



Impact

2012
/ 2013
ANNUAL
REVIEW



Ripples of Peace

“ NEVER DOUBT
THAT A SMALL GROUP
OF THOUGHTFUL,
COMMITTED CITIZENS
CAN CHANGE
THE WORLD;
INDEED,
IT’S THE ONLY THING
THAT EVER HAS.”

— MARGARET MEAD

It is not only the simple act of help that is important. It is where that help comes from that determines how far it can go.

When help comes from a neighbor, or a friend, or someone in the community, there is an inherent trust and confidence that make it far more likely for positive change to occur. Even small acts of kindness can then extend to those we don’t know, those we see as different from us, creating ripples of peace that slowly and deliberately create a better world.

This approach to developing local, grassroots networks of social activism is at the heart of URI’s commitment to providing resources and support to those who work in their communities to build meaningful change.

It’s an approach that honors the unique religious and cultural heritage of each member, and allows those characteristics to bring out the best of every exchange. It allows peace to become – ripple by ripple – attainable.

Dear Friends

Change has come to the world, its immediacy undeniable. In Pakistan, religious intolerance and a relentless Taliban presence have threatened countless lives, taking URI's own Cooperation Circle founder and youth leader Irfan Ali in a deadly bomb blast in Quetta. The bright future we once saw for Egypt has been marred by brutal violence and the tragic destruction of countless places of worship.

URI's purpose of ending religiously motivated violence and building cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings grows more urgent with each passing day. And it is your involvement in URI that makes all the difference.

Our grassroots approach to peacebuilding has seen transformative changes that are no less immediate. In the past year, the URI family grew to more than 600 Cooperation Circles (CC), establishing a presence in three new countries.

With the success of the Bridge Builders program in Argentina, the U.S. State Department is now considering it for use at its embassies. URI's Uganda office in Kampala partnered with religious leaders to establish

nearly 30 land mediations in the Great Lakes region. And in Sri Lanka, our Sarvodaya Shanti Sena CC held more than two dozen religious dialogues to address the escalating violence against women and children.

At URI, the term “grassroots” means that the communities we work for can work for themselves; they do work for themselves. But without the resources and commitment that only a united front committed to a grassroots movement can provide, the work that our members do may not create the social change they deserve to see in their lifetimes. It also describes a movement that honors the significance of our members’ individuality. Where else but at URI will members of a growing peace movement find that their religious, spiritual and cultural individuality will be honored and shared in a way that breaks down long-held barriers and allows peace to take root?

As we turn to the next chapter in the story of URI, we have much to look forward to in the future. Our youth ambassadors throughout the world are inspiring their communities, their elders, as well as their own peers. Women’s initiatives are spreading throughout our CCs, with roughly 45 of them devoted to the betterment of women’s lives. Earlier this year, Global Council Chair Kiran Bali addressed the United Nations General Assembly as part of the event “United for a Culture of Peace through Interfaith Harmony.” She called upon the world to restore the dignity of women.

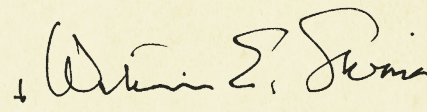
This year, we bid farewell to The Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs, who retired as Executive Director after 17 years of service to URI. Charles leaves a lasting legacy of servant leadership and an ever-growing global foundation for building cultures of peace, justice and healing. Under his guidance, together with Debra Ballinger Bernstein, URI was able to develop a worldwide interfaith presence, up-to-date administrative procedures, professionalized staff positions, a Theory of Change and stronger global initiatives and campaigns. The URI community is grateful to Charles and Debra for their vision and leadership, and thanks them for positioning the organization to build on these accomplishments.

This October, URI welcomes a new Executive Director, The Rev. Victor H. Kazanjian, Jr., whose unique interfaith experience includes work as former Dean of Wellesley College, Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life, and Co-Director of the Peace and Justice Studies Program.

