

Religions for Peace

Religions for Peace Global Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL



Dear Friends,

Religious believers and men and women of good will are rightly troubled by the fact that religions are increasingly being used in support of violent extremism. Perversely, religions-typically understood by their followers as the foundation of human dignity-are being used to justify killing others.

In response, The *Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies* and *Religions for Peace* partnered in convening a very high-level gather of leaders including many *Religions for Peace* Co-Presidents. The important Abu Dhabi

Statement: *Rejecting Violent Religious Extremism and Advancing Shared Well-being* was produced along with an ambitious action plan.

The Abu Dhabi Statement stresses the importance of a multi-religious approach, noting that it "builds solidarity around areas of shared concern and makes clear that the religious "other" can be recognized as a moral ally, as opposed to an enemy. It also makes clear that an attack on any religion is-at root-an attack on all."

In *Religions for Peace*, we agree that Peace is more than the absence of conflict and that it calls each religious community to stand in solidarity with the dignity, vulnerability and well-being of the "other," with the full force of its respective spiritual and moral teachings. Such teachings are specific to each religious tradition. They include: frank recognition of mutually inflicted injuries, striving for justice, accepting self-sacrifice for the well-being of others, bearing innocent suffering, returning good for evil, seeking and extending forgiveness and reconciliation and expressing unrestricted compassion and love in action.

It is these specifically religious strengths that can go to the roots of the problem of violent religious extremism. Let us continue to respect our differences and work together.

Yours in Peace

In partnership for Peace, I remain

Sincerely,



Dr. William F. Vendley
Secretary General

IN THE NETWORK

**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: RELIGIONS TAKING ACTION TOGETHER TO COUNTER
VIOLENT RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM**



(L-R: Sheikh Majid, Cardinal Onaiyekan, Dr. Vendley and Shaykh bin Bayyah)

Senior religious leaders gathered in Abu Dhabi, 12-13 December 2014, to initiate collaborative actions to combat violent religious extremism.

This event was hosted by the *Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies* and convened in cooperation with **Religions for Peace**. The Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies gathers intellectuals and leading thinkers from around the world to clarify that Islam is a religion of peace and reconcile disputes.

"Religions Working Together to Counter Violent Religious Extremism" was the first global multi-religious high-level conference on violent religious extremism. High-level religious leaders and intergovernmental officials such as **Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah**, President of the *Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu Dhabi* [**Co-Moderator of RfP**]; **Cardinal John Onaiyekan**, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria [**Co-Moderator of RfP**]; H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al Nasser, High Representative, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; and **Dr. William F. Vendley** [**Secretary-General, RfP**] noted that one of the keys to defeating extremism is the capacity of religious leaders to educate and mobilize their congregations against extremism.

"The primary narrative of each religion is about peace and human dignity. Let us collect and share the texts from all religious traditions that uphold human dignity," said Dr. Vendley as he addressed the high-level gathering.

Shaikh bin Bayyah and **Cardinal Onaiyekan** both stated that their respective texts must be re-interpreted for their followers so that they are applicable to modern conditions. **Shaikh bin Bayyah** stated that extremism is fueled by "the misconceptions and misunderstandings of Sharia" and that it is the responsibility of scholars to help religious followers understand the texts.

"The bible has been in existence for thousands of years but every generation has interpreted the bible to reflect the needs of their generation; we are not scandalized when the interpretations of 6th century are different from today. We need to interpret for today, for our own people," said **Cardinal Onaiyekan**.



(L-R: Cardinal John Onaiyekan, the Sultan of Sokoto and His Holiness Aram I)

Ayatollah Damad, Head of Islamic Studies at the Academy of Sciences of the Islamic Republic of Iran, **[Co-President of RfP]** explained that when there is a question of Quranic interpretation we must view the text from its core principle, which is peace.

The conference also examined psychological and socio-economic factors of violent religious extremism, as well as the misuse of religious traditions and texts. Reverend Father Ayuso Guixot, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for

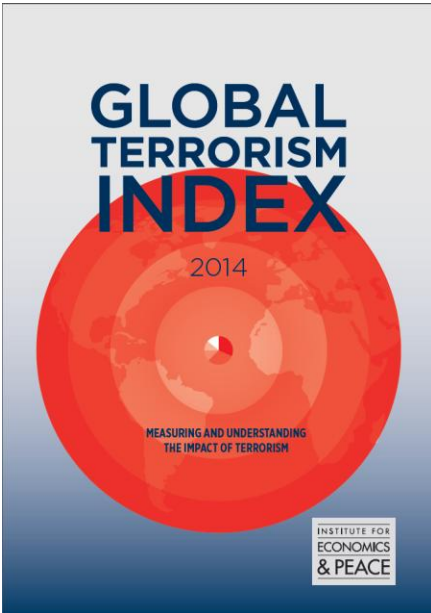
Inter-Religious Dialogue stated that "we have to reach young people, helping them live in a world of peace and justice. Young people need hope and jobs. Stagnant economies and poverty fuel extremism."

H.E. Nassir Abudulzaiz Al-Nasser, the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) confirmed this commitment of the UN to work with religious communities by reminding the group of UNAOC's "work with religious leaders in many different parts of the world, often through our longstanding relationship with **Religions for Peace**, to amplify their voices and more effectively disseminate messages of pluralism to their constituencies."

The conference yielded a powerful statement on "*Rejecting Violent Religious Extremism and Advancing Shared Well-being*." A robust Action Plan was adopted. It is designed to harness the unique capacities of the world's religions to blunt the major "drivers" of violent religious extremism, including notably the false and distorted religious narratives that mistakenly seek to justify killing in the name of religion.

Read the Statement: [English](#), [Arabic](#)

GLOBAL: 2014 GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX LAUNCHED



Rising social hostility toward individuals and groups-fuelled by intolerance and fear of the other-threatens human dignity, good governance and shared wellbeing.

