

Fall 2013

INTERACTION



SPECIAL EDITION: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE



Twekolere Women's Development Association CC, along with other Great Lakes region CCs, gathered hundreds of students on International Day of Peace at Seguku Hill College in Kampala, Uganda, to launch an Interfaith Peace Clubs program in schools.

EDUCATION for PEACE

International Day of Peace
21 September



Dear Friends,

It was an extraordinary experience to begin my tenure as executive director of the United Religions Initiative by attending the International Day of Peace celebrations at the United Nations. Surrounded by URI colleagues and friends from interfaith organizations, I was deeply moved by the stories of peacebuilders - gathered from around the world - embodying the dream of a world at peace. At the Interfaith Service that concluded the day's events, I offered the following message on behalf of URI:

May we know peace within ourselves.

May we know peace with one another.

May we know peace among the peoples of the planet and with the earth that is our home.

There is a picture in my office, a picture of the earth taken from deep in space by a friend of mine who was piloting the space shuttle.

There floating in the silence of space is this beautiful blue ball, so serene, so peaceful. Looking at that remarkable image, who would imagine that on the surface of that planet many of its habitants are locked in life and death struggles that all too often erupt in war, and that amidst such natural beauty so many are suffering from the violence of hunger, injustice and oppression.

But on this day, this day of peace, amidst the chaos of war and tragedy of violence, we pause to affirm not just the possibility of peace, but the reality of peace on our planet. On this day, let us remind one another that we are witnesses to daily acts of kindness, generosity and love. On this day, let us proclaim that peace is not just that which we seek, but that which we know in the embrace of a loved one, through the warmth of friendship, in extending oneself in compassion towards a stranger, in standing together against injustice and oppression. On this day, let us be courageous in our assertion that peace is in us and that peace is with us.

Sisters and brothers, may the power of our convictions infuse purpose into our actions that we may be part of extending the reality of the peace that we know in our hearts to this precious planet and its beloved inhabitants.

At URI, every day is an International Day of Peace. Each and every day, URI members are working through their Cooperation Circles in communities around the world to end religiously-motivated violence and create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all human beings. This issue of INTERACTION highlights but a few of those remarkable interfaith peacebuilding actions.

Blessings of peace,

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

OUR NEW COOPERATION CIRCLES

URI's grassroots network now includes 612 CCs in 87 countries.

JULY 2013

Association Voie du Développement (Djibouti, Djibouti - Africa)

SOS Jeunes (Balbala, Djibouti - Africa)

Initiative for a Positive Future (IPF-Togo) (Lomé, Togo - Africa)

Surya Thejas CC (Kerala, India - Asia)

Child and Youth Development through Inter Religious Initiative CC (Badula, Sri Lanka - Asia)

AUGUST 2013

Association Pour La Realisation Des Objectives Du Millenaire Developpement (AROMD) (Pragies, Djibouti - Africa)

Interfaith Mediation Centre, Kaduna (Kaduna, Nigeria - Africa)

Samagra Vikash (Uttar Pradesh, India - Asia)

Sarvodaya Bundelkhand (Uttar Pradesh, India - Asia)

European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom (EIFRF) (Paris, France - Europe)

Interfaith WASH Alliance (Multiregion)

SEPTEMBER 2013

URI Burundi (Bujumbura, Burundi - Africa)

Community Initiative for Social Enhancement (CISE) (Johannesburg, South Africa - Africa)

Faiths Together Uganda (Mukono, Uganda - Africa)

Global Mission Awareness CC (Punjab, Pakistan - Asia)

OCTOBER 2013

The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (ICSD) (Jerusalem, Israel - MENA)

Interfaith Action for Community – IAC (Preyveng, Cambodia - SEAPAC)

URI-Child and Youth Education Organization (Cyoe) (Phnom Penh, Cambodia - SEAPAC)

Interfaith Youth Council (Iligan, Philippines - SEAPAC)

NOVEMBER 2013

Burundi Women For Peace And Advocacy (Burundi, Africa)

Global Compassion CC (Cameroon, Africa)

Interfaith Forum of Muslim and Christian Women's Association (Nigeria, Africa)

Great Lakes Peace Foundation (G.L.P.F) (D.R. Congo)

URI Poland (Poland, Europe)

Fukushima Response Cooperation Circle (USA)

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO DONATE!

