saints with triumph and you do the will of all who fear you, looking after your creatures with love and kindness.

Hear us from your heavenly realm by the intercession of the Holy Mother of God and by the prayers of all your saints, especially the Holy Martyrs who gave their lives during the Armenian Genocide for faith and for the homeland, whom we commemorate today.

Hear us Lord, and show us your mercy. Forgive, redeem and pardon our sins. Make us worthy thankfully to glorify you with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Now and always unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Christians in Aleppo offer food to poor Muslims during Ramadan

By [Elise Harris](#)

Aleppo, Syria, Jun 17, 2016 / 12:08 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- Despite the war raging around them, Syriac Orthodox Christians in Aleppo have decided to provide food to poor Muslim families throughout the Islamic month of Ramadan.

According to Agenzia Fides, the information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, faithful of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of Aleppo are offering breakfast and evening meals to "the poorest Muslim families" living in the predominantly Christian and Armenian Sulaimaniyah neighborhood of the city.

The distribution center for the food, which is prepared by the Christian families themselves, is located at the archdiocese's Cathedral of St. Ephrem the Syrian.

Ramadan is a Muslim month of intense prayer and fasting which commemorates the revelation of the Quran to Islam's Prophet Muhammad. Meals are not taken during daylight hours, though food and drink are served before dawn and after sunset.

This year, Ramadan lasts from June 5-July 5. It ends with the holiday Eid al-Fitr, which breaks the fast.

A communique released by Syriac Orthodox archdiocese said the initiative is a simple gesture aimed at expressing solidarity between people of different religious backgrounds with the hope that it will, in time, help to restore the peaceful coexistence that existed among Syria's various religious and ethnic communities before the war.

The Syriac Orthodox Church is an Oriental Orthodox Church. These Churches reject the 451 Council of Chalcedon, and its followers were historically considered monophysites – those who believe Christ has only one nature – by Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox.

The Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of Aleppo is still formally under the authority of Archbishop Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, who was kidnapped near Turkey in April 2013 along with the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, Boulos Yazigi.

Aleppo is a hotly-contested city in Syria's north: with a pre-war population of 2.3 million, it was Syria's largest, but the population has now dwindled to around 1 million. The Syrian civil war, which began in the spring of 2011, spread to Aleppo in July 2012. It has been divided into government- and rebel-controlled sectors for years.

Three hospitals in the rebel-held portion of the city were hit by air strikes earlier this month.

Since the Syrian civil war began it has claimed the lives of more than 270,000 people. There are more than 4.6 million Syrian refugees in nearby countries, and an additional 8 million Syrian people are believed to have been internally displaced by the war.

http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/christians-in-aleppo-offer-food-to-poor-muslims-during-ramadan-60501/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email

Suicide Bomber Targets Assyrian Event in Syria – 3 Killed

Qamishli, Syria (AINA) — A suicide bomber disguised as a priest attempted to enter an Assyrian genocide commemoration event in the al-Wusta district of Qamishli but was stopped by Assyrian forces. The bomber detonated his bomb outside the hall, killing himself and three members of the Assyrian Sutoro security forces and wounding five. It is believed the bomber was targeting Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II Karim of the Syriac Orthodox Church, who was leading the commemoration.

The explosion occurred at the intersection of al-Quwatli and El-Kindi Park road in a neighborhood heavily populated by Assyrians. According to AssyriaTV, the 5 wounded Assyrians have been identified as Gawriye Ado, Riad Habsuno, Marios Malke, Fayez Farman and Siwar Hassan. The deceased have not been identified.

This is the fourth attack on Assyrians in Qamishli in the past six months:

- [May 22, 2016](#): an attack by ISIS in the Assyrian al-Wusta district of Qamishli, Syria killed at least five persons, three of them Assyrians, and injured more than a dozen.
- [January 24, 2016](#): Two explosions rocked an Assyrian neighborhood in Qamishli. The first targeted the Star Cafe, where a bomb was placed on a bicycle that was left in front of the store. The explosion killed 3 Assyrians and injured 20. The second blast targeted Joseph Bakery.
- [December 30, 2015](#): Three explosions targeted Assyrian businesses in Qamishli, 16 were killed.

No one has claimed responsibility for the latest attack.

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<http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/suicide-bomber-targets-assyrian-event-in-syria-3-killed/>

Other Related News

Amnesty Says Turkey Illegally Sending Syrians Back To War Zone



Refugees and migrants arrive by dinghy from Turkey to the coast of Mytilini, on the island of Lesbos, on February 17.

By RFE/RL

April 02, 2016

Amnesty International has accused Turkey of illegally returning thousands of Syrians to their war-torn homeland in recent months.

The human rights group said Turkey has been expelling around 100 men, women, and children nearly daily since mid-January.

"EU leaders have willfully ignored the simplest of facts: Turkey is not a safe country for Syrian refugees," Amnesty's Europe and Central Asia Director John Dalhuisen said on April 1.

Turkey's Foreign Ministry denied Syrians were being sent back against their will, while a spokesman for the European Commission said it took the allegations seriously and would raise them with Ankara.

The news comes as Greece pressed ahead with plans to start deporting migrants and refugees back to Turkey next week.

Lawmakers in Athens on April 1 voted 169-107 to back draft legislation, fast-tracked through parliament, to allow the returns to start as soon as April 4.

The operation would see migrants and refugees who arrived on Greek islands after March 20 put on boats and sent back to Turkey.

The imminent deportations are backed by the European Union following its recent agreement with Turkey, and triggered more violence at detention camps in Greece.

Authorities on the Greek island of Chios said several hundred people pushed their way out of an overcrowded detention camp and staged a peaceful protest on April 1 in the island's main town, chanting "Freedom! Freedom!" and "Turkey No!"

More protests are planned on the island on April 2.

Greek officials did not respond to the criticism directly, but insisted the rights of detained asylum seekers were being protected.

"I assure you that we will strictly observe human rights procedures, not what people are inventing but what is required under the circumstances," Migration Affairs Minister Ioannis Mouzalas told parliament on April 1.

In Geneva, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) urged Greece and Turkey to provide further safeguards for asylum seekers before the returns begin.

The UNHCR noted that conditions were worsening by the day for more than 4,000 people being held in detention on Greek islands.

<http://www.rferl.org/content/amnesty-turkey-sending-syrians-back-to-war-zone/27650007.html>

Preparing for justice for Syria

Justice for "colossal" war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria are in danger of being overlooked [warned](#) Amnesty International (AI) this week as talks resumed in Geneva to end the conflict now in its sixth year.

But with little hope for accountability in Syria, and no jurisdiction for the International Criminal Court (ICC), a growing, if so far insufficient, number of governments - including Germany, Sweden and France - are undertaking national prosecutions of suspected war criminals, reports AI.

Meanwhile, an independent investigative body, the Commission for International Justice and Accountability, has [reportedly](#) built a case against President Bashar al-Assad from a trove of over 600,000 government documents smuggled out of Syria over the past four years. The evidence has been [described](#) as the strongest since Nuremberg. While the Commission is assisting governments with national prosecutions, a question remains over which international court could hear cases arising from its investigations.

The US House of Representatives' has voted for the creation of a temporary UN criminal tribunal for Syria, but US support for a renewed ICC referral in conjunction with national prosecutions would be more viable - diplomatically, politically and financially - [writes](#) Kip Hale of the American Bar Association.

Widney Brown of Physicians for Human Rights stresses that history has shown that those in power and interests change and al-Assad would do well to [beware](#) the long arm of international justice.

New ICC home to open

The inauguration of the ICC's permanent premises takes place next week Tuesday, 19 April. The event will be [opened](#) by His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands and addressed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Coalition Convenor William R. Pace, among others. Pace will also, on the occasion of the Coalition's 20th anniversary, discuss progress to date and challenges ahead in the fight for global justice in a [lecture](#) in The Hague on 21 April.

[Read more on the fight for #GlobalJustice this week.](#)

[Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at an Informal Meeting on "Syria: War Crimes and the Pursuit of Justice," April 14, 2016](#)

Thank you all for your powerful presentations. Thank you, Ambassador al-Thani, for organizing this event and thanks to all of the cosponsors who are a part of it. The briefings were extraordinary, powerful, pragmatic, idealistic, and grounded in the tremendous suffering of the Syrian people, above all. And we thank you for the life changing work – really the three of you do every day on behalf of the Syrian people, in your case, Ms. Pillay, on behalf of people all around the world.

It is extremely important to talk about justice today. I was struck listening to Mazen about his humility, he did not really go into many of the details of his own experience. As many of you know, he was imprisoned unjustly for more than three years by the Syrian regime and subjected to some of the most horrific conditions imaginable. And yet, when he gets out of prison after suffering in that way, his first task has been to try to bring some measure of relief to people who themselves remain in those cells where he labored over such a long period of time. And that's very typical of him and his life's work, and the contribution he has made from the beginning of his professional life to his community, to his neighbors, and to peace and democracy in his country.

I want to begin by recognizing three other courageous individuals who need no introduction to the Syrians who have spoken, but I think just saying a word about their stories is in keeping with Sima's summons to us to remember the individuals who we're actually talking about here in this context.

Razan Zaitouneh, a friend of Mazen's and a widely respected leader of Syria's civil society. On December 9th, 2013, she and four other human rights defenders were abducted from their offices in Duma by a group of armed men. Her 39th birthday will be in two weeks.

Khalil Ma'atouq, a 56-year-old lawyer from Al Meshayrfeh village in Homs governorate. Khalil had spent years defending activists and prisoners of conscience before he and a friend were arrested on October 2nd, 2012 at a checkpoint in Damascus.

And Basel Khartabeil, a 34-year-old human rights activist and a brilliant computer engineer, who had sought to promote open access to the internet. On March 15th, 2012, the one-year anniversary of the first anti-government protests and two weeks before he was supposed to get married, he was arrested outside his office in Damascus. There are rumors that he has been sentenced to death.

We, unfortunately, today don't know the whereabouts, the conditions, or the future of any one of these three individuals. We know only that, like Mazen, they were unjustly detained, and we know that they should be released immediately.

I raise their stories first and foremost to urge their release and to urge those countries who have influence over this brutal regime to use that influence on behalf of individuals who will only make Syria better, and who only want to improve the dignity and the security of their communities. But I also raise these three individuals' names and describe their detentions or abductions because I think that they speak to the cause of this panel, the cause of justice.

First, they remind us that when the war is finally over – and it will end, even if some days a settlement seems very elusive – Syria will be home to literally millions of victims like those described by Sima and Mazen, victims like Razan, Khalil, Basel, and their families. The last five years have brought a catalogue of cruelty that few could have dreamed up, even if they were writing the worst horror movie imaginable – even you, Madam Pillay, having presided over so many important trials in the Rwanda tribunal – some creativity in the savagery that has been introduced to the Syrian theater. Illegal detentions, often involving torture, rape, murder; chemical weapon attacks against civilians; bombs landing on schools, hospitals, and civilian neighborhoods; sieges of entire cities; starving people to death willfully when you have the power with a pen – a pen stroke – to allow food to people you know are going to die if they don't get food, and you just simply don't sign the form. The Assad regime is the leading perpetrator of these crimes by a long shot, but ISIL and other armed groups, of course, are responsible for their share of atrocities.

Syria's future recovery will require coming to terms with these horrors. Mazen, I thought the way you put it was brilliant: that people say those who want accountability want revenge, but the opposite is true. That people who want accountability want to protect the Syrian people from revenge. They want individual responsibility so as to end a culture of collective responsibility and to end a culture of impunity.

The Syrian people will be the best placed to choose the right balance of justice, accountability, and reconciliation processes – and you, and Madam Pillay, and people who've worked on international justice, the conversations you're having, the thinking you are doing is going to prove useful someday. The documentation, the secure storage, the analysis, the reporting on the atrocities, the work of the commission of inquiry – the many, many reports that they have done. Such information can be used to support future prosecution – whether at the international level or eventually, again though it seems far-fetched now, in credible domestic courts.

I thought Sima made a very important point about how hard it is to motivate people to do this work around documentation five years in. And because they have not seen a formal accountability process set up, they haven't seen the payoff from what is maybe the most excruciating work that you can do. I mean, imagine what it's like to go into your community and capture these stories and interview people who've lost everything that matters to them. And so to do that and not see any return on that can be extremely demoralizing, and I can imagine your respective job of trying to encourage this work is very, very challenging. But this documentation is its own form of accountability; it is the evidence that belies

the lies told by the regime and the militias and the perpetrators of these atrocities, and it is also the foundation for what will happen.

And even if you don't yet have a lot to point to in the way of people being held accountable for the horrors that they have inflicted on your people, there are other trials that you can point to. You can point to the recent conviction of Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader who thought that he would be immune and inoculated. He had an attitude much like that you've encountered on the streets of Syria. The trial of the former Chadian dictator Habre, where his victims who never thought that they would ever be able to confront him in a courtroom, able to do so all these years later.

