

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

World Leaders Pledge to Combat Climate Change

Leaders gathered at the United Nations Climate Summit on Tuesday have vowed to direct [new energy in enacting policies to fight against climate change \(Al Jazeera\)](#); speakers directed particular emphasis on the role of the United States and China, the world's biggest polluters. Tuesday's meeting was the [precursor to the 2015 Paris summit \(NYT\)](#) at which leaders hope to sign a binding agreement. More than 300,000 people participated in the People's Climate March on Sunday in New York in advance of the meeting. Tuesday's talks are likely to be overshadowed by United States-led airstrikes on ISIS targets in Syria. Obama is set to address the UN General Assembly Wednesday morning and later convene a meeting of the UN Security Council to pass a resolution to combat global terrorism.

Analysis

"The meeting's sole purpose is to mobilize political will for a binding global treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol in December 2015. The president may be tempted to avoid the topic altogether given the upcoming midterm elections. That would be a terrible mistake. He must speak truth to Capitol Hill and to the American people about the [enormous U.S. stakes in curbing carbon emissions](#)," writes CFR's Stewart Patrick.

"Climate change, as I write this, is [causing displacement, fuelling conflict and jeopardizes development](#) across the world. You could say that either these delegates in New York succeed, or we all fail. But that would be absolving the rest of us from our responsibilities. Let us send a clear and unequivocal signal that failure to act will have consequences at the ballot box for politicians and for the bottom line of businesses. If leaders are unwilling to lead when leadership is required, people must," writes former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in the *Huffington Post*.

"World leaders must act on *all* global challenges when they recognize them. Preventing bank failures and stopping terrorist attacks are important goals; [unless we get serious about addressing climate change](#), we are likely to have more of both," writes African Development Bank president Donald Kaberuka in *Project Syndicate*.

Activity reports from UNAI members

All UNAI members are required to submit an annual activity report, detailing activities carried out in the past 12 months. We have received numerous reports, which are being uploaded on the UNAI website as these reports become available. In this issue of the Newsletter, we share highlights of some of those reports.

Meiji University, Japan: During this reporting period, Meiji University founded the Noborito Institute Peace Education Resource Center to promote effective peace-making practices within its student body and beyond. The University also introduced a new admissions practice, entitled “Admission-upon recommendation”, which is intended to increase the rates at which refugees enroll at the Meiji. An event organized in conjunction with Japanese clothing retailer UNIQLO and supported by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Japan Office, collected recycled clothing for ailing refugee populations.

Central Institute of Business Management Research & Development (CIBMRD), India: In collaboration with H.E.R.D. Foundation, VSPM Academy of Higher Education, the Centre of Science for Villages, and the Institute of Rural Industrialization, CIBMRD organized an event titled “Gramin Samridhi – Growth Drivers for Sustainable Rural Development,” which took place in April 2014. CIBMRD also organized an Intra-Collegiate Street Play competition for students pursuing Masters degree in its Business Administration programme. The competition was organized to spread awareness among students and within the local community of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Grenoble Ecole de Management (GEM), France: GEM created a new position in 2014: the Chair of Mindfulness, Well-being and Economic Peace Education. Its mission is to contribute to the development of knowledge, practices and training focused on the management of occupational stress, well-being, the personal development of managers, an evolution in management methods and the understanding of a new industrial model centered on the highest human values and on

economic peace in order to promote sustainable and shared value creation.

DongSeo University, Republic of Korea: DongSeo’s Asia Summer Program (ASP) brought together 346 students and 31 professors from 26 different universities to learn directly about the diverse cultures of Asia. The three-week, credit-based program involved participants from universities in China, Bangladesh, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, and the US, among others. Participants enjoyed cultural experiences such as playing Korean games and sightseeing around Busan on an all-day tour. The programme also included field trips to Korea’s ancient capital city of Gyeongju and to Geogae Island.

Baltic Sea Region University Network (BSRUN): In May 2013, BSRUN hosted its annual “Green University” forum on topics related to sustainability. The conference took place at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland. The Network also hosted a seminar—in conjunction with the Modernization Partnership for the South Eastern Baltic Area—on “Creativity and Cooperation in the South Eastern Baltic Area.” This event took place in Kaliningrad, Russian Federation on the 7th and 8th of June, 2013. BSRUN also organized the event “Frameworks for University Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region” alongside the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The forum was held in Turku, Finland on 28 October 2013.

Long Island University (LIU), USA: In September 2013, LIU’s “CHATS” programme brought together local and foreign students with the goal of expanding these students’ knowledge of languages, cultures, art, and religions from all parts of the world. Also in the fall of 2013, LIU hosted a conference entitled “Muslim Journeys,” which included exhibits, programmes, book discussions, films and lectures focused on the cultural heritage of Islamic civilization. LIU also organized and conducted a workshop on “Regional Implications of the Arab Spring and the United Nations’ response.”

This Week at the UN – 8 August 2014

After a brief hiatus, I am pleased to be reporting once again. Since my last briefing, there has been much going on in the international community. News of a massive ebola outbreak and a downed Air Malaysia flight have dominated the press clippings. Although much more has been occurring over the past two months, this briefing will cover the events of the past week.

Earlier this week, a United Nations-backed court found the leaders of the former Cambodian regime, Khmer Rouge, guilty of crimes against humanity: murder and extermination, among other charges. The two were sentenced to life in prison, what some would call a soft punishment. However, the guilty charge shows the awareness of the international community and will hopefully aid in future genocide prevention.

The UN continues to urge further peace talks between Israel and Palestine. Violence and death have crippled the Gaza strip for decades, and show no signs of stopping. United Nations flags have been flown at half staff due to the eleven staff members that have lost their lives in Gaza over the past month.

South Sudan is on the brink of a “humanitarian crisis” after an eight month civil war. There are currently 95,000 living on UN compounds and 4 million going hungry. For the conflict to halt, international forces need to intervene, a senior UN official believes. There is now more aid going to South Sudan than any other country, and it appears more can be done.

With ebola running rampant throughout western Africa, the need for a vaccine is getting greater and greater. The WHO is currently discussing the possibility of using experimental drugs on potential victims. These drugs have not gone through rigorous testing for possible side effects. Therefore, it is yet to be determined if the distribution of experimental vaccines is ethical. Offering these drugs may be seen as unethical, but because they are not widely produced, another problem arises on who should receive them. In the next week, medical ethicists are deciding whether or not to allow the administration of experimental ebola vaccines, a decision many are waiting for.

Finally, August 9th marks United Nations Day of Indigenous Peoples. This year, the focus is “bridging the gap: implementing the rights of indigenous peoples.”

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

David Nabarro on Ebola

20 August 2014

In an interview with the United Nations News Centre, newly appointed Senior UN System Coordinator for Ebola Virus Disease, updated the public on the current state of the nations West Africa affected by the disease.

The outbreak was first reported in March in the small country of Guinea. Since then, it has spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone, and has been found as far east as Nigeria. Over 1,000 have lost their lives to Ebola, and over 1 million have been affected. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, more and more cases arise daily. Without proper quarantine or aid, it is feared the disease will continue its spread. The number of cases in Guinea has decreased, and the situation is slowly becoming more under control.

The UN is teaming with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the national governments to halt the outbreak. “From the very highest level in our United Nations system there is an absolute commitment to stick with [the affected countries] and to help them and their people to cope with the current outbreak of Ebola virus disease,” Nabarro told the public. Healthcare workers are doing their best to keep patients comfortable and from spreading the disease. There is no cure for the virus, but experimental drugs may be used in the future. The disease is spread through bodily fluids, so the WHO recommends not coming into any sort of contact with an infected victim. Most doctors will be fully covered, and patients are usually isolated. Travel has been limited in order limit potential contact with the infected.

Luckily, the WHO has convened an emergency meeting, developing further precautions to limit and ultimately halt the spread of Ebola. Also, plans are in place if the disease keeps moving across the region and continent. Hopefully, Ebola will soon be a thing of the past, as we learn more and more about the disease. On a fortunate note, the two American Ebola victims were released from the hospital at various points throughout the week, a result of a functional, experimental vaccine.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Opening Session of UN Department of Public Information’s 65th NGO Conference, August 27, 2014

Hello, everybody. Welcome to New York. Totally energized to be here with you. I gather there are people from 117 countries who signed up for this conference – 900 NGOs. Apparently there are 4,000 people watching from various rooms around the UN today, and many more tuned on a webcast around the world. As much as I wish we could all be together in one room, I like the idea that – even here – there isn’t a room big enough to fit us all.

I’m also very honored to speak alongside such distinguished speakers. And they’re not just distinguished individuals. The people you’ve heard from so far are just truly fine people, fine human beings, and people who are asking themselves every day whether what they are doing is working sufficiently for real people in the real world.

It makes sense that there are so many of us here today. After all, what cause could be more worth joining than eradicating the world’s worst suffering and empowering people to live with dignity; ensuring that girls and boys, no matter where they are born, do not have to choose between getting a job to help their families and getting an education that could open doors for the rest of their lives; working together so that infants stop dying of illnesses that we can easily prevent; promoting human rights, freedom from fear, freedom from want; and making sure that creating opportunities for today’s poor never comes at the cost of sustaining the natural riches of our planet for generations to come.

But this conference, and the entire United Nations post-2015 development agenda, is not just about setting noble goals. It’s about figuring out what we can do to meet them. And I wouldn’t be here today if I didn’t believe we had a shot at that. And neither would you.

We believe we can succeed because we’ve seen the progress made toward eradicating extreme poverty in recent years, in part because of the UN Millennium Development Goals. I don’t have to quote the statistics to you: more than 600 million people moved out of extreme poverty in just 15 years; girls and

boys attending primary school in roughly equal numbers; nearly 14 million people receiving life-saving anti-retroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS. The list goes on and on.

Now, part of that progress has been achieved by countries focusing considerable energy, resources, and innovation towards empowering the poor, like Brazil's programs to reduce hunger, Malawi and Botswana's tremendous strides in reducing new HIV infections, and Rwanda's reduction of child mortality by 10% annually since the year 2000, one of the fastest declines in recorded history. At the same time, we recognize that much of the statistical progress in making -- in meeting the MGDs, in meeting the goals and the targets, has been made in countries like China and India, which have achieved massive and sustained economic growth in recent years. And we know there are many parts of the world where we haven't moved the needle in addressing deep and crippling poverty and suffering. We have to ask the hard questions about why our efforts are still not reaching so many people around the world who long for opportunities that they simply do not right now have.

A critical part of succeeding with this new agenda is prioritizing goals that can drive transformative change. We need to make concrete progress toward ensuring access to sustainable, modern energy services for the more than 1.2 billion people around the world who are still literally left in the dark. We also need to tackle issues like climate change, which wasn't even part of the Millennium Development Goals. Today, thankfully, we understand that if we don't aggressively rein in climate change, its negative consequences could wipe out all of the progress we stand to make on other fronts.

Climate change also teaches us that we can't meet global development goals if we only set targets for one part of the world. Our new goals must be relevant to all countries, just as they must be defined by all countries. This time around, our agenda must truly be a universal one.

President Obama, in whose cabinet I proudly serve, understands that. He gets that poverty and inequality are problems we also face here in the United States, and he has made it a top priority to tackle them at home as well as abroad. That's why he's worked so hard to ensure every American has access to affordable healthcare, and that women in our country have the right to equal pay for equal work.

But the president -- President Obama -- also understands that all of our destinies are interwoven with one another. More than ever before, inequality and poverty in any part of the world not only goes against our values, but also undermines our shared security and our shared prosperity.

