

Spring 2016

INTERACTION

PEACEBUILDING AND THE ARTS



Dancers perform in PANGEA, paying homage to one land and one Earth, reminding us that we are all connected. It was showcased at the 8th Australia Day Concert in Melbourne in 2011, and was directed by Peter Mousaferiadis, URI Global Council Trustee and CEO of Cultural Infusion, a URI Cooperation Circle.

A UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE PUBLICATION



Dear Friends,

This issue of InterAction focuses on the Arts - painting, sculpture, music, dance, and other methods of creative expression - as key approaches for peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue.

We are honored to highlight the efforts of several outstanding URI Cooperation Circles (CCs) - APEM, CARAVAN, Cultural Infusion, Ektaan, Faiths Together Uganda, Interkultureller Kreis URI Bonn, Springtide Opus, Salam Shabab, and Think Peace International - all of whom will also be featured at URI's 2016 Circles of Light gala this April. Those attending the San Francisco gala in person will be able to enjoy sculptures, paintings, music, photography, and dance, showcasing additional CCs such as Aflaii (Eterno), Heartbeat: Jerusalem, Umbiyozo Cultural Diversity, and The Voices of Peace CC. These are just a few among many CCs worldwide who use the art as a way of creating peace, justice, and healing. Our global URI family is invited to join the celebration by viewing the gala speeches on our website, engaging in social media activities, or reading and sharing this issue of InterAction with your network.

More than one fifth of URI's 775 CCs are engaged in the Arts in their peacebuilding effort across 95 countries. Through this work, they collaborate with their communities both locally and globally to bridge deep religious and cultural divides. They work together, promoting cultural and artistic expressions for the good of their communities and the world.

The support of URI's CCs and the power of URI's global network are made possible through the generosity of so many people around the world who believe in the mission of URI. I am so moved by the abundance of generosity through the URI community. Thank you for all that you give of your time, talents, and resources to sustain and strengthen the URI movement.

The Rev. Victor H. Kazanjian, Jr.
URI Executive Director

Welcome to our new Cooperation Circles!

JANUARY 2016

- Lower Shire Interfaith Assembly (Chikwawa, Malawi, URI Africa)
- Missao da Misericórdia Abranjente em Moçambique (Outreaching Mercy Mission in Mozambique) – MIMAMO (Lichinga, Niassa Province, Mozambique, URI Africa)
- Indlondlo Zulu Dancers Cultural and Art Centre (Durban, South Africa, URI Africa)
- Amalumbo Community Trust (Chipata, Zambia, URI Africa)
- Arunima Literary Club (Bangladesh, URI Asia)
- Bangladesh Minority Board (Bangladesh, URI Asia)
- St. Agnes Social Development Organization (Bangladesh, URI Asia)
- Interculturele Progressieve Stichting – IPS (Leidshendam, The Netherlands, URI Europe)
- Friendship Among Cultures in Turkey (Turkey, URI Europe)
- Yacu – Yura (Clear Waters) (Cordoba, Argentina, URI Latin America and the Caribbean)
- Comunidade Tao Judaica De Verdade (Goiânia, GoiásBrazil, URI Latin America and the Caribbean)
- LGBTQ CC (URI Multiregion based in Alabama, US)
- Asian Resource Foundation CC (Bangkok, Thailand, URI Southeast Asia and the Pacific)

FEBRUARY 2016

- Youthlead Africa (Somanya, Yilo Krobo, Ghana, URI Africa)
- Impart Liberia (Monrovia, Montserrado, Liberia, URI Africa)
- International Centre For Leadership Development Nigeria (Ikoyi, Lagos State, Nigeria, URI Africa)
- Qiaology Institute On Dialogue Of Civilizations (Xi'an, Shaanxi, China, URI Asia)
- Good Hope (Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India - North Zone, URI Asia)
- The World Religion And Tolerance Group (Gilbert, Arizona, USA, URI North America)
- Faith Ecology Network (North Sydney, Australia, URI Southeast Asia and the Pacific)

MARCH 2016

- PathWays for Diversity Education Inc. (Mont Albert North, Australia, URI Southeast Asia and the Pacific)
- African Youths Initiative on Crime Prevention (Lagos, Nigeria, URI Africa)
- CACOPA - The Central Africa Conflict Prevention Association (North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, URI Africa)
- Unite, Share For Peace & Prosperity (Johannesburg, South Africa, URI Africa)
- Council of Arakhna (Elders) and Wise (Minia, Egypt, URI Middle East and North Africa)

A Special THANK YOU to our Circles of Light Lead Sponsors!

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- Nicholas J. Weiser Foundation for Children

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- Margaret and Stephen Gill /
- The Stephen and Margaret Gill Family Foundation



Houssein Kazma's photo was one of the winning photos in 1000Kalema, a contest run by URI CCs Think Peace International and Naya CC.

The Fine Art of Peacebuilding

Artistic expression – through painting, sculpture, music, dance, and other methods of creative expression – is one of the key approaches that United Religions Initiative Cooperation Circles use to build bridges of peace and promote interfaith dialogue in their communities. In this issue of InterAction, we honor these grassroots groups.