So justice can be painstakingly slow, the victims and the potential witnesses can feel rightly desperate and demoralized and feel like the international community has let them down. But it is our job to take what you all have begun and turn it into something real for people who deserve justice, who want reconciliation but need accountability as a foundation for that reconciliation. And I think this session is just a chance for us to remind the perpetrators who are strutting around Syria today, feeling as if they have that impunity, that their actions have not gone unseen and they will not go unpunished. What these individuals do to their communities, to the people in their custody, to Razan and Khalil, to Mazen back in the day – recent day – they will answer for those actions. And the stories will be told, and if we fulfill our responsibilities – as we must – justice will be done. Thank you.

[Woman bulldozed to death in China signals new wave of oppression](#)

By [Kevin J. Jones](#)

Beijing, China, Apr 27, 2016 / 03:02 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- Two members of a Chinese church demolition crew have been detained by police after they allegedly bulldozed the wife of a Christian pastor who had attempted to halt the destruction of her church.

Bob Fu, president of the NGO China Aid, said that Christianity has become a “major target” in culture and is treated as “a political and security threat to the regime,” he told CNA April 25.

“Bulldozing and burying alive Ding Cuimei, a peaceful and devout Christian woman, was a cruel, murderous act,” Fu said in a previous statement from China Aid.

“This case is a serious violation of the rights to life, religious freedom and rule of law. The Chinese authorities should immediately hold those murderers accountable and take concrete measures to protect the religious freedom of this house church’s members.”

Ding Cumei and her husband Li Jiangong were pushed into a ditch and buried alive by the bulldozer as congregants watched. Her husband was able to dig his way out, but she was not.

Li headed Beitou Church in the city of Zhumadian in central China's Henan province.

A government-backed company had sent the demolition crew to the church after a local developer wished to take the property, China Aid said.

One member of the crew allegedly said “Bury them alive for me...I will be responsible for their lives.”

An officer at the local police station told China Aid that the two members of the crew were detained but the officer did not disclose their alleged crimes.

Local Christians said that the government departments in charge of the area were not present to oversee the demolition. Li said that police took an unusually long time to arrive after the murder was reported.

Fu told CNA that the situation for Christians in China has changed under President Xi Jinping, who took office in 2013. He likened the situation to a “new Cultural Revolution.”

Under the previous presidential administrations of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, Fu said, “officially Christianity was not overtly regarded as a national security threat.”

Suspicion and crackdowns instead focused on unregistered churches in both Protestant and Catholic churches.

Now, even registered churches have faced increased scrutiny and persecution. Church leaders at government sanctioned churches have faced heavy criminal sentences.

“Christians, including Catholics have been asked to change into a different version of belief under the banner of ‘Sinicization of religion’ in order to make Christianity compatible with socialism,” Fu said.

David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA, told Fox News that there has been a change from previous trends to recognize Christians as productive members of Chinese society.

“China has the goal of nationalizing Christians,” he said.

Curry’s organization monitors anti-Christian persecution around the world. He said there are many ways to marginalize China’s Christian churches, including rezoning church properties to allow for demolition. Some local pastors are required to meet weekly with local officials to discuss their sermons.

“It has had a chilling effect on religious freedom in China,” he said.

Fu added that China’s constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief. “Religious freedom is a universal, fundamental first freedom,” he said. “Religious freedom for Christianity can foster a more stable less volatile and more prosperous China.”

http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/woman-bulldozed-to-death-in-china-signals-new-wave-of-oppression-21809/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email

United Nations Academic Impact Mar-April Newsletter

Please see the Jan-Feb 2016 United Nations Academic Impact Newsletter by clicking [here](#).

Kindly note that you may also access this and all previous issues of the newsletter at <https://academicimpact.un.org/content/newsletters>.

Faith and Environmental Justice

CASA: Good afternoon from New York. And welcome to the Council on Foreign Relations Religion and Foreign Policy Conference Call Series. I’m Maria Casa, director of the National Program and Outreach

here at CFR. Thank you for joining us. As a reminder, today's call is on the record and the audio will be available on our website, www.CFR.org.

We are delighted to have Sally Bingham with us today to discuss the role of faith-based organizations in global efforts to address environmental issues. The Reverend Bingham is president and founder of Interfaith Power and Light, and the Regeneration Project, organizations dedicated to mobilizing a religious response to global warming. She also serves as canon for the environment in the Episcopal Diocese of California. As one of the first faith leaders to fully recognize global warming as a core moral issue, she has mobilized thousands of religious people to put their faith into action through energy stewardship.

The Reverend Bingham serves on the board of directors of the Environmental Defense Fund, the Environmental Working Group, and the U.S. Climate Action Network, and was formerly a member of President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. She is the lead author of *Love God, Heal Earth*, a collection of 21 essays on environmental stewardship. And in 2012, she received the Audubon Society's Rachel Carson Award for environmental leadership.

Welcome, Sally. Thank you for joining us today.

BINGHAM: Thank you, Maria, and anybody else who's listening in. It's a pleasure to be able to talk about this work because it is what I do and what I care the most about, other than the grandchild that I'm expecting—(laughs)—in about two weeks. Environmental justice is what we do. A religious response to global warming environmental justice, largely defined by the fact that the people who contribute the least to the global warming problem are the people who are suffering the most. And that, in anybody's mind, is not fair or just. So what we are doing is working under the mandate that most major religions if not all have, to protect and serve poor people.

And we figure that the global warming problem, the climate crisis that we're in today is what is harming poor people both here in America and also around the world—harming them the most, and that we have a responsibility as religious people and people of faith to address this problem. It's almost more than a responsibility. We have a—we have a—really it's an obligation, if we're going to be true to our faiths, to help solve this problem. And in our network, we have Buddhists and Baha'is, and Christians, and Jews, and Muslims, and Hindus. And all of those religions have expressed statements to protect the climate. And we don't see that there's any better way to protect the climate and protect poor people than to cut our greenhouse gas emissions and advocate for others to do the same.

We are promoting and pushing for the Green Climate Fund to be fully funded. The Green Climate Fund is what was pulled together at the different Conference of the Parties meetings. And each country has pledged a certain amount of money. The United States has committed a tremendous amount of money, it's \$100 million a year, to mitigate and help countries around the world adapt to this problem that they're suffering from but didn't cause. So the Green Climate Fund itself is an environmental justice solution, in a way. And I'm happy to say that when the Obama budget was recently passed, the Green Climate Fund funds stayed intact.

And specifically what we do, and it will involve the Faith Climate Action Week, which is around Earth Day, but our concentration has been on congregational facilities around the country, to have them serve as examples to their communities. And we would like the faith community to be doing and representing

what we'd like to see our government do. And on that note, we have something called the Paris Pledge that we took to Paris, where people—over 5,000 people and congregations have committed to cutting their greenhouse gases 50 percent by 2030, and being carbon neutral by 2050. That's a bigger pledge than what the U.S. government did, but we feel that it's important to do. And we're going to try to show the way. We want to be an example of what we want the government to do.

So our congregations, of which we have 18,000 in our network, are promoting the Green Climate Fund to their parishioners, and the Paris Pledge. We are continuing to take Paris Pledgers, and we will all the way until eternity, and try to check in with congregations to see how they're doing, just as the Paris agreement is doing with countries. They're checking in every five years to see how the countries are doing on their pledges. And we will check in with our congregations as well.

We asked the congregations, and we supply resources and directions on how to do it, with energy efficient appliances, if they can possibly put solar on the roof. We can come up with various plans that will make it possible for a congregation to put solar on the roof and not have any up-front cost. We have sample sermons. We have discussion points for congregants to use if they have an adult education class or discussions around climate. Our preach-in, which we used to do over Valentine's Days weekend, was a focus on loving God and loving creation.

And that happened over a weekend in February. It was so successful that we came to the conclusion that we probably could do more. If we could do a very little bit in—or, as much as we were doing in a three-day weekend, we could probably do a great deal more over a full week. So this year, the preach-in has become Faith Climate Action Week. And it's the whole week surrounding the secular Earth Day. We have kits available on our website that can be downloaded for free, or if you—a congregation or person were to buy the kit, it comes with the film, which is an award-winning film, called "Racing Extinction."

And in this kit, along with racing extinction, you would get sample sermons, talking points for climate conversations, and many other resources, including some postcards that have advocacy asks on them that can be sent to your senators and House representatives. Depending upon the number of congregants in the congregation is how many postcards one gets. And the person of faith that has listened to the sermon and is feeling inspired to do so would pick up one of these postcards and send it into their senator or House representative.

And the postcards this year are focusing on the Clean Power Plan. This is another environmental justice issue, because the way that we're going to cut air pollution is to lower the emissions out of coal plants, which is what the Clean Power Plan will do. And as I'm sure most of the people on the call know, the folks that live around those power plants here in America are the ones that suffer the most from air pollution, respiratory problems, lung diseases, and lung cancer. So the Clean Power Plan is one of the initiatives that we're working on this year as well.

We do a lot of policy work, and we'd like to get our congregations involved in the advocacy around good policy. AB 32, which is the California Global Warming Act, we were instrumental in helping to get that passed. We work on any legislation that will provide energy efficiency, retrofits, and help for low-income communities. We work with any legislation that will continue to give tax credits for solar. We're working on reducing the amount of methane that comes from both fracking and in just the leakage of natural gas traveling from place to place. Those rules have come out from the EPA. And we're supporting those.

We sent a declaration that was given to the DC court when they were having a discussion around the merits and the legality of the Clean Power Plan. We sent a declaration in. And of course, the DC court turned down this lawsuit from the 27 states asking for a stay, which of course was then undone when the Supreme Court went ahead and said they would—they would hold the stay, or allow for the stay to happen. And they're going to have the judgement on the merits and legality of the Clean Power Plan on June 2nd. So that's one of the things that we're writing letters about, opinion pieces about. There's an amicus brief that went in last Friday from the faith community.

So those are the sort of advocacy things that we're doing. And then we have a program called Cool Congregations coming underneath—if you were to go to—if you're all sitting in front of a computer and you were to go to our Interfaith Power and Light website, we have a Cool Congregation challenge going on right now, where congregations can write to use and tell us what they're doing, and they get financial awards when they win.

We have something called Carbon Covenant, which is a program for developing nations. We have one in Tanzania, one in Cambodia, one in Ghana, and one in Cameroon, where we're helping religious communities in those countries to reforest. And we feel that that's a really powerful way of connecting faith communities here in America with faith communities there, and also accomplishing something that needs to happen, which is planning—replanting trees, which of course alleviate the greenhouse gas situation.

So that in a nutshell is what we're doing with environmental justice. It's just about—everything we're doing out of this office in San Francisco is about environmental justice, and serving and helping the people who are suffering the most from the climate problem. And Faith Climate Action Week, also on our website, will provide congregations and people with tools that they might not otherwise have, along with the reasons why this is a spiritual and faith issue, that however we respond to the climate crisis is an indication of our relationship with God and, frankly, with each other. If we love God, and love creation, and love our neighbors, we don't pollute their air.

So I'm going to stop now and open this up for questions.

CASA: Thank you. Thank you, Sally. Thank you for providing context for this conversation, and for the many examples and suggestions for taking action. Let's open up the call to questions now.

OPERATOR: OK.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

And our first question will come from Steve Gutow with the National Religious Partnership.

GUTOW: Sally, hi. It's Steve. It's good to hear you.

I was actually shocked that you—you know, not shocked—but, you know, the idea that you could love anything more than the climate change work you do shocked me. So your granddaughter must be really loved, or going to be really loved. Mazel tov on that.

Two quick questions: What do you think—and I know we work very hard on Pope Francis' encyclical. What impact do you think that's had? Do you think it's been as positive as we've hoped, or not? And second, as far as the Green Climate Fund around the world, what are we doing in terms of both pledges

and commitments and, you know, actual money in terms of how that's going? If you know—I mean, if you're aware of those answers.

BINGHAM: Well, thanks, Steve. And the granddaughter is not a granddaughter. She's a grandson. And she's not born yet.

GUTOW: Sorry! (Laughs.)

BINGHAM: She's due the first week—I mean, he's due the first week in June. And I'll tell you, besides this work, which is my life, that is this incredible, bright beacon of light that is now popping up as something that may take a little attention over the next few years.

These are both really great questions. From my perspective, the pope's encyclical has been extremely influential, not just by the faith community, and certainly not just by Roman Catholics, but all of the different religions around the world that we have been in touch with were applauding the encyclical when it came out, and applauding this pope for making the declaration that this is a moral issue, it affects everybody, and we all need to act together to solve the problem.