Visit uri.org/get_involved/give or contact the **Development Team** via email at development@uri.org or by phone at +1 415-561-2300 ext 2018.



Students of Catholic Girls' School Michael Ham Memorial College in Buenos Aires, Argentina, along with Director of CC Support Maria Crespo de Mafia, surround Rabbi Arieh Sztokman during an Escuela de Amor CC celebration on International Day of Peace.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE CELEBRATIONS UNITE URI AND THE UNITED NATIONS IN GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

The United Nations (UN) established International Day of Peace in 1983 as part of its "Culture of Peace Initiative" to make world peace a reality in the 21st century. It was a direct response from the international community - initially led by the United Kingdom and Costa Rican governments - to honor a cessation of hostilities, spread peace awareness, and unite in non-violence.

Interfaith peace activists from around the world, many of whom now lead United Religion Initiative's (URI) current Cooperation Circles (CCs), have been celebrating International Day of Peace since before URI's founding in 2000.

Decades later, URI is a proud co-sponsor of the UN's New York event. URI-UN, a Cooperation Circle led by Monica Willard and Rev. Debrah Moldow, has organized hundreds of students in observance of International Day of Peace since the late 1990s, standing alongside the UN Secretary General for the annual ringing of the Peace Bell.

But URI's observance has spread to action beyond the events at the UN headquarters. Around the world, our CCs have adopted International Day of Peace for people of all faiths and spiritual traditions to focus their prayers on the vision of peace on Earth; a day not belonging to any one group, but to all of humanity.

"It's a natural time to observe and to realize the potential of this day in promoting interfaith work, because it gives the people of our network very specific reasons to reach out to their communities and their churches," says Monica Willard, URI representative at the United Nations.

This year, the range of URI activities celebrating International Day of Peace was as diverse as the communities that make up URI itself.

URI Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional coordinator Ma'moun Khreisat, along with Women's Initiative coordinator for MENA Nour Nahleh, celebrated International Day of Peace with a large group of deaf and blind children at an orphanage in Jordan as part of Quested Peace CC's celebration.

[IDP] is a natural time to observe and to realize the potential of this day in promoting interfaith work, because it gives the people of our network very specific reasons to reach out to their communities and their churches.

- Monica Willard

"The young people at the orphanage were so innocent and pure - you feel peace with them by being near them. You feel their passion," said Ma'moun. "You can tell that they miss the caring of a family - some don't know their parents, and some are Syrian refugees. We told them, 'the whole world is celebrating International Day of Peace, and we chose to spend it with you.'"

For Ma'moun, International Day of Peace is about sharing a sense of universal oneness: "URI is unique because we care for each other and our environment," he said. "When you join, you don't expect material benefits. You are fully dedicated to others and simply there to spread the oneness, despite your

relationship to your god. This is what makes URI unique."

Public awareness and education are also powerful components of International Day of Peace. With this year's theme, "Education for Peace," the UN called for greater investment in education, just as aid to schools and teachers around the world has dropped for the first time in a decade.

"On this International Day of Peace, let us pledge to teach our children the value of tolerance and mutual respect," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said. "Let us invest in the schools and teachers that will build a fair and inclusive world that embraces diversity." He highlighted the efforts of young leaders like Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan.

In an address to hundreds in an International Day of Peace event hosted by URI Asia Regional Coordinator Father James Channan, Pakistani Archdiocese of Lahore Bishop Sebastian Francis Shaw said, "We are working for the peace education of our children while the terrorists are working for the formation of the youth to achieve their own goals."

