

# 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!

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## Our Work at the United Nations

### UN: 5.5 million Syrian children affected by war

BEIRUT (AP) — The number of Syrian children affected by the civil war in their homeland has doubled in the past year to at least 5.5 million — more than half the country's children — with devastating effects on the health, education and psychological well-being of an entire generation, the United Nations children's agency said Tuesday.

#### Related Stories

- [Generation risks being 'lost forever' in Syria](#) AFP
- [Syria's children starving and scared as war drags on](#) AFP
- [Syria conflict has 3rd anniversary amid offensive](#) Associated Press
- [Syria-linked sectarian clash in Lebanon kills 3](#) Associated Press
- [More than 50 Syria rebels, jihadists killed: NGO](#) AFP

The conflict, which enters its fourth year this month, has unleashed massive suffering across all segments of Syrian society, but the impact on children has been especially acute, according to a new report by UNICEF. Malnutrition and illness have stunted their growth; a lack of learning opportunities has derailed their education; and the bloody trauma of war has left deep psychological scars.

"After three years of conflict and turmoil, Syria is now one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child," the agency said. "In their thousands, children have lost lives and limbs, along with virtually every aspect of their childhood. They have lost classrooms and teachers, brothers and sisters, friends, caregivers, homes and stability."

"Millions of young people risk becoming, in effect, a lost generation," UNICEF said.

Since the conflict began, thousands of videos and photographs of bloodied babies, lifeless children and bombed out schools in Syria have provided stark images of the war's impact on children. But in many ways, figures provide perhaps the clearest indication of how sweeping an effect the conflict has on their lives.

UNICEF said that more than 10,000 children have been killed in the violence, which would translate into the highest casualty rates recorded in any recent conflict in the region. Of those who have survived, thousands have been wounded, lost their home and schools, and seen family members and friends killed. That trauma has left around 2 million children in need of psychological support or treatment, the agency said.



FILE - This Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2013 file photo shows a Syrian girl weeping after receiving the meas ...

Almost 3 million children are displaced inside Syria, while another 1.2 million have fled the country and now live as refugees in camps and overwhelmed neighboring communities where clean water, food and other basic items are scarce.

On the education front, UNICEF said that nearly half of Syria's school-age children — 2.8 million and counting — cannot get an education because of the devastation and violence.

More than 2 million of those who should be in classes remain within Syria's borders, as education and health services collapse and classrooms are bombed or used as shelters and military barracks. Another 300,000 Syrian children are out of school in Lebanon, along with some 93,000 in Jordan, 78,000 in Turkey, 26,000 in Iraq and 4,000 in Egypt, agency officials said in Geneva.

Many are forced to grow up fast: One in 10 refugee children is now working, the agency estimates, while one in five Syrian girls in Jordan is forced into early marriage. Inside Syria, boys as young as 12 have been recruited to help the rebels, some as fighters and others in a support role, the U.N. report said.

Syria's conflict began in March 2011 with largely peaceful protests against President Bashar Assad. Facing a brutal government crackdown, protesters eventually took up arms and the country descended into a civil war that has killed more than 140,000 people so far.



FILE - In this Monday, May 6, 2013, file photo, Syrian refugee Um Raad, 30, from Daraa, holds her 6 ...

Two rounds of peace talks in Switzerland early this year between Assad's government and Syria's main Western-backed political opposition group broke up without making any progress, and there are no immediate plans for another session.

On the ground, meanwhile, the fighting has shown no sign of slowing down.

On Tuesday, three suicide bombers blew themselves up in a local administration building in the Kurdish town of Qamishli in northeast Syria, killing at least five people, state media and a Kurdish official said.

The state news agency said the blasts at the Hadaya Hotel killed five people, but a Kurdish official at the scene said at least seven people died, including four women.

The hotel in the center of Qamishli has functioned as a municipality building, said Joan Mohammed, who spoke to The Associated Press by phone. The area has been the scene of heavy fighting recently between Kurdish gunmen and members of the al-Qaida breakaway group, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Mohammed said several people wearing explosive belts and firearms shot dead the guards outside the building, walked in and hurled grenades before blowing themselves up. One of them was caught before he detonated his belt and was being questioned.

He said the dead included two employees and two visitors. He added that 15 people were wounded.

"The building is in the center of the town and is usually very crowded," said Mohammad, adding that Kurdish fighters in the area were "on high alert" following the attack.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but suspicion immediately fell on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Militants from the group have been fighting Kurdish gunmen for months in northern Syria in battles that left hundreds of people dead.

Kurds have carved out their own territory in the country's northeast, declaring their own civil administration in areas under their control amid the chaos of the civil war. But Kurdish militias continue to battle Islamic militant fighters in an offensive that has accelerated in recent months.

Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria, making up more than 10 percent of the country's 23 million people.

### [Haiyan Update - John Ging \(OCHA\), Ted Chaiban \(UNICEF\)](#)

15 November 2013 - Earlier today at the United Nations, John Ging, operations director of the UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Ted Chaiban of UNICEF briefed the press on the current state of the Philippines after the central part of the nation was leveled by Typhoon Haiyan. The first item on the meeting's agenda was the two speakers offering their condolences to those affected. Next,



they thanked the first responders for their immediate assistance before discussing the current state of the country.

In total, there are over 13 million affected by this disaster, with 1.9 million being displaced from their homes, those individuals now residing in one of over 1,100 temporary shelters. Unfortunately, over 60,000 homes have been completely destroyed, so some will be displaced for quite some time. The death toll is at 3,600 and counting. These numbers may be underestimated due to the increasing amount of information released to the public.

According to Ted Chaiban of UNICEF, the three largest obstacles in the recovery process are: 1. sanitation/hygiene/disease prevention, 2. water supply, and 3. reuniting children with their families. Proper sanitation goes hand in hand with access to clean water. Tablets and filters have been brought to distraught areas, so the likelihood of water-borne illness will decrease drastically. However, the lack of running water makes human waste a major threat to health. The only area where running water has been partially restored is in the city of Tacloban, home to just over 200,000 residents. This is due to the planning of the Filipino government, and the infrastructure of both the city and the government as a whole. The government is working hand-in-hand with the UN and other charitable organizations to contribute to the recovery process. Hopefully, with more resources being brought into the area, children can be reunited with their parents as quickly as possible.

As the days go by, more and more help is on the way. The UN has been able to mobilize groups to clear the roads, allowing for supplies to be moved in and out of devastated areas. Blocked roads have been the biggest problem presented to those trying to bring aid. Food, water, and other supplies can be brought in by sea, air, and now by land. To date, over \$153 million has been donated to help the victims, with more funds coming. That money has been used to deliver the basic necessities, like water, high-energy biscuits, clothing, and improving the existing shelters.

It has been said that the resilience of the Filipino people is unprecedented, just like the storm and the response. Hopefully, the Philippines will rise from this dreadful disaster stronger and more united than ever.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

### Security Council – Counter-terrorism and Tony Blair

21 November 2013 - In an open meeting, the United Nations Security Council allowed former British Prime Minister Tony Blair to address the public regarding counterterrorism. Since his time in office ended, Blair has started his own non-profit organization called the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

The Foundation has a vision for a better world. To achieve this vision, Blair and his associates attempt to strengthen peace in the world, strengthen security, and promote intercultural understanding. Another goal is to limit terrorism. Blair believes stopping religious extremism will result in a major decline in world terrorism. The UN Security council has the same goal, and teaming up with a former world leader is a sound decision.

Blair, in his address, stated "Education, tolerance, and respect will help in fighting terrorism." Eliminating ignorance will cause less conflict, and education will teach students that the world needs

diversity to function and flourish. He added, "I would say that in the 21st Century education is a security issue and not any education but education specifically that opens young minds to "the other", those who are culturally and religiously different; and shows them that the only future that works is one in which people are respected as equals whatever their faith or their culture."

There is a long way to go in the global fight against terrorism, which will hopefully result in its elimination. Until then, we can use education as a weapon to teach the importance of other cultures. Singer Robert Palmer hit the nail on the head when he sang "It takes every kinda people to make what life's about.....Every kinda people, to make the world go 'round."

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

### [Thursday November 21, 2013, Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 \(2001\) concerning counter-terrorism.](#)

Dr. Anthony DeLuca present on site at Trusteeship Council Chamber. Mr. Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of the UK, made a presentation on behalf of the Tony Blair Foundation on countering violent extremism through education.

"Common to the world's major religions are values of love for your neighbor, compassion and social justice. It is the most grotesque abuse of faith to commit acts of terror in the name of God."

Work With Us (Educational Outreach):

[info@tonyblairfaithfoundation.org](mailto:info@tonyblairfaithfoundation.org)

### [General Assembly \(68th Session\). 56th Plenary Meeting. Report of the Security Council \(A/68/2\) \[item 29\]](#)

Dr. Anthony DeLuca present in the General Assembly, November 21, 10 AM.

Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) statement delivered by H.E. Mr. Paul Seger, Switzerland, on behalf of the Group.

"This year, this document [Annual Report of SC] was adopted by the Security Council on 30 October, therefore only a week before the scheduled debate. It is crucial that members have time between the adoption of the annual report and the debate in the General Assembly, to allow the wider membership sufficient time to digest and analyze the contents of the report."

Statement by Ambassador Mukerji, India.

"On the issue of Counter-Terrorism, we recall that the Council has endorsed a policy of 'Zero Tolerance' for terrorism. This implies that no cause or grievance, including so called 'root causes' can be used to justify terrorism."

### [At UNAI's third anniversary, students commit to remain engaged, make a difference](#)

On 18 November, the otherwise storied chamber of the Economic and Social Council at UN Headquarters wore a distinctly different mood. Several hundred beaming students gathered there to celebrate the third anniversary of the United Nations Academic Impact.

The stage was set from the very beginning by Sage Chase, a 15-year old student from New York's Maria Regina High School, who opened the event with a song, "Be the change." That today's young people are ready to take the lead and be the agent of the change they want to see was the theme of a youth forum, with several UNAI member organizations' youth representatives participating. Speaker after speaker described how their local action was helping improve lives not only in their own neighbourhood, but also in places far away from home. Most speakers emphasized the importance of collaborative action and remaining engaged. Noorjahan Akbar, the 2013 Glamour Magazine College Student of the Year, described her own initiative to make a difference in the lives of young women in her native Afghanistan. Women everywhere faced discrimination and unequal treatment, whether in developing countries or in rich western nations, she emphasized. Michele Vella, who moderated the youth forum, recalled that she was present at the launch of UNAI. "It is deeply encouraging to see how UNAI has grown in just three years," she said.

Maggie Betts, a young film-maker who spent five years making a film on HIV/AIDS, described the many challenges she faced while making the film in Zambia. Women in some traditional societies did not have any control over their body, she said, and yet they were often blamed for HIV/AIDS, which in most cases they received from men with many partners. "Luckily, we see some change taking place, men are beginning to recognize their own role and assuming some responsibility," she said, describing a meeting of village elders in Zambia she had attended.

Another highlight of the day's event was a musical performance by members of the CityKids choir, led by its musical director Jordan Battiste. Alison Brown, speaking on behalf of CityKids, noted that its members often visited inner city schools to "spread positivity anyway we can."

Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division of the Department of Public Information reminded students that the UN was built by world leaders who dreamt big. "Now it is your turn. Don't stop dreaming. Don't stop believing in a better tomorrow," he told the cheering students. This sentiment was echoed by Ahmad Alhindawi, Envoy on Youth of the Secretary-General. In brief remarks, Dr. Rekha Datta (Monmouth University), Dr. Bill Hunter (Lehigh University) and Wayne Jacoby (Global Education Motivators) congratulated UNAI on its third anniversary and reiterated their commitment to uphold UNAI principles.

The event was webcast live, an archived copy of which can be found here: <http://bit.ly/187zK8B>

**Source:** <http://outreach.un.org/unai/files/2011/10/Newsletter-December2.pdf>

### [United Nations Accessibility Centre Inauguration \(attended on site\)](#)

04 December 2013 - Today was a groundbreaking day in UN history. Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon, as well as President of the 68th General Assembly John Ashe were on hand in the ribbon cutting ceremony to open the United Nations Accessibility Centre. From the beginning, there was a sign-language translator and a text broadcast of the speech shown on screens around the room. The President of the Youth Section of the World Federation of the Deaf, Jenny Nilsson was on hand to address the crowd, in sign language with a translator. In addition, the Secretary-General greeted the audience and signed off in sign language. These shows of gratitude showed how UN meetings would be now be held. From now on, discussions held within the grounds will be able to seamlessly include persons with disabilities,

including the deaf and blind. The Accessibility Centre “works to support inclusion and to facilitate greater participation in UN intergovernmental processes.” Those who are hard of hearing, blind, or have difficulty moving now have a place where they can access all meetings and give their input.

As Ashe stated “all people have the right to access information.” In the Accessibility Centre, numerous services are available to persons with disabilities in order to ensure inclusion in UN matters. These services include, but are not limited to: desktop magnifiers, screen readers, braille keyboards, hearing aids, bone conduction headsets, specialized mouse, braille note-takers, and wheelchair charging stations.

Ideally, the Secretary-General would like to expand the territory of the Centre, and not limit its technologies to one space. The UN is working to develop kiosks all around its grounds to allow even greater accessibility. He also hopes the opening of the Centre would set the bar and numerous organizations around the world will follow suit, and strive for greater inclusion, and new technologies should be developed to improve communication even more. His native country of the Republic of Korea is to thank for the funding of the Accessibility Center, and for its part in improving communication methods. Hopefully, the rest of the world will follow the United Nations' example, and ensure the inclusion of all people in its activities.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

### [Nelson Mandela: 18 July 1918 – 5 December 2013](#)

On Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, the world lost one of its most prominent leaders in its history. Nelson Mandela, age 95 passed away in his native country of South Africa.

Mandela devoted his life to the betterment of the world and the service of his people. He fought for human dignity, equality, and freedom for all. In a public address, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave thoughts on the life of the former South African President. “Nelson Mandela had shown what is possible in our world and within each one of us...to believe, dream, and work together” the Secretary-General stated with a heavy heart. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, the General Assembly observed a moment of silence in honor of Mandela.

In 1964, he was sentenced to life in prison for his opposition of the South African government and the principles of apartheid. At his trial, instead of testifying, he delivered a four hour monologue outlining the inhumanities in his native country. He signed off by saying ““I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination...I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Luckily, after 27 years, he was released as a hero of the South African people. Four years later, in 1994, the country held its first biracial democratic election. Mandela was victorious, and in his four-year term, made South Africa a more equal state. As he promised, he only served one term, but remained an icon of freedom until his death.

As dedicated by the UN earlier this year, July 18<sup>th</sup>, Mandela's birthday, is now Nelson Mandela International Day, in honor of one of the greatest leaders we have ever known.

-Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

### December 16 2013

*The Providence Journal* (with a Rhode Island readership of 250,000) published an editorial by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli which referenced her work as a representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America at the United Nations.

### December 18, 2013

Panel discussion and conversation on Migration and Development organized by United Nations Academic Impact, in association with John D. Calandra Italian American Institute was hosted by Maher Nasser, Director of Outreach, UN/DPI. The conversation began with the comment: "We are all connected to migration." The USA, described by Dr. Richard Alba of CUNY Graduate Center, as a "lucky land of migrants," leads the world in welcoming others to its shores for the purposes of reuniting families and offering a safe haven to refugees from all over the world. Dr. Julian Tamburri, Dean of the Calandra Institute of Queens College described the similar racist responses of Americans to Italian migrants in the USA over 100 years ago and compared it to the similar racist response of Italians in Italy to the African migrants arriving on their shores today. *Reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli*

### December 19, 2013

The UN/DPI final briefing of 2013, "*The Year in Review*," was hosted by Daniel Dickinson, Acting Chief, NGO Relations. The briefing opened with a film overview of events and work of the United Nations for 2013. Public Information Officer Hawa Diallo discussed the briefing calendar for 2014. She invited input from the NGO community to expand partnerships and encourage panel diversity. Kathryn Good, who joined the UN in August after working as a high school civics teacher, said her focal point will be the NGO Annual Review for continuing affiliation with the Department of Public Information. Felipe Queipo described the offerings of the spacious new NGO Resource Center and upgraded UN/DPI/NGO website. *Reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli*

### United Nations Academic Impact - Newsletter (January 2014 Issue)

Dear UNAI Friends,

Season's Greetings,

Please see attached the January 2014 issue of the United Nations Academic Impact Newsletter. You may also access this and all previous issues of the newsletter at <http://outreach.un.org/unai/resources/newsletters/>

Sincerely,

The United Nations Academic Impact Team

### January 9, 2014

Dr A.M. Riccitelli attended a morning coffee conversation with Ms. Hawa Diallo, sponsored by The Values Caucus at the UN and hosted by Carl Murrell at the Baha'i offices at the UN. After 28 years at the United Nations, serving at posts in Cambodia, Somalia and Kenya, in June 2013 Ms. Diallo assumed the position of Public Information Officer, NGO Relations, UN Department of Public Information.

Born in Sierra Leone, Ms. Diallo came to the United States at age seven when her father was UN Ambassador from Sierra Leone. Her father died when she was nine and her family remained in the US, where she attended school in New York. She began her UN career as a tour guide. She stated that her work as a tour guide was the foundation of all her other UN work. Tour guides are the first human contact visitors have with the UN and her passion to learn and teach about the work of the UN started then. She feels she has come full circle in working at the UN/DPI/NGO Relations. Her work in the field was with NGOs and now she continues that work with NGOs at UN Headquarters in New York.

### [The 70th Anniversary of the Deportation of the Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust](#)

23 January 2014 - Earlier today, in his first briefing as the Chief of NGO Relations, Advocacy and Special Events, Jeffrey Brez led the discussion on Hungary and its role in the Holocaust, beginning 70 years ago. This is the beginning of a week-long series of Holocaust remembrance and commemoration programs at the United Nations.