Now, I know you have come together, in part, to shape an agenda for influencing governments. And so -- as someone who has the privilege of serving in one of them -- let me make two recommendations for how you can do that more effectively.

First, as many of you know, there's an ongoing debate about whether to include goals on peace and good governance in the post-2015 agenda. Some have argued these goals are peripheral to reducing poverty. But the evidence tells a very different story.

From 1981 to 2005, countries that experienced conflict or severe violence fell twice as far behind in reducing infant mortality; their populations are three times as likely to be under-nourished; and their kids are three times as likely not to be in school. By 2015, more than half the people living in extreme poverty will live in places racked by serious violence.

A few weeks ago I traveled with the Security Council to South Sudan and to Somalia, both of which are at risk of famine. In South Sudan, I visited a camp of more than 17,000 displaced people living in deplorable conditions – knee-deep, sometimes waist-deep, in filth and mud, and terrified to leave the camp they were residing in for fear that they would be shot or raped outside it. The violence in South Sudan has prevented farmers from planting their crops, children from attending school, the sick from accessing medicine, and humanitarian groups from delivering crucial aid. 50,000 children could die in South Sudan in the coming months – 50,000 -- if humanitarian access doesn't improve and if the politicians don't get their acts together and put their people first.

Now, one of the best ways to prevent conflicts like these – and to provide checks against the lawlessness and corruption that exacerbate poverty – is by passing just laws and building the credible, independent institutions to protect them. Countries with these building blocks are more likely to empower marginalized groups, such as giving women the right to inherit land, and allowing civil society and community organizations like yours to monitor their performance without fear of harassment or repression.

So, promoting peace and good governance goes hand in hand with development. And we all – governments, NGOs, and citizens – should fight to make sure that they are part of our agenda as we go forward.

My second recommendation is to focus your agenda on a narrow set of goals – each with concrete and measurable targets. In choosing them, strive for what can be the most transformative and the most enduring for the most vulnerable people.

I know that this won't be easy. After all, you are each and all working on issues that are worthy of our global embrace. I know that, just from looking down the program and seeing what you all are working on. But if we set too many goals, we do run the risk of diluting our resources and our energy so much that we, in the end, reach far fewer of them.

I also know there will be excruciatingly difficult choices ahead of us. My team spent over a year working with other countries at the UN on a proposal for the post-2015 agenda. The report is a really good start. It has more than 160 targets, though, compared to the Millennium Development Goals, which had 21 targets. So governments have our work cut out for us as well.

I'm confident you can do this, and that you will insist that we governments do this. Every community, every family makes these decisions every day. So do your organizations, working on big problems with extremely limited resources. You have to prioritize which community needs the well or the training workshop or the medical supplies or the investment first. You – and we – must prioritize our energy in this effort in the same way.

You also know that to be effective, you need to measure your impact. So it's not enough to say we're going to improve our communication so as to better fight deadly diseases like Ebola; we need to know how many communication hubs we will set up in at-risk regions in the next five years, and how quickly they'll be able to coordinate a response to outbreaks.

In a few days, many of you will return home to the countries and communities that you serve. I suspect that in some of those places, you start talking about MDGs and SDGs and post-2015 and people start to look at you like you're speaking another language. And in a way you are.

This too is our challenge. Nobody has more of a stake in this agenda than the people whose lives it could change the most. Yet, right now, not nearly enough of them feel that way, or even know about this process. We want people to feel empowered by this effort – indeed, it’s the only way the shared aspirations we set will be the right ones. And it’s the only way that the shared aspirations that we set will become reality – only if people recognize that they can be the drivers behind this global effort and the ones holding governments and government partners to their commitments. Only then will we succeed.

You all – civil society in this room and well beyond – can bring citizens, families, and communities more fully into this effort. You have a unique ability to do that. You can help ensure that what is negotiated at the United Nations -- at our United Nations -- speaks your language and gives you a voice; that it meets your most urgent needs; and it gives you the openings on the backend to change lives. That is our most important goal – changing lives, changing the world. And I’m confident that together we can do it.

Thank you so much.

[SOCA ITEM from 65th UN DPI NGO Conference](#)

AUGUST 27, 2014

On August 27, 2014, several SOCA representatives attended the opening session of the 65th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference “2015 and Beyond” at United Nations Headquarters, NY. This is the first conference in seven years to be held at UN Headquarters. Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon addressed the delegates via taped message from Alliance of Civilizations meetings in Bali, Indonesia, noting the record number of participants for this conference. He cited the success of the MDGs in lifting families out of poverty, and urged those NGOs present to help the UN in its work, saying “I count on you.” Keynote speaker, US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power offered host country greetings to all, noting that 900 NGOs representing 117 countries were in attendance. She marveled that approximately 4000 NGO representatives were in various rooms at the UN watching the Opening Session, and countless more around the world were viewing via the internet. She told those assembled that “ the entire United Nations post-2015 development agenda is not just setting noble goals. It’s about figuring out what we can do to meet them.” She concluded by telling civil society present in the room and well beyond, “our most important goal – changing lives, changing the world...together we can do it.”

There was a musical performance by Mr. Lee Seung Chul, an international pop star from Korea known as the “Emperor of Live Music.” He sang in his native Korean and concluded with “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” in English to a rousing round of applause. The successful 65th Conference events concluded on Friday afternoon, August 29, 2014.

Submitted by A.M. Riccitelli

[Post-2015 and the UNFCCC Processes: Can They Be Friends?](#)

29 August 2014

With the increasing world population, the need for decreasing our carbon footprint becomes greater. Unfortunately, the UN has not given a specific goal to achieve this. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has a long way to go on formulating its goals and achieving them, but its formation is a step in the right direction.

Panelists from a wide range of specialties and backgrounds discussed the future of climate change and how it could shape our world. With the current situation of the world, it seems sustainable climate change development has taken a back seat to economic development. Most of the developed world view themselves as “consumers” when they should be seen as “savers” or “sustainers.” If the world population keeps growing and we keep consuming at the current rate, climate change could end life as we know it. The poor treatment of the environment leads to more natural disasters, which leads to a very high cleanup and mitigation cost. Stopping climate change needs to be the number one priority of political and social organizations. There is no plan B if climate change runs its course.

The growth of the world needs to be carbon-neutral, otherwise the growth will be for nought with the decline of the Earth.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

Youth Caucus 2: HeforShe Interactive Workshop

29 August 2014

In many places around the world, men are seen as superior to women. Women are frequently objectified, abused and silenced. Worldwide, one in three females is subject to violence. This youth meeting dealt with the need for gender equality, and the role of men in the process.

The workshop began with three young Afghani girls who discussed the inequalities between men and women in their home nation. The year 2008 marked the first time girls from 12-15 could attend school. Women are told not to get an education, especially once they are married. Most husbands do not want their wives to be potentially smarter than them. Also, it is common practice for a husband to divorce his wife if she gives birth to three females consecutively.

Luckily, these three girls were able to get into University (three of only 7,000 Afghani females). They joined the HeforShe campaign to fight for gender equality.

The HeforShe campaign is a large online movement, stressing the importance of men in gender equality. The empowerment of women is vital for inclusive economic growth, social cohesion and justice, and environmental balance. Men need to realize that including women achieves these goals, and also shows human progress for all.

“Playbooks” are available online for those with internet access. In lesser developed countries, printed playbooks are distributed, with local, recognizable heroes depicted.

The HeforShe campaign has received a growing following and is making huge strides for gender equality and huge strides for mankind.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

Youth Breakfast with Ambassador Cousens

28 August 2014

Before the workshops and roundtables on Thursday, August 28th, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Elizabeth Cousens spoke to the youth of the 65th Annual DPI/NGO Conference. In a

room of about fifty guests from around the world, H.E. Cousens discussed the difficulties facing the modern world and how to overcome them.

She realizes the adversity the UN faces, and pointed out “[The member states and delegates of the United Nations] are trying do do something we have never done before.” It is nearly impossible to have 194 nations from all parts of the world to agree on an action plan for the rest of the planet. She said the problems are tenacious, with the worst being climate change, but at the same time; the problems are solvable.

In order to solve these problems, she believes voices of ordinary citizens need to be amplified and increased opportunity provided to youth. This way, everyone will have a hand in the development of our world.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

[\(Really\) Leaving No One Behind](#)

28 August 2014

Until recently, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have come under scrutiny due to lack of inclusion. Much of the world's population was left out of goals for equality. These groups included, but are not limited to: women, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and youth. Luckily, new SDGs have been adopted, with the ultimate goal of equality. A diverse panel was on hand to discuss new, inclusive sustainable development goals.

However, in many places, women are still seen as inferior to men. It is a common (and improper) belief that women only serve one purpose in society, and that is reproduction. Luckily, the role of women in our future seems much brighter than the past.

15% of the worlds population suffer from disabilities, which is higher than most would imagine. In the new draft of SDGs, there are nine references to them, after almost zero in the previous draft.

Worldwide, there are over 75 million people from ages 15-24 without a job or education. In lesser developed countries, youth are commonly perpetrators and targets of violence. This can be seen in footage of nearly all violent conflicts. Young people are rarely seen in peace talks. The new SDGs include the increased opportunity of youth, because the future lies in the young population.

Fortunately, ways to address inequalities have been developed. Inclusion and elimination of discrimination are the keys to equality. With a balance and counterbalance mechanism, along with political visibility and effective and accessible institutions, equality is a foreseeable goal.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

[How Can A Global Ethic Contribute To The Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals? An Intergenerational Discussion](#)

28 August 2014

This workshop was led by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. Speakers and attendees represented a wide range of beliefs. Regardless of their backgrounds, these individuals shared a

common idea: the need of a “global ethic” for the development of the world. It was said that “it is humanity's responsibility to instill core values in everyday life.”

“The Golden Rule” can be seen throughout texts in 13 different religions. This rule translates into all languages and can be understood by everyone. There is almost no variation of the proverbial phrase of “do unto others as you would do to yourself.”

Another way the world's religions are linked is the dependence on the Earth. There is a universal responsibility to identify with not only the local community, but the Earth community as well. In 1993, the Earth Charter was passed, making the protection of the planet a sacred trust, not just an economic issue.

Obviously, religion has been the root of much conflict in the world, making the need for interfaith action vital to global development. Different religions need to be celebrated, not simply acknowledged. A common goal of all people should be to share values with people of other faiths. This goal can be accomplished by following a three-step process. The steps are: 1. Listen – Voice your opinions but be open to others.

1. Engage – Make connections based on previous communications and plan to act.
2. Act on the shared values and further the cause.

With the numerous religions in the world today, people are more similar than we realize because “what binds us in spirituality is that we are all human beings.”

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

The Resource Nexus: Food, Water, Sanitation, and Energy

28 August 2014

In today's world, poverty is one of the largest challenges we face. Most of the time, poverty comes from an imbalance in the Resource Nexus. This is the term given to the combination of food, water, sanitation, and energy; global citizens' needs in the modern world.

An expert group of panelists led the discussion, including:

1. Maruxa Cardama, Executive Project Coordinator, *Communitas: Coalition for Sustainable Cities and Regions* in the new UN Development Agenda
2. Olivier Dubois, Senior Natural Resources Officer/Climate, Energy and Tenure Division (NRC) of FAO
3. Vadim Belikov, Co-founder and co-chair, Next Generation Energy Leaders Council
4. Olimar Maisonet, SIWI Young Professionals Team
5. H.E. Sebastiano Cardi, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations.

They discussed how resource allocation will be a major problem with the ever-growing population. For example, in the next 15 years, energy demand will increase by an estimated 40% and food demand will increase anywhere from 30% to 50%. Also, the demand for water will outweigh its supply by 40%.

