

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL



Dear Friends:

Warm greetings.

The 2014 *Religions for Peace (RfP)* International Executive Committee (EC) meeting drew an array of prominent global religious leaders to New York City on 20-22 September 2014 to address threats to Peace.

Joining the EC in its gathering were members of *RfP's* World Council, Honorary Presidents, International Trustees, United Nations representatives, heads of foundations and NGOs, philanthropists, leading CEOs and media.

RfP leaders and guests collaborated and took action on pressing global subjects, including violent extremism, the post-2015 development agenda, the displacement of religious minorities and climate change.

Two issues--violent extremism and climate change--dominated the gathering and discussions focused on the positive role of religious communities in tackling these challenges.

Other discussions focused on the *RfP* Strategic Plan (2014-2018).

Participants also attended the official United Nations side event on Climate Change, the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, co-convened by *RfP* and the World Council of Churches. *RfP* salutes the outstanding work of its partner in this event, the World Council of Churches.

These series of *RfP* meetings and events served to scale up and strengthen programs and multi-stakeholder partnerships to increase multi-religious action for the common good at all levels--grassroots, national, regional and global.

In partnership for Peace, I remain

Sincerely,



Dr. William F. Vendley
Secretary General

IN THE NETWORK

GLOBAL: *RFP* RELIGIOUS LEADERS RESPOND TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM



L-R: Dr. Sayyid Syeed; Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson; Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah; Dr. Matthew Hodes; Dr. Din Syamsuddin; and Dr. William Vendley

Violent extremism, claimed to be rooted in religious doctrine, is steadily rising to unparalleled dimensions across the globe. In the past few months alone, we have witnessed Boko Haram's kidnapping of Nigerian girls and ISIS' slaughtering in Iraq and Syria. Religious leaders are particularly well positioned to address root causes of violent extremism, especially when it is masked in religious ideology.

In response to this rising violent extremism, religious leaders and communities are responding with condemnations and calls for peace. By acknowledging violence in all its forms and its impact on society, religious communities can be effective agents for peace and articulate a new vision of shared security.



Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, President of the Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu Dhabi, [**Co-Moderator of RfP**], has earned international recognition for his leadership and calls for peace as an Islamic cleric in the Middle East. He recently issued a [fatwa](#) against ISIS entitled "This is Not the Path to Paradise." In it, **Shaykh bin Bayyah** condemns ISIS, stating: "This is addressed to the young men who bear arms against their own nations and destroy both country and countrymen. You have abandoned all values and made enemies of the world. We call on you to pause, reflect, and heed this counsel for the sake of all who want good for our community."

President Barack Obama's speech to the United Nations recognized **Shaykh bin Bayyah's** leadership in the Middle East, in particular through the new Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies. President Obama cited **Shaykh bin Bayyah's** declaration: "We must declare war on war, so that the outcome will be peace upon peace."

On 26 September, **Shaykh bin Bayyah** and **Dr. William Vendley**, [**Secretary General of RfP**] participated in "Religious Actors Combating Radicalization and Violent Extremism Symposium," in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. Religious leaders, scholars and actors from around the world--Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Syria and Libya--discussed how to combat violent extremism. **Shaykh bin Bayyah** stated, "If we say in the current conditions, no peace without justice, then given the amount of grievances we're dealing with, let's forget about peace altogether. We have to get peace established in our hearts so that we can then work towards grievances in a peaceful environment."

Earlier that week, **Shaykh bin Bayyah** joined other **RfP** senior religious leaders, International Trustees and UN representatives to explore strategies religious communities can employ to combat violent extremism.

Panelists included: Mr. Matthew Hodes, Director of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; **Dr. Din Syamsuddin**, President of Muhammadiyah [**Moderator of the Asian Conference of RfP and Co-President of RfP**]; **H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan**, Archbishop of Abuja, [**Co-Moderator of RfP**]; **Dr. Sayyid Syeed**, National Director of the Office for Interfaith and Community Alliances of the Islamic Society of North America, [**Co-President of RfP**]; **Mr. Steve Killelea**, Founder of the Institute for Economics and Peace, [**Treasurer of RfP and International Trustee of RfP**]; and **Dr. William Vendley**, [**Secretary General of RfP**].

Shaykh bin Bayyah spoke of the faulty rhetoric on which such violent extremism is claimed to be based in his own faith of Islam. "People who claim to speak for religion are like energy," he said. "It can be productive or destructive.... People dress heinous actions in the garment of religion. But one of the names of God is Peace. And God calls to the abode of Peace. Peace is foundational."

In opening remarks, Mr. Hodes posed the question, "How do we act to finish the job of making the voices of moderation prevail?"

"We need to walk together to mainstream moderation," responded **Dr. Syamsuddin**.

"No matter what we do, we can do it much better if we can link 'us' with 'the other,' added **H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan**, in his reflections on the situation currently confronting Nigeria.



Mr. Matthew Hodes and H. E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan

GLOBAL: A MULTI-RELIGIOUS CALL FOR ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE



H. E. Dr. Kul Chandra Gautam

A trip to the hometown of **H.E Dr. Kul Chandra Gautam**, Former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations [**International Trustee of RfP**], in Amarpur, Nepal, usually takes him a few hours. This year, he will have to walk for several days to get to Amarpur. The rainy season was supposed to conclude by the end of August, but now, even at the end of September, Amarpur remains isolated due to heavy rain that has damaged the roads.

On the other side of the world, **Dr. Francis Kuria Kagema**, [**Secretary General of the African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP**], witnesses in Kenya that

snow no longer sits atop the mountains; that certain fruits and vegetables are no longer sold at markets; that certain insects that used to fly and buzz around him as a child are now extinct. He recalls, "People are fighting over the lack of clean water because the rivers they used to rely on no longer flow."

Changes in the weather patterns associated with climate change have had dire consequences, increasing natural disasters, food and water shortages, and mass migration.

