

# Holy Wisdom

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Peace: Showing that Others Matter!

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

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

## Inside This Issue

Our Work at the United Nations.....	3
Mobilizing Religious Communities to Act with Solidarity and Shared Responsibility to End Poverty and Promote Peace.....	4
Successful Daylong Intergenerational Event At United Nations On August 1.....	6
Building Bridges: International Dialog through the Arts.....	8
NGO Reporter August 2017 .....	9
Outreach at Wagner College through the Orthodox Christian Campus Ministry.....	16
Artificial Intelligence and Technology Tools for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Resilience .....	17
International Mental Health Report .....	19
Other Related News.....	20
Rights Group Says Iran Jailing Christian Converts.....	20
The Last Dalai Lama?.....	21
Important Video - H.H. Abune Antonios I of Eritrea (English Subtitles) .....	21
Sanctions And The Russian Farmer.....	21
US State Department recognizes ISIS genocide in religious freedom report .....	22
The Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation: Joint message.....	25
Patriarch Catholicose .....	27

## Our Work at the United Nations

### **Making Sustainable Development Work at All Ages:**

#### **Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity for Older Persons**

**Date and Time:** Friday 14 July 2017, 6:15-7:30pm

**Venue:** Conference Room 6, UNHQ

**Organizers:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations in New York, UNDP, UNDESA, HelpAge International

This side event focused on the importance of promoting the rights of older persons and adopting a life-course approach to ageing, which was emphasized as critical in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda and fulfil its pledge to leave no one behind. Panelists discussed existing evidence related to challenges and opportunities for older persons in Europe (Finland), Latin America (Argentina) and Africa (Nigeria), as well as globally, and explored ways to enhance and mainstream ageing issues in support of SDG implementation.

The panel discussion was moderated by **Ms Rosemary Kalapurakal** (Lead Advisor, 2030 Agenda, UNDP) who pointed to the 2030 Agenda as a good framework for entry points on ageing and underscored the significant role of partnerships in taking the ageing work forward.

**Ms Daniela Bas** (Director, Division for Social Policy and Development, UNDESA) recalled that the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing marked for the first time the interlinkage between ageing, social and economic development, and human rights. She also shared some of the recent data on population ageing which is one of the megatrends that will condition the prospects of achieving the SDGs. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of collaboration in raising the profile and integrating ageing issues into work programmes in the context of leaving no one behind within the 2030 Agenda.

**Ms Eppu Mikkonen-Jeanneret** (Senior Adviser for Global Social Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland) provided insights into ageing issues in Finland by sharing national experiences on the provision of income support (including through labour market policies, social care, parenting policies and a pilot programme on basic income), technologies such as e-governance and online services, and mental health as well as participation of older persons.

**Mr Ariel Gonzalez Serafini** (First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations) stressed the role of Argentina as a champion of protecting the rights of older persons and underlined the need to look at older persons as agents of change. For this it is necessary to revisit the human rights system and address structural conditions that currently frame older persons as passive subjects. He further pointed out that it is essential to develop and enforce mechanisms for promoting the rights of older persons, to provide universal social protection programmes and to invest in data disaggregated specifically by older persons.

**Mr Justin Derbyshire** (CEO, HelpAge International) showed a [video](#) on a life-course approach to ageing prepared in partnership with UNDP that views life as a journey with many different stages, none of which can be seen in isolation from each other. He highlighted the diversity of ageing population and various dimensions of poverty in old age, including challenges in earning income, pensions, health

coverage and autonomy. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of confronting ageism and need to develop a new narrative on ageing with a life course as a key resource to realize the 2030 Agenda.

**Ms Emem Omokaro** (Executive Director, Dave Omokaro Foundation, Nigeria) shared data on demographic trends and the situation of older persons in Nigeria, as well as ongoing initiatives to support older persons. She indicated that older persons continue to experience inequality and discrimination in accessing healthcare, social protection and finance; along with violence, neglect and abuse that are often based on cultural practices and stereotypes. She pointed out that widowhood, childlessness and disability are among major risks factors that reinforce the exclusion and multidimensional poverty of older persons. Despite some positive legislative and institutional changes in Nigeria, older persons and older women in particular continue to be neglected in the development process. She recommended building technical capacity including on data, formulating policies on ageing, while integrating it into national budget, and mainstreaming ageing into all sector plans.



The event also saw a launch of a new [issues brief](#) entitled “Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” that was prepared in collaboration between UNDP with inputs by several UN agencies (UNDESA, UNFPA, UN Women, UNRISD, WHO, ILO, UNDOCO and UN-Habitat) and key civil society partners such as HelpAge International and AARP. The brief acknowledges the importance of a life-course approach to ageing and calls for protecting and promoting the rights of older persons in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The event was attended by around 60 people and received positive feedback from all participants.

For further information contact Esuna Dugarova at [esuna.dugarova@undp.org](mailto:esuna.dugarova@undp.org).