Dr. Carol Rittner, professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Stockton College of New Jersey provided a brief history of Hungary's involvement in arguably the worst inhumanities in our world's history. Before World War II began, there were about 850,000 Jews in Hungary. Beginning in January 1944, the Hungarian government, in compliance with the Nazi regime, systematically deported about 440,000 Jews in a two month period. Most of these men, women, and even children, were taken to labor or extermination camps, including the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau. Post WWII, there were about 200,000 Jews remaining in Hungary.

Agnes Vertes, one of the fortunate few who survived this terrible ordeal, is now a documentarian, and was kind enough to share her tear-jerking story. In 1944, Agnes, 4, lived with her mother, father, and her younger sister, age 2. Her father, a well-known figure in Budapest, bribed city officials to allow his family to change their birth certificates. At the time, a child's religion was printed on the certificate, which would allow easy identification to enemies. Once the new documents were received, the two young sisters had to separate from their parents to increase the likelihood of survival from persecution. They were sent to stay with a poor, but kind-hearted woman in her foster home. Vertes described this woman as a "righteous Christian" with nothing but love in her heart. Her home lacked bathrooms and running water, but it was a safe haven for the two little girls. While the Allies were bombing Axis territories, the foster home lost its roof. The woman had to return the Vertes sisters back to their family.

Unfortunately, their parents had cover stories saying they did not have children, and the girls were not safe with their mother and father. They were then sent to the former Budapest mayor's residence, with over 100 children and a small handful of adults (many of whom did not have "proper" documentation like Agnes and her sister). Oftentimes, the Arrow Cross, Hungarian officials working with the Nazis, would pay a visit to the home. The officers could be warded off with a bribe of alcohol from the adults. One straight-laced officer asked for documentation of every resident of the mayor's house. Agnes' younger sister asked to try on the man's cap, to which he replied "Can anyone but an Aryan child be as cute as this one?" The officer and his partner left without further questioning. A little girl of only 2 years old saved a house of over 100.

Agnes' and her sister's journey was full of hardship and exposure to what no child should have to deal with, including hunger, extreme illness, bone-chilling temperatures, and seeing dead, emaciated corpses

in the Budapest streets. Luckily, after a bout with severe fevers, Agnes and her sister were found by her mother, who crossed the Danube on a bridge built by the Russians, an Allied power. She took them to safety to avoid persecution, and we are thankful that she is here today to share her story.

Vertes, an advocate for peace and an active fighter of genocide, believes that education is the key to preventing such atrocities from happening in the future.

His Excellency Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, Hungarian Representative to the United Nations discussed his nation's efforts in genocide prevention. First of all, Hungary formally apologizes for their roles in participating, assisting, and not defending its citizens from the Nazis. 2014 is now Holocaust Memorial Year in the country of over 9 million. Kőrösi acknowledged the importance of halting current genocides for the betterment of the future, and that his country will be at the forefront of the battle.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

### January 14, 2014

At today's UN/DPI press conference, "**Genocide: A Preventable Crime - - Understanding Early Warning of Mass Atrocities,**" were H. E. Mr. Eugene-Richard Gasana, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations; Hon. Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire; and Mr. Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect. The press conference was held on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda.

Lt. General Dallaire, who was stationed in Rwanda at the time and whose urgent pleas to stop the massacre went unheeded, told the press that we (collectively) permitted extremism to implement the murders of 700,000 of 1.2 million Tutsis. He said that the onus of the genocide is on every sovereign state that washed its hands of responsibility and that sovereignty is no longer an excuse to ignore the massive scale of human rights abuses. Questions were asked by reporters from CBS News, AP, Beirut, Turkey and others. Reported by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli

### January 16, 2014, Religious Freedom Day

H.E. Rev. Dr. A. DeLuca and Dr. A.M. Riccitelli were at the US Mission to the UN on Religious Freedom Day to hear the discussion, "The Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion: Religions Respond." A new report by the Pew Research Center presented by Dr. Brian Grim at the US Mission stated that religiously motivated hostility has reached a six year high. Over 5 billion people, or 76% of the world's population, live in places with high levels of restrictions on religion, up from 68% in 2007. Freedom of religion is fundamental to human dignity, a core human right which we must continue to work for all around the world.

### January 30, 2014, Q&A with Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal

The first UN/DPI/NGO briefing of 2014 presented a Q&A with

Under Secretary General for Communications and Public Information (DPI) Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, who was introduced to NGOs and members of the press in attendance by Maher Nasser, Director of Outreach for UN/DPI. Among the topics covered was the upcoming UN/DPI/NGO Conference on August 28-29, 2014, the first to be held at UN Headquarters in New York in seven years. The Conference will be devoted to the UN Millennium Development Goals. NGO Conference Co-Chairs are Jeffrey Huffines and Anne Marie Carlson. Reported by Dr. A.M. Riccitelli

## United Nations Academic Impact - Newsletter (February 2014 Issue)

Dear UNAI Friends,

Please see attached the February 2014 issue of the United Nations Academic Impact Newsletter. You may also access this and all previous issues of the newsletter at <http://outreach.un.org/unai/resources/newsletters/>

Sincerely,

The United Nations Academic Impact Team

### Scathing UN report: Vatican must act against sex abuse

GENEVA/VATICAN CITY — The United Nations on Wednesday accused the Vatican of systematically turning a blind eye to decades of sexual abuse of children by priests, and demanded it immediately turn over known or suspected offenders to civil justice.

In a scathingly blunt report, the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child said Church officials had imposed a "code of silence" on clerics and moved abusers from parish to parish "in an attempt to cover up such crimes".

The Vatican called the report "distorted" and "unfair" and said the United Nations had ignored steps taken in the past decade to protect children.

The combative exchange sets the scene for the Vatican's biggest clash with the United Nations since 1994. Then, at a U.N. population conference in Cairo, the Vatican forced the international organisation to back down on a proposal to approve abortion as a means of birth control.

The report also lays out a fresh challenge for a commission named by Pope Francis in December to advise him on a scandal that has plagued the Church for decades.

The committee said it was "gravely concerned that the Holy See has not acknowledged the extent of the crimes committed, has not taken the necessary measures to address cases of child sexual abuse and to protect children, and has adopted policies and practices which have led to the continuation of the abuse by and the impunity of the perpetrators".

It urged the Vatican to "immediately remove all known and suspected child sexual abusers from assignment and refer the matter to the relevant law enforcement authorities for investigation and prosecution purposes".

#### **HARSHER TONE**

The Vatican initially planned a muted response, according to a person familiar with the matter, but raised its tone, after much debate, in response to the report's demands that the Catholic Church scale back its opposition to abortion, artificial contraception and homosexuality.

"This committee has not rendered a good service to the United Nations," Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, head of the Vatican delegation to U.N. organisations in Geneva, told Vatican Radio, accusing the committee of interfering in religious freedom by trying to dictate the church's moral teachings.



Tomasi said non-governmental organisations favouring gay marriage - which the Church opposes - probably influenced the committee to reinforce what he called "an ideological line".

The committee said the Holy See must hand over an archive of evidence about the abuse of tens of thousands of children and take measures to prevent a repeat of cases such as the scandal of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, where girls were forced to work in church-run institutions.

Pope Francis, in office for only 11 months, has called sexual abuse of children "the shame of the Church" and has vowed to continue procedures put in place by his predecessor, Benedict XVI.

But the report expressed "serious concern that in dealing with child victims of different forms of abuse, the Holy See has systematically placed preservation of the reputation of the Church and the alleged offender over the protection of child victims".

### **BISHOPS NOT ACCOUNTABLE**

While several bishops have resigned after abuse scandals in their dioceses, victims' groups say the Vatican must make bishops legally accountable for alleged cover-ups.

"If the pope is serious about turning the page on this scandal, he should immediately dismiss any bishop who oversaw a diocese in which a priest who abused children was shielded from the civil authorities," said Jon O'Brien, president of the U.S. lobby group Catholics for Choice.

The report said Francis's commission should invite outside experts and victims to participate in an investigation of abusers "as well as the conduct of the Catholic hierarchy in dealing with them".

Miguel Hurtado, who was sexually abused by a priest in Spain when he was 16 and travelled to Geneva for the report's release, said he felt emotional and vindicated.

"Many times, victims were disbelieved. They doubted our stories, they doubted our motives. They thought that our motives were because we were after money or destroying or attacking the Church," the 31-year-old told Reuters.

At a stormy grilling by the committee in Geneva last month, the Holy See's delegation, answering questions from an international rights panel for the first time since the scandals broke about 15 years ago, denied allegations of a cover-up and said the Church had set clear guidelines to protect children from predator priests.

Wednesday's report called for an internal investigation of the Magdalene Laundries and similar institutions so that those who were responsible could be prosecuted, and "full compensation" could be paid to victims and families.

### **Ban Ki-moon, 126th International Olympic Committee Session - Sochi 2014**

6 February 2014 - Before Friday's (February 7<sup>th</sup>) opening ceremony, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed a crowd in Sochi, Russia, the host city of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. To open, he thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin and International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach for organizing an international event of such scale. The Secretary-General praised the Russian President, saying "I particularly commend President Putin's commitment to peace, unity and development through sports."

This led Ban to discuss the joint mission of the UN and IOC. The organizations share many ideals, including sustainability, universality, solidarity, and non-discrimination to bring together *all* people, regardless of their age, gender, or background (the Paralympic Games are a key part to Olympic tradition and festivities as well). Over 1000 UN offices are working in part with the IOC to ensure a successful Winter Games.

The Olympics bring the world together, and nations put aside their differences and compete peacefully, no matter how rich, poor, or well-represented they are. In fact, Secretary-General Ban asked all those who are fighting to put down their weapons and watch the athletes achieve amazing feats, and hopefully catch the contagious senses of community and pride within the human race.

Another shared goal of the UN and IOC is to break down negative stereotypes and build positive attitudes. It is an IOC law to oppose discrimination. It is said that there is “unity in diversity” and this solidarity is what drives the Olympic machine. Ban discussed the makeup of the machine: “The Olympics show the power of sport to bring together individuals regardless of age, race, class, religion, ability, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.”

If sport is part of the development of peace, the Olympics needs to be a peaceful event. Sochi has received numerous terrorist threats, and hopefully the power of sport will overcome the power of a few deranged individuals. Because of this power, the UN has set up an office to maximize the peacemaking ability of sport (UNOSDP). April 6<sup>th</sup> will now be the International day of Sport for Development and Peace. Sport is a diplomatic practice that should be used to minimize armed conflict and bring individuals together from all walks of life, from all corners of the globe.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

### [A World Without Violence Against Children](#)

February 5th 2014 - On February 5<sup>th</sup>, the United Nations hosted a Side Event on: A World Without Violence Against Children. This event was organized by World Vision International and co-hosted by the Permanent Missions of Canada and Paraguay.

Violence against children is a worldwide problem that includes domestic violence, sexual violence, child labor, child trafficking, and child marriage.


Mr. Guillermo E. Rishchynski, representative of the Canadian Government, confirms that the government of Canada supports a world without violence against children and invites other countries to do the same. He stressed that it is important for other countries to integrate child protection targets and indicators in their post 2015 development agenda. Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence annually across our world. More than 67 million young women aged 20-24 worldwide were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Canada is right now working to address these issues through Canada’s children and youth strategy that guide their oversea development assistance. Canada supports programs to prevent violence, exploitation, and abuse of children and youth. The nation also supported the post 2015 dialogue on child protection. In addition, the prime minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, announced that his government will provide 50 million dollars to the United Nations No Loss Generation Strategy that aims to protect child refugees and improve their education opportunities while in refugee camps. Mr. Guillermo stresses that to reach a world free from violation of child rights,

investment in health, education, and other sectors are not sufficient if protection and security issues are not addressed.

Mr. Jose Antonio Dos Santos representative of Paraguay starts pointing out the work of twelve NGO's and international organizations in Paraguay that form a coalition known as the Front for Children and Adolescents in Paraguay to promote their human rights. These organizations include Child Fund Alliance, Unicef, Plan International, Save the Children, and S.O.S Children Village among others. The government of Paraguay is fully aware of the effective and sustainable work of these organizations and supports them by investing in the children of Paraguay to provide them access to their basic rights, which includes health, nourishment, protection, and education. In the 2013 presidential campaign in Paraguay, the Front for Children and Adolescent organized and implemented an advocacy campaign with each presidential candidate. The document was prepared to implement the twenty commitments of quantity and efficiency of investing in children and adolescents. This document was signed by each candidate, and only one day after the election the new president of Paraguay reconfirmed these twenty commitments.

Nothing can repair the damage done to these children; this is why it is important to eliminate all forms of child violence to improve the life of our future. Both representatives stressed that because the size of this problem we face, we require partnership and support from other countries. Hopefully partnerships will be created in the near future for our children and youth to live in a world free from all forms of violence including child marriage.

-Stephanie Blais, United Nations Youth Representative



The logo for the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) Newsletter. It features the United Nations emblem on the left, followed by the text "United Nations academic impact IN ACTION" in a blue banner. To the right, the words "UNAI NEWSLETTER" are written in large, bold, blue letters. Below this, the date "March 2014" is displayed in orange. On the far right, a blue box contains the text "Sharing a Culture of Intellectual Social Responsibility" above four horizontal bars in green, yellow, blue, and orange.



The cover of the UNESCO 2014 Education for All Monitoring Report, titled "TEACHING AND LEARNING: Achieving quality for all". It shows a photograph of a teacher and a student working together at a desk.

### More than 125 Million Children Worldwide are Illiterate: UN report

According to UNESCO's 2014 *Education for All Monitoring Report* released recently, some 125 million school children around the world are unable to read a single sentence, even after four years of attendance – a waste of \$129 billion a year. "This learning crisis has costs not only for the future ambitions of children, but also for the current finances of Governments," the report warns.

The report, an independent publication commissioned by UNESCO on behalf of the international community, provides a timely update on progress that countries are making towards the global education goals that were agreed in 2000. The findings are deeply distressing:

- In 2012, 25% of children under 5 suffered from stunting. In 2011, around half of young children had access to pre-primary education, and in sub-Saharan Africa the share was only 18%.
- The number of children out of school was 57 million in 2011, half of whom lived in conflict-affected countries.
- Many adolescents lack foundation skills gained through lower secondary education. In 2011, 69 million adolescents were out of school, with little improvement in this number since 2004. In low income countries, only 37% of adolescents complete lower secondary education, and the rate is as low as 14% for the poorest.
- On recent trends, girls from the poorest families in sub-Saharan Africa are only expected to achieve lower secondary completion in 2111.
- In 2011, there were 774 million illiterate adults, a decline of just 1% since 2000. Almost two-thirds of illiterate adults are women. The poorest young women in developing countries may not achieve universal literacy until 2072.
- Around 250 million children are not learning basic skills, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school. The annual cost of this failure, around US\$129 billion.
- In around a third of countries, less than 75% of primary school teachers are trained according to national standards. And in a third of countries, the challenge of training existing teachers is worse than that of recruiting and training new teachers.

"If recent trends in the region continue, the richest boys will achieve universal primary completion in 2021, but the poorest girls will not catch up until 2086," it warns. But the disparity is not only restricted to the developing world. Even in high-income countries education systems are failing significant minorities. In New Zealand, while almost all students from rich households achieved minimum standards in grades 4 and 8, only two thirds of poor students did. Immigrants in rich countries are also left behind. In France, for example, fewer than 60 per cent of immigrants have reached the minimum benchmark in reading. As for adult literacy, that has hardly improved. In 2011, there were 774 million illiterate adults, a decline of just 1 per cent since 2000. The number is projected to fall only slightly, to 743 million, by 2015.

See more at: <http://globaleducationfirst.org/3722.htm#sthash.zveiQvR9.dpuf>

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Sincerely,  
The United Nations Academic Impact Team

## This Week at the UN

21 February – 28 February 2014

This is a small sample of the events occurring not only at the United Nations Headquarters, but also around the world.

**Syria** - United Nations humanitarian efforts were able to pass the blockade and give food and other aid to the refugees of the Yarmouk Camp in Damascus. There were 2 deliveries this past week. This was the first food delivery of any kind in the last 2 weeks. The refugees received medical aid for the first time since last July, which will help keep the population from dwindling even further. (Since the camp's establishment, the population has shrunk from about 150,000 to less than 50,000).

Luckily, the UN Security Council voted to increase access to Syria to provide more aid. This was done after a senior United Nations official said the UN needs to reach out to refugee camps, and the refugee camps should not have to reach out for UN help.

**South Sudan** – More violence has broken out, this time in the village of Malakal. When UN relief forces arrived, the town appeared to be deserted. The remaining villagers fled to the local church, and 756 were rescued. The number of refugees at UN camps in South Sudan now sits at a staggering 75,000, with no sign of decreasing.

**New York** – The 2014 Slavery Remembrance Commemoration at the United Nations Headquarters. Steve McQueen, director of the Oscar-award winning film *Twelve Years a Slave* was the keynote speaker. He discussed how his film should not only raise talk about the United States' grave past as a slavery-tolerant, but on slavery as a modern issue as well. It is still an ongoing global problem, and the public needs to be aware of this. International Remembrance Day for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade will be held on March 25<sup>th</sup>.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

## February 19, 2014

At the UN DPI/NGO Orientation on February 20, 2014, DPI Director of Outreach, Maher Nasser described the UN Department on Public Information's mandate to communicate the ideals and work of the UN to the world. He noted that currently 1400 NGOs are affiliated with UN/DPI and share the mandate of working for peace and understanding reaching diverse audiences through their communication platforms. After Mr. Nasser's keynote, he discussed the 2014 UN DPI/NGO conference to be held at UN headquarters in New York from August 27-29. The theme of the conference is the role of Civil Society in the post 2015 development agenda. No conference title has been set. Conference Co-Chairs are Jeff Huffines of Civicus and Jeffrey Brez, Chief on NGO Relations and Advocacy. Richard Jordan of the Royal Academy of Science International Trust will serve as Co-Chair for the committee of Conference Experts. Reported by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli

## 2 Views on the Crimean Crisis

27 March 2014 - Earlier today, the United Nations General Assembly partook in a vote that could have potentially altered the map as we know it today. Amidst the current conflict on the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, the UN is trying to sort out the matter diplomatically. The referendum of the Crimean citizens was deemed null and void, even though 97 percent voted in favor of joining Russia. The General Assembly decided to honor the territorial integrity of Ukraine, with 100 countries voting to keep present borders, 11 to grant Crimea Russian identity, and 58 countries abstaining. However, this charter is non-binding, and just shows the UN does not support the Russian occupation of the region, and could potentially send peacekeeping troops at a later date.

The Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Andrii Deschytisia, was pleased with the result of the vote, and was grateful for the support of the one hundred nations that voted in favor of his home country. Deschytisia stated there is more work to be done, as the charter is not a formal order, but it is a step in the right direction. There is a growing front in Ukraine against the Russian offensive in which he hopes will keep its neighbors out of their territory.

The Russian Ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly I. Churkin, was understandably not as pleased with the charter. In his press conference he appeared frustrated, but remained calm throughout. With the current trouble in Ukraine, he believes it is for the betterment of the Crimean people to join Russia. The referendum showed the true desires of its citizens, and it should be honored. Churkin also stated that Crimean citizens are no longer allowed to show their Russian culture, as they cannot fly the Russian flag (if they so desire) or watch Russian television stations without possible persecution. He believes keeping Crimea will not solve the turmoil within the Ukrainian government, and that Russian annexation will be a positive result for both parties.

In reality, this charter will not solve the current issues in Crimea. It will take more negotiation between Ukraine and Russia, and the United Nations as well. We can only hope for a quick, fair, and peaceful resolution.

- Zachary Yesko, United Nations Youth Representative

## Transatlantic Slave Trade Commemoration – DPI/NGO Briefing: Victory over Slavery?

27 March 2014 - On March 29, 2014, following the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the DPI/NGO organized an event to commemorate this dark period of the history.

The theme of this year's observance is "Victory over Slavery: Haiti and Beyond". It pays tribute to the fight against slavery in nations around the world and marks 210 years since the Republic of Haiti became the first nation to win independence as a result of the struggle of enslaved men and women. They are also marking the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO Slave Route Project, launched to break the silence surrounding the slave trade and its consequences.

Before the discussion started, we watched *The ark of return* a video presented through the United Nations TV. The video show how the United Nations decided what would be the winning design for the memorial that will be at the United Nations Headquarter to remind us to never allow such crime against humanity again. The winner is Rodney Leon, an American architect of Haitian descent, and announced in September 2013.

First speaker, President of the Frederick Douglas family initiative says: although most people think we eradicated slavery, there is a 21<sup>st</sup> century type of slavery, modern slavery like human trafficking. Most people don't realize or know about it. When he learned about it, he had to do something, he decided to educate children in school all over the country about this period, to make them modern abolitionist of slavery. By educating them, we prevent them from becoming victims and empower them to change the world to become better global citizen.

Miss Sandra A. Arnolds, founding director of the burial database project of enslaved African American at Fordham University, told us the story that when she visited her grand-father grave, she noticed many unmarked grave, which were actually unmarked slave grave. She said that what is alarming is that this happened all over the country and that now people are trying to build highways and other types of things on these lands. Even, they were losing the battle to get the remains of the people buried there removed before any construction, by respect for the family or the deceased. The goal of her project is to create a national registry that will document the sites and makes it accessible to the public, and to peace the family of the slaves. While doing her work, she noticed that most people fear to talk about slavery, but she says that it is important to talk about it.

Deborah Willis, chair of the department of photography and imaging at the New York University. She shared with us really interesting photography stories. These images talk about, how men, women, and children worked, and how they were labeled, also showed the torture, but also many images of emancipated families.

This event had the goal to educate us on slavery, and that one day, we will eradicate contemporary forms of slavery, as well as racism and racial discrimination, to move forward down the path of dignity, decency, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Like all speaker said, it is really important to remember, and acknowledge slavery, and hopefully in a near future, with all these efforts, we will be able to say that we really eradicated all forms of slavery around the world.

-Stephanie Blais, United Nations Youth Representative

## Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events

### Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a Security Council Stakeout on Syria, February 13, 2014

Hi everybody. As you know, Under Secretary Amos just briefed the Council and her report only re-confirmed what's already painfully clear to everyone who has seen the images of emaciated and tortured Syrians, of dead and dying children, and of so much more. In Syria we are witnessing the worst humanitarian crisis we have seen in a generation.

This Council and the international community have called upon the Assad regime to facilitate immediate humanitarian access and to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. But despite concerted efforts to get the regime to take concrete action on humanitarian issues, the Presidential Statement we issued in October has not been heeded. Indeed, it has been systematically disregarded.

The situation has only gotten worse in the last four months. In October, when the Council adopted the Presidential Statement, there were 6.8 million Syrians in need of assistance. Now that number is 9.3 million, a rise of more than one-third. There were 4.25 million internally displaced persons, now there are 6.5 million internally displaced persons – an increase of more than 50%. And throughout all of this, the Syrian Government has indiscriminately shelled civilian areas, including the almost daily use of barrel bombs on Aleppo, driving the death toll from 100,000 estimated in October to approximately 136,000 today.

Reportedly, nearly 5000 people have been killed just since the Geneva II talks began. That is the most concentrated period of killing in the entire duration of the conflict - that's just in the last three weeks – so it is not enough for us to stand here and say there has been no progress, which there hasn't, we must recognize and state very forcefully that the situation has gotten worst, and is getting worst.

Given these developments, the Security Council must consider additional ways to improve the humanitarian situation. Pressure was brought to bear on the Assad regime in regard to Homs, but let's not overstate the case there -- the deal on Homs took too long to negotiate, the cease-fire was broken by regime shelling just as evacuations and deliveries got underway, and the aid and evacuations, of an estimated 1,400 people – every one of those people matters and we are grateful again that they are out – but the evacuation of 1,400 people does not compare to the more than 200,000 people that remain trapped in besieged areas in Syria and under regime sieges particularly. What's more, we see that the regime has forced more than 200 men between the ages of 15 and 55 into screening facilities. Given the regime's past actions, we cannot take the safety of these men for granted and it is essential to press the Syrian regime to release those individuals and to ensure that the UN remains present as an any contact with government authorities in place.

Homs is only a small part of a larger catastrophe. The international community should not have to take action in order for a leader to simply allow the delivery of food and humanitarian assistance to his people in need. It should be a primary responsibility of any government. Clearly that is not the case with the Assad regime, which currently controls more than 80% of the besieged areas. Given the regime's deliberate denial of humanitarian access to innocent civilians in besieged communities, it is clear the Security Council must take humanitarian action.



The United States strongly supports the draft humanitarian resolution circulated to the Council on Tuesday – which I am sure most of you have managed to read by now – and we are negotiating within the Council to ensure a final text that will make a real difference on the ground. Working in unison, we were able to negotiate a resolution to rid the world of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles, an effort, as you know, is very much a work in progress. But now, this Council must speak with a united voice demanding immediate, full humanitarian access to those in need, particularly in besieged areas and increased flows of assistance, including across borders. Thank you and I’d be happy to take a few questions.

### Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At a Security Council Stakeout on Syria, February 6, 2014

**Ambassador Power:** So as you know, we just received a useful briefing from Special Coordinator Kaag. Ms. Kaag confirmed what has become increasingly clear: the Assad regime has fallen behind in complying with its international obligations to remove chemical agents and precursor chemicals from its soil. The Secretary General himself has affirmed that new equipment is not needed and that the Assad regime has the capability of eliminating the weapons stockpile.

So let me be clear: the Assad regime must immediately take the necessary steps to fulfill its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2118. We know the regime has the ability to move these weapons and materials because they have moved them multiple times over the course of this conflict. It is time for the Assad government to stop its foot-dragging, establish a transportation plan, and stick to it. We urge all member-states with influence over the regime to persuade it to move forward with the transportation phase.

### Under Threat in Russia, Some Russian Gays Look To Europe For Asylum

Although there is little in the way of official statistics, activists say an increasingly antigay environment, backed by legislation prohibiting gay "propaganda" -- which effectively bans public shows of affection among same-sex couples or the promotion of gay rights -- has caused interest in asylum among Russia’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community to rise sharply.

A ruling in November by the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which said gays could not be advised to be more discreet in their home countries as an alternative to asylum, has given new impetus to asylum seekers from gay and lesbian communities.

Still, despite November’s ruling, whether the law grants Russians a statutory right to asylum in Europe is murky.

The court’s ruling, which was brought about by three gay men from countries in Africa with much harsher rules, applies to those whose sexual orientation may realistically result in criminal prosecution at home.

In Russia, those found guilty of propagating "nontraditional sexual relations" can be punished by a fine of up to 200,000 rubles (\$6,060). Several activists have been detained and fined after protests, but criminal prosecution under the law, which Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into law in June, is so far unlikely.

Analysts say that although the ECJ's ruling in November may not legally bind European countries to accept asylum requests from Russia's LGBT community, the increased attention to the struggle of gays in Russia may make countries with strong domestic support for gay rights more likely to consider the refugee-status requests anyway.

## Religious News from Around the World

### Seven-Year-Old Boy in India Tortured, Murdered for Christian Faith

CARROLLTON, Texas – The body of a seven-year-old boy in India retrieved from a pond last week revealed horrific details of torture before he was brutally murdered because of his Christian beliefs. The son of a believer, Anmol went missing after attending Sunday School at a Believers Church on Nov. 17 in northern India. [Link to full article.](#)

### 'Evangelii Gaudium' amounts to Francis' 'I Have a Dream' speech

John L. Allen Jr. | Nov. 26, 2013

#### Analysis

Dreams can be powerful things, especially when articulated by leaders with the realistic capacity to translate them into action. That was the case 50 years ago with Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech, and it also seems to be the ambition of Pope Francis' bold new apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel."

In effect, the 224-page document, titled in Latin *Evangelii Gaudium* [1] and released by the Vatican Tuesday, is a vision statement about the kind of community Francis wants Catholicism to be: more missionary, more merciful, and with the courage to change.

Francis opens with a dream.

"I dream of a 'missionary option,' " Francis writes, "that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world, rather than for her self-preservation."

In particular, Francis calls for a church marked by a special passion for the poor and for peace.

The theme of change permeates the document. The pope says rather than being afraid of "going astray," what the church ought to fear instead is "remaining shut up within structures that give us a false sense of security, within rules that make us harsh judges" and "within habits that make us feel safe."

Though Francis released an encyclical letter titled *Lumen Fidei* in June, that text was based largely on a draft prepared by Benedict XVI. "The Joy of the Gospel," designed as a reflection on the October 2012 Synod of Bishops on new evangelization, thus represents the new pope's real debut as an author.

Early reaction suggests it's a tour de force.

The text comes with Francis' now-familiar flashes of homespun language. Describing an upbeat tone as a defining Christian quality, for instance, he writes that "an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!"

At another point, Francis insists that "the church is not a tollhouse." Instead, he says, "it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone." At another point, he quips that "the confessional must not be a torture chamber," but rather "an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us to on to do our best."

Francis acknowledges that realizing his dream will require "a reform of the church," stipulating that "what I am trying to express here has a programmatic significance and important consequences."

Though he doesn't lay out a comprehensive blueprint for reform, he goes beyond mere hints to fairly blunt indications of direction:

- He calls for a "conversion of the papacy," saying he wants to promote "a sound decentralization" and candidly admitting that in recent years "we have made little progress" on that front.
- He suggests that bishops' conferences ought to be given "a juridical status ... including genuine doctrinal authority." In effect, that would amount to a reversal of a 1998 Vatican ruling under John Paul II that only individual bishops in concert with the pope, and not episcopal conferences, have such authority.
- Francis says the Eucharist "is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak," insisting that "the doors of the sacraments" must not "be closed for simply any reason." His language could have implications not only for divorced and remarried Catholics, but also calls for refusing the Eucharist to politicians or others who do not uphold church teaching on some matters.
- He calls for collaborative leadership, saying bishops and pastors must use "the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear."
- Francis criticizes forces within the church who seem to lust for "veritable witch hunts," asking rhetorically, "Whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act?"
- He cautions against "ostentatious preoccupation" for liturgy and doctrine as opposed to ensuring that the Gospel has "a real impact" on people and engages "the concrete needs of the present time."

On two specific matters, however, Francis rules out change: the ordination of women to the priesthood, though he calls for "a more incisive female presence" in decision-making roles, and abortion.

Francis says the church's defense of unborn life "cannot be expected to change" because it's "closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right."

The pope's toughest language comes in a section of the document arguing that solidarity with the poor and the promotion of peace are constituent elements of what it means to be a missionary church.

Francis denounces what he calls a "crude and naïve trust" in the free market, saying that left to its own devices, the market too often fosters a "throw-away culture" in which certain categories of people are seen as disposable. He rejects what he describes as an "invisible and almost virtual" economic "tyranny." Specifically, Francis calls on the church to oppose spreading income inequality and unemployment, as well as to advocate for stronger environmental protection and against armed conflict.

In the end, "The Joy of the Gospel" amounts to a forceful call for a more missionary Catholicism in the broadest sense. The alternative, Francis warns, is not pleasant.

"We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in our own comforts," he writes. "Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide."

*Editor's note: Excerpts of Evangelii Gaudium will be posted to [The Francis Chronicles](#) [2] over the next few days, and watch the [NCR Today](#) [3] and [Distinctly Catholic](#) [4] blogs for commentary on the apostolic exhortation.*

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## Interfax: Moscow Patriarchate hopes Putin's Vatican visit will make Orthodox-Catholic ties stronger.

MOSCOW. Nov 22 (Interfax) - The Moscow Patriarchate expects Russian President Vladimir Putin's upcoming meeting with Pope Francis in the Vatican to give an additional impetus to relations between Orthodox people and Catholics.

"We would like to hope that President Putin's meeting with the Pope will help strengthen relations between Russia and the Vatican, as well as relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church," a spokesman for the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations told Interfax.

It will be a meeting of the leaders of two states, the spokesman said, adding that the two churches have been working directly to tackle many religious issues.

The Russian president and the pontiff are expected to meet during Putin's visit to the Vatican on November 25. It will be the third visit of the Russian head of state to the Vatican after the establishment of full-scale diplomatic relations in December 2009. In the earlier period, Putin met with Pope John Paul II in 2000 and 2003 and with Pope Benedict XVI in 2007.

## Syrian Christians; pope-mania; and a looming check-up on Vatican finances

Syria's roll call of missing Christians continues to grow.

In April, Islamic militants kidnapped two Orthodox prelates, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi. In July, the same fate befell Italian Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio, a well-known Jesuit pioneer in Christian/Muslim relations and anti-Assad activist. The whereabouts of all three remain obscure.

Given the courage and persistence shown by the country's religious women, it was probably inevitable that sooner or later it would be their turn, and that's precisely what happened this week.

Sometime late Sunday night or early Monday morning, an armed group linked to the rebels forced their way into the storied fourth-century monastery of St. Thecla (Mar Takla) in the village of Maalula, about 35 miles north of Damascus. It's one of those famed ancient Christian villages that still speaks Aramaic, by tradition the language of Christ.

The monastery's mother superior, Sr. Pelagia Sayyaf, and 11 other Orthodox nuns were taken away to the nearby rebel stronghold of Yabrud.

Though some rebel sources insisted that the sisters had been evacuated for their own safety, most observers regard it as a kidnapping, something that's become a sad fact of life for the country's Christian minority. Last February, the website Ora pro Siria, operated by Italian missionaries in Syria, launched an emergency fundraising appeal it called "Ransom a Christian." The website reported that the going price for a kidnapped priest in Syria today is in the neighborhood of \$200,000.

The news that the sisters had been taken was confirmed Monday by the papal nuncio in Damascus, Italian Archbishop Mario Zenari. On Wednesday, Pope Francis launched an appeal for their safe return during his general audience.

"I invite you all to pray for the nuns of the Greek Orthodox convent of St. Takla of Maalula in Syria, who were forcibly taken away by armed men two days ago," the pope said. "We pray for these nuns and for all kidnap victims in the conflict."

Though Christians long ago became targets of choice for radical elements within the anti-Assad uprising, this particular act has set off special alarms in part because Mar Takla isn't just any monastery. Along with the nearby monastery of Mar Sarkis, it represents the heart of Syria's antique Christian presence that reaches back to the Roman era. It's still an important point of reference, as Mar Takla was a popular center for the Sept. 7 day of prayer and fasting called by Pope Francis on behalf of peace, widely seen as a gesture of opposition to Western military strikes.

In part, too, Sayyaf isn't just any nun. She's a formidable figure, often willing to speak out about the situation facing Christians amid the country's civil war. She's paid a price for her candor, having been excoriated in turn both by the rebel forces and the Assad regime depending on what she's had to say.

Last March, for example, Sayyaf was blasted by the rebels for an interview she gave to Western media in which she denied that Assad's army was engaging in indiscriminate killing and said that the situation for Christians was markedly better in areas under the regime's control. The opposition was especially incensed that she closed her comments by saying, "God bless Assad."

In September, however, pro-government social media sites labelled Sayyaf a terrorist because of another interview in which she refuted claims from the regime that rebels had assaulted Christians in her area. A pro-Assad Facebook site labelled Sayyaf a "traitor," accused her of being friends with Dall'Oglio (and thus, presumably, hostile to Assad), and suggested that her loyalties to Syria are suspect because she's Lebanese.