As world leaders assembled at the United Nations in September to confront threats from climate change, **RfP** religious leaders also gathered to take common action to match this challenge. "Religious communities are the largest social infrastructure for change and they can use this power to address man-made climate change," said **Dr. William Vendley**, [Secretary General of **RfP**].

Dr. Vinu Aram, Director of the Shanti Ashram, [Co-Moderator of **RfP**], highlighted that, "Faith communities have a very important role to play to bring that voice of faith, that voice of reason, and that voice asking introspection not only from its own individual members but from communities across the world as to how they would want to define tomorrow, as to how they would want to hand over this planet, this beautiful planet to the next generation."



L-R: Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh; Ms. Laura Vargas; Priestess Beatriz Schulthess; Archbishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo; Dr. Jeffrey Sachs; Mrs. Christina Brown; Dr. William Vendley; and Rabbi Rick Jacobs

At the **RfP International Executive Committee Meeting** on 20 September, members adopted "[A Multi-religious Call for Action on Climate Change: A Statement of the Executive Committee of Religions for Peace.](#)" In this statement, religious leaders emphasized that, as agents of social change, they can help believers in their communities build a connection between the challenges of climate change to practicing their faith, called for personal lifestyle changes, and advocated for policies that can transform economies into environmentally friendly engines of sustainable development.

Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, hosted a conversation with **RfP** religious leaders on, "The Positive Role of Religions in Protecting the Earth." **RfP** and the

Earth Institute have formed a partnership to scale up our multi-religious response to climate change.

Moderated by **Mrs. Christina Lee Brown**, Founder of the Center for Interfaith Relations, [**International Trustee of RfP**], the discussion included contributions by Archbishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Chancellor, Pontifical Academy of Sciences; **Priestess Beatriz Schulthess**, President of Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council, [**Co-President of RfP**]; **Rabbi Rick Jacobs**, President of Union for Reform Judaism, [**Co-President of RfP**]; **Ms. Laura Vargas**, Focal Point Coordinator of COP 20 in Peru, [**Member of RfP Global Women of Faith Network**]; **Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh**, Chairman Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, [**Co-President and International Trustee of RfP**]; and **Dr. William F. Vendley**, [**Secretary General of RfP**].

Mrs. Brown reflected that, "We are beginning to understand that as we destroy the air, the water, and the soil, we are ultimately destroying human life."



Dr. Jeffrey Sachs

Dr. Jeffrey Sachs discussed the positive role of religion in protection of the Earth and stressed that the challenge of climate change is, "not so much an environmental or a financial crisis as it is a moral crisis."

Dr. Sachs has joined **RfP** as an International Trustee.

To convey the faith communities' concerns and proposals to the UN Secretary General's Climate Summit, as part of long term efforts to influence the universal climate agreement in Paris in

2015, **RfP** and the World Council of Churches co-convened the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, 21-22 September 2014, in New York. **RfP** salutes the outstanding work of its partner in this event, the World Council of Churches. To see the important statement of the global multi-religious summit, [click here](#).

Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, Secretary General of World Council of Churches, [**Co-President of RfP**], stated, "It is immoral to not speak the language of hope when we face climate change. Today hope is moving thousands including faith leaders."



GLOBAL: RELIGIONS FOR PEACE AFFIRMS STRATEGIC PLAN TO ACHIEVE MULTI-RELIGIOUS VISION OF PEACE



L-R: Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Dr. Vinu Aram, Shaykh Bin Bayyah (with Shaykh Hamza Yusuf), Rev. Kosho Niwano and Dr. William Vendley

Over 600 religious leaders representing historic faith traditions from every region of the world addressed the rising tide of social hostilities towards 'the other' at the **9th World Assembly of Religions for Peace** in Vienna, Austria, November 2013. Together the Assembly affirmed a multi-religious vision of Peace that calls on all people of faith to 'welcome the other.'

On 20 September 2014, this multi-religious vision of Peace was formulated into a Strategic Plan for action and was unanimously adopted by the **Rfp International Executive Committee** during its meeting in New York.

The Strategic Plan outlines goals and strategies for the upcoming years before the next World Assembly to advance the **Rfp** Global Agenda for Peace that includes: developing and advancing a concept of shared wellbeing; transforming violent conflict; promoting just and harmonious societies; advancing human development; and protecting the earth.

Five core strategies will be implemented to advance the Global Agenda for Peace: building and equipping national and regional multi-religious mechanisms; welcoming individual members; advancing the Center of Excellence; strengthening the Global Network; and scaling up the capacity of **Rfp** International. [Read More](#)

GLOBAL: RFP LEADERS RESPOND TO DISPLACEMENT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Annual Global Trends report found that for the first time since World War II the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons worldwide exceeds 50 million people.

In Central Africa Republic, clashes between Muslim and Christian communities have forced hundreds of people to flee their homes from war or persecution. In Iraq, Yazidis are fleeing through Syria into Kurdistan.



To speed up the momentum for global support to stop this crisis, **RfP** convened Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, other faiths and civil society leaders to strategize on ways government and civil society can better support members of religious minorities displaced by violent persecution around the world.

RfP Executive Committee and **International Trustees** were joined in the consultation by Dr. Sarah Sewall, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights; Mr. Tom Malinowski, Assistant US Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; Mr. Shaun Casey, Special Advisor for Faith Based and Community Initiatives; Mr. Ira Forman, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism; and Mr. Shaarik Zafar, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, [**Co-Moderator of RfP**], recalled how political conflict swiftly descended into religious persecution following the 2011 Nigerian presidential elections: "In a 14-hour period, close to 700 churches were destroyed in 12 states."

The 22 September consultation gave prominence to the issue of religious persecution against people of different faiths. It also highlighted the need for concerted international action by governments, religious communities, experts and those in the field working on these issues every day. Participants concluded the meeting pledging to work together with patience and determination in common action to protect all displaced and persecuted persons.