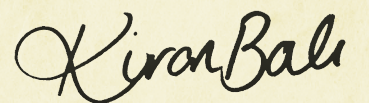
“One of the things that I have admired most about URI over the years is its commitment to a collaborative process of shared leadership that supports grassroots efforts to empower diverse groups of people of different beliefs and practices to transform their communities and the world,” says Rev. Kazanjian. “At a time when religion is often seen to be at the root of division among people, URI stands out as a beacon of hope for the possibilities for peace.”

We have faith that you will continue to be a part of that beacon of hope. Thank you for the work that you do, and allow us to do.

Blessings of Peace,



The Right Rev. William E. Swing
President and Founder



Kiran Bali, MBE, JP
Chair of the URI Global Council

Action

In 2008, URI's Director of Cooperation Circle (CC) Support Maria Crespo began reaching out to Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities in Buenos Aires at the request of the U.S. Embassy in Argentina. After acknowledgement and support from the U.S. State Department, the project created by this diverse group would later become known as Bridge Builders: a model of diversity training for students, teachers, and local law enforcement in this politically polarized country.

Impact

Bridge Builders has begun several interfaith solidarity programs that serve as a prototype for government agencies. Program participants have partnered with the City of Buenos Aires to launch interfaith film screenings and debates, and create a weekly interfaith radio show. The U.S. State Department is now looking to the program to create standards of interfaith diplomacy in its embassies around the world, starting with its embassy in Spain.

Action

In 2012, in partnership with the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative CC, URI staff in Kampala established a program to mediate land disputes in the region. Designed to provide support for social justice groups, train grassroots mediators, and work with both policy makers and religious leaders from different faiths, this work mediates and advocates for peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Impact

Among its many activities, the CC mentored 15 grassroots mediators, who in turn trained 50 volunteer mediators (themselves religious leaders) in each of three districts. To date, these mediators have carried out numerous grassroots mediations and appeared on local radio talk shows discussing land-based conflicts and strategies for reconciliation.

FROM ACTION TO IMPACT: A PROGRESS REPORT

Action

The Young Leaders Program partnered with the One Nation Bay Area project in 2012 to help create interfaith opportunities for youth to become involved in their local communities. A major goal of the program was to establish a youth speakers panel, to bring genuine personal narratives into the classroom setting and to invite peer-to-peer conversations about important topics such as bullying, religious and cultural discrimination, and identity issues.

Impact

A pilot speakers panel program launched in May 2013, offering student leaders the opportunity to develop their oral histories and share their stories with the larger community. Participating students are trained in leadership skills and public speaking in order to add their personal experience and perspective to widespread social issues. They also engage their host audience in valuable dialogue around topics of diversity and discrimination.

Action

Following Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war, the Sarvodaya Shanti Sena CC has been working tirelessly to end violence and promote understanding. This has included a series of awareness programs held by religious leaders throughout the country from July 2012 through May 2013, culminating in a National Inter-Religious Summit in Colombo.

Impact

Strengthened by the impetus of the initiative, religious dialogues were held in over two dozen districts to highlight the escalating violence against women and children and the steps that can be taken to reduce it. Other efforts included vocational training and the publishing of peacebuilding training materials. At the national conference in Colombo, a joint declaration – intended to influence future policy makers – promoted religious harmony throughout the region.

ADVOCACY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

EDUCATION

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

why?

INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES

PEACEBUILDING

WOMEN'S INITIATIVES

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Because we live in a world that is not at peace.

Conflict — beyond even war — among ethnic groups, religions, genders, and individuals, continues to poison the well of the human spirit.

As does prejudice and ignorance, which cause unspeakable hurt, while preventing the full force of the human character to flower.

At URI, we work to help people stop these conflicts and change these attitudes.

Because peace will be the result.