Religiously-motivated violence shook the global community this year with a terrorist attack at a Nairobi, Kenya shopping mall on International Day of Peace, and at a Christian church in Peshawar, Pakistan just one day after.

"This is a harsh reality, especially when our mission is about working for peace," said Monica. "Peace is fragile and needs dedicated workers to make a lasting impact"

EDUCATION

Education was the official United Nations theme for the International Day of Peace this year, and our Cooperation Circles honored it beautifully.

URI West Africa and New Era Educational and Charitable Support Foundation celebrated at Creative Minds Academy in Jos, Nigeria, with traditional dances, fashion shows, Nigerian indigenous meals, and discussions on peace education. Two hundred and fifty participants attended: students and teachers from colleges in Jos, religious and community leaders, as well as Nigerian national dignitaries.

Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, Nigeria, created *Peace Education for the Establishment of Peace Clubs and Community Peace Observers* in Kaduna State, Nigeria - a conference to teach children the virtues of peace, tolerance, and respect for others, and to encourage educators and communities to promote peacebuilding.



The **United Religions Initiative Great Lakes (URI-GL)** celebrated at Seguku Hill College in Kampala, Uganda, to launch an interfaith peace club program. They were joined by CCs like **Twekolere Women's Development Organization** and other prominent local organizations.

The **Pathfinders Commune CC**, along with URI SEA-Pac Regional Coordinator Potre Diampuan, coordinated a celebration at Maharlika Elementary School in Metro Manila, Philippines to talk about the new national anti-bullying law and participate in peacebuilding activities. Christian and Muslim students drew images of peace, pledging to the *Talking Back To Hate* campaign.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY BUILDING

By their very nature, online-based celebrations are universal and open to all.

PeaceBeats Global Team, based in the UK, organized a special webcast attracting 30,000 listeners from all over the world.

Monica Willard, URI Representative at the UN, and Rev. Deborah Moldow, World Peace Prayer Society representative to the UN, spoke on "Our Sacred Journey," an online radio program hosted by **URI-UN CC** member Audrey Kitagawa.

The **Compassion Action Network International** created *Compassion Games, Survival of the Kindest* in North America as an online initiative to unify many in a game of compassion in the spirit of "co-opetition" (competing to cooperate) over the course of 11 days, coming together on a global scale to serve the underserved, and practice intentional and intense acts of compassion both for communities and individuals.



ART & PERFORMANCE

For many, art and creative expression are powerful beyond words.

URI Pakistan partnered with **International Global Mission Awareness** and Pakistani Archdiocese of Lahore, Bishop Sebastian Francis Shaw for an evening celebration of peace that included songs, art installations, and video presentations. Event host Fr. James Channan, URI Regional Coordinator (Pakistan) and Director of the Peace Center, emphasized the need to promote education for peace.

The **Interfaith Cooperation Circle of Central Virginia's** festivities included thirty minutes of silent meditation, followed by thirty minutes of *Dances of Universal Peace*, concluding with a potluck dinner and songfest at Charlottesville, Virginia's Lee Park.

Interfaith Community Sanctuary's Art Exhibit for Middle East Peace in Seattle, Washington, saw the group transform their sanctuary into

a *Sonic Peace Temple*, filled with mystical vibrations from a variety of instruments shared by musicians, creating an immersive sound environment.

Charlotte CC in North Carolina, U.S. gathered more than 500 community participants and local organizations for an artist showcase and craft fair.

The **Interfaith Center at the Presidio** held an interfaith concert in San Francisco, CA. It featured performances inspired by Islam, Brahma Kumaris, Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism. The concert was co-sponsored by the **Marin Interfaith Council**, the **Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County**, **San Francisco Interfaith Council** and the **Silicon Valley Interreligious Council**.



PEACE WALKS

Sometimes the act of standing united, walking together, and moving through the community is enough to inspire.

Hundreds turned out for **URI Asia Region's** peace procession in Kerala, India, during the Onam Holidays that included URI Asia Executive Secretary Abraham Karickam and delegates from the Conference on Holy Books.