Challenges of further developing the resource nexus include: lack of knowledge and/or capacity, and inaccurate data collection. The fix for these issues relies on the improvement of and the spreading of education. With more knowledge and ability, the private and public sector can work together to distribute resources more efficiently. It will take time to maximize the potential of the resource nexus, the time cannot come soon enough, because everyone needs equal and easy access to food, water, sanitation, and energy.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

65th Annual UN DPI/NGO Opening Session

27 August 2014

This year's conference dealt with "The role of civil society in the post-2015 development agenda." For 3 days, there were numerous workshops, seminars, and roundtables dedicated to the improvement of the world. The declaration of the opening session stated "Our goal is to develop a framework that embraces all our diversity, is based on agreed principles and human rights-based approach and results in a just and equitable economic and social environment. We have made some progress. But this progress is certainly far from what we expected and have fought for."

Speakers included:

1. Mr. Maher Nasser, Acting Head of UN Department of Public Information
2. Mr. Jeffrey Huffines, Conference Chairman
3. Mr. Bradford E. Billet, Acting Commissioner for the NYC Mayor's office of International Affairs
4. H.E. Ms. Samatha Power, Permanent Representative of the U.S. to the UN
5. Ms. Susana Malcorra, UN Chef de Cabinet to the Executive office
6. Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund

Video remarks were made by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and President of the General Assembly His Excellency Mr. John Ashe and many prominent civil society members also spoke. The so-called "Emperor of Live Music" was on hand to perform, South Korean popstar Lee Sung Chul.

The Opening Ceremony was a fitting way to kick off the momentous 65th Annual United Nations DPI/NGO Conference.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

NGO Youth Subcommittee Meeting #1

27 August 2014

Wednesday, August 27th marked the beginning of the 65th annual DPI/NGO conference, held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. At 8:30 each morning of the conference, the NGO youth subcommittee held meetings, trying to get young men and women integrated into the UN and create awareness on the world's issues. The first youth meeting of the 2014 conference was led by Yasmin Jacobs, Pablo Angulo Truconis, and Catalina Escobar.

Jacobs, of UN Habitat, stressed the importance of urban development. This is due to the fact that a majority of the world's population lives in cities. Unfortunately, many of these cities have poor infrastructures. She believes social media is a key factor in urban development. The use of social media connects those who wish to see betterment in their cities with entrepreneurs and politicians, promoting social re-inclusive and environmentally sustainable cities. She also discussed the importance of the youth population, using the example of India to prove her point. India has the highest percentage of youth in its population, and is projected to have vast improvement in its economy and infrastructure.

The next speaker was Pablo Angulo Truconis, of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA). WFUNA has been conducting the MyWorld survey, which includes young people speaking out about the world they would like to see in the future. The topics they speak out against include, the ending of hunger, availability of quality education, and the presence of trustworthy governments, among an infinite amount of other possibilities. This survey allows young citizens to begin thinking about the changes they want to see in the world, and hopefully working towards those goals.

The final speaker was Catalina Escobar. After the death of her infant son, she founded the Juan Felipe Gómez Foundation, and is now its president. The Colombian was voted as one of CNN's Top 10 Heroes of 2012 for her work in empowering young girls and improving the infant mortality rate. Since the establishment of her foundation, the infant mortality rate has decreased by 81% in her city of Cartagena. Also, she works with teen mothers and sexually abused young women, helping them contribute to society after giving birth. Mrs. Escobar found that teen mothers drop out of school and often do not make ends meet. With the support of highly trained professionals, these mothers go back out into the real world and help the community, and better themselves along the way. In my opinion, Catalina Escobar is one of the strongest individuals I have ever met. She is a catalyst for improving the world around her, and her company (she did not call it a charity) is spreading across South America and other parts of the world. The entire room was captivated by her testimonies, and her energy was contagious. With more individuals like Catalina Escobar, the world would be a much better place.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative – Attended on site

[Joseph Cannizzo, SOCA new Youth](#)

Joseph Cannizzo, SOCA new Youth Representative being photographed at Security for grounds pass, Wednesday September 10, 2014. We welcome Joseph to the SOCA team



“I am a graduate of Nova Southeastern University with a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology. I have been involved in various charities as well as local disaster relief efforts. I am very active in the community and currently own and operate two local businesses. I look forward to contributing to our NGO.”

[Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic Mr. Erlan Abdyldaev at the High-level Special Event entitled «Reducing risks from water related disasters: a must for the post-2015 development agenda»](#)

25 September 2014, from 09.00 to 10.30, Conference Room 3

Madam Chair,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Your Excellencies,

Let me express my appreciation to the Governments of Peru, Switzerland, Tajikistan and Thailand for raising this important question before us. Due to global climate change and various man-made factors, water related disasters are becoming more and more frequent. This, unfortunately, leads to human fatalities. To reduce the risks from water related disasters the international community should continue shifting focus from emergency response to preventative measures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In view of its geographical features, Kyrgyzstan is prone to natural disasters which occur almost every year and have negative influence on our economy and development opportunity.

Water related disasters head our disaster list. There are four thousand mudflow basins with three hundred of inhabited localities in the under-flood zone. More than 95% of inhabited localities, it's about 55% of the population, that are located along riverbanks always under threat of flooding, mudflow and flood events.

Annual damage estimate from natural disasters in the Kyrgyz Republic is about 35 million dollars. Our limited budget resources do not cover the required expenses.

Besides damage caused, the disasters hinder the achievement of the MDGs and sustainable development of the country. This problem was also discussed yesterday, during the Climate Summit. And I would like to emphasize once again the necessity for adequate and fair reflection on vulnerable countries' needs regarding climate change, along with further action at the global level. Let me also draw your attention to the problem of recultivation and safety of uranium tailings, located in Kyrgyzstan.

Most of these are concentrated in the densely populated areas of the country, and their status in the past decade has significantly deteriorated. Many of the tailings are located in seismically active areas along transboundary rivers and are at risk of landslides and mudflows. And this is a highly relevant issue not only for Kyrgyzstan, but for the whole Central Asian region. And we need the support of the international community in solving the problem of radioactive and toxic waste for the full rehabilitation of the contaminated territories.

Dear participants,

Coming back to the subject of a comprehensive approach aimed at reducing the risks of disasters related to water I would like to highlight the issues of large hydropower construction in regional upstream countries .

This question often put to our neighbors is technological safety. It is feared that their construction and subsequent commissioning will create conditions for seasonal flooding downstream.

I would like to emphasize that large dams, in addition to providing clean and inexpensive electricity, have another important facet. Namely - the increase in the potential for natural flooding. This, by the way, was confirmed in the report, published by the World Bank at the beginning of this September. As the World Bank's experts concluded, Dam Rogun Hydro Power can greatly mitigate the effects of a possible maximum flood protection for all Vahshk cascade downstream.

In this regard, the planned construction of HPP in Kyrgyzstan is upstream to the existing Toktogul reservoir. And their commissioning will not be the cause of seasonal flooding. Furthermore, as we noted, Kambarata will allow for a balanced regime of water resources and raise the level of guaranteed water supply of irrigated downstream countries. This eventually will contribute to the sustainable development of the entire region .

In conclusion I would like to note that Kyrgyzstan has high expectations for the results of the third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to be held in Sendai in 2015. And we are

ready to contribute to the international efforts to secure a robust risk avoidance for our development achievements.

Thank you for your attention.

style edit: dr. a.j. de luca; meeting also attended by dc luca.

69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

26 September 2014 – This week marked the beginning of the UN General Assembly's 69th Session, which will continue until this time next year. Its new president, H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa, of Uganda, takes over for H.E. John Ashe. From September 24th until the 30th, representatives from all 193 member states will have an opportunity to discuss issues within their respective homelands. This general debate will see representatives try to get UN support to resolve issues related to “delivering on and Implementing a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda” within their countries. Current issues are also being addressed, such as ebola, and the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Ukraine and South Sudan.

At the same time, the 2014 Climate Summit has begun at the UN, addressing the greatest global issue. Speakers ranged from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to renowned actor Leonardo DiCaprio. All stressed the importance of the environment, and that its maltreatment affects all worldwide.

Hopefully, the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly (and all other UN missions) will be proactive at changing the planet for the better, putting an end to global issues, and making the post-2015 world of higher quality than the pre-2015 world.

-Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative



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Department of Public Information Non-Governmental Organizations

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**Fall Briefings and Events Calendar
October - December 2014**

1 October

The Role of Africa's Regional Economic Communities in Consolidating Peace, Security, Governance and Development in the Context of Agenda 2063

(Organized by the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa with the support of the Department of Public Information)

9 October

NGO-led Briefing in observance of the International Day of Older Persons

(Organized by the NGO Committee on Aging sponsored by the Mission of Argentina with the support of the Department of Public Information)

16 October

The Africa We Want: Support of the United Nations system to the African Union's Agenda 2063

(Organized in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa in observance of Africa Week)

6 November

DPI/NGO Conference Town Hall Meeting

(Appreciation to our volunteers, implementation of the Conference Outcome Document and looking ahead to next year's conference)

20 November

NGO-led Briefing in commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child

(Organized in collaboration with the NGO Committee on Children's Rights)

11 December

United Nations Development Business: Connecting Civil Society

18 December

End of Year Session

DPI/NGO Relations, Room U-204/5, UNITAR Building
Tel: +1-212-963-7234 * E-mail: undpingo@un.org
Website: outreach.un.org/ngorelations

*Please note that this calendar is subject to change.

**Webcast may be available, please check UN Web TV: <http://webtv.un.org/>

Last Updated 30 September 2014

Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events

Vatican official calls for military protection of Iraqi Christians

Vatican City, Aug 13, 2014 / 08:44 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- The Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations on Saturday urged the international community to provide humanitarian assistance and military and political protection for Christians persecuted by the Islamic State.

“We hope the voice that is surging from different Christian and religious communities, from moderate Muslims, from people of good will around the world, may find the response of concrete humanitarian assistance that is provided for the Christians in northern Iraq as well as some political and even effective military protection,” Archbishop Silvano Tomasi told Vatican Radio Aug. 9.

The militant Sunni Islamist organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was among the rebels fighting in the Syrian civil war; this spring it spread its operations to Iraq, taking control of Mosul and swaths of territory in the country's north and west, as well as in northern Syria.

It has now declared a caliphate, and calls itself the Islamic State. On Aug. 11 it seized the town of Jalawla, located 90 miles northeast of Baghdad in Diyala province.

All non-Sunni persons in the Islamic State have been persecuted – tens of thousands of Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims have fled the territory.

“We are faced with a certain indifference at the practical level with the international community. It is difficult to convince – because of false modesty, I would say – the Western powers to take a strong stance in defense of the Christians,” Archbishop Tomasi lamented.

He was encouraged that there is now “action beginning on the part of the international community,” citing special sessions of the U.N., U.S. military intervention, and that “some governments are beginning to express their suggestions for practical action in defense of these populations.”

The U.S. began airstrikes to protect Erbil, as well as Yazidis who fled Sinjar, on Aug. 8, which have continued.

The Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon, Louis Raphael I Sako, lamented the small scale of military intervention in an Aug. 10 statement.

“The position of the American president Obama only to give military assistance to protect Erbil is disappointing,” said Patriarch Sako. “The Americans are not up to a rapid solution to give hope specifically as they are not going to attack the ISIS in Mosul and in the Nineveh Plain.”