AFRICA: TAKING ACTION ON THE POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA



H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan, right, with Colleagues at the UN

With the process for setting a transformative post-2015 Development Agenda nearing completion, **RfP** in partnership with the United Nations Millennium Campaign co-convened a high-level meeting of African leaders and key stakeholders, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, to advance practical actions to shape the Agenda.

Held in conjunction with the Government of Liberia and the African Interfaith Initiative on the Post 2015 Development Agenda, the conversation followed on the African Faith Leaders' Summit on Post 2015 Development Agenda, hosted by the **Inter-religious Council of Uganda-RfP**, in Uganda in July 2014.

Rich exchanges and interventions were made that included both recognition of achievements in advancing the MDGs in African states and concerns that more is required to help shape the future development agenda.

Participants included: Mr. Sering Falu Njie, Deputy Director, United Nations Millennium Campaign; Rev. Nicta Lubaale, Chair Person, African Interfaith Initiative on the Post 2015 Development Agenda; Dr. Abdoulaye Dukule; Special Envoy of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the UN High Level Panel on the post-2015; **H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan**, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, [**Co-Moderator of RfP**]; Ms. Corrine Woods: Global Director, United Nations Millennium Campaign; **Dr. Francis Kuria**, [**Secretary General African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP**]; and **Dr. William Vendley**, [**Secretary General of RfP**].

H.E. Cardinal Onaiyekan thanked the United Nations for its continued concern for the plight of the peoples of the world. He urged governments to view the Church as a partner in progress, and collaborate with her for the good of society and to the Glory of a God.

Dr. Francis Kuria Kagema reminded of the importance "to develop efficient advocacy mechanisms to ensure that the Post 2015 Development Agenda is achieved."

In closing remarks, Ms. Corrine Woods--informed the African leaders that the United Nations is, "here to support your work, to support you."

NIGERIA: ADVANCING INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE JUST AND HARMONIOUS SOCIETY IN NIGERIA



Cardinal John Onaiyekan and Sultan of Sokoto

In the wake of the Boko Haram kidnapping of schoolgirls in April of this year, conflict claimed to be rooted in religious and political differences has commanded the public spotlight in Nigeria. With the 2015 presidential election on the horizon, fears of new or renewed tensions that will lead to further conflict are escalating.

In response, **H.M. Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar**, Sultan of Sokoto, [**Co-President of RfP**] and **H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan**, Archbishop of Abuja, [**Co-Moderator of RfP**] convened a historic gathering of Muslim and Christian leaders, leaders of other faiths, women, academia, youth, political leaders, and judges,

for a spirited discussion on the 'Imperative of Interfaith Understanding and Cooperation for Responsible Politics.'

Nigerian President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan opened the gathering. The President condemned the misuse of religion by politicians to foster enmity and violence. Moreover, he expressed a renewed hope for creating a just and harmonious Nigeria, declaring, "I can say categorically that Nigeria will not disintegrate, will not fail. We will surely get over our challenges and become even stronger as a nation."

H.E. Cardinal Onaiyekan delivered the keynote address. He highlighted the common ground on which

religious and political leaders can build a peaceful society. "In my opinion, what is more important is the wide range of common grounds that exist among all our religions, which we often take for granted or even totally ignore. And yet, these are the already existing stones for building the foundation of a peaceful and harmonious multi-religious community," said **Cardinal Onaiyekan**. "If we are not only to survive but thrive with our great diversity of ethnic and religious identities, we need a spirit of accommodation of one another, bearing with and accepting each other with respect."

Participants left the gathering with concrete recommendations for fostering interfaith dialogue at all levels of Nigerian society to advance mutual respect and shared wellbeing across ethnic and religious communities.

WEST AFRICA: RESPONDING TO THE EBOLA EPIDEMIC

West African nations - Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea - are being ravaged by largest ever Ebola outbreak in recorded history.

Schools and businesses are closing. Governments are overburdened and understaffed. Inflation is rising. Food shortages and prices are soaring. Hospitals are overrun with patients waiting for treatment. Those infected or affected are stigmatized. Security is destabilizing.

As the epidemic sweeps across these already fragile societies, it poses a grave threat to public health and to peace.



RfP Interreligious Councils in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea are leading quick and effective targeted awareness and sensitization activities to curb the spread of Ebola and save lives.

In Sierra Leone, the **Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone-RfP (IRCSL-RfP)** has formed a Religious Taskforce comprised of leaders of diverse faith backgrounds to tackle the crisis. In addition to providing critical psychosocial support to children who contract Ebola and families who are affected by the crisis, the taskforce has formally made a series of important recommendations to the President of Sierra Leone, which you can [read here](#).

In Liberia, the hardest-hit country, the **Interreligious Council of Liberia-RfP (IRCL-RfP)** has recruited 240 members, including 15 Pastors, 15 Imams, five Women of Faith and five Religious Youth in six counties to implement grassroots awareness campaigns.

To assist the **IRCL-RfP** in its efforts, **RfP International**, through its global partnership with UNICEF, has allocated extra resources to support an expansion of their critical work.

On 29 September, a delegation consisting of **Rev. St. John York, [Secretary General of IRCL-RfP]**; secretaries general of the two member organizations of **IRCL-RfP**, the Liberian Council of Churches and the Liberian Muslim Council; and the Minister of Internal Affairs travelled to six affected counties: Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, Bomi, Lofa and Nimba.

The delegation met with local government health workers, religious leaders and **IRCL-RfP** local staff and volunteers to lay the groundwork for scaling up grassroots responses and prevention activities to stem the epidemic through the dissemination of messages via radio programs, posters, DVDs and local meetings.

RfP International is working to expand support to its IRCs where the Ebola epidemic continues to rage. If you would like to help, please [click here](#).

