



# URI Europe Dialogue-Letter No. 7

## August - September 2006

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## **1. Welcome and news from the URI EEC (European Executive Committee)**

**Dear friends,**

**Peace we wish you – hopefully you are all in best health and you are having a peaceful time.**

We are very happy to present to you the **URI Europe Dialogue-Letter No. 7**. It contains news and articles, e.g. interfaith news from Cyprus, the Netherlands, Hungary, Catalonia/Spain and Romania, and we hope you will enjoy it.

You are invited to send us news about your Co-operation Circle's (CC's) activities for inclusion in the URI Europe Dialogue Letter. **PLEASE SEND CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE NEXT EDITION BY OCTOBER 15, 2006**, to Amina Bach (BachBirgit@web.de) and Karimah Stauch (dmlbonn@uri.org).

We are happy to be able to inform you that planning for the URI Europe conference and the Global Council meeting in Antwerp in June 2007 is moving forward.

The **EUROPEAN URI CONFERENCE will take place from June 15 – 18, 2006, in Antwerp/Belgium** (Friday through Monday). Places are reserved for two representatives from each of the 22 Co-operation Circles (CCs) in 11 countries.

The **GLOBAL COUNCIL MEETING** will bring together the three elected URI representatives from all of the eight world regions as well as the global staff. It is planned for June 6-15, 2006, likewise in Antwerp/Belgium.

**Please mark your calendars** for the **INTERFAITH CELEBRATION AT ANTWERP CATHEDRAL ON JUNE 15, 2006 (Friday)**. This will be a highlight and will include interfaith activists from the international, the European, the regional (Flemish) and the local level. We are doing our best to make it not only a colourful and joyful, but also a meaningful event, which will raise awareness for interfaith co-operation for peace, justice and healing.

On Thursday, **June 14, 2006**, Bond zonder Naam (BZN) CC in co-operation with URI Europe will organize an **ACADEMIC EVENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP**, on the subject of "Listening".

**URI Europe is grateful for Bond zonder Naam (BZN) CC for its ongoing support.**

Additionally we would like to let you know that URI Europe has published a **new URI EUROPE FLYER flyer, giving information about URI Europe and its activities**. **If you would like to receive one or more copies of it, please contact Karimah Stauch** under [dmlbonn@aol.com](mailto:dmlbonn@aol.com).

May the One show us the right way, so that we may live together in peace and mutual respect. Let us pray for those who are facing injustice, oppression and violence, may they be strengthened and have endurance and patience.

### **Peace and blessings to you!**

Mr. Dr. Raschid Bockemuehl, Dortmund/Germany, Treasurer URI Europe / Global Council Member  
Mr. Shaikh Bashir Ahmad Dultz, Bonn/Germany, Member URI Europe / Global Council Member  
Mr. Patrick Hanjoul, Antwerp/Belgium, President URI Europe  
Ms. Annie Imbens-Fransen, Eindhoven/The Netherlands, Member URI Europe  
Ms. Elisabeth A. Lheure, Barcelona, Catalonia/Spain, Member European Executive Committee  
Mr. Jean-Mathieu Lochten, Brussels/Belgium, Vice-President URI Europe  
Mr. Deepak Naik, Coventry/United Kingdom, Vice-President URI Europe  
Ms. Heidi Rautionmaa, Espoo/Finland, Member URI Europe / Global Council Member  
Ms. Karimah Stauch, Bonn/Germany, Co-ordinator URI Europe

## **2. European URI CC-activities – invitations, introductions, reports**

### **2.a) Ari van Buuren – co-leader of the „Steering Committee URI the Netherlands CC“ and the „Interfaith Dialogue Utrecht CC“ - received an honor for the project „Interreligious care center at the university hospital of Utrecht”**

*Information given by Ari van Buuren who is contact person for two URI CCs, the Interfaith Dialogue Utrecht CC and the Steering Committee URI the Netherlands.*

We offer our congratulations to Mr. Ari van Buuren for his wonderful care center and for having received this honor.

The prize for Complementarities of the religions was presented by Prof. Dr. Herbert Schultze from the interreligious institute INTR<sup>o</sup>A, Hamburg during the conference „Europe in the Orient“ in Frankfurt, September 2005.