## Mobilizing Religious Communities to Act with Solidarity and Shared Responsibility to End Poverty and Promote Peace

By Jin Chacko

Alternative Representative of SOCA and connected with the UN

On July 17th, I attended a meeting at the Baha’i Center at the United Nations Plaza on Mobilizing Religious Communities to Act with Solidarity and Shared Responsibility to End Poverty and Promote Peace. Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary-General of the World Conference for Religions Peace was the first speaker at the meeting. He proclaimed that decisions have to be made in a sense religious believers need to be agents in SDG’s. Archbishop Auza was the second speaker he is a Filipino Roman Catholic Archbishop who is the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations. Archbishop Auza mentioned that religious leaders were asked fundamentals to be in a role to stop mass atrocities and faith based organizations should play an important role in the SDG’s. They aren’t the ends and they need to bring up good citizens. He stated that Pope Francis sees how we should incorporate problems and challenges in our social crisis.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs was the third speaker he is an American Economist and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, where he holds the title of University Professor. He mentioned that St. Ambrose said when you give to the poor you are restoring their rights. The world belongs to everybody we live in a world where there is tremendous wealth and people die of poverty every day. What strikes him as an economist is our lack of decency and ability to get along with each other. Dr. Azza Karam was the fourth speaker and serves as the Senior Advisor on Culture at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), where she coordinates UNFPA-wide outreach with faith-based partners and chairs the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on FBO partners on the MDGs and Development. She has stated that we tend to be over religious we are learning the hard way and with faith based organizations it comes with a baggage of systems.

Mr. Mitchell Toomey was the fifth speaker and the Director of SDG's Action Campaign at United Nations. He claimed that we acknowledge a behavior modification with human desire to do good things and trying to find a way to explore their goals and needs we have gone beyond that. Ms. Elena Cedillo was the sixth and final speaker she is a Representative of the LWF Central America program. She had stated that working with multiple different organizations contribute to these beautiful SDG's goals we must contribute regarding to partnerships we have. An important effort is to promote dialogue and promote synergy between us. We should know our best countries in the region and monitor how governments apply the agendas and promote dialogue. To implement a new policy regarding a specific SDG's we also have to promote a dialogue in a complete way helping the most vulnerable.



**Mr. Mitchell Toomey**



### Successful Daylong Intergenerational Event At United Nations On August 1

The United Nations Department of Public Information, together with the UN/DPI/NGO Executive Committee, hosted a day-long event on August 1, 2017

"Intergenerational Dialogues and the Sustainable Development Goals," which was attended by 600 representatives from 180 organizations and 45 countries. The Sustainable Development Goals (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>) were adopted by UN member states in 2015 to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure human rights and prosperous and fulfilling lives for all by 2030. The SDGs are inclusive, allowing youth and older persons a distinct role in the process of implementing the 17 Goals and in addressing challenges specific to their respective age groups.

Dr. Mary Norton, EdD, DM, who served as lead planner and Co-Chair of the UN event, feels that concerted efforts are required to identify the needs of youth and older persons and incorporate their voices appropriately on key issues affecting us all as global citizens.

The Dialogues raised awareness of the high value that the participation of youth and older persons have in achieving these goals. Both groups, often marginalized by society are seen by the UN as important agents of change.

In the opening plenary session the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres addressed the gathering via video, followed by UN, government and civil society leaders who shared their own stories of youth and older persons working together for global change.

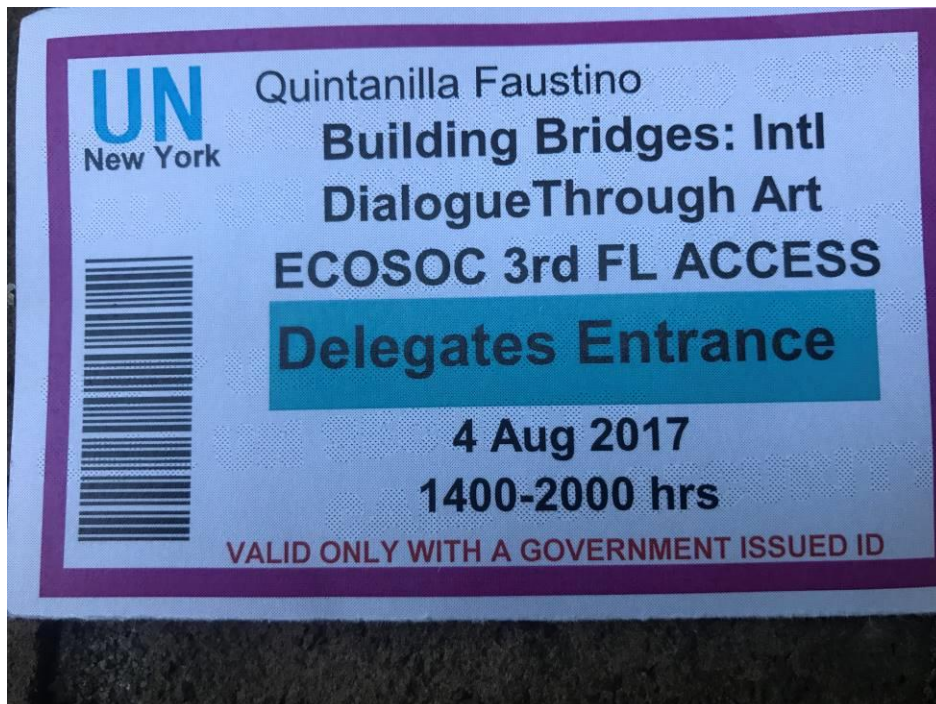
Six interactive dialogues followed the opening: on intergenerational poverty - youth and elders are disproportionately affected; gender equality and full inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status; access to employment throughout life; sharing responsibility for the planet; intergenerational innovation; and healthy living, which includes physical and mental wellness. These lively conversations were repeated in the afternoon.