Trail of Dreams World Peace Walk CC, led by Global Indigenous Initiative interim coordinator Audri Scott Williams, walked one mile for peace through downtown Williamsport, Pennsylvania. U.S. Pennsylvania Representative Richard Mirabito introduced a resolution for the IDP in the State legislature.



URI Latin America held *Encuentro en Buenos Aires: Global March for the UN International Day of Peace* in Argentina. The event was held in conjunction with **Bridge Builders CC**, the Government of the City of Buenos Aires and other peace organizations. Participants took part in a moment of silence with the World Peace Prayer Society. They later marched to a Christian Parrish, a Jewish Synagogue, and a Chinese Buddhist Temple. In the weeks following the march, participants will be visiting five schools in order to involve students of different ages in peace education.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Some used IDP as a reason to serve their communities, bringing peace to those who need it.

Quested Peace CC visited a deaf and blind orphanage in Al Salt, Jordan. URI Women's Initiative Coordinator Nour Nahleh baked cakes with dozens of deaf girls as URI Regional Coordinator Ma'moun Khreisat led children in a friendly competition of *Sports for Peace*, followed by prayers and a dinner celebration.

CC Campinas held a *Meeting for Peace* in Sao Paulo, Brazil, holding a lunch and peace talk in order to raise funds for housing construction. Children, youth, and adults shared their thoughts on how to create inner peace and contribute to a better world.



Manbazar Chandra Memorial and **EKTAAN CC** held a blood donation camp in the Purulia district of India to cope with the shortfall of blood. Nearly 500 people from various faiths participated, including district health officials and local personnel, medical doctors, and URI delegates.

Youth Society for Peace Nepal organized 55 students to clean the Bagmati River in Kathmandu, Nepal. The day was also marked by a conference at Shanti Sewa Ashram in Koteshwor, attracting more than 100 students from various orphanages and schools.

PEACE RALLIES

Many CCs banded together to reflect, pray or hear moving speeches.

A Better Community for All Pakistan (ABC4ALL), alongside **Global Mission Awareness**, held a rally at the Lahore Press Club. Participants held peace candles and Yuel Bhatti, principal of ABC4ALL School, led prayers for peace with Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities in attendance.

URI Women's Initiative Burundi held an event to discuss peacebuilding with UN and local officials. The event was officially launched by Mrs. Clotilde Niragira, the minister of Gender in Bujumbura Province. UN representative Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, and other high ranking officials were among the participants. In the Bujumbura mayorship, youth from four different ethnically-divided communes, including Tutsis and Hutus, met and discussed ways to go forward with peace enforcement.

Escuela De Amor CC held a mass for peace for more than 100 people



at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Buenos Aires, Argentina alongside URI supporters and Council of Peace members Mil Milenios de Paz.

Interfaith Council at Stapleton in Denver, Colorado, U.S., co-hosted a panel discussion entitled *The Many Faces of Creation: Myths and Theories* with **URI North America**. Community leaders shared the face of creation as embodied in their different faiths.

The **URI at the UN** and **Global Family for Love and Peace CC** took part in the student observance of IDP with the United Nations in New York, bringing together nearly 700 students. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon rang the UN Peace Bell, and everyone enjoyed an interfaith prayer ceremony and concert. Speakers included Messenger of Peace Jane Goodall and 13 year-old Sliammon First Nation representative and **Protecting and Restoring the Sacred CC** member Ta'Kaiya Blaney.



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of light**

 URI's Annual Gala

SAVE THE DATE

March 22nd, 2014

**Honoring URI's Young Leaders:
Building an Interfaith Future**

**Entertainment provided by
Ta'Kaiya Blaney,
of the Sliammon First Nation
from British Columbia, Canada**

**Reception 6:15 pm Dinner 7:00 pm
Four Seasons Hotel San Francisco**

**For tickets and sponsorship, please
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