

Holy Wisdom

Peace: Showing that Others Matter!

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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

SOCA NGO Rep Joseph Cannizzo in Tokyo, Japan

In Tokyo Japan SOCA NGO Rep Joseph Cannizzo conducted various Judo clinics from the 20th to the 25th of July 2015, which emphasized traditional judo principles such as physical education and social responsibility. In attendance were Japanese and American intermediate, high school and college students from Takanawa High School, Meiji University, Leeward Judo Club Hawaii, Chuo college, and Pearl Harbor Judo and the International School of the Peninsula.



Helping to coordinate this event was Tenkai Miki, a Buddhist Monk and Assistant Judo Instructor at the U.S. Embassy in Japan. Together Tenkai and Joseph helped to keep the seminars educational and fun. Special time was given after workouts for students from around the world to form culturally diverse group discussions designed to build friendships and discuss culture.



After the immensely successful event Joseph began discussions with Shigeyoshi Sakai, a Judoist dedicated to bringing to life an International Judo exchange program. This program would allow high school and college Judo students to canvas using their Judo skills and ability as a metric for charitable donations. As a reminder, Japan has been the victim of various natural disasters during the recent past. Charities are not popular in Japan however, a program like this has never been created. This program has great potential to be used as a model for international youth community service which would raise money for disaster victims and help increase and world peace efforts. Students who raise the most money would be eligible for various educational rewards. Some of these rewards would include the ability to travel abroad to United States Judo schools which would allow students to share their experiences with community service and social responsibility.



As many people know, the 2016 Olympics is rapidly approaching. Modern Judo is often focused on competition and results however the creator of Judo, Jigoro Kano, emphasized Judo as being both Physical Education, Self Defense and most importantly a tool to be able to help people improve themselves and the world.





Engage with the UN: What we're up to!

The Situation of #YouthNow

We are happy to present an overview highlighting the situation of young people around the world. The information was made available with the support of more than 25 partner agencies of the United Nations. Check out the facts on 16 thematic areas of development and learn more here.

In Paris, the Youth Envoy calls for effective partnership with youth to counter violent extremism

On 16 June, the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, spoke at the International Conference on "Youth and the Internet: Fighting Radicalization and Extremism," held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France. For more information click here.

Inclusion and active involvement of youth vital to success of UN sustainability agenda - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

On 29 May, the United Nations General Assembly commemorated the 20th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth with an acknowledgement that young people have been

"disproportionately" affected by many global challenges but "are ready and willing to be actively involved in shaping their future." For more information [click here](#).

News For Youth

MDGs Report launch: Lessons from Millennium Development Goals 'springboard' for future UN agenda

On 6 July in Oslo, Norway, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the 2015 MDG Report.

"The report confirms that the global efforts to achieve the Goals have saved millions of lives and improved conditions for millions more around the world," said the Secretary-General. For more information [click here](#).

On World Refugee Day, young refugees tell their stories on stage

On 19 June, the evening before this year's World Refugee Day, the "Junge Burg" production of "Gimme Shelter" celebrated its premiere in Vienna's famous Burgtheater. Featuring a cast of 30 young refugees from 12 different countries, the piece incorporates a mix of acting, dance and song. For more information [click here](#).

UN Youth Advisory Panel established in Belarus

We are happy to announce that the UN Country Team in Belarus has joined the countries that have established UN Youth Advisory Panel. The UN Youth Advisory Panel is an initiative championed in the work plan of the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth to increase youth participation with the UN System at the national level. For more information [click here](#).

Opportunities

Join the Youth Consultation on the Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security

Ahead of the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security taking place in Jordan on the 21st and 22nd of August, 2015, we invite you to provide inputs for the Amman Declaration, which will present young people's vision and roadmap towards a strengthened policy framework in support of young people's roles in preventing and transforming conflict, countering violent extremism and building peace. Join the Youth Consultations on the Amman Declaration. For more information [click here](#).

Take a picture and enter the #YouthDay competition

Take a picture and enter the #YouthDay competition to celebrate theme of International Youth Day 2015: 'Youth Civic Engagement'. Share your photos of young people engaging and promoting civic engagement for change. For more information [click here](#).

United Nations Young Professionals Programme is Open for Applications

Interested in a UN career? See if you're eligible for the 2015 Young Professional Programme. Young Professionals Programme (YPP) is a recruitment initiative for talented, highly qualified professionals to start a career as an international civil servant with the United Nations Secretariat. For more information [click here](#).

UN Seeks To Counter 'Cultural Cleansing' By Islamic State

The United Nations cultural organisation July 1 called for a campaign against the "cultural cleansing" being carried out by the Islamic State.

IS has destroyed archaeological treasures in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, including two mausoleums in the recently captured ancient city of Palmyra.

IS' destruction of the 2,000-year-old fortress city of Hatra in Iraq with sledgehammers, seen in a video this spring, prompted UNESCO this week to put Hatra on a list of 'Heritage in Danger' sites, joining the Old City of Jerusalem and other threatened archeological wonders.

"Extremists don't destroy heritage as a collateral damage, they target it systematically to strike societies at their core," said UNESCO's Director-General Irina Bokova.

UNESCO has launched a campaign called "United Heritage" to defend historical sites under threat from militants.

Earlier, the militants also damaged the site of Iraq's ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud and destroyed dozens of pieces from the museum in Mosul.

Such acts are motivated by "ignorance and criminal stupidity," said Bokova. "Culture should be part of our response to violent extremism."

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/iraq-islamic-state-un-cultural-heritage-sites/27105523.html>

Seventieth Anniversary of the United Nations Charter



“We, the Peoples of the United Nations,” the opening words of the Charter became a reality just four months after the signing of the Organization’s founding document on 26 June 1945 in the auditorium of the Veterans’ Memorial Hall in San Francisco.

Seventy years later, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon returned to San Francisco where the Charter was first signed. The Secretary General’s words laid down the importance of that moment in history and in the present- “The 70th anniversary falls in a year of potentially momentous decisions on our common future. Countries are shaping what we hope will be an inspiring new sustainable development agenda and moving towards a meaningful agreement on climate change. Our goal is transformation: we are the first generation that can erase poverty from the earth – and the last that can act to avoid the worst impacts of a warming world.”

The Secretary-General recalled his first encounter with the UN, dating back to his childhood during the Korean War when, as a displaced person fleeing his burning village, he and his family relied on the Organization to rescue them from the ravages of war. His family, he has said, was saved from hunger by UN food relief operations and, when doubts surfaced over whether the world was concerned about their suffering, “the troops of many nations sacrificed their lives to restore security and peace.”

On 26th June 2015, with a fresh set of challenges marking a pivotal moment for the planet – from the fight against climate change to the aspirations of a sustainable future – the Secretary-General confirmed that the UN is standing once again as a nexus of collaboration for all Member States.

“As the distinctions between the national and the international continue to fall away, challenges faced by one become challenges faced by all, sometimes gradually but often suddenly,” the Secretary-General concluded. “With our fates ever more entwined, our future must be one of ever deeper cooperation – nations united by a spirit of global citizenship that lives up to the promise of the Organization’s name.”

Opening Mass of the Holy See at Holy Family Church, 14 September 2015 for the 70th Session of the United Nations. Pictures taken by Rev. Father Faustino Quintanilla, D.D.











[65th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference - FINAL REPORT](#)

Dear NGO Colleagues,

We are pleased to share with you the **Final Report of the 65th Annual United Nations Department of Public Information/ Non-Governmental Organizations Conference.**

The report includes extracts from the different presentations, as well as the Outcome Document, the Youth Sessions deliberations, summaries of the Thematic Roundtables and much more.

Given the size of the document, we suggest that you download it to your device first.

[FINAL REPORT](#)

[His Holiness Pope Francis' Visit To The Un, September 25, 2015](#)

His Holiness Pope Francis arrived at the United Nations at 8:30 AM on Friday, September 25, 2015. He was welcomed by Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and his wife. Together they viewed the Norman Rockwell "Golden Rule" painting and exchanged gifts. His Holiness signed the guest book and then addressed the UN staff for a "town hall" meeting in the lobby of the Secretariat Building. About 400

people, standing in the lobby, were present to hear the Pope speak to those assembled: "...the vast majority of people working here do not make the news...thank you for your quiet and devoted work...(which) contributes to the betterment of the United Nations...working for peace...in peace...in a spirit of justice...I will pray for you and your families...I ask each one of you to pray for me and wish me well..." The meeting was followed by a moment of silence for fallen UN staff members. The Pope and Secretary General laid a wreath in their memory. The Pope and SG rode through the UN in a motorized cart, receiving flowers and greeting a group of schoolchildren who sang: "Light a candle for peace...for love...that our wish for world peace will one day come true."

The Pope then had meetings with the President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly, H.E. Mogens Lyketoft of Denmark; H. E. Sam Kutesa of Uganda, who invited him to the UN; and the President of the Security Council for the month of September, H. E. Vitaly Churkin of Russia.

This marks the fifth visit of a Pope to the United Nations: Pope Paul VI, October 4, 1965; Pope John Paul II October 2, 1979 and October 5, 1995; Pope Benedict XVI, April 18, 2008. This is the **first time** a Pope has addressed the opening of the General Assembly at the annual gathering of world leaders and the adoption of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The Pope spoke in Spanish to representatives of all nations gathered for the 70th session of the General Assembly.

In reaffirming "the importance which the Catholic Church attaches to this Institution and the hope she places in its activities," the Pope highlighted many important achievements of the United Nations. He did not claim to be exhaustive as he mentioned, "the codification and development of international law, the establishment of international norms regarding human rights, advances in humanitarian law, the resolution of numerous conflicts...All these achievements are lights which help to dispel the darkness of the disorder caused by unrestrained ambitions and collective forms of selfishness." He continued: "I would recall today those who gave their lives for peace and reconciliation among peoples, from Dag Hammarskjöld to the many United Nations officials at every level who have been killed in the course of humanitarian missions, and missions of peace and reconciliation."

On the global climate crisis he said, "The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion...a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity (which) leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged...the poorest are those who suffer most..." He concluded by saying: "...I assure you of my support and my prayers...that this Institution...will always render an effective service respectful of diversity and capable of bringing out, for sake of the common good, the best in each people and in every individual...Thank you." Viewed and reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli, SOCA Representative to UN/DPI

For full text of *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the General Assembly of the United Nations*, go to: <http://www.holyseemission.org>

Pope Francis' Speech to the United Nations General Assembly



Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good day. Once again, following a tradition by which I feel honored, the Secretary General of the United Nations has invited the Pope to address this distinguished assembly of nations. In my own name, and that of the entire Catholic community, I wish to express to you, Mr Ban Ki-moon, my heartfelt gratitude. I greet the Heads of State and Heads of Government present, as well as the ambassadors, diplomats and political and technical officials accompanying them, the personnel of the United Nations engaged in this 70th Session of the General Assembly, the personnel of the various programs and agencies of the United Nations family, and all those who, in one way or another, take part in this meeting. Through you, I also greet the citizens of all the nations represented in this hall. I thank you, each and all, for your efforts in the service of mankind.

This is the fifth time that a Pope has visited the United Nations. I follow in the footsteps of my predecessors Paul VI, in 1965, John Paul II, in 1979 and 1995, and my most recent predecessor, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in 2008. All of them expressed their great esteem for the Organization, which they considered the appropriate juridical and political response to this present moment of history, marked by our technical ability to overcome distances and frontiers and, apparently, to overcome all natural limits to the exercise of power. An essential response, inasmuch as technological power, in the hands of nationalistic or falsely universalist ideologies, is capable of perpetrating tremendous atrocities. I can only reiterate the appreciation expressed by my predecessors, in reaffirming the importance which the Catholic Church attaches to this Institution and the hope which she places in its activities.

The United Nations is presently celebrating its seventieth anniversary. The history of this organized community of states is one of important common achievements over a period of unusually fast-paced changes. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we can mention the codification and development of international law, the establishment of international norms regarding human rights, advances in humanitarian law, the resolution of numerous conflicts, operations of peace-keeping and reconciliation,

and any number of other accomplishments in every area of international activity and endeavour. All these achievements are lights which help to dispel the darkness of the disorder caused by unrestrained ambitions and collective forms of selfishness. Certainly, many grave problems remain to be resolved, yet it is also clear that, without all this international activity, mankind would not have been able to survive the unchecked use of its own possibilities. Every one of these political, juridical and technical advances is a path towards attaining the ideal of human fraternity and a means for its greater realization.

I also pay homage to all those men and women whose loyalty and self-sacrifice have benefitted humanity as a whole in these past seventy years. In particular, I would recall today those who gave their lives for peace and reconciliation among peoples, from Dag Hammarskjöld to the many United Nations officials at every level who have been killed in the course of humanitarian missions, and missions of peace and reconciliation.

Beyond these achievements, the experience of the past seventy years has made it clear that reform and adaptation to the times is always necessary in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of granting all countries, without exception, a share in, and a genuine and equitable influence on, decision-making processes. The need for greater equity is especially true in the case of those bodies with effective executive capability, such as the Security Council, the Financial Agencies and the groups or mechanisms specifically created to deal with economic crises. This will help limit every kind of abuse or usury, especially where developing countries are concerned. The International Financial Agencies should care for the sustainable development of countries and should ensure that they are not subjected to oppressive lending systems which, far from promoting progress, subject people to mechanisms which generate greater poverty, exclusion and dependence.

The work of the United Nations, according to the principles set forth in the Preamble and the first Articles of its founding Charter, can be seen as the development and promotion of the rule of law, based on the realization that justice is an essential condition for achieving the ideal of universal fraternity. In this context, it is helpful to recall that the limitation of power is an idea implicit in the concept of law itself. To give to each his own, to cite the classic definition of justice, means that no human individual or group can consider itself absolute, permitted to bypass the dignity and the rights of other individuals or their social groupings.

The effective distribution of power (political, economic, defense-related, technological, etc.) among a plurality of subjects, and the creation of a juridical system for regulating claims and interests, are one concrete way of limiting power. Yet today's world presents us with many false rights and – at the same time – broad sectors which are vulnerable, victims of power badly exercised: for example, the natural environment and the vast ranks of the excluded. These sectors are closely interconnected and made increasingly fragile by dominant political and economic relationships. That is why their rights must be forcefully affirmed, by working to protect the environment and by putting an end to exclusion.

First, it must be stated that a true “right of the environment” does exist, for two reasons. First, because we human beings are part of the environment. We live in communion with it, since the environment itself entails ethical limits which human activity must acknowledge and respect. Man, for all his remarkable gifts, which “are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology” (Laudato Si’, 81), is at the same time a part of these spheres. He possesses a body shaped by physical, chemical and biological elements, and can only survive and develop if the ecological environment is favourable. Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity. Second, because

every creature, particularly a living creature, has an intrinsic value, in its existence, its life, its beauty and its interdependence with other creatures. We Christians, together with the other monotheistic religions, believe that the universe is the fruit of a loving decision by the Creator, who permits man respectfully to use creation for the good of his fellow men and for the glory of the Creator; he is not authorized to abuse it, much less to destroy it. In all religions, the environment is a fundamental good (cf. *ibid.*).

The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion. In effect, a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged, either because they are differently abled (handicapped), or because they lack adequate information and technical expertise, or are incapable of decisive political action. Economic and social exclusion is a complete denial of human fraternity and a grave offense against human rights and the environment. The poorest are those who suffer most from such offenses, for three serious reasons: they are cast off by society, forced to live off what is discarded and suffer unjustly from the abuse of the environment. They are part of today's widespread and quietly growing "culture of waste".

The dramatic reality this whole situation of exclusion and inequality, with its evident effects, has led me, in union with the entire Christian people and many others, to take stock of my grave responsibility in this regard and to speak out, together with all those who are seeking urgently-needed and effective solutions. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the World Summit, which opens today, is an important sign of hope. I am similarly confident that the Paris Conference on Climatic Change will secure fundamental and effective agreements.

Solemn commitments, however, are not enough, although they are certainly a necessary step toward solutions. The classic definition of justice which I mentioned earlier contains as one of its essential elements a constant and perpetual will: *Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius sum cuique tribuendi*. Our world demands of all government leaders a will which is effective, practical and constant, concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and thus putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion, with its baneful consequences: human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime.

Such is the magnitude of these situations and their toll in innocent lives, that we must avoid every temptation to fall into a declarationist nominalism which would assuage our consciences. We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges.

The number and complexity of the problems require that we possess technical instruments of verification. But this involves two risks. We can rest content with the bureaucratic exercise of drawing up long lists of good proposals – goals, objectives and statistics – or we can think that a single theoretical and aprioristic solution will provide an answer to all the challenges. It must never be forgotten that political and economic activity is only effective when it is understood as a prudential activity, guided by a perennial concept of justice and constantly conscious of the fact that, above and beyond our plans and programmes, we are dealing with real men and women who live, struggle and suffer, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights.

To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny. Integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed. They must be built up and allowed to unfold for each individual, for every family, in communion with others, and in a right relationship with all those areas in which human social life develops – friends, communities, towns and cities, schools, businesses and unions, provinces, nations, etc. This presupposes and requires the right to education – also for girls (excluded in certain places) – which is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in the education of their children. Education conceived in this way is the basis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for reclaiming the environment.

At the same time, government leaders must do everything possible to ensure that all can have the minimum spiritual and material means needed to live in dignity and to create and support a family, which is the primary cell of any social development. In practical terms, this absolute minimum has three names: lodging, labour, and land; and one spiritual name: spiritual freedom, which includes religious freedom, the right to education and all other civil rights.

For all this, the simplest and best measure and indicator of the implementation of the new Agenda for development will be effective, practical and immediate access, on the part of all, to essential material and spiritual goods: housing, dignified and properly remunerated employment, adequate food and drinking water; religious freedom and, more generally, spiritual freedom and education. These pillars of integral human development have a common foundation, which is the right to life and, more generally, what we could call the right to existence of human nature itself.