Although a friend reported that she spoke to Sayyaf by phone Monday and that Sayyaf said she and the other sisters were safe, it's not clear what their abductors want or how long the women might be held.

The drama is merely the latest chapter in the rapidly deteriorating situation facing Christians in Syria. At the same time the nuns were being taken, militants took over the Armenian Church of the Martyrs in Raqqa, in the country's north, unveiling an Islamic banner atop the church.

In his final speech as president of the U.S. bishops' conference, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York recently called his brother bishops to ramp up their efforts on behalf of suffering Christians around the world. Right now, Syria would be a great place to put those words into action, insisting that the Obama administration use whatever nominal influence it may have with the rebels to secure the safe release of Sayyaf and the other sisters.

In early Christian tradition, Thecla was a follower of St. Paul who, as the story goes, was saved from her persecutors by a mountain of Maalula that miraculously opened up to shelter her. Right now, Syria's Christians are probably praying for another such miracle, because they certainly could use one.

**Source:** <http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/syrian-christians-pope-mania-and-looming-check-vatican-finances>

## The Complexity of the Sunni-Shia Divide

Sunni and Shia represent the two main sects of Islam. The sectarian divide has its origins dating back to

the earliest days of Islam, following the death of Prophet Mohammed in 632.

At the time it was a political split on who should be the Prophet's successor. The choice was between his closest lieutenant, Abu Bakr, and his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. Those who agreed on the latter went on to be known as Shia, and those who were in favor of the former became the Sunnis.

In essence, Sunnis believe in the caliph, who is decided upon by consensus of Muslims, while the Shiites believe in the imam, who is divinely ordained and has to be from the family of the Prophet.

Since then (and after the founding of Iran), Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran have been locked in a competition for the leadership in the Middle East. The struggle is not purely religious but also geopolitical, and in the middle is the United States trying to keep a balance in the region.

While Washington doesn't favor one over the other, it has recently changed its strategy with its longtime rival, Iran, and in turn has upset its regional ally, Saudi Arabia. The United States wants to use Iran and its Shiite allies to keep Sunni radicalism in check, but it's also cooperating with moderate Salafist-jihadists to prevent Iran from taking a preponderant role in the region.

### Attacks on Churches and Mosques in Russia on the Rise

Against the backdrop of anti-Islamic hysteria launched by the Russian government's propaganda machine, it is hard not to notice the negative trend in such a delicate matter as interfaith dialogue in the country. Deliberately or not, a negative image of Muslims has been firmly established in Russia. A man with a beard or a woman wearing the hijab are increasingly perceived in society as extremists

It was inevitable that this attitude would result in a backlash by Muslims in Russia; the question only was whether Muslims would aim their opposition at politicians or Christians. Muslims are in fact becoming aggressive toward Christians because they are associated with the authorities. The Russian Orthodox Church also contributes to the trend because it aspires to become a dominant force in the society (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/19/world/europe/russian-regions-hijab-ban-puts-squeeze-on-muslims.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>; <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/russia/100209/russian-orthodox-church>).

The church bases its aspirations on the fact that ethnic Russians are an absolute majority in the country ([http://statistika.ru/naselen/2007/12/05/naselen\\_9686.html](http://statistika.ru/naselen/2007/12/05/naselen_9686.html)). However, 11–15 percent of Russians are atheists and a quarter see themselves outside of any church, so at most 40–45 percent of the population can be considered Christians. At the same time, restrictions remain on the activities of Christian Protestant churches (<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/secularism-limits/2005/01/d3385/>). It is possible that the Russian Orthodox Church realizes the actual weakness of its position in society and that is why it wants Russian government help in boosting its influence in society.

Since Muslims cannot challenge the pressure of the Orthodox Church in Moscow, muted protests are unfolding in the provinces that are likely to end badly. Meanwhile, arson attacks on churches have been reported in Muslim-populated areas. For example in Tatarstan, there have been eight arson attacks on

churches and one arson attack on a mosque since August 2013. Bearing in mind that the first attack on the Farhad Mosque in Kazan took place on August 13 (<http://news.prokazan.ru/news/view/83544>), the following attacks on churches can be regarded as reprisal attacks and a signal that Muslims will not tolerate a situation in which Moscow dictates how and when beards or hijabs can be worn. The authorities did their best to present the attacks as hooliganism. In the past four months, churches have come under attack in these respective areas: In the village of Sloboda Petropavlovskaya in Novosheshminsky district on the night of August 15, in the village of Ivanovka in Leningorsky district on September 13, in the village of Lenino in Novosheshminsky district on November 1, in the village of Sokolka in Bugulminsky district on the night of November 14, in the city of Chistopol on November 17, in the village of Lenino in Novosheshminsky district on November 17, in the village of Albai in Mamadyshsky district on November 28, and, finally, in the village of Kreshchennye Kazyli in Rybnoslobodsky district on November 29 (<http://www.moidagestan.ru/blogs/46866/36315>). In the end, the police was forced to admit that the arson attacks may have been specifically organized and reclassified these actions as terrorist attacks (<http://www.rg.ru/2013/11/29/reg-pfo/prokuratura-anons.html>).

Tatarstan is not the only region where religious buildings are being attacked. Arson attacks also take place in the North Caucasus. On November 9, 2008, an Orthodox church was set on fire in the city of Karabulak in Ingushetia. Two months later, on January 2, 2009, it was set on fire again (<http://www.pravda.ru/news/accidents/03-01-2009/298101-cerkov-0/>). In 2010, two churches and one Christian prayer house were burned down in the village of Ordzhonikidzevskaya in Ingushetia and in the city of Karachaevsk in Karachaevo-Cherkessia (<http://kavkaz.ge/2010/11/02/v-karachaevo-cherkesii-podozhgli-dva-xrama-i-molelnyj-dom/>). On June 21, 2010, Novaya Zhizn, an Evangelical Baptist church, was burned down. On July 15, 2010, Pentecostal pastor Artur Suleimanov was shot to death near a prayer house (<http://www.protestant.ru/news/prosecution/ofchristians/article/65621>). On April 30, 2011, the Shaoninsky church in Karachaevo-Cherkessia was set on fire. This past July, the rabbi of the local Jewish community in the city of Derbent in Dagestan was attacked (<http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1109702>).

Arson attacks on mosques are frequent in areas where Christians are the majority. On September 27, a Muslim prayer house was burned down in the village of Kapustin Yar in the Akhtubinsk district of Astrakhan region (<http://www.ansar.ru/rfsng/2013/10/01/43753>). On October 22, a Muslim prayer house came under attack in the city of Volgograd. That attack may have been a reaction to the female suicide bomber attack on October 21, which killed six passengers on a bus and wounded 28 (<http://ria.ru/infografika/20131021/971555739.html>).

So many attacks have taken place that they can no longer be seen as isolated cases. And these do not include the dozens and even hundreds of attacks and murders of Christian clergy in robberies, or the dozens of attacks on Muslim clergymen in the North Caucasus in recent years. Tensions are increasing, especially in areas where the government propaganda campaign against jihadists runs strong.

Although the Orthodox Church recognizes that all these attacks are attempts to foment inter-religious hostility in society, it does little to prevent such acts. On the contrary, it is completely unclear why a cathedral is being erected on the main square of the capital city of Ingushetia, Magas, even though no Christian Orthodox believers live in the city (<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=53233>). It



is unclear why another Orthodox church is being built in Grozny ([http://www.gazeta.ru/news/social/2011/01/18/n\\_1661462.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/news/social/2011/01/18/n_1661462.shtml)) when only a couple of dozen parishioners at most regularly visit the existing church ([http://expert.ru/russian\\_reporter/2013/19/svoichuzhie/](http://expert.ru/russian_reporter/2013/19/svoichuzhie/)). This unwarranted imposition of Orthodox churches in Muslim regions, against the backdrop of the rise of jihadist sentiment, is unlikely to increase religious tolerance in the region.

Observing what is going on in the Muslim regions of Russia, one invariably arrives at the conclusion that everything the Russian authorities do comes back at them in the end. If no quick measures are taken, inter-religious tensions in Russia may become increasingly irreversible.

## RSF Denounces Censorship In Name Of Religion

By RFE/RL

December 13, 2013

In a new report, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) documents censorship that is being exercised in the name of religion and God.

In the report released on December 13, the Paris-based group says news and content providers in "far too many countries" constantly face what it calls this "very special and formidable form of censorship."

RSF says that in Iran, the Persian Gulf emirates, and some Christian Orthodox countries, journalists are "branded as heretics as soon as they dare to describe the far-from-holy practices of the regime and its clergy."

If they dare to denounce the atrocities of Islamist militants in Pakistan, RSF says, they are gunned down as infidels.

The group urges international institutions to reject attempts by some governments to have "blasphemy" and "defamation of religion" treated as violations of fundamental human rights.

## Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia established in India

Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia established in India with Deacon Fr Silouan being Ordained

OCP News Service – 5/1/13

Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (Moscow Patriarchate)

India/Bangalore: Deacon Fr Silouan was formally ordained to the Holy Priesthood in Archangel Michael Orthodox Church in Blacktown, NSW and established as the Rector of St John Chrysostom Orthodox Church (ROCOR) located in Bangalore, India under the Deanery of India and Pakistan of ROCOR which is under the Diocese of Australia and New Zealand.

Fr Silouan in his public life is also Asst Vice President of Deutsche Bank in India.

Glory to God for all His Mercies.

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http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/2014/01/russian-orthodox-church-outside-russia-established-in-india-with-deacon-fr-silouan-being-ordained/  
http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/2014/01/russian-orthodox-church-outside-russia-established-in-india-with-deacon-fr-silouan-being-ordained/

Finally true Orthodox Christian mission has started in India.

George C. Thomas

Kuwait

## The Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion: Religions Respond



*The Committee of Religious  
NGOs at the United Nations*

**IN CELEBRATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY  
THE U.S. MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
AND  
THE COMMITTEE OF RELIGIOUS NGOs AT THE UNITED NATIONS  
INVITE YOU TO A DISCUSSION  
“THE RISING TIDE OF RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION: RELIGIONS RESPOND”**

**DR. BRIAN GRIM  
RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE PROJECT, PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

**DR. WILLIAM VENDLEY  
SECRETARY-GENERAL, RELIGIONS FOR PEACE**

**REVEREND CHLOE BREYER  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INTERFAITH CENTER**

**RABBI JOSEPH POTASNIK  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, NEW YORK BOARD OF RABBIS**

**IMAM KHALID LATIF  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ISLAMIC CENTER AT NYU**

**REVEREND DR. ELIAS D. MALLON  
CATHOLIC NEAR EAST WELFARE ASSOCIATION**

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2014  
1:15 TO 2:45 PM**

**U.S. MISSION TO THE UN  
45<sup>TH</sup> STREET & 1<sup>ST</sup> AVENUE  
(USE 45<sup>TH</sup> STREET ENTRANCE)**

**R.S.V.P. acceptances with your full name and affiliation  
to Kathleen Herrera at [herrerak@state.gov](mailto:herrerak@state.gov)**

## Global Religious Hostilities Reached Six-Year High in 2012

**Washington, D.C., Jan. 14, 2014** — The share of countries with a high or very high level of **social hostilities involving religion** reached a six-year peak in 2012, according to a [new study](#) by the Pew Research Center.

A third (33%) of the 198 countries and territories included in the study had high religious hostilities in 2012, up from 29% in 2011 and 20% as of mid-2007. Religious hostilities increased in every major region of the world except the Americas. The sharpest increase was in the Middle East and North Africa, which still is feeling the effects of the 2010-11 political uprisings known as the Arab Spring. There also was a significant increase in religious hostilities in the Asia-Pacific region, where China edged into the “high” category for the first time.

The new report – released two days ahead of [Religious Freedom Day](#) in the United States – is the fifth in a [series of Pew Research reports](#) based on two indexes (the Government Restrictions Index and the Social Hostilities Index) used to gauge the extent to which governments and societies around the world impinge on religious beliefs and practices.

The share of countries with a high or very high level of **government restrictions on religion** stayed roughly the same in the latest year studied. About three-in-ten countries in the world (29%) had a high or very high level of government restrictions in 2012, compared with 28% in 2011 and 20% as of mid-2007. Europe had the biggest increase in the median level of government restrictions in 2012, followed closely by the Middle East-North Africa – the only other region where the median level of government restrictions on religion rose.

Looking at the overall level of restrictions – whether resulting from government policies or from social hostilities – the study finds that restrictions on religion are high or very high in 43% of countries, also a six-year high. Because some of these countries (like China) are very populous, more than 5.3 billion people (76% of the world’s population) live in countries with a high or very high level of restrictions on religion, up from 74% in 2011 and 68% as of mid-2007.

Among the world’s 25 most populous countries, Egypt, Indonesia, Russia, Pakistan and Burma (Myanmar) had the most restrictions on religion in 2012, when both government restrictions and social hostilities are taken into account. As in the previous year, Pakistan had the highest level of social hostilities involving religion, and Egypt had the highest level of government restrictions on religion. Social hostilities related to religion in Burma (Myanmar) rose to the “very high” level for the first time in the study.

During the latest year studied, there also was an increase in the level of harassment or intimidation of particular religious groups. Indeed, two of the seven major religious groups monitored by the study – Muslims and Jews – experienced six-year highs in the number of countries in which they were harassed by national, provincial or local governments, or by individuals or groups in society. As in previous years, Christians and Muslims – who together make up more than half of the global population – were harassed in the largest number of countries (110 and 109, respectively).

The new study scores 198 countries and territories on the same 10-point indexes used in the previous Pew Research studies on religious restrictions around the globe:

- The Government Restrictions Index (GRI) measures government laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices. The GRI is comprised of 20 measures of restrictions, including efforts by governments to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversions, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups.
- The Social Hostilities Index (SHI) measures acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society. This includes religion-related armed conflict or terrorism, mob or sectarian violence, harassment over attire for religious reasons or other religion related intimidation or abuse. The SHI includes 13 measures of social hostilities.

The [full report](#), “Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High,” is available on the [website](#) of the Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, as are the [previous reports in the series](#).

The Pew Research Center’s work on global restrictions on religion is part of the Pew-Templeton [Global Religious Futures](#) project, which analyzes religious change and its impact on societies around the world. The initiative is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation.

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*Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take policy positions. Its Religion & Public Life Project seeks to promote a deeper understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs.*

## Persecution of Christians Increases in Countries Labeled as ‘Failed’

### **Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Central African Rep. among Highest Risers on World Watch List; North Korea Remains No. 1 Persecutor of Christians**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Jan. 8, 2014) – For the 12th consecutive year the hermit communist country of North Korea remains the world’s most restrictive nation in which to practice Christianity, according to the Open Doors 2014 World Watch List (WWL). However, a major trend which the WWL tracked in 2013 was a marked increase in persecution for Christian communities in states that are commonly regarded as “failed.” A failed country is defined “as a weak state where social and political structures have collapsed to the point where government has little or no control.”

The top 10 countries where Christians faced the most pressure and violence in the 2013 reporting period of the 2014 WWL are: North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Pakistan, Iran and Yemen. For the complete list, go to [www.worldwatchlist.us](http://www.worldwatchlist.us).

Overwhelmingly, the main engine driving persecution of Christians in 36 of the top 50 countries is Islamic extremism, with the most violent region being the states of the African Sahel belt (a semi-arid zone extending from Senegal on the Atlantic Ocean eastward to Sudan and the Red Sea) where a fifth of the world’s Christians meet one seventh of the world’s Muslims in perilous proximity. The World Watch List Top 10 contains six failed states: Somalia (#2), Syria (#3), Iraq (#4), Afghanistan (#5), Pakistan (#8) and Yemen (#10). Another newly failed, war-torn state – the Central African Republic (CAR) – made the list for the first time at #16. Libya (#13) and Nigeria (#14) remain very high.

Each year the Open Doors WWL ranks the 50 worst countries in which to practice Christianity. This year the complete methodology of the Open Doors WWL is published for the first time. It was independently audited by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (<http://www.iirf.eu/>) to help make the information gathering and calculation process more transparent.

Open Doors is an international ministry which has been supporting and strengthening persecuted Christians around the world for almost 60 years.

“The 2014 WWL is the most comprehensive study of the systematic persecution of Christians ever done. Often completely unaddressed in the West is the fact that Christians are the largest persecuted minority in the world,” says Open Doors USA President/CEO Dr. David Curry. “Countries on the WWL, such as North Korea, Saudi Arabia and throughout the Middle East and North Africa are targeting Christians; imprisoning, punishing, and even in some cases murdering people who choose to express privately or publicly their Christian faith. The 2014 WWL is a wake up call to Americans to become more aware of these atrocities and restrictions on religious freedom.”

#### North Korea Remains Horrific Place for Christians

In no other country in the world are Christians so fiercely persecuted because of their faith than in North Korea. Like others in that country, Christians have to survive under one of the most oppressive regimes in contemporary times. They have to deal with corrupt officials, bad policies, natural disasters, diseases and hunger.

On top of that, they must hide their decision to follow Christ. Being caught with a Bible is grounds for execution or a life-long political prison sentence. An estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Christians live in concentration camps, prisons and prison-like circumstances under the regime of leader Kim Jong-Un.

#### Somalia’s First #2 Position

For the first time in the history of the Open Doors World Watch List, a sub-Saharan African country – Somalia – is ranked #2. Although the capital of Mogadishu is under more moderate Muslim government control, surveillance is conducted to root out converts from Islam and the church has to remain secret. Large parts of the country remain ungovernable and retreating al-Shabaab rebels vent their anger by imposing an even more restrictive form of Sharia law.

As one Christian told an Open Doors researcher, “In Somalia, a Christian cannot trust anyone. One false confidence and you literally lose your head.”