IRAQ: REJECTING TERRORISM, PROMOTING PEACE WITH JUSTICE



The violence and persecution of Iraqi Christians and other minorities have escalated to devastating heights. The world community—including religious leaders from across the globe—is urgently calling for intervention, dialogue and peace.

One such religious leader is **H.E. Sheikh Majid Hafeed**, Imam of the Big Mosque in Sulaimaniya, **[Honorary President of RfP]**. "I implore you, in the name of our Great Creator, to rapidly help the Yazidis, in particular those refugees that have fled their homes, towns and villages in search of safety and protection.

I implore you and every brother and sister in **RfP**, or in any other organization to do everything possible within your available means to support and protect those innocent human beings," said **Sheikh Hafeed**.

His Beatitude Louis Raphaël Sako, Christian Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon, **[Co-President of RfP]**, has also appealed for intervention and aid to assist the over 100,000 Iraqi Christians who have fled their homes for haven in the Kurdish cities of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaimaniya: "We appeal with sadness and pain to the conscience of all people of good will and the United States and the European Union to save these innocent persons from death."

The [appeals](#) of **H.E. Sheikh Majid Hafeed** and **His Beatitude Louis Raphaël Sako** were sent to the President of the United Nations Security Council, urging the Security Council to take appropriate

measures to protect these innocent civilians.

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, **[Co-President of RfP]** stated in his [appeal](#): "We strongly condemn the atrocities against the Yazidi people, and are deeply disturbed by the inhumane violence that has destroyed the lives of countless innocent victims in recent days."

Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah, President of the Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu Dhabi, **[Co-Moderator of RfP]** issued a [fatwa](#) against ISIS and has publicly condemned ISIS's rhetoric and actions in Saudi Arabia and the US.

The [European Council of Religious Leaders-RfP](#), [RfP United Kingdom](#) and the [Inter-Religious Council of Albania -RfP](#) have each called for an end to the persecution of Iraqi Christians and other minorities.

H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, **[Co-Moderator of RfP]** called for Muslim religious leaders in Nigeria to condemn the violence committed by ISIS, stating, "I am hoping that the Nigerian Muslim community will find the opportunity to speak loudly against these atrocities. This is not only for the sake of the minorities of Northern Iraq, but for the sake of our nation in the face of Boko Haram, whose rhetoric is very similar to that of ISIS. We shudder at the prospect that they may have a similar end game in mind."

Muhammadiyah, the prominent Islamic organization in Indonesia chaired by **Professor Dr. M. Din Syamsuddin [Moderator of the Asian Conference of RfP and Co-President of RfP]**, has also condemned the rhetoric and violence of ISIS, "because it contradicts the principles and values of the Islamic teachings. Violent means used to achieve goals is contrary to Islamic teachings of peace and civility, and can bring a setback for the future of civilization." Muhammadiyah further pledged to prevent the recruitment of Indonesians by ISIS and to further educational training of the true values and principles of Islam.

RfP members around the world hold those suffering in Iraq and around the world in prayer and join the global community in appealing for protection of the vulnerable populations of Iraq to be protected from further violence.

SYRIA: SUPPORTING DISPLACED YAZIDIS

As ISIS continues to consolidate its control over northern Iraq, Yazidis are fleeing their homes for refuge and protection in Kurdistan. The safest route that Yazidis can take to reach protection in Kurdistan is through northeastern Syria.

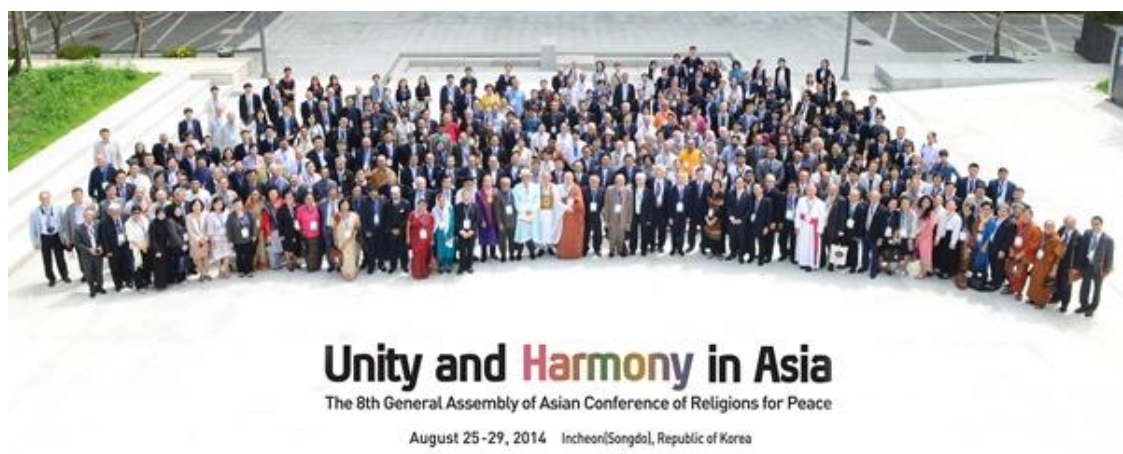
RfP leaders have called for the protection this vulnerable population from further attack and affirm



their shared wellbeing and security.

Rfp-affiliated leaders in northern Syria and Iraq are working within their communities to facilitate aid through their networks for Yazidis fleeing through Syria. Despite the risks, these religious leaders are opening their places of worship for shelter, providing clean water and meals, establishing stations along the route to supply snacks and drinks, offering medical care and standing in solidarity and encouragement with the Yazidis as they search for safe haven.

KOREA: BUILDING JUST AND HARMONIOUS SOCIETIES



Asia faces rising social hostilities among nations and religious communities, such as the decades-long conflict between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

As affirmed during the **9th World Assembly of Rfp**, religious leaders and communities have a key role countering rising hostilities.