Dr. A. M. Riccitelli, SOCA representative to UN/DPI served on the Dialogues planning committee as Media Committee Co-Chair.

SEE THIS LINK FOR PHOTOS FROM EVENT:

[https://www.facebook.com/pg/UNDPINGO/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/UNDPINGO/photos/?ref=page_internal)

## Building Bridges: International Dialog through the Arts



On the 4th of August, Abouna Faustino Quintanilla from the Ignatius Mission of the Syrian Orthodox Church, participated at the symposium at the United Nations: “Building Bridges: International Dialog through the Arts” organized by ECOSOC, NGO Branch of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



The purpose of this symposium was to build international cooperation throughout the creativity of the peoples. The forum concluded with a presentation of art work created by artists of the Asian countries and awards presented to the most distinguished artists.

## NGO Reporter August 2017

### BRUCE KNOTTS / MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Readers,

We've had a very successful summer. We successfully conducted elections for the committee. Along with DPI, we co-sponsored an all-day "Dialogues" Event, followed by a reception hosted by the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, which about 300 participants attended. DPI and the NGODPI Executive Committee are very grateful to the China Great Wall Society and the World Development Foundation for their generous support, which helped make it possible for us to host the reception and the one-day event. We also gave our guests an opportunity to donate to the committee and they donated nearly \$800. With such support we look forward to a very productive year.

With the success of the one-day event on August 1, we hope that we are well positioned to do more of these kinds of events in the future. Keep in touch and give us your ideas and feedback.

For More on the Dialogues, click [Here](#)

[READ MORE](#)

### GREETINGS FROM MAHER NASSER

#### ACTING UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS



On 1 August, UN's Department of Public Information (DPI) co-hosted an "Intergenerational Dialogues on the Sustainable Development Goals" event at UNHQ with the NGO / DPI Executive Committee. Those attending, young and old, discussed the perspectives and expectations of their generation with regard to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The Intergenerational Dialogues event received good coverage, particularly in social media, where the hashtag #NGO Dialogues was

trending and reached 32 million media impressions on that day. Around 600 NGO representatives and students, representing 180 entities from 45 countries, took part in the one-day event. Many of those attending announced their concrete commitments to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

both in the closing plenary session and online.

The achievement of the SDGs is a collective responsibility that requires collaboration and partnerships between countries and within them. Civil society and academia have a substantial role to play in mobilising young and old in all sectors to achieve the SDGs. DPI is therefore committed to working with all through our #DPINGO and #UNAI partnerships to achieve a prosperous future for humanity in which no one is left behind and our environment and other species are respected and protected.

**Maher Nasser**

### **DPI/NGO RESOURCE CENTER THANK YOU**

Dear Colleagues,

We would like to express our appreciation for your support of the recent DPI NGO event, the Intergenerational Dialogues on the Sustainable Development Goals, which took place on 1 August 2017. The event generated a high level of interest, underscoring that both youth and older persons play an important role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. The event was one of the first to be held that emphasized the voices of both of these groups of people.

A highlight of the event was the commitments that you as participants were able to make, both in the closing plenary session and online. We hope that these commitments will have full support from the international community, and urge NGOs to promote their commitments through their networks and beyond. If you would like to make your commitment, please click on the following link: <http://bit.ly/2waoT1l>

We would love to hear your feedback and look forward to your participation at our future Events. Thank you once again for your support.

Sincerely,

NGO Resource Centre / NGO Relations and Advocacy

The NGO Resource Centre in New York is located on the second floor of the UNITAR Building, 801 First Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA.

Services to accredited NGO delegates include:

- Access to computers connected to the Internet, including printers and copiers
- Database with comprehensive information on each DPI-associated NGO
- Conference room for up to 15 people
- Digital library with access to almost all the electronic versions of UN documents as well as audio-visual material in electronic format, including the UNTV produced series 21st Century, UN in

Action and other films produced by the United Nations Television or UN Agencies and Programmes

- Up-to-date United Nations materials and publications such as copies of the latest briefing calendar, UN Daily Journal, UN Spokesman's Daily Highlights, etc

Delegates can call the NGO Resource Centre to make an appointment at (212) 963-7234

### **THE DIALOGUES / Barbara Burns**



Six hundred representatives from 180 organizations and 45 countries actively participated in the

daylong event, Intergenerational Dialogues on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), August 1 at UN headquarters. Before the end of the day, many made their commitments in person or via Twitter before the extraordinary gathering of youth and older persons. The event was co-sponsored by the Department of Public Information (DPI) and the NGO/DPI Executive Committee. Co-chairs were Mary Norton, Felician University, and Maxton Scotland, Rotaract scholar.



#### **Barbara Burns**

NGO/DPI Executive Committee

International Public Relations Association

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### **THE DIALOGUES / Patricia Talisse**

**Breaking the Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty**



Old or young, poor people need to feel worthy of living first so they can start to think of a bigger goal than just keeping a roof over their heads. We must listen to their solutions and their ideas, thinking of the poor as consumers and participants. It should be our goal, outlined in SDG to "build resilience in the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters".



