

Holy Wisdom

Peace: Showing that Others Matter!

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

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

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Our Work at the United Nations

Dr. Riccitelli to Serve on 67th United Nations DPI/NGO Conference Committee



SOCA'S UN REPRESENTATIVE TO SERVE ON 67TH UNITED NATIONS DPI/NGO CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

United Nations, New York – Dr. A. M. Riccitelli, SOCA's representative to the United Nations Department of Public Information has been chosen to serve on the 67th UN/DPI/NGO conference committee. The conference, to be held August 22-23, 2018 at United Nations headquarters in New York, is titled "We the Peoples...Together Finding Global Solutions for Global Problems." Dr. Riccitelli has co-chaired the conference planning media sub-committee in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2016, 2017, for a total of six times since becoming SOCA's representative at the United Nations Department of Public Information in 2005.

This year she will work as a member of the Workshop Sub-Committee. Members of this committee will review proposals from NGOs around the world which are affiliated with UN/DPI, and select workshops as side events for the conference. These events provide a platform for Civil Society to share ideas and learn from each other in an effort to solve problems together. The workshops must relate to the overall theme of the conference.

"We the Peoples..." with this simple introduction, the United Nations Charter lays out an ambitious and noble mandate. The impetus for creating such an organization came from an understanding, after two world wars, that a global framework for working together was essential to avoid a repeat of the catastrophic suffering. Yet today, skepticism is rising worldwide about the value of multilateralism and the United Nations faces the challenge of remaining relevant and effective.

The conference is an opportunity to take the UN's people centered mandate forward, in closer partnership with civil society. The re-positioned UN development system will offer a platform for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to work more effectively with the UN to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and to communicate and advocate for it.

Syrian Orthodox Church in America does outreach to students at Wagner College

On April 17, our two UN Youth Representatives, Christopher Casais and Dominic Zamarlicki held a forum and discussion on the work of the United Nations. Their Reports follow.

Presentation to Wagner College students on the role of the United Nations in Diplomacy and Religious Freedom

By Christopher Casais

On April 17, 2018, Dominic Zamarlicki and myself presented to a group of Wagner College students on the topic of the role the United Nations has in diplomacy and legal matters as well as in religious affairs. With Dominic's focus on political philosophy and my concentration in theology and religious affairs, we were able to present on a topic that has critical ramifications for world peace; The philosophical concepts of religious freedom and 'faith' and 'reason' and of the appropriate or ethical relationship we ought to have to these concepts is an existential and unavoidable one that we must come to grips with. In other words, the United Nations' role in establishing world peace through diplomatic/legal methods hinges also on understanding the existential question of how to find the appropriate relation between the philosophical/legal/reason/diplomatic/ethical and the religious/faith. The hope of the presentation, then, was that the Wagner College students would better understand and appreciate the role of the United Nations in the world by introducing or re-introducing to them these existential and unavoidable concepts. Moreover, the hope was to inspire the students to think more critically about issues in religious freedom, 'faith' and 'reason' and of natural and positive law so that we can learn to coexist in a world in the best and most appropriate way possible.

In understanding the role of the United Nations in regards to religious affairs worldwide, I chose to more specifically focus on the topic of religious freedom. Though religious freedom is protected by international law, it continues to be threatened by new challenges in different parts of the world; challenges that are re-emergent and we have been facing for centuries, having yet to solve them. Some skeptics are beginning to question the optimism that proponents of religious freedom hold as mentioned above due to challenges like abortion, revisionist theories of traditional family values and of theologically rooted moral codes (i.e. natural law and positive law). Students were given illustrations to demonstrate how important religious freedom is, for example, by reminding them of the real struggles that humanity faces when it comes when religious freedom is threatened, such as telling them of the religious persecution and genocide occurring worldwide, or of the forced baptisms or conversions, and our very real struggle with divorce and in understanding the role of the family in our society. Besides illustrations, religious freedom needed to be further explained and defined, which took up the remaining portion of the presentation.

In 1948, the United Nations, in Article 18 of the Declaration of Human Rights, recognized religious freedom as a universal right. Article 18 states,

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."¹

¹ GA Res. 217 (A (III)), December 10, 1948, UN Doc. A/810, at 71 (1948)).