Secular organizations were almost as excited as the—secular environmental organizations were almost as excited as the faith community. I can't tell you the number of calls, and I'm sure you got them too, saying: How can we use the encyclical to further our work, you know, from Environmental Defense Fund and RGC, World Wildlife, the Union of Concerned Scientists even did a discussion on the encyclical. In fact, I hardly know people—anyone who's been working on climate that didn't embrace this encyclical.

Now, as to its effect going forward, I know that most of the folks in our organization, which is, of course, in 40 states all around the country, we had discussions around the encyclical that are still ongoing. Several conferences, papers. We have on our website actually a discussion group, it's kind of a small class on the encyclical, and we have it in Spanish as well as in English. And it is being downloaded and used now. So the pope's encyclical is certainly not a one-time, one-thing piece of—document. I think it's going to be with us for a long time and I think it's had tremendous influence. And more Catholics have heard about climate now than prior to the encyclical.

And on the Green Climate Fund, I don't know the numbers, but I do know that what Obama put in the U.S. budget is still there. When it got passed in January or early February, the Green Climate Fund from the United States money stayed intact. There was a worry that it might get yanked, but it didn't. It's still there. And there's a lot of pressure on him from people like NRPE and us to keep it going forever. But I don't know the exact numbers.

GUTOW: Thank you very much. I just—thanks, I just wanted to get those responses. Thanks a million.

CASA: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Yes, our next question will come from Crystal Hall with the Union Theological Seminary.

HALL: Thanks so much for your presentation. I work with an organization in Baltimore called United Workers, which is a grassroots human rights organization. And a student group of theirs, which is called Freer Voice, has been organizing for the past four years against a trash-burning incinerator, so very concerned with the question of air pollution that was already mentioned on the call. And they recently

won a victory against the Maryland Department of the Environment that actually ruled the permit for the company that was going to build the incinerator as invalid, which has been very exciting.

So my question for this discussion is, what is the role of organizations like Interfaith Power and Light in supporting grassroots efforts that are happening on the ground for environmental justice? In our work in Baltimore the local faith community has certainly played a role, as well as the local affiliate of Interfaith Power and Light. But I also wonder, like, what's the role on a national level for calling for involvement at the local level in local environmental justice fights?

BINGHAM: Well, we in our national office really try not to micromanage our state programs. But having said that, nearly all of our state programs are involved with local issues. And we encourage them, particularly when they have to do with things like air pollution. And I'll give you an example of that. Out here in California, the port of Oakland is being—there's a proposal to build a coal-export facility. The coal would come from Utah, and it would go right through the poor neighborhoods of Oakland, and then be shipped off to China. Now, our Interfaith Power and Light folks in Washington were able to defeat this proposal to go out of Seattle. Our Interfaith Power and Light people in Oregon were able to get involved and prevent this from happening in Oregon. Now, California IPL is deeply involved in trying to stop this from happening.

They're open to having a port there if they're exporting agriculture, and the things that the original—the original design from the developer was had nothing to do with coal. But as it began to look like they were going to be able to build this port in this export center, we found that they were intending to bring coal from Utah. So this is a local issue. California IPL is very involved. They've been to hearings. They're getting other religious, you know, people to come around and go to the hearings with them. We've written opinion pieces. We've had articles in the newspaper.

And those are the kinds of things that could happen with your—with the example you gave of trash burning in a local neighborhood. We would encourage our local IPLs to get involved and work with any issues like that, although we wouldn't say you have to—(laughs)—because we don't, as I say, have that jurisdiction over the local IPL. But we would encourage it.

CASA: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Yes, ma'am.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

And our next question will come from John de Vries with Multifaith Council.

DE VRIES: Yes. Thank you for this opportunity. Just finished reading a little while ago "This Changes Everything," by Naomi Klein. It's about climate change. And she makes one strong recommendation, that we have allies in the First Nations communities, the aboriginal communities. I think especially in light of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, this gives the faith communities a natural ally. And I'm wondering if this is happening across USA and other countries, or Canada? And secondly, in Ontario, the politicians have gotten very aggressive and the coal mines have been shut down in light of the carbon issue. And thirdly, in Canada the carbon tax—the conservatives, and they would be the last ones onboard, but they are now onboard as being pro-carbon tax. Any comments on those three questions or comments?

BINGHAM: They're all really important. And I think that Naomi Klein's book was excellent. And I think she's right. We do have allies with indigenous peoples. I was in Houston over last weekend, and there were some indigenous people who came to the Rothko Chapel to be—to listen in at this conversation we were having, and at great lengths gave us a reason to get involved and keep them involved in some of these issues. Just as you just said, that they are obvious partners.

And the New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light folks are working with the Navajos to—because there are places in Navajo land down in the four corners where they have no electricity and they have no running water, right—you know, right here in the U.S. So our New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light program is now looking for funding to help these folks get solar on their roofs and get water to them. So we do recognize that there are some very difficult issues that the indigenous peoples in this country are facing. But that they also can be, and are, allies of ours. So that's a point well-taken that you made.

Coal plants being shut down are happening. I think the last two years 250 coal plants have retired early. And that is a really good step in the right direction. I want to make one point about that, though. I think as people of faith, and it's a justice issue too, there are people that have relied on working in coal plants, or their families have, for years, and years, and years. And as these coal plants close, those folks are losing their jobs. And we have to have sympathy and perhaps work on solutions for those folks to readjust their lives. We know that it's better for them. I think they know it's better for them as well. But there's going to be some suffering as those folks lose their jobs.

And Gina McCarthy, who runs our U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, I asked her about that. And there is a fund that's being created for people to have the money to retrain themselves to do other things. And also, if they're 55 or 60 and they can't necessarily start a new career, that they will have compensation. So it is being thought about. And it's something that the faith community really needs to pay attention to.

What was the third thing that you asked me about? Do you mind, John, saying it again?

OPERATOR: His line has actually been cleared. If he presses star-one again, I can go ahead and get him open to repeat the third part. OK, Mr. de Vries, your line's back open.

DE VRIES: Yes, I was asking about carbon tax efficacy. And here the most least-likely party is now having some of its leaders support carbon tax.

BINGHAM: OK, well, the carbon tax—of course, just the word “tax” is going to have difficulty getting through U.S. legislation. I happen to be a strong believer that the cap-and-trade works. There were some difficulty in the beginning with the Waxman-Markey bill being so very, very long. That was a cap-and-trade bill at the federal level. But they got a cap-and-trade bill signed by Governor Schwarzenegger here in California in 2006. And it went into effect in 2012, I believe. It has been so successful that China is now doing a cap-and-trade. There are parts of Canada that are working with the West Coast states, working with cap-and-trade.

And I know some of the numbers, that the auction that are part of the cap-and-trade business here in California, has created enough money to bring down our deficit. Twenty-five percent of the money goes back to low-income communities, which is, I think, one of the benefits of cap-and-trade. They're investing in more renewable energy. And it has just been—it's just been an enormous success. And

anything—anytime you look up the success of this global warming act in California, you will see that in all areas it's been a success. So I'm a proponent of pushing cap-and-trade.

I think we have to have a price on carbon. Maybe that's even a better way of saying versus tax. But the cap-and-trade puts a price on carbon as well. I do—and you didn't really express your opinion about this, but I'm assuming because you asked the question that you think a carbon tax is a good thing. I do too. I think it would be difficult to pass just being called tax.

Q: Yeah. I would say, let's call it something else, but I think it expresses the onus is on us to reduce the carbon. And if other incentives can be helpful, and tax is an ugly word, but if we can with mutual cooperation and dialogue with the people that make the laws, or that have some of the community initiatives call it—or the cap-and-trade. I think that's a good way to go.

BINGHAM: Yeah. Well, I agree with you. And I think we're on the same page.

Q: Yeah.

CASA: Thank you. Thank you both.

Q: Thank you very much.

CASA: Next question.

OPERATOR: OK. Our next question will come from Ved Nanda with the University of Denver.

NANDA: Thank you very much. I appreciate your presentation. And I work with the Hindu-American Foundation and the Hindus here. The question I wanted to ask you is that you very appropriately talked about all the initiatives that you have taken, and working with the states. Just wanted to ask if there was any effort in order to see that we do advocate even cities, because cities at the present time, municipalities, states, they have taken initiatives. And while the federal government is not going to be acting with Congress, or not willing to take the initiative, I think we ought to be working with cities and municipalities. And I hope that there is an effort to have that advocacy be enhanced and strengthened.

BINGHAM: Yes, thank you. I agree with you. I think that cities do have to become models. And there are a few around the U.S. that are considered very green cities. But we at Interfaith Power and Light are focused on congregations, with the hope that it might start with a congregation if you have a very large cathedral or synagogue or temple in your city that becomes green, to the extent that it can be a model for the rest of the community. Because that's what we hope our congregations will do, serve as examples to the community. I think that we have to—I mean, we can't do everything. And our focus is on these congregational facilities. But I agree with you, that cities need to step up and do their job as well. And maybe the congregations can get the cities started.

NANDA: That's exactly what I was saying, that the congregations and members in the congregation can at least do that advocacy with the cities, because they are the ones who play an active role in the communities, they are the ones who persist in doing so many other things in the communities, and they can obviously play a very active role in energizing the city to take action, which at the present time seemingly is probably even more important than putting focus simply on the federal government.

BINGHAM: Yes. Thank you.

NANDA: Thank you.

CASA: Next question, please?

OPERATOR: Yes, ma'am. Our next question will come from Syed Sayeed with Columbia University.

SAYEED: Hello? Can you hear me?

BINGHAM: I can hear you. Is that Syed, my friend?

SAYEED: I'm not from, you know, Washington, DC, that Syed.

BINGHAM: Oh.

SAYEED: OK. (Laughs.) He's different—he's another person. We are friends.

But I have been affiliated with Columbia in, you know, the role of a religious life advisor on call. And I just wanted to first, you know, once again, thank the Council on Foreign Relations for bringing this subject to the attention of all of the participants, and to them—you know, to a broader range. And you, for devoting your time, energy and resources, for bringing this climate issue to the attention of, you know, people at large.

The connection between faith and climate, as you have pointed out, is traced back to all the sacred texts. In fact, you know, in the Quran there are very clear references. Anyhow, I don't want to get into that. I just wanted to share your idea of bringing this, you know, message to the congregants and, in fact, through the congregants to the neighborhoods. Then wherever people live, they can start talking about our responsibility as people who believe in any faith to do what is critically important for us to do, to not litter our neighborhoods, for example, not use too much plastic. I mean, all those kinds of things, we can do it individually. And that can make a big difference both in terms of models and, you know, in actions.

So I wanted to ask if you have sort of attempted to bring this to the level of every citizen, not just people of faith in congregations or through organizations. Thank you very much, again.

BINGHAM: OK. And thank you very much. Maybe I wasn't clear, and I think I was not entirely clear. But as we focus on these congregational facilities, and we want them to serve as an example to the community and to the neighborhood, we also make the point that if a congregation has energy-efficient appliances, if they have sensors in their bathrooms where the lights go out after no one's been there for five minutes, if they have solar on the roof, if they have put in the energy efficient windows so that the heat stays in when it's supposed to stay in, and the cold air stays out when it's supposed to out—all of these things do three things that are good.

They are saving money. They're creating jobs. And they're saving creation at the same time. Now, when a religious leader in one of these facilities can announce to the congregation, and all the people that come in and out of that facility, we are saving money, saving creation, and creating jobs, why don't you all go home and make all of these changes in your homes, because once you start doing it in your home, you'll be saving money, creating jobs, and saving creation at the same time. So if I wasn't 100 percent clear about that, I mean that we are hoping through example of the congregational facility to train the people that are in that facility or attend that facility to go home and do the same thing in their homes.

Now, if you live in a neighborhood and six houses on your block have put solar on, or they're driving an energy-efficient car, or they are walking to the store instead of driving their car—they serve as examples to their neighbors as well. And it can almost be a—almost like peer pressure. If you're the only house with the trash out front, and you're the only house that leaves their lights burning all night, you may, just through you're your neighborhood is doing, change your ways. And I think that's what you're saying, that if we—the more of us that participate in less waste and become more efficient, the more people will do it. And I think that you're right on about that, because I think that's true and has proven to be true.

SAYEED: Thank you.

CASA: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: OK. Our next question will come from Nancy Lorence with Call to Action.

LORENCE: Yes. I also participate with the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

And I just wanted to bring up another aspect of working with Native American allies, and that is that a lot of the Native Americans who have been in the front of environmental struggles in their communities, the Keystone XL pipeline being one where Native American communities took the leadership on that, but also the recent threats that come against people who do that, and the example being—the most recent example being Berta Caceres in Honduras, this environmentalist who was a Lenca indigenous person from Honduras, who led the struggle of her community to stop this huge dam going in that was actually going to provide electricity for other mega-mining projects that were very harmful to indigenous lands.