**Patricia Talisse**

Former DPI/NGO Youth Representative for  
Close The Gap (Brussels, Belgium)  
Aleppo and New York

[READ MORE](#)

**THE DIALOGUES / GEORGE GARLAND**



"Sharing Responsibility for the Planet" was moderated by Scott Carlin, Geographer, Long Island University. Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 12, is about promoting resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, and providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs and a better quality of life for all. The discussions explored the roles of youth and older persons in protecting the planet, and how intergenerational partnership can help us to achieve SDG 12, and SDG 13, 14 and 15 in particular.

## **George Garland**

President

UNA/USA Southern New York State Division

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## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **ANNUAL ELECTIONS, JUNE 2017**

The annual elections for the NGO/DPI Executive Committee for 2017-2018 were held with the following results:

#### **Officers:**

Bruce Knotts / President / Unitarian Universalist

Kim Quarles / First Vice President / World Jurist Association

Fannie Munlin / Second Vice President / National Council of Negro Women

Elisabeth Shuman / Treasurer / Association for Childhood Education International

Brian Muzas / Secretary / Seton Hall University

#### **Directors:**

Barbara Burns / International Public Relations Association

Scott Carlin / Long Island University

Bill Hunter / Lehigh University

Judy Lerner / Peace Action

Bernice K. Lever / American Bar Association

Samantha Lu / NAFSA: International Educators

Padmini Murthy/ Medical Women's International Association

Mary Norton / Felician College, The Franciscan College of NJ

Out Uwem Robert / African Youth Movement

Chonita Spencer / UNA New York

Janet Stovin / World Union for Progressive Judaism

Debra Tzeng Tzehuel Boudreaux / Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation  
Richard Yep / American Counseling Association

The members of the 2017-18 committee are comprised of newly elected directors and returning directors who are serving their second term. We wish them all the best and are looking forward to a very productive year.

## **PIANGO / PACIFIC ISLANDS ASSOCIATION OF NGOS**

Many of us may not be aware that there is a vibrant NGO Community in the Pacific Islands, as evidenced at the Ocean Conference held at UN Headquarters earlier this summer- June 5-9, 2017. Their relative large and active presence at that conference was in part due to the topic, as the ocean is of particular significance to populations in the region, affecting daily lives and livelihoods, from food supply to altered shorelines.

One of the most active groups is the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Association (PIANGO), an umbrella group of NGOs from the 23 member countries encompassing the Pacific Islands. PIANGO's Executive Director, Ms. Emele Duituturaga, is also the NGO/DPI Executive Committee's Regional Coordinator and provides updates on regional developments.



This past April, PIANGO, along with 2 partners, opened the Pacific partnership office in GUAM in an effort to more closely connect NGOs in the region and link National activities. PIANGO will also be the co-host, along with CIVICUS, of a major international Civil Society gathering December 4-8 in Suva, Fiji: "Our Planet, Our Struggle, Our Future."

Elisabeth Shuman

Vice-Chair, NGO/DPI Executive Committee

Regional NGO Coordinator Liaison / Pacific Islands

Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)

[READ MORE](#)

## **THE ANNUAL RETREAT**

The NGO/DPI Executive Committee held a successful Retreat on Saturday, August 1, 2017. The meeting gave the Officers and Board members an opportunity to review the accomplishments achieved over the past two years and to make some recommendations that will aid the Executive Committee in advocating on behalf of the 1,400+ NGOs associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information.

We will review our fund-raising efforts; we also plan to develop ways in which to engage more NGOs in working with Board members. YuKang Choi proposed the creation of a Global subcommittee, which he will chair, to develop ways to better engage NGOs around the world. He moved to a non-voting position on the committee.

Over all it was a productive day and the NGO/DPI Executive Committee looks forward to sharing more detailed information on our future activities. We appreciate your help and assistance in all that we do.

Fannie Munlin

Vice-Chair, NGO/DPI Executive Committee

National Council of Negro Women

## **TRAVEL, TOURISM, AND TRANSFORMATION CONFERENCE**

**22-23 AUGUST 2017**

### **The NGO DPI Executive Committee**

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

The *NGO Reporter* is an official publication of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee.

For additional information, [please click here](#)

## Outreach at Wagner College through the Orthodox Christian Campus Ministry

The Syrian Orthodox Church in America, NGO accredited to United Nations Department of Public Information, has outreach at Wagner College through the Orthodox Christian Campus Ministry. Here our work at UN is being introduced at Freshmen Orientation on August 24, 2017. Jin Chacko, Alternate Representative and Chris Casais, Youth Representative ran this. Students are being invited to participate in the work of the UN.







Chris Casais, Youth Representative; Chorbishop Anthony, Jin Chacko, Alternate Representative;

### [Artificial Intelligence and Technology Tools for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Resilience](#)

16 May, 2017 - Event entitled "Artificial Intelligence and Technology Tools for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Resilience" (co-organized by the Permanent Mission of Iraq, in collaboration with the International Association of Applied Psychology and the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth).