From 23-25 August, over 80 religious youth from 14 countries across Asia convened to address rising hostilities. The youth affirmed their responsibility as agents of peace. "We have to make sure that the role of religions in society is to solve social issues, not be part of the problem," said **Mr. Dahnil Anzar Simanjutak [Member of the International Youth Committee]** from Indonesia. **Dr. Sunggon Kim, [ACRP Secretary General]** asked the youth to engage in multi-faith collaboration and become agents of peace: "Our extreme diversity should create harmony not conflict."

Following the youth gathering, the **8th General Assembly of ACRP** was held in Incheon, Korea and discussions focused on addressing rising social hostilities and promoting just and harmonious societies. Reflecting on the theme of 'Unity and Harmony in Asia,' the Assembly brought together more than 450 religious leaders from 27 countries in Asia and the Pacific to collaborate on common action for peace

and to set the program agenda for **ACRP**.

Dr. William Vendley, [Secretary General of RfP], stated in his welcome remarks that, "Unity and harmony are central features of our emerging multi-faith community. We need bonds of unity. 'The other' is us as our religions teach us."

Rev. Nichiko Niwano, President of the Rissho Kosei-kai, **[Honorary President of RfP]**, remarked in his keynote address, " We should realize that hatred only fosters hatred...Asia with its rich experience could lead the world in the path of peace, and this may be its great role in the world, leading all sentient beings into peace and deliverance."

Delegates at the Assembly affirmed the Incheon Declaration, committing to work in their communities to promote initiatives that counter discrimination and violence against women and children, to welcome the other as part of our multi-religious understanding of peace and to promote dialogue between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. [Read More](#)

SRI LANKA: FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION



On 16 June 2014, sectarian violence between Buddhist and Muslims erupted in Aluthgama (Kalutara District), causing damages to Muslim mosques and Buddhist temples, as well as homes and businesses. Three Muslims were killed, and more than 78 people were seriously injured. The **Sri Lankan Council of Religions for Peace (RfP Sri Lanka)** is actively responding to the rising hostilities and violence between Buddhists and Muslims.

Venerable Prof. Kotapitiye Rahula, [Chairman of RfP Sri Lanka Kalutara District Council] reached out to local Buddhist and Muslim leaders and collaborated with state authorities to organize Muslim-Buddhist consultations to foster social cohesion.

The Most Venerable Prof. Bellanvila Wimalaratana Anunayaka Thero, [Secretary General of RfP Sri Lanka and Co-President of RfP], assisted **Venerable Rahula** in organizing these meetings, and appealed to the President of Sri Lanka, requesting government support to advance social cohesion and promote peace in the region.

At the national level, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Christian leaders stood together and condemned incitements to violence and called for a restoration of harmonious relations between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka.

RfP Sri Lanka leaders in other districts are actively working within their communities to build sustainable peace in the region.

INDONESIA: RFP LEADS THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON BUDDHIST MUSLIM RELATIONS



The International Forum on Buddhist Muslim Forum Core Group met with ASEAN and the Foreign Ministry of Indonesia (12 August 2014)

Dr. Din Syamusuddin, President of Muhammadiyah, [**Co-President of Rfp**] hosted the core group of the International Forum on Buddhist Muslim Relations (BMF) in Jakarta, Indonesia on 11-14 August to respond to sectarian tensions and violence in South and Southeast Asia. The BMF core group includes **Rfp**, International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB, Thailand), Muhammadiyah (Indonesia) and JUST (Malaysia). BMF has been actively engaged with key actors from Buddhist and Muslim communities, governmental and intergovernmental partners, as well as with extremist groups in Myanmar and Sri Lanka to prevent sectarian violence and advance reconciliation in the region.

ARGENTINA: PROTECTING THE EARTH

Threats to our planet are threats to peace. Environmental degradation is leading to increased social hostility as natural resources, including water, become more and more scarce. Moreover, climate change has resulted in devastating natural disasters, widening shortages of food and water, and mass migration, threatening human health and security.



Juan Manuel Urtubey, Governor of Salta, Zulema Burneo, Regional Coordinator, International Land Coalition Latin America and the Caribbean (ILC), and Elias Szczytnicki, Secretary General and Regional Director, RfP Latin America and the Caribbean

In Latin America, environmental degradation of semi-arid lands has led to social hostility and conflict.

In tri-national Chaco, covering parts of Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay, de-forestation and conflicts over land have aggravated the social inequality and poverty in the region.

To address this rise in social hostility, **RfPLatin America and Caribbean** joined the International Forum on "Semi-Arid Regions: Dialogue and Social Participate, the Road to Regional Management" in Salta, Argentina, on 19-20 August. This event, co-sponsored by the International Land Coalition, Church World Service and the Foundation for

Development in Justice and Peace, gave participants an opportunity to exchange experiences and generate concrete proposals to address the environmental and social dilemmas in semi-arid regions.

Participants of the Forum committed to build alliances for defending the rights of people to access, use, and manage natural resources, and established a mechanism for resolving territorial and sectorial conflicts. They also agreed to work to encourage the adoption of public policies that address environmental degradation and social hostilities.

AZERBAIJAN: "WELCOMING THE OTHER"



Chief Rabbi Dr. Rene Gutman

Every historic faith calls us to 'welcome the other' in our communities by promoting mutual respect and understanding.

On 1-2 September 2014, the **European Council of Religious Leaders - RfP (ECRL-RfP)** joined over 30 representatives from religious communities, interreligious groups, NGOs, experts, academics, and youth at the '7th Exchanges on the Religious Dimensions in Intercultural Dialogue,' organized by the Council of Europe in Baku, Azerbaijan.