And you know, I know when the summit happened in Peru after the meeting here in New York, and prior to the Paris summit, that that was another issue that was brought out, about how many native Peruvians—indigenous Peruvian environmentalists had been killed up to that time. So it's just another aspect, I think, of our relationship with Native American communities that we should take into account, is the protection of the environmental leaders.

BINGHAM: Nancy, that's a really important point. Do you know the Goldman Environmental Prize? If you don't, look them up on the web. But they often are giving prizes to just extraordinary people who have really put their lives on the line. And in several cases, sadly, those people have lost their lives. I mean, they have sacrificed for their causes. And the Goldman Environmental Prize recognizes these folks. But I do think that all of us have to pay attention and, yes, support those folks that are out front. Thank you for saying that.

LORENCE: Berta had won—had been awarded that prize prior to being killed.

BINGHAM: That's right. So you do know about it.

LORENCE: Yeah.

CASA: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: All right. Our next question will come from Martin Bresler with Americans for Peace Now.

BRESLER: Yes. Thank you for taking this question, although it may overlap a little bit with one of the questions that was asked earlier. But you mentioned in your earlier presentation the availability of postcards to mail to our congresspeople. And I'm wondering how effective you may find that campaign, given the fact that the majority of our Congress unfortunately does not believe that there's a problem.

BINGHAM: Well, you're right. What we have done—the postcards are not so general that they say: Let's take action on climate. The postcards are usually—we've done this now for seven years. The postcards have been directed towards a particular piece of legislation that's trying to work its way through Congress and those legislations. And this year it's going to be on the Clean Power Plan, showing—you know, with a note showing that we will save many, many trips to the hospitals if we can keep the air pollution down. And I think our postcards have had an effect, 70,000 or 80,000 of them went in last year.

And we've been told that better than writing an email, better even than writing a letter are these postcards. And that when they go in individually to legislative offices, if a senator gets 4,000 individual postcards into his or her office from their own constituents—I mean, I don't send one to Senator Inhofe in Oklahoma. I send mine to the senators that are from California. But the ones that go to Senator Inhofe come from Oklahoma. And it's our understanding that politicians care tremendously what their own constituents have to say about these issues. And there are a lot of senators who will say—because we have a lobby day every year where we take—we spend a whole day and our IPL leaders from around the country go in and visit their particular legislators.

And we've heard from them. They will say, I haven't heard—if you want me to do this, make me do it. And we need to hear from our constituents. And that's why the postcards, because apparently people care more now than ever—65 percent of the American people now care about climate change and understand that it's a human-induced problem. But they're not getting that message to their elected officials. And that's what we need to do. And that's why we think the postcards are effective, because the message is coming from the people that elected that person into office.

BRESLER: Thank you.

CASA: Thank you. Thank you, Sally. On a related subject, do you have advice on what the best ways of engaging in meaningful dialogue with climate change skeptics, apart from politicians, might be?

BINGHAM: Well, I just want to point out the difference between skeptics and deniers. Deniers are often the folks who are—well, let me start with the skeptics. (Laughs.) We like skeptics. Skeptics are people who say, look, I have questions about this, but if you can answer those questions, or you can prove to me that this is true, I could move my opinion. The deniers are folks who for almost the wrong reasons are denying that it's a problem. They may be denying it because they're part of a political party that has said: Don't say those two words. They may be denying it because they're on the payroll of the fossil fuel industry. There are a lot of reasons for deniers.

And we have not spent an enormous amount of time trying to convince the deniers because we may not be able to get anywhere. But we can talk to the skeptics. And when we're talking to skeptics, what we do is we start with what do we have in common. And even the skeptics will—about climate change—will agree with you that they want clean air, they'd like their children to be able to go outside and play and not be threatened with an asthma attack. They want—they want clean energy. And if you start there,

and people can agree, we want clean air, we want clean energy, we want a safe future for our children, well, you don't have to use the word climate change, because the things that will keep the air clean, keep kids out of hospitals for asthma, and that will continue to keep the air clean for the future. If you like that, those are all the same things that you would help have happen if you care about climate change.

So some of our Interfaith Power and Light leaders who are in parts of the country where it is hard to talk about climate change because of skepticism, they talk about clean energy, clean air, and investments—a new industrial revolution, if you will, but this time a clean one that will create jobs for people—putting solar on the roof, building wind turbines, making products that don't hurt the environment. We have a whole new clean energy evolution—or revolution right happening now. And we want people to get involved in that. And you can—so you can talk about all those things that even your skeptics will agree with.

CASA: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: OK.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

And our next question will come from David Hart with the Institute for Policy Studies.

HART: Hello. Thank you so much. It was a really great talk. Interested to hear the work in Baltimore, because that's where my focus has been, and the comment about Naomi Klein's book, which was moving for me as well. And had a question that was related to what was asked earlier. From her book they made that link between climate change and the need to change our economy, and that we can't solve one without the other. I'm curious what you think our role is, and the faith community's role is, in helping people open up that larger conversation about the need to build a new economy with racial justice at its core and that treats the people as well as the planet better.

BINGHAM: Well, I think that's you're absolutely right. And I think she's right. We do need a new economy, and it needs to be based on clean products, starting with clean energy. We need to have—our electrical grid has to be upgraded. There are just so many—so many things that need to be done to sort of change the focus on—that has been based on fossil fuels for 200 years. And this whole clean energy economy is where we need to go. So I mean, I'm not an economist. I wish I had more economy in my background. But as an Episcopal priest I studied theology, and fairness, and justice. But I've read, and heard, and seen that a clean economy is on the horizon, and we all need to be pushing for that.

I can't give the direction on how to get there, but I know it's a start by using wind and sun. And you're probably aware that the price of solar has gone down by 80 percent in the last five years. And they're selling wind energy now for the same price that coal was—at something like 9 cents a kilowatt hour. So these things are starting to happen. We need to, if we can, make them happen faster. And maybe every single one of us that believes this to be true needs to make the changes in our own lives, and then be an example for what we want to see other people doing.

HART: Thank you.

CASA: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: OK. Our next question will come from Andrew Gerhart with Stanford University.

GERHART: Hi. Yeah, my question pertains to messaging as well. And I'm curious, Sally, if you all at Interfaith Power and Light have done any kind of analysis of how you message to your congregations, I'm reading that you have about 18,000 of them, and whether certain types of messaging may or may not be more effective in helping out climate skeptics understand a little bit more about the climate crisis. You know, and this kind of goes along with some thinking about types of doomsday environmental journalism that are pretty normal in our society and our dialogue, particularly statements about the human species going extinct and certain other types of things, which I tend to think may actually cause people to become more paralyzed than otherwise. And I just wanted to hear your thoughts on all that.

BINGHAM: Thanks, Andrew. Messaging, of course, is really important, and starts with before you're even talking about climate to anyone you have to know your audience. And I had interesting experiences when first started this work, because I used to get on the pulpit and just tell everybody that climate was a problem, it was their fault, and we needed to fix it. Well—(laughs)—I'm telling you, that doesn't work. And I found out the hard way that I was being—I was called a communist and I was after world government, and what right did I have as a priest to get on the pulpit and use the pulpit for that kind of messaging?

Well, that was 20 years ago. And as time has gone on, I have learned, and others in our organization have learned, that the first thing you have to know is your audience, and who is it—who is it out there that you're speaking with? And when it's a faith audience, and you're in a congregation that either—I mean, it could be Buddhist or Hindu—but there's that sense of the greater divine and the mystery that operates in the world that we all believe in, it doesn't have to be called God. But every one of those religions has a sense of the connectivity between all of us and all of creation. So if you can being with: We are all one. And if you're harming some part of it, in the way that we are with something like air pollution, we're harming everybody.

And people don't argue with that. I mean, in a way, my job is easier because in the Judeo-Christian religion right from the get-go in the Genesis God put Adam in the garden to till it and to keep it. And we are the gardeners. We are the people that were put here to take care of this place. And nobody will argue with that. And once you have your congregation or your audience really believing that humans are on the planet not to destroy to, but to take care of it, then you can get into specifics of how are we going to take care of it? But I think that initial helping a person understand that each one of us matters, each one of our behaviors matters. And if we're all one, we all have to work together.

And I think that that's a really important beginning for an environmental stewardship messaging. And I don't know if that's helpful. If you're at Stanford we can get together for coffee sometime and talk more about this, because I'm only a half-an-hour away. (Laughs.)

GERHART: I don't know if I'm still on there.

BINGHAM: You are.

GERHART: Oh, I am. OK. I actually just finished a PhD at Stanford, and I'm in Austin, Texas right now. But I would love to get coffee with you sometime. (Laughs.)

BINGHAM: Excellent. (Laughs.)

CASA: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: OK. Our next question will come from Homi Gandhi with FEZANA.

GANDHI: OK. My name is Homi Gandhi. I represent the Zoroastrian faith, one of the oldest monotheistic faiths. And we have always respected and (proposed ?) the (methodology ?) for conservation of the elements of world. This is all in our prayers. We have also had a panel discussion on stewardship of our environment at the Parliament of World Religions.

As to one major issue which effects the people who want to have solar panels in their homes, the solar panels, if you are having at the homes, there are two issues which takes place. One is the subsidization by the state or federal government, and second is the use of the electricity generated by the solar energy. We are propagating this to many people, and I find the major issue is that many utilities in different states have different rules. Some of them do not take the extra energy being created. So one thing, my question is, how can we resolve around that?

And the second question I have is, when you are subsidizing the solar panels over here, there's a large amount of solar panels which are coming from other countries, like China. And as a result, some of the solar manufacturing companies in the United States and Canada have found themselves in a difficult situation. SunEdison is the latest example of going into Chapter 11, because they have got many other reasons why—(inaudible)—but I think the subsidization and cheaper solar panels (is another ?). So how do we resolve all these issues?

BINGHAM: Oh my goodness. Well, I wish I had a nice simple answer for that. We are not going to—I can't answer how are we going to solve all these issues. They are huge. And you're absolutely correct that different utilities in different states have different laws. And we just had a very bad experience in Nevada, where for a long time the utility there was doing what's called net metering. And if you as an individual put solar on your home and you created more electricity than you could use, that you got credit on your bill. And you didn't get money back, but you got credit back for the energy that you were creating and the utility could use.

SolarCity started a factory out there. They had 17,000 homes with solar on the roof. And in the last two months, the public utility in Nevada took back the net metering that they were doing, took the incentive away from people putting solar on their homes, and 500 people lost their jobs who were working for SolarCity, and SolarCity has left Nevada, gone off some other place where the rules are not like that, or changing. So there are political issues in these states that we have to deal with. And I think that the faith community and all of us, with opinion pieces, with visits to our utilities, with conversation to let folks know that we want solar and that we can have an influence if enough of us are willing to speak out about it.

And that's really all—I mean, we're watching the price of solar coming down. There are a lot of creative ways that homes can get solar onto the roof without any upfront cost. And we're able to do that with congregations now too. Some of these situations are—some of these plans for putting solar are quite complicated, but it can be done. But we need to ask for it. We can't just sit back and complain that a utility has just taken the net metering away from it. We have to be outraged, the way—the SolarCity folks who lost their jobs went to the hearings. And apparently there were, you know, 500 employees out

in front of these hearing that had a big effect on the PEU. However, they did—they did change the plans, and they haven't gone back on it yet.

We have to speak out. I mean, we can't just sit back and let this happen. We've got to cry for what we want. And that really, in a nutshell, is let's just not be quiet. If we want these things to happen, we have to ask for them.

GANDHI: I agree with you on that. But I read about SolarCity issue a little bit, but there has been a larger issue here. And the larger issue is the greed—greed of the people who are financing those—the coal or other plants in that area. And I believe, because of Warren Buffett's company which tried to bring the SolarCity down. So although Warren Buffett may be a good investor, so far as the environmental situation is concerned, his company—one of his companies did the damage to the SolarCity. And SolarCity has been in very bad—because of this particular issue—in a very bad financial crisis. And SunEdison, which is also related to SolarCity, is a worse situation, and has gone into Chapter 11.

BINGHAM: It's true. I mean, you're absolutely right. I wish that I had some influence over the folks that are dependent—the Koch brothers, whose money comes out of the oil fields and coal plants, they're fighting solar everywhere. But be heartened by the fact that solar is still happening. More and more people are getting solar. And as I said, the price is coming way, way down, that we cannot be defeated by those folks. We have to keep fighting for what we want. And I think—is it Warren Buffett that's got all the wind plants in Texas, I think? So the shift is going to happen in spite of those industry-dependent folks.

Times are changing. We're moving away from coal, and there's so many statistics to show that. And I think we just cannot be disheartened. We can't give up. And this is where faith comes in and provides that hope. I mean, we can do—we have to believe in the human spirit, and we have to keep fighting for what it is we want and what we know is morally right.

GANDHI: I agree with that.