That year the prize was divided by the international jury and awarded to the following projects: „Tent of Abraham“ friends (further information: [www.friedenskoch.de](http://www.friedenskoch.de)) and promoters of the interfaith kindergarten in Ramle / Israel and the Pastoral care center in Utrecht.

Mr Ari van Buuren is the director of the care center where spiritual company for ill and dying humans is practiced. They also organize training for the UMC coworkers (UMC = Centre for interfaith spiritual welfare at the University hospital Utrecht) with people from different religious and human traditions and world views, who work with a common spiritual concept.

For further information please contact  
Ari van Buuren, Eindhoven, The Netherlands  
[avanbuuren@ncrvnet.nl](mailto:avanbuuren@ncrvnet.nl)

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### **2.b) International Congress on religions and mediation in urban areas from December 18th to December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006, in Barcelona organised by the „Associació UNESCO per al Diàleg Interreligiós - Centre UNESCO de Catalunya CC“**

*Information about the „international Congress on Religions and Mediation in urban areas“ given by Elisabeth A. Lheure, Member of the European Executive Committee. We wish you great success for this wonderful conference*

The congress will be organized by UNESCOCAT, centre UNESCO de CATALUNYA under the auspices of UNESCO.

The promotion of intercultural dialogue, including interreligious dialogue, as a fundamental tool for the creation of a democratic and cohesive society has been at the core of Unescocat - UNESCO Centre of Catalonia's mandate since its very creation in 1984.

Since its creation Unescocat has been concerned with the protection and promotion of human rights, including the promotion and implementation of the right to freedom of religion and conviction. One way of achieving this goal consists in creating relationships

among religious minorities, as well as between these ones and the Catholic majority and between those and the Catalan civil society.

The **main goal of the International Congress on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas** that Unescocat is organizing is to promote and to develop reflection, analysis and exchange on interreligious prevention and mediation of conflicts, with a special focus on urban areas. This will be achieved through a three-day meeting of international experts and activists in this field in Barcelona. Religious and spiritual traditions can contribute through their spiritual and communitarian resources to build dynamics of peace in dangerous zones – zones, where you can find conflicts because of or related to religious diversity.

This congress will gather

- experts and activists in interreligious mediation of conflicts from the most relevant local, regional and international interreligious organizations in this field (among those we underline the World Conference of Religions for peace, the United Religions Initiative, Peace Council, and so on),
- members from the faith based international organizations that have worked the religious mediation of conflicts (Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Saint Egidius' Community, etc.),
- members from the public administrations in each country promoting or having in charge good practices in this field,
- researchers from University projects that have worked or investigated on specific religious or interreligious mediation in the field of intercultural relationships.

### **And here a possibility to contribute to this Congress**

#### CALL FOR PAPERS AND WORKSHOPS

Both papers and workshops should refer to experiences and good practices carried out at the local level and in close relation to the general subject of the congress. Proposals must be sent to [c.monteys@unescocat.org](mailto:c.monteys@unescocat.org) before October 31, 2006.

#### Papers

Papers will take into account the following format:

1. Title of the paper
2. Author's complete name
3. Title or academic position
4. Author's short curriculum (100 words)
5. E-mail address
6. Summary (200-300 words)
7. Key words (4 to 6)
8. Body of the article, divided in sections and sub-sections (3.000-5.000 words)
9. Bibliography

#### Workshops

The workshops are aimed at creating spaces of participation around the general subject of the congress, allowing to approach the methodologies of mediation and conflict management. The length of the workshops will be 90 minutes.

For further information please contact **Cristina Monteys**, Barcelona, Catalunya/Spain

E-mail: [c.monteys@unescocat.org](mailto:c.monteys@unescocat.org)

<http://www.unescocat.org/religions-mediacio>

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## 2.c) Martin Gurvich about the “Convictions en dialogue CC”, Septon, Belgium

*E-Mail from Martin Gurvich in July 2006, contact person for “Convictions en dialogue CC”,  
Belgium –  
All the best for the “Convictions en dialogue CC” – May peace be with you*

Information about our activities

Our CC is starting to get really interesting. We have 3 aspects to it.