Opening Statement – We are human beings and when we look for well being we are used to turning toward other human beings. Now we may be asking a machine for help instead of another human being. There are 300 million people depressed. 1 in 4 have some kind of emotional or neurological issue. People who are not able to find the therapy they need (due to a lack of resources or bad location) may be able to use technology to get help they need. Less than 1 in 5 people are able to get help.

Thomas Gas – Assistant Secretary to General

What are the benefits and risks of the use of artificial intelligence to treat mental health. This must be considered. Sustainable development is central to UN's mission and should be considered in the topic.

Caleb Otto

Again, sustainable development is paramount in this task. We need to promote mental health and mental health for all ages for everywhere. Over 75% of those who need help in poorer countries do not receive it. In areas of conflict, individuals get even less.

David Luxton – Psychologist from Washington

Speak about AI applications that provide simulations of therapists, as chat bots. Overview of applications, including virtual humans instead of actual nurses for outpatient treatment, putting the virtual person on to a mobile app. People seem to prefer this application to real people because they can be more open with a machine than a person. Limitations include speech processing issues, need large sampling populations, who is developing these applications, how can the therapeutic relationship form, how can the AI tell if someone is at risk of self harm.

Video about PARO

This is an animatronic seal that replicates actions of a real animal. It responds to touch/petting. This robot is helpful for elderly patients and particularly those with dementia. It gives patients sensory information and recreates the loving bond between owner and pet.

Julie Edgcomb

There are not enough mental health professionals in rural areas. There are not enough professionals who can interact with people of varying backgrounds and languages. In Monterey county in California, there is no help. Instead, California has created eCounseling, in which people can reach help. Waiting time has dropped by 30%. Telephone visits are helpful for those who lack transportation or who cannot take off work. AI texting software is also about to be implemented.

Roxanda Renita

We should consider age in these technologies. Coming from a more rural area, my phone and internet was able to connect me to the world. Innovations need to be inclusive of many different peoples. Sustainable livelihood is important. Integrating these many aspects with technology is not a choice but a necessity.

Step-by-Step Program Video

New mental health app in Lebanon, used with refugees. Used 200 participants for pilot evaluation. This app allows individuals to log in whenever needed. Clinical trial is about to start. This application was developed in a language that all target groups could understand. The app tells a story and allows the user to choose outcome. The app would then provide cognitive-based interventions. Lebanon has a large population of displaced people. While finding support for this population has been difficult, it has provided an opportunity for understanding mental health issues. Efficacy, cost effectiveness, scaling, and price must be considered when developing programs that effects such a large group of people.

Raksha Kandlur

We must consider psychological research in all of these developments in technology. We must be aware of changing needs of people. There are emerging opportunities for these AI based mental health programs. These programs can help vulnerable populations, especially youth in remote areas. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth. Perhaps with text based interventions, we can reach the youth more easily. Tools need to be tested and adapted to LGBTQ youth, rural populations, and elderly populations.

## International Mental Health Report

On May 16, 2017, the Permanent Mission of Iraq, the International Association of Applied Psychology, and the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth Event, hosted a discussion entitled “Artificial Intelligence and Technology Tools for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Resilience.” The discussion was moderated by Dr. Judy Kuriansky of the International Association of Applied Psychology. Panel members included Dr. Caleb Otto, Dr. David Luxton, Dr. Rabih El Chammay, Julie Edgcomb, Yanmeng Zou, Junting Yu, Ruxanda Renita and Dr. Astrid Hurley.

The discussions revolved around new developments in the field of artificial intelligence and the ethical concerns around their use in the mental health field. With 300 million people around the world suffering from depression and at least a quarter of the planet suffering from some type of psychological or neurological illness at some point in their life, still only 20 percent of these people have access to mental health resources. Dr. Caleb Otto, a public health physician and former Ambassador to the United Nations from Palau, played an integral role in including mental health and wellbeing at the heart of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. He pointed out that even in developing countries, only 50 percent of those who need mental health help receive it, and the gap is even larger, upwards of 80 percent, in developing countries, particularly in war torn countries where this assistance is so much needed. With this gap in the resources versus the need for mental health resources the question was posed if artificial intelligence technology could help bridge this gap.

Dr. David Luxton explored the field of artificial intelligence and the current progress in that field. In 1966, the first computer program was designed to replicate a psychotherapist. Later programs have been used to simulate an individual with paranoid schizophrenia (Parry) and even one that fooled human judges into thinking it was a real human in the Turing test (A.L.I.C.E.). In more recent times, AI has been used to accomplish small tasks but is even seeing applications in hospital discharge planning. It can also be used in coaching and affective sensing, actually identifying human emotions in conversations. These capabilities are only growing with more advancement in artificial intelligence.

A number of ethical concerns have been raised about the use of artificial intelligence. First, is its ability to interact with sensitivity to different cultures. The privacy of the potential patient’s information is also a chief concern. Among other concerns are how will the machines make decisions and will their deployment be fair and equitable among all populations.

Dr. Astrid Hurley covered this gap in developing countries access to not just health care but technology in general. She sees these as fundamental to change as well as including mental health resources in schools.

Overall the conference was very interesting and thought provoking. The use of artificial intelligence technology in the mental health fields can have wide ranging benefits, particularly for those in developing countries and others who have difficulty in access. While this technology can absolutely supplement our existing mental health system, I believe that the fundamental issue of relatedness with actual people is fundamental to mental health. This combined with ethical concerns outlined above would make this as a standalone resource troublesome.