So, religious freedom is not merely some desirable option, but is recognized as a universal inherent or inalienable right. At the basis of religious freedom is the universal belief that all humans want to be treated with respect and consideration. Stated differently, people want to follow the golden rule of treating others as we would wish to be treated, that is, with respect and consideration. The golden rule is found in all major religions and most philosophical traditions. As Allen D. Hertzke says, “This trait of common humanity- potentially recognizable by people of all faiths or no faith- can provide a justification for religious liberty understood as the freedom to live in accord with one’s conscience or belief.”² Moreover, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights exhibits how certain human traits justify religious freedom as inalienable. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Anchors universal rights in the ‘inherent dignity’ and ‘worth of the human person’ and in the ‘equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family’ who are ‘endowed with reason and conscience’”. In addition, Article 18 emphasizes the relational aspect of human life, that people must be free ‘in community with others’ to manifest their faiths and beliefs”.³ So, as we can see, dignity, reason, conscience, and community all point us in the direction of religious freedom. That in the religious traditions, the dignity and worth of a human being is rooted in their belief in a divinity and in their relation with that divinity, that is, being made in the image and likeness of God, should not take away their rights and worth as humans to follow that faith. Conversely, religious people should not force or coerce their views upon non-believers. In fact, most religious traditions, because of religious freedom, prohibit against the coercion or compulsion of belief in a divinity. Being created in the image and likeness of God means we have the ability of reason, creativity and free will. Having these qualities means that we are free to search, explore or even reject ultimate truths about timeless and existential questions and arrive at our own conclusions. For example, Chris Seiple, director of the Institute for Global Engagement which engages in relational diplomacy around the world in support of responsible religious rights and Dennis Hoover, the editor of the *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, both state, “Because all people seek answers to ultimate questions, states play with fire when they trample on these natural transcendent impulses.”⁴

² Hertzke, Allen D. *The Future of Religious Freedom: Global Challenges*. University Press, 2013, p. 27.

³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴ Hertzke, Allen D. *The Future of Religious Freedom: Global Challenges*. University Press, 2013, pp. 46-47.







Left: Christopher Casais. Right: Dominic Zmarlicki

The Depiction of Women and Women Leaders in Film, History, and Society



March 15, 2018, 2:30-4:00 pm

This CSW62 parallel event was sponsored by The Salvation Army Social Justice Commission and the UN Women National Committee.

This parallel event was moderated by Terry Brackett, retired Washington, DC attorney and member of UN Women National Committee. Panelists featured Madeline Di Nonno (PHOTO: <http://startupperphenomenon.com/2013/participant/madeline-di-nonno/>), CEO of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, whose motto is “If She Can See It, She Can Be It.” Madeleine illustrated this motto when she described how in 2013, more girls took up archery than ever before, inspired by “The Hunger Games.” Jamie Dobbie, the Executive Director of Peace is Loud, a leading non-profit founded by film maker and philanthropist Abigail Disney, described how Christian and Muslim women working together, brought peace to Liberia. Together they rose up, using non-violent tactics and put pressure on their government to end a bloody civil war and begin peace talks. Their story was documented in the 2008 film, “Pray the Devil Back to Hell.” Dr. Linda M. Heywood, Professor of African History, the African Diaspora and African American Studies at Boston University, spoke on the subject of her latest book the 17th century African queen Njinga who rivaled Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great in cunning and military prowess.

Attended and reported by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli, SOCA NGO representative to UN Department of Public Information.

Wisdom, Water and Rural Women; Unmuting Women’s Voices

March 15, 2018, 4:30-6:00 pm

This CSW62 parallel event was sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations; Congregations of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd; Mercy International Association; Salesians of Don Bosco; Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; Loretto at the UN; Society of the Sacred Heart at the UN; Malteser International; and the Sovereign Order of Malta. The event opened with a welcome from H. E. Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadro, the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations. A career diplomat with 32 years in Peru’s foreign Service, he noted that the High Level Panel on Water, “Making Every Drop Count,” co-chaired by the UN and the World Bank advocated for the privatization of water. “In Peru, there are geography challenges with water, the poor pay seven times more for water than the rich,” he noted. “Access to water is a human right. In the USA people are

buffered to global issues by so many layers of comfort” he added. The next speaker, Chris Schimmoeller, grew up in rural poverty in a tenant farmhouse without running water in Kentucky. As a 1991-92 Fulbright Scholar to India, her eyes were opened to the issue of water. She saw women and girls carrying it; she realized how heavy water was when it was carried. She saw heavy rains flood homes; and she saw the invasive species in flood water which bring disease to vulnerable populations. She is a rural Kentucky activist and an advocate of harvesting rainwater. She said, “We cannot grow beyond our means.” Meera Karunanathan is an International Water Campaigner for Blue Water Project, a global initiative of the Council of Canadians which promotes water justice around the world. She admits there is a politics of water and commends the UN for recognizing water and sanitation as a human right. It is the 6th sustainable development goal, or SDG. Meghan Clark, Associate Professor of Theology and Religious studies, St. John’s University, NY, and a faculty expert for the Holy See’s Mission to the United Nations, quoted Pope Francis: “All people have a right to safe drinking water. This is a basic human right.” The final speaker was Matteo Cinquemani, a Program Manager at Malteser International Americas, the worldwide relief agency of the Sovereign Order of Malta. An engineer by profession, Matteo has a specialization in water resource management and WASH – water, sanitation, and Hygiene. He is currently working on a Malteser International project in Haiti. He told us that women and girls collect water all over the world and it is “essential to listen to women’s voices in the decision making process. Projects must be gender sensitive and do no harm.” (Photo of Haiti project:<https://www.malteser-international.org/index.php?id=162495&L=OA%3DO%27%22>)

Attended and reported by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli, SOCA NGO Representative to UN Department of Public Information.