The ecological crisis, and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity, can threaten the very existence of the human species. The baneful consequences of an irresponsible mismanagement of the global economy, guided only by ambition for wealth and power, must serve as a summons to a forthright reflection on man: “man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature” (Benedict XVI, Address to the Bundestag, 22 September 2011, cited in *Laudato Si'*, 6). Creation is compromised “where we ourselves have the final word... The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any instance above ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves” (ID. Address to the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, 6 August 2008, cited *ibid.*). Consequently, the defence of the environment and the fight against exclusion demand that we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, one which includes the natural difference between man and woman (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 155), and absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions (cf. *ibid.*, 123, 136).

Without the recognition of certain incontestable natural ethical limits and without the immediate implementation of those pillars of integral human development, the ideal of “saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war” (Charter of the United Nations, Preamble), and “promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (*ibid.*), risks becoming an unattainable illusion, or, even worse, idle chatter which serves as a cover for all kinds of abuse and corruption, or for carrying out an ideological colonization by the imposition of anomalous models and lifestyles which are alien to people’s identity and, in the end, irresponsible.

War is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples.

To this end, there is a need to ensure the uncontested rule of law and tireless recourse to negotiation, mediation and arbitration, as proposed by the Charter of the United Nations, which constitutes truly a fundamental juridical norm. The experience of these seventy years since the founding of the United Nations in general, and in particular the experience of these first fifteen years of the third millennium, reveal both the effectiveness of the full application of international norms and the ineffectiveness of their lack of enforcement. When the Charter of the United Nations is respected and applied with transparency and sincerity, and without ulterior motives, as an obligatory reference point of justice and not as a means of masking spurious intentions, peaceful results will be obtained. When, on the other hand, the norm is considered simply as an instrument to be used whenever it proves favourable, and to be avoided when it is not, a true Pandora's box is opened, releasing uncontrollable forces which gravely harm defenceless populations, the cultural milieu and even the biological environment.

The Preamble and the first Article of the Charter of the United Nations set forth the foundations of the international juridical framework: peace, the pacific solution of disputes and the development of friendly relations between the nations. Strongly opposed to such statements, and in practice denying them, is the constant tendency to the proliferation of arms, especially weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons. An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction – and possibly the destruction of all mankind – are self-contradictory and an affront to the entire framework of the United Nations, which would end up as “nations united by fear and distrust”. There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the non-proliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons.

The recent agreement reached on the nuclear question in a sensitive region of Asia and the Middle East is proof of the potential of political good will and of law, exercised with sincerity, patience and constancy. I express my hope that this agreement will be lasting and efficacious, and bring forth the desired fruits with the cooperation of all the parties involved.

In this sense, hard evidence is not lacking of the negative effects of military and political interventions which are not coordinated between members of the international community. For this reason, while regretting to have to do so, I must renew my repeated appeals regarding to the painful situation of the entire Middle East, North Africa and other African countries, where Christians, together with other cultural or ethnic groups, and even members of the majority religion who have no desire to be caught up in hatred and folly, have been forced to witness the destruction of their places of worship, their cultural and religious heritage, their houses and property, and have faced the alternative either of fleeing or of paying for their adhesion to good and to peace by their own lives, or by enslavement.

These realities should serve as a grave summons to an examination of conscience on the part of those charged with the conduct of international affairs. Not only in cases of religious or cultural persecution, but in every situation of conflict, as in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, South Sudan and the Great Lakes region, real human beings take precedence over partisan interests, however legitimate the latter may be. In wars and conflicts there are individual persons, our brothers and sisters, men and women, young and old, boys and girls who weep, suffer and die. Human beings who are easily discarded when our response is simply to draw up lists of problems, strategies and disagreements.

As I wrote in my letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 9 August 2014, “the most basic understanding of human dignity compels 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” and to protect innocent peoples.

Along the same lines I would mention another kind of conflict which is not always so open, yet is silently killing millions of people. Another kind of war experienced by many of our societies as a result of the narcotics trade. A war which is taken for granted and poorly fought. Drug trafficking is by its very nature accompanied by trafficking in persons, money laundering, the arms trade, child exploitation and other forms of corruption. A corruption which has penetrated to different levels of social, political, military, artistic and religious life, and, in many cases, has given rise to a parallel structure which threatens the credibility of our institutions.

I began this speech recalling the visits of my predecessors. I would hope that my words will be taken above all as a continuation of the final words of the address of Pope Paul VI; although spoken almost exactly fifty years ago, they remain ever timely. I quote: “The hour has come when a pause, a moment of recollection, reflection, even of prayer, is absolutely needed so that we may think back over our common origin, our history, our common destiny. The appeal to the moral conscience of man has never been as necessary as it is today... For the danger comes neither from progress nor from science; if these are used well, they can help to solve a great number of the serious problems besetting mankind (Address to the United Nations Organization, 4 October 1965).

Among other things, human genius, well applied, will surely help to meet the grave challenges of ecological deterioration and of exclusion. As Paul VI said: “The real danger comes from man, who has at his disposal ever more powerful instruments that are as well fitted to bring about ruin as they are to achieve lofty conquests” (ibid.).

The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic. This common home of all men and women must also be built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature.

Such understanding and respect call for a higher degree of wisdom, one which accepts transcendence, self-transcendence, rejects the creation of an all-powerful élite, and recognizes that the full meaning of individual and collective life is found in selfless service to others and in the sage and respectful use of creation for the common good. To repeat the words of Paul VI, “the edifice of modern civilization has to be built on spiritual principles, for they are the only ones capable not only of supporting it, but of shedding light on it” (ibid.).

El Gaucho Martín Fierro, a classic of literature in my native land, says: “Brothers should stand by each other, because this is the first law; keep a true bond between you always, at every time – because if you fight among yourselves, you’ll be devoured by those outside”.

The contemporary world, so apparently connected, is experiencing a growing and steady social fragmentation, which places at risk “the foundations of social life” and consequently leads to “battles over conflicting interests” (Laudato Si’, 229).

The present time invites us to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society, so as to bear fruit in significant and positive historical events (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223). We cannot permit ourselves to postpone “certain agendas” for the future. The future demands of us critical and global decisions in the face of world-wide conflicts which increase the number of the excluded and those in need.

The praiseworthy international juridical framework of the United Nations Organization and of all its activities, like any other human endeavour, can be improved, yet it remains necessary; at the same time it can be the pledge of a secure and happy future for future generations. And so it will, if the representatives of the States can set aside partisan and ideological interests, and sincerely strive to serve the common good. I pray to Almighty God that this will be the case, and I assure you of my support and my prayers, and the support and prayers of all the faithful of the Catholic Church, that this Institution, all its member States, and each of its officials, will always render an effective service to mankind, a service respectful of diversity and capable of bringing out, for sake of the common good, the best in each people and in every individual. God bless you all. Thank you.

Remarks By President Obama To The United Nations General Assembly

10:18 A.M. EDT

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen: Seventy years after the founding of the United Nations, it is worth reflecting on what, together, the members of this body have helped to achieve.

Out of the ashes of the Second World War, having witnessed the unthinkable power of the atomic age, the United States has worked with many nations in this Assembly to prevent a third world war -- by forging alliances with old adversaries; by supporting the steady emergence of strong democracies accountable to their people instead of any foreign power; and by building an international system that imposes a cost on those who choose conflict over cooperation, an order that recognizes the dignity and equal worth of all people.

That is the work of seven decades. That is the ideal that this body, at its best, has pursued. Of course, there have been too many times when, collectively, we have fallen short of these ideals. Over seven decades, terrible conflicts have claimed untold victims. But we have pressed forward, slowly, steadily, to make a system of international rules and norms that are better and stronger and more consistent.

It is this international order that has underwritten unparalleled advances in human liberty and prosperity. It is this collective endeavor that's brought about diplomatic cooperation between the world's major powers, and buttressed a global economy that has lifted more than a billion people from poverty. It is these international principles that helped constrain bigger countries from imposing our will on smaller ones, and advanced the emergence of democracy and development and individual liberty on every continent.

This progress is real. It can be documented in lives saved, and agreements forged, and diseases conquered, and in mouths fed. And yet, we come together today knowing that the march of human progress never travels in a straight line, that our work is far from complete; that dangerous currents risk pulling us back into a darker, more disordered world.

Today, we see the collapse of strongmen and fragile states breeding conflict, and driving innocent men, women and children across borders on an epoch scale. Brutal networks of terror have stepped into the vacuum. Technologies that empower individuals are now also exploited by those who spread disinformation, or suppress dissent, or radicalize our youth. Global capital flows have powered growth and investment, but also increased risk of contagion, weakened the bargaining power of workers, and accelerated inequality.

How should we respond to these trends? There are those who argue that the ideals enshrined in the U.N. charter are unachievable or out of date -- a legacy of a postwar era not suited to our own. Effectively, they argue for a return to the rules that applied for most of human history and that pre-date this institution: the belief that power is a zero-sum game; that might makes right; that strong states must impose their will on weaker ones; that the rights of individuals don't matter; and that in a time of rapid change, order must be imposed by force.

On this basis, we see some major powers assert themselves in ways that contravene international law. We see an erosion of the democratic principles and human rights that are fundamental to this institution's mission; information is strictly controlled, the space for civil society restricted. We're told that such retrenchment is required to beat back disorder; that it's the only way to stamp out terrorism, or prevent foreign meddling. In accordance with this logic, we should support tyrants like Bashar al-Assad, who drops barrel bombs to massacre innocent children, because the alternative is surely worse.

The increasing skepticism of our international order can also be found in the most advanced democracies. We see greater polarization, more frequent gridlock; movements on the far right, and sometimes the left, that insist on stopping the trade that binds our fates to other nations, calling for the building of walls to keep out immigrants. Most ominously, we see the fears of ordinary people being exploited through appeals to sectarianism, or tribalism, or racism, or anti-Semitism; appeals to a glorious past before the body politic was infected by those who look different, or worship God differently; a politics of us versus them.

The United States is not immune from this. Even as our economy is growing and our troops have largely returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, we see in our debates about America's role in the world a notion of strength that is defined by opposition to old enemies, perceived adversaries, a rising China, or a resurgent Russia; a revolutionary Iran, or an Islam that is incompatible with peace. We see an argument made that the only strength that matters for the United States is bellicose words and shows of military force; that cooperation and diplomacy will not work.

As President of the United States, I am mindful of the dangers that we face; they cross my desk every morning. I lead the strongest military that the world has ever known, and I will never hesitate to protect my country or our allies, unilaterally and by force where necessary.

But I stand before you today believing in my core that we, the nations of the world, cannot return to the old ways of conflict and coercion. We cannot look backwards. We live in an integrated world -- one in which we all have a stake in each other's success. We cannot turn those forces of integration. No nation in this Assembly can insulate itself from the threat of terrorism, or the risk of financial contagion; the flow of migrants, or the danger of a warming planet. The disorder we see is not driven solely by

competition between nations or any single ideology. And if we cannot work together more effectively, we will all suffer the consequences. That is true for the United States, as well.

No matter how powerful our military, how strong our economy, we understand the United States cannot solve the world's problems alone. In Iraq, the United States learned the hard lesson that even hundreds of thousands of brave, effective troops, trillions of dollars from our Treasury, cannot by itself impose stability on a foreign land. Unless we work with other nations under the mantle of international norms and principles and law that offer legitimacy to our efforts, we will not succeed. And unless we work together to defeat the ideas that drive different communities in a country like Iraq into conflict, any order that our militaries can impose will be temporary.

Just as force alone cannot impose order internationally, I believe in my core that repression cannot forge the social cohesion for nations to succeed. The history of the last two decades proves that in today's world, dictatorships are unstable. The strongmen of today become the spark of revolution tomorrow. You can jail your opponents, but you can't imprison ideas. You can try to control access to information, but you cannot turn a lie into truth. It is not a conspiracy of U.S.-backed NGOs that expose corruption and raise the expectations of people around the globe; it's technology, social media, and the irreducible desire of people everywhere to make their own choices about how they are governed.

Indeed, I believe that in today's world, the measure of strength is no longer defined by the control of territory. Lasting prosperity does not come solely from the ability to access and extract raw materials. The strength of nations depends on the success of their people -- their knowledge, their innovation, their imagination, their creativity, their drive, their opportunity -- and that, in turn, depends upon individual rights and good governance and personal security. Internal repression and foreign aggression are both symptoms of the failure to provide this foundation.

A politics and solidarity that depend on demonizing others, that draws on religious sectarianism or narrow tribalism or jingoism may at times look like strength in the moment, but over time its weakness will be exposed. And history tells us that the dark forces unleashed by this type of politics surely makes all of us less secure. Our world has been there before. We gain nothing from going back.

Instead, I believe that we must go forward in pursuit of our ideals, not abandon them at this critical time. We must give expression to our best hopes, not our deepest fears. This institution was founded because men and women who came before us had the foresight to know that our nations are more secure when we uphold basic laws and basic norms, and pursue a path of cooperation over conflict. And strong nations, above all, have a responsibility to uphold this international order.

Let me give you a concrete example. After I took office, I made clear that one of the principal achievements of this body -- the nuclear non-proliferation regime -- was endangered by Iran's violation of the NPT. On that basis, the Security Council tightened sanctions on the Iranian government, and many nations joined us to enforce them. Together, we showed that laws and agreements mean something.

But we also understood that the goal of sanctions was not simply to punish Iran. Our objective was to test whether Iran could change course, accept constraints, and allow the world to verify that its nuclear program will be peaceful. For two years, the United States and our partners -- including Russia, including China -- stuck together in complex negotiations. The result is a lasting, comprehensive deal

that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, while allowing it to access peaceful energy. And if this deal is fully implemented, the prohibition on nuclear weapons is strengthened, a potential war is averted, our world is safer. That is the strength of the international system when it works the way it should.

That same fidelity to international order guides our responses to other challenges around the world. Consider Russia's annexation of Crimea and further aggression in eastern Ukraine. America has few economic interests in Ukraine. We recognize the deep and complex history between Russia and Ukraine. But we cannot stand by when the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a nation is flagrantly violated. If that happens without consequence in Ukraine, it could happen to any nation gathered here today. That's the basis of the sanctions that the United States and our partners impose on Russia. It's not a desire to return to a Cold War.

Now, within Russia, state-controlled media may describe these events as an example of a resurgent Russia -- a view shared, by the way, by a number of U.S. politicians and commentators who have always been deeply skeptical of Russia, and seem to be convinced a new Cold War is, in fact, upon us. And yet, look at the results. The Ukrainian people are more interested than ever in aligning with Europe instead of Russia. Sanctions have led to capital flight, a contracting economy, a fallen ruble, and the emigration of more educated Russians.

Imagine if, instead, Russia had engaged in true diplomacy, and worked with Ukraine and the international community to ensure its interests were protected. That would be better for Ukraine, but also better for Russia, and better for the world -- which is why we continue to press for this crisis to be resolved in a way that allows a sovereign and democratic Ukraine to determine its future and control its territory. Not because we want to isolate Russia -- we don't -- but because we want a strong Russia that's invested in working with us to strengthen the international system as a whole.

Similarly, in the South China Sea, the United States makes no claim on territory there. We don't adjudicate claims. But like every nation gathered here, we have an interest in upholding the basic principles of freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce, and in resolving disputes through international law, not the law of force. So we will defend these principles, while encouraging China and other claimants to resolve their differences peacefully.

I say this, recognizing that diplomacy is hard; that the outcomes are sometimes unsatisfying; that it's rarely politically popular. But I believe that leaders of large nations, in particular, have an obligation to take these risks -- precisely because we are strong enough to protect our interests if, and when, diplomacy fails.

I also believe that to move forward in this new era, we have to be strong enough to acknowledge when what you're doing is not working. For 50 years, the United States pursued a Cuba policy that failed to improve the lives of the Cuban people. We changed that. We continue to have differences with the Cuban government. We will continue to stand up for human rights. But we address these issues through diplomatic relations, and increased commerce, and people-to-people ties. As these contacts yield progress, I'm confident that our Congress will inevitably lift an embargo that should not be in place anymore. (Applause.) Change won't come overnight to Cuba, but I'm confident that openness, not

coercion, will support the reforms and better the life the Cuban people deserve, just as I believe that Cuba will find its success if it pursues cooperation with other nations.

Now, if it's in the interest of major powers to uphold international standards, it is even more true for the rest of the community of nations. Look around the world. From Singapore to Colombia to Senegal, the facts shows that nations succeed when they pursue an inclusive peace and prosperity within their borders, and work cooperatively with countries beyond their borders.

That path is now available to a nation like Iran, which, as of this moment, continues to deploy violent proxies to advance its interests. These efforts may appear to give Iran leverage in disputes with neighbors, but they fuel sectarian conflict that endangers the entire region, and isolates Iran from the promise of trade and commerce. The Iranian people have a proud history, and are filled with extraordinary potential. But chanting "Death to America" does not create jobs, or make Iran more secure. If Iran chose a different path, that would be good for the security of the region, good for the Iranian people, and good for the world.

Of course, around the globe, we will continue to be confronted with nations who reject these lessons of history, places where civil strife, border disputes, and sectarian wars bring about terrorist enclaves and humanitarian disasters. Where order has completely broken down, we must act, but we will be stronger when we act together.

In such efforts, the United States will always do our part. We will do so mindful of the lessons of the past -- not just the lessons of Iraq, but also the example of Libya, where we joined an international coalition under a U.N. mandate to prevent a slaughter. Even as we helped the Libyan people bring an end to the reign of a tyrant, our coalition could have and should have done more to fill a vacuum left behind. We're grateful to the United Nations for its efforts to forge a unity government. We will help any legitimate Libyan government as it works to bring the country together. But we also have to recognize that we must work more effectively in the future, as an international community, to build capacity for states that are in distress, before they collapse.

And that's why we should celebrate the fact that later today the United States will join with more than 50 countries to enlist new capabilities -- infantry, intelligence, helicopters, hospitals, and tens of thousands of troops -- to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping. (Applause.) These new capabilities can prevent mass killing, and ensure that peace agreements are more than words on paper. But we have to do it together. Together, we must strengthen our collective capacity to establish security where order has broken down, and to support those who seek a just and lasting peace.