#### Increasing Islamic Extremism in Syria

Syria is the least surprising newcomer to the top 10, though it is one of the WWL’s highest risers, at #3, up from #11. The civil war continues to rage, perplexing an international community anxious to intervene but seeing no viable opportunity. Atrocities against the Christian community, perpetrated especially by foreign supported jihadi groups, run at their highest level since the war began almost three years ago. Syria had more martyrs (1,213) than any country on the WWL. Nigeria followed with 612 martyrs, Pakistan 88, Egypt 83, Angola 16, Niger 15, Iraq 11, CAR 9 and Colombia 8.

There is evidence that these fighters are destabilizing neighboring countries such as Iraq (#4), and even relatively peaceful Jordan (#26). “Polarization is increasing across the Middle East, and Islam is becoming

even more radicalized with the civil war in Syria giving the jihadists a new impetus,” says a WWL persecution analyst for the area.

#### Pakistan Makes Major Jump to #8

Pakistan saw its worst act of persecution ever against Christians on Sept. 22 when 89 Christians were killed by two suicide bombers outside All Saints church in Peshawar. But the country rises to #8 on the WWL also because the anti-Christian pressure in Pakistani society is also increasing.

The country is simply the world’s most extremist infested state. An election during the reporting period often saw prominent political candidates openly court Taliban groups, emboldening them to increase the pressure on the substantial yet beleaguered Christian minority

#### Central African Republic New Hot Spot

In the last year the most gruesome headlines have been dominated by the little known Central African Republic. Horrific violence often directed at Christians by the Seleka rebel alliance has catapulted the nation of 4.5 million to #16 on the WWL. The country has been torn apart by warlords and especially foreign mercenaries from Chad and Sudan who target Christians for rape, robbery and murder.

Like Mali last year, CAR shows how rapidly a seemingly stable state can disintegrate and a Christian minority or even majority can come to the brink of extinction. Even after foreign intervention to chase away the Muslim extremists, Christians in northern Mali still fear returning to their homes. Mali remains on the list at #33 after being #7 in 2013.

#### Colombia and Sri Lanka Also Higher on List

Two other countries rose significantly higher on the list. Colombia enters the top 30 for the first time at #25 as levels of kidnappings and assassinations remain high in rebel-held areas. Sri Lanka is another newcomer (#29) to the WWL after a significant rise in anti-Christian violence (over 50 attacks on churches last year alone) powered by a strident Buddhist nationalist movement and higher pressure on Christians from local communities and monks.

#### World Watch List Methodology Independently Audited

The Open Doors World Watch List is the only annual survey of religious liberty conditions of Christians around the world. It measures the degree of freedom Christians have to live out their faith in five spheres of life – private, family, community, national and church life, plus a sixth sphere measuring the degree of violence. The methodology counts each sphere equally and is designed specifically to track the deep structures of persecution, and not merely incidents.

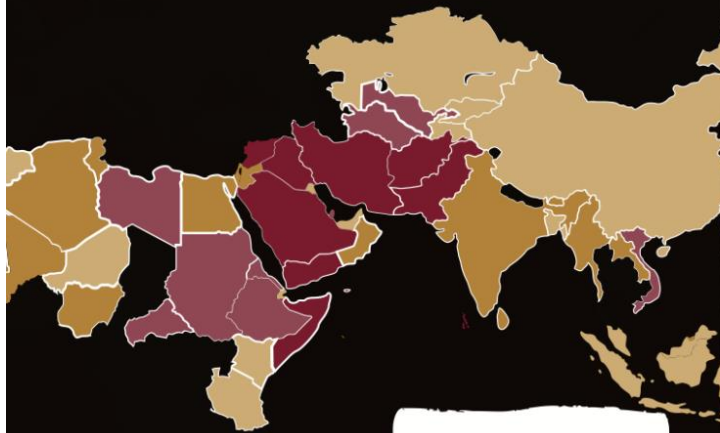
Dr. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, head of Strategy and Research for Open Doors International, says, “It is our intent through the WWL to encourage more people and organizations to carefully study the needs and stories of persecuted Christians, and as a result deepen the passion to pray for them.

“The WWL is more than a set of numbers. It must also be seen as a human document, reflecting millions of sad but also amazing stories of strong faith.”

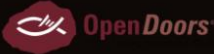
*(For more information or to set up an interview on the World Watch List, contact Jerry Dykstra at 616-915-4117 or email [jerryd@odusa.org](mailto:jerryd@odusa.org).)*



The World Watch List (WWL) is a ranking of 50 countries where persecution of Christians for religious reasons is most severe.



Decrease in rank ▼  
 Increase in rank ▲  
 Rank stayed the same ■  
 New Country +



COUNTRY	RANK	2013
North Korea	1	1
Somalia	2	5
Syria	3	11
Iraq	4	4
Afghanistan	5	3
Saudi Arabia	6	2
Maldives	7	6
Pakistan	8	14
Iran	9	8
Yemen	10	9
Sudan	11	12
Eritrea	12	10
Libya	13	17
Nigeria	14	13
Uzbekistan	15	16
Central African Republic	16	new
Ethiopia	17	15
Vietnam	18	21
Qatar	19	20
Turkmenistan	20	19
Laos	21	18
Egypt	22	25
Myanmar	23	32
Brunei	24	27
Colombia	25	46
Jordan	26	34
Oman	27	22
India	28	31
Sri Lanka	29	new
Tunisia	30	30
Bhutan	31	28
Algeria	32	29
Mali	33	7
Palestinian Territories	34	36
United Arab Emirates	35	26
Mauritania	36	23
China	37	37
Kuwait	38	33
Kazakhstan	39	48
Malaysia	40	42
Bahrain	41	35
Comoros	42	41
Kenya	43	40
Morocco	44	39
Tajikistan	45	44
Djibouti	46	43
Indonesia	47	45
Bangladesh	48	new
Tanzania	49	24
Niger	50	50

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## The latest on Syria

“Evil appeared in an unprecedented way.”

That is how Fr. Ziad Hilal described the nightmare that is now Syria when he wrote to us earlier this year. His [“Letter from Syria”](#) in the summer issue of *ONE* painted a stark portrait of a world torn apart by war — and of the innocent children he is desperately trying to save.



CNEWA, with the generous support of its donors, is making a difference in the lives of those children and so many others. To learn what we have been able to do, we invite you to read [the latest report](#) compiled by our regional offices in Amman and Beirut. To learn how you can help, you can also visit [our Syria giving page](#).

“Hope is what CNEWA has helped us provide,” Fr. Hilal wrote. “I believe it has been a lifeline from God — helping us and guiding our efforts to glorify the name of the Lord.”

Thank you for making that lifeline possible!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John E. Kozar".

Msgr. John E. Kozar  
President  
Catholic Near East Welfare Association

## [U.N. Panel Questions Vatican on Handling of Clergy Sexual Abuse \(NYTimes\)](#)

By NICK CUMMING-BRUCE and [LAURIE GOODSTEIN](#) JAN. 16, 2014

GENEVA — The Vatican faced a barrage of pointed questions from a United Nations panel on Thursday about how it had handled decades of reports of clergy sexual abuse, the first such prolonged interrogation by an international body and a moment long awaited by abuse victims in many countries.



Vatican representatives insisted that abuse cases were not primarily the responsibility of the Vatican, but of local dioceses and law enforcement officials with the authority to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators. But in their remarks, the Vatican officials said that the church could and should do better to prevent these crimes.

Bishop Charles J. Scicluna, who was the Vatican's chief prosecutor of sexual abuse until 2012, told the panel: "The Holy See gets it. Let's not say too late or not, but there are certain things that need to be done differently."

The hearing in Geneva happened on the same day that Pope Francis celebrated morning Mass alongside an American cardinal who was widely disgraced last year in the abuse scandal. At the Mass, Francis delivered a homily about scandal in the church, never mentioning sexual abuse, but speaking of "those failings of priests, bishops, laity."

"But are we ashamed?" Francis said, according to a [Vatican Radio transcript](#). "So many scandals that I do not want to mention individually, but all of us know."

The United Nations committee in Geneva was looking into the Vatican's failure to adhere to the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which calls on signers to protect children from harm, including sexual and physical abuse. The committee will issue final observations and recommendations on Feb. 5, but it has no authority to issue sanctions, and its recommendations are nonbinding.

The Center for Constitutional Rights, based in New York and representing victims of abuse, submitted reams of documents and victims' testimony as evidence that the Vatican had allowed abusers to remain in ministry and shuttled them to different locations without informing law enforcement officials or local parishes.

The committee questioned the Vatican officials about their ambassador to the Dominican Republic, who is being investigated by Dominican prosecutors about accusations that he sexually abused children. The ambassador, Archbishop Josef Wesolowski, was recalled to the Vatican in August, and last week the Vatican denied a request to extradite him to the Dominican Republic.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's representative to the United Nations in Geneva, told the panel that the ambassador's case would be handled by a Vatican tribunal because he is a citizen of the Vatican, and that the case would get "the severity it deserves."

Sara de Jesús Oviedo Fierro, the United Nations committee's vice president, asked the Vatican representatives why, if the church had a policy of "zero tolerance" of abusers, there were "efforts to cover up and obscure these types of cases?"

Bishop Scicluna said: "It is not the policy of the Holy See to encourage cover-ups. This is against the truth."

The panel questioned Bishop Scicluna persistently about why the Holy See does not make it mandatory for local dioceses to report abuse to civil authorities. Many countries do not require such reporting. "Our guidelines have always said the domestic law of the country needs to be followed," he said.

Barbara Blaine, the president of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, in Geneva for the hearing, said in a telephone news conference during a break that survivors were grateful to the United

Nations committee. “Even if one child is kept safe, all of this will be worth it,” she said. But at the end of the day she said it was “insulting and disingenuous” for Vatican officials to say local courts were responsible for bringing about justice “when it’s church officials who are obstructing justice.”

In Rome, meanwhile, Francis celebrated morning Mass and held a private audience with Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, the former archbishop of Los Angeles, who was publicly shamed last year after documents revealed he had a [history of protecting priests](#) accused of sexual abuse.

Cardinal Mahony was relieved of his public duties early last year by his successor after the court-ordered release of documents chronicling decades of mishandling people accused of being sexual predators in the Los Angeles archdiocese.

On Wednesday, Cardinal Mahony took to Twitter and his [blog](#) to broadcast his delight about his time with the pope. The cardinal wrote that most of their private conversation was about the plight of immigrants and refugees, and what the church could do to help them. But he noted that Francis’ homily during the Mass was about scandal.

Francis preached, “Scandals in the church happen because there is no living relationship with God and his word.”

Nick Cumming-Bruce reported from Geneva, and Laurie Goodstein from New York.

### [Statement by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on Religious Freedom Day, January 16, 2014](#)

Religious freedom is a founding principle of the United States, its promise so essential to the American spirit that it was enshrined in the very first amendment to our constitution. But the belief that all people should be free to hold and profess their own religious views, values, and opinions is not just an American value, it’s a right guaranteed to all humans by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For centuries – from the original pilgrims to eastern European Jews to refugees from all corners of the world today – people have fled religious persecution in their own lands to travel to America, where they could practice freely. On Religious Freedom Day, let us recommit to that ideal and pledge to protect those around the world who are marginalized or persecuted for their faith.

In a new report by the Pew Research Center presented at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations today, religiously motivated hostility has reached a 6-year high. Over 5 billion people – or 76% of the world’s population – live in places with high or very high levels of restrictions on religion, up from 68% in 2007. In Burma, Muslim Rohingyas are denied the rights of citizenship, instead forced into dangerous labor conditions, told what they can and can’t study, and subjected to a two-child limit. In Syria, some Christian civilians, including nuns and priests, are kidnapped, threatened, and forced to convert. In North Korea, where owning a bible is against the law, people are imprisoned, tortured, and killed for their religious activities and affiliations.

These are just a few of the far too many examples of religious persecution that persist in our world, and the United States is proud to be leading the fight against all forms of religious intolerance, wherever they exist. Protecting freedom of religion is a cornerstone of American foreign policy, carried out by prioritizing accountability for religiously-motivated violence, urging governments to adopt legal protections for religious minorities, and promoting societal respect for religious diversity. And at the

United Nations, we work with our partners to fight for the world's religious minorities, including adoption of the landmark Human Rights Council resolution calling on member states to combat intolerance, violence, and discrimination based on religion.

Make no mistake, freedom of religion is fundamental to human dignity – an inalienable liberty essential to who we are as human beings. Today, on Religious Freedom Day, Americans should honor the proud legacy of tolerance passed down by our founders, and continue to work for freedom of faith as a core human right all around the world.

### Report: 5.3 billion people face harsh religious freedom restrictions

Global religious hostilities reached a six-year high in 2012 and affected more people than government curbs on religious freedom, according to the Pew Research Center's latest report on religious restrictions around the world.

The report, released Tuesday ahead of National Religious Freedom Day on Thursday, shows that 74 percent of the world's population experienced high levels of social hostility toward religion, up from 52 percent in 2011.

The sharp rise is due to hostilities in China, which for the first time in the survey's six-year history, scored a "high" level of religious strife. Home to more than 1.3 billion people, China experienced an increase in religion-related terrorism, mob violence and sectarian conflict in 2012.

The greatest levels of social hostilities toward religion were felt in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Somalia, Israel and Iraq, according to the report.

"One of the common things we see in that group of countries is sectarian conflict," said Brian Grim, senior researcher at Pew Research. "In Pakistan, even though minority religious groups like Christians face hostility, there's also inter-Muslim conflict between Sunnis, Shias and Ahmadi Muslims."

Global government restrictions on religion remained relatively unchanged between 2011 and 2012, with 64 percent of the world living under harsh legal and political conditions. Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, Indonesia, Afghanistan, the Maldives and Syria imposed the strictest government restrictions.

When social hostilities and government restrictions are combined, Pew estimates that 5.3 billion people or 76 percent of the world's population lived under high religious restrictions in 2012.

Government restrictions include political efforts to ban conversions, limit preaching, or privilege some religious group over others. Social hostilities include armed conflict, terrorism, sectarian violence, harassment, intimidation or abuse motivated by religious factors.

"The Pew report is a chilling reminder that religious freedom is losing ground in much of the world," said Charles Haynes, director of the Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum in Washington. "The rise in social hostilities toward religion in 2012 is a harbinger of much worse to come."

Among the world's most populous countries, Egypt, Indonesia, Russia, Pakistan and Burma had the worst overall restrictions in 2012, while Brazil, the Philippines, Japan, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the fewest.

On the regional level, social hostilities and government restrictions remained highest in the Middle East and North Africa. Libya, Tunisia, Syria and Lebanon saw the greatest rises in regional hostilities in 2012, and experienced violent attacks against religious minorities. Widespread government intimidation of religious groups was reported in 16 of the region's 20 countries.

On the global scale, Mali, Libya, Mexico, Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon and Afghanistan experienced some of the greatest increase in hostilities. The social situation improved significantly in only seven countries, including Ethiopia, Cyprus and Cambodia.

"Some of these improvements are associated with peacemaking efforts to solve long-standing conflicts," Grim said. In Cyprus, a country divided between the predominantly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south, there were a number of efforts to bridge divides, he added.

The number of countries in the world with "very high" social hostilities toward religion rose from 14 to 20 between 2011 and 2012, with Syria, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand and Burma joining the worst of the worst.

For the first time, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Morocco, Iraq and Kazakhstan joined 19 other countries with "very high" government restrictions. Overall restrictions increased somewhat in 61 percent of countries between 2011 and 2012.

Abuse targeting religious minorities was reported in 47 percent of countries, up from 38 percent in 2011. The report documents intensified violence in Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka against Muslims and Christians and in Muslim-majority Egypt against Coptic Orthodox Christians.

Christians were harassed in 110 countries, Muslims in 109 and Jews in 71. Harassment against Hindus, Buddhists, folk religionists and members of other faith traditions also increased by country. Jews faced social harassment in more countries than they faced government harassment. The opposite was true for Sikhs and Baha'is.

Haynes sees a strong connection between governments denying their citizens religious freedom rights and the outbreak of sectarian violence. "Without a renewed commitment to religious freedom, religious differences will deepen and the world will be torn by religious conflict," he said.

Governments used force against religious groups in nearly half of the world's countries. Violence or the threat of violence was used in 39 percent of countries to compel people to adhere to religious norms, including in Somalia, where the Islamic militant group al-Shabab continued to ban "un-Islamic" behavior.

Pew documents a rise in the number of countries in which women were harassed for religious dress, mobs turned violent over religious issues and sectarian violence escalated.

In Burma, communal violence led to hundreds of deaths and the displacement of more than 100,000 Rohingya Muslims. Sectarian strife continues to claim lives in Syria and Iraq.

Pew's latest report covers 198 countries. Notably absent is North Korea, which Pew acknowledges "is among the most repressive in the world with respect to religion as well as other civil and political liberties." Due to the country's repressive and closed environment, Pew was unable to obtain sufficient data on North Korea for this study.

## Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, January 27, 2014

Mr. Under-Secretary-General, President Ashe, Ambassador Prozor, Mr. Spielberg, Excellencies, and guests, I am honored to participate in this annual ceremony of remembrance, which is centered this year on the theme “Journeys Through the Holocaust.” Today marks the 69<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. In pondering the lessons of the past, it is worth thinking back even further, to January 27, 1939 – exactly three quarters of a century ago, when “Auschwitz” was just the German name of a Polish town.

On that day, the Polish Foreign Minister had just returned from meetings in Germany. He reported that the Nazis were unlikely in 1939 to start a war, an assessment widely shared within the European diplomatic community.

In Prague, Czech officials were also returning from Germany, having been pressured by the Nazi authorities to intensify discrimination against Czech and Slovak Jews.

In Berlin, Hermann Göring had that week established a Central Office for Jewish Emigration, designed to facilitate both the flight of Jews and the theft of their assets.