No Room in Rural Villages, Cities or Homes for the Disabled? Are Boys and Girls With Down Syndrome Being Left Behind?



March 20, 2018

This CSW62 Parallel event was sponsored by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN in collaboration with the Center for Family and Human Rights, the Pujols Family Foundation, the Jerome Lejeune Foundation and the newly released film, “Summer in the Forest,” about Jean Vanier and L’Arche.

The event was held in light of World Down Syndrome Day, which the UN General Assembly in 2011 decreed to be celebrated March 21, or 3-21, for Trisomy-21, the scientific name for Down Syndrome. Archbishop Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See Mission to the UN, said that most boys and girls

with Down Syndrome experience lethal discrimination before they take their first breath, through disability-selective abortion after parents receive genetic testing. “At the United Nations there is much sincere talk and passionate action to fight against any form of discrimination,” Archbishop Auza said, noting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, adopted in 2006, which aims to “promote protect and insure the full and equal employment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.” Yet he added, “in practice, many states, UN agencies and members of civil society tolerate gross violations of these commitments.” The Holy See invited persons with Down Syndrome, their families, advocates and research professionals to explore various challenges facing individuals with Down Syndrome and cultural attitudes toward those with disabilities. Reported by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli, SOCA NGO Representative to UN Department of Public Information.

Sharing the Journey of Migrants and Refugees: an Interfaith Perspective on the Global Compacts

United Nations, New York – May 3, 2018 – Sponsored by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See, together with Caritas Internationalis and its Share the Journey Campaign. H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza made opening remarks for this side event, taking place during intergovernmental negotiations in New York toward the adoption of a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and in Geneva with the office of the UN High Commissioner for refugees for the global compact on refugees. H.E. Archbishop Auza told the audience that Pope Francis in his message for the 104th World Day of Migrant and Refugees, called for solidarity. The Pope said our shared response should be to welcome, protect, promote and integrate. Archbishop Auza said that faith-based organizations are especially effective in carrying out these four essential tasks. This flows from their focus on the dignity of each person beyond economic and political consideration. For example, six of the nine agencies that assist the U.S. government in working with refugees are faith based. Speakers at the event also included Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, President of Caritas Internationalis and Archbishop of Manila; Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Co-President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace; Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee; Sheikh Mohammed Abou Zaid, Senior Judge of the Sunni Family Court of Saida in Lebanon; Venerable Gijun Sugitani, Chair of Religions for Peace, Japan; and Reverend Rachel Carnegie, Co-Executive Director of the Anglican Alliance. Attended and reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli, SOCA representative to UN/DPI. For photo: <https://holyseemission.org>

Our Outreach to Guatemala

Our NGO brings news of the work of the United Nations to this Mission in Guatemala (check spelling) and provides financial support. In return, the Pastor sends a message on how progress is taking place especially in view of the volcano eruption.

Programa pastoral de invierno



En San Nicolas, Chiantlia, Huehuetenango, Guatemala, se ha comenzado el programa pastoral de invierno denominado “Sembradores y Obreros”, en vías de concretizar la misión a mas profundidad. Durante el inicio del año, la comunidad eclesial, hizo un análisis profundo, para evaluar el trabajo pastoral. Incluyendo los beneficios espirituales y las

limitaciones pastorales que se tienen en el área. Ya que la población en su mayoría, vive en pobreza, vive del cultivo de papas, repollo, cuidado de ovejas, y otros. Que por las condiciones climáticas el cultivo de maíz, alimento fundamental, en Mesoamérica, no es viable.



El propósito fundamental de “*Sembradores y Obreros*” es buscar la manera de armonizar la evangelización y el trabajo. Y al mismo, ir buscando alternativas más viables para la sobrevivencia de nuestra comunidad como tal. Ya que estas comunidades llamadas en sí mismas “*milisianas*” porque su fundación viene de concesiones dadas a un buen grupo de defensas civiles.

Como comunidad cristiana se vive un fervor muy bendecido. La vida de sacramentalidad es una

experiencia del Espíritu Santo, que une más a la comunidad.