Nowhere is our commitment to international order more tested than in Syria. When a dictator slaughters tens of thousands of his own people, that is not just a matter of one nation's internal affairs -- it breeds human suffering on an order of magnitude that affects us all. Likewise, when a terrorist group beheads captives, slaughters the innocent and enslaves women, that's not a single nation's national security problem -- that is an assault on all humanity.

I've said before and I will repeat: There is no room for accommodating an apocalyptic cult like ISIL, and the United States makes no apologies for using our military, as part of a broad coalition, to go after them. We do so with a determination to ensure that there will never be a safe haven for terrorists who

carry out these crimes. And we have demonstrated over more than a decade of relentless pursuit of al Qaeda, we will not be outlasted by extremists.

But while military power is necessary, it is not sufficient to resolve the situation in Syria. Lasting stability can only take hold when the people of Syria forge an agreement to live together peacefully. The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict. But we must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the pre-war status quo.

Let's remember how this started. Assad reacted to peaceful protests by escalating repression and killing that, in turn, created the environment for the current strife. And so Assad and his allies cannot simply pacify the broad majority of a population who have been brutalized by chemical weapons and indiscriminate bombing. Yes, realism dictates that compromise will be required to end the fighting and ultimately stamp out ISIL. But realism also requires a managed transition away from Assad and to a new leader, and an inclusive government that recognizes there must be an end to this chaos so that the Syrian people can begin to rebuild.

We know that ISIL -- which emerged out of the chaos of Iraq and Syria -- depends on perpetual war to survive. But we also know that they gain adherents because of a poisonous ideology. So part of our job, together, is to work to reject such extremism that infects too many of our young people. Part of that effort must be a continued rejection by Muslims of those who distort Islam to preach intolerance and promote violence, and it must also be a rejection by non-Muslims of the ignorance that equates Islam with terror. (Applause.)

This work will take time. There are no easy answers to Syria. And there are no simple answers to the changes that are taking place in much of the Middle East and North Africa. But so many families need help right now; they don't have time. And that's why the United States is increasing the number of refugees who we welcome within our borders. That's why we will continue to be the largest donor of assistance to support those refugees. And today we are launching new efforts to ensure that our people and our businesses, our universities and our NGOs can help as well -- because in the faces of suffering families, our nation of immigrants sees ourselves.

Of course, in the old ways of thinking, the plight of the powerless, the plight of refugees, the plight of the marginalized did not matter. They were on the periphery of the world's concerns. Today, our concern for them is driven not just by conscience, but should also be driven by self-interest. For helping people who have been pushed to the margins of our world is not mere charity, it is a matter of collective security. And the purpose of this institution is not merely to avoid conflict, it is to galvanize the collective action that makes life better on this planet.

The commitments we've made to the Sustainable Development Goals speak to this truth. I believe that capitalism has been the greatest creator of wealth and opportunity that the world has ever known. But from big cities to rural villages around the world, we also know that prosperity is still cruelly out of reach for too many. As His Holiness Pope Francis reminds us, we are stronger when we value the least among these, and see them as equal in dignity to ourselves and our sons and our daughters.

We can roll back preventable disease and end the scourge of HIV/AIDS. We can stamp out pandemics that recognize no borders. That work may not be on television right now, but as we demonstrated in reversing the spread of Ebola, it can save more lives than anything else we can do.

Together, we can eradicate extreme poverty and erase barriers to opportunity. But this requires a sustained commitment to our people -- so farmers can feed more people; so entrepreneurs can start a business without paying a bribe; so young people have the skills they need to succeed in this modern, knowledge-based economy.

We can promote growth through trade that meets a higher standard. And that's what we're doing through the Trans-Pacific Partnership -- a trade agreement that encompasses nearly 40 percent of the global economy; an agreement that will open markets, while protecting the rights of workers and protecting the environment that enables development to be sustained.

We can roll back the pollution that we put in our skies, and help economies lift people out of poverty without condemning our children to the ravages of an ever-warming climate. The same ingenuity that produced the Industrial Age and the Computer Age allows us to harness the potential of clean energy. No country can escape the ravages of climate change. And there is no stronger sign of leadership than putting future generations first. The United States will work with every nation that is willing to do its part so that we can come together in Paris to decisively confront this challenge.

And finally, our vision for the future of this Assembly, my belief in moving forward rather than backwards, requires us to defend the democratic principles that allow societies to succeed. Let me start from a simple premise: Catastrophes, like what we are seeing in Syria, do not take place in countries where there is genuine democracy and respect for the universal values this institution is supposed to defend. (Applause.)

I recognize that democracy is going to take different forms in different parts of the world. The very idea of a people governing themselves depends upon government giving expression to their unique culture, their unique history, their unique experiences. But some universal truths are self-evident. No person wants to be imprisoned for peaceful worship. No woman should ever be abused with impunity, or a girl barred from going to school. The freedom to peacefully petition those in power without fear of arbitrary laws -- these are not ideas of one country or one culture. They are fundamental to human progress. They are a cornerstone of this institution.

I realize that in many parts of the world there is a different view -- a belief that strong leadership must tolerate no dissent. I hear it not only from America's adversaries, but privately at least I also hear it from some of our friends. I disagree. I believe a government that suppresses peaceful dissent is not showing strength; it is showing weakness and it is showing fear. (Applause.) History shows that regimes who fear their own people will eventually crumble, but strong institutions built on the consent of the governed endure long after any one individual is gone.

That's why our strongest leaders -- from George Washington to Nelson Mandela -- have elevated the importance of building strong, democratic institutions over a thirst for perpetual power. Leaders who amend constitutions to stay in office only acknowledge that they failed to build a successful country for their people -- because none of us last forever. It tells us that power is something they cling to for its own sake, rather than for the betterment of those they purport to serve.

I understand democracy is frustrating. Democracy in the United States is certainly imperfect. At times, it can even be dysfunctional. But democracy -- the constant struggle to extend rights to more of our people, to give more people a voice -- is what allowed us to become the most powerful nation in the world. (Applause.)

It's not simply a matter of principle; it's not an abstraction. Democracy -- inclusive democracy -- makes countries stronger. When opposition parties can seek power peacefully through the ballot, a country draws upon new ideas. When a free media can inform the public, corruption and abuse are exposed and can be rooted out. When civil society thrives, communities can solve problems that governments cannot necessarily solve alone. When immigrants are welcomed, countries are more productive and more vibrant. When girls can go to school, and get a job, and pursue unlimited opportunity, that's when a country realizes its full potential. (Applause.)

That is what I believe is America's greatest strength. Not everybody in America agrees with me. That's part of democracy. I believe that the fact that you can walk the streets of this city right now and pass churches and synagogues and temples and mosques, where people worship freely; the fact that our nation of immigrants mirrors the diversity of the world -- you can find everybody from everywhere here in New York City -- (applause) -- the fact that, in this country, everybody can contribute, everybody can participate no matter who they are, or what they look like, or who they love -- that's what makes us strong.

And I believe that what is true for America is true for virtually all mature democracies. And that is no accident. We can be proud of our nations without defining ourselves in opposition to some other group. We can be patriotic without demonizing someone else. We can cherish our own identities -- our religion, our ethnicity, our traditions -- without putting others down. Our systems are premised on the notion that absolute power will corrupt, but that people -- ordinary people -- are fundamentally good; that they value family and friendship, faith and the dignity of hard work; and that with appropriate checks and balances, governments can reflect this goodness.

I believe that's the future we must seek together. To believe in the dignity of every individual, to believe we can bridge our differences, and choose cooperation over conflict -- that is not weakness, that is strength. (Applause.) It is a practical necessity in this interconnected world.

And our people understand this. Think of the Liberian doctor who went door-to-door to search for Ebola cases, and to tell families what to do if they show symptoms. Think of the Iranian shopkeeper who said, after the nuclear deal, "God willing, now we'll be able to offer many more goods at better prices." Think of the Americans who lowered the flag over our embassy in Havana in 1961 -- the year I was born -- and returned this summer to raise that flag back up. (Applause.) One of these men said of the Cuban people, "We could do things for them, and they could do things for us. We loved them." For 50 years, we ignored that fact.

Think of the families leaving everything they've known behind, risking barren deserts and stormy waters just to find shelter; just to save their children. One Syrian refugee who was greeted in Hamburg with warm greetings and shelter, said, "We feel there are still some people who love other people."

The people of our United Nations are not as different as they are told. They can be made to fear; they can be taught to hate -- but they can also respond to hope. History is littered with the failure of false

prophets and fallen empires who believed that might always makes right, and that will continue to be the case. You can count on that. But we are called upon to offer a different type of leadership -- leadership strong enough to recognize that nations share common interests and people share a common humanity, and, yes, there are certain ideas and principles that are universal.

That's what those who shaped the United Nations 70 years ago understood. Let us carry forward that faith into the future -- for it is the only way we can assure that future will be brighter for my children, and for yours.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END 11:00 A.M. EDT

Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events

[Xiuhtezcatl Martinez's speech from the UN PGA's High-level Event on Climate Change: 210,000+ views on YouTube, featured in Rolling Stone, and more.](#)

On 29 June 2015, President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Sam K. Kutesa, hosted the [High-level Event on Climate Change](#) at UN Headquarters. Leaders from government, civil society and the private sector presented many climate action initiatives to provide political momentum toward an ambitious climate change agreement at COP21 in Paris in December.

UN-NGLS facilitated an open, transparent and participatory process to identify the civil society speakers for the event. **Mr. Xiuhtezcatl Martinez**, 15-year old indigenous environmental activist and Youth Director of the organization [Earth Guardians](#), was selected to address the opening session of the event. His impassioned speech has now been covered as a feature [article in Rolling Stone](#) and [dozens of additional press outlets](#), and has been viewed more than 210,000 times on the UN YouTube channel. You can watch it here:

"Youth are standing up all over the planet to find solutions," he said. "We need you to take action. We are all indigenous to this earth."

Xiuhtezcatl will return to the United Nations on Wednesday, 5 August to deliver a closing Keynote address and performance for the [UN Youth Assembly](#) at 5:15pm in Conference Room 4.

This week, Earth Guardians - who have crews in 25 countries - as well as many other civil society networks and organizations from around the world are seeking strong outcomes from the post-2015 development agenda process that will inspire more action to address climate change. Their leading call is for a world "free of harmful emissions":

<https://twitter.com/unngls/status/626103478822268928>

For more information on the post-2015 development agenda, please visit: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015>

For more information on the UN climate change negotiations, please visit: <https://unfccc.int>

War and hunger - CBS News

The following is a script of "War and Hunger" which aired on Nov. 30, 2014. Scott Pelley is the correspondent. Nicole Young and Katie Kerbstat, producers.

While we're giving thanks for the feast this weekend let's not leave out what may be one of the best ideas that America ever had. It's called the [World Food Programme](#) -- the emergency first responder to hunger anywhere on the globe. The United Nations launched WFP in 1961 at the urging of the United States. And today the U.S. government pays the biggest part of the bill as the World Food Programme feeds 80 million people a year. Its greatest challenges come when it confronts war and hunger. And that's what's happening today in Syria where you will find heroes of the World Food Programme saving the most vulnerable people in what looked to us like the edge of oblivion.

The map said, "no man's land." We plowed the border of Jordan and Syria where the Jordanian military told us we would find war refugees. But considering the wasteland it seemed more likely the map was right -- who could survive here?

But after several hours we found them, pouring over the land like a flash flood. With three hundred miles behind them, these Syrian families made their final steps through a war that nearly killed them and a desert that could have finished the job. Watch a moment and listen.

Scott Pelley: This berm marks the border between Syria and Jordan. The refugees that we ran into were coming across the top of the berm and turning themselves in to the safety of Jordanian border officers here. More than a million have crossed into Jordan so far during the three-year civil war in Syria.



They had been farmers, shopkeepers, office workers. Now they shared one occupation: saving the children with matted hair and faces covered in ten days of misery. We noticed the little ones around Halima. Turns out she's the mother of nine.

Scott Pelley: Why did you come?

"There's bombing all around us," she said, "I'm afraid for my children. But I don't know what will become of us now."

Scott Pelley: You don't know what's coming next but you know this must be better than where you came from?

She had taken five of her children. Her husband took four by another route. And they hope to find one another. Halima said they managed to save everyone in her family. But as for the fate of others in her town -- no translation was needed.



60 MINUTES OVERTIME WHY TELLING STORIES MATTERS

Andrew Harper: This is happening every day. Every day we are getting hundreds of people, sometimes up to a thousand people, fleeing the violence, fleeing the deprivation in Syria and coming across into Jordan.

Andrew Harper is in charge in Jordan for the United Nations high commissioner for refugees.

Scott Pelley: What kind of shape are they in when they come at the end of this journey?

Andrew Harper: It's horrific. We're seeing children coming across now without any shoes. Often they've only got one pair of clothes, some of them are just wearing their pajamas because, when their places were bombed, they had nothing to grab to leave.

"Are we willing to lose a generation of children to hunger?"

The U.N. refugee relief agency and Jordanian troops met the families, gave them food and water, and loaded them up for the trip to a U.N. camp. There was room for everyone on the trucks but no mother

would take that chance. They pressed their children in first. Parents had sacrificed all they had to see this moment. And a long dead emotion began to stir. It felt like hope.

Scott Pelley: You know, this war's been going on for three years. Why are these people still coming now?

Andrew Harper: Because it's getting worse. I think now more than ever there is absolutely no hope for the future at the moment in Syria.

Part of what has stolen hope inside Syria is hunger. Starvation is a weapon in the war that began as an uprising against the dictator Bashar al Assad. These words read, "kneel or starve." Signed Assad's soldiers. All sides are laying siege to communities and cutting off the food. This is what happened in a neighborhood called Yarmouk when a U.N. food convoy broke through. The people had eaten the dogs and the cats and were running low on leaves and grass. This girl eventually starved to death, five miles or so from a supermarket.

Ertharin Cousin: Are we willing to lose a generation of children to hunger? To lack of access to medicines? To lack of access to water while we wait until the fighting stops? No. We can't.

Ertharin Cousin is executive director of the World Food Programme. She's a former food industry executive from Chicago. WFP is often headed by an American because the U.S. donates more than a third of the four billion dollar annual budget.



Ertharin Cousin: The operation in Syria is one of the largest that we have ever operated in WFP. We have over 3,000 trucks supporting 45,000 metric tons of food delivered every month inside Syria.

Scott Pelley: All of that and your people are getting shot at.

Ertharin Cousin: All of that and people are getting shot at. It's a war zone. It's a conflict zone. The world doesn't stop. The war doesn't stop. The conflict doesn't end because people need to eat.

The World Food Programme estimates that more than six million Syrians do not know where their next meal is coming from.

Matthew Hollingworth: These are areas where people have nothing. They really do have nothing.

Matthew Hollingworth heads the World Food Programme mission inside Syria. In February, he led an armored column into the city of Homs, which had been sealed off by the dictatorship for 600 days.

Matthew Hollingworth: People were skin and bones. I could lift a grown man because he'd got to about 40 kilos.

Scott Pelley: 85 pounds or so?

Matthew Hollingworth: Exactly.

In the city of Homs, months of negotiations had opened a three-day ceasefire to distribute food. But it turned out the starving residents wanted something else first.



[60 MINUTES: SEGMENT EXTRAS HELD FOR RANSOM FOR FOOD](#)

Matthew Hollingworth: The people of Old Homs asked us to evacuate women, children and the sick before any assistance came in. So we went through the last checkpoint. And there we could see in front of us 80 or 90 children, women and sick and injured people waiting to come out. And then the worst thing happened. The sniping started.

Scott Pelley: People were shooting at you.

Matthew Hollingworth: People started to shoot at us. So we took the decision then to put the vehicles, the armored vehicles in front of the area where they were shooting down in the alley to allow the people to come out. It was a hugely moving experience. And we successfully brought them out. This opened the way the following day for us to go into Homs and deliver the first assistance and we did that successfully, but halfway through, sadly, the operation, we came under mortar fire.

Matthew Hollingworth: It was panic, chaos. People screaming, people running everywhere. The hot metal flying around you.

Scott Pelley: You decided to stay. And I wonder why.

Matthew Hollingworth: We'd seen the faces of the people who were asking us to help them, asking United Nations to help them in their time of crisis, which is why we're here. So we again negotiated with

all the sides to this time obey the ceasefire, to respect the ceasefire. And we went in the following day and the next day and the next day, and the rest is history.

"Nobody in this world, no matter who he is, deserves to die from hunger."

History records that in Homs, WFP evacuated 1,300 people and brought in enough food to feed 2,500 others for a month. But elsewhere in Syria more than one million remain beyond reach.

[Man in YouTube video: November the fifth 2013...]

We know they're there because we can hear their pleas for help. A man in a Damascus suburb called Moadamiyeh, put out a series of videos on YouTube.

[Man in YouTube video: In a protest to the world to enter the humanitarian aids to the besieged city of Moadamiyeh.]



After several videos begged for someone to break the siege, the man made his way out of Syria. We found him, but we're not using his name to protect his family.

Man from YouTube video: People are starving to death while food and medicine is only two minutes away behind the Assad checkpoints.

Scott Pelley: Tell me what you witnessed, what you saw with your own eyes.

Man from YouTube video: Even while the regime is bombing, nobody cared. It seems like if you die from the shelling, it will be a merciful way to die instead of dying from hunger because it will take months to die from hunger. People lost faith with the world, with their families, even with God. Nobody understood that we can die from hunger in the 21st century in Syria.

Scott Pelley: The regime shelled Moadamiyeh to rubble, used nerve gas on the population, but it was starvation...

Man from YouTube video: Yes.

Scott Pelley: ...that broke the town.

Man from YouTube video: That's absolutely true. It can destroy your soul, your mind, your beliefs, before it can destroy your body. Nobody in this world, no matter who he is, deserves to die from hunger. Nobody.