In London, the British Foreign Office was circulating a memo to friendly governments stating, and I quote, that “there is as yet no reason to suppose Hitler has made up his mind” about attacking his neighbors. The memo referred to Germany’s acute economic problems and to speculation about whether the Nazi dictator could count on his army’s loyalty.

But on January 30, Hitler delivered a speech that revealed more of his intentions. He mocked the West for refusing to accept more Jewish refugees and he predicted that a second world war, if it came, would result “in the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.” Seven months later, German troops swarmed across the Polish border and the world’s most devastating conflict began.

I cite this history not to illustrate the dubious wisdom of hindsight, but because the evidence is clear that the Holocaust was not inevitable. The Shoah was not set in stone by the terms of the Versailles Treaty, or by Hitler’s rise to power, or by the Anschluss with Austria, or by the Munich Pact. What Hitler wanted was clearer than what Hitler thought he could actually achieve. He was constantly assessing the degree of resistance he might encounter – both domestically and globally. He was probing. He was planning. Early in 1939, had he been confronted by a more united and determined world community; he might well have been stopped before he truly began.

The horrors of the Holocaust have no parallel but the world continues to confront crimes that shock the conscience. In October the Security Council spoke with a united voice about the need for action to address the humanitarian devastation in Syria. There are people who are imprisoned in their own neighborhoods. They are literally being starved and bombed to death. They need food desperately and yet food cannot reach them because the regime won’t allow it.

In 1945, Russian soldiers liberated Auschwitz. Sixty-nine year later, if the United Nations is to live up to the noble purposes for which it was founded, the world again needs Russia to use its influence, this

time, to ensure that food reaches the desperate and starving people imprisoned in besieged Homs, Yarmouk, the Damascus suburbs, and elsewhere.

Today, as we recall the unmatched horrors of Auschwitz, the Holocaust, and World War II, we must acknowledge our responsibility to remember with honor both those who died and those who endured great suffering, unimaginable suffering, and who survived. Some of them are with us. We will never ever forget these men and women, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters. We also must acknowledge as well that remembrance is the beginning – not the end – of our responsibility; and while the world has never seen anything as horrific as the Holocaust, the duty we have is an urgent and active one: to confront evil, to defend truth, to unite in the face of threats to human dignity, and to strive to stop any who would abuse their neighbors. Let us go forward, then, to meet that obligation, recognizing our own fate in that of others, and demanding always the very best of ourselves.

### [Kidnapped nuns stripped of crosses](#)

A new video of the twelve Christian nuns kidnapped in Syria recently appeared. In it, the nuns are taped sitting in a room and being questioned by an unseen man, presumably a member of the kidnappers. He asks them how they are, if they've been mistreated, etc.

They respond that they are being treated fine, that they very much look forward to being returned to their convent, that they heartily thank the world for its concern, and that they continually pray that God grant peace to all nations.

Their words say one thing, their expressions and demeanor another. Put differently, as female captives of Islamic jihadis, what else could they say but what they were told to say? Even if one of them dared to say the “wrong thing,” it naturally would have been edited out. Who knows how many takes it took to get the video—which includes a bizarre clip of the nuns having a snowball fight with their abductors—just right?

One thing, however, although minor, speaks volumes concerning the nature of their captivity. Although these same nuns, in pictures before they were kidnapped, often appear wearing the large pectoral crosses that nuns often wear, these are all gone in the recent video.

### [Christians For Fair Witness on the Middle East Prays for an End to the Violence in Israel and Palestine](#)

(New York, NY March 3, 2014) Christians For Fair Witness on the Middle East (“Fair Witness”) is very disturbed by the findings in Amnesty International’s recent Report accusing the Israeli Defense Forces (“IDF”) of routinely using excessive force against Palestinian protesters on the West Bank and needlessly causing numerous Palestinian deaths and injuries.

The IDF, on the other hand, said that the Report ignored what they called a substantial increase in Palestinian violence against Israel in the last year including shootings, the planting of explosive devices, attacks with blunt weapons, rock throwing and the abduction and murder of a soldier.

We have concerns about the methodology of the Report because according to an Israeli spokesperson, no Israeli military or other officials were interviewed or given a chance to give their own version of events or to respond to Amnesty International’s Report before its publication. Therefore, while we

register our deep concern, fundamental due process keeps us from commenting directly about the Report at this time.

What we can say however, is that there has been far too much violence on both sides of this conflict. Far too many Israelis and Palestinians have died, and far too many have grown up and lived their entire lives in an atmosphere of fear and hostility. The senseless violence has to stop and the occupation has to end. Both people have to be free to live in their own sovereign states without fearing that a soldier will shoot their child at a protest or at a checkpoint or that a Qassam rocket will fall on them or a suicide bomber will blow up a bus they are riding in.

Fair Witness is praying that the current round of peace talks is the final round of peace talks. We pray that Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas both summon up the historic courage to reach a compromise and sign off on a final status peace agreement. As Rev. Dr. Bruce Chilton, Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion at Bard College and Fair Witness Executive Committee member notes “it is only after their political leaders reach a negotiated settlement, that Israelis and Palestinians can begin the healing and reconciliation that is desperately needed after so many years of conflict and blood shed.”

### Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly – February 28

Solitary Confinement – The debate over whether some prisoners should be locked up by themselves heated up this week as a Senate subcommittee held hearings on the practice and the New York State prison system agreed to new guidelines for the maximum length of time prisoners may be placed in solitary. Meanwhile, a growing faith-based movement says the abuse of solitary confinement violates religious values. In the United States there are an estimated 80 thousand prisoners now locked up in small cells, 23 hours a day, sometimes for more than 40 years. Lucky Severson reports on those who say solitary is unChristian and does more harm than good. Against them are corrections officers and others who insist solitary is necessary to protect guards and other prisoners from the most violent. Severson also interviews Bobby Dellelo who spent five years in solitary and talks about the anger and rage it provoked and Mississippi’s Corrections Director Christopher Epps, who removed two-thirds of Mississippi’s prisoners in solitary and saw violence go down 40%. (Previously aired on October 11, 2013) <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2013/10/11/october-11-2013-solitary-confinement/20631/>

### Ash Wednesday Letter to Pope Francis: Speak out against Targeting of Palestinian Children

In anticipation of the Pope’s May visit to the Holy Land, an Open Letter signed by over 200 bishops, clerics, members of religious orders and theologians from several faith traditions, was delivered today to Pope Francis. The letter asks the Pope to speak out against the Israeli army’s program of kidnapping, detention, and systematic abuse of Palestinian children and to call for an end to the occupation and colonization of Palestine.

The letter, whose signers include over 20 bishops, cites a recent UNICEF report that documents nighttime arrests, blindfolding and shackling of children between 12 and 18 years of age. Based on over 400 sworn testimonies, UNICEF concluded that the “ill-treatment of children who come into contact with the system appears to be widespread, systematic, and institutionalized throughout the process.”

“With this letter, we are raising the profile of the well-documented systematic mistreatment of Palestinian children,” said Rev. Don Wagner. “The Israeli government is purposefully going after children, who are clearly vulnerable, to deeply scare and traumatize them.”

Wagner is the National Program Director of Friends of Sabeel-North America (FOSNA.org), which initiated the letter. FOSNA supports the work of Sabeel, a Jerusalem-based peace and justice organization founded by Palestinian Christians.

The letter notes that similar concerns about the mistreatment of Palestinian children have been raised by Save the Children, the United Nations Commission Against Torture, Military Court Watch, Defense of Children International, and B’Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization.

“The enthusiastic response to our request for signers to the letter indicates the urgency of these concerns,” Wagner said. “Now that the letter has been delivered, we would like to invite people worldwide to join this appeal to Pope Francis and raise this issue with their media, human rights organizations, and governments until this targeting of children and the occupation are ended.”

The petition to support the letter is hosted at [www.endtheoccupation.org/Letter2Pope](http://www.endtheoccupation.org/Letter2Pope)

Wagner said that FOSNA initiated the letter in the hope that Pope Francis would speak out for the people of Palestine as he has boldly spoken for the poor and oppressed elsewhere.

“During his upcoming May visit, we want the Pope to publicly call upon the Israeli government to end its intentional mistreatment of Palestinian children,” Wagner said, “as well as to end its prolonged military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip and its punitive and illegal blockade of Gaza, where 51 percent of the 1.8 million residents are under the age of 18.”

### **Pope Francis observes, judges, and acts. And begins establishing a parallel Curia**

Andrea Gagliarducci    Mar.3, 2014

Watch, judge, act. These are the three steps put into action by Pope Francis. After almost one year of pontificate, Pope Francis has decided on a way forward on how to reform the Curia. Those who were thinking of a wide reform, built on a solid legal framework, will be perhaps disappointed. Pope Francis seems to have taken the decision of changing everything without waiting any longer. And of starting the Curia reform without reforming the Pastor Bonus, i.e. the constitution that regulates the functions of the offices of the Curia. Rather, Pope Francis is going to directly establish a parallel Curia. When this parallel Curia is complete, he will probably let all the other structures wither away.

This development is informed by two decisions Pope Francis has taken and is reportedly going to take. The first, that of establishing an Secretariat for the Economy. The second, that of appointing Cardinal Giuseppe Bertello as 'Moderator Curiae', i.e. a general coordinator of the Roman Curia.

Attentive observers believe that Pope Francis will establish several secretariats, at least eight, and the prefects will be the cardinals of the Council of Cardinals.

### **Primates of world's Orthodox Churches agree to first historic council in 1,200 years**

Patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches have agreed to hold an ecumenical council in 2016, a major event that could bring the 14 autonomous Orthodox Churches closer to each other and allow them to consider closer ties to the Roman Catholic Church.



The summit of bishops is the first of its kind to take place in 1, 200 years.

The patriarchs met in Istanbul at a rare 6-9 March summit or synaxis called by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who is spiritual leader of the Orthodox but has no authority over the other Churches.

The Churches, representing about 250 million faithful, are in full communion with each other but often have minor disputes among themselves.

While respecting the historical primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarch, based on his role as the bishop of former Constantinople, the Russian Orthodox Church – which with 165 million members is by far the biggest Church – has worked to limit his authority by insisting all decisions among Orthodox must be unanimous and issuing objections to Bartholomew's efforts to foster closer ties to the Vatican.

In his opening address, Bartholomew reminded the patriarchs that synodal decisions were traditionally taken by majority vote. He made an oblique reference to strains between Istanbul and Moscow, saying "we sometimes give the impression to outsiders that we disagree even about who is 'first' among us."

Russian Patriarch Kirill argued for consensus voting at the council and extensive preparations before the council opens. In the final communiqué, the Russian proposals prevailed. The 2016 date is a year later than expected, to allow for the extra work Moscow wanted.

Bartholomew, who fears that some brother Churches are too isolated from each other and the outer world, said the council must find a way to strengthen the synodal system to help Orthodox Churches resolve their differences and work more as one Church rather than many. "Unless the Orthodox Church places its own house in order, it would be unable to address the world with authority and validity," he said.

He mentioned "relations with non-Orthodox Christians" as a topic to be debated before the council but gave no specifics.

The council, officially called the Holy and Great Synod, will take place in Istanbul's Hagia Irene, a former Byzantine church in a courtyard of Topkapi Palace, the home of the Ottoman sultans.

## [Herdsman Kill 100 in Attacks on Nigerian Villages](#)

March 16, 2014

KADUNA, Nigeria — Gunmen shot, hacked and burned to death at least 100 people and razed homes in central Nigeria, a region riven by disputes over land, religion and ethnicity, local officials and witnesses said on Sunday.

Police confirmed the raids by Fulani herdsman at around 11 p.m. on Friday on three villages in Kaduna state, but declined to give a death toll.

Hundreds have been killed in the past year in clashes pitting the cattle-herding and largely Muslim Fulani people against mostly Christian settled communities like the Berom in Nigeria's volatile "Middle Belt", where its mostly Christian south and Muslim north meet.

"I came back from the market and there were bullets flying all around the village," said Pius Nna, 64, of Ungwan Gata village. He escaped by jumping across an open well and fleeing into the bush.

"I saw three people running into my house to take refuge. They were macheted to death before my eyes," he said, adding that he saw a Fulani neighbor directing the gunmen where to go.

The unrest in central Nigeria is not usually linked to the insurgency in the northeast by Boko Haram, an al Qaeda-linked group which wants to impose Islamic law in northern Nigeria.

However, analysts say there is a risk the insurgents will try to stoke central Nigeria's conflict. Although most of the Islamist sect's attacks are contained further north, it did claim a 2011 Christmas Day bomb attack at a church in the central city of Jos.

"We are still picking bodies out of the bush but so far there are more than 100 killed," said Daniel Anyip, vice chairman of the Kaura local government authority.

Andrew Kazah, another local councilor, said at least 96 had been killed, but that the toll was likely to go up.

— Reuters

## Local Ecclesiastical News

### Helping our Seminarians in the US

Dear Friends

With reference to my previous message where I tried to address why those brought up in the US may not go to India for Seminary study:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/IndianOrthodox/conversations/messages/35391>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/IndianOrthodox/conversations/messages/35391>

Its been over a month but here are my thoughts on the other related question:

2) Are they not losing out on the Oriental Orthodox\ Syriac tradition when they are trained in the Seminaries of the Byzantine Orthodox tradition?

From what I have understood based on personal interactions

1) St. Vladimir's though of Byzantine tradition goes out of the way to teach and understand the Oriental Orthodox perspective. Syriac Liturgy is studied as well there since it had a major influence in early Christianity. There are elective classes offered on Oriental Orthodox Liturgy taught by people like Fr. Alexander Rentel who studied at the Oriental Institute in Rome. (some people here may know him). Fr. John Behr, the current dean of the Seminary, offers classes on St. Severios.(I am told he considers St Severus as the most brilliant theological mind of his time and that the questions posed by Severus couldn't be reconciled in the Byzantine tradition until Maximus the Confessor.)

To see how much our Fathers are used and accepted there - I was told that Fr. Behr once allowed his ward to use the book by Paulose Mar Gregorios on St.Gregory of Nyssa for a paper on the Capodocian Father. He quotes Fr. V.C. Samuel in his classes. He makes the students read "The Council of Chalcedon Reexamined" by VC Samuel achen

2) For Syriac, the Armenian Seminary close by offers Syriac classes which the Vladmirians can use.

3) For Liturgy itself, earlier visiting professors from our Church like Fr. George Koshy were on staff, nowadays a 6 month course is planned in Kottayam\Nagpur.

4) Half the students in St. Vladimir's this year is Oriental.

5) Nicholovas Thirumeni is part of the Board of Trustees at St. Vladimirs, providing the ability for us to address the the deficiencies and limitations for our Students there.

The above is only intended as a starting point to begin a conversation on the Seminaries here in the US and its offerings for our children. While there are limitations, we must appreciate that these Seminaries are going out of the way to accomodate us, and in the face of the reality that we do not have our own Seminary here, and its not always practical for every student to get trained in India, we must see this as a God given opportunity.

Hope these series of messages atleast open some minds towards this dire need from our side to support, encourage and stand with our future leaders studying in the Seminaries in the US. One good

start might be to at least begin praying for, and showing some support for these dedicated individuals on Seminary Day, along with our Seminarians studying in Kottayam and Nagpur.

One person recently told me, how his entire perspective about the Seminary in the US and the seminarians studying here changed completely when he visited St. Tikhons once. When he saw with his own eyes the life and the ways of the people living there, and got an idea about the work of the Seminary first hand, he came forward to help the Seminarians. So perhaps that could be a good way to begin a change - plan a trip individually or with your parish to one of these Seminaries and see the life there first hand - perhaps it could bring a paradigm shift in our attitude towards our Seminarians in the US.

Sincerely

Mathew Samuel,

Albany, NY

### Message from His Eminence Mor Titus Yeldho, Patron

As we enter another period of the Great Lent, it is vital for us to understand the importance of Lent and fasting in our lives so we may reap the full benefits that the harvest has to offer. Lent and fasting is an essential part of our Church life. Many criticize its necessity and inconvenience in this modern day.

During the Old Testament times, fasting was observed to express grief. After the incarnation and the sacrificial passion and death of Jesus on the cross and the triumphal resurrection, the fasting has taken a different meaning for Christians. Fasting is now a way to focus on God and prayer. Such a focus was Jesus Christ's intent during his 40-day fast in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2). In preparation for His public ministry, Jesus intensified his prayer with the addition of fasting.

Fasting is set as spiritual preparation for an experience of deeper communion with God. Each person is a unity of body and soul. Prayer benefits not only our soul but also our body. Similarly, fasting helps not only our body but also our soul. Fasting and prayer make us more sensitive to God's personal presence. Thus fasting from foods must be accompanied by fasting from evil. As St. John Chrysostom states, "It is folly to abstain all day long from food, if you fail to abstain from sin and selfishness." Fasting is always associated with prayer and alms giving as spiritual awareness to take a person's attachment away from the world and focus it on God and Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Let us labor diligently in fasting for it is the weapon with which those who are perfected in Christ won victory.

By fasting, Moses' face became shining.

By fasting, Joshua withheld the sun and the moon in the firmament.

By fasting, Daniel won victory over the beasts.

By fasting, Hananiah and his companions quenched the flames.

By fasting, Elijah was lifted to the heavens.

By fasting, our Lord taught His Church to conquer the evil one.

By fasting, the just were glorified and the martyrs were crowned.

By fasting, may our Lord hear our supplications and have mercy upon our souls.

Remember to spend more time in prayer, reading of the Holy Scripture and on meditation. Get ready for a true Confession to unload our burden and to continue the journey in a spirit-filled manner.

I am indeed proud to introduce the 200th issue of the Malankara World Journal which has already secured the commendation of thousands of people worldwide. I deeply appreciate the efforts of Dr. Jacob Mathew in maintaining a high standard in providing the various information. On the release of the 200th edition, I must say, it is the fruit of the combined labor of a dedicated team who has been working diligently to provide rich spiritual nourishment to the readers of MWJ.