As a result of the global spike in social hostility, there was a 61% increase in the number of lives lost in terrorist attacks, from 11,133 in 2012 to 17,958 in 2013, according to the 2014 Global Terrorism Index Report.

The Report was released on 18 November by the Institute of Economics and Peace, whose founder, **Mr. Steve Killelea**, serves as the **International Treasurer and Trustee of RfP**.

The 2014 Global Terrorism Index Report measured the impact of terrorism in 162 countries, using four indicators: the number of terrorist incidents, the number of deaths, the number of casualties and the level of property

damage.

"Since we first launched the GTI in 2012, we've seen a significant and worrying increase in worldwide incidences of terrorism," remarked **Mr. Killelea**. He urged leaders to reduce state-sponsored violence, reduce group grievances and improve community-supported policing to reduce the threat. [Read the full report here.](#)



SYRIA: RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONVENE IN TRYING TIMES

The grievous suffering of innocent Syrians grows each day, as the country's three-year-old civil war rages unabated. Refugee outflows number over three million, half of whom are children.

Despite these difficulties, traditional religious leaders came together in a historic meeting of reconciliation.

Bishop Elia Toume, Episcopal of Pygrou (Bishop of Marmarita in Hims), convened a small, yet historic, local reconciliation meeting that brought together religious and community leaders from the Sunni, Alawite and Christian communities to discuss how to care for those in need, a value shared equally by all major religions. The meeting grew out of *Rfp*-sponsored local projects designed to equip mosques and churches to serve as refuges for children of all communities.

It is the first meeting of its kind since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, bringing together ten local Alawite and ten local Sunni religious leaders in a multi-religious meeting with ten Orthodox Christian leaders, five Catholic clergy and other local community leaders. The meeting drew the attention of the Governor of Hims, who made it a point to join the meeting and have lunch with the participants. The meeting was also covered by the Syrian government controlled Media (Radio and Television).

The seeds of this achievement were sown three years ago with the opening of the first Center of Peace for Children and subsequent activities *Rfp* sponsors in cooperation with Bishop Toume and other local religious partners. In particular, the community reconciliation and peace building initiatives organized by *Rfp* last Ramadan in Syria paved the way for this important meeting.

Rfp is committed to supporting its local partners in their quest to advance peacebuilding and national reconciliation in the country.

TURKEY: SYRIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS ADVANCE MULTI-RELIGIOUS COOPERATION FOR PEACE



(Participant of the Syrian Consultation)

Building on previous work, *Religions for Peace* convened a consultation of Syrian religious leaders on 23 and 24 November in Istanbul Turkey.

Participants categorically rejected attempts on all sides of the conflict to use religion and religious discourse to serve a political agenda, fuel conflict and disrupt the notion of the Syrian national identity.

The participants decried the slow and insufficient response of the international community towards the tragedy of continued displacement and exile, violence and terrorism against Syrian civilians of all parties, and urged all sides to actively devise a political solution that will lay the foundations for the building of a new and modern Syria based on a strong and sustainable contract and unity between all its components, and deeply rooted in the values of citizenship. The participants committed to working together to reject extremism and fanaticism, develop viable community-based solutions in response to rising social hostility, advocate an increase in the size of the international community's humanitarian relief efforts and to foster and promote religious collaboration for peace in Syria.

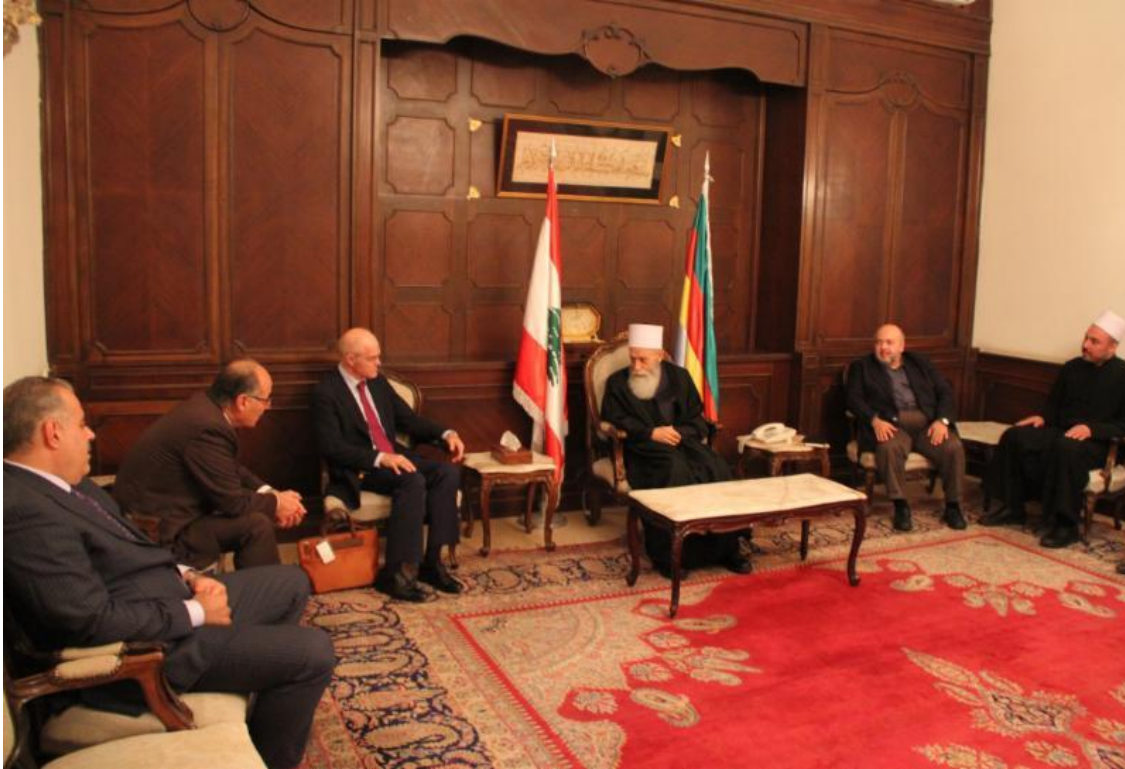
RfP continues to engage a wide variety of Syrian religious leaders in areas controlled by the regime, in areas under the control of the opposition, as well as outside of Syria. These Syrian religious leaders have requested *RfP* to assist them in establishing the *RfP-Syria Council*. [Read More](#)