CASA: Thank you. Thank you, Sally. I'm afraid we're going to have to close now. Sally, thank you for sharing your experience and knowledge with us. You've provided us with many excellent suggestions for moving forward. And thanks to all of you on the call for your questions and comments. You can follow Sally on Twitter at @RevSallyBingham, that's R-E-V Sally Bingham. We also encouraging you to follow CFR's Religion and Foreign Policy on Twitter at @CFR_Religion for announcements about upcoming events and information about the latest CFR resources. And we thank you all again and look forward to your participation in future discussions.

BINGHAM: Thank you. And please like us at Interfaith Power and Light on Facebook.

CASA: (Laughs.) Thank you. Bye.

(END)

http://www.cfr.org/climate-change/faith-environmental-justice/p37744?cid=nlc-religion-religion-and-foreign-policy-bulletin-resources-for-the-faith-community-link3-20160429&sp_mid=51270434&sp_rid=aWduYXRpdXN1QGFvbC5jb20S1

Serbian church head says string of fires could be a 'warning'

The head of the Serbian Orthodox Church said Wednesday he finds it “strange” at best that four of the religion’s sanctuaries went up in flames on the same exact day.

“Anything can be suspected — including that the fires were started on purpose and were not accidental,” Patriarch Irinej told Belgrade-based weekly Nedeljnik, according to B92.

“It is strange that four of our (Orthodox Christian) churches burned at the same time on three different continents,” he said. “It’s all symptomatic. We still don’t know if it is some kind of warning, and what kind. And whether someone set them on fire in an organized way.”

Irinej added that the Serbian Orthodox Church, also known as SPC, was “unpleasantly surprised” that Serbia’s top officials failed to immediately contact them after the Cathedral of St. Sava in Manhattan was gutted by a four-alarm fire on Sunday, just hours after Easter services.

Churches in Russia and Australia also caught fire that day, but SPC wasn’t alerted to any of the blazes “until noon on Tuesday,” the patriarch said.

Worried that the incidents could all be connected, Serbian Consul in New York Mirjana Zivkovic on Wednesday said the Serbian Embassy in Washington has decided to reach out to the US State Department, asking for all results of the FDNY’s investigation to be reviewed by the consulate.

“We expect that to happen as soon as the investigation has been completed,” Zivkovic told Serbia’s state broadcaster RTS, according to B92.

Irinej also confirmed that officials in the Big Apple had been keeping him updated on the FDNY’s investigation — saying they still had not determined an official cause, even though they were homing in on a careless caretaker who may have failed to put out all the candles that were lit for Orthodox Easter.

“I have received reports from our embassy in New York that the cause of the fire is being investigated,” he said, adding that people shouldn’t “jump to conclusions” about who was responsible “before the truth has been determined.”

Many people in the Christian Orthodox community believe the blazes at St. Sava and in Russia and Australia may have been set in retaliation for Pope Francis’ recent decision to postpone the canonization of Croatian Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac, an infamous Nazi supporter.

Francis chose to stop the ceremony from happening last week after the Serbian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Irinej himself urged the pontiff to consider Stepinac’s notorious past.

Orthodox Christians ultimately fear that the churches may have all been set on fire by Stepinac supporters fuming over the pope’s decision.

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a UN Security Council Briefing on Aleppo, Syria, May 4, 2016

Thank you. Thank you, Under-Secretary-General Feltman and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien. I'd also like to thank the United Kingdom for calling today's important session.

The city known today as Aleppo has been continuously inhabited for more than 7,000 years. Over the centuries, it has been won and lost by a succession of empires – the Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Ottomans, and more. It has been home to diverse populations of traders and merchants, which included Muslims, Jews, and Christians. This is not ancient history. These influences have long been visible in the city's architecture; tasted in its food; and felt in its culture. By the 16th century it was famous enough for Shakespeare to cite it in *Othello* and *Macbeth*.

A city doesn't become one of the world's oldest without surviving great challenges. Aleppo has endured wars, occupations, and earthquakes. In 1260 it survived a siege by the Mongols. After so many centuries, a city like this might seem able to survive anything.

But in recent days, young Syrians have spread a slogan across social media: "Aleppo is burning." After five years of war, the recent explosion of violence has threatened what remains of the city. Just today, Special Envoy de Mistura warned that continuing violence could be "catastrophic," and it could force 400,000 more residents to flee. Imagine the ripple effect and the consequences of that additional displacement.

To save Aleppo – what is left of Aleppo – we need progress on the same three fronts we need for peace in Syria overall. It's not that complicated. As Special Envoy de Mistura has previously underscored, the three elements are: stopping the fighting; improving humanitarian access; and engaging in political negotiations to bring about transition. This year has actually shown that all three are possible – however belatedly, unevenly, and imperfectly they have been implemented – when there is political will. The cessation, up to this point, has saved lives; humanitarian access, while still grotesquely restricted, has improved modestly; and Special Envoy de Mistura has convened the parties for talks in Geneva. All three tracks are interlinked and interdependent, and we cannot – as some have argued – neglect any one of them and expect the other two to succeed.

In recent days, as evidenced most clearly by what has occurred in Aleppo, all three of these tracks are in grave peril.

First, as others have noted, across much of Aleppo the Cessation of Hostilities has given way to horrific violence. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that more than 270 civilians were killed in Aleppo just since April 22nd. While all sides have contributed to the violence, the military escalation was attributable largely to the actions of a single party: the Assad regime. The regime launched more than 300 airstrikes, 110 artillery strikes, and 18 missiles, and dropped more than 68 bombs on the city over just these last two weeks, according to credible actors on the ground. All of this while still paying lip service to a Cessation of Hostilities.

Against this backdrop, the United States has been working urgently with Special Envoy de Mistura and with the Russian Federation to reaffirm the Cessation across the country. Through these efforts, the parties to the Cessation agreed to recommit to the truce in Aleppo and its suburbs earlier today. The city

has been calmer, and we urge all parties to comply fully so that hostilities actually cease – not just in Aleppo, but across the country.

The regime and some of its supporters sometimes claim to be attacking al Nusra or Da'esh, but the sites hit in Aleppo show otherwise. Consider this list of targets struck by the regime or its allies between April 20th and 29th – not ancient history, just in the last couple of weeks. These targets, provided by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which has proven highly reliable during the conflict: an ambulance in the Bab Al Neirab neighborhood; a public market in the district of Al Sakhour, a Civil Defense Center in Al Atarib; a bakery in Al Ameriya; a school in the Bab Al Hadid district; and a mosque in the Al Sokari district. The distinction between civilians and military personnel and targets has to be respected in accordance with international law. But every day the photos and videos out of Aleppo show that that distinction has been obliterated.

It is important to note that violence by Nusra or Da'esh is violence by groups who are not a party to the Cessation, and are not protected by the Cessation of Hostilities. The rest of the opposition who signed up for the Cessation and abided by it cannot not be held responsible for the actions of terrorists who have made no secret of their desire to keep fighting. Nobody benefits more from this war and from the failure to reach a political solution and a political transition than the terrorists. But one cannot lump the like with the unlike, the innocent with the guilty.

These attacks have imposed an incalculable toll on Aleppo's civilians, and they contribute to a devastating humanitarian situation in the city. But the regime has also taken additional measures that show its overt intent to ratchet up civilian suffering in Aleppo. The Syrian government has restricted humanitarian access and blocked aid, thereby undercutting that second element necessary for a peaceful resolution to be advanced. The ISSG has just been informed – and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien just confirmed here today – that the regime only approved aid deliveries for 25 percent of the people in the UN's May delivery plan for besieged and hard-to-reach areas. And the Syrian government did not approve any of the Aleppo locations in the UN's May plan. Coincidence, or in keeping with its massive offensive designed to terrorize the people of Aleppo?

Though this Council should need no reminder, UN Security Council resolution 2254 calls for rapid, safe, and unhindered access throughout the country. Aleppo is a place of huge need right now. We focus often in our remarks on those who have been killed, but think of all who have been injured and who are in desperate need of help, UN Security Council resolution 2254 proscribes the removal of medicines and medical supplies from aid convoys, but again, OCHA has documented this is routine practice across Syria. It is the exception when medical supplies are actually allowed past armed convoys. It is a rule, and a rule that is enforced across the board by the Syrian government's bureaucracy to remove medical supplies from convoys. Just to give you one example, on a recent convoy to Rastan, the authorities even went so far as to remove the scissors and anesthetics from midwifery kits. Who does this? Let's be honest. The people who do this are people who don't give a damn what this Council prescribes. They don't care. They've stopped listening.

At the same time, the regime has deliberately targeted first responders, health care workers, and medical facilities. Of the 33 hospitals open in Aleppo in 2010, fewer than 10 are reportedly functioning today. The latest, as we all know, was lost last week when the al Quds Hospital suffered a horrific attack that killed at least 50 civilians, including the city's last pediatrician, Dr. Muhammad Waseem Maaz – a man described by a colleague as “the loveliest doctor in our hospital,” a man who had sent his family to

safety in Turkey but stayed behind to treat his patients, a man so committed to his people that he often slept in the hospital in case a child needed emergency help during the night. According to Physicians for Human Rights, this attack which killed this great doctor along with so many others, was actually the third strike on the hospital since the war began. That is not an accident. If you hit a hospital once by mistake, you can adjust your targeting and make allowances. But this is willful targeting. At least six medical facilities across Aleppo were attacked in the past week and the most recent, as we've heard, was yesterday against the al-Dabit maternity clinic in regime-held territory, where more civilians were killed.

All of these attacks are reprehensible. And just yesterday, this Council adopted a resolution on the importance of protecting medical personnel, the importance of access to medical care in armed conflict. Every member of this Council voted in favor, and it is now time to call for its implementation in a real context, the context of Syria. And that means urgently pressing the regime and any group who would shell a hospital to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, to cease targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and medical personnel.

This brings me to the third and final element necessary for progress toward the conflict's resolution: political negotiations toward political transition. After five years of war, it should be abundantly clear that this conflict will only be settled through political dialogue. Aleppo is a living monument to the belief that military force can achieve anything for the people of Syria. This is precisely what the Council agreed last December when we passed resolution 2254. Yet we have seen one party in particular renege on its commitments to a full Cessation of Hostilities nationwide and to the full and the rapid and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid – blatantly disregarding resolution 2254. This undermines the conditions needed for negotiations, and makes finding common ground and forging compromises exceedingly difficult.

Let me conclude. There is plenty of blame to go around for the worsening situation in Aleppo – but there can be no doubt about where primary responsibility lies. It lies with the same regime responsible for committing similar offenses across the country. The one that has laid siege to 15 cities across Syria and restricted access to aid for millions of Syrians, leading to the preventable deaths of countless civilians. The one responsible for 12 of the 13 attacks on medical facilities recorded between January through March of this year by Physicians for Human Rights, and 24 of the 25 deaths which resulted from those strikes. The regime responsible for last week's air strikes against a Syrian Civil Defense station in the town of Al-Atareb, Aleppo province, which killed five brave men who volunteered to serve their communities as first responders – Ahmad Abdullah, Khaled Bashar, Ahmad Mahmoud, Hamdo Haj Ibrahim, and Hussain Ismail – the latest of the more than 115 "White Helmets" who have died in the line of duty since this war began. The same party – the same regime – responsible for the vast majority of the 400,000 deaths, and counting, in this conflict.

The party primarily responsible for Aleppo burning is a UN Member State. That should revolt us. The party responsible is a UN Member State indifferent, cold to the ghastly suffering of its people. That should galvanize and unite us.

All those with influence – particularly Russia and Iran – must press the regime to meet its commitments and obligations. For our part, the United States will continue pressing the opposition to do the same, we will work with our Russian counterparts to try to restore a real and lasting Cessation of Hostilities in

Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria, and to facilitate a political transition away from Assad – the only way in which this war will finally end. And the entire ISSG is going to have to be a part of making that happen.

Today, a Syrian surgeon in Aleppo, Osama Abo El Ezz, wrote in the *New York Times* of losing so many of his close friends who were medical professionals over the last five years. Over the last week, he wrote, “the bombardment [in Aleppo] has reached such ferocity that even the stones are catching fire.”

Of the Cessation of Hostilities, he wrote, “Imperfect though it was, it offered Syrian civilians a brief respite from five years of violence. People had begun to recover during the truce, to get their lives back.” Now, he said, people in Aleppo were waiting for death – even praying for it, in some instances – “to take them away from this burning city,” as he put it.

All of us here must work relentlessly to restore and maintain the “respite” from violence that Syrians yearn for and deserve, to ensure they receive vital humanitarian aid that they need to survive – many are on death’s door right now as we sit here – and to build the political solution that is the only escape from this daily inferno.

I thank you.

[Christians in Nigeria are essentially 'target practice' – here's one bishop's response](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/christians-in-nigeria-are-essentially-target-practice-heres-one-bishops-response-19037/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email)
http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/christians-in-nigeria-are-essentially-target-practice-heres-one-bishops-response-19037/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email

Report Says Worldwide Religious Freedom Deteriorates

The latest report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom says religious freedom across the world deteriorated in 2015.