## Other Related News

### Rights Group Says Iran Jailing Christian Converts



The Center For Human Rights In Iran (CHRI) has voiced concern over what it says is a "disturbing trend" of arrests and imprisonments of Christian converts in Iran.

The New York-based rights group said on July 20 that in less than two months, eleven Christian converts and the former leader of the Assyrian Pentecostal Church in Iran have been sentenced to long prison terms.

"Christians are recognized as an official religious minority in Iran's Constitution, but the state continues to persecute members of the faith, especially converts," CHRI's executive director, Hadi Ghaemi, said in a statement.

Activists say that dozens of Christian converts have been arrested and harassed in recent years in Iran, where according to applied Islamic laws a Muslim who converts to another faith can face the death penalty.

Christian groups say that that the number of converts in Iran is growing despite the state pressure.

Source: <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-christian-converts-jailed/28630710.html?ltflags=mailer>

## The Last Dalai Lama?

**Dates:** July 28 - August 3, 2017

**Times:** Multiple screenings daily 10:45 am to 7:25 pm; See ticket website below

**Location:** [IFC Center, 323 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10014](#)

A follow-up to Mickey Lemle's first film on the 14th Dalai Lama, *Compassion in Exile*, *THE LAST DALAI LAMA?* shows His Holiness at peace in his ninth decade as he confronts aging, the intersection of science and faith, and the question on everyone's mind: *Will he be the last Dalai Lama?*

*The Last Dalai Lama?* is premiering on July 28th at the IFC Center (323 Avenue of the Americas), and will screen multiple times a day from 7/28 - 8/3. Filmmaker Mickey Lemle will host a Q&A after the 7:25pm showings on Friday and Saturday.

[See the trailer here](#)

Showtimes and Tickets available at <http://www.ifccenter.com/films/the-last-dalai-lama/>

## Important Video - H.H. Abune Antonios I of Eritrea (English Subtitles)

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

In the body of this email, please find a link to a video of H.H. Abune Antonios I, apparently taken at his new place of residence in Eritrea, complete with English subtitles. Attached to the email, please find a synopsis and transcript of the video by Fr. Athanasius Ghebre-Ab, who will hopefully be able to answer any questions that the Fathers might have.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRJVtjBEo0o>

## Sanctions And The Russian Farmer

When the West imposed economic sanctions on Russia in 2014 in response to the seizure of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, Moscow took the punishment as an opportunity. It imposed a ban against a variety of food imports, mostly from European states, with an eye on unleashing its own farming potential. By investing in homegrown agriculture, the idea went, the country could eliminate a potential security threat by lessening its dependence on foreign products, boost employment by returning Russians in rural areas to the land, and set itself up for an organic future by providing ultra-niche crops to patriotic foodies. Three years after the counter-sanctions were announced in August 2014, those closest to Russia's black earth tell us how the country's strategic food-to-table initiative has affected their livelihoods.

Source: <https://www.rferl.org/a/sanctions-and-the-russian-farmer/28658608.html?ltflags=mailer>

## US State Department recognizes ISIS genocide in religious freedom report



By [Matt Hadro](#)

Washington D.C., Aug 15, 2017 / 04:57 pm ([CNA/EWTN News](#)).- Religious freedom advocates were heartened by the State Department recognizing in its annual religious freedom report released Tuesday the genocide of Christians by the Islamic State.

“As we make progress in defeating ISIS and denying them their caliphate, their terrorist members have and continue to target multiple religions and ethnic groups for rape, kidnapping, enslavement, and even death,” Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated at the Aug. 15 release of the 2016 International Religious Freedom report.

“Application of the law to the facts at hand leads to the conclusion ISIS is clearly responsible for genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims in areas it controls or has controlled,” he said. “ISIS is also responsible for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing directed at these same groups, and in some cases against Sunni Muslims, Kurds, and other minorities.”

The annual State Department report is mandated by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, which created the Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department and worked to make promoting religious freedom a part of U.S. foreign policy.

The 2016 report makes explicit reference to the “genocide” of Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims at the hands of the Islamic State, or “Daesh.” Then-Secretary of State John Kerry had said in March of 2016

that “in my judgement, Daesh is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control, including Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims.”

In 2014, Islamic State militants conquered large areas of territory in Iraq and Syria, forcing religious and ethnic minorities in the region to stay and convert to Islam, leave, or die.

Reports documented that Islamic State committed mass killings of Christians, Yazidis, Shia Muslims, and others, as well as enslaving women and children. The Knights of Columbus and In Defense of Christians partnered to release a massive report documenting Islamic State atrocities committed against Christians.

As Islamic State has been driven from towns in northern Iraq, the inhabitants have returned to find their homes vandalized and their churches desecrated or destroyed.

“America’s promotion of international religious freedom demands standing up for the rights of the world’s most vulnerable populations,” the preface to the State Department’s report stated.

Tillerson added that in addition to Christians being targeted for genocide in Iraq and Syria, they have also been targeted by Islamic State militants in Egypt.

“The protection of these groups – and others subject to violent extremism – is a human rights priority for the Trump administration,” he said.

Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute in Washington, D.C., welcomed Tillerson’s statement as an even more forceful pronouncement of genocide than was made by the previous administration.

Tillerson, Shea said, “forcefully clarified that ISIS has the ‘specific intent’ of destroying the Christian community, along with the other two minorities.”

Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.), the author of the update to the original International Religious Freedom Act, also praised Tillerson for specifically recognizing the atrocities committed against minorities under Islamic State.

“I want to commend Secretary Tillerson for focusing on those who have been victims of genocide,” he said. “These groups are looking for help and leadership, and I am proud that after eight years of denial and foot dragging, this report positions the United States to become a world leader in helping those who need it most.”

Tillerson, in his remarks unveiling the report on Tuesday, also focused on the persecution of minorities in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China, Pakistan, Sudan, and Bahrain.

In Iran, for instance, 20 persons were executed by the state in 2016 for apostasy charges including “waging war against God,” he said. Baha’i leaders are still imprisoned for their religious beliefs in the country, where the state religion is Ja’afari Shia Islam.

In Turkey, religious minorities have seen their rights infringed upon by the government, which has also imprisoned Pastor Andrew Brunson who should be released, Tillerson said.

“Turkey continues to unjustly imprison Dr. Andrew Brunson without charges, and I appreciate Secretary Tillerson reminding the world of this. It is important for America to be clear about the human rights abuses happening around the world,” Sen. Lankford (R-Okla.) said.

Tillerson also named Saudi Arabia as a violator of human rights and religious freedom, as punishments like prison and lashings are given to persons for charges of apostasy, atheism, blasphemy, and insulting the state’s interpretation of Islam.

“We urge Saudi Arabia to embrace greater degrees of religious freedom for all of its citizens,” Tillerson stated to the U.S. ally.

China is another well-known human rights violator, torturing and detaining thousands of citizens for their religious beliefs, including Uyghur Muslims and the members of Falun Gong, Tillerson said.

However, the secretary did not also mention that Christians are persecuted by the government there. State-sanctioned destruction of churches, or removing crosses from churches, has become commonplace in some provinces, and state officials have hampered parents from bringing their children to church.

In addition, the Vatican and the Chinese government have been working on an agreement on the appointment of bishops in the state-sanctioned Church, although critics like Cardinal Joseph Zen, the Archbishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, say the atheistic government will continue to meddle in the elections of bishops.

Smith said the report “rightly shows that China’s religious freedom conditions are among the world’s worst.”

“The Chinese government is an equal opportunity abuser of the rights of Protestants, Catholics, Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghur Muslims and Falun Gong practitioners – all who face imprisonment and torture for practicing their faith,” he said.

Calling the report “a step in the right direction,” he also commended the reporting on other countries, such as Vietnam, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria, “with individuals who simply want to worship in peace being beaten, jailed, tortured or worse.”

“The more difficult step will be to place these countries or non-state actors like ISIS and Boko Haram on the U.S. blacklist of severe religious freedom violators,” he said.

This would include updating the “Countries of Particular Concern” list, which is comprised of countries the State Department deems where the worst violations of religious freedom are taking place and the government is either the instigator, actively complicit, or is powerless to stop the abuses.

The creation of the list was mandated by the International Religious Freedom Act as a way to hold violators of religious freedom accountable. Actions can be legally taken against such countries if the State Department places them on the CPC list, like imposing sanctions.

With the rise of non-state terror groups like Islamic State and Boko Haram, Smith’s bill created the “Entities of Particular Concern” designation for violators of religious freedom that are not themselves states and who are active in multiple countries.



The State Department currently has designated China, Burma, Eritrea, North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan as CPCs.

Pakistan does not occupy a place on the list despite leading the world in the number of prison sentences for blasphemy, which can carry a death sentence.

Also, Tillerson did not mention Russia in his remarks, despite the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a bipartisan federal commission that advises the State Department, asking that it be added to the CPC list as one of the worst violators of religious freedom.

In its annual report earlier this year, the commission pointed to the criminalization of certain non-sanctioned religious beliefs in the Russian mainland, and the treatment of minorities in the Russia-occupied Crimean Peninsula as serious abuses that merited Russia's place on the CPC list. Recently, Russia's supreme court rejected an appeal of the outlawing of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country.

Religious freedom advocates applauded the Trump administration's selection earlier this summer of an Ambassador at-Large for International Religious Freedom, who is charged with monitoring abuses of freedom of religion abroad and promoting religious freedom as part of U.S. foreign policy.

President Donald Trump nominated Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, a former U.S. Senator, for the position. Lankford expressed his desire that Brownback be confirmed for the position soon.

Source: [https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/us-state-department-recognizes-isis-genocide-in-religious-freedom-report-56307?utm\\_source=CNA&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=daily\\_newsletter](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/us-state-department-recognizes-isis-genocide-in-religious-freedom-report-56307?utm_source=CNA&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=daily_newsletter)

### The Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation: Joint message

(Vatican Radio) The Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation is being marked today September 1 and has special importance in this its third year.

It is a Joint Message which was released on Friday morning from Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who for the first time are writing together on Themes of the Day, inviting all the faithful and men of good will to prayer and to reflect on how to live in a simple and solid manner, responsibly using earthly goods.