60 MINUTES: SEGMENT EXTRAS THE PRICE OF POLITICAL FAILURE

That is the principle on which the World Food Programme was founded, an idea in the Eisenhower administration, after 70 million people around the world starved to death in the first half of the 20th century. Today, WFP is in 75 countries plagued by war or weather. It has an air force, a navy and an army of 14,000 people.

But emergency response is just part of what it does. The World Food Programme prevents famines by teaching farming. It uses its vast purchasing power to support small farms. All of this despite the fact that WFP gets no funding from the United Nations. It raises its budget entirely from donations by governments, companies and individuals. But in Syria the need is so great, the money is falling short. We got a sense of the scale of that need by flying over the latest U.N. refugee camp with the Jordanian police and the U.N.'s Andrew Harper.

Andrew Harper: We're looking at probably one of the world's largest refugee camps.

The refugee families we saw earlier at the border were headed here.



Scott Pelley: You have built this for 130,000 refugees. Do you think you're going to have that many?

Andrew Harper: Well if you look it there's about six and a half million people displaced in Syria. I think we may even need to build more than this.

When the U.N. camps opened, the World Food Programme served three meals a day. But it soon discovered that these families hungered for more than just a meal.

Ertharin Cousin: What they're receiving is not food. But they're actually receiving a voucher, which will give them the ability to decide what food their family can eat for the month.



[60 MINUTES: SEGMENT EXTRAS GETTING THE RECIPE RIGHT](#)

Scott Pelley: Why do you do that?

Ertharin Cousin: It gives them a choice, more than anything else and it gives them respect.

Respect because the vouchers are a ticket here. Where there was only desert, the World Food Programme has built supermarkets like any in America. Osama and his wife led nine children through the desert after their daughter was wounded by a mortar. Each member of his family now gets a WFP voucher for 29 dollars a month.

Scott Pelley: The difference between being fed out of the back of a truck and cooking your own meal is dignity.

Ertharin Cousin: It's dignity. It's providing your children with some hope.

Back on the border, in the last moments of the day, we ran into another exodus, families pressing through no man's land on a path marked only by the desperate steps of those who'd come before. Jordanian troops crossed into Syria to lift a woman who had stopped short saying, "Mother we are on the border."

In recent weeks, Jordan has been forced to reduce the numbers it can accept. And the World Food Programme has come perilously close to cutting back rations for lack of funds. But millions more are on the move and the days of war remain uncouncted.

Source: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/war-and-hunger-world-food-programme-and-syrian-refugees-in-jordan/>

International Youth Day

Join the day-long International #YouthDay Digital Surge on Twitter!

We'd love to hear from youth and youth-led organizations globally. Join us from 9:00-9:30am EST to kick-off our day-long Twitter surge! Share with us what your organization is doing to empower youth in your community and around the world using #YouthDay & #YouthNow.

Click the image below for full details on the Twitter surge.http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001tn0fDgsuFM-Z2hpS7_B5DI8qCxWnPwt9kDIRWA-GpJYskTHCefL6K9sSIDPzPgYG67D5Gkcf6N3DX-CvLONdy6pFrRGoedZigBSUwb2ZUW6k7MNnEWA8sd0bDHP_Lv-3NGq9Nr_82IkU8xHARbiAnwBYF_9CfLGr8o2JhIQsGLOflqZfYPGIza_2xHty47ogcd1NOlz3QDX-ul_P9WCbNI2s2uVsgIHZbhlsyVgSDjq7KVVKmCvWR3LW11flGhg4&c=UnKzbY13okUN_5lkt1dD8FG0dtPp7KKlrkM237Rs65YOTMW14TVEpg==&ch=hfLzvoMbAdjmCDGt4aCIPMAvq_1ZznqCK3-IUJO_H8UnE90C89eeMg==

Featured Event: International Youth Day Event in the Philippines

The Youth Envoy will mark the International Youth Day with young people from Asia at large and from the Philippines in particular. On August 12, the Envoy will deliver opening remarks at the 3rd Asian Youth Forum. The UN Youth Envoy will also join the Filipino National Youth Day Celebration with 1,000 young people from the country, UN, government representatives, legislators, civil society partners, and donor organizations.

For more information click here.

Twitter Chat with the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth @AhmadAlhendawi

Join the chat with Ahmad Alhendawi from 9:30-10:00 AM EST on 12 August and tweet your question for the Youth Envoy using #AskYouthEnvoy by 6pm EST August 11.

http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001tn0fDgsuFM-Z2hpS7_B5DI8qCxWnPwt9kDIRWA-GpJYskTHCefL6K9sSIDPzPgYG67D5Gkcf6N3DX-CvLONdy6pFrRGoedZigBSUwb2ZUW6k7MnNnEWA8sd0bDHP_Lv-3NGq9Nr_82lkU8xHARbiAnwBYF_9CfLGr8o2JhIQsGLOflqZfYPGIza_2xHty47ogcd1NOlz3QDX-ul_P9WCbNI2s2uVsgIHZbhlsyVgSDjq7KVVKmCvWR3LW11flGhg4&c=UnKzbY13okUN_5lkt1dD8FG0dtPp7KKlrkM237Rs65YOTMW14TVEpg==&ch=hfLzvoMbAdjmCDGt4aCIPMAvq_1ZznqCK3-IUJO_H8UnE90C89eeMg==

International #YouthDay events around the world

12 August 2015

Organize an event to celebrate International Youth Day in your community, school, youth club, or workplace. You can get some ideas from the toolkit here. If you organize an event, let the UN know about it sending an email to youth@un.org, and we'll map it. The map is facilitated by UN-DESA.

http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001tn0fDgsuFM-Z2hpS7_B5DI8qCxWnPwt9kDIRWA-GpJYskTHCefL6K9sSIDPzPgYGE73ttg-kml694nrrJR64kLe3_hjWYKx9staHgF1mP4Asasb9z7B8cdldJHuOt1X0Mo8vyHUoYGQ_GtRGa-8WRrvl40Yrq1D0-u4NBUsHAXO4jojczSUZLGrR-uatVI6A_7nmnRE6m22pAdkni_9qiZultc6-u8ZgtGLceWm0y3Gg9F_3lsYiA==&c=UnKzbY13okUN_5lkt1dD8FG0dtPp7KKlrkM237Rs65YOTMW14TVEpg==&ch=hfLzvoMbAdjmCDGt4aCIPMAvq_1ZznqCK3-IUJO_H8UnE90C89eeMg==

International Youth Day 2015 video featuring the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and his Envoy on Youth

Watch their joint video message below:

http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001tn0fDgsuFM-Z2hpS7_B5DI8qCxWnPwt9kDIRWA-GpJYskTHCefL6K9sSIDPzPgYGd17NW5grHX1qpt2X6n6ZWw26rWw--ybPcDExkAHulH8HigMLWFIC57Tz6rFJwrKYxZdoQKoECSpjGtKudQhh3BPPK2wkTjq95Y-ydNhLQ3UOcDuAXY2K2g==&c=UnKzbY13okUN_5lkt1dD8FG0dtPp7KKlrkM237Rs65YOTMW14TVEpg==&ch=hfLzvoMbAdjmCDGt4aCIPMAvq_1ZznqCK3-IUJO_H8UnE90C89eeMg==

UN Video: International Youth Day 2015

Secretary-General's Message on the International Day of Youth

"In this landmark year, as leaders prepare to adopt a bold new vision for sustainable development, the engagement of youth is more valuable than ever. At this critical moment in history, I call on young people to demand and foster the dramatic progress urgently needed in our world. "

United Nations Secretary-General's Message on the International Day of Youth 2015. Read Ban Ki-moon's full message.

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a UN Security Council Arrria-Formula Meeting on ISIL's Targeting of LGBT Individuals, August 24, 2015

Today we are making UN history. The UN Security Council has never before had a meeting on LGBT issues.

It is an honor to co-host this meeting with Chile, which continues to be a strong advocate for LGBT rights and more generally for empowering civil society around the world.

Let me welcome our briefers. Deputy-Secretary General Jan Eliasson, who along with Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, has worked tirelessly to advance LGBT rights both within the UN, taking unprecedented steps on behalf of LGBT rights, and across the world. Jessica Stern is here representing the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, an NGO doing critically important work to protect LGBT persons, including in the places we will discuss today. And finally, we are beyond grateful to have a man we'll call "Adnan" and Subhi Nahas speak to us today. You will have the opportunity to hear from them directly, but I'd like to just now say a few words about each.

"Adnan" is not Adnan's real name – it is a pseudonym he is using to hide his identity. Adnan fled northern Iraq after being marked for death by ISIL because he is gay. Adnan is a client of the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project, an extraordinary organization that has helped facilitate his participation today. He still fears that he could be attacked by ISIL if identified, which is the reason he is speaking to the Council today by phone rather than by video link. Out of concern for Adnan's safety, I would like to request that no audio or video recordings be made during this historic event.

Subhi Nahas – a gay man and LGBT advocate from Syria – was forced to flee his home after receiving death threats from Jabat al Nusra. Even after fleeing to neighboring Lebanon and then Turkey, he continued to receive threats, this time from ISIL. He now lives in the United States.

Adnan and Subhi's experiences are distinct, as you will hear, but they share key parallels. Both faced discrimination, threats and attacks before violent extremist groups seized power in their communities. Both were marked for death for being gay, and knew LGBT individuals who were killed. And both had to flee their homes because of who they are.

Their cases are not outliers, but rather part of a pattern of systematic abuse. Yet until now, the targeting of LGBT persons like Adnan and Subhi by ISIL has received scant international attention. Today, we are taking a necessary step toward remedying that oversight.

ISIL does not try to hide its crimes against LGBT persons – it broadcasts them for all the world to see. Many of us have seen the videos. ISIL parading a man through the streets and beating him – for being gay. ISIL marching men to the tops of buildings and throwing them to their deaths – for being gay. In one of these videos, allegedly from Syria, we are told that the victim was found to be having a gay affair. He is blindfolded, walked up stairs of a building, and then heaved off its roof. His suffering did not end there. The victim miraculously survived the fall, only to be stoned to death by a mob that waited for him below. Kids in the crowd were reportedly encouraged to grab stones and take part.

The mob in this instance carries an important lesson: while the targeting of LGBT individuals in the region appears to have worsened as ISIL's power has grown, such violence and hatred existed well before the group's dramatic rise, and that violence and hatred extends far beyond ISIL's membership. The victim in that grotesque video may have been thrown to his death by ISIL, but he was ultimately killed by stone-throwing individuals who did not belong to the group. Similarly, before Subhi Nahas was forced to flee his country because of death threats from Jabhat al Nusra, he was targeted for being gay by Syrian government soldiers. And before ISIL came to power, Adnan was repeatedly attacked by gangs of thugs for being gay, once being beaten so severely that he could hardly walk.

Today, we are coming together as a Security Council to condemn these acts, to demand they stop, and to commit to one day bringing the perpetrators to justice. That unified condemnation matters. This is the first time in history that the Council has held a meeting on the victimization of LGBT persons. It is the first time we are saying, in a single voice, that it is wrong to target people because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. It is a historic step. And it is, as we all know, long overdue.

But crucial and unprecedented as this step is, condemning ISIL's violent and systematic targeting of LGBT individuals is the easiest step we can take today. Because while today's session is focused on the crimes against LGBT persons committed by ISIL, we know the scope of this problem is much broader. Consider the report released in June by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – a report that found that thousands of people have been killed or brutally injured worldwide because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. According to the report, "the overall picture remains one of continuing, pervasive, violent abuse, harassment and discrimination affecting LGBT and intersex persons in all regions...often perpetrated with impunity."

We are all horrified by ISIL's videos of men being thrown to their death. But what is it about these crimes that so shocks our collective conscience? At its essence – it is the denial of a person's most basic right because of who they are. It is ISIL deciding that, because of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, they do not deserve to live.

Yet if these crimes feel utterly unjust and wrong to us, we must also ask: Why is it acceptable to deny LGBT persons other human rights? Why should LGBT persons be imprisoned for who they are? Why should police be allowed to refuse to investigate attacks or threats against LGBT persons? Why should we accept LGBT persons being turned away from schools or jobs or social services because of who they love? The answer to all of these questions is the same: We should not accept it. But too often we do.

No religious beliefs justify throwing individuals off of buildings or stoning them to death because of who they love. No cultural values excuse refusing to investigate a killing, assault or death threat because the victim is gay. These are not Western-imposed rights, or the North trying to force its values on the South.

Yet in too many parts of the world, denying LGBT rights is still seen as moral and just. Laws are used to criminalize LGBT persons, rather than to prosecute the people who violate their rights. That must change.

That change begins by working to stop attacks against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. And by taking steps to ensure that those who commit these heinous and brutal crimes are held accountable, whether the perpetrators belong to ISIL or police forces or are members of our own communities.

But stopping violence is not enough. We must strive to defend the rights of LGBT persons wherever they are denied, including within the United Nations. To give just one example, as recently as five years ago the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission – the NGO led by Jessica Stern, one of our guest briefers – was denied UN accreditation in the UN NGO Committee because of the issues they work on. And you will hear today just how critical those issues are. As a result, Jessica and members of her NGO were not even allowed to attend meetings like this one, much less speak at one – they wouldn't even be in the room. Today, because of a successful campaign led by some Member States with support from civil society, Jessica's group has been accredited – and she is speaking up here on the stage where she belongs. Nonetheless, groups like Jessica's are still being denied accreditation on similar grounds.

The effort to defend the equal rights of LGBT persons must also be waged within every one of our countries, even those where important progress has been made – and that includes in the United States. For just as this year we have made tremendous strides in advancing LGBT rights in the United States, we are under no illusion that the work is finished. Every one of our countries can and must do more to advance these rights domestically.

Let me conclude and hand the floor over to my esteemed co-host, Ambassador Barros-Melet. This year we mark seventy years since the creation of the United Nations. It is fair to say that in writing the charter, the drafters did not consider LGBT rights part of their conception of equal rights. But if we read the Charter today – and in particular its call to “reaffirm faith... in the dignity and worth of the human person” – it is impossible not to see a call for all of us to affirm LGBT rights. It is impossible not to see individuals like Adnan and Subhi as having the same inherent dignity and worth. And it is impossible not to take up the struggle for their rights as our own, as we have other great human rights struggles over the last seven decades. Today, we take a small but important step in assuming that work. It must not be our last step.

Thank you.

And with that, let me turn it over to Ambassador Barros-Melet of Chile, the United States' co-chair for today's event.

[Briefing on Sexual Violence in Iraq and Syria by Special Representative Bangura](#)

Tomorrow afternoon (25 August), Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zainab Bangura will brief Security Council members in consultations on her 16 - 29 April visit to the Middle East . Bangura visited Iraq and Syria as well as neighboring countries Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey which host Syrian refugees. No outcome is expected following the consultations.

Spain has tried for several months to have Bangura brief on her Middle East mission but these attempts were met with resistance by Russia. It seems Russia did not want Bangura to brief during the monthly Middle East meeting which, they argued, should remain focused on the political issues in the region. Several Council members pointed out that sexual violence should not be sidelined as a women's issue or a humanitarian issue, arguing that it is a central political issue that has been a component of the Iraq and Syria conflicts. A compromise was reached this month that Bangura would brief in consultations under the “Middle East” agenda item, but not during the regular, and public, Middle East briefing.

Bangura will share her discussions with survivors and witnesses that affirm previous findings that sexual violence is being committed strategically, in a widespread and systematic manner, and with a high-degree of sophistication by most parties to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq—both state and non-state actors.

Regarding government actors, most Council members are aware that sexual violence by security forces or pro-government militias has been characteristic of the Syrian conflict from its inception. Bangura is likely to report that in Syria sexual violence occurs during house searches, in detention and at checkpoints. Fear of rape has been one of the factors driving displacement from Syria. There is an increased vulnerability of displaced women and girls to sexual exploitation, such as human trafficking and forced marriage.

The fear of rape has also led to refugee and internally displaced persons communities' adopting negative coping mechanisms that affect women and girls, such as early marriage and removal from school. In Iraq, there have also been reports of sexual torture in government detention centers. Concern has also been expressed about the conduct of Shi'a militias, allied with the Iraqi government, during their military operations to liberate areas from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

Last week, on 20 August, Bangura participated in a Council briefing on security sector reform. She said a response to conflict-related sexual violence must include engagement with the security sector at the highest political and military levels, particularly in settings where the security services may have been involved in the commission of sexual violence. In this regard, Council members will be interested in the details of Bangura's meetings with both Syrian and Iraqi officials, particularly whether her office has been able to secure commitments from these governments to take concrete action to address sexual violence.

Regarding non-state actors, Council members expect there will a discussion of sexual violence in the context of violent extremism, with a particular focus on ISIS. Bangura is likely to detail how ISIS uses sexual violence in Iraq and Syria to achieve tactical objectives, dispelling the notion that sexual violence is just an incidental by-product of conflict. Sexual violence has been institutionalised by ISIS to increase recruitment by promising male fighters access to women and girls, to populate a new "Caliphate" through forced pregnancy, to terrorise communities into compliance, displace populations from strategic areas and generate revenue through trafficking, slave trade and ransoms. In this context, the sexual enslavement of Yezidi women and girls for over a year now in Iraq by ISIS is likely to be raised. Bangura is also likely to call for the engagement of religious leaders in addressing the stigma around sexual violence by noting how the Yezidi spiritual leader called for his community to support, not ostracise, women who have been abducted and released by ISIS—a practice that Bangura is likely to suggest other religious leaders could embrace. Bangura will also likely reiterate her call that the UN and member states ensure that the protection and empowerment of women are at the heart of any counter-terrorism response so that such efforts do not exacerbate the vulnerabilities that women and girls face in Iraq and Syria.

Some Council members are keen to hear more from Bangura about a regional approach to addressing sexual violence in conflict, and how such an approach could be coordinated with UN actors. Bangura is expected to share the initial concept of a seven-point strategy for the Middle East region that will broadly seek to fill gaps in the existing response by improving protection, access to services, and accountability.

