

Spring 2014

INTERACTION

SPECIAL EDITION: WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

A UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE PUBLICATION



As part of this year's World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrations, youth from various faiths - including URI young leader Sharon Vaswani (far right) - presented the UN action song, "Harmonize" during the *Love & Peace Celebrations* held at the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Buddhist Temple in Manila, Philippines.



Dear Friends,

World Interfaith Harmony Week is a time for us to embody the dream of the peoples of the planet living in peace. So often we talk about peace and our hopes for a future moment of a peaceful world, but too often this vision remains just words spoken of some future moment rather than as a lived reality practiced every day.

Around the globe, World Interfaith Harmony Week is a time in which we are reminded that we are all fellow travelers on life's pathways. While we may speak of our experiences of the world using words that come from different ancient stories spoken in different languages, when we look into each other's eyes, when we take each other's hands, we can see and feel in each other the light of which all of our traditions speak. In these moments, we are *being* peace.

As I see images and hear stories of the many activities during World Interfaith Harmony Week throughout the URI network in which people of different cultures and religions are coming together to practice peace, I am reminded of the words of Mahatma Gandhi who said "I offer you peace. I offer you love. I offer you friendship. I see your beauty. I hear your need. I feel your feelings. Your wisdom flows from the Highest Source. I salute that Source in you. Let us work together for unity, love, justice and peace."

We thank HM King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein and HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad for partnering with the United Nations and interfaith leaders from around the world in creating this magnificent celebration.

The 625 Cooperation Circles in 84 countries that form the United Religions Initiative community extend our deep gratitude as we celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week. Thank you.

In peace,

The Rev. Victor H. Kazanjian, Jr.
Executive Director
United Religions Initiative (URI)

OUR NEW COOPERATION CIRCLES

URI's grassroots network now includes 625 CCs in 84 countries around the world.

December 2013

Albadiya for Intercultural Dialogue Initiative (AIDI) (Adroh-Maan, Jordan - Middle East & North Africa)

January 2014

Gulshan Foundation CC (Satara, India - Asia)

Safar CC (Ahmedabad, India - Asia)

UDAAN CC (Ahmedabad, India - Asia)

Coexister (Paris, France - Europe)

Action of Dialogue & Development for Life (ADD for Life) (Deir-Koubel, Lebanon - Middle East & North Africa)

February 2014

Powdikkonam CC Trivandrum (Kerala, South Zone, India - Asia)

Ur for Interfaith Dialogue & Peacemaking (Baghdad, Iraq - Middle East & North Africa)

Andalus institute for tolerance and anti-violence studies (Kasserine, Tunisia - Middle East & North Africa)

Awakening Humanity To Oneness With All Nature (AHOWAN) (Multiregion)

Charlotte Red Bench Garden (Matthew, North Carolina, USA - North America)

Silicon Valley Interreligious Council (SiVIC) (San Jose, California, USA - North America)

March 2014

Prometra Uganda (Kampala, Uganda - Africa)

Light of Hope CC (Lahore, Pakistan - Asia)

Alianza por la Espiritualidad, Maya Q'eqchi', Mopán e Itzaj-APEM CC (Petén, Guatemala - Latin America & the Caribbean)

Being There (Charlotte, North Carolina, USA - North America)

NOWTIME Radio (Multiregion)

Youth Center for Development (Sangkat Boeung, Cambodia - Southeast Asia & the Pacific)

A-CAUSE-TICS (Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines - Southeast Asia & the Pacific)

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Faiths Together Uganda CC's Cultural Troupe, comprised of students from the schools that the CC supports, perform traditional dances at Goma Health Center.

AT URI, WE ARE INTERFAITH HARMONY

The United Nations (UN) designated the first week in February as World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) in 2011 in a General Assembly resolution initiated by HM King Abdullah II of Jordan. At its inception, URI embraced this opportunity to highlight our dedication to promoting interfaith cooperation with programs throughout the world and at the UN.

“World Interfaith Harmony Week is a wonderful time for URI to connect with the United Nations resolution and to get people of every faith to know that they are appreciated,” said Monica Willard, URI’s representative at the UN. “In the UN resolution, it calls upon people of different religions to think about the love of neighbor, the love of God, and the love of good. It just makes my heart sing.”