Bendiciones

Mi gratitud por su donación a la obra misionera que realizo en Guatemala.

Lamento no haberle visto personalmente durante mi estancia en NY.

La situación en relación a la erupción del volcán es aun muy delicada. Nosotros estamos bien.

Dios le bendiga

Fr Pedro

UNAI June Update

Dear UNAI members and friends,

Please find below the latest update from the United Nations Academic Impact and its members, as well as of other parts of the UN System.

With this issue, we'd like to bring to your attention the conference "Universities #JoinTogether" which UNAI co-organized with De Montfort University on 7 June at UN Headquarters in New York. We are also encouraging all our UNAI members to [submit materials](#) regarding any SDG-related activities carried out by their institutions that could be featured in our [#SDGsInAcademia](#) article series!

Enjoy the read,

Your UNAI team

Universities #JoinTogether

UNAI and De Montfort University co-organized the conference "Universities #JoinTogether" on 7 June. The event, which took place at UN Headquarters in New York, focused on how universities can help support Agenda 2030 and the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). The conference proved a great success, as it featured several impressive examples of how universities can play key roles in helping

bring about a more sustainable world. If you were not able to attend the conference, we encourage you to [watch the full event online here](#).

New UNAI quiz on Global Citizenship Education!

We have a brand new quiz ready for you! This time, you can test your knowledge on our fourth principle: global citizenship education, and the commitment to encouraging global citizenship through education. Take the quiz to see what you already know, and to learn more, about this principle.

Take the quiz: <https://academicimpact.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=8572b4cc1ffd18424c6e34975&id=0962bb9c69&e=ee54ceb241>

#SDGsInAcademia features SDG 5: Gender Equality

UNAI is continuing its weekly series of articles on #SDGsInAcademia, which highlights the importance of higher education in achieving the SDGs. In this new article, we feature work related to SDG 5 carried out by our amazing member institutions around the world.

Read more: <https://academicimpact.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=8572b4cc1ffd18424c6e34975&id=038283b37f&e=ee54ceb241>

Get inspired: GoGreen Initiative at NYU Shanghai

UNAI member institution NYU Shanghai developed its GoGreen initiative in 2015. Since then, it has spread through the NYU global network to New York and Abu Dhabi. The initiative just reached yet another nation when it was launched at Ariel University in Israel.

Learn more: <https://academicimpact.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=8572b4cc1ffd18424c6e34975&id=43acc466c4&e=ee54ceb241>

Inside Major UN Actions & Events

Syria Conference / Calls for accountability and redress as chemical attacks devastate Douma

Fifteen Syrian and international NGOs are calling for on states attending the EU and UN chaired **Brussels II Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the region** to do more to "overcome impunity and bring justice to victims for the overwhelming magnitude of atrocity over the past seven years."

"Impunity is affecting all Syrians inside and outside of Syria and will have severe long-term consequences if not addressed urgently. **Impunity for past and present crimes gives a blank check to perpetrators and abusers** to continue committing serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, and threatens to undermine popular trust in any judicial system reconstructed from its repressive forebears," said the letter to UN and EU leaders chairing the conference on 24-25 April 2018. Several Coalition members and its parent organization the World-Federalist Movement are among the signatories.

An alleged **chemical weapons attack** against civilians in Douma, Syria this week has been widely condemned by civil society. The attack is said to have killed at least 60 people and left over 1,000 injured.

Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch described the attack as a war crime attributed to the Syrian government. “There is no question that the Assad government is criminally liable for the war crime strategy of targeting civilians” he said on Monday, “I think a strong case can be made that Russia shares criminal responsibility for the war crime strategy pursued by the Assad government in targeting civilians.”

The **lack of decisive action taken by the UN Security Council** on the issue in the wake of allegations has outraged civil society, and has intensified the call for accountability and justice.

The **Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT)**, to which 115 states now belong, meanwhile called the UN Security Council to act on the violence and use of chemical weapons in Douma in accordance with the **Code of Conduct** regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Amnesty International Syria handed over more than **115,000 signatures** from around the world demanding Justice for Syria to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head of the **The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)** to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes in Syria was established by UN General Assembly resolution in December 2016.

Civil society and UN officials are also calling on all sides to the conflict to respect **UN resolution 2401**, which calls for a ceasefire and allowance of humanitarian assistance.

[Read the full letter here](#)

[Read more on the reaction to the chemical attack in Douma.](#)

Shared Security and Shared Well-being of the Korean Peoples

The Statement of Religions for Peace Secretary General

Dr. William F. Vendley

New York | 24 April 2018

Religions for Peace (RfP) International joins its national affiliates, the Korean Conference of *Religions for Peace* (KCRP- South Korea), and the Korean Council of Religionists (KCR-North Korea) in calling for shared security and shared well-being for all peoples on the Korean Peninsula.