LEBANON: RELIGIONS AND POLITICAL VALUES

RfP co-sponsored with the Adyan Foundation and other distinguished partners a symposium on Religions and Political Values in Beirut, Lebanon. *RfP Co-President H.E. Dr. Mohammad Sammak* also participated in the event along with long-term *RfP MENA* partners Rev. Riad Jajour and Judge Abbas al-Halabi. From the International Secretariat, *Secretary General Dr. William Vendley* and *Mr. Baker al-Hiyari, [Advisor to the RfP Secretary General for Middle East Affairs]* participated.

Outstanding scholars were gathered to focus on the relationship between religions and political values. In his remarks during the opening ceremony, *Secretary General Dr. Vendley* noted that today, people of many different religions and none are living together. "Are we," he asked, "to impose a particular religious interpretation of political order on all, thus risking the oppression of many? Or, are we to jettison any relationship of transcendence to political order, thereby risking the profound and pervasive disorder of a system closed to the transcendence at the heart of the soul? This is the dilemma that today must be solved. [For Dr. Vendley's full comments, click here.](#)

During the Adayn conference, **RfP Co-Moderator, Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah**, was awarded the prestigious 2014 Adayn Award of Spiritual Solidarity.



Judge Abbas presents Dr. Vendley to His Eminence sheikh Naim Hassan, Leader of the Druze community during his time in Lebanon

PERU: UNITING FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION



The recent World Assembly of **Religions for Peace** called on religious leaders and people of faith

to address the causes of climate change. This was followed by a powerful Statement of the Executive Committee on 21 September 2014. Taking another important step, the **RfP Latin American and Caribbean Regional Council-RfP** and the **Inter-Religious Council of Peru-RfP** organized a series of events during the 20th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP20) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Lima, Peru 1-12 December.

A highlight occurred in COP20 side event, the "The COP20: Perspectives from the South," held in partnership with **RfP Latin American and Caribbean Regional Council-RfP**, the **Inter-Religious Council of Peru-RfP**, the Antonio Ruiz de Montoya University and the Association of Jesuit Universities Entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Latin America.

The keynote address was delivered by **Professor Jeffrey Sachs**, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, **[International Trustee of RfP]**. **Professor Sachs** outlined both the dimensions of the climate challenge and the key roles of the religious communities in addressing it. The role of religious leaders working together is essential through networks such as **RfP**," **Sachs** remarked.

AUSTRIA: ENDING THE DANGER AND MORAL TYRANNY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Nuclear weapons are a grave threat to human life. In addition to their profound danger, they also pose an inherent moral contradiction.

On the one hand, our religious traditions affirm the ultimate value of each human life and call us to respect all life, while on the other, nuclear weapons, threaten indiscriminate death to massive numbers of people and threaten the global ecosystem on which all life depends.

Concern for this grave threat and fundamental moral challenge is at the core of **RfP**, which has consistently worked towards the elimination of nuclear weapons since its founding in 1970.



Dr. William F. Vendley [Secretary General of RfP], Madam Ela Gandhi, peace activist and granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi **[Co-President of RfP]**, and **Dr. Mustafa Cerić**, Raisu-l-Ulama Emeritus of Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina **[Honorary President of RfP]**, reaffirmed the growing consensus among diverse religious communities of the need for total abolition of nuclear weapons on 8-

9 December at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons convened by the Federal Ministry of the Republic of Austria.

"The prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons is a deeply spiritual and moral imperative," **Dr. Vendley** said, as he addressed the Special Session on Nuclear Weapons and the Moral Compass, co-chaired by Ambassador Libran Cabactulan, Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations and attended by governments, faith communities and civil society leaders.

Madam Ela Gandhi outlined some of the main concerns during her remarks. "There is no moral justification for nuclear weapons. The combined nuclear arsenal in the world can indeed have the effect of not only destroying humanity as a whole, but also destroying any possibility of future generations being able to survive and lead a normal life....Leaders, therefore, have a moral duty to bring an end to the possession and production of nuclear weapons."

Also addressing the conference, **Dr. Mustafa Cerić** stated "I am here to remind my fellow Muslims that we must be people of faith, who are the messengers of Peace, who are the peaceful men as our name calls us to be. Hence, we need to join forces with other people of faith to play the needed vital role in helping to achieve a nuclear weapons-free world."

Organized jointly by the Permanent Mission of the Philippines, Global Security Institute, the United Religions Initiative, World Evangelical Alliance and **RfP**, the conference helped to further galvanize action aimed at promoting nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. [Read More](#)

MYANMAR: LANDMARK INTER-RELIGIOUS WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK LAUNCHED



In Myanmar, women are hardest hit by the fallout of communal violence and armed conflict. They are often left to fend for their community with no security; displaced with no access to social services; abused and raped with impunity; and their children are robbed of the right to an education.

This growing violence and instability, which undermines peace, lent urgency to the recent convening of women leaders in the country.

On 2 December, women leaders from Myanmar's Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities jointly launched **Religions for Peace (RfP) Myanmar Women of Faith Network (RfP Myanmar WOFN)**, the country's first multi-religious women of faith network created to promote women's empowerment, enhance women's role in peace-building initiatives and raise public awareness and support for the **RfP Restoring Dignity: A Commitment to End Violence Against Women** campaign.

The inaugural ceremony brought together the country's senior religious leaders, newly-elected officers and members of the **RfP Myanmar WOFN**, leaders of women's groups and faith-based organizations, representatives from the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, as well as international guests, including **Rev. Kosho Niwano**, President-Designate of Risho Kosei-kai [**Co-Moderator of RfP**], and **Rev. Kyoichi Sugino** [**Deputy Secretary General of RfP**].