- A meeting every 2 months where we share prayers, thoughts, meals, etc.
- Every 2 months we visit an important center of Spirituality, Religion or Philosophy in Belgium where we also meet its leaders.
- Finally a series of projects to contribute in a tangible way to spreading interfaith: Conference on Secularization, Religious and Philosophical traditions and Spirituality in Belgium; Exhibit, Calendar, Brochures, Website, etc.

For further information please contact:

[martingurvich@pamho.net](mailto:martingurvich@pamho.net)

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## 2.d) Peace demonstration on Hiroshima day in Finland , coorganized by the „Religious Forum in Helsinki CC”

*E-Mail sent by Heidi Rautionmaa, Finland, Member URI Europe / Global Council Member,  
about the beautiful peace ceremony on the Hiroshima day.*

This is the webpage to see some pictures of this peace event on Sunday

- there is one picture that shows the event among people from different faith. Most of the people are from the Religious Forum in Helsinki, URI.

<http://www.podemos.dk/rauha/kuvia/index.html>

with love and peace -

Heidi

*The video of the peace sign in Helsinki is available in*

*[www.active-nonviolence.org/RAUHA.mpg](http://www.active-nonviolence.org/RAUHA.mpg)*

*File size 78.6 Megabytes*

*Duration 12 minutes*

*language mostly Finnish, but also some English and Swedish*

**We had a great peace event on Sunday - here is a report from the  
humanist Juha. I was one of the organizers with Religious Forum in Helsinki, URI. :)**

May Peace Prevail on Earth  
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Hi all

here are some photos and the story of my experience of organizing and participating in a Peace Sign in Helsinki yesterday.

We organized the sign as private persons, and used a page [www.podemos.dk/rauha](http://www.podemos.dk/rauha) for informing about the event. (It is not connected to Podemos so much, but this temporary page we set up under my site because it was easy to access.) Here are first of all some photos attached taken by Antti and a couple taken by me before and after the event itself. (The girl with the peace shirt is Neea, one of the main organizers of the event; the guy with me in the night photo with a peace sign in the background is Anton from South Africa)

There were video cameras and later (in September) I will edit a simple video. Later I will also put more photos which you can find at the website: [www.podemos.dk/rauha](http://www.podemos.dk/rauha)

***(by now the video of the peace sign in Helsinki is available in [www.active-nonviolence.org/RAUHA.mpg](http://www.active-nonviolence.org/RAUHA.mpg)***

***File size 78.6 Megabytes***

***Duration 12 minutes***

***language mostly Finnish, but also some English and Swedish)***

***A "short" synthesis of the event; or more accurately, my testimony of it©***

We started organizing the event only about 10 days before the event started. This gave an active energy for organizing and keeping to what would be simple enough to do, as we were just 4 persons without any funds.

The idea of organizing a peace demonstration on Hiroshima day came from Neea, the idea about the Peace sign and the ceremony for nuclear disarmament came from me (from the humanist movement) The other speakers saying some words about peace was something that Heidi had organized once before. Neea and Petteri had contacts in the cultural world and organized music and the technical issues (the candles, permits, sound equipment, musicians etc.), I brought the Asking ceremony and organized the webpage and the video crew (with a lot of help from Pekka), and Heidi brought the speakers who were mostly from the contacts that she had through her activism in the United Religions Initiative ([www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org)).

We wrote the press release as a team and everyone invited participants, mostly through email and sms, sometimes talking on the phone and also we informed the media (there were some short mentions in some important media). We also informed the organization who kept the traditional Hiroshima day event so that they could invite people from there to continue in our event.

We put little marks from tape in the stairs so that it would be easier for people to form the sign. A location was arranged for the speakers and the musicians. 3 video cameras were in use: two mobile and one static filming the speakers.

At about 22:00 people started arriving and we started to give/sell the candles and the paper with the text of the Asking.

The activity of disseminating the candles and directing people to their places had for us the same kind of effect as the work with the fire in the beach in Skamlebæk:

Before starting to care for the fire, things were unfocused but when the thing started to be forming, energy was moving and everything was interesting.