The religious communities in South and North Korea have maintained contact, engaged in dialogue and built trust for over 25 years, even during challenging political and security situations. KCRP and KCR have been supported in their confidence building work by the solidarity of *RfP's* other national inter-religious councils around the world and particularly in the region, including the China Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP) and *RfP* Japan.

Religions for Peace knows from long experience that the Peoples in North and South Korea long for Peace, shared security and shared well-being. This was symbolized in 2013 when North and South Korean religious leaders held hands in front of over 700 applauding senior religions leaders from over 140 countries at the *Religions for Peace* 9th World Assembly in Vienna, Austria.

In solidarity with religious leaders in KCRP and KCR, *RfP* International respectfully urges the political leaders of North and South Korea to take bold steps to build Peace on the Korean Peninsula. *Religions for Peace* also pledges its principled solidarity in the efforts of the Korean Peoples to build shared Peace.

Dr. William F. Vendley

Secretary General

Religions for Peace International

UNAI May Update

The Millennium Fellowship: Application now open!

UNAI and Millennium Campus Network (MCN) are pleased to announce a strategic partnership to convene, challenge, and celebrate student leadership advancing UN goals. Building on their combined 17 years of experience engaging institutions of higher education, MCN and UNAI are partnering on the Millennium Fellowship. Between admission in August and conclusion of the program in December 2018, cohorts of Millennium Fellows will convene locally on their respective campuses to engage in the leadership development program with the goal of advancing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Read more and apply to the Millennium Fellowship [here](#).

Test your knowledge on the UNAI principles

UNAI is informed by a commitment to support and advance ten basic principles. The second of these principles is: capacity-building. A commitment to building capacity in higher education systems across the world. Take our quiz and test your knowledge on UNAI's second principle: capacity-building.

Take the quiz: <https://academicimpact.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=8572b4cc1ffd18424c6e34975&id=b519d7ed34&e=ee54ceb241>

UNAI campaign: #SDGsInAction

As part of the ongoing campaign on the SDGs carried out by the United Nations, UNAI is presenting a weekly series of articles on #SDGsInAction that highlights the importance of higher education in achieving the SDGs.

Read more: <https://academicimpact.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=8572b4cc1ffd18424c6e34975&id=7e5bb0851e&e=ee54ceb241>

UN-Making of Hate: What happened to the winners?

UNAI presents a series of articles on some of the projects implemented by the recipients of the UN-Making of Hate Diversity Contest held in 2015. The contest was a partnership with the UNHATE Foundation of United Colors of Benetton.

Learn more: <https://academicimpact.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=8572b4cc1ffd18424c6e34975&id=26103dceb8&e=ee54ceb241>

The NGO Reporter June 2018

Greetings from the Chair, NGO DPI and NGO CO-CHAIR, 67TH UN DPI NGO CONFERENCE

Bruce Knotts, Chair NGO DPI Executive Committee and NGO Conference Co-Chair Conference. There may have never been a more important conference at a time when there is a rise of nationalism and a decrease in multi-nationalism. We are faced with critical problems of climate change, unprecedented levels of forced migration, risk of nuclear war, poverty, and oppression.

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN: 67TH UN DPI NGO CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE 67th United Nations DPI/NGO Conference

We the Peoples... with this simple introduction, the United Nations Charter lays out an ambitious and noble mandate, the implementation of which has generated successes and challenges throughout the years. While the need for creating the United Nations after two world wars was stark and widely acknowledged, today there is rising skepticism regarding the value of multilateralism and the effectiveness of UN operations. "We need to assert the value of multilateralism, only global solutions can address global problems," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said upon taking office.

Winnie Byanyima Announced as Conference Chair!

I am honored to serve as Chair of the 67th United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) / Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Conference titled "We the Peoples... Together Finding Global Solutions to Global Problems" to be held on 22 and 23 August 2018 at UN Headquarters in New York.

USING THE PAST TO GUIDE THE 67th UN DPI/NGO CONFERENCE

As planning begins for the upcoming 67th United Nations DPI/NGO conference in New York City, NGOs can use the next few months to work with the NGO/DPI Executive Committee on conference planning. A strong conference requires broad attendance, effective speakers, and new strategies to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. As the largest gathering of NGOs at the United Nations, the Conference is a valuable venue for partnership building, one that is inclusive of member states and the private sector as well. The 2018 conference should look back upon UN history, previous DPI/NGO conferences and their achievements.