I wish all success to the Two Centum edition of the Malankara World Journal and all the forthcoming editions of the Journal. May God richly bless those who are working behind this and those who read them.

+Archbishop Theethose Yeldho

May God bless You,

+ Archbishop Theethose Yeldho

## Russian Orthodox Church Becomes Kremlin Tool for Retaining Control Over North Caucasus Muslims

It has been obvious for years already that Moscow's North Caucasus policy has been coordinated by one of the Kremlin's working groups on the region. It has been unclear, however, whether this Kremlin working group on the North Caucasus was actually pursuing the same policy for the entire region or adjusting it according to local peculiarities and conditions. In fact, it now appears that there are different sets of policies for the northeastern Caucasus and the northwestern Caucasus, and that the policies toward North Ossetia–Alania and Abkhazia are also separate.

The differences between Russia's policies toward the northeastern and the northwestern Caucasus could be seen in the anti-Caucasian pressure campaign that was organized by the Kremlin throughout the country ([www.magas.ru/content/khronika-sobytii-dpni-fsb-natsionalisty-antikavkazskaya-isteriya](http://www.magas.ru/content/khronika-sobytii-dpni-fsb-natsionalisty-antikavkazskaya-isteriya)). Russian fascists clearly divided these two sub-regions of the North Caucasus: in proposing the expulsion of Caucasians from Russia, they only advocated that natives of the northeastern Caucasus republics—Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia—be singled out for such treatment (<http://www.nr2.ru/voting/218.html>).

The Kremlin recently gathered the leaders of the northeastern Caucasus for meetings with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill ([http://www.ng.ru/facts/2014-03-05/4\\_kavkaz.html](http://www.ng.ru/facts/2014-03-05/4_kavkaz.html)). The meetings were apparently aimed at demonstrating to the patriarch the loyalty of the leaders of Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, the three Muslim-majority republics in the northeastern Caucasus.

Each of the three North Caucasian leaders has tried to reap some benefit from these meetings. Dagestan's Ramazan Abdulatipov was the first leader to meet Patriarch Kirill at his residence in Moscow on February 21. Abdulatipov acted like a junior student before his distinguished professor (<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3574960.html>). After lengthy and flowery overtures, Abdulatipov stunned his fellow Dagestanis by stating that Dagestan was almost the cradle of Christianity not only in

the North Caucasus, but in the whole of Russia. Based on this statement, Abdulatipov promised to restore an old Christian church in the city of Derbent that dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and which was buried for centuries. The restoration is supposed to be completed by the time Derbent marks its 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Patriarch expressed interest in the restoration of the church and promised to support Abdulatipov's initiative (<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/news/68641.htm>).

Ramzan Kadyrov met Patriarch Kirill on February 22, the day after his Dagestani colleague. Kadyrov managed to cast the meeting with the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church as a meeting of equal sides better than the other two North Caucasian leaders. He spoke not only as a representative of Chechnya, but as a representative of the entire Muslim community of the country, including the Muslims of Moscow (<http://chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=14736>). He asked the patriarch for assistance with building mosques in Moscow and other regions of Russia, saying that it is not the believers who are dangerous, but rather those who remain outside the mosques. Kadyrov implied that it is easier to control the masses in the mosques that were built by the state than to allow young people to learn about Islam through the Internet.

Soon after returning to Chechnya from his meeting with the Patriarch, Kadyrov issued a decree to provide Orthodox priests with housing (<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=54653>). Given the fact that there are only three Orthodox clergymen in Chechnya, the price for obtaining permission to build mosques in Moscow was not excessive. Moscow's primary interest is to resolve the issue of the exodus of ethnic Russians from the region. Kadyrov proposed distributing land among Cossacks, so that they could stay and develop agriculture. This solution, however, is unlikely to happen on a large scale, since small producers find it quite difficult to sell their agricultural products.

Following the meetings of the leaders of Dagestan and Chechnya with the patriarch, the question was what the leader of Ingushetia, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, could offer the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. At his meeting with Patriarch Kirill on February 26, Yevkurov managed only to present him with a keg of mountain honey. Kirill thanked Yevkurov for steering the situation in the republic toward inter-ethnic peace (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1771860.html>).

In contrast to his colleagues, Yevkurov also met with the chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, Ravil Gainutdinov (<http://ingushetia.info/2014/02/26/yunus-bek-evkurov-vstretilsya-s-patriarxom-kirillom.html>). Yevkurov thereby showed that he had met not only with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also a Muslim leader. The Russian Orthodox Church has been trying unsuccessfully to retain its presence in the North Caucasus through cooperation with Russian authorities. The ethnic-Russian presence in the northeastern Caucasus is so small now that the question is whether there will be any ethnic Russians at all left in the region in 20 years, given Moscow's policies in the area (<http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/russia-caucasus-illarionov-tlisova/1817034.html>). The numbers of ethnic Russians living in Ingushetia and Chechnya are now historically so low that the two republics can be safely described as mono-ethnic for the first time since the Russian conquest of the North Caucasus in 1859.

The Russian-Chechen wars and the rise of nationalism among indigenous peoples were the catalysts for the exodus of ethnic Russians from the region (<http://rossia3.ru/quotes/5920>). Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to deal with this issue openly ([http://www.peoples.ru/state/king/russia/putin/news\\_putin\\_iskhod\\_russkogo\\_naselenija\\_-](http://www.peoples.ru/state/king/russia/putin/news_putin_iskhod_russkogo_naselenija_-)

[\\_problema\\_vsego\\_.shtml](#)), thereby confirming the gravity of the problem, while the Russian sociologists and demographers had tried to broach it in a more diplomatic way.

The Kremlin decided that only the Christian Orthodox Church which could keep ethnic Russians from leaving the region (<http://www.foma.ru/kavkaz-dolgij-put-k-miru.html>). It is unclear who invented this idea, but its absurdity is quite obvious, given that not all of the Russians who live in the North Caucasus are even Orthodox Christians (<http://cef.ru/publish/smi/?id=446>).

Retaining the Christian element in the region at a time of a Muslim resurgence will be quite difficult. Also, support for the idea of a global jihad is gaining more and more adherents among the local population. Furthermore, there is also the problem of ethnic Russians leaving the region because of economic problems (<http://www.ng.ru/news/448771.html>), but that is not the main reason for the outflow.

The region is not attractive for long-term investment projects, and the plans for retaining ethnic Russians in the ethnic republics of the North Caucasus are unconvincing. Moscow should be paying more attention to the outflow of ethnic Russians from the regions north of the North Caucasian republics, where ethnic Russians are gradually being replaced by North Caucasians. This demographic problem is by far a more worrisome trend than the number of Russians living in the region because these regions represent the new buffer zone between orthodoxy and Islam in the North Caucasus.

--Mairbek Vatchagaev

Religious News – Submitted by Father George McBride, D.D.

### **HIS EMINENCE MOR CYRIL APHREM KARIM DELIVERS A LETTER TO PRESIDENT BARAK OBAMA**

At the invitation of President Barak Obama, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim attended a Christmas Reception at the White House on Tuesday, December 17, 2013, where the President and the First Lady took the opportunity to thank everyone in attendance for the service they render to the United States and to their neighbor. After several words of welcome the President extended his appreciation to all those who in any manner, shape or form have supported him and his administration during his term in office.

As the President greeted and shook the hands of his guests, Archbishop Karim spontaneously brought to the attention of the President the Christian situation in Syria and the on-going dilemma of the two kidnapped Archbishops. His Eminence hand delivered a letter to the President drawing attention to the suffering of Christians in Syria, the two abducted Archbishops and the most recent abduction of the eleven nuns living in Maalula's Mar Takla Convent. When asked about his reaction to the gathering, His Eminence said, "We have succeeded in bringing our message to the attention of the President of the United States. All we can do at this time is pray for a positive reaction and some involvement from him."

Accompanying His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim was Elias Sarkar, President of the Archdiocesan Executive Council.

### **LETTER TO PRESIDENT BARAK OBAMA**

December 17, 2013

President Barak Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing you concerning the two Archbishops, Metropolitan Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and Metropolitan Boulous Yazigi, both of Aleppo, Syria, who were abducted by Chechen militants operating in Syria. The Kidnapping took place at the Syrian Turkish border on April 22, 2013. Their chauffeur was mercilessly shot and killed, and the two clerics were taken captive to an unknown location. Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim is a United States Citizen.

After numerous futile efforts over the past several months, by many, including His Holiness Pope Francis, no resolution surfaced, leaving everyone asking what more can possibly be done? No ransom was asked, which further clouded the reasoning behind the act. This month eleven nuns living in Maalula's Mar Takla Convent were kidnapped after rebels seized the Qalamoun town of Yabrud. These events receive world-wide exposure and are monitored daily. They highlight the danger of religious extremists in the area and what Christians have to reckon with on a daily basis.

Mr. President, we are humbly seeking your intercession which, along with the involvement of international diplomats, would bring an end to these unacceptable tactics which victimize innocent and helpless citizens. I have personally pursued and cooperated with the State Department with no real consequence to the effort. Unfortunately the process at hand proved overly time consuming and unproductive considering the intense urgency of the situation.

Mr. President we appeal to you, as the leader of the free world, to do all that you can within the power and authority of your office, to secure the safe return of all these innocent victims. This Christmas season is a blessed time of the year, and a kind and peace-loving gesture of this magnitude would be very timely and much appreciated. May God bless you, your family and the United States of America.

Sincerely yours,

Cyril Aphrem Karim, Archbishop

**CENTRAL FALLS CHURCH MARKS 100 YEARS AS HAVEN FOR PERSECUTED**

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL





CENTRAL FALLS — On Sunday, the bright new bell in front of St. Ephraim Syriac Orthodox Church will ring out for the first time. It will signal more than time for worship. It will ring out in testament to a faith that has traveled a great distance and survived many tribulations. And it will ring out in hope of an even stronger future. The St. Ephraim parish is celebrating its centennial — 100 years of being part of Central Falls and 100 years of offering sanctuary to many Christians who have had to flee their homelands in the Middle East.

The Syriac Orthodox Church, the oldest Christian church in the world, began putting down roots in the United States around the turn of the century as its members were fleeing persecution in parts of Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, according to parish members. Ephraim Doumato, a lifelong member the church, describes the parish as a close-knit family that shares religion, cultural traditions and love for this country.

The parish will celebrate the centennial most of this weekend with an anniversary gala Saturday night at the Kirkbrae Country Club in Lincoln and a special service performed by Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim on Sunday. “I am so very happy to be part of this church and its pastor at this time,” says the Very Reverend Mattias Alan Shaltan, who has led St. Ephraim since 2008. He says he is grateful not only to be part of the celebration but to share it with such devoted parishioners such as Doumato, who is the son of St. Ephraim’s retired, long-time pastor, the Very Reverend Abdulahad Doumato.

One visible sign that this is a special year is the gleaming new bronze bell on the front lawn of the modest yellow brick church on Washington Street. There are about 35 Syriac Orthodox Churches in the United States, according to the websites of the two dioceses that cover the country. Ephraim Doumato and fellow parishioner Pierre Ghazal, both of whom serve on the centennial committee, say that small number of Syriac Orthodox churches in this country adds to the feeling of family and connectivity with church leaders.

The Syriac Orthodox Church dates to 36 A.D. and is considered to be part of what is called the Oriental Orthodox family of churches. Its spiritual leader, now based in Damascus, Syria, is called the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, and is currently His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas. Doumato and Ghazal say that the St. Ephraim parish is growing, mostly due to an immigrant population as persecution of Christians escalates in the Middle East. They said that the local community takes heart, however, in their religion’s history of resilience, and the legacy of devotion left by the five men who founded St. Ephraim’s in 1913 for just a few families transplanted to an American mill village. St. Ephraim’s first two structures were destroyed by fire in 1939 and 1961. The current church was completed in 1963 and its amber windows fill its simple interior with golden light. The church, which

traces its roots to St. Peter the apostle, has held tightly to its history with its services here performed in three languages: Arabic, the ancient liturgical language of Aramaic, and English.

Father Shaltan says that English is being used more and more now, particularly in special ceremonies such as weddings and baptisms, as the church looks for ways to keep its younger members who are growing up as Americans. "They will decide our future," he said, noting that some of the parish youths will be making a presentation as part of the Saturday night celebration and it is not by accident that the centennial event is titled "The First 100 years." It is a challenge for all churches to keep a focus on faith these days with all the distractions of the 21st century America, Father Shaltan says. But, he and parishioners note that a strong love for this country and thankfulness for the refuge it offered earlier generations of Syriac Orthodox Church members are woven into the parish culture. "Central Falls and Rhode Island have been a great home to our community over the last 100 years," Father Shaltan said. "God willing, we will be here another 100 years."



#### **VERY REV. FR. SHAMOUN ASMAR PASSES AWAY**



Dear brothers and sisters:

It is with deep sorrow that we report the passing away of Very Rev. Father Shamoun Asmar, Pastor of Saint Barsawmo Church in Wyckoff, NJ who passed away on Monday, December 16, 2013.

#### **HIS EMINENCE PARTICIPATES IN THE ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS GRACE BISHOP DAVID**



On Saturday December 7, 2013, His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim participated in the installation of His Grace, Bishop David as the first Bishop for the newly- formed Coptic Diocese of New York and New England. He was accompanied by the Very Rev. Father Gabriel Adde and Shamosho Esia Bahdi. During the ceremony, His Eminence congratulated His Grace on behalf of The Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese, as well as on behalf of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Bishops in the United States. It was an uplifting spiritual gathering for Clergy and Parishioners to enjoy in this holy occasion, the love, concord and harmony among the churches, which the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His followers to have.

We wish His Grace, Bishop David, success in his new mission, asking God Almighty to give him His holy guidance, wisdom and good health.

#### **NATIONAL CHRISTIAN LEADERS OPPOSE MASS INCARCERATION**

Newark, NJ—Christian leaders sat transfixed as Rev. Darren Ferguson, pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Far Rockaway, NY, told the story of his decline from adolescent years with promise to incarceration and God’s power to restore and redeem. The leaders of Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A represent the broadest coalition of church leaders in the United States, including: Historic Protestant, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Catholic, Orthodox, and Historic Black Churches. They came together for the group’s annual meeting in Newark, NJ, February 4–7. On this night, the leaders were struck by one thing: Jesus loves the prisoner and he was one.

For the past six years, CCT has educated itself and taken action on issues of poverty, racial justice, and immigration reform. This year, the group furthered its commitment to these issues by engaging the issue of mass incarceration in the U.S.

The message was clear from speakers that included formerly incarcerated faith leaders, a federal judge, a former prosecutor, a director of state corrections and a social worker, as well as the deliberation among CCT participants: Mass Incarceration is not just an issue. It is first and foremost about people created in God’s image with lives, families, hopes, and dreams ensnared within a web of personal struggles and choices exacerbated by social conditions, laws, structures, and historic dehumanization of people of color.

Mass incarceration is a destructive system of human control where certain ethnic minorities experience inequitable interaction with the nation’s penal system. Current realities include:

- With only 5 percent of the world’s population, the U.S has 25 percent of the world’s imprisoned people. (The Sentencing Project)

- Incarceration rates have increased from 500,000 inmates in jail and prison in 1980 to more than 2.2 million in 2010. (The Sentencing Project)
- For--profit prison companies commonly demand 90 percent occupancy from the states that contract with them. (6 Shocking Revelations about how private prisons make money, by April M. Short on Salon.com)
- CCA and Geo Group, the nation's two major private prison companies, "have had a hand in shaping and pushing for criminal justice policies such as mandatory minimum sentences that favor increased incarceration." (In the Public Interest Report, September 2013)
- The "War on Drugs" dramatically increased the U.S. prison population from 41,000 drug offenders in 1980 to half a million in 2010. (The Sentencing Project)
- African Americans make up 13 percent of the U.S. population and use drugs at the same rates as people of other races, but represent 45 percent of those imprisoned for drug violations. (Drug Policy Alliance Report)
- Criminal prosecutions of immigration suspects in federal court districts along the U.S. southern border have increased by 1,475 percent over the last 20 years resulting in increased demand for prisons and detention centers to hold inmates (War on Undocumented Immigrants Threatens to Swell U.S. Prison Population, by Chris Kirkham on Huffington Post and TRAC Reports)
- 1 in 3 Black men and 1 in 6 Latino men are likely to be imprisoned in their lifetime. Only 1 in 17 white men will experience the inside of a jail or prison in his lifetime. (The Sentencing Project)

In light of these facts and others corroborated by the personal testimonies of several speakers, agreement among CCT's leaders was palpable. The group declared:

The church in the United States has a moral and ethical imperative to protect human dignity and must address the problem of mass incarceration in our nation.

First, we recognize that the legacy of the dehumanization of people of color has borne lasting effects in current--day society. These effects are perhaps most acutely experienced by our African--American brothers and sisters who were deemed non--human, "chattel," by law in the days of antebellum slavery and whose human equality was challenged by the Jim Crow system of subjugation until passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 attempted to right it. We see the vestiges of these systems of human control in America's current system of mass incarceration.

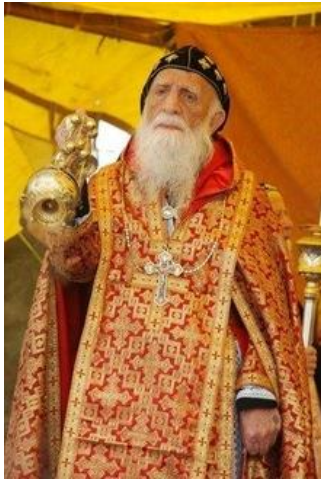
Second, we recognize that these systems are not only affecting African--Americans. They are now impacting all people of color, the poor, the marginalized, and the immigrant in the United States. Latinos and other immigrants, in particular, are experiencing the brunt of increased detention rates in the midst of their struggle for immigration reform.