Finally, some members may raise issues covered in the 24 August Arria-formula meeting on the targeting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons (actual or perceived) by ISIS. But given the focus on both state and non-state actors in tomorrow's meeting, any mention of violence against LGBT persons is unlikely to be only ISIS-specific. The March 2015 Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence noted the targeting of LGBT individuals by armed groups for the first time—as a form of “moral cleansing” in Iraq and in the context of checkpoint stops and detention in Syria (S/2015/203).

Source: <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2015/08/special-representative-bangura-to-brief-on-sexual-violence-in-iraq-and-syria.php>

Destruction of Syrian temple a war crime



This week's **destruction** of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, Syria, by the so called Islamic State (ISIS) is “an intolerable crime against civilization” and a “war crime” according to UNESCO's Director-General, Irina Bokova.

The Temple of Bel, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was considered as one of the most important ancient temple in the Middle East. **Satellite images** issued earlier this week by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) confirmed the site was destroyed by a powerful blast.

Since ISIS captured Palmyra in May earlier this year, serious **concerns** were raised regarding the ancient city ruins. These images come just few days after it was confirmed the blast destroyed another temple in the ancient city, the one of Baal Shamin. This destruction also constituted a “**war crime**” according to UNESCO's chief and was qualified as “**barbaric**” by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

UN Presses EU Migration Crisis

Antonio Guterres, the UN high commissioner for refugees, called on the European Union to **admit** (*Guardian*) up to 200,000 refugees as part of a mass relocation plan that would be binding on EU member-states. In the wake of France and Germany's calls for binding EU quotas, UK Prime Minister David Cameron **pledged** (*Bloomberg*) to take in thousands of additional refugees from Syria. Meanwhile, in Hungary, hundreds of asylum-seekers **left** (*Deutsche Welle*) Budapest's Keleti train station, setting off on foot for Austria. Separately, Hungary closed its southern border with Serbia after three hundred migrants broke out of a nearby reception camp. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban warned that

Europe is "[threatened \(WaPo\)](#) by a mass inflow of people" that could see tens of millions reaching its borders.

ANALYSIS

"Europe's failure to measure up to the human disaster has radically increased the human, financial and political costs of the crisis. One of the bedrocks of the EU, the Schengen free-movement zone, is now in jeopardy. It is not too late for the bloc to recover from a crisis largely of its own making. As hardline, anti-migrant parties surge in many countries, European governments must show they can work together to [tame the chaos](#), uphold international law and show compassion to those in need," writes Peter Sutherland in the *Financial Times*.

"The best way to ensure refugees don't hop between European countries is not to build fences, which encourages more dangerous forms of smuggling, but to ensure that the asylum system in every EU state operates to the same high standards, gives refugees the same level of benefits and grants the same length of residency. A [common policy](#) would also ensure that refugees were distributed proportionally throughout the EU. As it is some countries, particularly Greece and Italy, share a disproportionately large of the burden of the crisis. But such a move would be resisted by most European countries as many politicians believe it would cost them political capital at home," writes Patrick Kingsley in the *Guardian*.

"The trip is made by boat, foot, rail and bus—and over the more than 1,000 miles between jumping off points in Turkey and the safety of Germany, smugglers are almost always involved in at least part of the journey, law enforcement officials say. Swedish authorities think that 90 percent of refugees reaching their territory used smugglers to [ease at least a part of their trip](#). European officials estimate that the business runs in the billions of dollars," writes Michael Birnbaum in the *Washington Post*.

Religious News from Around the World

Aleppo archbishop aims to help Christians stay in Syria



Aleppo, Syria, Jul 24, 2015 / 06:07 am ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- With half of Syria's population displaced due to its ongoing civil war, Church leaders in the country are seeking to send a message of hope and support for the persecuted Christian minority who have chosen to stay.

"At the time of this writing, Aleppo is undergoing a massive assault by jihadists, and bombs have been falling for hours. It is as if everything is being done to scare people and push them to leave," Melkite Archbishop Jean-Clement Jeanbart of Aleppo wrote in a July 17 letter.

"We want to convey a message of optimism, one that encourages perseverance," he said.

For Archbishop Jeanbart, the most concrete assistance that can be offered to Syrians right now is to help them stay in their homes.

He explained that his diocese is seeking to establish a development program offering concrete aid to benefit small businesses, help rebuild small workshops, and repair homes damaged in the civil war.

Called "[Build to Stay](#)," the movement aims to gather the large number of faithful who are convinced of the relevance of Christians' continued presence in Syria.

"We do all that we can to allow the faithful to live on in this time of great trial in which humanitarian aid has become a priority," he said.

Now in its fifth year, the Syrian conflict has claimed the lives of an estimated 230,000 persons.

The conflict began March 15, 2011, when demonstrations protesting the rule of Bashar al-Assad and his Ba'ath Party sprang up nationwide. In April of that year, the Syrian army began to deploy to put down the uprisings, firing on protesters.

Half of Syria's population have fled their homes because of the civil war. There are more than 4 million Syrian refugees in nearby countries, most of them in Turkey and Lebanon, and an additional 8 million Syrians are believed to have been internally displaced by the war.

Archbishop Jeanbart said he remains close to the people who have chosen to stay, in order “to give them courage. We try to give them reasons to believe in a brighter future in this country.”

“For us bishops, successors of the Apostles and shepherds of the faithful in Syria, acting to further the continuation of the Christian presence in the country is a huge responsibility and a sacred task,” he said.

He noted that the Church in Syria has been fighting against the Christian exodus for years, because it weakens and “compromises the presence of the Church of the Apostles in the land that saw the very beginnings of Christianity”.

“Must we forget that Saul was converted on the road to Damascus? Wasn't he baptized, confirmed and ordained a priest and sent on his great mission in the world by the Church of Syria that had its beginnings in Damascus?” the archbishop asked.

The Church in Syria, he observed, has given up millions of martyrs who have “irrigated with their innocent blood the soil of our country.”

“Doesn't this Church deserve to be helped and supported so that it can continue its two-thousand year journey on the path of the Christian faith?”

In an appeal, Archbishop Jeanbart closed his letter explaining that if the world wants to help, “pray with us for an end to this war. If you want to help us, fight to bring peace to our land.”

“If you want to help us, help us support those Christians who have decided to stay to ensure the perennial Christians presence in the country. If you want to help us, help us accompany these faithful in their battle against defeat and in their efforts to ‘Build to Stay.’”

Source: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com//news/aleppo-archbishop-working-to-provide-means-for-christians-to-stay-in-syria-51219/>

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a UN Security Council Open Debate on the Middle East, July 23, 2015

Thank you, Foreign Minister McCully for convening this meeting, thank you Special Coordinator Mladenov for your informative briefing and for all of your essential work.

When the Security Council convenes every three months for an open debate on the Middle East, our discussion inevitably returns to a similar set of themes: the gut-wrenching, and ever-growing humanitarian catastrophe in Syria; the need – the urgent need – to breathe new life into efforts to achieve a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the importance of finding political solutions to these profound challenges, which have an impact far beyond the borders of any one

country or even the region. The longer these conflicts drag on, the greater the humanitarian consequences are that must be addressed. And the deepening humanitarian crises exacerbate the conditions in which enmity and violence thrive, making it even harder to reach those durable political solutions.

This has been the pattern in Syria. This month, we crossed the calamitous threshold of four million refugees from the conflict – making Syria the largest refugee crisis in a quarter-century. Another 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced within the country’s borders, and approximately half of all Syrians – 12.2 million people – need humanitarian assistance. Yet the international community is not just failing to keep pace with the urgent needs of this population – we are falling further and further behind. Just a quarter of the UN 2015 humanitarian appeal for Syria has been funded. One quarter. For the greatest humanitarian crisis in a generation.

The shortfall has immediate and profound consequences for Syrians in need. As a result of the funding gap, the World Food Program has been forced to cut the food assistance of more than 5.5 million Syrians, and 750,000 Syrian refugee children are not in school.

The shortfall also has considerable repercussions for Syria’s neighbors, which have shown immense generosity and compassion by taking in millions of Syrians, and whose governments and communities are left to fill in the gaps when the international community fails to step up.

As we have said all along, this humanitarian crisis is man-made. It is fueled by the widespread atrocities of a regime that – seemingly unsatisfied by the carnage wrought by its barrel bombs and use of chemical weapons – is now dropping entire dumpsters filled with explosives on neighborhoods, and did not even suspend its bombings on the celebratory holiday of Eid. As one resident of Aleppo told a reporter, “Here, Eid means Assad's bombs.” According to recent reporting, when residents fled an upsurge in fighting in Dar’a city in late June, the regime expanded its aerial bombing to target the open fields and villages where civilians took shelter. At least four hospitals in the villages where civilians fled were hit by aerial bombs, including one strike that reportedly killed five children in the hospital in the village of Taybeh.

A doctor who leads a makeshift twelve-bed clinic in Idlib province described the horror that followed airstrikes on a nearby town on June 4th. More than 130 wounded people, many of them children, arrived within hours. He said, “Bodies were everywhere, on the tables, in the hallways, on the floor. The floor was full of blood. Medical staff and volunteers picked their way between the wounded, doing what they could.” Overwhelmed and only able to provide basic treatment, the clinic had to turn away 50 people. The doctor said, “The only choice we have is to replenish our supplies, gather our hopes, and prepare for the next tragedy.”

The humanitarian crisis is also fueled by the terror of violent extremist groups like ISIL, which in May released a video of children executing 25 soldiers in Palmyra, and just last week posted footage of a child decapitating a Syrian army captain. A 14-year-old Yazidi boy who was abducted by ISIL and forced into one of their so-called “cub” training camps, aimed at indoctrinating children as young as four or five-years-old, said that he and more than a hundred other child recruits were given dolls – dolls – on which to practice beheadings. In Deir al-Zor, ISIL recently beheaded women for the first time – for the alleged crime of “sorcery.”

We must do more than name these challenges and call for them to be addressed. Instead, it is on us to come up with solutions that are pragmatic and principled and effective. So, for example, while it is important to call on Syria's neighbors to keep their borders open to the Syrians fleeing violence and persecution, thousands of whom are trapped on the border and struggling to survive – we also have a responsibility to help those neighboring countries shoulder the immense costs of hosting massive refugee populations. We must condemn every use of chemical weapons in Syria, but also develop a way of identifying those who perpetrate, organize, sponsor, or otherwise have a hand in these attacks, as the proposed UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism would do, so that those responsible can one day be held accountable. And after two months of consultations with stakeholders, UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura continues to work diligently to create a political path toward resolving Syria's crisis. His efforts deserve this Council's full support.

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, we risk falling into a similar pattern, especially with regard to rebuilding Gaza. Only 28 percent of the funds pledged to Gaza's recovery at the Cairo conference last October have been disbursed. That means that around \$2.5 billion that was committed to assist the people of Gaza nine months ago has not materialized. We see, as has been said, a similarly profound gap with respect to UNRWA funding, which currently has over a hundred million dollar shortfall. UNRWA officials say, and we've heard here again today, that if this shortfall is not filled, they will be forced to close its more than 700 schools, which serve some 500,000 students – nearly half of them in Gaza.

Countries concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza must follow through on their commitments to the people who live there, and do their part to fill UNRWA's significant budget deficit. The United States has disbursed 95 percent of the \$400 million we pledged at the Cairo conference, and we provided more than \$398 million to UNRWA in 2014, more than any other bilateral donor.

But, of course – it has to be said – addressing Gaza's immediate humanitarian needs addresses the symptoms of conflict, but not the root causes.

We continue to believe that achieving a two-state solution through negotiations remains the best path forward not only for resolving many of the issues in Gaza, but also for Israel's security, for Palestinian aspirations and security, and for regional stability. And we continue to look to the Israeli government and the Palestinians to demonstrate – through policies and actions – a genuine commitment to a two-state solution. Only then can trust be rebuilt and a cycle of escalation avoided in the future.

Let me conclude. On Monday, this Council unanimously adopted a Security Council resolution endorsing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the JCPOA. If implemented, the deal would cut off all pathways for the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop the fissile material required for a nuclear weapon, while putting in place a rigorous inspection and transparency regime to verify Iran's compliance.

Now, the true measure of this deal will be in its implementation, of course. But also important – for the purposes of this debate and the Security Council in general – is what the JCPOA tells us about how to tackle some of the world's most intractable-seeming problems. First: persistence. This deal was reached after two years of talks and grueling negotiations between the P5+1 nations, the European Union, and Iran. Second: pragmatism. The deal does not tackle every concern we have over Iran's destabilizing actions, but rather focuses on the gravest single threat to the region. And third: enforceability. The JCPOA does not trust that Iran is not pursuing a nuclear weapons program, but it puts in place rigorous verification measures that have the force of the unified international community behind them. This

Council should take it as our challenge to apply these lessons to the other serious crises facing the region.

Local Ecclesiastical News

Islamic State Kidnaps Scores in Syria

A monitoring group said that militants of the self-proclaimed Islamic State have [kidnapped \(Guardian\)](#) at least 230 people, including dozens of Christians, from the central Syrian town of Qaryatain, a day after the group seized the strategic town. On Thursday, the Islamic State [claimed \(Al Jazeera\)](#) responsibility for a suicide bomb attack on a mosque in Saudi Arabia that killed at least fifteen people. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council will [vote \(NYT\)](#) on a resolution to hold accountable the users of chemical weapons in Syria by creating a panel to investigate perpetrators of chemical attacks.

ANALYSIS

"The assertive Islamism of some of the most powerful rebel groups has ensured that a military solution to the four-year conflict—which has claimed nearly a quarter of a million lives—is [all but impossible](#) in an increasingly fractious and complex battlefield," writes Kareem Shaheen in the *Guardian*.

"The intensity of the Syrian conflict; the proliferation of armed factions on all sides; the huge influx of weapons; the divisive involvement of multiple regional and international states; as well as the brutality of the fighting itself makes the war in Syria a [ripe candidate for intractability](#). All jihadist groups in the country, including IS, have invested in Syria precisely for this reason. The longer the conflict continues, the more unmanageable it will become and the more jihadists will find themselves operating within an environment that secures their long-term future," writes Charles Lister in *Terrorism Analysts*.

"As the self-proclaimed Islamic State, or ISIS, commits horrendous videotaped executions, it might seem to pose the [greatest threat to Syrian civilians](#). In fact, that ignoble distinction belongs to the barrel bombs being dropped by the military of Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad. The Islamic State has distracted us from this deadly reality," writes Kenneth Roth in the *New York Times*.

Other Related News

Christian Pastor To Be Released Two Years Early From Iranian Jail

A Christian pastor who has been held in Iran's notorious Evin prison since 2010 will be released two years early in an apparent goodwill gesture by Tehran.

"Farshid Fathi has been told by prison officials that he will be released on December 10, 2015," instead of December 2017, Iranian Elam Christian Ministries said on its website

Farshid is currently serving a six-year sentence for what the government claimed was violations of national security. His family says he was only "being a Christian and freely exercising his faith."

Farshid was arrested at his home in Tehran by agents of the Intelligence Ministry in December 2010 and imprisoned. Supporters say he was held in solitary confinement and brutally interrogated.

The Revolutionary Court in Tehran later convicted Farshid for "action against the national security" because he cooperated with foreign evangelical organizations.

The Russian Orthodox Church claimed to play a role in Farshid's early release. It said Moscow's Patriarch Kirill in April sent a letter to Tehran asking authorities to show mercy to imprisoned Christians.

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-grants-jailed-christian-pastor-early-release/27130230.html>

Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza at the United Nations Security Council
Open Debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question"



Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza,
Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN

United Nations Security Council Open Debate on
**“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian
question”**
New York, 23 July 2015

Mr President,

My Delegation congratulates you on New Zealand’s Presidency of the Security Council this month and commends you for convening this timely open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question.”

The Holy See continues to monitor closely the situation in the Middle East, which is deeply afflicted by various conflicts that continue to intensify. Unfortunately, the international community, which seems to have become accustomed to these conflicts, has not yet succeeded in working out an adequate response.

Particularly preoccupying is the situation in Syria, where the dramatic humanitarian situation affecting more than half of the population calls for renewed commitment by all in order to arrive at a political solution to the conflict. We should not continue to look helplessly from the sidelines while a great country is being destroyed. The situation in Syria requires putting aside many particular interests in order to prioritise those of Syria and of the Syrians themselves.

In Syria as well as in Iraq, we continue to be gravely concerned about the terrorist acts perpetrated by the so-called “Islamic State.” This is a challenge not only for the region but for the entire international community, which is called upon to cooperate with unity of purpose in order to thwart this terrorist plague, which is expanding its activities into different countries.

Having to take care of millions of refugees, Lebanon and Jordan also bear the brunt of the conflict in neighbouring Syria. They urgently need the solidarity of the whole international community.

The Holy See hopes that the Land of the Cedars will be able to resolve, as soon as possible, this period of institutional instability, arising largely from the vacancy for over a year now of the Presidency of the Republic.

While being aware of the sufferings of entire populations, I wish to point out the difficulties that Christians and other minority ethnic and religious groups are experiencing, forcing many of them to leave their homes. The diminution of the Christian presence is a grave loss for the entire region, where Christians have been present since the very beginnings of Christianity and where they wish to continue cooperating with their fellow citizens in building harmonious societies and working for the common good, as promoters of peace, reconciliation and development.

My delegation wishes to express appreciation for the agreement which has been reached between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the 5+1 group.

On June 26 this year, the Holy See and the State of Palestine signed the Comprehensive Agreement that follows the Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) of 15 February 2000. This Agreement is indicative of the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in recent years, above all in the level of international support it has acquired, as exemplified by UN Resolution 67/19, which, inter alia, recognizes Palestine as a non-member Observer State.

The Holy See hopes that this Agreement may in some way be a stimulus to the achievement of the two-State solution, bringing a definitive end to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict that continues to cause suffering on both Parties, and that the Agreement may offer, within the complex reality of the Middle East, a good example of dialogue and cooperation.

As Pope Francis said during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land last year: “The time has come for everyone to find the courage to be generous and creative in the service of the common good, the courage to forge a peace that rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two States to exist and to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.”¹

In this context, my delegation wishes to reiterate that the peace process can move forward only if it is directly negotiated between the Parties, with the support of the international community.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?