At the launch, **U Myint Swe [President of Rfp Myanmar]** remarked that, "As the MDG target year 2015 is approaching the **Rfp Myanmar WOFN** will intensify its efforts to raise awareness of women's rights and empower women to help eliminate poverty."



Rev. Kosho Niwano addressing the Launch

Rev. Kosho Niwano emphasized that "all men and women in our world come from mothers. The heart of a mother--virtues of unconditional love and compassion, forgiveness, and perseverance--should be engaged by all men and women of faith to build peace and development."

"As the newly formed and first interreligious women's network in Myanmar, **Rfp Myanmar WOFN** has great ideas and plans

to build capacity, advance women rights, promote peace and the advancement of women, in collaboration with the existing women's groups and with the UN Women," said **Ms. Daw Yin Yin Maw [Chairperson of Rfp Myanmar WOFN]**, as she outlined the Network's initiatives. [Read more](#)

THAILAND: Women of Faith Network Launched in Pattani, Southern Thailand



Approximately 200 Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Hindu women of faith, senior religious leaders, government officials and civil society leaders gathered in Pattani, Southern Thailand, to launch an **Rfp Thai Women of Faith Network**. **Rfp Co-Moderator Rev. Kosho Niwano** joined the event as **Rfp** senior representative. As the suspended peace talks between the government and insurgency groups may be reinitiated relatively soon, **Rfp Thai Women of Faith**

Network is considered to be an important instrument for women in Southern provinces who have been greatly affected by the conflict and who have a critical role to play as peacemakers in the official peace processes and in families and communities.

INDONESIA: Religions for Peace's Contribution to the ASEAN-UNICEF Consultation on Harmful Practices in the Name of Culture and Religion



On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, marked on 20 November 2014, ASEAN, through its Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children with support of UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, held a Consultation on Cultural and Religious Practices Impacting on the Rights of

Children in Jakarta, on 18-20 November 2014.

Deputy Secretary General, Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, presented *RfP*'s methodologies in interreligious action to address harmful practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting, as well as key relevant international multi-religious statements including "The World's Religions for the World's Children" Adopted by over 300 religious leaders at Princeton, New Jersey, July 25-27, 1990 on the occasion of the Adoption of Convention on the Rights of Child and "A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children" adopted by 800 religious leaders from more than hundred countries at the **Religions for Peace** VIII World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, on 28 August 2006. *RfP* methodologies for multi-religious action have been adopted in their final report to be shared with ASEAN member states.

INDONESIA: Religions for Peace Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia Led World Peace Forum under the theme: Quest for Peace: Lessons of Conflict Resolution



Approximately 200 political, religious, civil society and business leaders convened in Jakarta, Indonesia from 20-23 November to learn from past and current conflict resolution initiatives in Aceh and Ambon, Kosovo, Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Myanmar. Representatives from *Rfp* affiliated national interreligious councils led the panels to present multi-religious interventions in conflict resolution in their respective countries.

PANAMA: ADDRESSING INCOME INEQUALITY AND EXCLUSION



Cardinal Assis-front Row, second from left-with members of the LACCRL-*Rfp*

The global rise of income inequality and exclusion remains fraught with moral concerns.

Shared ethical values compel us to forge bold and strong partnerships to take collective actions to eradicate poverty.

Next September, governments will agree on a new development agenda to replace the MDGs. A shared understanding has emerged

that issues of global inequality and exclusion must underpin the post-2015 development agenda. The **Latin American and Caribbean Council of Religious Leaders-*Rfp* (LACCRL-*Rfp*)** supports this call.

Under the leadership of **H. E. Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis**, Archbishop of Aparecida, Sao Paulo [**Moderator of the LACCRL-*Rfp* and Co-President of *Rfp***], the **LACCRL-*Rfp*** convened in Panama City on 10-12 November to discern contributions religious leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean can make in addressing inequality and exclusion in the post-2015 development agenda.

Joining the religious leaders in their deliberations were representatives from the United Nations Population Fund, World Vision Latin America and the Caribbean, the Latin American Council of

Churches, the Latin American Parliament and the **Inter-Religious Committee of Panama-RfP**.

To accomplish its aims, the **LACCRL-RfP** issued a global message calling for an ambitious long-term sustainability agenda to succeed the MDGs.

In addition, the **LACCRL-RfP** adopted its 2014-2018 Strategic Plan and a statement to advance climate protection: [The Planet is in our Hands](#).

[Read more](#)

BANGLADESH: PROMOTING AN ATMOSPHERE OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION



A complex mix of intercommunal and inter-religious tensions has stalled progress in some of Southeast Asia's most economically and strategically important nations in the past four years.

As the international community gropes for a solution to the intractable, intercommunal conflicts and tensions spreading across the

region, **RfP** continues to diligently work with Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and other communities in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka to advance inter-communal harmony.

To assist in this work, **RfP** partnered in 2013 with Muhammadiyah, International Network of Engaged Buddhists, and International Movement for a Just World to establish the International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim Relations (BMF), headquartered in Malaysia. The Forum mobilizes religious and interreligious mechanisms in the region to counter religiously motivated discrimination and violence in order to restore the historically peaceful relationship between Muslim and Buddhist communities in the region.

On 28 October 2014, a high-level delegation of **RfP International** and BMF leaders visited Dhaka

and Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The delegation met with senior Muslim and Buddhist leaders and high-level government officials and engaged in discussions on ways the Forum can best support their peace and reconciliation efforts.

Delegates included: **Rev. Norio Sakai [International Trustee of RfP]**; **Rev. Kyoichi Sugino [Deputy Secretary General of RfP]**; Mr. Somboon Chungprampree, Executive Secretary, International Network of Engaged Buddhists; Rev. Mitsuyuki Aritomi, Chief Minister, Rissho Kosei-kai Bangladesh; **Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam [President of RfP Bangladesh]**; and **Mr. Sukomal Barua [Secretary General of RfP Bangladesh]**.