Meanwhile the speakers had started. There were speakers from different ethnicities and religions - a Buddhist, a Shia Muslim, a Christian, ... I could not concentrate on their message as I was directing people to form the sign, but the atmosphere was very interesting, soft, very kind. There were people of all ages, also people from other countries (some Russians and also some others who did not understand Finnish but enjoyed the atmosphere of the event) and down in the square groups of tourists stopped to admire the event and the sign. The people forming the sign were sitting in the stairs of the cathedral, which made the event very relaxed and intimate for those who were sitting there with their loved ones.

The last speaker before the ceremony was a Hopi elder called Charles who was visiting Finland to participate in a gathering called "Four Winds". He had received a message from his grandmother (from the spirit world) that he should speak for world peace. Right after receiving that message, he was sitting with a friend who received an invitation to this event. Therefore it seemed that it was meant for him to speak at the event.

Because the other possible speakers who could lead the ceremony could not come, I had to take that role, which of course I also enjoyed, even though I was a bit nervous. Maybe because of being a bit nervous I forgot to give a copy of the text to the other speakers who were standing behind me and some did not have a copy

It seemed it could have been better to bring them into speaking the common parts together with me, and to stand with them. But somehow the atmosphere was that solemn, and the text of the ceremony is also quite serious, so I moved more formally and went directly into the text. The people in the sign and elsewhere read the ceremony text quite silently, which is more the Finnish style perhaps rather than a very militant style.

After the ceremony all the speakers held hands and the Buddhist brother (who happened to be the father of an old friend of mine) played three times on his sound-bowl. During this "closing meditation" I was doing an Asking by directing the air into my heart. I'm sure all the participants were doing their prayers in their style.

After this, some musicians with gongs and other percussions continued keeping an ambient soundscape in the square. The police, who had been very discreet in the far end of the square, had already left, realizing that this demonstration has absolutely no element of unrest... people left little by little, some stayed longer to chat, meeting old friends. We left the candles on the stairs for several hours while the band transported their equipment with the only car that we had. Passers-by stopped to admire the sign and took pictures of the sign and of themselves in front of the sign. I left at this point and I don't know for how long Neea and Petteri left the candles in the stairs, whether it was until the morning like they planned.

There were about 100 persons participating in forming the sign; other active/organizing participants were some 10 or so; and there were another 30 or 40 persons who stopped by in the square to follow the event from outside. It was actually a quite nice effect that one could participate in the sign or just watch, because then one could choose to be part of it or a spectator of it. The form of the sign became very well formed too, thanks to the help of Pekka and Päivi in putting the tape marks in the stairs. I had considered collecting contact information from participants but the flow of the events was not in favor of that.

Most of the people however came through personal contacts and we have their contact info. Some interested new people would have been there and if we do this kind of things again we should consider how to provide an entrance to such people.

There is no fixed follow-up; I am considering traveling to Finland in October to keep an informative seminar about the Humanist Movement in order to form a group that continues developing humanist direction;

United Religions Initiative has an international campaign of a Peace Day in the end of September and Heidi is interested in doing something then; but in general we remain in the creative emptiness also regarding the question of whether this was a unique happening or whether we want to organize the same again next year.

To tell you an example, I also had a good short discussion about the Humanist Movement with Anton from South Africa, who is visiting Finland and whom I met in person the first time in 16 years. Possibly he may build a team of the Movement in S.A., I will send him some more information first so that he has it clear how the Movement works and what it is all about. In general I find that the humanist ideals were very much alive in the words and deeds of the participants, the only speech that I heard was the speech of the Hopi Indian, and the content of that speech was exactly humanism, exactly the same as our proposal. Yet for many, including myself, there is the step that we need to develop: the step from paying lip service to humanism but remaining in the fundamental beliefs of individualism, to a conscious humanism that works every minute of every day for such a social and personal process which has a future beyond the external and the internal violence and indifference. Peace, force and joy to you all

Juha

For further information please contact:

Heidi Rautionmaa

[h.rautionmaa@suomi24.fi](mailto:h.rautionmaa@suomi24.fi)