Call for Exhibit Proposals Guidelines and Requirements

Invitation to Submit Proposals

NGOs who are formally associated with the Department of Public Information (DPI) are invited to sponsor exhibits and/or partner with other entities to propose exhibits for the Conference

DPI NGO Townhall on the 67th UN DPI/NGO Conference

Was Held on 22 June 2018 - See it Here!

Hear the latest from the Conference Planning Committee and Sub-committees Co-chairs on UNWEB TV to keep up with the latest developments on the UN DPI NGO Conference, coming up in August.

THE NGO/DPI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Publishers of the NGO Reporter, the NGO/DPI Executive Committee was founded in 1962 to create a link between the United Nations and the Non-Governmental Organizations associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI). It is composed of eighteen Directors and encourages and assists NGOs, as members of civil society, to communicate their interests throughout the United Nations system and to support United Nations' goals and objectives. In partnership with the United Nations Department of Public Information, the NGO/DPI Executive Committee sponsors annual conferences for the 1500+ accredited DPI/NGOs around the world.

NGO/DPI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - CALL FOR NOMINATIONS 2018

The NGO/DPI Executive Committee, an eighteen member elected body, represents your interests as Non-Governmental Organizations associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI). The Executive Committee, which acts in an advisory and liaison capacity with DPI, meets at the UN Headquarters in New York each month, from July to June to discuss matters of interest and concern to NGOs associated with DPI. It is now preparing to hold its annual elections.

Religious News From Around The World

Religions for Peace Multi-religious Delegation's Visit to Rakhine State



Representatives of Religions for Peace visited Sittwe and Maungdaw in the north of Rakhine State, Myanmar, where militant attacks in August 2017 triggered massive operations by the security personnel on the area's Muslim communities and some 700,000 Muslims and hundreds of Hindus fled for Bangladesh. This region has also seen terrorist attacks by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) accused of massacres of a 100 Hindus and attacks on other ethnic and religious minorities. While acknowledging the authorities' duty to maintain law and order, the delegation expressed a concern that an excessive use of force could hamper the peace and reconciliation process.

The delegation saw from the air hundreds of burned and destroyed Muslim villages before visiting the sites of reception centers and transit camps. Included in the mission were meetings with representatives of various ethnic and religious groups.

It was noted with appreciation that refugee return infrastructure such as reception centers and transit camps are ready to welcome returnees from Bangladesh. Technical facilities, equipment, and necessary staffing such as health screening and identification procedures are in place. This calls for speeding up the finalization of the agreement between the Myanmar government and the United Nations on the return of refugees from Bangladesh. The delegation affirmed the relevance and urgency of the recommendations from the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by Mr. Kofi Annan.

Al Haj U Aye Lwin, Chief Convener of Islamic Center and Founding Member of RfP Myanmar discuss the National Identification and Verification procedures with the local authority at the refugee reception center in Maungdaw, Rakhine State. It was noted that those who have a proof of residence can go directly into the process of issuing a National Identification Card, while those who have lost identification documentations but were able to report on the village of origin will be crosschecked by the immigration with their records in the office and will be exempted from going through the National Verification Card (NVC) procedures. The authority confirmed that NVC is only for undocumented persons. (27 May 2018)

The delegation exchanged views with Union and Rakhine State government officials, stressing the need to overcome the prevalent culture of fear and suspicion and to promote inter-communal harmony, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, gender and citizenship. This multi-religious message for peace found in all religions was shared by members of the delegation.

In response to different narratives of victims, the delegation urged the Union Government to take full responsibilities for a thorough and transparent investigation into multiple crimes perpetrated in Rakhine State, including events related to entire populations such as the Rakhine Muslims, Myo, That, Dynet, Khamee, Kamen and the Hindu. Religions for Peace is encouraging a process to establish facts, restore rights of victims, and support social and political change. The process will contribute to overcoming fear, hatred and intolerance in Rakhine State and elsewhere.

In the meeting with the Religions for Peace multi-religious delegation in Nay Pyi Taw on 25 May, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi welcomed the delegation's offer of multi-religious solidarity and accompaniment for humanitarian response and peace building in Rakhine State, as well as in other ethnic conflict situations. The first meeting of a Religions for Peace Advisory Forum on the Advancement of Peace in Myanmar is scheduled to take place in October 2018, bringing together representatives of the Myanmar government, the military, parliamentarians from ruling and opposition parties, UN agencies, ASEAN, ICRC, international NGOs, national NGOs, religious leaders, and experts.

Accompanying the delegation were Union Minister for Religious Affairs, Chief Minister of Rakhine State, State Minister for Planning and Finance, and senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Bishop Gunnar Stalsett greeting with Chief Minister of Rakhine State and Union Minister for Religious Affairs (27 May 2018)

His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo, on behalf of the delegation, expressed appreciation to the Union and local governments and the military for facilitating this visit.