[According to the report](#) released on May 2, the global refugee crisis, political strife, and economic dislocation have contributed to an increase in “societal intolerance.”

The commission identified 17 countries as “Tier One” concerns, meaning they have “particularly severe violations of religious freedom that are systematic, ongoing, and egregious.” Among countries listed in that category are Iran, Iraq, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan.

Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia were among 10 countries categorized as “Tier Two,” meaning religious-freedom violations in those countries are serious enough to require close monitoring.

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Wars, extremism fray Christian-Muslim relations in Middle East

Fr. Youssef Yaacoub dates his troubles from June 9, 2014.

That was the day the Islamic State group reached southeast Mosul, Iraq, shooting guns in the air and announcing, from a loudspeaker at a mosque, "We are here."

"We are creating a caliphate. We will rule by Sharia law," said a booming voice. "Those who don't abide by the law will be killed." That included Christians who refuse to convert to Islam.

Yaacoub and other Christians -- including three monks and two laypeople -- stayed put at the Mar Behnam convent. An initial encounter with Islamic State commanders was slightly reassuring: "Nothing will happen to you," the five men were told.

But the reassurances soon evaporated. The Islamic State group was seizing not only all buildings and property, but farms -- tons of wheat and oats that could be used for food and for monetary leverage.

Eventually, Islamic State troops took everything from the convent and made a pointed threat to Yaacoub and the others: "You don't have a right to be here."

After a period of stalemate, and things "tightening more and more" -- like a noose around the neck, Yaacoub said -- gunmen arrived at the convent on July 20, 2014, again shooting in the air. Yaacoub opened the door. A gunman peered at him and said, "You have to leave now. This building is now in the possession of the Islamic State."

Death threats ensued, followed by caveats. If the Christians paid money, or if they converted to Islam, they would not be harmed.

Over the next few hours, the threats eased a bit. No one knew exactly why. "We're letting you live," said the leader of the group. "We're being nice to you."

But the Christians would have to leave immediately. Now meant now. The men had barely any time to gather their things. They were dropped off along a highway and told, "Don't ever come back." They were stranded, Yaacoub said, with "nothing around us." They walked several miles in the midday sun in 116-degree heat.

Eventually, they came upon a Kurdish area; one of the men rustled up a white underwear shirt as a flag signaling they came in peace.

But the troubles did not end there. A Kurdish soldier greeted the men and said, "Whoever is coming from this area is ISIS."

Yaacoub told the soldier, "But I am a priest."

A phone call to Yaacoub's bishop eventually convinced the soldier that the men were not Islamic State members.

A meeting days later with the local bishop cleared matters up further. The bishop told Yaacoub, "Go, my son, to your home."

He did. But then the Islamic State militants threatened that area -- Karakosh -- and Yaacoub had to flee again.

Finding safety

Yaacoub arrived in Beirut in June 2015 a tired and weary man of 43.

He felt an "unseen hand" pushing him forward into eventual safety. "I felt this power when I was released and simply walked," Yaacoub said -- an experience that strengthened his faith, though he says his faith could have been shattered at any moment under the stress of threats and possible death.

What the experience has not done, however, is made him feel generous toward Islam and those who practice it. He feels neither trust nor comity nor bonds of brotherhood and goodwill toward Muslim neighbors and acquaintances.

It is not a feeling Yaacoub is necessarily proud of -- he says if he were not a priest, "I'd not be able to forgive them." Here, he is speaking not only of his own experiences but of killings and massacres he knows have resulted in death for both Christians and Muslims in Iraq.

Being a priest and having "the mission of evangelization," he said, "I have learned from Jesus to forgive because Jesus died for us." Yaacoub paused. "It is not easy to forgive, even if you're a priest. You're human. But you have to forgive them."

Still, he acknowledges that trusting Muslims is now difficult -- and he thinks he is not alone. For Christians -- many of whom have left Iraq and Syria under threat or lived through the experience of religious persecution -- it means feeling they can no longer trust Muslim neighbors, friends and acquaintances.

"Muslims trust Christians but Muslims know that the Christians don't trust them," Yaacoub said.

When you multiply experiences like Yaacoub's by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the tens of thousands, it does not take long to figure out that relations between Christians and Muslims in places

where refugees of both faiths have landed -- in countries like Lebanon and Jordan -- are frayed.

Experiences and perceptions, prejudices and grievances all enter into the mix, and Christians feel especially aggrieved right now.

To Yaacoub, there is something troubling within the Islamic tradition that has allowed this to happen, and his belief is shared by many Christians who have had similar experiences. He muses that perhaps the only hope is for Christians to leave the Middle East.

The numbers are not encouraging: *The Economist* magazine reported that over a century's time, the proportion of Christians in the Middle Eastern population decreased from 14 percent in 1910 to just 4 percent today.

Even grimmer are the specific statistics of countries disrupted by war: Iraq's Christian population is now only a third of what it was a decade ago, CNN reported. There are only about 500,000 Christians in Iraq now, down from 1.5 million a decade ago. And in Syria, a onetime Christian population of 1.1 million is now about 500,000 -- 600,000 either "fled or died," CNN reported.

"As Christians, I don't think we have confidence in this region," Yaacoub said. There is probably no future for the Christians here, he said. "It's why I feel like a stranger."

Marlene Constantin, a project manager at the Catholic Near East Welfare Association/Pontifical Mission, hopes that is not the case. She still has faith that Christianity will endure in the Middle East, and that the religion's 2,000 years in the region will prove durable. "Yes," she said, "I do have faith about that."

The hope that Christianity will remain durable here is partly due to Christians feeling the region needs them. Sana Samiah, a humanitarian worker for the Greek Catholic church in the city of Zahle, Lebanon, said Christians -- many of whom are middle-class professionals -- are a bridge between Arabic and Western culture. Also contributing to that bridge are Catholic educational institutions, many run by women religious.

"Without support, the Christians will leave and that will be a loss for the whole region," she said, arguing that religiously moderate Muslims want the Christians to stay. "They know the value of the Christians staying in the region."

Feeling unwelcome

Still, feeling like a stranger is a common experience these days in the Middle East. In the midst of millions of refugees trying to create new lives and identities in new countries, religious affiliation has come to mean much more than it did in the past.

To hear people of both faiths tell it, religion was once rarely on people's minds -- religious identity among minority Christians and majority Muslims was a secondary issue.

Whether that was true can be debated. But a decade of wars in Iraq and Syria that have pushed millions into neighboring countries means that who you are religiously is now a primary form of identity and meaning.

It is another outcome of the legacy of war.

"War has changed the mentality of everyone," said Sleiman El Khoury a Syrian humanitarian worker who now works in Beirut for Jesuit Refugee Service. In the context of the Syrian crisis, that means "if you're a Christian you are perceived as pro-al-Assad [Syrian President Bashar Assad]. If you're a Muslim, you're perceived as a terrorist."

His Jesuit Refugee Service colleague, Sharleen Issa, who like El Khoury is Christian, has a similar view. "The war reminded you of your religion," she said. "Before [the start of the war in] 2012, people didn't pay much attention to religion in Syria."

Walking together on Beirut's busy streets one afternoon, El Khoury interjected: "The root of the problem is politics."

Issa agreed. "The war made these things appear. Earlier, it was considered impolite to even ask about religion."

No longer. The grievances about religion are now out in the open -- though many refugees, sensitive to the need to be careful about what they say publicly, given their legal status, are sometimes reluctant to be quoted by name on the topic.

This is certainly the case among Christians; among Muslims, it is common to hear people say that people of the two faiths are cordial to each other.

"I have different friends -- Kurdish, Christian. All are one," said Syrian refugee Hanan Hretan, a Muslim.

One Christian refugee from Syria, who did not want to be identified publicly on the issue of religion, said members of her family witnessed a Muslim militiaman rape a Christian girl during the military takeover of a predominantly Christian area. That experience proved searing, the refugee said, and she will not allow her daughter to interact with Muslim men.

Iraqi refugee Sanaa Abdallah Yaacoub, whose family fled Iraq after an Islamic State takeover, said that among Christians, there is an overall wariness and even fear of Muslims right now. But she added that the Islamic State group is, of course, an extremist faction. "Muslims can be peaceful," she said. "Not all are ISIS, there are those who pray to God and are peaceful."

Others are more adamant on that point. "ISIS has nothing to do with Islam. It's taking the name of Islam," said Sr. Judith Haroun, general superior of the Antonine Sisters, a Lebanese Maronite Catholic congregation. "This is fanaticism; it's not Islam. We've lived with Muslims for years."

Still, mistrust hangs in the air, even for Lebanese who are welcoming refugees. "We sympathize with them," said Sabah Rizk, who like Yaacoub is a patient at a medical clinic in Beirut run by a consortium of Catholic sisters. The influx of refugees "is putting pressure on us all."

The new religious dynamics -- Rizk is Christian -- add to the problems, she said. "It's not fear exactly, but mistrust, yes."

Of course, not only Christians feel aggrieved. In Beirut, a city with a large Christian population, things are not always easy for Muslim women wearing the hijab. Appearing in public -- on the streets to shop, say - - can sometimes mean dealing with taunts and slurs. One refugee from Syria, who did not want to be identified publicly, has heard the whispers and taunts of "Daesh," an Arabic-language acronym for the Islamic State, more than once on the street, she said.

It does not make her feel welcome or comfortable in Beirut.

Wary of the future

Nayla Tabbara, director of the Beirut-based Adyan Institute, said that perceptions of "victimhood" are common in both Sunni and Shiite traditions now, but can be found among those of many religious traditions. Adyan, an interreligious studies institute, promotes dialogue and receives financial support from Catholic Relief Services and other Catholic groups.

Breaking cycles of distrust are not easy. But Tabbara cautioned that religious traditions also have within them the potential to promote building and healing, and not sow defeat, anger or retribution.

"I remember a letter from an Iraqi who had been displaced, and commenting on how easy it is to fall into fear and victimhood," Tabbara said. "But this Iraqi realized that the Gospels call on us to build. Forgiveness and reconciliation are on the path. Ultimately, it is to think about life, not death, to build and not destroy."

Certainly, she said, in war and conflict, "people go into their own shell and become very sectarian." That is understandable. Tabbara, who is Muslim, said it is not her role or the role of other Muslims to tell Christians who have experienced hardship at the hand of Muslims that they need to forgive Muslims.

"It's our place, first, to talk to our own," she said. "When people have suffered, it is not our place to tell them that they should forgive others."

Finding common humanity across religious lines is needed, she said, but people do not have to put aside their religious identities. What is needed, she said, are affirmations of religious identity that are life-giving, generous to all and respectful of other traditions.

The responsibility of those working for peace is "to provide the tools to change the religious discourse. We need to reform the discourse."

Kamal Abdelnour, a project manager with the Catholic Near East Welfare Association/Pontifical Mission, understands the current discourse and the heated nature of the moment right now. But he notes that, in terms of numbers, the Islamic State group is harming more Muslims than Christians.

He takes a long view: Extremist groups eventually die out, and this period of tension "will pass."

Islam, Abdelnour says, "is not a bad religion. It's a good religion. We Christians have lived with Muslims for 1,400 years without problems. Eventually, things will change for the best."