"Any form of art is a strong unifying force that allows us to transcend religious and cultural ideology. The arts are a bridge that helps us connect at deeper levels and create a stronger bonding as human beings, leading to greater interfaith cooperation."

- Biswadeb Chakraborty, Musician, Peacebuilder and India National Coordinator for URI Asia

Through the arts, people are able to reach across barriers of language and culture, forming a basis for connection at a deep, human level. Through shared appreciation of a beautiful painting, or by sharing an emotional response to a piece of music, we can begin to form bonds with each other that transcend the artificial gulfs imposed by ignorance and harmful stereotypes. The arts allow us to reach within ourselves to appreciate our own humanity, and, in doing so, to connect with our fellow humans regardless of differences.

One of our outstanding Cooperation Circles using the arts for peacebuilding work is the Rothko Chapel, a North American group that brings together intellectuals, poets, musicians, and journalists to host free public exhibitions.

This makes social justice topics, ideas, and innovations available to a wider audience. "Action takes the form of supporting human rights, and thus the Chapel has become a rallying place for all people concerned with peace, freedom, and social justice throughout the world."

Promoting peace in the Middle East, Just Vision Cooperation Circle makes educational media as accessible as possible to journalists, educators and community leaders in order to broaden awareness about Israeli and Palestinian peace workers. They produce award-winning films, graphic novels and other forms of digital media in order to drive attention to compelling local role models in unarmed movement-building. "Through our work, we demonstrate to journalists, community leaders, the public, intellectuals, and students – in the US, Israel, Palestine and beyond – what is possible when leaders at the grassroots choose to act."

One of URI's Multiregion Cooperation Circles, CARAVAN, develops artistic initiatives to bring together the creeds and cultures of the Abrahamic faiths from the East and West. These include exhibitions, festivals, seminars, forums, lectures, concerts, screenings, exchanges, and other events that highlight the visual arts, music, literature, film, drama, and dance. Their visual art exhibition "THE BRIDGE" has been touring major cities worldwide to "enhance understanding, bring about respect, enable sharing, and deepen friendship" between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish faiths and cultures.

In addition to these Cooperation Circles, hundreds more Cooperation Circles are working every single day to increase interfaith dialogue and bring peace to their communities and the world through artistic expression.



Salam Shabab

(Morocco) URI Middle East and North Africa

Salam Shabab believes that music and art play a major role in building a community of love and peace. The group uses painting, music, speech, theater, storytelling, singing, and dancing, as well as Moroccan folkloric singing and traditional storytelling, to spread the culture of interfaith dialogue. They ran a mural project in educational institutions and forums to extend the culture of tolerance, dialogue and joint action, and to break hate speech. "We use art, video, and music of peace and tolerance in promotional activities because it reaches hearts and minds."

Interkultureller Kreis URI Bonn CC

(Germany) URI Europe

This group was formed in 2012 by Muslims, Catholics, Evangelical Christians, Baha'is, and Humanists from different European countries and cultural backgrounds. One current program involves members visiting Syrian refugee camps, which are often overcrowded, to work with children. This enables the adults to attend to other needs. They play with the children and run activities such as painting with them while teaching them the German language. Often, the children's mothers will join in the exercises as well.

Springtide Opus

(India) URI Asia

Springtide Opus, from Mumbai in West India, is composed of six musicians from three different religions who involve street children and orphans in constructive social activities as a means of bringing them hope and uplifting their lives. Using the media of art and music, Cooperation Circle members help children develop their skills and education. The groups strongly believes that if you want peace in the world, you have to start peacebuilding work with children. "Music is the best medium to reach anyone's heart, because everyone likes music. We hope for a day when all the children are protected against exploitation and have every opportunity for development."



Think Peace International

URI Multiregion

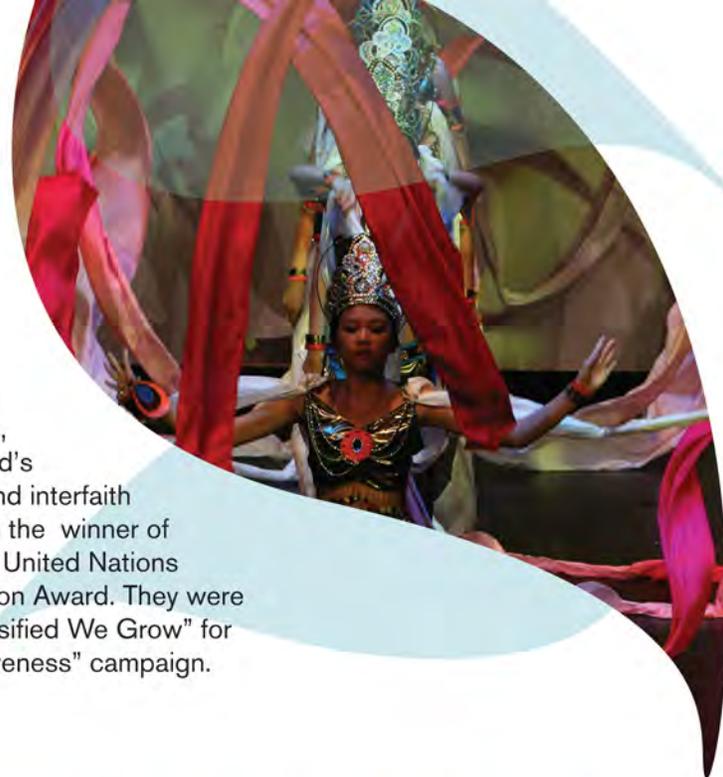
The mission of Think Peace is art, advocacy, and activism. In 2010, two unlikely individuals, one from the Middle East and another from the United States, came together to create an international photography competition. With almost 200 photographs submitted to the competition, more than 17 countries were represented in moments of "Inspiration, Poignancy, and Epiphany." The competition has evolved beyond simply sharing photographs, as the submissions provide material for dialogue and conversations that bring clarity and understanding among diverse communities.