The Day of Prayer for the Creation of the Creation was instituted by Pope Francis in 2015. The Orthodox Church has commemorated the Day since 1989.

**Below find the English Language translation of the Joint Message from Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew**

JOINT MESSAGE of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the World Day of Prayer for Creation

The story of creation presents us with a panoramic view of the world. Scripture reveals that, "in the beginning", God intended humanity to cooperate in the preservation and protection of the natural environment. At first, as we read in Genesis, "no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was

no one to till the ground” (2:5). The earth was entrusted to us as a sublime gift and legacy, for which all of us share responsibility until, “in the end”, all things in heaven and on earth will be restored in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10). Our human dignity and welfare are deeply connected to our care for the whole of creation.

However, “in the meantime”, the history of the world presents a very different context. It reveals a morally decaying scenario where our attitude and behaviour towards creation obscures our calling as God’s co-operators. Our propensity to interrupt the world’s delicate and balanced ecosystems, our insatiable desire to manipulate and control the planet’s limited resources, and our greed for limitless profit in markets – all these have alienated us from the original purpose of creation. We no longer respect nature as a shared gift; instead, we regard it as a private possession. We no longer associate with nature in order to sustain it; instead, we lord over it to support our own constructs.

The consequences of this alternative worldview are tragic and lasting. The human environment and the natural environment are deteriorating together, and this deterioration of the planet weighs upon the most vulnerable of its people. The impact of climate change affects, first and foremost, those who live in poverty in every corner of the globe. Our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly implies the recognition of and respect for all people and all living creatures. The urgent call and challenge to care for creation are an invitation for all of humanity to work towards sustainable and integral development.

Therefore, united by the same concern for God’s creation and acknowledging the earth as a shared good, we fervently invite all people of goodwill to dedicate a time of prayer for the environment on 1 September. On this occasion, we wish to offer thanks to the loving Creator for the noble gift of creation and to pledge commitment to its care and preservation for the sake of future generations. After all, we know that we labour in vain if the Lord is not by our side (cf. Ps 126-127), if prayer is not at the centre of our reflection and celebration. Indeed, an objective of our prayer is to change the way we perceive the world in order to change the way we relate to the world. The goal of our promise is to be courageous in embracing greater simplicity and solidarity in our lives.

We urgently appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as political and cultural, responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to attend to the needs of the marginalized, but above all to respond to the plea of millions and support the consensus of the world for the healing of our wounded creation. We are convinced that there can be no sincere and enduring resolution to the challenge of the ecological crisis and climate change unless the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, unless we give priority to solidarity and service.

From the Vatican and from the Phanar, 1 September 2017

Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Source:

[http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/09/01/the\\_day\\_of\\_prayer\\_for\\_the\\_care\\_of%20creation\\_joint\\_message/1333983](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/09/01/the_day_of_prayer_for_the_care_of%20creation_joint_message/1333983)

# Patriarch-Catholicos direct talks likely

Initiative has come from Aphem II in the form of an invite for dialogue and Orthodox Church responds positively

GEORGE JACOB  
KOTTAYAM

In what appears to be a thaw in the decades-old vicious schism in the Malankara Church hitting abysmal low and innumerable legal battles, the synod of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church which concluded here on Saturday gave the green signal for a direct talk with the Patriarch of Antioch.

In fact, the initiative came from the Patriarch early this week in the form of an invite for a dialogue. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Metropolitan Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, secretary of the synod, said the

invite was from Metropolitan Mathews Mar Thimothios, secretary to the Patriarch of Antioch Ignatius Aphem II. The letter said the Patriarch was ready for a dialogue regarding issues in the Church and invited the Malankara Church for the purpose. Mar Dioscoros immediately replied that he would get back after discussing the issue in the synod.

The synod discussed the issue in detail. The press note released later said: "It was decided to finalise steps to bring the message of unity and peace to all believers of the Church in a legal manner, based on the Constitution of 1934 and the judg-



Catholicos of the East Basellos Mar Thoma Paulose II and Patriarch of Antioch Ignatius Aphem II.



ment of the Supreme Court." According to Mar Dioscoros, the decision of the synod will be conveyed to the Patriarch immediately. "We will take further steps

on the basis of the reply from the Patriarch," he said. The date, venue, and theme all would depend on the reply from Antioch. Based on the reply, the Orthodox Church

will send a delegation to initiate the dialogue and make way for direct interaction between the two pontiffs.

When contacted, Thomas Mar Thimothios, senior bishop of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Christian Church and head of the Kottayam diocese, expressed cautious optimism. He said it was the Patriarch who had taken the initiative. "The invite was part of an attempt to create genuine reconciliation among the two groups. However, he alone will not be able to achieve anything. He needs support from both sides," he said.

He said the dialogue, if materialised, will have to ar-

rive at a clear roadmap for the process which will be long and slow. Basic to such a roadmap will be creating mechanisms to resolve local issues. "No one should feel they are neglected."

While specific technical issues will have to be addressed, the larger perspective should not be neglected. "The call of the Church in the present milieu should be clearly understood and articulated," he said and added that "so far, little issues had a huge cumulative impact on the community." The effort should be to create genuine reconciliation and unity. No body wants to repeat 1958, the metropolitan said.

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