“The confirmation that this terrible situation will continue until the Iraqi Security Forces will fight along with Peshmerga against the ISIS militants is very depressing. The President of the Kurdistan Region said that the Kurdish troops are fighting with a terrorist State and not minor groups! While the country is under fire, the politicians in Baghdad are fighting for power.”

“At the end, perhaps, Mosul will not be liberated neither the villages in the Nineveh Plain. There is no strategy to dry up the sources of manpower and the resources of these Islamic terrorists. They control the oil town of Zumar and the oil fields of Ain Zalah and Batma along with the oil fields of Al-Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor in Syria. The Islamic extremist fighters are joining them from different countries around the world.”

France announced Aug. 13 that it would begin supplying arms to the peshmerga, Kurdish militants fighting the Islamic State, the same day.

Patriarch Sako also emphasized the scale of needed humanitarian aid for the displaced.

“Death and sickness are grabbing the children and elderly people among the thousands of refugee families spread over the Kurdistan Region who lost everything in the recent tragic developments while the ISIS Militants are still advancing and the humanitarian aid is insufficient.”

He said there are 70,000 displaced Christians in Erbil: “the families who found shelter inside the churches or schools are in a rather good condition while those who are still sleeping in the streets and public parks are in a deplorable situation.” He added that there are more than 60,000 displaced Christians in Dohuk, whose “situation is worse than those in Erbil.”

“While the humanitarian needs are escalating: housing, food, water, medicine and funds, the lack of international coordination is slowing and limiting the realization of an effective assistance to these thousands awaiting immediate support. The Churches are offering everything within their capacity.”

According to the UNHCR, there are more than 1.2 million internally displaced persons in Iraq, as well as at least 10,000 Iraqi refugees in Syria.

The U.S., U.K., and France have also provided food, water, and other aid to those displaced by the caliphate.

On Aug. 12, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue issued a statement calling on religious leaders, especially Muslims, to condemn the Islamic State and its acts of terrorism.

“This Pontifical Council, together with all those engaged in interreligious dialogue, followers of all religions, and all men and women of good will, can only unambiguously denounce and condemn these practices which bring shame on humanity,” it said.

Citing the terrorizing acts of the Islamic State, the pontifical council said that “no cause, and certainly no religion, can justify such barbarity. This constitutes an extremely serious offense to humanity and to God who is the Creator ... We cannot forget, however, that Christians and Muslims have lived together – it is true with ups and downs – over the centuries, building a culture of peaceful coexistence and civilization of which they are proud. Moreover, it is on this basis that, in recent years, dialogue between Christians and Muslims has continued and intensified.”

“The dramatic plight of Christians, Yazidis and other religious communities and ethnic minorities in Iraq requires a clear and courageous stance on the part of religious leaders, especially Muslims, as well as those engaged in interreligious dialogue and all people of good will. All must be unanimous in condemning unequivocally these crimes and in denouncing the use of religion to justify them. If not, what credibility will religions, their followers and their leaders have? What credibility can the interreligious dialogue that we have patiently pursued over recent years have?”

The pontifical council called on religious leaders to “exercise their influence with the authorities to end these crimes, to punish those who commit them and to reestablish the rule of law throughout the land, ensuring the return home of those who have been displaced. While recalling the need for an ethical management of human societies, these same religious leaders must not fail to stress that the support, funding and arming of terrorism is morally reprehensible.”

The dicastery concluded saying that it “is grateful to all those who have already raised their voices to denounce terrorism, especially that which uses religion to justify it.”

Source: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/vatican-official-calls-for-military-protection-of-iraqi-christians-28331/>

Pope Francis urges United Nations to intervene in Iraq

Vatican City, Aug 13, 2014 / 10:31 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- Pope Francis wrote United Nations general secretary Ban Ki-moon, asking him to act to end the humanitarian tragedy now underway in Iraq.

The letter, received by Ban Aug. 13, is the latest of the Pope’s interventions to stop the plight of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq. In it, Pope Francis writes that he has been following “the dramatic events of these past few days in Northern Iraq” with “heavy and anguished heart.”

“Christians and other religious minorities have been forced to flee from their homes and witness the destruction of their places of worship and religious patrimony,” the Pope wrote.

The militant Sunni Islamist organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was among the rebels fighting in the Syrian civil war; this spring it spread its operations to Iraq, taking control of Mosul and swaths of territory in the country’s north and west, as well as in northern Syria.

It has now declared a caliphate, and calls itself the Islamic State (ISIS). In Syria on Aug. 13, ISIS seized a string of towns located northeast of Aleppo and near the Turkish border, including Akhtarin. On Aug. 11 it had seized the Iraqi town of Jalawla, located 90 miles northeast of Baghdad in Diyala province.

All non-Sunni persons have been persecuted by the Islamic State – tens of thousands of Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims have fled the territory.

In his letter to the U.N., Pope Francis said he appointed Cardinal Filoni as his special envoy to Iraq in order to “manifest my spiritual closeness and to express my concern, and that of the entire Catholic Church, for the intolerable suffering of those who only wish to live in peace, harmony and freedom in the land of their forefathers.”

Pope Francis placed before the UN general secretary “the tears, the suffering and heartfelt cries of despair of Christians and other religious minorities of the beloved land of Iraq,” and renewed his “urgent appeal to the international community to take action to end the humanitarian tragedy now underway”.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, there are more than 1.2 million internally displaced persons in Iraq, as well as at least 10,000 Iraqi refugees in Syria.

“The violent attacks that are sweeping across Northern Iraq cannot but awaken the consciences of all men and women of goodwill to concrete acts of solidarity,” Pope Francis stressed.

Among these acts of solidarity, he suggested the protection of those affected or threatened by violence, the assurance of necessary, urgent assistance for the many displaced people, as well as their safe return to their cities and their homes.

The Pope underscored that “the tragic experiences of the twentieth century, and the most basic understanding of human dignity, compels the international community, particularly through the norms and mechanism of international law, to do all that it can to stop and to prevent further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities.”

Pope Francis then united his appeal to those of the Oriental Patriarchs and other religious leaders, stating his confidence that the appeal “will meet with a positive reply.”

Source: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-urges-united-nations-to-intervene-in-iraq-66909/>

Remarks by Christopher Klein, Political Minister Counselor, U.S. Mission to the United Nations, at a Security Council Open Debate on Conflict Prevention, August 21, 2014

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for convening this important discussion and thank you Mr. Secretary-General and Madame High Commissioner for your insightful and informative briefings. And also thank you, Madame High Commissioner, for your service to the UN and to the cause of human rights.

The United Nations was established in the wake of two devastating World Wars, with the intent to save future generations from the scourge of such conflict; now, the UN, including the Security Council, remains the focal point for the maintenance of international peace and security. Yet, we look out at a world mired in crisis and conflict.

The complex conflicts of today increasingly involve heavily armed non-state actors, some infused with extremist ideologies. These actors push clashes across borders, they traffic illicit goods, undermine governments, and destabilize entire regions. While the international community did not fully imagine such conflicts at the UN’s inception, the UN system has nonetheless, developed ever more nimble and well-suited tools to respond to early warning signs of conflict and instability.

Today’s session offers us a valuable chance to broaden our focus beyond the crisis of the day and to think strategically about how we can better leverage UN tools now and in the future to prevent conflict.

In this connection, the United States commends efforts by the Department of Political Affairs to monitor and analyze political developments around the world and to alert the Security Council and the international community to brewing crises. For example, last year, Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco warned the Council that heightened frictions around an election dispute in the Maldives could lead to violence. Calls for restraint by high-ranking UN officials, coupled with the ASG's visit to the Maldives the week before the elections, helped to usher in a peaceful transfer of power. In this vein, we welcome DPA's continued efforts to deepen their analysis, work with other UN offices, and take measures to identify potential triggers of violence.

DPA has also used active responses to potential conflict scenarios through its regional political missions. In Guinea, for example, the UN – with the savvy diplomacy of Said Djinnit, the UNOWA SRSG at the time – engaged successfully in mediation efforts ahead of the 2013 legislative elections after recognizing key warning signs of potential conflict.

Likewise, we welcome the DPA Standby Team of Mediation Experts. The demand for these experts has increased each year since the team's inception. Mediators are playing a critical role in peaceful dispute resolution in Africa's Great Lakes region – as well as in Mali, where mediators have facilitated the difficult reconciliation process between Bamako and northern rebel groups.

At the same time, dozens of UN Special Envoys, political missions, mediators, and good offices of the Secretary-General work tirelessly to bridge political differences. There is a common thread for successful missions: they need sound and credible leadership, strong mandates, and monitoring and reporting capacity on potential drivers and flashpoints of conflict. We now need better mechanisms for recognizing the earliest signs and delivering the right prevention tools at every stage of a conflict to address root causes, end impunity, and save lives.

One key aspect of this is peacebuilding. In each Peacebuilding Commission Country Specific Configuration, the PBC coordinates efforts to build national political, economic, judicial, and civil society institutions. In Burundi, the PBC Chair's regular engagement with local leaders has helped to highlight potential flashpoints, such as problematic practices by Burundian leadership, which have the potential to exacerbate societal frictions and result in violence in the run up to elections.

This year's headlines also remind us that serious human rights abuses, including sexual violence, can be an early indication of imminent conflict, as well as a consequence of it. The horrible accounts of abduction, detention, rape, murder, and other acts of violence against women in Iraq at the hands of ISIL militants and in Nigeria by Boko Haram appall and concern us greatly. Supporting the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as the efforts of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, is an essential tool in addressing and preventing such injustices.

Finally, we welcome today's Security Council resolution on conflict prevention. We share a common responsibility to do everything in our power to pursue sustainable solutions to disputes and to prevent violence and bloodshed. It is indeed the reason this Council was created.

Thank you, Mr. President.

UN Launches Aid Operation in Iraq

The United Nations' agency for refugees is launching a [major aid operation \(BBC\)](#) to send supplies to more than half a million civilians displaced by the fighting between the militant ISIS group and Iraqi and Kurdish forces in the north. The agency will send supplies by air, road convoys, and sea shipments through Turkey, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. Meanwhile, Iraqi forces launched an [offensive on Tuesday \(Reuters\)](#) to drive ISIS fighters out of Tikrit, the hometown of former dictator Saddam Hussein. President Barack Obama had announced on Monday that Iraqi and Kurdish ground troops reclaimed Iraq's largest dam with the aid of a bombing [campaign by U.S. warplanes \(NYT\)](#).

Analysis

"Taken together, the moves highlight the fact that the Islamic State, already the best-armed and best-funded terror group in the world, is quickly adapting [to the challenges of ruling and governing](#). That, in turn, dramatically reduces the chances that the extremists will face homegrown opposition in what amounts to the world's newest territory," writes Yochi Dreazen for *Foreign Policy*.

"Any expanded direct support for the Peshmerga could further strain the relationship with the central government in Baghdad. [The battle for the dam was an important test](#) of new cooperation between Kurdish and Iraqi forces, with the guidance of American advisers," write Nour Malas and Tamer el-Ghobashy for the *Wall Street Journal*.

"Although Washington has long been wary of Kurdish nationalism, it is a powerful mobilizing force. It also [converges with America's strategic interests](#). The Kurdish groups from Syria and Turkey reject radical Islamism. They are secular nationalists and natural American allies," write Aliza Marcus and Andrew Apostolou for the *New York Times*.

Religious News from Around the World

Islamic Militants Seize Christian Towns In Northern Iraq

By RFE/RL

August 07, 2014

Militants from the Islamic State have seized Iraq's largest Christian town and surrounding areas in northern Iraq, prompting the exodus of tens of thousands of people.