ARMED CONFLICT HAS KILLED 2 MILLION CHILDREN,
DISABLED 4 TO 5 MILLION, LEFT 12 MILLION
HOMELESS, AND ORPHANED MORE THAN 1 MILLION
IN THE PAST DECADE.

At URI, what moves us to action is peace. Everything we do — from healing wounds of conflict to working for economic and social justice to creating dialogue among people of different faiths — we do in the name of creating a world where compassion, understanding, and cooperation are the guiding tenets.

peace building

SAFE TO BE THEMSELVES

Talking Back to Hate is URI's global campaign that uses dialogue, education, and storytelling to prevent and respond to incidents of hate speech, bullying, and discrimination.

"Bullying and hate speech have reached epidemic proportions across North America and Europe," says Sarah Talcott Blair, Campaign Coordinator for Talking Back to Hate.

An online platform on URI's website allows participants to post personal stories and photos of how they've overcome discrimination through positive action, from taking a stand against bullying to triumphing over civil rights abuses. They are also rallying around the hashtag #TalkingBackToHate on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr.



GRADE 5 PUPILS OF MAHARLIKA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN TAGUIG CITY, METRO MANILA, PHILIPPINES SHOW THEIR SUPPORT OF TALKING BACK TO HATE.

"URI is committed to embracing and celebrating the ideal of being good to one's neighbor that exists in all faiths and traditions."

Supporters are adding their names to an online pledge to "create a more safe, accepting, and inclusive environment" – an effort that has already garnered more than 1,450 pledge signatures, demonstrating the possibility of a world where it is, truly, safe to be ourselves.

"We must stand up for one another, to treat others as they would wish to be treated, and to engage in respectful dialogue to better understand one another."

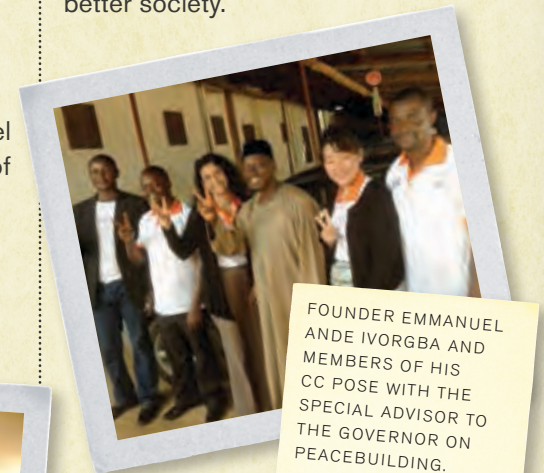
— Sarah Talcott Blair, Campaign Coordinator, Talking Back to Hate

AN ENEMY IS ONE WHOSE STORY WE HAVE NOT HEARD

Emmanuel Ande Ivorgba likes to describe himself as a teacher, a husband, and a father. All three roles influence his work with youth in his native Nigeria, where the disconnect of major religions and ethnic groups is the country's greatest challenge.

As the founder of the New Era Educational and Charitable Support Foundation – a URI CC – Emmanuel is the driving force behind a series of international conferences on youth and interfaith dialogue that started in 2009. In a country where many young people feel that nobody is

listening to them, where boys in poverty are drawn to violence, and where citizens have historically mistrusted their government, New Era's conferences shine a bright light on the way forward to a better society.



FOUNDER EMMANUEL ANDE IVORGBA AND MEMBERS OF HIS CC POSE WITH THE SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE GOVERNOR ON PEACEBUILDING.



CERTIFIED PARTICIPANTS CELEBRATE AFTER A NEECSF TEACHER TRAINING ON PEACE EDUCATION.

Through listening and dialogue, such gatherings engage these young peacebuilders in practical projects to improve conditions locally, and in learning leadership from the heart, so that as they begin to ascend to positions of influence in society, they will do so with compassion and integrity.

"If you think two people coming together to talk is not enough to make a difference, consider that yesterday they were not talking."