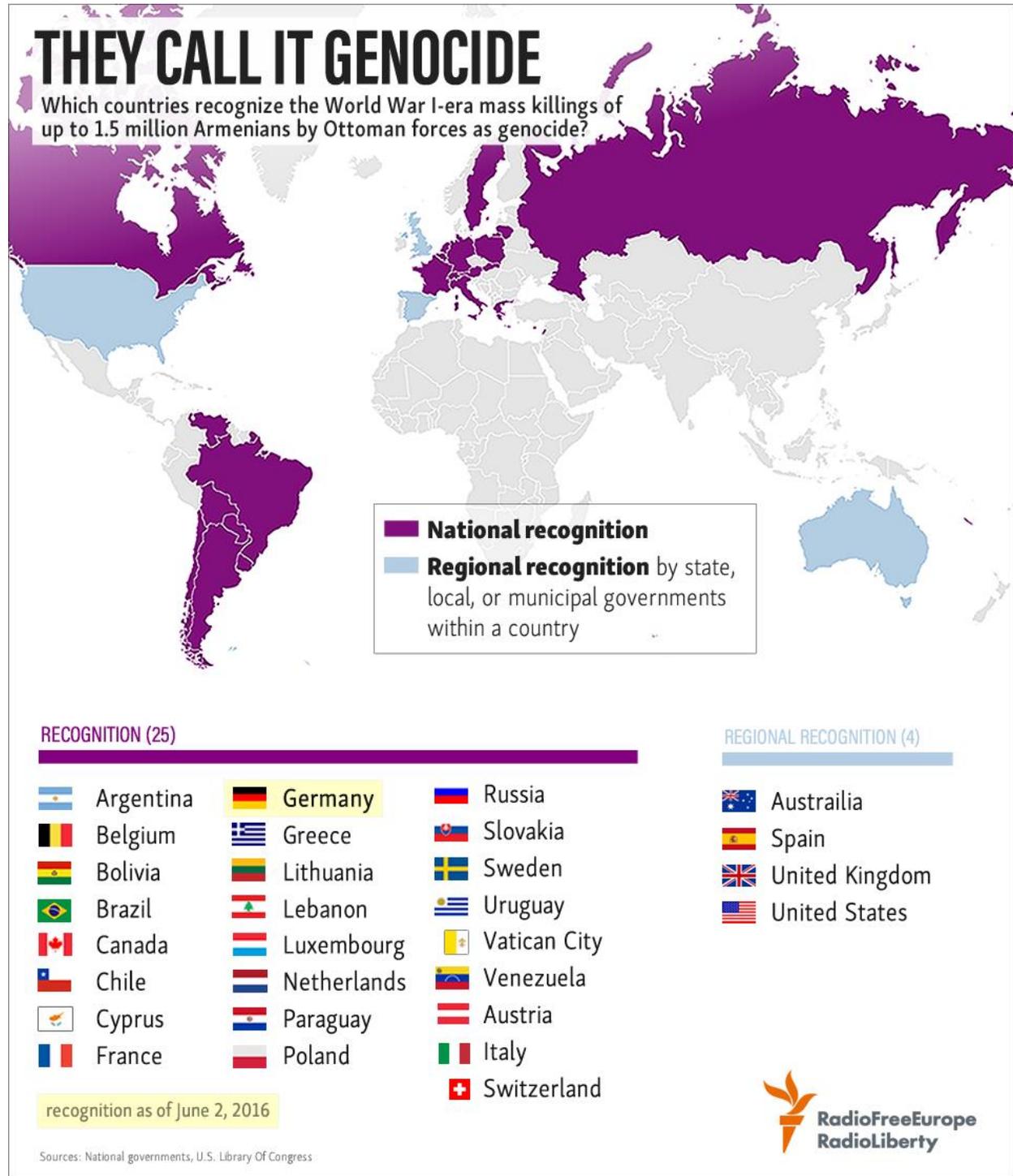
Still, he acknowledges the grave difficulties now. "It will end at some point," Abdelnour said of current tension between those of different faiths and the extremism that has fueled it. "But at what price? How many cities will be destroyed? How many lives will be lost?"

Fr. Youssef Yaacoub does not disagree with any of this. But he remains wary about the future -- at least the immediate future. Asked if there is any hope for reconciliation between peoples of the two faiths, he remains neutral.

"All I will say," he said, "is that it's a very difficult situation right now."

[Chris Herlinger is an international correspondent for Global Sisters Report.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/global/two-religions-tension-wars-extremism-fray-christian-muslim-relations-middle-east>



Germany just voted to recognize the Armenian genocide. Turkey is furious.

You'd think that the German parliament, of all parliaments, would be able to vote to commemorate a genocide without stirring up a controversy.

Yet Thursday morning, when the Bundestag passed a resolution labeling the 1915 slaughter of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire a "genocide," the Turkish government reacted with fury. Turkey recalled its ambassador from Berlin, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened to take more steps to punish Germany. ["We will do whatever is necessary to resolve this issue,"](#) he warned ominously.

This issue could not be more fraught. Recognizing the Armenian genocide is, for Turks, a grave insult — essentially, it links their nation's creation to a crime of monumental proportions. They've embarked on a decades-long, surprisingly successful campaign to block the international community from recognizing it. Yet for Germans, recognizing the genocide is crucially important to coming to terms with their own history of mass slaughter.

The vote also comes at a critical time in German-Turkish relations, as the two countries are absolutely vital in resolving the Syrian refugee crisis. So this isn't just an academic dispute between the two countries; the stakes are real for the entire European continent.

Why the Armenian genocide is so controversial



(Photo12/UIG/Getty Images) Armenians in 1915, on the deck of a French cruiser that rescued them from genocide.

To understand the German-Turkish controversy, you need to understand the Armenian genocide itself — and the political controversy that erupted in its aftermath.

In 1908, a military coup — led by the so-called "Young Turks" — took control of the Ottoman Empire, which at the time was reeling from a series of disastrous wars. Their goal was to revive the nation, partly through liberal reforms and partly through unifying the country around Islamo-Turkic ethnic nationalism.

"There was a policy of Turkification by the young Turks dating back to 1908," Hrach Gregorian, a practitioner in residence at American University, tells [PBS](#). "The Armenians were viewed as a threat to Turkish identity and Turkish security."

So during World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was buckling even further under the pressure of the conflict, the Young Turks launched a campaign to rid the country of its 2.1 million Christian Armenians, who lived in the province of Anatolia.

"The genocide occurred when state authorities decided to remove the Armenians from eastern Anatolia in order to realize a number of strategic goals," University of Chicago historian [Ronald Grigor Suny](#) writes. It was "initiated at a moment of near imperial collapse when the Young Turks made a final, desperate effort at revival and expansion of the empire that they had reconceived as more Turkic and Islamic."

The scale of the slaughter, which took place over the course of two years, was horrific. "More than a million Armenians were exterminated through direct killing, starvation, torture, and forced death marches," the [International Association of Genocide Scholars](#) explains in a 2006 letter. "The rest of the Armenian population fled into permanent exile."

That this slaughter took place, and that it was a targeted campaign of genocide, has been established beyond any reasonable doubt. "The documentation on the Armenian Genocide is abundant and overwhelming," as the genocide scholars' letter puts it.

Yet the official policy of the Turkish government since basically forever has been to deny that the Armenian genocide happened. The government contends that it was a civil war between Turks and Armenians, and that the Armenians fled when the Turks emerged victorious.

"I think, for the Turkish government, there are three factors that prevent it from acknowledging and apologizing," [Gregorian says](#). He continues:

The first is, it's a shameful act and no government wants to admit to it. The second is, there is some concern about reparations and land claims. And the third is, there are — there are substantial nationalists, right-wing nationalists in Turkey that are violently opposed to such acknowledgment.

The Turkish government doesn't just deny the genocide — it puts immense diplomatic pressure on other countries to avoid acknowledging the historical reality. And because strategically important Turkey wields more influence on world powers than does small, relatively unimportant Armenia, this strategy has basically worked.

A scant [20 countries](#) formally recognize the Armenian genocide, with both [Israel](#) and the [United States](#) among the holdouts. When the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to recognize the genocide in 2010, the Obama administration successfully worked to block the resolution, arguing that it would imperil US-Turkish relations.

"The Obama administration strongly opposes the resolution that was passed by only one vote by the House committee and will work very hard to make sure it does not go to the House floor," then-[Secretary of State Hillary Clinton](#) said.

<http://www.vox.com/2016/6/2/11839830/germany-vote-armenian-genocide>

[Worldwide Condemnations, Condolences for Orlando Attack](#)

The UN Security Council, foreign governments, religious leaders, and civil society organizations issued condemnations of Sunday's attack at an LGBT nightclub in Orlando, Florida, that left fifty people dead.

Repudiations of the attack and condolences came from (Al Jazeera) Pope Francis, Afghanistan's chief executive, Iran's foreign ministry, and Turkey's deputy prime minister (LA Times), among others. A Chinese state-run newspaper published excerpts (Global Times) from a letter from Chinese LGBT rights organizations condemning "terrorism and all forms of violence based on sexual orientation." U.S. authorities continue to investigate the motivations of the shooter, Omar Mateen, who is increasingly seen as a "lone wolf" gunman.

ANALYSIS

"There needs to be some type of civil society program or organization that provides an 'off-ramp' where law enforcement can direct people like Mateen. This would be a program for individuals who they don't think should be kept on their radar as an imminent threat. So, in Mateen's case, this program could have stepped in between the time the FBI closed its investigation and the Orlando attack. This type of organization would be [embedded in civil society](#) and deal with individuals who are on the verge of going down the path that we know can lead to violence," Karen J. Greenberg says in a CFR interview.

"Firearms killed over 13,000 Americans last year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a figure which more than doubles when suicides are included. It has [long befuddled America's allies](#) that a rich and civilized nation that regularly seeks to keep the peace around the globe seems incapable of reining in access even to military-style weaponry at home. Lobbyists at the National Rifle Association have somehow persuaded politicians that the right to bear arms embodied in the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment is sacrosanct in a way other elements of the Constitution are not," Richard Beales writes for Reuters.

"In countries where large and highly-capable militant armies exist, [governments lack the homeland security and law enforcement infrastructure](#) needed to prevent mass-fatality attacks as successfully as been the case for the United States. The innocent victims of terrorism within these countries suffer so greatly, because they try to create a life among ongoing insurgencies and civil wars, cannot rely upon the state to protect them, and then are killed by terrorists searching for the least well-defended populations, in order to spread fear and elicit recruits. Few of these eighty-two attacks were covered by Western media, and even those (like myself) who try to understand terrorism probably knew of only a dozen of them," writes CFR's Micah Zenko in this blog post.

[Afghanistan's dwindling Sikh, Hindu communities flee abuses](#)

By **Hamid Shalizi/REUTERS** | June 23, 2016



Afghan Sikh Jagtar Singh Laghmani, 50, sits at his traditional herb shop on June 19, 2016, in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo by Mohammad Ismail/REUTERS

KABUL (Reuters) On a bright day in downtown Kabul, Jagtar Singh Laghmani was in his traditional herb shop when a man turned up, drew a knife and told him to convert to Islam or he would cut his throat. Only bystanders and other shopkeepers saved his life.

The incident earlier this month was the latest attack on a dwindling community of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan, a deeply conservative Muslim country struggling with growing insecurity caused by an Islamist insurgency and economic challenges.

Once a thriving minority, only a handful of Sikh and Hindu families remain. Many have chosen to flee the country of their birth, blaming growing discrimination and intolerance.

“This is how we begin our day — with fear and isolation. If you are not a Muslim, you are not a human in their eyes,” said Jagtar Singh, speaking in his tiny shop in the bustling center of Kabul. “I don’t know what to do or where to go.”

For centuries, Hindu and Sikh communities played a prominent role in merchant trade and money lending in Afghanistan, although today they are known more for medicinal herb shops.

According to Avtar Singh, chairman of the national council of Hindus and Sikhs, the community now numbers fewer than 220 families, compared with around 220,000 members before the collapse of the Kabul government in 1992.

Once spread across the country, the community is now mainly concentrated in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Ghazni and the capital, Kabul.

Although Afghanistan is almost entirely Muslim, its constitution, drawn up after U.S.-led forces drove out the Taliban government in 2001, theoretically guarantees the right of minority religions to worship freely.

But as the conflict drags on, Avtar Singh said, conditions are worse than under the Taliban, which imposed strict Islamic laws, staged public executions and banned girls from schools.

Hindus and Sikhs had to wear yellow patches that identified them in public, but were otherwise seldom bothered.

“The good old days have long gone when we were treated as Afghans, not as outsiders,” Avtar Singh said from a temple in Kabul, all the while keeping an eye on visitors by using monitors linked to security cameras.

“Our lands have been taken by powerful figures in the government, especially by the warlords. We are facing threats, and this small community is getting smaller and smaller every day,” he added.

Last week, dozens of Hindu and Sikh families left Helmand, where Taliban insurgents, who have a presence in much of the southern province, sent a letter demanding 200,000 Afghani (\$2,800) a month from the community.



Afghan Hindu and Sikh families wait for lunch inside a Gurudwara, or a Sikh temple, during a religious ceremony June 8, 2016, in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo by Mohammad Ismail/REUTERS

Hostility

Tensions have surfaced in Qalacha, an area on the outskirts of Kabul where the Sikh and Hindu community owns a high-walled crematorium.

As the capital has expanded in recent years, the neighbourhood has become densely populated, and some newer residents oppose Hindu and Sikh cremations, a practice foreign to Muslims, who bury their dead.

“When they burn the body the smell makes our family sick and we don’t want this to happen here,” said Ahmad Timor, a Muslim resident in Qalacha.

The Sikhs say local Muslim hard-liners have stirred up hostility against them, and the community now requires police protection for funeral rituals.

“They throw stones and bricks at us, at the bodies of the dead, whenever there is a funeral,” said Avtar Singh, pointing to a newly built house next to the crematorium.

Dahi-ul Haq Abid, deputy minister for Haj and religious affairs, said the government had done what it could to improve the livelihood of Hindus and Sikhs.

“We agree that conflicts pushed them out of the country, but their condition is not as bad as they claim,” Abid added.

“We have allocated them a place to burn their bodies because inside the city people complained about the smell, but they did not agree,” he told Reuters.