The capture of Qaraqosh by the Sunni-led extremists on August 7 followed the overnight withdrawal of Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, who had suffered a humiliating defeat in the area over the weekend.

Before the Islamic State -- then known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) -- seized large swaths of western and northern Iraq in June and declared a caliphate, Qaraqosh had a population of about 50,000 people, mostly Christians.

But thousands of displaced Iraqis also fled to Qaraqosh and other nearby towns that were being defended by Kurdish fighters since the militants seized Mosul in June.

Militants also seized the mostly Christian towns of Tall Kayf, Bartella, and Karamlesh.

The other towns seized by the Islamic State on August 7 also had communities from the Shabak Shi'ite minority.

Reports say almost all of the residents and displaced Iraqis have fled the towns.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on August 7 called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council over the advances of Islamic militants in Iraq.

Earlier, Pope Francis called for world governments to take steps to protect Christians driven from their villages in northern Iraq and provide them with humanitarian aid.

Meanwhile, Kurdish television reports that Mahmour and Gwar -- two Kurdish settlements less than 40 kilometers west of the Kurdish regional capital of Irbil -- fell to the militants on August 6.

The conquests put the jihadist fighters less than 20 kilometers from the border of northern Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region.

Yazidis Flee Massacres

Meanwhile, thousands of Iraqis from the Yazidi minority who fled the militants' advance into the nearby town of Sinjar during the weekend are now stranded in the barren Sinjar Mountains with little food or water.

Those Yazidi families practice a 4,000-year-old religion that is rooted in Zoroastrianism.

Yazidi leaders have warned that their entire community is at risk of being massacred or starved into extinction.

Their plight has prompted the United Nations to mobilize its resources to assist them, with some displaced Yazidis being evacuated since August 6.

But reports say the total number of people forced to flee the latest jihadist advance dwarfs the exodus that was sparked in July by the Islamic State's ultimatum for Christians and other non-Muslims to convert to Islam or face the threat of execution.

A UN spokesman on August 7 said a total of 200,000 people had fled fighting in northern Iraq in recent days, creating a "tragedy of immense proportions."

The Islamic State also claimed it had seized Iraq's largest dam, the Mosul Dam on the Tigris River, but Kurdish forces said the dam was still under their control.

The latest militant advances come despite a counterattack on Mosul that was launched by Kurdish fighters on August 6 in coordination with air strikes by Iraqi government forces.

Iraqi officials say one air strike on August 6 targeted a building in Mosul that was under the control of the Sunni militants, killing at least 60 people.

Medical workers said the building was a prison run by the Islamic State since it seized Mosul in June.

But an Iraqi military spokesman described the building as a Shari'a court that was created by the jihadists.

Kurdish forces also were shelling the eastern and northeastern districts of Mosul on August 6 but have been unable to dislodge the militants.

In the Kurdish-held city of Kirkuk, two car bombs killed at least six people near a Shi'ite mosque where people displaced by attacks on nearby towns had sought refuge.

In Baghdad, a car bomb exploded in a predominantly Shi'ite northern neighborhood, killing at least 12 people on August 7.

With reporting by Reuters, AP, AFP, dpa, and "The New York Times"

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/iraq-islamic-state-christian-towns/26518378.html>

Christians Say Terror Drove Them From Mosul

By Abdul Hamid Zebari

July 23, 2014

Rawan Jinan, a 25-year-old Iraqi Christian, says she could not believe her eyes when she received an order that effectively gave her no choice but to leave Mosul within 24 hours.

The order came in the form of a letter delivered to every Christian home by the Islamic State, formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which rules Iraq's second-largest city. The letter offered three options: to convert to Islam, to begin paying a monthly tax for practicing a religion other than Islam, or to be executed if they remained in Mosul.

Jinan, now in a refugee camp near Irbil, in the Kurdish autonomous region, says she and her husband stared at the paper in amazement. "We were prepared for anything, but we were not expecting to be banished from our city in this manner," she says. "When we first heard Christians should leave the city, we thought this meant that Mosul was about to be targeted by heavy shelling. We did not know they were going to rob us and throw us out."

The couple initially thought the letter was an evacuation, not expulsion, order because they and their two young sons -- one 4 years old, the other 18 months -- had already fled fighting in Mosul once. That was when ISIL [captured the city in three days of combat](#) that ended with the rout of the Iraqi Army on June 9.

The Honeymoon's Over

But after that fighting ended, the family returned amid reports that the Islamic State promised to guarantee the safety of all religious minorities in the city, so long as they respected Islamic law.

At first, she says, the militants seemed almost protective. "They welcomed us, and asked us what we needed, asking us to contact them if anyone bothered us."

In return, the city's Christians saw no reason why they would offend the city's fundamentalist new rulers. Christian women had already long been wearing the "abaya," the figure-shrouding outer garment Muslim women wear for modesty outdoors, and both Christian men and women mostly stayed within their own neighborhoods to avoid trouble.

But the honeymoon period, which contrasted starkly with the Islamic State's reputation for cruelty toward religious minorities in areas it occupies in Syria, did not last long. As soon as the militia was firmly in control of Mosul, the mood began to change.

Then, Jinan says, the militants began to enter Christian churches, intimidating priests and making people afraid to go to their places of worship. "They did not only enter the churches," she says. "They also went into the shrine of Prophet Younis [the Old Testament prophet Jonah], which they demolished. They also demolished monasteries."

The [reported destruction of the tomb of Jonah](#) was shocking for Mosul's Christians and many mainstream Muslims alike, because he is revered by both faiths. The tomb itself is housed in a mosque built on a site where a church once stood, and the interlayering of faiths around the site had long been a symbol of Mosul's tradition of religious tolerance.

Things soon got worse.

On July 16 and 17, Jinan says, a black painted symbol began appearing on Christian homes. "They began marking Christians' homes with the letter 'N' within a circle and the phrase 'property of the Islamic State.' When we asked why, they said that 'this would ward off anyone coming to loot [your home] because looters will fear that this house belongs to us. You need not be afraid; there's nothing wrong,'" she recalls.

But the Christians were feeling terrorized. The letter N stood for "Nasrani," a term used for Christians in the Koran that refers to Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus Christ. By this time, the Islamic State was also replacing the crosses atop some churches with their own black jihadist flags, as if they had been seized in a holy war. "I saw the flags on the Orthodox Mar [St.] Ephraim Cathedral and the Chaldean Bishop's Seat," Jinan notes.

Driven From Their Homes

When the order with three choices came, Jinan says she and the other several thousand Christians in the city had no trust left in the Islamic State. She personally did not even inquire about the amount of the "jizya," or religious tax, the militants promised would grant Christians immunity. The amount has been variously reported by other refugees as being around \$100 monthly.

Instead, Jinan and her husband rushed to get their sons and fled by car to one of the Christian towns to the east of Mosul on the Nineveh plain. From there, they proceeded on to the greater safety of Ayn Kawa, a town just inside the Kurdish autonomous region where they remain today.

The Kurdish autonomous region, which is religiously tolerant and is guarded by its own powerful security forces, puts her beyond the reach of the Islamic State. But Jinan says she and most other refugees lost many of their possessions to the Islamic State's fighters, who shook them down as they fled from Mosul.

The fighters took the money her husband was carrying and searched their luggage thoroughly, stealing clothes and even baby diapers. They also treated their victims with open contempt. "They opened the can of baby milk and poured its contents into the street," she says. "We begged them to give us a bottle of water for the children, to quiet them, but they opened the water bottles and poured out the water in front us."

Now, with Mosul about 80 kilometers to the west but her former life closed to her, Jinan says she doesn't know what to expect next.

Her options range from waiting for the Iraqi government to retake Mosul -- something she calls unlikely when the Islamic State is at the gates of Baghdad -- to emigrating, something she says she never had to consider before.

Her only certainty is that her family now would not want to return to Mosul even if it could. "No Christian, and I for one, will return to the place where I lived, where I was persecuted, and from which I have been expelled," she says.

Reported from Irbil by RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq correspondent Abdul Hamid Zebari. Written by Charles Recknagel in Prague. Translation from Arabic by Ayad al-Gailani

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/iraq-christians-mosul-terror/25467870.html>

ISIL caliphate presents a lifestyle alien to Syrian society

By Waleed Abu al-Khair

2014-08-04

CAIRO – The response to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) social media campaigns that attempt to draw foreign fighters into the militant group's ranks in Syria and Iraq has been slowing and is lower than the organisation claims, activists and experts told Al-Shorfa.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has used the hashtag, "Friday Migration to the Islamic Caliphate," as seen above pasted to an image of child soldiers, to draw foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria. The group has recruited children to carry out suicide bombing missions, according to Human Rights Watch. [Snapshot from a jihadist Twitter account]

After examination of a recent ISIL Twitter campaign using the hashtag "Friday Migration to the Islamic Caliphate," and the accounts of users who posted related tweets, "it became clear that the response is confined to the online medium," said Mazen Zaki, director of the new media division at Ibn al-Waleed Studies and Field Research Centre in Egypt.

The response rate "conflicts with the exaggerated claims made by the ISIL media machine that its 'jihad' is attracting thousands of mujahideen of all nationalities around the world," he added.

The same is the case for hashtags initiated over the past year calling for "jihad" in Syria and Iraq, he said.

"ISIL has lost the emotional mobilisation it used at the beginning of the Syrian war by promoting 'jihad' as a way of helping the Syrian people topple the regime," Zaki said. "Also, travelling to Syria via Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon has become far more difficult because of the international security cordon."

"Without a doubt, the inflow of news and press reports that exposed ISIL's true agenda, actions and ambitions played a role in ebbing the flow of people wanting to join it," he said.

Foreign fighters, foreign rules

ISIL's infusion of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq has been problematic for the local population, said Al-Sharq Centre for Regional and Strategic Studies researcher Sami Gheit.

"It is very difficult for these [fighters] coming from all countries of the world to integrate into these communities that have their own specificity, customs and traditions, especially in terms of the daily interaction among them," he told Al-Shorfa.

The new converts to ISIL's extremist ideology, especially young Europeans, "act according to the religious teachings they received and follow religion to the letter in a greatly exaggerated manner," especially in relation to everyday life, lifestyle and dealings with women, Gheit said.

"This is one thing that may not be compatible with the lifestyles adopted in Syria and Iraq, where people interact with other members of society with some forbearance and leniency," he said.

Foreign fighters conduct daily patrols and man check-points along the streets in parts of Syria, said Syrian journalist Mohammed al-Abdullah, an al-Raqa native who now lives in Cairo.

"ISIL puts its foreign fighters at the fore, especially when it comes to meting out a punishment handed down by a 'Sharia' committee, on a citizen," he told Al-Shorfa.

"It does so to terrorise citizens and silence them by force, for it is natural that a Syrian member of this organisation may not be able to deal violently with fellow citizens all of the time," he said.

Source: http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2014/08/04/feature-02

ISIL denounced for destroying religious sites

PESHAWAR – Pakistani ulema and religious scholars are condemning the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) for destroying sacred sites including shrines and mosques, saying such acts are un-Islamic.

Iraqi volunteers loyal to cleric Moqtada al-Sadr take up positions in Samarra, an area under threat from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), July 12. [AFP/Ahmad Al-Rubaye]

"Islam does not allow the desecration of holy sites even if they belong to members of other faiths," said Dr. Ghafoor Ahmad, former director of the Sheikh Zahid Islamic Centre and Seerat Studies Department Chairman at Peshawar University.

Formed in April 2013 in Iraq, ISIL, a jihadi organisation, is demolishing mosques and Muslim shrines in the militancy-riddled regions of Nineveh Province, Iraq.