There was something about Diyaa that his wife’s brothers didn’t like. He was a tyrant, they said, who, after 14 years of marriage, wouldn’t let their sister, Rana, 31, have her own mobile phone. He isolated her from friends and family, guarding her jealously. Although Diyaa and Rana were both from Qaraqosh, the largest Christian city in Iraq, they didn’t know each other before their families arranged their

marriage. It hadn't gone especially well. Rana was childless, and according to the brothers, Diyaa was cheap. The house he rented was dilapidated, not fit for their sister to live in.

Qaraqosh is on the Nineveh Plain, a 1,500-square-mile plot of contested land that lies between Iraq's Kurdish north and its Arab south. Until last summer, this was a flourishing city of 50,000, in Iraq's breadbasket. Wheat fields and chicken and cattle farms surrounded a town filled with coffee shops, bars, barbers, gyms and other trappings of modern life.

Then, last June, ISIS took Mosul, less than 20 miles west. The militants painted a red Arabic "n," for Nasrane, a slur, on Christian homes. They took over the municipal water supply, which feeds much of the Nineveh Plain. Many residents who managed to escape fled to Qaraqosh, bringing with them tales of summary executions and mass beheadings. The people of Qaraqosh feared that ISIS would continue to extend the group's self-styled caliphate, which now stretches from Turkey's border with Syria to south of Fallujah in Iraq, an area roughly the size of Indiana.

Photo



A roadblock near the headquarters of a Dwekh Nawsha Assyrian Christian militia unit in Baqofa, Iraq. Credit Peter van Agtmael/Magnum, for The New York Times

In the weeks before advancing on Qaraqosh, ISIS cut the city's water. As the wells dried up, some left and others talked about where they might go. In July, reports that ISIS was about to take Qaraqosh sent

thousands fleeing, but ISIS didn't arrive, and within a couple of days, most people returned. Diyaa refused to leave. He was sure ISIS wouldn't take the town.

A week later, the Kurdish forces, known as the peshmerga, whom the Iraqi government had charged with defending Qaraqosh, retreated. ("We didn't have the weapons to stop them," Jabbar Yawar, the secretary general of the peshmerga, said later.) The city was defenseless; the Kurds had not allowed the people of the Nineveh Plain to arm themselves and had rounded up their weapons months earlier. Tens of thousands jammed into cars and fled along the narrow highway leading to the relative safety of Erbil, the Kurdish capital of Northern Iraq, 50 miles away.

Piling 10 family members into a Toyota pickup, Rana's brothers ran, too. From the road, they called Diyaa repeatedly, pleading with him to escape with Rana. "She can't go," Diyaa told one of Rana's brothers, as the brother later recounted to me. "ISIS isn't coming. This is all a lie."

The next morning Diyaa and Rana woke to a nearly empty town. Only 100 or so people remained in Qaraqosh, mostly those too poor, old or ill to travel. A few, like Diyaa, hadn't taken the threat seriously. One man passed out drunk in his backyard and woke the next morning to ISIS taking the town.

As Diyaa and Rana hid in their basement, ISIS broke into stores and looted them. Over the next two weeks, militants rooted out most of the residents cowering in their homes, searching house to house. The armed men roamed Qaraqosh on foot and in pickups. They marked the walls of farms and businesses "Property of the Islamic State." ISIS now held not just Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, but also Ramadi and Fallujah. (During the Iraq War, the fighting in these three places accounted for 30 percent of U.S. casualties.) In Qaraqosh, as in Mosul, ISIS offered residents a choice: They could either convert or pay the *jizya*, the head tax levied against all "People of the Book": Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews. If they refused, they would be killed, raped or enslaved, their wealth taken as spoils of war.

No one came for Diyaa and Rana. ISIS hadn't bothered to search inside their ramshackle house. Then, on the evening of Aug. 21, word spread that ISIS was willing to offer what they call "exile and hardship" to the last people in Qaraqosh. They would be cast out of their homes with nothing, but at least they would survive. A kindly local mullah was going door to door with the good news. Hoping to save Diyaa and Rana, their neighbors told him where they were hiding.

Diyaa and Rana readied themselves to leave. The last residents of Qaraqosh were to report the next morning to the local medical center, to receive "checkups" before being deported from the Islamic State. Everyone knew the checkups were really body searches to prevent residents from taking valuables out of Qaraqosh. Before ISIS let residents go — if they let them go — it was very likely they would steal everything they had, as residents heard they had done elsewhere.

Diyaa and Rana called their families to let them know what was happening. "Take nothing with you," her brothers told Diyaa. But Diyaa, as usual, didn't listen. He stuffed Rana's clothes with money, gold, passports and their identity papers. Although she was terrified of being caught — she could be beheaded for taking goods from the Islamic State — Rana didn't protest; she didn't dare. According to her brothers, Diyaa could be violent. (Diyaa's brother Nimrod disputed this, just as he does Diyaa's alleged cheapness.)

At 7 the next morning, Diyaa and Rana made the five-minute walk from their home to Qaraqosh Medical Center Branch No. 2, a yellow building with red-and-green trim next to the city's only mosque. As the

crowd gathered, Diyaa phoned both his family and hers. “We’re standing in front of the medical center right now,” he said, as his brother-in-law recalled it. “There are buses and cars here. Thank God, they’re going to let us go.”

It was a searing day. Temperatures reach as high as 110 degrees on the Nineveh Plain in summer. By 9 a.m., ISIS had separated men from women. Seated in the crowd, the local ISIS emir, Saeed Abbas, surveyed the female prisoners. His eyes lit on Aida Hana Noah, 43, who was holding her 3-year-old daughter, Christina. Noah said she felt his gaze and gripped Christina closer. For two weeks, she’d been at home with her daughter and her husband, Khadr Azzou Abada, 65. He was blind, and Aida decided that the journey north would be too hard for him. So she sent her 25-year-old son with her three other children, who ranged in age from 10 to 13, to safety. She thought Christina too young to be without her mother.

ISIS scanned the separate groups of men and women. “You” and “you,” they pointed. Some of the captives realized what ISIS was doing, survivors told me later, dividing the young and healthy from the older and weak. One, Talal Abdul Ghani, placed a final call to his family before the fighters confiscated his phone. He had been publicly whipped for refusing to convert to Islam, as his sisters, who fled from other towns, later recounted. “Let me talk to everybody,” he wept. “I don’t think they’re letting me go.” It was the last time they heard from him.

[Continue reading the main story](#) Slide Show



The Shadow of Death

Credit Peter van Agtmael/Magnum, for The New York Times

No one was sure where either bus was going. As the jihadists directed the weaker and older to the first of two buses, one 49-year-old woman, Sahar, protested that she’d been separated from her husband, Adel. Although he was 61, he was healthy and strong and had been held back. One fighter reassured

her, saying, “These others will follow.” Sahar, Aida and her blind husband, Khadr, boarded the first bus. The driver, a man they didn’t know, walked down the aisle. Without a word, he took Christina from her mother’s arms. “Please, in the name of God, give her back,” Aida pleaded. The driver carried Christina into the medical center. Then he returned without the child. As the people in the bus prayed to leave town, Aida kept begging for Christina. Finally, the driver went inside again. He came back empty-handed.

Aida has told this story before with slight variations. As she, her husband and another witness recounted it to me, she was pleading for her daughter when the emir himself appeared, flanked by two fighters. He was holding Christina against his chest. Aida fought her way off the bus.

“Please give me my daughter,” she said.

The emir cocked his head at his bodyguards.

“Get on the bus before we kill you,” one said.

Christina reached for her mother.

“Get on the bus before we slaughter your family,” he repeated.

As the bus rumbled north out of town, Aida sat crumpled in a seat next to her husband. Many of the 40-odd people on it began to weep. “We cried for Christina and ourselves,” Sahar said. The bus took a sharp right toward the Khazir River that marked an edge of the land ISIS had seized. Several minutes later, the driver stopped and ordered everyone off.

Led by a shepherd who had traveled this path with his flock, the sick and elderly descended and began to walk to the Khazir River. The journey took 12 hours.

The second bus — the one filled with the young and healthy — headed north, too. But instead of turning east, it turned west, toward Mosul. Among its captives was Diyaa. Rana wasn’t with him. She had been bundled into a third vehicle, a new four-wheel drive, along with an 18-year-old girl named Rita, who’d come to Qaraqosh to help her elderly father flee.

The women were driven to Mosul, where, the next day, Rana’s captor called her brothers. “If you come near her, I’ll blow the house up. I’m wearing a suicide vest,” he said. Then he passed the phone to Rana, who whispered, in Syriac, the story of what happened to her. Her brothers were afraid to ask any questions lest her answers make trouble for her. She said, “I’m taking care of a 3-year-old named Christina.”

Photo



Syrian Christian refugees in Beirut, Lebanon, mourn the death of an elderly man, Benjamin Ishaya. He died of a head wound after being struck by a militant while fleeing his home village. Credit Peter van Agtmael/Magnum, for The New York Times

Most of Iraq's Christians call themselves Assyrians, Chaldeans or Syriac, different names for a common ethnicity rooted in the Mesopotamian kingdoms that flourished between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers thousands of years before Jesus. Christianity arrived during the first century, according to Eusebius, an early church historian who claimed to have translated letters between Jesus and a Mesopotamian king. Tradition holds that Thomas, one of the Twelve Apostles, sent Thaddeus, an early Jewish convert, to Mesopotamia to preach the Gospel.

As Christianity grew, it coexisted alongside older traditions — Judaism, Zoroastrianism and the monotheism of the Druze, Yazidis and Mandeans, among others — all of which survive in the region, though in vastly diminished form. From Greece to Egypt, this was the eastern half of Christendom, a fractious community divided by doctrinal differences that persist today: various Catholic churches (those who look to Rome for guidance, and those who don't); the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox (those who believe Jesus has two natures, human and divine, and those who believe he was solely divine); and the Assyrian Church of the East, which is neither Catholic nor Orthodox.

When the first Islamic armies arrived from the Arabian Peninsula during the seventh century, the Assyrian Church of the East was sending missionaries to China, India and Mongolia. The shift from Christianity to Islam happened gradually. Much as the worship of Eastern cults largely gave way to Christianity, Christianity gave way to Islam. Under Islamic rule, Eastern Christians lived as protected people, *dhimmi*: They were subservient and had to pay the *jizya*, but were often allowed to observe

practices forbidden by Islam, including eating pork and drinking alcohol. Muslim rulers tended to be more tolerant of minorities than their Christian counterparts, and for 1,500 years, different religions thrived side by side.

One hundred years ago, the fall of the Ottoman Empire and World War I ushered in the greatest period of violence against Christians in the region. The genocide waged by the Young Turks in the name of nationalism, not religion, left at least two million Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks dead. Nearly all were Christian. Among those who survived, many of the better educated left for the West. Others settled in Iraq and Syria, where they were protected by the military dictators who courted these often economically powerful minorities.

From 1910 to 2010, the percentage of the Middle Eastern population that was Christian — in countries like Egypt, Israel, Palestine and Jordan — continued to decline; once 14 percent of the population, Christians now make up roughly 4 percent. (In Iran and Turkey, they're all but gone.) In Lebanon, the only country in the region where Christians hold significant political power, their numbers have shrunk over the past century, to 34 percent from 78 percent of the population. Low birthrates have contributed to this decline, as well as hostile political environments and economic crisis. Fear is also a driver. The rise of extremist groups, as well as the perception that their communities are vanishing, causes people to leave.

For more than a decade, extremists have targeted Christians and other minorities, who often serve as stand-ins for the West. This was especially true in Iraq after the U.S. invasion, which caused hundreds of thousands to flee. "Since 2003, we've lost priests, bishops and more than 60 churches were bombed," Bashar Warda, the Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Erbil, said. With the fall of Saddam Hussein, Christians began to leave Iraq in large numbers, and the population shrank to less than 500,000 today from as many as 1.5 million in 2003.

The Arab Spring only made things worse. As dictators like Mubarak in Egypt and Qaddafi in Libya were toppled, their longstanding protection of minorities also ended. Now, ISIS is looking to eradicate Christians and other minorities altogether. The group twists the early history of Christians in the region — their subjugation by the sword — to legitimize its millenarian enterprise. Recently, ISIS posted videos delineating the second-class status of Christians in the caliphate. Those unwilling to pay the *jizya* tax or to convert would be destroyed, the narrator warned, as the videos culminated in the now-infamous scenes of Egyptian and Ethiopian Christians in Libya being marched onto the beach and beheaded, their blood running into the surf.

The future of Christianity in the region of its birth is now uncertain. "How much longer can we flee before we and other minorities become a story in a history book?" says Nuri Kino, a journalist and founder of the advocacy group Demand for Action. According to a Pew study, Christians face religious persecution in more countries than any other religious group. "ISIL has put a spotlight on the issue," says Anna Eshoo, a California Democrat in the U.S. House of Representatives, whose parents are from the region and who advocates on behalf of Eastern Christians. "Christianity is under an existential threat."

One of the main pipelines for Christians fleeing the Middle East runs through Lebanon. This spring, thousands of Christians from villages in northeastern Syria along the Khabur River found shelter in Lebanon as they fled an ISIS assault in which 230 people were seized for ransom. This wasn't the first

time that members of this tight-knit community had been driven from their homes. Many of these villagers were descendants of those who, in 1933, fled Iraq after a massacre of Assyrian Christians left 3,000 dead in one day.

On a recent Saturday, 50 of these refugees gathered for a funeral at the Assyrian Church of the East in Beirut, which sits on the steep slope of Mount Lebanon, not far from a BMW-Mini Cooper dealership and a Miss Virgin Jeans shop. The priest, the Rev. Sargon Zoumaya, buttoned his black cassock over a blue clerical shirt as he prepared to officiate over the burial of Benjamin Ishaya, who arrived just months before, displaced from one of the villages ISIS attacked. (He had died of complications following a head wound inflicted by a jihadist.)

“We’re afraid our whole society will vanish,” said Zoumaya, who left his Khabur River village more than a decade ago to study in Lebanon. He picked up his prayer book and headed downstairs to the parish house. The church was helping to care for 1,500 Syrian families. “It’s too much pressure on us, more than we can handle,” he said. The families didn’t want to live in the notoriously overcrowded Lebanese refugee camps that had filled with one-and-a-half million Syrians fleeing the civil war. They no longer wanted to live among Muslims. Instead they crammed into apartments with exorbitant rents that the church subsidized as best it could.

Photo



The headquarters of a Dwekh Nawsha Assyrian Christian militia unit near the front line against ISIS in Baqofa, Iraq. Credit Peter van Agtmael/Magnum, for The New York Times

Inside the church, men and women sat in two separate circles. A young woman passed out Turkish coffee in paper cups. Waves of keening rose from the ring of women, led by Ishaya's widow. Wearing an olive green suit, she sat at the head of the open coffin, weeping, as women touched her husband's body. Nearby, her son, Bassam Ishaya, nursed two broken feet. He'd been trying to support his family by repairing couches until one dropped on him. The Ishaya family left Syria with nothing. ISIS, Bassam said, told them they "either had to pay the *jizya*, convert or be killed." He pointed to a blue crucifix tattoo on his right arm. "Because of this, I had to wear long sleeves," he said.

To escape, the Ishayas were airlifted from Al-Hasakah, a town in northeastern Syria, which had been under the joint control of the Assad government and the Kurds but has since largely fallen to ISIS, and flown 400 miles to Damascus. From there, they drove to the Lebanese border. Syrian Air charged \$180 for the flights; Assad's government charged \$50 a person, the refugees at the funeral said.

Since the civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Assad has allowed Christians to leave the country. Nearly a third of Syria's Christians, about 600,000, have found themselves with no choice but to flee the country, driven out by extremist groups like the Nusra Front and now ISIS. "As president, he made the sheep and the wolf walk together," Bassam said. "We don't care if he stays or goes, we just want security." Assad has used the rise of ISIS to solidify his own support among those who remain, sowing the same fear among them that he tries to spread in the West: that he is the only thing standing in the way of an ISIS takeover. This argument has been largely effective. As Samy Gemayel, leader of the Kataeb party in Lebanon, said: "When Christians saw Christians being beheaded, those who saw Assad as the enemy chose the lesser of two evils. Assad was the diet version of ISIS."

Like most of the refugees in the parish house, Bassam wasn't planning on returning to Syria. He was searching for a way to the West. His brother Yussef moved to Chicago two years earlier. He didn't have a job yet, but his wife worked at Walmart. Maybe they would help. He wanted to leave like everyone else, although it would hasten the end of Christianity in Syria. No one would go home after what ISIS had done. "Christians will all leave," he said. "What can I do? I have four kids, I can't leave them here to die."

After his father's coffin was sealed, Bassam and the rest of the male mourners filed out. As the women looked on, the men filled waiting cars and drove, past a cement factory, to a nearby graveyard. Zoumaya swung a censer of frankincense along the narrow pathway. But neither the smoke nor the wilting rose bushes could mask the reek of corpses. Behind the priest, Bassam hobbled on crutches. The mourners lifted the coffin into a wall of doors, which resembled the shelving units in a morgue. This was a pauper's grave. Since the family couldn't afford the fee, the church paid \$500 to place the coffin here. In a few months, the body would be quietly burned, although cremation is anathema to Eastern Christian doctrine. The ashes would take up less space in this overcrowded city of the dead.

"We ran from the war only to die in the street," one mourner said.

Later, Zoumaya talked of his family members, who were among the 230 captured by ISIS. At noon, on the day ISIS arrived in his wife's village, Zoumaya called his father-in-law to check in.