Harassment is also common.

Jasmeet Singh, 8, stopped going to school because of what he said was daily harassment. He and other children from the community now either go to private schools or study inside the temple.

“While I was at school, other students were making fun of me. They were removing my turban, hitting me and calling me Hindu and kaffir (infidel),” said Jasmeet, as other boys nodded in agreement.

Increasing numbers of Sikhs and Hindus have moved to India, their spiritual homeland, but some say they remain foreigners wherever they go.

“When we go to India, we are known as Afghans, but when we are here, we are seen as outsiders even if we are native Afghan,” said Baljit Singh, a shopkeeper in Kabul. “We are lost between both worlds.”

<http://religionnews.com/2016/06/23/afghanistans-dwindling-sikh-hindu-communities-flee-new-abuses/>

Francis and Armenian Orthodox patriarch say churches are one in prayer, action

Joshua J. McElwee | Jun. 26, 2016

Francis in Armenia

VAGHARSHAPAT, ARMENIA

While there may continue to be theological obstacles to the full unification of the different long-separated Christian communions, Pope Francis and the head of the Oriental Orthodox Armenian apostolic church both boldly declared Sunday that their communities are already one in prayer and action.

During an Orthodox Divine Liturgy at the Armenians' mother church here, Francis and Catholicos Karekin II echoed one another in separate remarks.

The Armenian leader said in his homily for the liturgy that during the pope's Friday-Sunday visit to the country the two communities had "reconfirmed that the Holy Church of Christ is one in the spreading of the gospel of Christ in the world, in taking care of creation, [in] standing against common problems."

In his remarks at the end of the liturgy, the pontiff declared: "We have met, we have embraced as brothers, we have prayed together and shared the gifts, hopes and concerns of the Church of Christ. We have felt as one her beating heart, and we believe and experience that the Church is one."

Moments later Francis turned to Karekin and asked for a blessing, requesting the patriarch to "bless me and the Catholic Church, and to bless this our path towards full unity." The two then embraced in a fraternal hug with three kisses on the cheeks.

The shared sentiment of unity among the two leaders carries special significance as the Catholic and Armenian churches have been separated since the fifth century.

The Armenian church, which traces its founding to the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus, is one of six churches that form Oriental Orthodoxy. Those churches, which have about 84 million members together, recognize only the first three ecumenical councils.

Francis and Karekin were speaking at a liturgy held in the square outside the Armenian church's Etchmiadzin Cathedral, a fourth century building that is among the oldest cathedrals in the world.

As the Catholicos led the Armenian community in a liturgy marked by use of elegant gold and red-trimmed liturgical vestments and chanted music with strong vibrato, the pope sat on the side of the sanctuary, using a booklet to follow along in the rite.

It was only the second time that Francis had publicly attended an Orthodox liturgy since his election in March 2013, following a liturgy with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul in November 2014.

Later in the afternoon Sunday Francis and Karekin released a joint common declaration in which they stated: "We gladly confirm that despite continuing divisions among Christians, we have come to realize more clearly that what unites us is much more than what divides us."

"We urge our faithful to work in harmony for the promotion in society of the Christian values which effectively contribute to building a civilization of justice, peace and human solidarity," they continued. "The path of reconciliation and brotherhood lies open before us."

The Christian leaders also used the statement to speak out about what they called the "immense tragedy" of displacement and targeting of ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

Invoking Bartholomew and Thaddeus alongside the apostles Peter and Paul, founders of the Christian church in Rome, they called for "a change of heart in all those who commit such crimes and those who are in a position to stop the violence."

"We implore the leaders of nations to listen to the plea of millions of human beings who long for peace and justice in the world, who demand respect for their God-given rights, who have urgent need of bread, not guns," they stated.

Francis and Karekin also invoked Jesus' words in Matthew's Gospel about seeing him in the hungry and giving them food, or in the stranger and welcoming them, asking Christians "to open their hearts and hands to the victims of war and terrorism, to refugees and their families."

"At issue is the very sense of our humanity, our solidarity, compassion and generosity, which can only be properly expressed in an immediate practical commitment of resources," they stated.

In his homily at the Divine Liturgy earlier Sunday, Karekin reflected on the Armenians' Gospel reading for the day, which was Matthew's account of Jesus' feeding of 5,000 people with only five loaves and two fishes.

"The essence of this miracle, which became one of the important missions of Christ's holy church, is the satisfaction of empty spirits by the Lord-given teachings and the support of the needy through compassion," said the Catholicos.

"The Lord urges his followers to rejuvenate faith by works, to conjoin prayer and worship with compassion, and to give alms; through which, by the appeasement of hardship and tribulations, we are co-workers with God," he said.

The Armenian leader also said that faith in God today "is being tempted and human souls are being hardened during times of hardship and difficulties as well as during times of wealth and lavishness, when they are disengaged with the concerns of those who long for daily bread and are in pain and suffering."

"The root of evil in modern life is in trying to build a world without God, to construe the laws and commandments of God which bring forward economic, political, social, environmental and other problems, that day by day deepen and threaten the natural way of life," said Karekin.

In his three-day visit to Armenia, Francis has been sending both ecumenical and political messages.

On Saturday [he called on Christians](#) [1] to "abandon rigid opinions" in the search for unity among their different communions and demanded the wider world not forget the lessons of the World War I-era killings of some 1.5 million Armenians.

Visiting the large memorial complex to the killings in Yerevan, the country's capital, the pontiff wrote in its guestbook that memory of the event "should not be watered-down or forgotten."

Francis is to conclude his visit to Armenia Sunday afternoon with a trip to the apostolic church's monastery of Khor Virap, an historic institution that dates to the seventh century and is within walking distance of the Armenia-Turkish border.

The pope is to return to Rome Sunday evening.

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<https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-and-armenian-orthodox-patriarch-say-churches-are-one-prayer-action>

[Catholic News Service has just posted a wonderful 3-minute video on the visit of Pope Francis to Armenia.](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTlCT4iM6lw&authuser=0>

Brexit And The Holy And Great Synod Of The Orthodox Church: The Return Of Nationalism by [Lucian N. Leustean](#)

During the last weeks of June 2016, two major international events took place, namely the 'Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church', on the island of Crete (June 16-27), and the British referendum that narrowly voted to leave the European Union (June 23). At first sight, the two events are unrelated. One is the product of extensive inter-Orthodox dialogue that began in 1923, nearly a century ago. The other is the expression of the democratic political vote that took place in Britain, on Europe's western periphery. Although neither event referred to the other, both are representative of tectonic shifts in the international liberal order of the post-Cold War era.

What do they have in common?

First, the holding of the Orthodox Synod was agreed on at the time of Russia's takeover of Crimea in March 2014. For the last two years since its announcement, regular meetings of hierarchs planning the agenda were interspersed with references to the religious and political situation in Ukraine. Subtle allusions to Russia's geopolitical ambitions were also made during the Brexit debate, to the extent that on the day when the official results were made public, President Putin declared his dissatisfaction with this British criticism. Ukraine was the unseen face of both the Synod and the British referendum. Fracture between European political elites was particularly evident during the last two years. The British Prime Minister Cameron was notably absent from meetings between Chancellor Merkel, President Hollande and President Putin negotiating the Donbass conflict and the Minsk accords.

Second, the Synod and the Brexit vote took place at the time of unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Syria. The decision of the Patriarchate of Antioch, based in Damascus, not to attend the Synod, demonstrated the struggle for religious and political survival in the Middle East. Its conflict with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem over the jurisdiction of the faithful in Qatar denoted the geopolitical strategies of churches and their search for authority, recognition and regional influence. The forced displacement of Syrian refugees also made headlines during the debate on the British referendum, to the extent that a few days before the vote, a poster with migrants marching towards Europe was presented as a sign of a veritable siege on the British coast.

Third, and more importantly, the Synod and the Brexit vote indicated the return of nationalism to the midst of the international liberal order in post-Cold War Europe. The British decision to leave the European Union has been presented in the media precisely in this way, as a unique 'British' case. The refusal of the Russian, Georgian and Bulgarian churches to attend the Synod emphasised the 'national' dimension of the Orthodox church. Before being part of the wider family of the Orthodox commonwealth, these churches are 'national' with close links to state structures, diplomacy and political interests.

Both the Brexit decision and the Synod will shape the future of the European continent for years to come. The conflict in Ukraine continues to produce headlines and its religious dimension remains unsolved. Will an independent national Ukrainian Church be recognised by the other Orthodox churches? The dramatic forced displacement of people in Syria challenges the very survival of Christian communities in the Middle East. Will religious communities in the Middle East engage with their counterparts or focus exclusively on national objectives? These are potent questions directly linked to nationalism. The unleashing force of nationalism in Europe shapes the ways in which religious

communities and state structures engage with the international liberal order. The rebuttal of the *status quo* was evident on the first day after the official conclusion of the Orthodox Synod, when the Moscow Patriarchate criticised the ways in which decisions were adopted by stating that ‘democracy is irrelevant in church life’. Both churches and states will become more involved in the return of nationalism as a subterfuge to European integration and liberal values. The impact of the Brexit vote and the holding of the Synod may not immediately reverberate across Western Europe, but more in the East, where the interplay between Eastern Orthodoxy, geopolitics and nationalism provides the source for transnational alliances based on interests, security and political power.

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<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/06/29/brexit-and-the-holy-and-great-synod-of-the-orthodox-church-the-return-of-nationalism/>

The Fruit Of The Holy And Great Council

by [Alberto Melloni](#)

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was concluded on Sunday June 26th at Kolymbari, Crete. Within eight days of work, all the typical practices in the history of Synods were experienced: doubt and fermentation, surprises and compromise, conflicts, such as the crisis and the impasse in the final days that brought the Council one step away from failure.

In reality, it wasn't the absence or the positions of the four Churches (among them the Church of Moscow) which endangered the Council. It was the persistence of a radical faction of the Church of Greece which requested that the other churches not be called "Churches", including the Catholic Church. At some point, it seemed that the Council was fated to either succumb to this demand or to admit the failure of the Council. In this case, the Council would have given a great gift to the Russian Church, which always recognized the ecclesiastical nature of Catholicism and would have precedence in talks with Rome.

Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon himself intervened to remind all that from the 11th to the 20th century, even in the most heated disagreements, Orthodoxy never denied Rome the title of "Church". And on the night between Friday and Saturday came the conciliatory solution in the form of a synodal Circular, which summarizes all the documents. It recognizes the "historical name" of the "Christian Churches and Confessions" which in the official translations into English, French, and Russian are referred to as "non orthodox" and binds all of Orthodoxy to dialogue. Something which was not a given.

A brief version of the Circular was read in its abbreviated form during the closing liturgy of the Council, during which the synodal decisions were published. Furthermore, these documents will be sent to the Churches, both those present and absent, for their approval. Hence, the Council closed on a balance which is based on three foundations: the documents, the hall, and the fact that the Council itself took place.

Although the documents were accurate and the product of discussions, they remained just as they were since the closing of the Synaxis of the Primates: texts of compromise, sometimes disappointing, although they contained patristic theology. A few paragraphs – such as that in the Circular which refers to the refugees as an eschatological point, as a reminder of the final judgment of the Gospel of

Matthew, or that which is relative to the conciliar nature of the Church – bear a theological mark which can speak to everyone. However, they do not contain constraints of a conservative nature, as was feared initially. And that’s something.

The experience of the Council hall may be more positively assessed. The orthodox metropolitans, just as each bishop, needed time to learn to listen to one another, to oppose, to exert irony, to understand. Eight days, which began after a two-hour liturgy, proved that the procedure of mutual understanding and true brotherhood is possible and fertile, although there isn’t much that can be done in such a short period of time. However, it was enough to unravel “clichés.” And that’s something.

Lastly, the Council was ultimately a success. A success for Metropolitan John Zizioulas, an elder theologian who began to ask for one when Cardinal Martini requested the convention of a Council for the Catholic Church. In contrast to the then Archbishop of Milan, he (Zizioulas) was heard. It was also a success for Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis of France, who handled the discussions for the content of the Circular.

But, above all, it was a success for Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who proved that the function of the primacy of Constantinople may be exercised by giving voice to all, by the consensus of all the Christian churches – this is what the patriarch claimed persistently in his closing speech.

The Council closed with the opening up of new challenges: the first of these involves the absences. The absence of some Churches did not prevent nor did it cancel the Council: but absence should not allowed to become established. The spirituality, the theology, the prayer of the Russian Church is of vital importance for the whole of Christianity: and just as Orthodoxy can not exist without Russia, there can not exist a Russian which is foreign and indifferent to the fate of Orthodoxy. The same applies for Bulgaria, Georgia and Antioch. It has been demonstrated once again that the conciliar way is the one that can bring society where it seems impossible to achieve.

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<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/07/01/the-fruit-of-the-holy-and-great-council/>

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