Cultural Infusion

(Australia) URI Southeast Asia and the Pacific

Cultural Infusion is a social enterprise that works with schools, youth, and the arts to promote cultural harmony and diversity for a more cohesive and richer society. Cultural Infusion reaches more than 300,000 people each year, and has produced intercultural experiences at major events for organizations such as the United Nations, Commonwealth Games, and the Parliament of the World's Religions. They have also created a range of cultural and interfaith digital interactive products. Cultural Infusion has been the winner of more than 15 international awards, which include the United Nations Alliance of Civilization (UNAOC) Intercultural Innovation Award. They were recognized for developing the winning slogan "Diversified We Grow" for the UNAOC "Do One Thing for Diversity and Inclusiveness" campaign.



Alianza por la Espiritualidad, Maya Q'eqchi', Mopán e Itzaj (APEM)

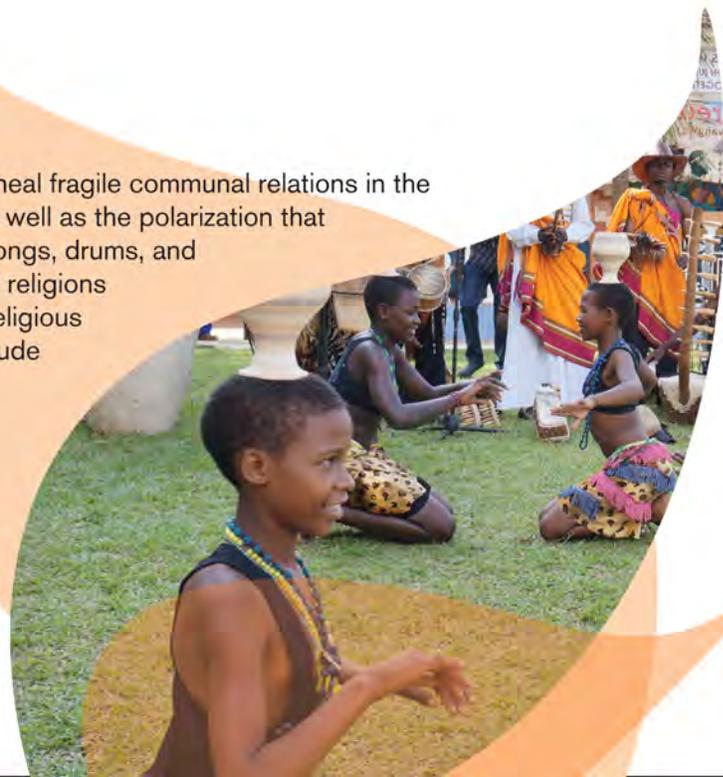
(Guatemala) URI Latin America and the Caribbean

This Cooperation Circle serves as a bridge between Mayan communities in Peten, Guatemala, and the non-Indigenous world. Members share the wisdom of their cultures through ceremonies, the use of plants in medicine, and the conservation and protection of natural resources through customary law. They also utilize this wisdom in music, decision-making, and systematic and unsystematic education. This group has had an important impact on women in Peten by training them in agriculture and crafts to promote the development of ancestral cultural practices based in the customary law and to expand their inter-religiosity to avoid religiously motivated violence.

Faiths Together Uganda

(Uganda) URI Africa

Faiths Together Uganda is actively working to heal fragile communal relations in the face of recent ethnic and religious violence, as well as the polarization that swept the country and region. Members use songs, drums, and dance to bring people of different cultures and religions together, in order to pass on the message of religious and ethnic tolerance. Their main programs include forming interfaith and intercultural clubs on school campuses, teaching peace drums, and organizing an intercultural performance troupe. Faiths Together Uganda has helped many youths forge strong relationships across cultural and religious lines through collaborative action and dialogue.





UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

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The background of the lower half of the page is a dark, starry field of golden light particles. A large, glowing ring of light, resembling a halo or a ring of fire, is centered in the frame. The text "circles of light" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, centered within the dark area of the ring.

circles of light

 URI's Annual Gala

Make your reservations for Circles of Light, URI's annual fundraising gala!

URI.ORG/GET_INVOLVED/CIRCLES_OF_LIGHT

For more information, call Diana Conan at (415) 762-2723 or send an email to events@uri.org.

URI is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization which relies solely on individual contributions to further its global efforts.