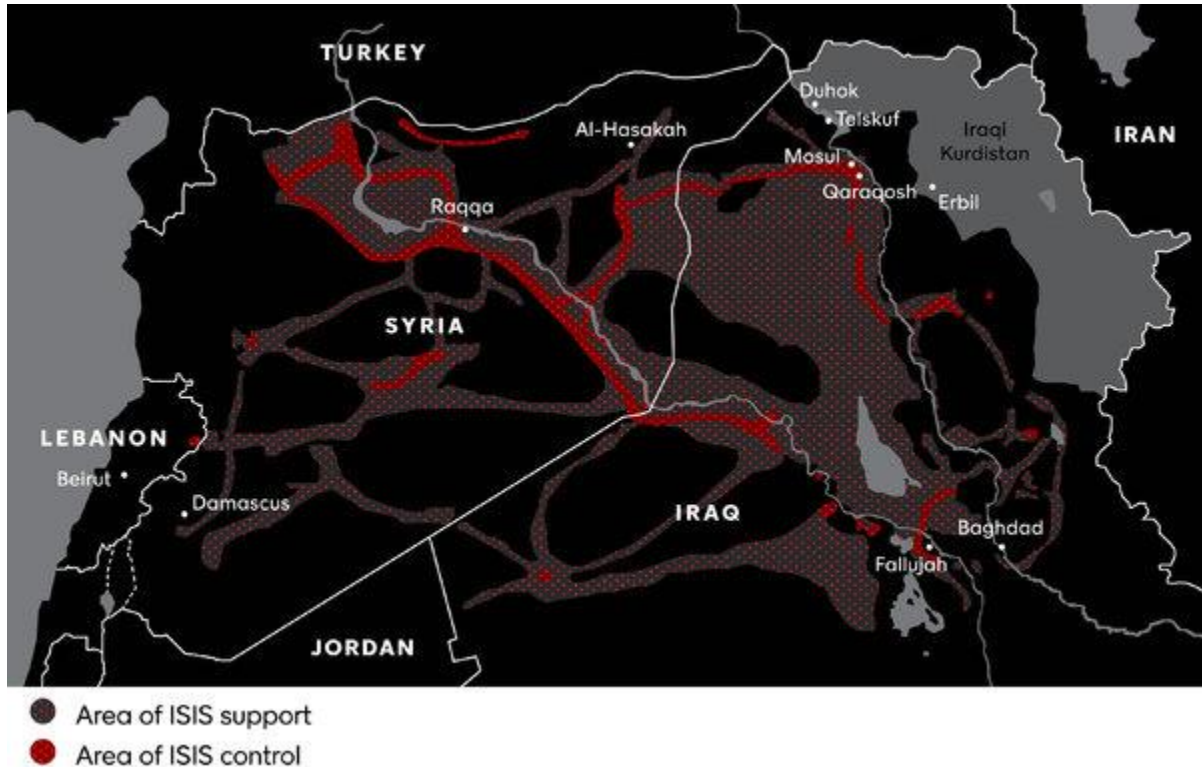
"This is ISIS," said the man who answered.

"Please let my family go," the priest begged. "They've done nothing to you. They're not fighting."

“These people belong to us now,” the man said. “Who is this calling?”

Zoumaya hung up. He feared what ISIS might do if they knew who he was. But this was not the end of his communication with them; they sent him photographs via WhatsApp. He pulled out his phone to show them. Here was a jihadi on a motorcycle, grinning in front of the charred grocery store that belonged to his father. Here was a photo, before ISIS arrived, of a 3-month-old’s baptism. Here was a snapshot of the family dressed up for Somikka, Assyrian Halloween, during which adults don frightening costumes to scare children into fasting for Lent.

Photo



CreditSource: Institute for the Study of War

“All these people are missing,” he said.

ISIS wants \$23 million for these captives, \$100,000 each, a sum no one can pay.

This spring the U.N. Security Council met to discuss the plight of Iraq’s religious minorities. “If we attend to minority rights only after slaughter has begun, then we have already failed,” Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein, the high commissioner for Human Rights, said. After the conference ended, there was mounting anger at American inaction. Although the airstrikes were effective, since October 2013, the United States has given just \$416 million in humanitarian aid, which falls far short of what is needed. “Americans and the West were telling us they came to bring democracy, freedom and prosperity,” Louis Sako, the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Babylon who addressed the Security Council, wrote to me in a recent email. “What we are living is anarchy, war, death and the plight of three million refugees.”

Of the 3.1 million displaced Iraqis, 85 percent are Sunnis. No one has suffered more at the hands of ISIS than fellow Muslims. Other religious minorities have been affected as well and in large numbers: the Yazidis, who were trapped on Mount Sinjar in Northern Iraq last summer, as ISIS threatened them with genocide; as well as Shia Turkmen; Shabak; Kaka'i; and the Mandeans, who follow John the Baptist. "Everyone has seen the forced conversions, crucifixions and beheadings," David Saperstein, the United States ambassador at large for religious freedom, said. "To see these communities, primarily Christians, but also the Yazidis and others, persecuted in such large numbers is deeply alarming."

It has been nearly impossible for two U.S. presidents — Bush, a conservative evangelical; and Obama, a progressive liberal — to address the plight of Christians explicitly for fear of appearing to play into the crusader and "clash of civilizations" narratives the West is accused of embracing. In 2007, when Al Qaeda was kidnapping and killing priests in Mosul, Nina Shea, who was then a U.S. commissioner for religious freedom, says she approached the secretary of state at the time, Condoleezza Rice, who told her the United States didn't intervene in "sectarian" issues. Rice now says that protecting religious freedom in Iraq was a priority both for her and for the Bush administration. But the targeted violence and mass Christian exodus remained unaddressed. "One of the blind spots of the Bush administration was the inability to grapple with this as a direct byproduct of the invasion," says Timothy Shah, the associate director of Georgetown University's Religious Freedom Project.

More recently, the White House has been criticized for eschewing the term "Christian" altogether. The issue of Christian persecution is politically charged; the Christian right has long used the idea that Christianity is imperiled to rally its base. When ISIS massacred Egyptian Copts in Libya this winter, the State Department came under fire for referring to the victims merely as "Egyptian citizens." Daniel Philpott, a professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame, says, "When ISIS is no longer said to have religious motivations nor the minorities it attacks to have religious identities, the Obama administration's caution about religion becomes excessive."

Last fall, Obama did refer to Christians and other religious minorities by name in a speech, saying, "we cannot allow these communities to be driven from their ancient homelands." When ISIS threatened to eradicate the Yazidis, "it was the United States that stepped in to beat back the militants," Alistair Baskey, a spokesman for the National Security Council, says. In northeastern Syria, where ISIS is still launching attacks against Assyrian Christian villages, the U.S. military recently came to their aid, Baskey added. Refugees are a thornier issue. Of the more than 122,000 Iraqi refugees admitted to the United States, nearly 40 percent already belong to oppressed minorities. Admitting more would be difficult. "There are limits to what the international community can do," Saperstein said.

Eshoo, the Democratic congresswoman, is working to establish priority refugee status for minorities who want to leave Iraq. "It's a hair ball," she says. "The average time for admittance to the United States is more than 16 months, and that's too long. Many will die." But it can be difficult to rally widespread support. The Middle East's Christians often favor Palestine over Israel. And because support of Israel is central to the Christian Right — Israel must be occupied by the Jews before Jesus can return — this stance distances Eastern Christians from a powerful lobby that might otherwise champion their cause. Recently, Ted Cruz admonished an audience of Middle Eastern Christians at an In Defense of Christians event in Washington, telling them that Christians "have no better ally than the Jewish state." Cruz was booed.

The fate of Christians in the Middle East isn't simply a matter of religion; it is also integral to what kinds of societies will flourish as the region's map fractures. In Lebanon, for example, where Christians have always played a powerful role in government, they increasingly serve as a buffer between Sunni and Shia. For nearly 70 years, Lebanon was a proxy battleground for the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Across the region, that conflict is now secondary to the shifting tectonic plates of the Sunni-Shia divide, which threatens terrible bloodshed.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

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Earlier this year, Lebanon closed its borders to almost everyone escaping the war in Syria but made an exception for Christians fleeing ISIS. When the extremists attacked the villages along the Khabur River, the interior minister, Nouhad Machnouk, ordered the official in charge of the border to allow Christians to enter the country. "I can't put this in writing," the border official said. Machnouk replied, "O.K., say it aloud, word by word."

Machnouk told me this story on a recent evening. "They're paying much, much, much more than others," in both Syria and Iraq, he said. "They're not Sunni and not Shia, but they're paying more than both." We sat in his airy office, housed in a former art school from the Ottoman era. It was decorated with his private collection of Greek and Roman antiquities, including a carved basalt head with finely wrought curls. For the minister, a moderate Sunni, sheltering Christians is as much a sociopolitical imperative as a moral one.

Photo



A bullet wound on the arm of Raed Sabah Matt, a former member of the Iraqi Army who survived an attack by Al Qaeda in Mosul and is now a member of an anti-ISIS Christian militia. Credit Peter van Agtmael/Magnum, for The New York Times

In Lebanon, the tension between Sunni and Shia plays out in a system of political patronage, which has split the Christian community into two rival political parties, both born of the country's 15-year-long civil war. The pro-Saudi Future movement, which consists of mainly Sunnis, supports the Christian leader Samir Geagea, who lives atop Mount Lebanon behind three check points, two X-ray machines and a set of steel doors. Hezbollah, which is Shia and backed by Iran, has been openly allied since 2006 with the Free Patriotic Movement (F.P.M.), a Christian Party headed by Michel Aoun. For Hezbollah, Christians offer an opportunity to forge an alliance with a fellow minority. (Of the world's one and a half billion Muslims, only 10 to 20 percent are Shia.)

"It's a political game," Alain Aoun, a member of Parliament for the F.P.M. and Michel Aoun's nephew, told me. The emergence of ISIS has strengthened the alliance. "The Christians are happy to have anyone

who can fight against I.S.” Hezbollah has paid young Christian men from Lebanon’s impoverished Bekaa Valley a one-time \$500 to \$2,000 fee to fight ISIS.

“Christians here are making the same calculation that Obama does,” Hanin Ghaddar, the managing editor of NOW, a news website in Lebanon, said, referring to Obama’s willingness to support Iran as a bulwark against Sunni extremism. For many Christians in the Middle East, a Shia alliance offers a hope of survival, however slim. Ghaddar, an independent Shia, says that it is uncertain how these tenuous allegiances will play out. This spring, pro-Iranian forces of Hezbollah were battling Sunni extremists in Syria. No one knew who would prevail. “It’s like ‘Game of Thrones,’ ” she said. “We’re waiting for the snow to melt.”

The front line against ISIS in Northern Iraq is marked by an earthen berm that runs for hundreds of miles over the Nineveh Plain. A string of Christian towns now stands empty, and the Kurdish forces occupy what, for thousands of years, was Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac land. In one, Telskuf, seized by ISIS last year, the main square is overgrown with brambles and thistles. It was once a thriving market town. Every Thursday, hundreds came to buy clothes, honey and vegetables. Telskuf was home to 7,000 people; now only three remain.

The Nineveh Plain Forces, a 500-member Assyrian Christian militia, patrols the town. The N.P.F. is one of five Assyrian militias formed during the past year after the rout of ISIS. It shares a double aim with two other militias, Dwekh Nawsha, an all-volunteer force of around 100, and the Nineveh Plains Protection Units, a battalion of more than 300: to help liberate Christian lands from ISIS and to protect their people, possibly as part of a nascent national guard, when they return home. The two other militias are the Syriac Military Council, which is fighting alongside the Kurds in northeastern Syria, and the Babylonian Brigades, which operate under Iraq’s Shia-dominated militias.

A few of these militias are aided by a handful of American, Canadian and British citizens, who, frustrated with their governments’ lack of response to ISIS, have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight on their own. Some come in the name of fellow Christians. Some come to relive their roles in the United States invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan — or to make amends for them. One American named Matthew VanDyke, the founder of Sons of Liberty International, a security company, has provided free training for the N.P.U. and is now about to work with a second militia, Dwekh Nawsha. VanDyke, who is 36, traveled to Libya in 2011 to fight against Muammar el-Qaddafi’s forces; he was captured and spent 166 days in solitary confinement before escaping and returning to combat. He has no formal military training, but since last fall, he has brought American veterans to Iraq to help the N.P.U., including James Halterman, a veteran of Afghanistan and Iraq, who found the group on the Internet after watching a segment about Westerners fighting ISIS on Fox News. The United States government does not support groups like VanDyke’s. “Americans who have traveled to Iraq to fight are not part of U.S. efforts in the region,” Joseph Pennington, the consul general in Erbil, says. “We wish they would not come here.”

In Iraq, the militias operate at the front only with the approval of the Kurdish peshmerga, who are using the fight against ISIS to expand their territory into the Nineveh Plain, long a disputed territory between Arabs and Kurds. Even to travel 1,000 yards between bases and forward posts, the Christian militias must ask the Kurds for permission. The Kurds are looking to integrate all the Christian militias into their force; they have succeeded with the N.P.F. and two others. But the N.P.U. remains wary. They fear that the Kurds are using the Christian cause to seize territory for a greater Kurdistan. And because the Kurdish forces abandoned them as ISIS approached, the militias want the right to protect their own

people. For now, they make do with the help they can find. Romeo Hakari, the head of the N.P.F., said, “We want U.S. trainers, but we can’t even afford to buy weapons.” After his militia purchased 20 AK-47s in an open market in Erbil, the Kurds gave them 100 more.

Other than a daily mortar or two launched by ISIS from a village a mile and a half away, the area the N.P.U. patrolled was a sleepy target. After coalition airstrikes pushed ISIS out of Telskuf last summer, the group retreated about a mile and a half to the southwest. Beyond a bulldozed trench and a line of burlap sandbags littered with sunflower-seed shells, 12 black flags fluttered over a village. Three weeks earlier, at 4:20 a.m., two suicide bombers carrying a ladder to place over the trench attacked this forward post. The suicide attack was foiled after the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS launched airstrikes, which killed 13 ISIS fighters, Manaf Yussef, a Kurdish security official in charge of this front, said. “Without airstrikes, we’d lose,” he said. Minutes later, a high whistle signaled an incoming ISIS shell, which set fire to a nearby wheat field. The land is sere due to a drought.

As a column of smoke from the daily ISIS shell billowed into the blue sky, five Assyrian fighters belonging to the Nineveh Plain Forces went from house to house to evacuate the last residents of Telskuf — three old women. When the N.P.F. commander, Safaa Khamro, pushed open the door of the first house, Christina Jibbo Kakhosh began to cry. She was 91.

“I have no running water,” she said. Less than four feet tall, she peered up at Khamro through bottle-thick glasses.

“I fixed it for you yesterday,” Khamro said.

Photo



A member of a Christian militia unit tries to persuade Kamala Karim Shaya, one of the last residents of Telskuf, to move to a secured home near their barracks. Credit Peter van Agtmael/Magnum, for The New York Times

“I forgot,” she said. She shuffled back inside and beckoned him to follow. Her refrigerator was flung open; because there was no electricity, it served as a pantry. A half-eaten jar of tahini, a lighter and a pair of scissors sat on a table in front of the mattress on which she slept. When she heard her visitors were American, she said: “Three of my children are in America. Only one has called me.”

Khamro tried to persuade her to come to a house near the base where she would be safer. “It has satellite TV,” he said. She packed a small satchel and left with the patrol. “That’s my uncle’s house,” one Assyrian fighter said as he passed a padlocked gate. “He’s in Australia now.” The patrol passed St. Jacob’s Church, where ISIS fighters had destroyed a porcelain statue of Jesus, which was now missing its face. An icon of a martyr having his fingers cut off by Tamerlane, who massacred tens of thousands of Assyrian Christians during the 14th century, hung on the wall.

Nearby, the N.P.F. had replaced the cross that ISIS fighters filmed themselves hurling down. Khamro was a politician in Telskuf before ISIS invaded. He owned one of the 480 now-shuttered shops, a boutique that sold women’s and children’s clothes. He’d sent his wife and children to Al Qosh, 10 miles to the north, a safer Christian city.

Khamro turned off the main drag and into a warren of overgrown pathways. He stopped before a chicken-wire awning, calling out “Auntie” to Kamala Karim Shaya, who sat on her front stoop, a kerchief tied over her thick white ponytail. When she learned that Khamro had come to move her out of her clay home, she began to scream: “Even if my father stands up in his grave, I will not leave this house. No, no, no, no, no, never, never, never,” she shouted. Khamro, who refused to move her by force, had no choice but to pass on.

Even if ISIS is defeated, the fate of religious minorities in Syria and Iraq remains bleak. Unless minorities are given some measure of security, those who can leave are likely to do so. Nina Shea of the Hudson Institute, a conservative policy center, says that the situation has grown so dire that Iraqi Christians must either be allowed full residency in Kurdistan, including the right to work, or helped to leave. Others argue that it is essential that minorities have their own autonomous region. Exile is a death knell for these communities, activists say. “We’ve been here as an ethnicity for 6,000 years and as Christians for 1,700 years,” says Dr. Srood Maqdasy, a member of the Kurdish Parliament. “We have our own culture, language and tradition. If we live within other communities, all of this will be dissolved within two generations.”

The practical solution, according to many Assyrian Christians, is to establish a safe haven on the Nineveh Plain. “If the West could take in so many refugees and the U.N.H.C.R. handle an operation like that, then we wouldn’t ask for a permanent solution,” says Nuri Kino, of A Demand for Action. “But the most realistic option is returning home.”

“We don’t have time to wait for solutions,” said the Rev. Emanuel Youkhana, the head of Christian Aid Program Northern Iraq. “For the first time in 2,000 years, there are no church services in Mosul. The West comes up with one solution by granting visas to a few hundred people. What about a few hundred thousand?” If Iraq devolves into three regions — Sunnis, Shia and Kurds — there could be a fourth for

minorities. “Iraq is a forced marriage between Sunni, Shia, Kurds and Christians, and it failed,” Youkhana said. “Even I, as a priest, favor divorce.”

Proponents say a safe haven wouldn’t require an international force or a no-fly zone, neither of which is likely to find much support in the United States or among its allies. U.S. policy does play a role. When Congress was asked to approve \$1.6 billion in aid for Iraqi forces fighting ISIS — the Iraqi Army, the Kurds and the Sunni tribes — it amended the bill to explicitly include local forces on the Nineveh Plain, but also passed legislation directing the State Department to implement a safe haven there. Ultimately, however, the responsibility lies with the Iraqis. Pennington, the consul general, said, “The creation of a safe haven in the Nineveh Province would be an idea for the Iraqi Parliament in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution.”