— Emmanuel Ande Ivorgba, founder, NEECSF

VOLUNTEERING RATES IN AMERICA FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 16-19 DOUBLED BETWEEN 1989 AND TODAY AT A RATE THAT EXCEEDS THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER RATE.

Of every five people on earth, three are under the age of 30. With pressure on these young individuals from conflict, poverty, and lack of access to education, the demand for youth volunteer services to help them is on the rise.

That's why URI's Young Leaders Program is equipping increasing numbers of young people around the world with the tools and resources they need to organize and act in their local communities. In the last two years, this program has spurred countless individual acts of service that will stand as models for other youth and will involve, through peer networks, many hundreds more across the globe.

youth

THE INGREDIENTS OF PEACE

Although the Bosnia conflict ended nearly two decades ago, Bosnia and Herzegovina is still rife with ethnic division and separation. Many young people born after the war are not aware that local communities lived in peace for many years prior to the hostilities.

It is here that Lejla Hasandedic, URI Youth Ambassador, Europe, sees opportunity. Just as the traditional dish called Bosanski Lonac (“Bosnia Pot”) brings together diverse ingredients to make a delicious meal, Lejla envisions her country’s Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians – and all other faith traditions – coming together to build a better future for themselves.

To that end, Lejla, in partnership with a local youth club, organized two inter-religious workshops. The first, an “Interfaith Café,” welcomed in a safe space 30 young people, who discussed issues pertaining to stereotypes and prejudices in hopes of overcoming them. A second workshop followed, in which participants took the lessons learned and celebrated and embraced one another’s diversity by making movies, putting on skits, and working with children with special needs.

YOUTH AMBASSADOR LEJLA HASANDEDIC (EXTREME RIGHT) POSES WITH PARTICIPANTS OF HER BOSANSKI LONAC INTERFAITH WORKSHOP.



“Our mission is to erase the boundaries that still exist in people’s minds.”

— Lejla Hasandedic, URI Youth Ambassador

HOW TO MOVE A CONTINENT

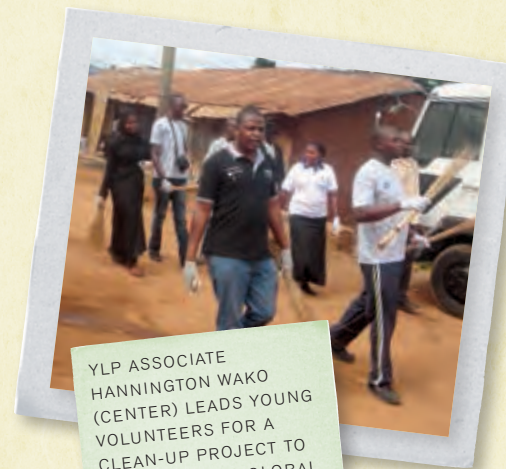
URI’s African Youth Network is an ongoing platform that allows young people all over Africa to participate in projects, attend leadership courses, and otherwise take part in building the future they want to live in.

Hannington Wako, an Associate of URI’s Young Leaders Program, is responsible for implementing the network’s Youth Ambassadors Program, URI’s flagship youth leadership program. “The hand that is supposed to help young people is not helping them,” says Hannington. Which is precisely why he organizes leadership development initiatives for

youth in the Great Lakes region of Africa based on URI’s core principles of nonviolent communication, conflict resolution, and the promotion of diversity.



PEARSON MAKOMA, HEAD PREFECT, EXPLAINS THE BENEFITS OF A GREEN ENVIRONMENT TO STUDENTS AT THE KASENGEJE SECONDARY SCHOOL DURING A CC ACTIVITY WORKSHOP.



YLP ASSOCIATE HANNINGTON WAKO (CENTER) LEADS YOUNG VOLUNTEERS FOR A CLEAN-UP PROJECT TO COMMEMORATE GLOBAL YOUTH SERVICE DAY IN KAMPALA, UGANDA.