"It is very disturbing to see ISIL members callously bombing shrines in Iraq and Syria that are revered by [all] Muslims," Ghafoor told Central Asia Online. "Islam teaches a message of peace, love, brotherhood and tolerance, and this act is totally against the basic tenets of our religion."

"Such religious fanatics are presenting the wrong picture of Islam to the outside world and embarrassing Muslims across the globe," he added.

Bombings hurt Islam's image

ISIL is vowing to demolish the shrine of Ghaus-ul-Azam Abdul Qadir Gilani in Baghdad before marching toward Najaf and Karbala, where it has said it intends to destroy the mausoleums of Imam Ali and Imam Hussain.

"The practice adopted by ISIL cannot be considered a service to Islam; rather, it will tarnish the image of our religion besides causing fragmentation of the Muslim ummah, which is presently in dire need of unity and harmony," Allama Abid Shakiri, caretaker of the Arif Hussaini seminary in Peshawar, said.

Such actions harm Islam and its followers, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Sami (JUIS) Central Vice-Amir Maulana Hamid-ul-Haq said.

"If ISIL members were true Muslims, they would respect different beliefs," he said. "Forcefully imposing religious beliefs on others has always pushed people from Islam rather than bringing them close."

"The most horrendous act ISIL committed was the bombing [in March] of the Uwais Al-Qarni RA shrine in Raqa, Syria," Irshad Agha, spokesman of the Pakistani religious organisation Majlis Wehdat-ul-Muslimeen, said. "It wrenched the hearts of [all] Muslims."

Standing up to ISIL

Fed up with the jihadist group's acts, some Muslims are taking a stand.

Thousands of foreign Muslims have volunteered to go to Iraq to protect holy shrines against the onslaught of radical ISIL militants, Irshad said, urging Muslim leaders to intervene and stop ISIL extremists from causing a rift within the Muslim ummah by further dividing it in the name of faith and practice of religion.

ISIL's continued disregard for the basic tenets of Islam "will fan sectarianism and lead to infighting and bloodshed among Muslims," he added.

Irshad's group on the last Friday of Ramadan (July 25) plans to hold protests throughout Pakistan condemning ISIL, Irshad said.

Source:

http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/pakistan/main/2014/07/14/feature-02

ISIL shows no dignity for the elderly

CAIRO – A video clip that appears to show an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) emir mocking an elderly Syrian man has sparked angry reactions among Syrians and Iraqis who told Al-Shorfa it is indicative of the group's lack of respect for the elderly in the areas it controls.

Old men and their families take refuge from conflict in Syria at a makeshift camp in Ankara, Turkey. A recent video showing the abuse of an elderly man at the hands of an ISIL 'emir' has been met with anger and outcry. [Adem Altan/AFP]

The video, which circulated on social networking sites in June, showed an ISIL emir in Jarabulus, Aleppo province, berating an elderly man.

The emir, an Egyptian national known as Abu Bakr al-Masri, threatens the old man with a gun when he fails to answer questions about the Prophet Mohammed, other prophets, angels and prayer, amid shouts of derision from those around him.

This prompts the elderly man to attempt to kiss al-Masri's foot, begging him to spare his life.

Syrian journalist Mohammed al-Abdullah, who lives in Cairo, said the elderly man in the video is a Kurd who is known in the Jarabulus area as a good and simple man who suffers from disorientation and the inability to focus.

Respect is of 'utmost importance'

The emir's treatment of the elderly man is both humiliating and offensive and demonstrates the extent of the organisation's disrespect for human beings, said Rasem al-Hilali, an Iraqi graduate student at Cairo University's faculty of law.

"Respect for the elderly is of utmost importance to us, and to tribesmen in particular," he told Al-Shorfa.

Tribesmen see this as a red line that is not to be crossed under any circumstance, he said.

And such treatment runs counter to Islamic teachings, others said.

"Islam stresses respect for the elderly," said Al-Azhar University Sharia and law professor Nayef Abd Rabbu, noting that scholars are in consensus on hadith that demonstrate this.

Abd Rabbu quoted an excerpt from a hadith, "Part of glorifying God is honouring the grey-haired Muslim."

In addition to honouring the elderly, Islam also emphasises the need to provide them with all types of support, assistance and health and social services, he said.

If it is true that the elderly man shown in the video does not know anything about religion, "then the so-called emir is obligated to teach him the fundamentals of religion, care for him and return him to the fold of faith," Abd Rabbu said.

Source: http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2014/07/28/feature-02

Iraq's Holy Sites Reduced To Rubble

by RFE/RL

The Islamic State initially exhibited some restraint after entering northwestern Iraq in June, focusing on establishing control of the territories it held and gaining the trust of local Sunni communities. But as the self-declared caliphate has grown more comfortable in its surroundings, it has revealed its radical aims by destroying anything that conflicts with its strict interpretation of Islam.

This includes turning historical religious sites and landmarks to dust. Most are Shi'ite, but any religious site -- whether Christian, Sunni, or other -- is at risk if it is deemed a center for apostasy, and not prayer.

Tal Afar

Following reports that Islamic State militants (then known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) had seized the western Iraqi city of Tal Afar, images emerged on the group's purported Twitter page of Shi'ite places of worship that had been destroyed.

Three Shi'ite shrines and three mosques were destroyed in Tal Afar in late June (the shrines of Khader Elias, Imam Saad bin Aqeel, and Ar Mamut, and the mosques of Imam al-Hakim, Ahel al-Bayt, and Hussienieh Sadiq [Al Julaq]), according to [Shaffaq news](#).

Mosul

Mosul, capital of Nineveh Province, has been at the center of the Islamic State's war on holy sites in recent weeks.

Mosque of the Prophet Jonah (Younis)

This massive complex holds the tomb of the Prophet Jonah, who in both the Koran and Bible is depicted as being swallowed by a whale. The site is held sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike -- that is, it was held, until the Islamic State got to it.

Militants built a wall of explosives around the tomb and turned it to rubble on July 24.

Shi'ite Sheikh Muqtada al-Sadr, who returned to Iraq from Lebanon to defend Shi'ite religious sites, condemned the desecration of the tomb. "He was a prophet for all religions," Sadr was quoted as saying by Beirut's "The Daily Star Online."

Despite the loss, some are already looking forward to the day the tomb, which dated to the eighth century B.C., is rebuilt.

Mosque of Seth

This is believed to be the burial site of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve. Seth is a revered figure among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, and his ancient shrine stood in Mosul until it was blown to bits on July 25.

One resident who witnessed the explosion described the scene to AFP: "IS militants stopped people from coming close, set explosives in and around the shrine and then detonated them as a crowd looked on."

Awn al-Din Shrine

The day of July 25 was also the last for Mosul's ancient Awn al-Din Shrine, whose final moments were documented here.

Mosque of the Prophet Jirjis

The following day, the Islamic State turned to the Prophet Jirjis Mosque, which dated to the late 14th century, and included a small shrine.

Preparations for the destruction of the mosque, located on Mosul's right bank, were evident ahead of time...

...before images of the result emerged.

Mar Behnam Monastery

Crosses were removed from the Mar Behnam Monastery, built in the fourth century near the town of Beth Khdeda just south of Mosul, before Islamic State forces stormed the complex and gave resident monks and priests the option to flee or face death.

The monastery is still standing, albeit adorned with black flags, but fears are being expressed about the fate of the monastery and its relics.

Spared -- For Now

Al-Hadba Minaret

Known as the "Hunchback Minaret" because of its extreme tilt resembling the Tower of Pisa, Mosul's Al-Hadba Minaret was pegged for destruction.

But according to recent reports, the minaret was saved by locals.

Imam al-Askari Shrine

The Islamic State's sweep through Iraq led to calls for Shi'a around the world to come and defend holy sites.

Iranian President Hassan Rohani was among the first to signal his country's willingness to enter the fray. Iraq's top cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, appealed during Friday Prayers for all Muslim sects to stand together to protect Shi'ite shrines. Shi'ite cleric Sadr was among those to answer the call, settling in Samarra to defend the Imam al-Askari shrine.

In Samarra, the effort appears to have paid off. Rockets fired by militants at the revered Shi'ite shrine resulted in numerous casualties and 14 deaths in late June, but defenders of the complex have so far managed to hold off attempts to take it.

In 2006 and 2007, bombings of the site inflamed sectarian tensions, leading to thousands of deaths over the next two years.

The shrine was later restored to its former glory.

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/iraq-holy-sites-destroyed/25474424.html>

Local Ecclesiastical News

Apostolic Kalpana - Mosul Status

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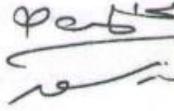
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BY THE GRACE OF GOD

Ignatius Aphrem II
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church

No EI 26/14



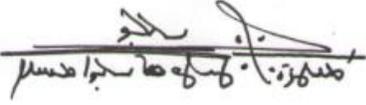

24th July 2014

Apostolic benediction to our beloved Brother-in-Christ His Beatitude the Catholicos Mor Baselios Thomas I, and to all our beloved brothers in Christ Their Eminences the Metropolitans of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church.

The situation of our spiritual children in Mosul and Nineveh Plain is breaking our hearts; the horrific and unbearable atrocities committed against our people there, are well-known to all. We are confident that you share prayer and hope with us that God will restore justice to all those who are unjustly treated in this life. As Patriarch and Father of the Syriac people, we have intensified our efforts and adopted an intense program of meetings and gatherings with people of good will. We hope to gain their support in order to offer our people a dignified life in our forefathers' land.

We deem it right to dedicate the Holy Qurobo (divine liturgy) on Sunday August 3rd, 2014 in all our Syrian orthodox parishes throughout the world for the sake of peace in Iraq and everywhere. The church collection on that day shall be donated for the assistance of the displaced families from Mosul. It can be sent to the Patriarchate, or directly deposited in the Bank Account of St. Ephrem Patriarchal Development Committee (number and address details included).

Finally, we offer our apostolic benediction to all members of our Syrian Orthodox Church, clergy and laity, asking the Lord to pour His blessings on them and protect them from danger and all evil. May the grace of God be with you all. We extend our Apostolic Blessings. ܩܝܫܝܐ ܘܩܝܫܝܐ ܘܩܝܫܝܐ ܘܩܝܫܝܐ ܘܩܝܫܝܐ

Forwarded by Archbishop Mor Theethose Yeldho 

Christians a fundamental part of Iraq, ambassador observes

by [Elise Harris](#)

Vatican City, Jul 31, 2014 / 05:16 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- The Iraqi ambassador to the Holy See has lamented the ongoing persecution of Christians by ISIS forces in Iraq, stating that they are an important and historic part of the country's origins.

"Right now with the entrance of these jihadists, ISIS, they have imposed the sword and want to kill the Christians," Habbib M.H. Al-Sadr told CNA July 24, 2014.

"This is outside of our culture, of our history, because the Christians are a fundamental, historic component of Iraq...they have origins here," he continued, noting that "When the ISIS jihadists entered Mosul they forced the Christians to convert to Islam, pay the jizya tax, or to leave or escape, because they told them that 'this is not your country.'"

Al-Sadr, a Shiite Muslim, has been Iraq's ambassador to the Holy See since 2010, and spoke in wake of the July 17 departure of the last Christian families in Iraq's second largest city of Mosul.

The exodus of Christians from the city follows a June 10 initiative launched by members of ISIS, a militant group that operates in Iraq and Syria with the aim of establishing a caliphate in northern Syria and Iraq, who overtook Mosul and the city of Tikrit, 95 miles north of Baghdad, the same day.