Tarek Mitri, a former Lebanese minister and a former special representative to the U.N. secretary general for Libya, says that his impression in speaking to officials in the White House “is that Obama is in a withdrawal mood. He thinks that he was elected to withdraw from Afghanistan and Iraq and to make a deal with Iran. If this is the mood, then we shouldn’t expect much or ask much from the Americans.” Baskey, of the National Security Council, counters that “rather than withdrawing, the president and this administration have, in fact, remained deeply engaged, building and leading a coalition of some 60 nations to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.”

The last time Rana, one of the women taken by ISIS from Qaraqosh, was able to speak to her family by phone was in September. She told them what had befallen Rita and Christina. Rita had been given as a slave to a powerful member of ISIS; Christina was given to a family to be raised as a Muslim.

Rana said little about her own circumstances, and her family didn’t ask. To be honest, they weren’t sure they wanted to know what ISIS had done to her.

For months now, the phone Rana used has been switched off. “There’s word they’re still alive,” Rabee Mano, 36, a refugee from Qaraqosh who runs an underground railroad out of the Islamic State, told me one recent evening over beer and kebabs. “She’s been ‘married’ to a powerful guy in ISIS,” he added, as he sat in the garden at the Social Academic Center in Ankawa, a Christian suburb of Erbil. At the next table, three gleeful men poured straight vodka into plastic cups. Over the past year, Ankawa has swelled by 60,000 as refugees have poured in.

For nearly a year, Mano has been trying to buy freedom for Rana, Rita and Christina from ISIS. Through his network of contacts, a greedy ISIS member, friends in Arab villages and a brave taxi driver, Mano has paid to free 45 people. The haggling is made easier by the fact that ISIS members frequently trade women among themselves, so the buying and selling of people doesn’t raise suspicion. This work has cost him \$10,000, which he raised by opening a carwash. He sent \$800 to a member of ISIS, saying he would send more when the women and the child made it to safety. But the man had done nothing of what he promised.

Before Mano fled his hometown last August, he dealt in commercial real estate. “You can see my buildings from Google Earth,” he said. At the picnic table, he pulled an expired Arizona driver’s license from his wallet. It was a temporary license from 2011, the year he came to the United States and tried to buy 48 apartments. The deal fell through, so he went home; now his passport had expired. He lost about \$1.5 million, he said.

He longed to return to the Nineveh Plain. “Even though all of my money is in the garbage, I’ll be O.K. if we get this safe haven,” he said. “If it takes too long, we’ll be annihilated.” It was all he thought about. “Are we going home or not?” he asked. “This safe haven is the last chance we have, or Christianity will be finished in Iraq.”

Earlier, a text message came in from Mosul. One of his contacts was having trouble locating a woman named Nabila, who was ready to be smuggled to safety. Mano had instructed her to hang a black cloth in her window so that her rescuer could find the right house. But the wind had blown the cloth to the ground, and now her would-be rescuer couldn’t tell where she was being held. They would have to try again. “I’ll tell her to hang a blanket,” Mano said. They would find her, he hoped, if the blanket held its weight against the wind.

Correction: August 9, 2015

An article on July 26 about Christianity in the Middle East misstated a statistic regarding the Christian population in the region. It was the percentage of the overall population that is Christian that declined between 1910 and 2010, not the total number of Christians.

Correction: August 30, 2015

An article on July 26 about Christianity in the Middle East described incorrectly a finding in a Pew study about religious hostilities. The study reported that Christians face religious persecution in more countries than any other religious group; it did not say that more Christians face religious persecution than at anytime since their early history.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html>

IS Blows Up First-Century Baal Shamin Temple in Palmyra, Officials Say

Gunmen from the Islamic State (IS) militant group have blown up a first century A.D. temple in the ancient city of Palmyra, Syrian government officials and a monitoring group have said.

However, there is confusion over when the detonation is thought to have taken place.

Syria's directorate-general of antiquities and museums, Maamoun Abdelkarim, told the Syrian state news agency SANA late on August 23 that he had heard from local sources of the destruction of the Baal Shamin temple, built almost 2,000 years ago in 17 A.D.

[Abdelkarim said Palmyra locals told him](#) the militants had blown up the temple using a large amount of explosives but did not say when it had occurred.

Officials are currently trying to contact locals in Palmyra for further information, Abdelkarim told SANA.

The Britain-based monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the destruction happened around a month ago.

IS took control of Palmyra in May, prompting fears that the extremist group would destroy the UNESCO World Heritage site.

UNESCO chief Irina Bokova described the destruction of the temple as "a new war crime and an immense loss for the Syrian people and for humanity."

Baal Shamin, whose name means Lord Of The Heavens, was the Phoenician god of storms and fertilizing rains. The temple in Palmyra was first begun in the early first century, and work on it continued until the third century.

IS gunmen last week [publicly beheaded](#) a retired 83-year-old antiquities scholar, Khalid al-Asaad, after holding him captive for weeks, reportedly because he refused to tell them where some of Palmyra's most ancient artifacts had been hidden.

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-palmyra-temple-destroyed/27205945.html>

Muslim and Christian Religious Leaders Rally Together to Support Christians in Middle East Religious leaders at Athens meeting to propose projects to support citizenship rights and peaceful coexistence between Christians, other religious and ethnic groups and Muslims.

Religious leaders from Christian and Muslim communities in the Middle East will gather in Athens in September to discuss plans to better support the citizenship rights of Christian, other religious and ethnic groups in Iraq and Syria.

The meeting, which will take place from 2 to 3 September, is a joint initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the [Vienna-based KAICIID Dialogue Centre](#), with the support of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The meeting will bring together Christian and Muslim religious leaders from across the Middle East, including representatives from the Armenian, Catholic, Evangelical, Rum (Greek) Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Sunni, Shi'a and Druze communities.

His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel, who is a member of the [KAICIID Board of Directors](#), said the meeting will give Muslim and Christian religious leaders the chance to intensify their joint work to address the critical situation facing Christians, and other minority groups, in Iraq and Syria, where violence and political upheaval have placed long-established communities in jeopardy.

"Christian communities are integral parts of the diverse societies of the Middle East. It is essential for religious leaders from all faiths and denominations to speak with one voice, and address this current crisis to preserve the endangered communities. Christian communities have lived in this region for over 2,000 years and contribute to all aspects of Middle Eastern societies. Their loss would be a catastrophe for coexistence and the region as a whole," he said.

The meeting will underline the role of religious leaders as active peacemakers, rather than passive observers of religious co-existence and conflict. The leaders will take stock of the existing situation, map out requirements, share best practices and develop concrete follow-up measures that can be implemented at the regional level.

Plans include establishing a task force of high-level religious leaders to engage policy makers in the region to address the security and needs of Christian and other religious minorities and ethnic groups in the region.

The meeting will also consider plans for supporting interreligious education to foster tolerance, promote pluralism and preserve diversity. At the local level, joint community development projects to help different communities cooperate and build trust will be discussed.

The meeting is part of the “Dialogue between Christians and Muslims” that the Ecumenical Patriarchate initiated, in partnership with relevant Islamic organizations, as a means to use interreligious dialogue to facilitate peace and reconciliation.

The meeting is also convened under KAICIID’s “[United against Violence in the Name of Religion \(UVNR\)](#)” initiative, which seeks to foster cooperation between religious institutions and governments to counter extremism, particularly in Syria and Iraq.

The UVNR initiative was launched at a meeting in Vienna in [November, 2014](#), where leaders of Muslim, Christian, and other religious and ethnic communities from Iraq, Syria and the larger Middle East region jointly issued the Vienna Declaration, which denounced violence in the name of religion.

Since then, the initiative has continued to grow. KAICIID with partners such as [UNESCO](#), the UN Office for the Prevention of Genocide and ISESCO, as well as NGOs are implementing these recommendations.

Metropolitan Emmanuel said that too often conflicts in the Middle East are associated with, or portrayed solely as, sectarian divisions with the various factions purporting to act in the name of religion. No terrorist organization represents religions, nor should religion be associated with terrorism. Any attack in the name of religion is an attack on all religions.

He added that the event underlines the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s and KAICIID’s mission to provide platforms where religious leaders can take an important role in crisis management and conflict resolution.

ABOUT KAICIID: The [KAICIID Dialogue Centre](#) is an intergovernmental organization that uses dialogue to build peace in conflict situations, and to enhance understanding and cooperation between people of different cultures and followers of different religions. The Centre’s mission is to promote dialogue as a way to bridge animosities, reduce fear and instill mutual respect. The founding states of the Centre are the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Austria and the Kingdom of Spain. The Holy See is the Founding Observer. Prominent representatives from five major world religions make up the nine-member Board of Directors. The Board designs and supervises the Centre’s programs, ensuring its credibility across many religious communities.

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Source: [http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/08/31/muslim-and-christian-religious-leaders-rally-together-to-support-christians-in-middle-east/#\[\]](http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/08/31/muslim-and-christian-religious-leaders-rally-together-to-support-christians-in-middle-east/#[])

Muslim Leaders from Central African Republic Meet at KAICIID to Plan Cooperation for Post-Conflict Reconciliation

Muslim religious leaders from the Central African Republic met in Vienna on August 27 to discuss how they can bring together Muslim communities from across the country in support of national dialogue and reconciliation.

The meeting was convened by the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), the [Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers](#), the [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation \(OIC\)](#) and the [Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies](#), which have joined forces to develop a long-term initiative to support the involvement of religious leaders in the process of national reconciliation in CAR.

Moderating the session, KAICIID Senior Adviser Mohammed Abu-Nimer stressed that without cooperation, the future of the country is at stake: “Allowing disagreements and past issues to hinder progress means failure for this reconciliation process. Until the religious communities in the CAR can overcome their differences, both within and among the groups, no progress can be made. This is not easy, but it must be done, and done in a dialogical way.”

The conflict in the Central African Republic has killed thousands and left hundreds of thousands homeless. A report submitted to the UN Security Council on December 19 2014 said up to 6,000 people had been killed though it “considers that such estimates fail to capture the full magnitude of the killings that occurred”.

Tens of thousands of Muslims live in UN-protected enclaves, and those outside these zones have been targeted with impunity, according to reports. More than one million people, Animists, Christians and Muslims, have been displaced. Women, and in particular Muslim women, and children have faced particular victimisation as a result of the militarisation of the conflict. Many continue to be enslaved to this day.

Despite a ceasefire concluded in July 2014, violence, widespread poverty, and displacement continue to be problems, with reports of violence continuing as recently as August 2015.

A reconciliation process is underway: the Bangui Forum in May 2015 brought together nearly 700 leaders from diverse groups within the CAR’s society—including the transitional government, national political parties, the main opposing armed groups (the Séléka and anti-Balaka), the private sector, civil society, traditional chiefs, and religious groups—to define their collective vision for the country’s future. One of the recommendations of the Forum is to strengthen the role of religious leaders in the reconciliation process.

But in addition to promoting inter-religious cohesion, intra-religious cohesion continues to be a challenge in the ethnically and religiously diverse country. Issues of national and ethnic identity and citizenship complicate the religious leadership’s attempts to forge a united way forward.

This meeting, jointly organised by KAICIID and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, aimed to strengthen the Islamic community in the Central African Republic through dialogue, and to assist their efforts to forge a unified voice and vision for the Islamic community in the Central African Republic.

The group made preparations for an Intra-Muslim Conference later in the fall, where participants will discuss issues concerning Muslim citizenship and identity and how these issues can be addressed within the larger framework of national reconciliation.

KAICIID in the Central African Republic

Independently of this process, KAICIID is also working with international NGO [Search for Common Ground](#) to facilitate a process of inter-religious dialogue, to bring different religious communities together to better the future of the country.

KAICIID Deputy Secretary General for External Relations, Alvaro Albacete added that this joint initiative will support the work being done by the United Nations agencies in the country, and that it has received the blessing of the transitional government, inter-religious groups in the country and NGOs involved in reconciliation efforts. "This initiative underscores the long-term commitment that KAICIID and its partners have toward the process of national reconciliation in CAR. The Conference will be the first phase of a multi-year project that we foresee in the country," he said.

He added that this initiative also reinforces the work that KAICIID is doing to support the Platform of Religious leaders in CAR with its partner Search for a Common Ground.

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Source: <http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/09/01/muslim-leaders-from-central-african-republic-meet-at-kaiciid-to-plan-cooperation-for-post-conflict-reconciliation/>

Why Don't Rich Arab Gulf States Welcome Syrian Refugees?



It's hard not to notice how almost all Syrian refugees flee westward rather than seek a safe haven in the rich Arab Persian Gulf states.

Now, social-media users worldwide are increasingly raising the question of why.

On Twitter, the Arabic-language hashtag #Hosting_Syria's_refugees_is_a_Gulf_duty has become a forum for expressing the indignation many Arabs feel at seeing European states like Germany taking in thousands of refugees while the Gulf states host almost none.

A recent message showed a photo of a drowned refugee with the comment: "it is shameful that they have to roam all about God's earth and drown in the seas while fleeing death when we are supposed to be closer to them than the West."

Another Arabic-language hashtag #People_demand_admission_of_refugees has called for a sustained campaign to welcome refugees to the Gulf states.

"The interactions with this campaign are promising," a recent message urged. "Do not be shy about your demands and tweets. You are the loudest voice here."

In Europe, too, Internet users are calling out the Gulf states. A Facebook community of Syrians in Denmark recently demanded, "How did we flee from the region of our Muslim brethren, which should take more responsibility for us than a country they describe as infidels?"

The vast majority of the 4 million or so people who have fled conflict and hardship in Syria have gone to neighboring Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, where they live in crowded refugee camps.

Thousands have sought to go on to Europe, particularly this year, as the four-year-old Syrian war shows no sign of winding down. They are attracted to Europe by the opportunity to apply for asylum or refugee status and, if accepted, to get jobs and begin rebuilding their lives.

But if social media are bristling over the fact the rich Arab Gulf states do not offer the same welcome, there seems little likelihood the situation will change. The reason is the Gulf Arab states' aversion to granting refugee status, not just to Syrians but to anybody.

"There are some Syrians who have found refuge in the Gulf, especially in Qatar, but they would all generally be on some kind of temporary visas," says Jane Kinninmont, deputy head of the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House in London. "The Gulf countries are not signatories to the international conventions on refugee rights that Western countries and indeed most world countries have signed up to."

She says their position appears to be motivated by the presence of so many migrant workers in the Gulf states, including from countries like Pakistan, where there is political unrest and repression.

"Their concern would be that if they started recognizing political asylum it could potentially open the doors for a multitude of their temporary workers to stay permanently and that would raise a lot of quite complex issues."

The number of migrant workers exceeds the native population in every Gulf country except Saudi Arabia and Oman. In all of the Gulf countries, the vast majority of the [workforce is foreign](#), ranging from 88.5 percent in Oman to 99.5 percent in the United Arab Emirates.

But if the Gulf states look unlikely to change their own position on political asylum, it would be unfair to say that they have turned a blind eye to the plight of Syrian refugees in other countries.

Kinninmont notes that Kuwait is the single largest Arab donor to Syrian refugees, and the fourth-largest internationally, following the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany. Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are also among the [top 10 international donors](#).

Below: tweet text: "#Hosting_Syria_refugees_is_a_Gulf_duty [The difference] between the present and history (when Muslims had [some genuine] men)."

Cartoon: "Formerly: conquerors. Now: refugees."

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/why-dont-rich-arabs-welcome-syrian-refugees/27227458.html>

[Israel takes land from 58 Christian families, blocks soccer field in Muslim village](#)

September 10, 2015 – United Methodist Kairos Response (UMKR) condemns Israel's theft of land from fifty-eight Christian families in the Cremisan Valley and the stop-work order for a soccer field in the Muslim village of Wadi Foquin. Both are in the Bethlehem district, and Bethlehem residents believe these actions are part of an effort to drive Christians and Muslims from the region. The United Methodist Church has close connections in the area, and sponsors several projects in Wadi Foquin, where the soccer field was being built in part with United Methodist donations. UMKR urges all Americans to contact government officials in the US and Israel, asking that the equal human rights of all people in the region be respected.

Bulldozers began demolishing Christian-owned lands in the beautiful Cremisan Valley in August to make way for a massive three-story wall that will separate a historic monastery and its monks from the convent, school, and Palestinian people they serve. The monastery and fertile convent fields will be annexed to Israel, which has already taken more than 70% of Bethlehem's farmland. Fifty-eight Christian families will lose their orchards, farms and livelihoods. In recent weeks, Christians have clashed with Israeli forces and held prayer services on the land as the destruction took place. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem has said, "Our Christian faith demands that we cry out in protest." More information and a [call to action](#) may be found at the Kairos Palestine website.

The nearby village of Wadi Foquin is also seeing its land confiscated. According to Friends of Wadi Foquin Chairman Rev. Michael Yoshii, "Significant portions of land in Wadi Foquin have already been annexed through the development and expansion of the illegal settlement of Betar Illit on the east side of the village." In June Israeli bulldozers destroyed 1300 fruit trees belonging to the village. United Methodists had worked with Friends of Wadi Foquin to raise funds for a soccer field that would provide hope for village children. When the field was cleared and ready to plant, a stop-work order was issued by Israeli authorities. More information and an [action call](#) may be found at the Friends of Wadi Foquin website.

Similar land theft has been occurring all over the West Bank as illegal settlements expand. First there are trailers, then settlements, and finally the industrial parks that sustain them. Ahmad Sokar, mayor and head of the village council of Wadi Foquin, believes that the latest annexation by the Israeli authorities is intended for the creation of an industrial and commercial zone serving the settlement community. Israeli settlements on occupied land are a violation of international law and are strongly opposed by the United Methodist denomination.

United Methodist Kairos Response is a global grassroots movement in the United Methodist Church responding to the urgent call from Palestinian Christians for action that will help to end Israel's occupation. For more information, visit <http://www.kairosresponse.org>

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