ECRL-RfP was represented in the gathering by **Chief Rabbi Dr. Rene Gutman**, Rabbi of Strasbourg, [**Honorary President of RfP**]; **Mr. Jamie Cresswell**, Director of the Centre of Applied Buddhism, [**Member of the ECRL-RfP**]; and **Mr. Stein Villumstad**, [**Secretary General of ECRL-RfP**].

Rabbi Rene Gutman stated in his opening remarks, "We only

represent fragments of civilization and history, but we need as religious people to contribute to our common future in constructive ways."

The 7th Exchanges on the Religious Dimensions in Intercultural Dialogue provided an opportunity for collaboration among religious communities to find ways of 'welcoming the other.'

BELGIUM: SAYING NO TO A WORLD OF WAR



As the tide of social hostility rises throughout the world, religious leaders are joining together to promote a multi-religious vision of Peace.

On 7-9 September in Antwerp, Belgium, senior religious leaders, scholars and heads of organizations renounced the rising hostilities that have afflicted the contemporary world.

Convened by the Community of Sant'Egidio, the *Peace is the Future: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue 100 Years after World*

War I gathering addressed current international conflicts and explored ways to build peace. Leaders engaged in discussion on sustainable development, immigration, poverty, peace education, religious violence, Christian unity and dialogue with Islam.

Rev. Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, [Secretary General of the Asian Conference of RfP], discussed choices religious and political leaders have to make: "Choose the objective of building a 'culture of love and mercy' rather than take the road toward a 'culture of violence and full of fear,'" he declared.

Chief Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, **[Co-President of RfP]**, discussed the importance of sustainable development from a theological perspective. "How does one preserve that which one is working, transforming, developing? The answer is, by doing so responsibly; by protecting the resources that one develops; by guaranteeing their healthy renewal for ourselves and for future generations. And this is precisely what is meant today by 'sustainable development'."

The gathering fostered a vision of hope for the future. Religious leaders were called to engage with one another and live their responsibility to promote peace. Dr. Andrea Riccardi, Founder of the Community of Sant' Edigio concluded the gathering by emphasizing the power of multi-faith: "There is plenty religions can do: they can inspire and give back a heart to the search for peace as the common destiny of all peoples."

UNITED STATES: COMBATING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE UNITED STATES

Anti-Muslim sentiment has been on the rise in the United States for over a decade, leading in extreme cases to discrimination and violence against American Muslims and non-Muslims. Tennessee has a long history of such rising hostilities towards 'the other,' holding the highest rate of violence against minorities in the country.

In 2012, **Religions for Peace USA (RfP USA)** launched the Our Muslim Neighbor (OMN) initiative to promote relationships of trust and respect among faith communities in Tennessee.

The OMN Initiative works in collaboration with Auburn Theological Seminary; El-Hibri Foundation; International Shinto Foundation; Islamic Networks Group; William and Mary Greve Foundation, Chaired by **Mr. John Kiser [International Trustee of RfP]**; and Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding to convene individuals from varied backgrounds and perspectives to engage in public diplomacy, media training, and interfaith education.

Dr. Naeem Baig, President of the Islamic Circle of North America, **[Moderator of RfPUSA]** envisions that the OMN will be replicated in other states to effectively manage public perceptions while reframing misguided discourse that disseminates negative and inaccurate portrayals of Islam and Muslims in America.



Dr. Naeem Baig

Mr. Aaron Stauffer, [Executive Director, RfP USA] noted: "OMN is a vital effort during a time when religious communities across the United States are fracturing. We are working to build bridges across ethnic, religious and racial divides that have historically plagued the US. OMN works to increase understanding and carry out collective actions based on our shared values. People realize the power in this movement and it is founded in **RfP USA's** mission.

HIGHLIGHT OF A RELIGIOUS LEADER

H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan is the Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria.



In *RfP*, Cardinal Onaiyekan serves as **Co-Moderator of the World Council; Member of the International Executive Committee** (since 2001) and **Co-Chair of the African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP**.

Cardinal Onaiyekan has served as President of the Christian Association of Nigeria; President of the Catholics Bishops' Conference of Nigeria; and President of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. He currently serves as a Member of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and the Presidential Committee of the Pontifical Council for the Family. Cardinal Onaiyekan was named Pax Christi International's 2012 Peace Laureate.

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?

Let me just say straight away that my relationship with and work within **Religions for Peace International** is what led us to form the **African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP**. And it is what also helped me to spearhead the formation of the Nigerian Inter-religious Council. From that point in time, because of my regular contact with **Religions for Peace**-directly or indirectly-I have become more attentive and competent when dealing with issues of interfaith dialogue. That has been very useful for me in the context of the realities of life in Nigeria-where Muslim-Christian relationships present a lot of challenges for us.

I must say that my efforts in interfaith dialogue in Nigeria have not been futile. In fact, I believe it has made significant impact and people appreciate that. In other word, if it were not for **Religions for Peace** I would not even know where to start.

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

That is a difficult question to answer, for the simple reason that we have faced new challenges in regards to interfaith relations in Nigeria in the last decade. In other words, where we once did not have problems we now have problems. So all I can say is that if it were not for the work of **RfP**, namely the interfaith work in Nigeria, then things would probably be far worse than they are right now.

Ten years ago no one was talking about Islamic terrorism, because it did not exist. Now it exists. And we

are now using the relationships we have built between religious leaders to see how we can jointly address this common problem of Islamic terrorism. How much have we succeeded? We don't know. We do know that it would be much worse without the efforts we are making. But there are those you are not too sure whether our efforts are making a significant impact. Personally, I think it is making an impact. I know many people who also appreciate the messages of peace we share with others.

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?

In terms of terrorism, one thing is certain: the mainstream Muslim community in Nigeria is completely and utterly against the rhetoric and the violence of the terrorist groups. The terrorist groups are opposed to and hate the regional Islamic leaders in Nigeria and now these religious leaders are being targeted. They have killed several religious leaders, in particular targeting imams who preach against them. This has not stopped Muslim leaders from voicing the position that you do not promote Islam through terrorism. That is a constant message we are hearing. It is a positive step for us when we hear from our Islamic leaders that if you kill in the name of Islam, you will not go to heaven, you will end up hell.