The **RfP**-BMF international delegation also visited Buddhist temples destroyed during the 2012 riot. Although the riots were brought under control and the government has restored and rebuilt some of the Buddhist temples, relics of the Buddha, located in some of the 25 destroyed temples constructed around 400 years ago, cannot be replaced.

Buddhists comprise less than one percent of Bangladesh's population, and sectarian clashes between the country's Muslim majority and Buddhists remain rare. However, tensions between the communities escalated when deadly violence erupted between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in nearby Myanmar this June.

As a result, **RfP**, **RfP Bangladesh**, and BMF will provide needed support to strengthen interreligious cooperation, and they will support the launch of a pilot project to promote inter-communal harmony through child protection in the city of Cox's Bazar. Much more needs to be done to prevent Bangladesh and its regional neighbors from becoming hostages to intolerance and bigotry. [Read More](#)

SOUTH AFRICA: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF ADVANCING RECONCILIATION AND PEACE



RfP congratulates **RfP-SA** on its 30th anniversary.

RfP-SA was established in 1984 amidst the struggle against the gross injustices and cruelties of apartheid, and was subsequently recognized by President Mandela in 1994 for its role in the country's reconstruction and development.

Following the dissolution of the apartheid regime, **RfP-SA** served as a meeting point for multi-religious communities, mobilizing them to work together in the rebuilding and harmonizing of South Africa. Many commissioners who served on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission were members of **RfP-SA**, including **Archbishop Desmond Tutu [Founding Member and Patron]** and **Madam Ela Gandhi**, peace activist and granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi [**Co-President of RfP**].

It was, therefore, only fitting that the members of **RfP-SA** chose to celebrate their anniversary

on 21 November on the occasion of "The Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture." Participants at the gathering acknowledged the contributions of those who have supported the struggle for liberation in South Africa through peaceful means, and it served to further promote understanding and co-operation, emphasizing that all the religious traditions represented in South Africa subscribe to liberation, justice, peace and harmony.



In a recent conversation with **Rfp, Ms. Paddy Meskin [President of Rfp-SA and Co-President of Rfp]** discussed the work that is underway to achieve numerous MDGs by utilizing faith in action. "Within the past decade, **Rfp-SA** has held workshops and discussions to provide educators and the community with resources to help those affected by HIV/AIDS. **Rfp-SA** has built schools and educational centers, including Mavela Creche, which provides support to children affected by HIV/AIDS."

Rfp-SA also helped to found the **African Women of Faith Network-Rfp** to provide support and resources to HIV/AIDS affected communities, women and children.

The African Women of Faith Network, established in early 2003, is a network of women of different faith backgrounds from nearly 30 different countries in Africa.

TUNISIA: RELIGIOUS YOUTH LAUNCH "WELCOMING THE OTHER" CAMPAIGN

Inspired by positive changes Tunisia has made since 2011: upholding human rights and freedoms, involving all citizens in constitutional dialogue, and focusing on reconciliation over retribution, **Rfp** chose Tunisia as the venue for the launch of a historic global multi-religious youth campaign, "Welcoming the Other."



The campaign aims to address rising social hostility towards "the other" and radicalization of youth across the globe.

It emerged from last year's **Rfp** 9th World Assembly in Vienna, Austria, where over 700 religious leaders from more than 120 countries, representing the world's diverse religious traditions and every region of the globe, gathered to address

the theme "Welcome the Other: Action for Human Dignity, Citizenship and Shared Well-being."

The global multi-religious youth campaign launch featured His Excellency Dr. Moncef Marzouki, the President of the Republic of Tunisia; H.E. Mr. Mounir Tellili, Minister of Religious Affairs; and **Madame Meherzia Labidi- Maïza [Honorary President of Rfp]**, Vice President of the Constituent Assembly; among other distinguished guests and about 400 Tunisian youth.

Ms. Rori Picker [Coordinator, Rfp International Youth Committee], who also attended, noted that "**Rfp** International Youth Committee believes that by collaborating on shared positive elements of Peace grounded in diverse faith traditions, we can together counter the rising tide

of hostility toward the 'other'."

The **RfP** International Youth Committee consists of 15 official youth representatives of the world's major religious institutions and other outstanding religious youth leaders from around the world with profound knowledge and experience in inter-religious cooperation for peace at the national, regional and global levels.

The religious youth in attendance produced an action plan for the **RfP** Global Interfaith Youth Network. As part of its deliberation on the **RfP** Global Action Plan, religious youth leaders committed to intensifying their efforts at national, regional and international levels to tackle intolerance, discrimination and other forms of social hostilities, and promote the culture of "Welcoming the Other" for our shared well-being.

HIGHLIGHT OF A RELIGIOUS LEADER



Priestess Beatriz Schulthess, President, Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council

In **RfP**, **Priestess Beatriz Schulthess** serves as **Co-President**, Member of the International Executive Committee and **Special Representative to the United Nations**. Prior to that, she was a member of the Executive Committee of the **Latin American and Caribbean Council of Religious Leaders** and the **Latin American and Caribbean Network of Women of Faith of Religions for Peace**.

What has your work with RfP meant to you and your community? What has it allowed you to do that would have otherwise been more challenging without RfP?

To have the opportunity to meet with representatives of other faiths, traditions and religions and learn about the particularities of their respective teachings and practices is extremely important. In discussions with these representatives, we often discover that in spite of our differences, we may end up having similar opinions or positions. It is my duty to inform and share about the **RfP** experiences with our people, and in particular with the elders who taught me, as well as with other spiritual leaders that are part of the Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council.

What are the changes you have seen as a result of the work you and RfP have done together?