Because this geographical area is one of constant conflict, youth are understandably drawn to the program’s message of love for interfaith harmony and problem solving. And the results have been impressive, as attendees who want to be involved in creative solutions return home to become catalysts of change, leading blood donation drives, urban cleanups, mentoring programs, and much more.

“Peace is more than just a universal calling. It is a universal language, that everyone, deep down, wants to speak.”

— Hannington Wako, URI Young Leaders Program Associate



EVERY YEAR, 60 MILLION GIRLS ARE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED AT,
OR ON THEIR WAY TO, SCHOOL.

In time of conflict, women — and children — are the ones most vulnerable. It is no surprise, then, that women, young and old, are invariably the strongest agents of peace. As mothers, they bridge both international borders and internal divides, whether ethnic, religious, political, or cultural. This is why roughly 2,000 URI members in 45 Cooperation Circles are devoted to projects for women, which focus on domestic violence prevention and counseling, job and skills training, gender equality, education, leadership and more.

women

REPAIRING THE FABRIC OF LIFE

The Great Lakes region of Africa is a vast area in the eastern part of the continent that has been home in recent generations to a virtually unending cycle of wars, unrest, and genocides.

It is in this environment that Despina Namwembe, URI's regional coordinator, works at both the policy and grassroots levels to help those hit hardest by these conflicts: women.

This may entail setting up support mechanisms for women still traumatized by the genocide in Rwanda – and encouraging the

survivors to compose and sing songs of reconciliation. It may mean organizing volunteers to help women heal from the wounds and stigma of rape and defilement in Democratic Republic of Congo. And it may mean advocating to give women access to and control of property in Burundi. In all cases, it means working with local religious leaders who have the respect of their communities to create or implement bylaws for a particular policy or advocacy.



WOMEN SURVIVORS OF UGANDA'S 20-YEAR CIVIL WAR DURING A LAND MEDIATION PROCESS IN NORTHERN UGANDA - FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHT TO OWN LAND, WHICH IS GUARANTEED BY THE LAW, BUT IGNORED BY THEIR CULTURE.



REGIONAL COORDINATOR DESPINA NAMWEMBE (SECOND FROM RIGHT) CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WITH STUDENTS AND SPEAKERS AT NTINDA EAST HIGH SECONDARY SCHOOL IN KAMPALA, UGANDA.

Despite the unspeakable atrocities she's seen, Despina remains optimistic, and deeply committed to showing these loving women what is possible when hurt is taken away.

“The deep spirituality of the women here is a major strength in allowing them to persevere and move on to create better societies.”

— Despina Namwembe, URI Regional Coordinator

FROM HELP TO HOPE

War is not the only societal calamity that threatens women. In the state of Jharkhand, in India, women live in constant fear of being kidnapped and sold into prostitution and slavery; of being killed, because of centuries-old attitudes about witchcraft; and of dying in childbirth, because of a lack of maternal healthcare programs.

Sunita Singh, a member of the Ranchi Peace CC, is doing something about this. She has used the courts to single-handedly chase a corrupt front company

involved in human trafficking out of the area. She has worked with local volunteers to build helpline teams that support and provide accurate information to women in need. And she is creating local forums that help indigenous female villagers to stand up for themselves.

“We want to create a movement, not an organization” says Sunita. “A movement of women, by women, and for women.” A movement, she knows, that is the true basis for empowerment and hope.



SUNITA SINGH OF THE RANCHI PEACE CC SPEAKS AT A RALLY IN JHARKHAND, INDIA.

“As part of URI we can draw the attention of the international community. We must stand together for the goodness of women.”

— Sunita Singh, Ranchi Peace CC coordinator

You are changing the direction of the world.

FOR YOUR SUPPORT
AND GENEROSITY,
WE THANK YOU.