We are telling people that they should live in peace with one another. And we have our differences, but our differences should not stop us from living together in peace. This is how far have gone and our going. It is a very difficult journey because the more the terrorists are active and creating problems the more difficult it becomes to speak about good relationships between Christians and Muslims. Many Christians have, in the last 30 years, become less willing to reach out to Muslims. And Muslims are no longer sure where they stand. This is a trend we have noticed and for us it is a dangerous trend that we must do all we can to change.

In other words, I have always said that the Islamic terrorists killed many, destroyed livelihoods and homes and that is a terrible tragedy. But in my own opinion the biggest damage Islamic terrorism has done to our nation is that it has destroyed a lot of the goodwill we have built over the years between Christians and Muslims. Our task now is to prevent this goodwill from degenerating further and build a united, harmonious and peaceful Nigeria.

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

Obviously this is something we have heard frequently in the past. But luckily, I belong to a church-the Catholic Church-which has very clear guidelines in this regard and has constantly affirmed that doing all we can do to build relationships with people of other faiths is part and parcel with what it means to renew the Christian faith. In other words, interfaith dialogue is integral to the task of evangelization. And whenever we are talking of evangelization, we talk not only about preaching to others or of converting others. We also talk of recognizing the work of God in other peoples' faith as it affects their daily lives; of recognizing people who are living honest, committed, moral lives; and of finding the

common ground that binds us together, that point of view which recognizes the common morals and principles we all share. And most of all- in places like Nigeria- we must identify the challenges that engage all of us, irrespective of our different faiths.

For example, right now we face the significant challenge of Ebola, which is clearly not a religious problem. So Muslims and Christians must find a way to tackle the challenges that Ebola outbreak has done to our nation. And we are working on that together. We are finding ways in our churches and mosques to spread the kind of messages that will help people find a way to be conscious and cautious about the kind of threat Ebola poses.

IN THE NEWS

Muslim Scholars Present Religious Rebuttal to ISIS

PARIS (REUTERS) - Over 120 Islamic scholars from around the world, many of them leading Muslim voices in their own countries, have issued an open letter denouncing militants of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and refuting their religious arguments.



2 October 2014
The Straits Times
Photo: AFP

An array of Muslim leaders and groups have publicly rejected the Islamist movement since it imposed its brutal rule over large areas of Syria and Iraq this summer. Five Muslim nations have also joined a US-led military campaign against it.

The 22-page letter, written in Arabic and heavy with quotes from the Koran and other Islamic sources, is just as clear as those groups in condemning the torture, murder and destruction ISIS militants have committed in areas they control.

"You have misinterpreted Islam into a religion of harshness, brutality, torture and murder," the letter said. "This is a great wrong and an offence to Islam, to Muslims and to the entire world."

The letter is addressed to al-Baghdadi and "the fighters and followers of the self-declared 'Islamic State'", but is also aimed at potential recruits and imams or others trying to dissuade young Muslims from going to join the fight.

The 126 signatories are all Sunni men from across the Muslim world, from Indonesia to Morocco and from other countries such as the United States, Britain, France and Belgium. Including Shi'ite or women signatories could have discredited the appeal in the eyes of the hardline Islamists it addresses.

Amongst those who signed were the current and former grand muftis of Egypt, Shawqi Allam and Ali Gomaa, former **Bosnian Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric, [Honorary President of RfP]**, the **Nigerian Sultan of Sokoto Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar [Co-President of RfP]** and **Din Syamsuddin**, head of the large Muhammadiyah organisation in Indonesia, **[Co-President of RfP]**.

Eight scholars from Cairo's Al-Azhar University, the highest seat of Sunni learning, also put their names to the document. [Read More](#)

East Africa Religious Leaders Form Council to Fight Terror



21 September 2014
Source: World Bulletin

Religious leaders from the five-member East African Community have signed a declaration to form an interfaith council to fight religious extremism and terrorism in the region.

"You as religious leaders have agreed on the establishment of an institution to serve as a platform for your contributions to peace and security in the region," East African Community Deputy Secretary General Charles Njoroge told the gathering at the conclusion of their five-day meeting.

"Now the baby has been born - the East African Community Inter-religious Council," he declared. The meeting held in Kigali brought together religious leaders from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda.

Sheikh Adan Wachu, Chairman Inter-Religious Council of Kenya-RfP, insisted that the religious justification of indiscriminate violence is based on a misrepresentation of scriptures.

"We need to move beyond religious tolerance to a position of mutual respect," he told Anadolu Agency.

Reflecting on experience in the region, the five-day conference concluded that the contribution of inter-religious cooperation in matters of peace and security is not fictional. The recommendations are expected to be shared with the EAC ministerial council currently taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, and the Summit of the Heads of State in November. [Read More](#)

Sultan of Sokoto Charges Govs on Modern Conflict Resolution



25 August 2014
Source: The Nigerian Tribune

The President of Islamic Supreme Council of Nigeria and **Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar III, [Co-President of RfP]** charged other states to emulate the Jigawa State government on training traditional rulers in the respective states on modern conflict resolution and mediation for peace and security in the country.

The Islamic Supreme Council President made the charge over the weekend in Dutse, capital city of Jigawa State, while delivering his speech, during a day training on conflict resolution and mediation to traditional ruler of the North West and North East, organised by the Jigawa State

Justice sector and Law reform commission supported by the Department for International Development.