Members of the Myanmar National and International

Multi-religious Delegation Visiting Rakhine State

H.E. Cardinal Charles Bo

Archbishop of Yangon; Patron, Religions for Peace Myanmar

Bishop Gunnar Stalsett

Bishop Emeritus of Oslo, Norway; Honorary President, Religions for Peace International

U Myint Swe

President, Ratana Metta Organization; President, Religions for Peace Myanmar

Al Haj U Aye Lwin

Chief Convener, the Islamic Center of Myanmar; Founding Member, Religions for Peace Myanmar

Rev. Father Joseph Maung Win

Head of the Office of Yangon Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Interfaith;

Secretary General, Religions for Peace Myanmar

Rev. Kyoichi Sugino

Deputy Secretary General, Religions for Peace International

[Study finds mounting global restrictions on religion](#)

Washington D.C., Jun 22, 2018 / 12:06 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- Government restrictions on religion continued to rise across the globe in 2016, according to a recently released Pew study, which linked the stifling of religion to nationalist parties and organizations.

“This marks the second year in a row of increases in the overall level of restrictions imposed either by governments or by private actors (groups and individuals) in the 198 countries examined in the study,” said the Pew report.

The research found that 42 percent of countries experienced high or very high levels of overall religious restriction, which included hostile acts by government or private individuals or groups. This number is up from 40 percent in 2015, and 29 percent in 2007.

“This marks the biggest number of countries to fall in this top category since Pew Research Center began analyzing restrictions on religion in 2007,” Pew said.

“The share of countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ levels of government restrictions...rose from 25 percent in 2015 to 28 percent in 2016,” the study found. “Meanwhile, the share of countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ levels of social hostilities involving religion...remained stable in 2016 at 27 percent.”

The Middle-East and North Africa experienced the highest median level of government restrictions on religion, while Europe and the Americas were the only areas to experience an increase in median levels of social religious hostility.

Additionally, the research pointed to nationalist groups’ role in the rise of religious restrictions, particularly through targeting specific ethnic and religious minorities.

“In many countries, restrictions on religion resulted from actions taken by government officials, social groups or individuals espousing nationalist positions,” the Pew study noted.

Around 11 percent of countries saw government actors who “at times used nationalist, and often anti-immigrant or anti-minority, rhetoric to target religious groups in their countries in 2016,” – a 5 percent increase from the previous year.

European countries experienced this attitude most strongly, with around 33 percent having nationalist parties making statements against religious minorities, while 12 percent of Asia-Pacific countries shared a similar experience.

“Typically, these nationalist groups or individuals were seeking to curtail immigration of religious and ethnic minorities, or were calling for efforts to suppress or even eliminate a particular religious group, in the name of defending a dominant ethnic or religious group they described as threatened or under attack.”

Additionally, there was a 5 percent increase in countries where organized groups aimed to overtake public life at the expense of a religion.

The most popular targets for religious restrictions were Muslims, Christians and Jews.

“Looking at religious groups, harassment of members of the world’s two largest groups – Christians and Muslims – by government and social groups continued to be widespread around the world, with both experiencing sharp increases in the number of countries in which they were harassed in 2016,” the study said.

This research, which included 198 countries making up 99.5 percent of the world, comes from Pew’s ninth annual study of global restrictions on religion, which analyzes the “extent to which governments and societies around the world impinge on religious beliefs and practices.”

These levels were measured by government laws and policies, acts of individual or group hostility against religion, including armed conflict and terrorism. Harassment of religious groups was gathered by data relating to physical or verbal assaults, arrests, detentions, desecration of holy sites, and discrimination against religious groups via employment, education and housing.

The 2016 year was the most recent year in which data was available.

Other Related News

[A New Primate for the Eastern Diocese](#)

The Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America entered a new era of leadership on Friday, May 4, 2018, when the 116th Diocesan Assembly elected the Very Reverend Fr. Daniel Findikyan as the new Diocesan Primate.

Ordained as a celibate priest in 1997, and a noted international scholar of liturgics, Fr. Findikyan has served the church as dean of North America’s St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, and as director of the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, the Eastern Diocese’s research and scholarship facility.

He succeeds Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, at 28 years the longest serving Diocesan Primate.

On May 8, His Holiness Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, confirmed Fr. Findikyan's election in a letter of blessing. The confirmation occasioned a short enthronement service in New York's St. Vartan Cathedral, whereby Archbishop Barsamian ceremonially passed his staff of office to the new Primate.