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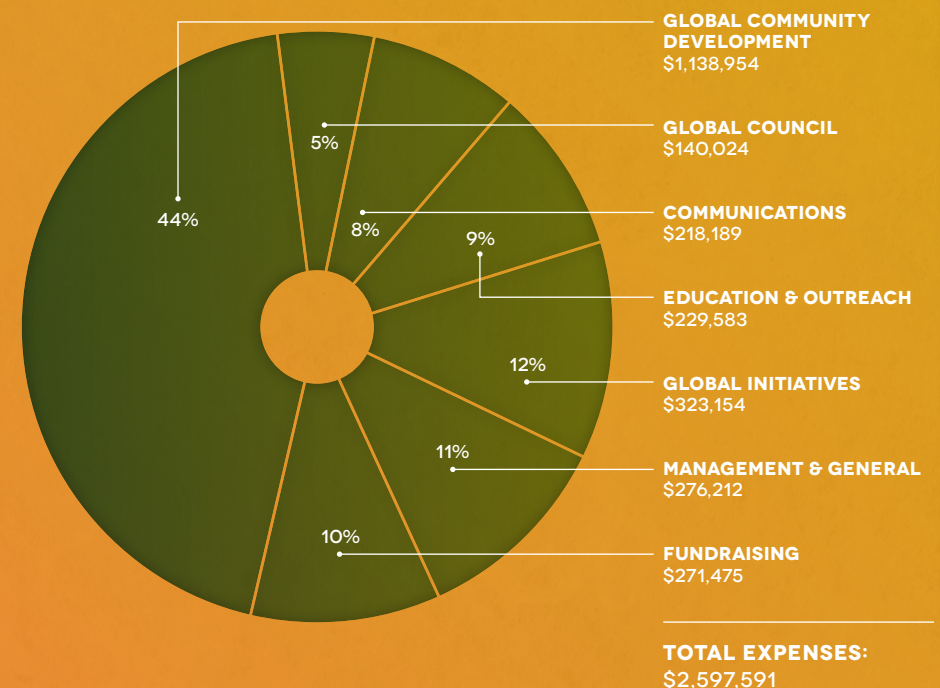
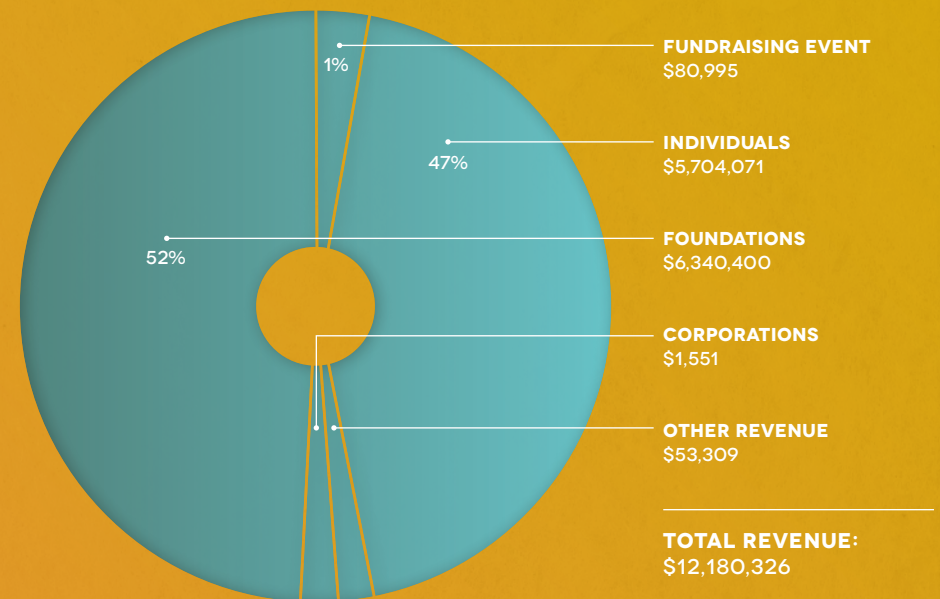
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