From New York to Manila, our Cooperation Circles (CCs) sent us incredibly joyful celebrations. Gatherings ranged from a handful of participants reaching out to their communities, to hundreds of people reflecting a growing community of peacebuilders. What some events lacked in size, they made up for in spirit.

This year, the judges of King Abdullah’s World Interfaith Harmony Week organization gave URI an honorable mention. More importantly, they awarded a URI CC - Faiths Together Uganda CC - Third Place for its celebrations.

“[This award] comes at a time when we needed it to help the growing generation truly understand the need and reward of passionately demonstrating faith as a force for good,” said Faiths Together Uganda director Micheal Buyondo. “URI unlocked our potential as a grassroots interfaith organization in a small town of Seta in the Mukono district of Uganda. It’s our wish that the award draws many young people and organizations into joining the great cause of peacebuilding.”

“We should strive to create a world filled with hope not hate, as we embrace interfaith and inter-culture as a new model of resolving conflict worldwide.”

Michael Buyondo, Director, Faiths Together Uganda

WIHW has engaged prominent UN partners in internationally recognized interfaith activities, supported by Monica Willard, former President of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN, and Deborah Moldow, URI-UN CC. In 2012, WIHW was hosted by the 66th President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, currently the High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations. In 2013, WIHW was hosted by the 67th President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremic.

This year, URI co-sponsored “Engaging Religions in the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes,” a special event featuring Special Representative Mr. Adama Dieng, Office of Genocide Prevention. Consolee Nishimwe shared her terrifying and inspiring story of survival during the Rwandan Genocide, finding refuge with a Muslim family. Rabbi Roger Ross, URI-UN CC member, closed the event with a call for religious leaders and people of faith to recognize their abilities to prevent genocide.

“World Interfaith Harmony Week provides the annual opportunity to share who we are around the world,” said Monica. “URI is interfaith harmony in action!”

This is the fourth year in a row that World Interfaith Harmony Week has been celebrated by URI at the UN and across the globe. Although every week at URI we are engaging in interfaith harmony, the official celebrations give the guiding lights of URI a chance to shine a little brighter.

“World Interfaith Harmony Week is a wonderful opportunity to share what United Religions Initiative (URI) was created to do: **build meaningful interfaith connections that work towards peace.**”



Gathering for sacred readings and prayers in Caracas

URI Latin America & the Caribbean

In **Latin America**, URI CC members came together at the Diocesan Center of the Anglican Episcopal Church in Caracas, Venezuela for “*Cantana: Sacred Readings and Interfaith Prayers For Peace and Reconciliation*.” The event was meant to inspire peace and harmony towards reconciliation and unity. Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Buddhists, Baha’is, Brahma Kumaris and Hare Krishnas were all in attendance at the Diocesan Center of the Anglican Episcopal Church in Caracas. The event’s host, Monsignor Orlando Guerrero Bishop of Venezuela, is both nationally and internationally known for his interfaith work.

URI Southeast Asia & the Pacific

Performing songs of peace and driving discussions

On February 1st, **URI South East Asia and the Pacific (SEA-Pac)** joined in the *Love and Peace Celebrations* held at the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Buddhist Temple in Manila, Philippines for interfaith prayers and songs. The guest of honor for the event was Former First Lady Imelda Marcos, and was attended by more than 100 people.

On February 7th, the **SEA-Pac Regional Office**, in cooperation with De La Salle University, hosted an enthusiastic focus group discussion with 15 student leaders under the theme “*Interfaith Tomorrow from the Lens of the Youth Today.*”

Mindanao Peace Garden CC held interfaith lectures and prayers with more than 175 participants of various faiths, focusing on the theme “*In Search of Truth for Unity and Harmony in Service to God.*”

URI Europe

Engaging students in peacebuilding workshops and intercultural prayers

URI Europe and **URI Poland** helped organize the interfaith workshop “*Building & Maintaining Peace, Prosperity, and Personal Wellbeing in Poland*” bringing hundreds of participants to Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University. In Austria, **Lienz/Austria** celebrated with more than 300 students for an intercultural breakfast, book fair of Holy Scriptures, and prayer service.