Third, while there is a role for prisons to address violent offenses, we recognize that our nation's justice system has lost the hope embodied by its historic vision to "correct" and restore broken people back to society. As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe in the redemption and reconciliation of all things, rather than retribution. This includes the prisoner and broken systems. This is the essence of the gospel.

As Christian leaders, CCT declared: “Mass incarceration must stop. We are challenging ourselves together with government and the nation to seize this moment when multiple forces are aligning toward positive action to correct the injustices within our ‘justice’ system.”

CCT in the U.S.A. is encouraging its member denominations and organizations to increase awareness, educate, and take action to oppose mass incarceration in the public square. CCT also committed to developing guiding principles for the Church in its efforts.

#### HIS EMINENCE MOR DIONYSIOS BEHNAME JIJAWI SLEEPS IN THE LORD



With great sorrow we announce the passing away of His Eminence, Mor Dionysios Behname Jijawi in Malikiyeh, Syria. He passed away on Sunday the 16th of February 2014, after celebrating the Holy Qurbano on All Priests’ Day. The late Archbishop was born in 1925 in Mosul, Iraq. He was the former Archbishop of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. In 1999, he retired at the Archdiocese of Al Jezira & Euphrates, Syria, and took residence at the Monastery of the Virgin Mary in Hassakeh.

In his long life, Mor Dionysios Jijawi was honored with many medals by the Patriarchate, for his good services, especially at his Episcopal Golden Anniversary.

His Eminence will be remembered for his eloquent sermons and good literary background.

*THE ARCHDIOCESE HOSTS THE ANNUAL MEETING OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TOGETHER*



His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, Archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese for the Eastern United States, hosted a dinner on Thursday, February 6th for participants of the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Christian Churches Together.

Christian Churches Together offers a space inclusive of the diversity of Christian traditions in the United States-Evangelical/Pentecostal, Orthodox, Catholic, Historic Protestant, Historic Black churches and Christian organizations. It is unique in providing a venue where these communions, representing over one hundred million Christians, come together to pray together, discern the will of the Holy Spirit, engage in respectful theological dialogue, provide fellowship and mutual support and seek common actions and statements.

CCT, of which our Archdiocese is a founding member, is the only Christian organization which brings together all traditions of the Christian faith in the USA. The theme of this year's meeting was the issue of Mass Incarceration.

The dinner was held at the social hall of St. Mark's Cathedral in Teaneck, New Jersey. Approximately one hundred members of the organization attended a prayer service at St. Mark's Cathedral. Jimmy Zaitoun, a member of the St. Mark's parish, was asked to speak on his personal experience of being unfairly detained for deportation for over a year. Special prayers were also said for the safe return of the two abducted Archbishops of Aleppo Syria: Archbishop Mor Gregorius Youhanna Ibrahim and Archbishop Boulous Yazigi.

At the conclusion of the prayer service the attendees were invited to the social hall to break bread together. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim blessed the meal and invited everyone to partake in the dinner. This time period afforded the attendees the opportunity to evaluate the day, and at the same time socialize in a relaxed environment with their peers. His Eminence thanked the Ladies Auxiliary of the Cathedral for preparing and serving the meal, and he also thanked the Children's Violin Ensemble of the Archdiocese, under the leadership of Mr. Elias Sarkar, for providing background music during dinner.

A photo opportunity followed before the wrap up, after which His Eminence thanked everyone for attending, and prayed for the safe return of those who traveled from far distances to participate in the 2014 Annual Meeting.



### [Kalpana for Sunday on the demise of His Holiness the Patriarch](#)

Blessings in our Lord Jesus Christ to our beloved Vicars, Associate Vicars, Board of Trustees and the spiritual children of our parishes in the Malankara Archdiocese in North America.

Dearly beloved,

It is with profound grief that we all received the sad news of the passing away of His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and the Supreme Head of the Syrian Orthodox Church. His Holiness was called to rest while in Germany on March 21st, 2014 after a lengthy struggle with disease and sickness. With his passing away, our Holy Church lost its leader, guide and teacher, and the role model.

Our entire Archdiocese is very much indebted to the Holy Father who not only created this Archdiocese but guided and supported in every time when it faced challenges. His Holiness loved our Archdiocese and its people very much for the steadfast faith and loyalty to the Holy Throne of Antioch. For our humble-self; this is a personal loss as a person who enjoyed the unconditional love and care for the last

17 years. His Holiness will be remembered for his multifaceted leadership in bringing the Holy Church to the new millennium.

The viewing and the funeral service will be held on Wednesday & Thursday (March 26,27) in Lebanon and after the services, the body will be taken to Damascus for burial. A delegation from our archdiocese will be attending the funeral service in Lebanon. Those who wish to join with the delegation, may contact the diocesan office.

We hereby declare a mourning of 40 days in honor of the departed Patriarch. We also advise all our parishes to offer special service and the Divine Liturgy for the peaceful rest of the departed soul. We extend our paternal blessings. May the Grace of God be with you.

### [The Service of Zuyoho for the late Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka](#)

Comment by Dr. George Kiraz:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHZsi73AK2Q&feature=youtu.be>

The Service of Zuyoho for the late Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka I (last Sunday in Germany). The service is unique to the Syriac tradition during which the Patriarch is carried by the bishops to the four sides of the church. On each side, they knock the coffin three times against the altar or the church walls.

During the service, a bishop chants on behalf of the deceased "Phush Bashlom" (remain in peace O altar, O church, O faithful, etc.), the clergy then respond "Zel Bashlom..." (go in peace). It is then a moving farewell act. [When one leave someone's home after a visit, the guest says "phush bashlom" and the host says "zel bashlom".]

It is difficult to provide an English equivalent to the Syriac word Zuyoho. It is derived from a verb which means "to put in motion", "to move something", "to lift up something". The Order of Zuyoho embodies all of these meanings as one will see from the video below.

While the bishop get ready to carry the coffin, the clergy are chanting the Lord's prayer.

### [Video: Mortal remains of Moran being brought to St. George Cathedral](#)

The Mortal remains of Moran being brought to St. George Cathedral, Damascus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0hMIXbJlyM#t=261> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0hMIXbJlyM#t=261>

### [Video: Mortal Remains Being Taken to Damascus](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=609140622512702>

### [Final Journey into the Tomb: Video](#)

Burial of Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I was I

Final Journey into the tomb video:



<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=609355679157863> <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=609355679157863>

Patriarch Elect Aphrem II Karim (Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch for the Eastern United States of America ), 123rd Patriarch of Universal Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch.



## Other Related News

### From The U.S. To Russia, 2013 Was The Year LGBT Rights Went Global

By Daisy Sindelar

December 31, 2013

Yelena Goltsman describes June 30, 2013, as one of the best days of her life -- and also one of the worst.

On the one hand, it was the day that she and other Russian-speaking members of New York's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community debuted the [first-ever Russian float](#) in the city's annual Gay Pride parade.

The parade came just days after [landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings](#) bolstering the right of same-sex couples to marry. Goltsman, who had immigrated from Soviet Ukraine years before coming out in New York, said she was "elated" to be recognized as equal with fellow American citizens.

But on the other hand, for the parade's Russian-speakers, there was a darker side as well. Russian President Vladimir Putin had chosen the same day to sign a [law prohibiting gay propaganda](#), a sweeping setback in a country that had decriminalized homosexuality 20 years earlier.

At such moments, "it's very difficult to live in both worlds," Goltsman says. "The parade and the signing of this document happened on the same day. You can't describe it any other way than bittersweet."

### From Shadows To Center Stage

As the United States in 2013 marked a historic breakthrough in LGBT rights, Russia witnessed some notorious lows. Putin's regressive new law accompanied a horrific wave of violence, with gay men [assaulted](#) and [killed](#), same-sex parents [threatened with losing their children](#), and [LGBT activists brutally beaten](#) in plain view of police.

Putin, who has sought to muzzle all forms of dissent since returning to the presidency last year, might have expected such domestic incidents to pass unnoticed. But two things stood in his way: the growing globalization of the LGBT movement, and Russia's high-stakes role as the host of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games.

If two years ago, the plight of Russian gays ranked low on the Western rights agenda, in 2013 it was front and center -- inspiring diplomatic pressure, [vodka-dumping campaigns](#), celebrity support from the likes of Madonna and Lady Gaga, and even a special mention in the U.S. satirical "Mad" magazine's list of the year's 20 "dumbest" things.



Gay rights activist Yelena Goltsman

For its part, Goltsman's organization, [RUSA LGBT](#), has demonstrated on Wall Street during a visit by a Russian business delegation, and recently picketed New York's Metropolitan Opera during an [opening-night gala](#) attended by Valery Gergiev, the artistic director of St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theater and a close friend of Putin's.

Such demonstrations proved effective attention-getters in the United States. But Goltsman said RUSA, which works closely with LGBT groups in the former Soviet Union, had to reconsider their approach when it came to a major global event like Sochi.

"We had advocated from the very beginning for a boycott of the Sochi Olympics," she says. "But our counterparts in Russia, for the most part, are against boycotting Sochi. They would like to use this opportunity and highlight to the world what is going on with the rights of LGBT people in Russia. So we kind of scaled back the intensity of our campaign."

### **'Standing Alone'**

Rather than an outright boycott, many LGBT activists have now instead set their sights on [criticizing corporate sponsors](#) backing the billion-dollar Sochi games, whose start date is less than six weeks away.

The IOC has acknowledged that several of the sponsors -- including major international corporations like McDonald's, Procter & Gamble, and Coca-Cola -- have expressed concern about potential unrest at the Games and how it may affect their bottom line. But for the most part, few of the sponsors have expressed willingness to press Russia and the IOC for a stronger commitment to LGBT rights.

Other organizations are looking for ways to promote an agenda of nondiscrimination without violating Olympic rules prohibiting political statements.



Youths kick a gay rights activist during a protest in central Moscow in June, 2013.

Two groups, All Out and Athlete Ally, in early December launched a campaign, called [Principle 6](#) that would allow competing athletes and spectators to wear T-shirts and other clothing citing the IOC's own mission statement, which declares any form of discrimination to be "incompatible" with the Olympic movement.

Andre Banks is co-founder of All Out, a political mobilization group which has 1.9 million members worldwide. He says the intense focus on Sochi, combined with the wave of marriage-equality rulings in countries like the United States and France, have permanently transformed the fight for LGBT rights into a global human rights cause where change is likely to come sooner rather than later.

"People are picking up on the momentum from places like the United States that have had some important policy victories," says Banks. "And they're using that to build positive global momentum for the kinds of changes that would make it possible to get rid of laws that still make it a crime to be gay in 76 countries."

Some government leaders have initiated their own form of pressure, by announcing they will not attend the Sochi Olympics. Francois Hollande and Joachim Gauck, the presidents of France and Germany, are skipping the Winter Games, as are Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. President Barack Obama, who is sending in his stead a delegation that includes a number of prominent gay athletes.

"We want to see Putin standing alone," Goltsman says.

## Changing Neighborhood

In the post-Soviet arena, there is cautious optimism that the movement will continue to gain strength even once the Olympics are over.

[Moldova this year held its first sanctioned pride parades](#), and became the first former republic to team up with the "It Gets Better" video campaign targeting LGBT youth. Amnesty International has launched a [letter-writing campaign](#) in support of a Belarusian gay activist, Ihar Tsikhanyuk, who was beaten by police.

And there is slow progress in Russia as well. The ["It Gets Better"](#) campaign has launched a special program sending translated messages of support to Russia ahead of the Sochi Games. And several American filmmakers -- including director Gus Van Sant and screenwriter Dustin Lance Black -- attended the recent Side by Side LGBT film festival in St. Petersburg, despite five bomb threats and hostile attacks by Russian nationalists.

Sasha Semyonova is the communications director for the Petersburg-based group [Vykhod](#), or Coming Out. She says the wave of global attention has been a boon to the Russian LGBT movement.

But what heartens her most, she says as she looks forward to the year ahead, is that more and more straight, nonpolitical Russians are beginning to understand that LGBT rights are just part of a wider struggle for basic human rights in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

"Most people used to be passive, and never expressed the desire to defend their rights -- many, to the contrary, said that the actions of activists was harmful to them," says Semyonova. "But now, thanks to the worsening situation and attacks, more and more members of society are acknowledging that it's important to fight for their rights."

## Russian emigre theologians in Paris from 1920s through WWII

*The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and Their Journal, 1925-1940*

Antoine Arjakovsky

Translated by Jerry Ryan • Edited by John A. Jillions and Michael Plekon • Foreword by Rowan Williams

In the summer of 1922, Soviet leaders Lenin and Trotsky expelled a number of progressive intellectuals who were leaders in the renaissance of religious and philosophical thought then underway in Russia. The "philosophers' boat," as it came to be called, took such luminaries as Nicholas Berdyaev, Simon Frank, Sergius Bulgakov, and Nicholas Lossky first to Istanbul, then by stages to Prague, some to Berlin and Belgrade, then to Paris, with a few eventually ending up in New York and Boston. In the years between the wars, the émigrés turned their "Russian Paris" into a bazaar of fascinating creativity and dynamism in the arts, humanities, and politics. Once in Paris, Berdyaev established a journal which he named *Put'*—"The Way"—using the name of a progressive review back in Russia. In its pages, the legacy of pre-Revolutionary debates, in which aesthetics, politics, and theology mingled freely, was displayed in a lively philosophical mix alien to Western readers.

Antoine Arjakovsky takes *The Way* and its diverse contributors as the coordinates for his masterful assessment of what these Russians—many Orthodox Christians—brought from their tradition and experiences to the West. In the first sustained study of the Russian émigré intellectuals who were associated with *The Way*, Arjakovsky situates the entire generation in a broad historical and intellectual context. He provides assessments of Berdyzev, Bulgakov, Florovsky, Nicholas and Vladimir Lossky, Mother Maria Skobtsova, and Afanasiev, and compares their philosophical agreements and conflicts. He examines their intense commitment to freedom, their often contentious struggles to bring the Christian tradition as experienced in the Eastern Church into conversation with Christians in the West, and their distinctive contributions to Western theology and ecumenism. Arjakovsky also charts the relationships the émigré thinkers established with significant Western theologians such as Jacques Maritain, Yves-Marie Congar, Henri de Lubac, and Jean Daniélou, who provided the intellectual underpinnings of Vatican II.

“In this welcome and deeply stimulating book . . . Professor Arjakovsky has offered a treasury of material . . . as well as . . . a story of extraordinary intellectual adventure in the most challenging of circumstances.” —**from the Foreword by Rowan Williams**

“The journal *The Way* was the heartbeat of the Russian religious intelligentsia from 1925 until the end of World War II, and no more creative band of religious thinkers existed anywhere in the world at the time than this small group of Russians coordinated by the indefatigable Berdyaev. This book is an extraordinarily rich study that deserves to be widely known. Its subject is of the first order of importance for modern intellectual history.” —**Paul Valliere, Butler University**

**Antoine Arjakovsky** is research director at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris and founding director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies and professor of ecumenical theology at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine.

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## A Summary of “Psychology in Russia: Past, Present, Future”

Christopher Casais

International School for Mental Health Practitioners

This 19 of March, 2014, at Marymount Manhattan College, was held an event entitled, “*Psychology in Russia: Past, Present, Future.*” The event was coordinated by Dr. Harold Takooshian, professor of psychology at Fordham University and the psychology department at Marymount Manhattan College.

The event discussed the results of an empirical study performed by the social and differential psychology department at the People’s Friendship University of Russia (PFUR). The study, entitled *Tolerance Types and Features of Intercultural Adaptation in International Students* (Irina A. Novikova & Alexey L. Novikov, 2013) sought to determine the tolerance types and intercultural adaptation in international students enrolled in PFUR from countries within Asia, Africa, and countries in the Middle East and Latin America. The speakers discussed how a major reason for undertaking this study was to understand the effects of the increasing multiculturalization and internationalization of universities, most specifically, their own (PFUR). This internationalization, according to the authors of the study, has led to significant changes in the educational environment and in personal self-realization conditions.

The study cited socialization, emotional intelligence, hardiness, tolerance, coping strategies, gender, values, ethnic identity, the year of learning and the region where the student is from as key factors to adaptation in other cultures. One of the most important factors of intercultural communication and adaptation is tolerance, which is defined as an attitude or value that accepts the rights of other people to behave and think in a different way from their own.

Tolerance was measured using L.V. Yankovsky’s The Questionnaire of Adaptation of the Person to the New Socio-Cultural Environment (APSCE). A modified version of the aforementioned questionnaire was used for the international students. The questionnaire included six scales, of which the first three (contentment, interactivity, conformity) corresponded to positive intercultural adaptation indicators. The last three scales (nostalgia, depression, alienation) indicated certain adaptation problems. The results showed that students from Central Asia and Latin America have the most harmonious style of intercultural adaptation. Contrariwise, Middle Eastern and African students had the most controversial and least effective style of adaptation.

After presenting their empirical study to the audience at Marymount Manhattan College, a question-and-answer forum took place. The audience, which consisted of a vast majority of visiting professors and practitioners of psychology and a smaller number of students from undergraduate and graduate institutions, posed many challenging questions regarding the empirical study. One such question, by a neurologist from NYU Langone Medical Center, proposed the possibility that the international students at PFUR may have self-selected the school because of its already known positive attitude towards tolerance and internationalization. If so, this self-selection bias would render the results of this study non-generalizable. Another question was offered by a professor from Columbia who questioned if intelligence had been measured in addition to the other components of the APSCE.

Overall, however, the study was conclusive in demonstrating that tolerance is at least somewhat correlated with the constructs of depression, nostalgia and alienation.

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