In current times, changes are taking place very rapidly. Therefore it becomes difficult to measure the results obtained. Since all our actions have consequences, I am certain that the work that we do with *Religions for Peace* is helping to develop the level of acceptance between different religions and religious leaders. According to our knowledge, the level of human consciousness is accelerating rapidly during the present cycle of time. *Religions for Peace* is contributing to this positive evolution by promoting cooperation and dialogue, in particular in difficult circumstances around the world.

When you look at the challenges we are facing now, in your community and beyond your community, what are some things RfP can help you do now and in the future?

Well, as indigenous peoples, we have a long history of challenges, in particular to survive. Today the struggle continues. Perpetuating our philosophy, ancestral spirituality and knowledge has helped us to survive. Those who maintain that ancestral knowledge and spirituality work diligently according to instructions and do not travel around the world. Others like me acquire knowledge from them and are then entrusted to move around the world to share some of this knowledge.

Religions for Peace can help strengthen our work so that we can contribute to humanity as a whole.

One of the concerns we hear is that multi-religious work diminishes one's own faith. How would you respond this concern?

One's faith can only diminish when there is already a loss of connection with one's spiritual beliefs, teachings and values. Persons that are well educated in their own culture, spiritual beliefs and language will always be very strong.

IN THE NEWS

Articles in this section are taken from independent news sources. The content and opinions expressed do not represent the views of RfP.

Spiritual Leaders Set Out Action Plan to Combat Violent Extremism

[Roberta Pennington](#)

The National, UAE

13 December 2014



ABU DHABI. Spiritual leaders and scholars representing the world's major religions gathered in the capital for a two-day conference to unite against violent religious extremism and work together to combat it.

The leaders on Saturday announced a ten-point action plan that they will initiate over the next three years aimed at combating religious extremists who misinterpret religious text to advance their own agenda.

"This plan is not impossible to implement," said **Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah**, President of the Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies and co-moderator of the forum [**Co-Moderator of RfP**]. "Within these two days, we talked about one of the most important subjects that preoccupies us, that is peace and security in the world.

"I think that we may not disagree on the significance of this subject, of the necessity to establish peace and security across the world, specifically in this area, in the Middle East, which unfortunately has been blighted by the consequences of its own wars."

"It's a battle for the hearts and minds of people in many parts of the world," said **Dr William Vendley** [**Secretary General of RfP**].

"Violent religious extremism is not in anybody's interest and it cannot promote any genuine religion, on that we all agree," said **Cardinal John Onaiyekan**, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria [**Co-Moderator of RfP**]. "We are aware that those terrorists don't really listen to their spiritual leaders, but we cannot sit quiet simply because they will not listen to us. [Read More](#)

Heads of Churches Visit Al-Aqsa Mosque and Islamic Waqf of Jerusalem



The Heads of Churches in Jerusalem visited the Grand Mufti and the Islamic Waqf to show solidarity between the two religions and to endorse the historic Status Quo of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

JERUSALEM - On November 10th, 2014, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem visited Sheikh Abed Al-Atheem, Director of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Azam Abed Alkhatib Altamimi, Head of the Islamic Waqf of Jerusalem to show their support for the historical Status Quo and a show of solidarity between the two faiths. The Heads of Churches included His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of the Greek Orthodox Church, and **His Beatitude Patriarch Fouad Twal** of the Latin Church, **[Honorary President of RfP]**, His Beatitude Patriarch Nourhan Manougian of the Armenian Church, **His Grace Bishop Munib Younan** of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, **[Member of the RfP MENA]** as well as representatives from the Coptic and Anglican churches.

"Holy places must not become political. Some are trying to make the political conflict into a

religious war where we will all be losers, except for the extremists," said **Bishop Munib Younan**. **Bishop Younan** spoke out against any changes to the historical Status Quo: "In Jerusalem, it is very important to keep both the historic Status Quo, freedom of religion, and access to Holy Places." [Read More](#)

Bishop Munib Younan Receives 2014 Civis Mundi Award

22 October 2014
The ELCJHL



WATERLOO, CANADA - On Wednesday, October 22nd, 2014, **Bishop Munib Younan** was awarded the 2014 Civis Mundi Award for Global Citizenship by the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Canada.

The award is being presented to **Bishop Younan** for his dedication to bringing peace to the Middle East. The award is given to those who embody global citizenship and who tirelessly work towards peace, justice, and integrity.

It [the award] tells us, 'Don't grow tired. Continue your good work to bring peace based on justice, to combat any types of extremism, and to continue to strengthen Christians in this county,'" Younan said before the event. [Read More](#)



The Year of Sustainable Development

By Dr. Jeffrey D. Sachs [International Trustee of RfP]

Project Syndicate
9 December 2014

NEW YORK - The year 2015 will be our generation's greatest opportunity to move the world toward sustainable development. Three high-level negotiations between July and December can reshape the global development agenda, and give an important push to vital changes in the workings of the global economy. With United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's call to action in his report "[The Road to Dignity](#)," the Year of Sustainable Development has begun.

In July 2015, world leaders will meet in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to

chart reforms of the global financial system. In September 2015, they will meet again to approve [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) to guide national and global policies to 2030. And in December 2015, leaders will assemble in Paris to adopt a global agreement to head off the growing dangers of human-induced climate change.

The fundamental goal of these summits is to put the world on a course toward sustainable development, or inclusive and sustainable growth. This means growth that raises average living standards; benefits society across the income distribution, rather than just the rich; and protects, rather than wrecks, the natural environment. [Read more](#)

Christian, Muslim Leaders Vow to 'Walk Hand-in-Hand' to Promote Peace

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service
5 December 2014



ROME (CNS) -- Catholic, Anglican, Sunni and Shiite leaders vowed to do all they can to combat "ugly and hideous" distortions of religion, and to involve more women -- often the first victims of violence -- in official interreligious dialogues.

Holding the third Christian-Muslim Summit in Rome December 2-4, the leaders said that while more and more women are involved in high-level dialogues, there is still much to be done, including recognizing that "women play a key role in peacebuilding."