Bringing children together to pray, sing and paint

URI Asia

URI Asia Coordinator Jinwol Lee went to Seoul, where **URI Korea MCC** leaders gathered to commemorate World Interfaith Harmony Week with interfaith prayers and lunch.

Karickam International Public School, a CC in Kerala, India, held an interfaith prayer ceremony with nearly 500 students, holding painting and elocution contests under the theme “*The Impact of World Interfaith Harmony Week for Peace.*”

In URI Pakistan, **Women and Kids’ Education (WAKE) CC** held Muslim and Christian prayers and, later, children recited prayers, peace songs, and poems. **BETHAK-Pakistan CC** in Khanewal celebrated with “*Peace Cultural Festival!*”

“At URI, our motto is ‘**Bound for Peace.**’ We live and breathe these words, and are honored to be a part of this celebration.”

URI Executive Director Victor Kazanjian, in his Letter of Affirmation to King Abdullah II of Jordan

URI Africa

Faiths Together Uganda CC organized a blood drive, provided HIV testing, painted local buildings, and enjoyed traditional dances from the West Nile, Congo, and Uganda. The event was held at Goma Health Center III, where participants also prayed for the sick.

World Interfaith Harmony Week was also celebrated by **URI Africa** and the **Sikh Women Society Kenya** on February 3rd at the East African Ramgarhia Sikh Temple Pangani. Among the participants were: Sikh Women Society Kenya, Damietta Peace Initiative, Respect Foundation, Brahma Kumaris, Theosophical Society, and local members of the media. Attendees discussed the challenges faced by women at home and at the workplace, with an emphasis on the increase in rape cases and domestic violence.



Advancing women's rights, making time to dance

URI Middle East & North Africa

Reaching out to Syrians and gathering for dialogue, peace workshops and yoga

URI Middle East and North Africa (MENA) organized “*Yoga for Peace and Harmony*” along the Jordan River at the Baptism Site of Jesus Christ, one of the holiest spots in Jordan for many Abrahamic Religions’ followers. Also in Jordan, **Gathering for Happiness CC** hiked around the city collecting funds to buy blankets for Syrian families in Jordan. **Al Badiya for Intercultural Dialogue CC**, also in Amman, held a one-day workshop on volunteer work and interculturalism for students aged 5-18, emphasizing the role and impact of voluntary work, as well as intercultural cooperation, in building communities.

Also in the MENA region, Iraq’s **Ur for Interfaith Dialogue & Peacemaking**, one of URI’s newest CCs, organized the lecture “*Rights of Minorities Under Islamic Rule*” in collaboration with the College of Applied Sciences at the University of Karbala. They began the event by reading scriptures of holy books from diverse religious traditions such as Ginza Rabba, Old Testament, New Testament, and the Qur’an.

URI Multiregion

Supporting unheard voices on the air

Global Indigenous Initiative Coordinator Audri Scott Williams launched an online radio show, “*Indigenous Voices.*” It is set to engage in discussions with indigenous activists and artists, and featured Victor Kazanjian, URI Executive Director, for its first broadcast.

URI North America

More than 400 people of 14 different faiths attended an interfaith celebration held at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Syracuse, New York, in an event sponsored by Interfaith Works of Central New York and **Women Transcending Boundaries CC**. With the Golden Rule as a theme, traditional songs were performed live and prayers from various faiths including Zen Buddhism and Goddess Faith/Wicca were held.



Joining hands for music and inspiration



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Imagine a **worldwide network** of dedicated organizations and committed individuals **bridging cultures** and **building peace**.

A graphic consisting of three vertical panels with a background of yellow and orange diagonal lines. The left panel is green and contains the text "You +". The middle panel is blue and contains the text "600,000 Other People Committed to". The right panel is orange and contains the text "Peace + Justice". An equals sign "=" is positioned between the middle and right panels, forming the equation "You + 600,000 Other People Committed to = Peace + Justice".

You + 600,000 Other People Committed to = Peace + Justice

Join our Global Community!

find out more at uri.org/get_involved/supportingmembership