Since then the group had seized portions of Ramadi and Falluja earlier; Tal Afar was seized by ISIS June 16, and the group briefly held parts of Baquba, 37 miles outside of Baghdad, the following day.

July 17 the self-proclaimed Islamic Caliphate declared to the remaining Christian community of Mosul that they either needed openly convert to Islam, pay an unspecified jizya tax in exchange for their safety while observing certain conditions, leave their homes with only their clothes and nothing more or face death.

According to BBC News, the Christians had until midday to comply with the conditions of ISIS, who stated that "We offer them three choices: Islam; the dhimma contract – involving payment of jizya; if they refuse this they will have nothing but the sword."

Following the declaration, the houses of Mosul Christians were marked with the letter "N," signifying "Nazarenes." As a result the few remaining Christians left the city, marking the first time in history it has been without Christians.

"These Christians have left Mosul with just their clothes on. They did not have anything else with them," Al-Sadr observed.

"The houses of Christians in Mosul have been given to the terrorists that have come from diverse parts of the world really. They have taken the houses of the Christians."

Speaking of the general help that citizens are receiving from the Iraqi Ministry of Migrants and Itinerants and the Ministry of Health, Al-Sadr explained that those who have fled are being provided with basic food necessities as well as one-million Iraqi 'dinari,' which is equivalent to 750 U.S. dollars.

Noting how there have been 1 million Iraqi citizens internally displaced by the recent uptick in conflict, the ambassador also drew attention to the 3 million who have left the country “to search for security, freedom and work” following the reign of their previous dictator, Saddam Hussein.

“Immigrants right now prefer not to come back until there is tranquility in the country again,” he said, stating that the government is searching for ways to convince them to eventually return, because they are considered “an integral part of the country and of its social fabric.”

Source: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/christians-a-fundamental-part-of-iraq-ambassador-observes-43473/>

How can we rescue Christians in the Middle East?

By Drew Christiansen | Aug. 8, 2014

The persecution and expulsion of Christians from northern Iraq by the Islamic State is the latest, most organized, highly destructive blow to hit the Christians of the Middle East in more than a century. It follows pressures by Saddam Hussein on Assyrian Christians to force them to Arabize and, later, after the disastrous American invasion of 2003, repeated attacks by Sunni militants to drive Christians from the Iraqi homeland.

Especially after the civil war in Syria, northern Iraq had been last refuge for Iraqi Christians, and now they are driven with unprecedented ferocity from that haven, as well. Not since the Nazis' war on the Jews has there been such complete depredation of a people. They walk into exile alongside other minorities with no vehicles, no baggage, no jewelry, no money, no papers. Those who remain will be slain unless they convert to Islam.

One of the most damaging effects of the George W. Bush administration and the American foreign policy establishment in Iraq was to prepare the way for the destruction of Middle Eastern Christianity. Now the Obama administration compounds the tragedy by providing little for the defense and succor of Christian refugees.

My confrere Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese [has written of the policies](#) that might be undertaken to provide protection and humanitarian aid to the Christians of Iraq and Syria. I would like to advocate another approach: a special synod for the Middle East that would draft a long-term collective plan of action for preservation of Middle Eastern Christianity in diaspora.

The 2012 synod on the Middle East dealt mainly with intra-church and long-standing ecumenical issues. Because of the volatility of the times, little was said about public policy, and no plan of collective action was undertaken. That traditional policy of discretion proved a failure. With so much now lost, it is a time to look to the construction of a future in which the rich diversity of Middle Eastern Christianity can be preserved.

Since the problem affects so many churches -- Catholic, Orthodox, Copt, Syrian, Armenian, etc. -- it would be wonderful for this to be a common effort. Though the odds are against it, Pope Francis might join Patriarch Bartholomew in convoking a comprehensive meeting. The convocation would not have to be a formal synod. It might take a different designation, like the First Congress of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of the Middle East in 1999.

The advantage of a broadly ecumenical meeting would be to include the diversity of Middle Eastern Christians, many of whom have no effective voice. The most feasible scenario, however, with the greatest prospect of success, would seem to be a synod of the Catholic churches with others as participant observers.

In addition, I would propose that governmental, international organizational and nongovernmental organization observers be invited. This would put the plight of Christians firmly on the agenda of the world community. Such secular observers would also provide expertise on possible remedies for humanitarian problems and provide input in the drafting of a plan of action.

The fate of Middle East Christians can no longer remain the province of protest and advocacy. The religious liberty lobby needs to organize in a more constructive, more consultative way to meet this "existential threat." Rescuing Middle Eastern Christianity has to have the same priority that the defense of Jews has had for the last 60 years. Indeed, it requires higher status now, because for Middle Eastern Christians, the hour of communal and cultural destruction is at hand.

The great unknown piece in an alternate Christian future is Christian-Muslim relations. The Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East and other official groups premised the continued Christian presence in the region on coexistence and conviviality in the Arab-Muslim world. Except for a couple of pockets like Jordan and Lebanon, that future no longer seems viable. Reimagining Christian-Muslim relations must be part of any collective reassessment of the future of Middle Eastern Christianity.

Response to the Islamic State's extremism and the future of Christian-Muslim relations should also be on the agenda of moderate Muslims, like the authors of the 2007 letter "[A Common Word Between Us and You](#)," who still believe in dialogue and a shared future with the Christian world.

A new initiative on the part of Muslim scholars, as difficult as it might be to organize under current circumstances, would be most welcome. Ideally, it would reject religious intolerance, affirm Muslim-Christian ties and the place of Christians in the Middle East, and uphold the common values that sustain conviviality between the faithful of the two traditions.

[Jesuit Fr. Drew Christiansen is former editor of *America* magazine and a professor of ethics at Georgetown University. He served as an expert at the 1999 Congress of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of the Middle East.]

Source: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/how-can-we-rescue-christians-middle-east>

Patriarchs met with US President in Washington D.C



United States President Barak Obama met with several Eastern Church leaders on Thursday, Sept 11th at the White House in Washington, D.C. to discuss the current situations in the Middle East. Amongst the Heirarchs was our Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, His Holiness Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Aphrem II.

His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II



Father Anthony DeLuca was present at the farewell dinner for His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch, given by the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church of N.America in Hanover, New Jersey, September 19, 2014.

Meeting of the Oriental Orthodox-US National Conference of Catholic Bishops at Stella Maris Retreat House, Long Branch, New Jersey, October 2, 3, 2014















Other Related News

[These Are The Most Breathtaking Church Ceilings In The World-- And We Almost Missed Them](#)

Don't forget to look up.

Sometimes you find the real treasures when looking at things from a different perspective. While plenty of churches have beautiful stained glass windows, fascinating gargoyles, and stunning works of art to distract your eye, simply raising your gaze heavenward can provide the most stunning view of all. The crick in your neck will be totally worth it.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/12/church-ceilings_n_5568080.html

[Paul Goble: Window on Eurasia: Putin's 'Russian Spring' Idea was Invented by Russian Fascists in 1920s.](#)

Staunton, July 30 - Commentators in Moscow and the West ever more frequently draw parallels between Vladimir Putin's ideas and actions and those of fascist regimes in the first part of the 20th century, but few have focused on the fact that one of the Kremlin leader's most-cherished ideas, that of the "Russian Spring," was invented by a Russian fascist in the 1920s.

In a blog post today, Pavel Pryannikov corrects that gap, pointing out that "the 'Russian Spring' in fact is not an invention of the present time" but rather that this "synthesis of fascism, Stalinism, Russian Nationalism and Orthodoxy" was invented by Aleksandr Kazem-Bek, a leading theoretician of Russian fascism in the 1920s (ttolk.ru/?p=21214).

While the more familiar Eurasian movement represented the first attempt to "combine corporatist (proto-fascist) and Bolshevik ideas," he writes, "far more popular" among White Russians were the ideas of the Young Russians ("Mladorossy") whose intellectual leader was Aleksandr Kazem-Bek.

The descendent of an aristocratic family which came from Persia to Russia in the early 19th century, Kazem-Bek was "completely Russified." He fought in the White Army and in 1920 at the age of 18 fled to Europe. There in 1923, he founded the Young Russia Union and served as its chief ideologist.

The group in his view was to promote "a certain new type of totalitarian monarchy, the struggle against masonry and international capital and also a life 'full of blood, fire, and self-sacrifice.'" In Kazem-Bek's view, Russia should have a regime like Mussolini's in Italy but be fully committed to the promotion of "'Russianness.'"

Not only were his ideas derived from fascism, but Kazem-Bek adopted many fascist external features: a uniform, military discipline, and a cult of the leader. He insisted that the old Russia had died because of its corruption and that the Soviet revolution, which a catastrophe, was also "an apocalypse" which "cleansed" the Russian nation.

Kazem-Bek increasingly viewed Stalin as an exemplar of the kind of leader he believed Russia should have, and he insisted that what Russia needed was a combination of Russian autocracy and Bolshevism or as he put it in one of his slogans, "a tsar and soviets" at one and the same time.

His ideas attracted support among some of the Romanovs and other members of the nobility in emigration. But they and he also attracted the attention of the Soviet secret police, and by the middle 1930s, Kazem-Bek was assumed by many to be a collaborator with the NKVD, all the more so when he declared that Young Russia was a "second" Soviet party.

Throughout his émigré career, Kazem-Bek was withering in criticism of "European values." He insisted that "Russia is not a competitor of Europe; it is its successor" and has the right to dispense with anything harmful in the European tradition. "We are not only Europeans," he wrote; "we are Russians. That is something European chauvinists cannot forgive us for."

After Mussolini formed his alliance with Hitler in 1939, Kazem-Bek broke with the Italian government and moved to France. By that point, his ideology could be described as "Russian Orthodox Stalinism." After Germany occupied France, the Young Russia leader fled to the United States.

There he began to work with the Russian Orthodox Church and especially with its Moscow Patriarchate wing. And in 1957, Kazem-Bek returned to Moscow where he worked in the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, which always had close ties with the KGB and out of which the current patriarch came.

While in that job, Kazem-Bek frequently met with Patriarch Aleksii, Metropolitan Nikolay and other senior churchmen. He lived in Ministry of Defense housing. When he died in February 1977, he was buried in Peredelkino and among those who spoke at his funeral was Archpriest Nikolay Gundyayev, the elder brother of Patriarch Kirill.

At that time, Father Nikolay Gundyayev said "we must not only remember Kazem-Bek but study him." Since the latter's death, the Moscow Patriarchate has done so. In 2002, on the centenary of Kazem-Bek's death, Vsevolod Chaplin was among those who took part in a conference on the Young Russia leader.

Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), who has been a spiritual advisor to Putin, is known to highly value Kazem-Bek's ideas, Pryannikov says. And it is probably through him that the ideas of a Russian fascist of the 1920s have come to the attention and affected the thinking of the current Kremlin leader.

Pussy Riot Members Seek Compensation From Kremlin

By RFE/RL

July 28, 2014

Two former members of the Russian punk performance-art group Pussy Riot are reportedly seeking compensation from the Kremlin for "violation of their rights to freely express their opinions, to personal immunity, and to a fair trial."

The "Vedomosti" newspaper on July 28 reported that Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina filed their lawsuit with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg last week.

They are demanding 120,000 euros (\$161,000) each, plus 10,000 euros as compensation of legal costs.

The two were convicted of hooliganism and sentenced to two years in jail in 2012 after staging a performance against Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

They were released as part of an amnesty in December 2013, two months before the end of their terms.