The Catholic, Sunni and Shiite delegations at the summit each included one woman scholar; the Anglican delegation included two women clergy and two female scholars.

The declaration was signed by Bishop Chane; Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; **Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan [Moderator Emeritus of RfP]**; and **Ayatollah Seyyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad of Iran [Co-President of RfP]**.

Cardinal Tauran, who also participated in the first summit in Washington in 2010 and the second in Beirut in 2012, said Catholic-Muslim dialogue "is not so easy today," especially when such

ferocious violence is enflaming Syria, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East. [Read More](#)

President Martelly Meet with Religions for Peace Haiti

30 September 2014
LACCRL-*RfP* Newsletter



The President of Haiti, Michel Martelly, met with a delegation of *Religions for Peace Haiti*, led by its **Coordinator, Most Rev. Pierre-Andre Dumas**, [Bishop of Anse-à-Veau et Miragoâne] in the framework of the consultations to find a solution to the political problems of the country, due to the continuous postponement of the legislative and local elections for more than three years, which generates a vacuum of legislative power and local government administration, and as a result, a further weakening of Haiti's fragile democracy.

RfP Haiti includes Senior Haitian representatives of the Roman Catholic Church; the Evangelical Protestant Churches; the Federation of Protestant Churches; the Lutheran Church; the Muslim Community and the Voodoo Confederacy.

Muslims, Buddhists Team Up to Bring about Peace for Rohingya

Hans Nicholas Jong
The Jakarta Post
23 November 2014



(Center) Chairman of Muhammadiyah Muslim organization, Din Syamsuddin, [Co-President of RfP]

Muslims and Buddhists in Indonesia are joining forces to push for conflict resolution in Myanmar, where the Rohingya Muslim minority has been persecuted and denied citizenship for more than three decades.

Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), said that in collaboration with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Council of Buddhist Communities (Walubi), it would make a trip to

Myanmar in December to start a dialogue with Buddhist monks there.

"I agree with the United Nations which said that the conflict in Myanmar could be resolved by allowing the Muslim community and Buddhist community to meet and talk. This is not only a problem for Myanmar, but also our concern," NU executive council chairman Slamet Effendy Yusuf told The Jakarta Post on Saturday.

In recent years, attacks by Buddhist mobs have left hundreds dead and 140,000 trapped in camps, while other Rohingya are fleeing the country. *Religions for Peace* said that as a follow-up to the visit, members of the Buddhist community in Myanmar are expected to visit Indonesia.

"It should happen both ways. They should come to Indonesia and make friends with Muslims. This has never happened before and I think this is important," *Religions for Peace Deputy Secretary-General Kyoichi Sugino* said.

Sugino said that members of the international community, especially countries that have close diplomatic ties with Myanmar, such as EU countries, Japan and Indonesia, could play a role as mediators in the conflict between Muslims and Buddhists in the country. [Read More](#)

Jordan's Prince Hassan: Recognition of Palestinian State Is a 'Gross Irrelevance.' The Issue Is Citizenship for All

Alain Elkann recently sat down in London with Jordan's Prince El Hassan bin Talal [Moderator Emeritus of RfP]. Here are excerpts of his interview.

Huffington Post
3 December 2014



How are your efforts going to bring an ecumenical community together to address the problems of the Middle East?

I am beginning to feel that voices from the region have some traction. [This month], I am going back in Rome, having already met the Holy Father earlier this year, for a meeting of the Pontifical Council where there are going to be Anglicans and Catholics, Shia and Sunni. So I am beginning to feel that the call for justice, which basically is a call for enabling and empowering people with citizenship, is beginning to receive the support of the broad ecumenical community.

What does it take for peaceful coexistence?

The traction I feel we are beginning to get is that, for the first time in a long time, authentic ideas are coming from the region and are being listened to. Some years ago we established the West Asia-North Africa Forum, and today we are in touch with the international bar associations of the world. People are beginning to develop the content of the rule of law.

We have not talked together since this time last year. What has changed since then, and what are your major concerns now?

Well, a major concern in the region, with the possible exception of Tunisia, is rampant corruption, alongside a lack of governance and of institutionalism. So I am talking today about the importance of the triple helix of political, economic and civil society coming together to talk. You see the problem we face is that all the slogans of the Arab Spring in 2011 were just that -- slogans. Democracy. Freedom. [Read More](#)

Attackers are Targeting Everything Valuable in Jerusalem, Palestinian Mufti Says

World Bulletin/News Desk
9 December 2014



The Palestinian Mufti and Imam of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the scene of attacks and violent incidents in recent months, has described the situation in the holy city as "painful" during a visit to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

Mohammed Ahmed Hossein said Monday after being received by the head of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Husein Kavazovic, that everything of value in Jerusalem -- viewed by Muslims as one of the world's holiest sites -- was being

targeted by attackers. Hossein said: "Truly, the situation is very painful, not only in the mosque compound, but in the entire city." "Attackers target everything that is valuable in the holy city, such as the al-Aqsa Mosque, but do not spare churches either." Comparing Sarajevo and Jerusalem, Hossein said the capital of Bosnia was a "European Quds" due to its multi-ethnicity and presence of different religions.

He said: "Talking with Kavazovic today, I learned that Bosnia has an inter-religious council (**The Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina-RfP**) which advocates dialogue between Muslims, Catholics and others who live here." "We support it, as it is important in building sustainable security and peace in the country." "Here you have mosques, churches and synagogues next to one another, similar to what we have in Jerusalem," he said. [Read More](#)

Birmingham Faith Leaders Travel to India as Part of Interfaith Programme

20 October

By Steve Squires

The Church of England-Birmingham



A delegation comprising of the Faith Leaders of the major faiths in Birmingham will be travelling to India as part of a programme to experience the rich heritage and culture of the Sikh Dharam (Faith) whilst participating in interfaith dialogue.