The Sultan, who was represented by his deputy and Shehu of Borno, Dr Abubakar Ibn Umar Garbai El-Kanemi, called on the all the governors in the country to copy their Jigawa counterpart on ways of replicating the system in their various domains, "retrain and fully involve them on security matters at all level because they have vital role to play in peaceful co-existence." [Read more](#)

Bishop Munib Younan Leads Delegation to Visit Gaza Wounded in Jerusalem



12 August 2014
Source: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and The Holy Land

On Friday, August 1st, 2014, **Bishop Munib Younan [Member of the MENA Council of Religious Leaders-RfP]** led delegates from the Pontifical Mission, Caritas Hospital, Jerusalem Inter-Church Center that represents both the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, the Apostolic Delegate, and Catholic World Relief in visiting those wounded in Gaza who have been brought to Jerusalem hospitals. Between St. Joseph's Hospital, a hospital owned by the

Catholic Church, and Augusta Victoria Hospital, run by the Lutheran World Federation, there are 32 cases, including 1 Christian, with ages ranging from 2 to adulthood.

Bishop Younan walked among the wounded and tried to bring them comfort through words. He stated, "We pray that God will give them healing, for all people, since it is our responsibility to care for all who are hurting. I told the patients to continue in their faith and to trust God, who is a God of love. We pray that justice will prevail in this country." [Read more](#)

Park Vows to Expand Contribution to World Peace, Co-prosperity



12 August 2014
Global Post

President Park Geun-hye said Tuesday that South Korea will expand its contribution to peace and co-prosperity in the world amid tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

She made the remark in a video address for hundreds of Asian religious leaders attending a regional conference in Songdo, west of Seoul, according to her office. She did not elaborate on South Korea's planned contribution.

Park expressed hope that the General Assembly of the **Asian Conference of Religions for Peace** could help resolve frictions and disputes in Asia through religion.

Her comments came amid tensions on the Korean Peninsula over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and territorial 25 August 2014 disputes between China and its neighbors over the South China Sea. The regional conference -- founded in 1974-- is designed to promote cooperation among Asian religious leaders for peace and interreligious harmony. [Read more](#)

Religions for Peace Welcomes New Leaders

Dr. Francis Kuria Kagema
Regional Secretary General
African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP



Dr. Francis Kuria Kagema, 49, is the **Secretary General of the African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP** and **Executive Director of Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK-RfP)**, a position he has held since 2008. He previously served as Programs Director and head of the **IRCK-RfP** secretariat for a period of six years. Before joining the **Inter-Religious Council of Kenya-RfP**, Dr. Kuria worked as the National Coordinator for the Small Business Network, an organisation advocating for small and medium enterprises. He also worked as a

Financial Analyst at the Nairobi Stock Exchange and as a volunteer with St. John Ambulance Brigade where he worked for 16 years, eventually retiring as Assistant Commissioner, Training and Operations in 1998. A holder of a degree in Veterinary Medicine and Surgery, Dr. Kuria is married with four children.

Rev. Yoshitaka Hatakeyama
Secretary General
Asian Conference of Religions for Peace



Rev. Yoshitaka Hatakeyama is the recently-elected Secretary General of the **Asian Conference of Religions for Peace [ACRP]** and the **Secretary General of Religions for Peace Japan**. In **Religions for Peace Japan**, he served as the Under Secretary General for 10 years. Since 2009, **Rev. Hatakeyama** has served in **ACRP** as a Deputy Secretary General and represented Dr. Sunggon Kim, former ACRP Secretary General, in various meetings of **Religions for Peace International** and other global network meetings.

Rev. Hatakeyama is known for his staunch advocacy and organized series of programs and projects on nuclear disarmament, care for the environment, poverty reduction programs, relief operations to refugees, and natural disaster relief work through multi-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Mr. Jacques Hubert
Secretary General
RfP France



Mr. Jacques Hubert is the recently elected Secretary General of **Religions for Peace France**. Mr. Hubert served as a member Religions for Peace France for many years prior to his election. He is also the founder of Tibhirine, an inter-religious organization working on issues to advance democracy for peaceful societies.

In Memoriam

Tribute to Shri Pratap Bhogilal

25 October 1916--8 August 2014



RfP mourns the passing of **Shri Pratap Bhogilal**, Chairman Emeritus of the World Jain Federation, and Chairman Emeritus of Batliboi **[International Trustee of RfP]**.

A traditionalist to the core, Shri Pratap Bhogilal did not break rules. He broke new ground with his convictions and commitment to the task in hand.

Shri Pratap Bhogilal was modern and well-educated and strived to live by the same Jain traditions and values which his father and grandfather upheld. Discipline, patience, hard work, respect for elders, active participation in community work and committed support for the Jain cause without ever losing sight of the national good had been the bedrock of his life.

Jainism had a profound influence on him in the later years, initiated him into practicing Anekantavada, a Jain treatise which propounds that truth has many facets and that others' way of looking at things could be as valid as yours.

UPCOMING EVENTS

10 October 2014: *RfP* **Italian Women of Faith Network** consultation on Women of Faith and the Family: Between Tradition and Modernity Conference; Rome, Italy

13 October 2014: **European Council of Religious Leaders-RfP** Executive Committee Meeting; Oslo, Norway

End of October 2014: **African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP** Strategic Planning; Nairobi, Kenya

10-12 November 2014: **Latin American and Caribbean Council of Religious Leaders-RfP** Plenary Session; Panama City, Panama

20 November 2014: World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, sponsored by the Arigatou International's, Global

8-9 December 2014: Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons; Vienna, Austria

9 December 2014: **Latin American and Caribbean Council of Religious Leaders-RfP** Interreligious Conference on COP 20; Lima, Peru. <http://cop20.religionesporlapaz.org/en/>

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

Questions, comments, or news?

Kindly contact:
Ms. Valerie Nash
vnash@rfp.org

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.

777 United Nations Plaza | New York, NY 10017 USA | Tel: 212 687-2163 | Fax: 212 983-0098
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