Fr. Findikyan now serves as the 12th Primate of the Diocese, and the first in its 120-year history born in the United States of America. Click on the following links to read more about the [election](#) and the [Catholicos' confirmation](#), to [view photos](#) and to [view a video of the enthronement ceremony](#).

[A Pastoral Message from Fr. Daniel Findikyan](#)

In the past two weeks, the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America entered a new era of leadership under a new Primate: the Very Reverend Fr. Daniel Findikyan.

Elected by representatives of all our Diocesan parishes during the recent Diocesan Assembly, and subsequently confirmed and blessed in his new office by the Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Karekin II, Fr. Findikyan now offers this special video message to his flock: his first pastoral statement as Diocesan Primate.

Please click on the buttons below to view Fr. Findikyan's pastoral message, in Armenian and English.

[Watch the message in Armenian](#)

[Watch the message in English](#)

U.S. Slams Russian, Iranian, Af-Pak Religious Persecution In New Report



The United States says religious persecution continues to be widespread around the globe as it unveiled its annual report on religious freedom, with violations cited in Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, among other countries.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the [2017 International Religious Freedom Report](#) "is critical to our mission to defend religious liberty," as he presided over the release of the report at the U.S. State Department in Washington on May 29.

The United States remains "committed to protecting religious freedom around the world, both now and in the future," Pompeo said, noting that the report "documents across 200 countries and territories reports of violations and abuses committed by governments, terrorist groups, and individuals so that we may work together to solve them."

In Russia, the report notes that, although the constitution provides for religious freedom and the right to worship and profess one's religion, "the government prosecuted individuals of many denominations for unauthorized missionary activity under the amendments to antiterrorism laws passed in 2016, known as the Yarovaya Package."

The report singles out the situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose activity was criminalized, after the Supreme Court ruled in April 2017 that the sect was an extremist organization and prohibited them from operating in the country. The court upheld the ruling on appeal in July.

'Physical Assaults'

The sect has been operating in Russia and across the former Soviet Union since the early 1990s and claims some 170,000 adherents in Russia.

The report notes that, although "there were fewer instances of violence based on religious identity than in prior years," there were also reports of physical assaults on Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims, as well as other attacks on individuals, "possibly based on both their ethnicity and religion."

In Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014, "Russia-led forces continued to control parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and to detain and imprison religious leaders," said the report, noting that a military tribunal in Donetsk "sentenced an academic specializing in religious studies to 32 months in prison." The academic was later released in a prisoner exchange with the Ukrainian government.

In Iran, which the United States in 1999 designated as a Country Of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the penal code provides for the death sentence for "proselytizing and attempts by non-Muslims to convert Muslims, as well as for moharebeh (enmity against God) and sabb al-nabi (insulting the prophet)," the report notes.

Iran continued to execute people charged with enmity against God, "including four prisoners at Rajai Shahr Prison in December 20, and four men charged with waging 'war on God' in Kerman Province in September [2017]," the report said, adding that authorities "continued to harass, interrogate, and arrest Bahai's, Christians (particularly converts), Sunni Muslims, and other religious minorities."



Pakistani civil activists demonstrate against the killing of university student Mashal Khan, who was shot and beaten to death in the northwestern city of Mardan amid accusations of blasphemy. (file photo)

In Afghanistan, "conversion from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy and is punishable by death, imprisonment, or confiscation of property," the report says.

According to the Afghan Supreme Court, the Baha'i faith "is a form of blasphemy and is punishable by death. However, there were no reported prosecutions for apostasy or blasphemy," the report noted.

The Afghan branch of the Islamic State group and the Taliban "continued to target and kill members of minority religious communities."

Neighboring Pakistan continued to enforce blasphemy laws, "whose punishment ranges from life in prison to the death sentence for a range of charges, including 'defiling the Prophet Muhammad.'"

The report says that at least 50 individuals were imprisoned on blasphemy charges,"at least 17 of whom had received death sentences."

The document singles out an incident in April 2017, when a mob shot and beat to death student Mashal Khan at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, "following an accusation of blasphemy later deemed by investigators to be false, which prompted widespread condemnation in the country."

[Archbishop's letter ahead of India's 2019 elections incites political outrage](#)

by Wyatt Massey

A six-paragraph letter by the Archbishop of New Delhi is being called a church-led attack on Indian democracy. Archbishop Anil Couto published the letter in May to parish priests calling for a year of prayer before the 2019 general elections in India, which has long struggled with protecting religious minorities.

"We are witnessing a turbulent political atmosphere which poses a threat to the democratic principles enshrined in our Constitution and the secular fabric of our nation," Couto wrote before asking for a weekly fast and prayers for the nation on Fridays.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and Hindu nationalists responded to Couto's letter saying it was an attempt by the Christian church to divide the country, although the letter did not mention any political party or politician.

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