The event, sponsored by **Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia**, Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Birmingham [**Co-President and International Trustee of RfP**] was organised with a view to increase awareness of the Sikh Dharam, its rich heritage, culture and to give a first-hand experience of the Sikh way of life.

The host and sponsor of the event, **Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh**, has worked tirelessly over the last two years to negotiate diaries and agendas to get the Faith Leaders to have an interfaith retreat to spend time together to learn about each other. "It has been my desire for a long time to take the Faith Leaders to Amritsar, the most sacred holy shrine for Sikhs, with a view to give them the exposure to the Sikh Dharam, our heritage, our values and a link to our ancestry. We have spent a lot of time together in formal meetings and I wanted the Faith Leaders to spend some quality time together whilst addressing some really relevant issue".

Bhai Sahib went on to say, "Faith leaders have a great role to play and can be very influential, they can bring harmony in challenging times as we have seen. Promoting values like compassion, truth, forgiveness, kindness, tolerance and fostering inter-religious harmony are all so crucial and important, the trip will provide an opportunity to share some sacred time together". [Read More](#)

World Faith Leaders in Pledge to End Modern Slavery

Rabbi David Rosen's Newsletter
October-December 2014



On the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, Pope Francis hosted The Global Freedom Network to eradicate human slavery and trafficking that brought together leaders and representative of the five major world religions to declare modern slavery as a crime against humanity and to work for its eradication.

In a ceremonial act at the Vatican in Cassina Pio IV, a Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders against Modern Slavery was signed by Pope Francis, Most Revd and Right Hon. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury; Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) (represented by Venerable Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Chan Khong); The Most Ven. Datuk K Sri Dhammaratana, Chief High Priest of

Malaysia; Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma); **Rabbi David Rosen, KSG, CBE**, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, AJC, **[Co-President of RfP]**; Rabbi Dr. Abraham Skorka; Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar (represented by Dr. Abbas Abdalla Abbas Soliman, Undersecretary of State of Al Azhar Alsharif); Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi al-Modarresi; Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Basheer Hussain al Najafi (represented by Sheikh Naziyah Razzaq Jaafar, Special advisor of Grand Ayatollah); Dr. Omar Abboud; His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (represented by **His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel of France**), **[Co-President of RfP]**. [Read More](#)

Din Gets Award from China

The Jakarta Post, Jakarta
4 December 2014



Muhammadiyah Chairman **Din Syamsuddin [Co-President of RfP]** received on Thursday the Lifetime Achievement Award for Religion and Culture Development, which was conferred at the 6th World Chinese Economic Forum in Chongqing, China.

The forum conferred the award on Din for his contributions in international fora developing religion and culture, both at home and abroad, such as Muhammadiyah's active role in conflict resolution in Mindanao, southern Philippines, and

Patani, southern Thailand.

I am most thankful for this divine blessing and humane award because I feel I have played only a small role for peace, civilization and humanity," Din said in a media release. [Read More](#)



Tanzania: Concerted Inter-Faith Activities Bear Fruits in Kilimanjaro

14 December 2014
All Africa

Moshi - **Inter-religious Council for Peace Tanzania-RfP** and Interfaith committees have

greatly changed the Kilimanjaro region, by bringing harmony between the residents and supporting them in economic activities.

The **Council** and committees that advocate for religious tolerance go a step further in initiating interfaith dialogue at district, regional and zonal level, conflict resolutions, service for children with special needs as well as introduction of Inter-Religious Village Community Banks in quest for poverty reduction.

That was disclosed on Saturday during an official inauguration of the **Council** and committees which include paralegals and women interfaith network that was graced by the Kilimanjaro Regional Commissioner (RC), Mr Leonidas Gama.

The grand occasion brought together Kilimanjaro Regional Sheikh Shaban Rashidi; the Moshi Catholic Diocese Bishop, Right Reverend Isaac Amani, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) Northern Diocese Bishop, Rev Dr Martin Shao, the diocese's Bishop elect, Rev Dr Fredrick Shoo and other dignitaries.

The **Council** implored the government to join hands in maintaining peace, harmony, love and well organized economic activities in the region. [Read More](#)

In Memoriam

Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom [1963-2014]



Religions for Peace mourns the passing of **Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom [Co-President of RfP]**, and a member of the **RfP Middle East North Africa Council of Religious Leaders**, in addition to other important duties.

Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom was a person of great faith, deeply respected and warmly appreciated by all who had the privilege to know him.

Born into one of Iraq's most prominent traditional Shi'a clerical families, **Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom's** courage as a young man served as an inspiration for Shiite believers and many others around the world. In 1991, his father, a leading scholar of Najaf, Iraq, was executed by the government of Saddam Hussein, along

with 21 other close relatives. Despite this devastating personal blow, **Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom** was known by all as a deeply religious man utterly committed to peace.

In the course of his pursuit of freedom and justice, **Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom** studied with some of the most illustrious Shi'a scholars at Hawza seminaries in Najaf, Iraq, and Qom, Iran. He would later return to the Hawza in Najaf in 2003 as an expert in Islamic studies to teach and train young clerics.

Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom was buried on 16 October 2014, in Najaf. **Mr. Abdul Ilah Marafie, [RfP International Trustee]**, a close personal friend and colleague of **Dr. Syed Hassan Bahr Al Oloom**, was present for the burial and shared this [letter](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

28 February 2015 - **RfP** United Kingdom hosting "**FAITH COMMUNITIES - PROGRESS TOWARDS A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS,**" London, UK

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YOUR WORK, YOUR SUCCESS

Send us your news and work, and we will include it in the next Newsletter

Questions, comments, or news?

Kindly contact:

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RELIGIONS FOR PEACE--the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition--advances common action among the world's religious communities for peace. *Religions for Peace* works to transform violent conflict, advance human development, promote just and harmonious societies, and protect the earth. The global *Religions for Peace* network comprises a World Council of senior religious leaders from all regions of the world; six regional inter-religious bodies and more than ninety national ones; and the Global Women of Faith Network and Global Interfaith Youth Network.

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