With reporting by vedomosti.ru

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/pussy-riot-compensation-tolokonnikova-alyokhina-human-rights/25472461.html>

Editorial: Path of destruction in Iraq began in 1991

By NCR Editorial Staff | Aug. 25, 2014

The horrid truth of this moment in Iraq is that it is, finally, a moment of clarity. The lucidity, if one dare call it such, that emerges from the long fog of war is a scene of utter futility and devastation. The hideous symbols that signify the moment are the final flight of Christians and other religious minorities before the brutal extremes of the most virulent of the pan-national terrorist groups to have emerged in the Middle East.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria at the moment is a state only in the abstract, a statement more of ambition than reality. Yet it has effectively taken over huge sections of Syria and Iraq, including oil resources and power-generation facilities, in its attempt to construct a wide-flung caliphate in the region. More violent and fundamentally dogmatic than even al-Qaida, the Islamic State has become the latest and most formidable threat to any hope that Iraq might somehow gain its equilibrium and form governing structures representative of all of the ethnicities and religions contained in its borders.

The Islamic State wants nothing to do with inclusive governance. It is brutally forcing conversions under threat of death. In its wake, hundreds of thousands of Christians are fleeing territory that can claim

some of the deepest roots in Christian history. This is no longer a matter of "complex" geopolitics or of oil wars. The politics of this certainly can generate strange alliances -- the enemy-of-my-enemy dynamic is at work in several directions -- but the urgency has to do with the assault of innocents by religious and political fanatics who have no regard for law, culture or human life.

As Msgr. John Kozar, president of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), put it, "We are witnessing, at the hands of extremist thugs, the eradication of Christianity in the cradle of civilization." A recent CNEWA release noted that fewer than 150,000 Christians remain in Iraq, where more than a million coexisted with multiple Islamic and other religious communities prior to 1991.

It dangerously distorts the reality of the moment, however, if we reserve our moral outrage for the indisputably repulsive acts of the Islamic State. For that threat did not arise out of nothing in the deserts of the Middle East.

The year 1991 is important, because it was the year that the United States took its first steps down a regrettable path that has gone on for nearly a quarter of a century. That path has led to far more chaos and destruction than peace. With the final remnants of the Christian population now scrambling for borders and safe haven in other countries to escape Islamic State marauders, the bitter fruit of decades of military folly is on full display. This is former Secretary of State Colin Powell's Pottery Barn analogy come to full reality: We broke that country completely and we will be paying for it far into the future. We miss the point entirely if we ignore the whole bloody arc of 24 years that witnessed the criminal destruction of a country:

- From the senior George Bush's oil war, Desert Storm;
- Through Bill Clinton's 10 years of sanctions that were directly responsible for the deaths of a half-million Iraqi youngsters under the age of 5, and for the utter collapse of Iraq's infrastructure and educated middle class;
- Through the lunacy of the occupation of Iraq conceived by the younger Bush in league with the likes of Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on demonstrably false claims.

It is not a sign of political tolerance but of ongoing political confusion that Cheney still has access to national forums from which he continues to advance his delusions about that period of history. For the rest of us, the lesson should be strikingly clear: Our quick and repeated resort to war and the brutal use of sanctions yielded a bitter harvest. What we created was a condition infinitely worse than the disease we were attempting to treat.

It is necessary to carry the burden of that history into the urgency of the current moment, for part of that history was the overlooked or ignored voices of religious leaders -- popes, women religious, lay peace groups and local pastors -- insisting that war was not the solution.

Those same leaders and groups, while appealing to the international community for whatever assistance it can provide, are also the ones most directly involved in the work in those border areas where refugees are pouring in, looking for safe haven.

The Catholic Near East Welfare Association, a New York-based nonprofit, is an agency of the Holy See working mainly in the Middle East. It has launched a campaign to rush emergency assistance to tens of

thousands of Christians forced to flee the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. More information can be found on [the association's website](#).

Catholic Relief Services, a U.S.-based agency, is partnering with Caritas Internationalis, a consortium of international Catholic agencies, to provide relief for refugees from Iraq. More information on CRS work in that region and ways to contribute can be found [at its website](#).

Pope Francis has appealed to the international community "particularly through the norms and mechanisms of international law, to do all that it can to stop and to prevent further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities."

Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, repeated the pope's words in a recent letter to President Barack Obama, urging the United States "to answer this call in concert with the international community."

For those who construe a green or yellow light or other permission in Francis' words during [his airplane news conference](#) on the way back from South Korea, we would only urge reading the entire segment of that response. Yes, the pope said it was "licit" to stop the unjust aggressor. But he qualified that statement: "I underscore the verb 'stop.' I'm not saying 'bomb' or 'make war,' just 'stop.' " How the aggressor is to be stopped should be evaluated by the international community, not by one country's decision, and he suggested the United Nations as a venue.

More telling, perhaps, is his warning that "we nevertheless need to remember how many times, using this excuse of stopping an unjust aggressor, the powerful nations have dominated other peoples, made a real war of conquest." In one economically stated sentence, Francis seems to not only turn the question back on the questioner but also give a micro-history of the last 24 years of U.S. involvement in Iraq.

We dare not take too much solace in finally having an enemy almost everyone can agree on. The enemy owes a great deal to our own national stupidity and rush to war, not to mention the weaponry we left behind.

It is beyond time for any reasonable outcome in Iraq. History shows the difficulty of stopping the war machine before it is too late, and the battle with extreme forces is likely to go on for the foreseeable future. Facing such a grim prospect, we strain for a bit of hope and an answer to that fathomless question: What can we do?

As a nation, we have poured inordinate amounts of treasury into what has amounted to the destruction of Iraq and the scattering of its citizenry. As people of faith, our personal treasury may seem miniscule, but it is one way we can show solidarity with those suffering the consequences of international violence. Both CNEWA and CRS are worthy recipients of whatever we can give. Further, Kurtz has requested two special collections at the beginning of September to aid those in need in the Middle East. Look for details from your parishes.

People of faith can step into this moment of urgency by understanding the harsh lessons of the last 24 years and by adding a layer of action by giving, whatever your means, to the rescue of those whose lives have been forever altered by the demons of war and religious intolerance.

Source: <http://ncronline.org/news/global/path-destruction-began-1991>

Review of Movie, *Calvary* (seen and highly recommended by Ambassador DeLuca)

Portrait of a Real Priest reviewed by [Robert Barron](#)

St. John Paul II said that a priest should have the heart of Christ the Good Shepherd. Far too many saccharine paintings of effeminate Jesuses in the midst of delicate lambs have conduced toward a misconstrual of this image as something sentimental and harmless.

But shepherds not only had the smell of their sheep (to use Pope Francis's language), but they also wielded a stick, meant to bring back strays and to fend off threats. Real shepherding was, and is, a dirty and hard-edged business.

John Michael McDonagh's film *Calvary* shows, with extraordinary vividness, what authentic spiritual shepherding looks like and how it feels for a priest to have a shepherd's heart. The movie opens in the quiet of the confessional, where Fr. James, played by the always-compelling Brendan Gleeson, waits to receive the confession of a penitent. What he hears, however, is not a list of sins, but a brutal threat: "I will kill you Sunday next. Say we meet on the beach?" The awful words are coming from a man who had been sexually abused, across many years, by a priest and who now wants to seek his revenge by eliminating a man he admits is a good priest. The story then unfolds as Fr. James's passion week, the stations of the cross, as he makes his way to his own Calvary.

We see immediately that he is a pastor who knows his people and their struggles. And we also see that this knowledge is not abstract or distant, but rather is born of very close and sympathetic contact with them. By foot, by boat, or by car, he visits the homes of his parishioners and addresses their practical and spiritual needs. Moreover, he is not afraid to take them to task when he sees them walking on an errant path. The people to whom he ministers -- a sexually promiscuous woman, a suicidal old writer, a young man caught up in all forms of pornography, a deeply embittered and corrupt financier, an atheist doctor more cynical than Richard Dawkins, and even an imprisoned serial killer -- represent the spiritual wasteland that has emerged in Ireland in the wake of the clergy sex scandals and under the influence of postmodern indifferentism. In his dealings with these people, Fr. James is unfailingly simple, direct, and spiritually incisive, but he is met, over and over, with mockery, condescension, even contempt. And yet, wearing the soutane and collar that unmistakably mark him as a priest, he soldiers on.

Any suspicion that the man in the confessional was only making an idle threat is eliminated when Fr. James's church is burned to the ground, in an obvious act of arson, and when his beloved dog is found with his throat cut. Understandably enough, the frightened priest, as the fateful Sunday approaches, books passage on a flight to Dublin. The only time that we see him out of his soutane and in civilian clothes is as he makes his way to the airport to escape his fate. But as he is about to board the plane, the priest decides to return to his parish, to his people, and to the encounter with his killer on the seashore. On Sunday morning, Fr. James has a telephone conversation with this daughter Fiona (he had been married and had lost his wife prior to entering the seminary). In the course of their exchange, he says, "I think there's been too much talk about sin and not enough talk about virtue." "What is the greatest virtue?" Fiona asks, and her father responds, "I think forgiveness has been quite underrated."

On the strand, an angry young man, whom we have seen throughout the film, comes striding toward the priest, gun in hand, and with astonishing courage, Fr. James meets him face to face. The tortured man spits out his bitterness toward the church and then breaks into sobs expressive of anger, regret, and

deep pain. All this time, Fr. James holds his ground, offering simple words of forgiveness and hope. Finally, the man presses the gun to priest's forehead and fires.

It seems to be the grimmest possible ending, a confirmation of the worldview of the most nihilist and despairing of Fr. James's parishioners. But then we remember that the movie is entitled "Calvary" and that a good priest, by definition, is an alter Christus, another Christ. Jesus' shepherding ministry came to its climax on a squalid hill outside of Jerusalem, when he stood his ground as the darkness and dysfunction of the world swept over him. The crucified Jesus did not battle evil on its own terms, but rather swallowed it up in the divine mercy: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Fr. James, though tempted to avoid his awful confrontation with wickedness, walked all the way up his own Calvary, and dealt with sin precisely as Jesus had.

The final scene of the film is filled with Christian hope. Fr. James's daughter comes to the prison where her father's killer is incarcerated. Through the glass partition that separates them, he looks at her with anguish, but she looks back at him with a smile. Though no words are exchanged, it is clear that Fr. James's heroic witness to the most underrated of virtues has had its effect. Through the ministrations of a real priest, a green shoot appears in a spiritual wasteland; Calvary is followed by resurrection.

Father Robert Barron is the founder of the global ministry, Word on Fire, and the Rector/President of Mundelein Seminary.

[Elena Chebotareva, Irina Novikova, Alexey Novikov \(People's Friendship University of Russia\)](#) and [Anastasia Chebotareva \(Russian State University for Humanities\)](#)

We met with Rivka Meir for the first time at the EPA Meeting at Cambridge MA on March 2011. We were impressed by her sincerity, openness, energy and humanity. She was really cross-cultural in origin and in her style of life, and she was so sensitive to cultural peculiarities of different people and could find a common ground with every person. Rivka was so kind to invite us to her home in New Jersey, where we had the good fortune to get to know Rivka as a hospitable hostess. Rivka's remarkable and diversified career in theoretical and practical psychology couldn't leave anybody indifferent. Rivka Meir always readily shared the results of her work and supported us in our projects. All our meetings with Rivka were bright and unforgettable!

Rivka amazed us by her vitality, optimism, sense of humor.

We will always remember and love our dear Rivka!

Congressman Charles Rangel



Ambassador Anthony DeLuca spoke briefly with Congressman Charles Rangel (D-NY, representing Harlem) at City Cadillac, Long Island City, Queens, NY on Sunday September 21, 2014.

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