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## **2.e) German Muslim-League-Bonn CC participates in the URI youth exchange in Cyprus, June 2006**

*Report written by Amina Birgit Bach, the group leader for the German group during the conference.*

*The participants were supposed to be between 18 and 25 years old. For each participating country there was one group leader from there country helping to organize the flights and the preparations in advance and during the conference. There was a group leader meeting in May as well in Cyprus, Krytou Terra were Sarah Talcott the organizer and the group leaders, discussed about the Schedule of the week and the preparation which had to be done in advance.*

### **The „interfaith youth exchange for environmental and cross cultural healing “ June 05. – 12 2006**

Report

I arrived back from Cyprus, Krytou Terra, full of joy, my heart filled with peace and love for my new friends. The exchange was organized by the URI Global Youth Group. The topical issue this year was “environmental and cross cultural healing”

We were cordially welcomed in Krytou Terra, a beautiful small village with now predominantly older inhabitants in the southwest of Cyprus

Sarah Talcott from the URI global youth group, organized the conference together with Nick Symons, the director of the environmental training centre.

Many positive factors and the very interesting program with a balanced mixture of theory and practice developed self-dynamics with a marvelous cordial and warm atmosphere.



**Olivia Damm, Judith Mila Durante, Amina Bach, the German group**

The participants of the program, an interesting and multicultural mixture from 10 countries and different religions, catholic Christian, Science Christians, orthodox Christians, Jews, Baha'i, Zoroastrian, Muslim, Agnostic, not religious, interfaith and the countries America, England, Ireland, Germany, Lithuania, Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Tunisia.

We started the week with confidence-building parts of the program, e.g. "blind guiding". After that we went for a walk and experienced the environment and the different voices during a meditation.

We also set up some rules. These shared agreements were for example in our edited version: "Be kind and loving, give respect and be patient, be thoughtful and open, be sincere and honest, be responsible"

Each country was introduced by another country briefly and the participants from each country brought special food. Particularly the Palestinians, who had a genuine cook in the group, pleased us very much with their cooked meal.

The workshop on nonviolent communication and the role plays were very informative.

During the morning meditation, the Yoga or Tai Chi exercises, we also had opportunity for spiritual practice.

On Friday the 09th we invited the elders of Kytou Terra and some religious leaders from Cyprus to join our conference. We welcomed a Yoga teacher and scholar, a Sikh, a Baha'í, a Buddhist and a Muslim guest from the Naqshibendi Sufi order, Dr. Munir. The religious leaders answered our questions and joined in our discussion groups. They were enriching our youth exchange.



Dr. Munir prayed with us the Muslim afternoon prayer and gave us in advance a few explanations about the Muslim prayer. We distributed copies with the English translation of the parts of the Muslim prayer.

We also lighted candles before sunset for the beginning of the Shabbat. The Jewish group described some characteristics of the Jewish celebration. On Sunday morning we had a small Christian ceremony, where we recited Christian and Baha'í texts and a part of the sure Maryam from the Koran.



During our week we also had beautiful days with trips and sporty activities. We visited the reptile park, the Avagas Gorge, we filled 10 garbage bags at a beach where rare birds breed, climbed cliffs up and down and snorkeled and/or drove in the marvelous sea with boats along the coast.

We planted three oak trees at the entrance of Kytou Terra hoping that they will grow well there. During the ceremony we recited small verses from all religions.



A beach picnic during the last evening with grilled Haloumi cheese and other tasty food was wonderful. The following party with music and photo session was nice and we didn't want to think about the departure the next day.

**Sarah Talcott (middle)  
with participants**

Amina Birgit Bach  
For further information please contact  
[BachBirgit@web.de](mailto:BachBirgit@web.de)

## **2.f) Maia Morgenstern was invited by the Federation of Jewish Community from Sighetu Marmatiei to visit the synagogue – report from Ion-Marius Tatomir, URI Affiliate Member from Romania**

*E-Mail written by Ion-Marius Tatomir, thank you for the information and may peace be with you and Romania*

15 MAY 2006

In Sighetu-Marmatiei, for the 15-th of May, hours 19:00, a theatre event was prepared with the special presence of Ms. Maia Morgenstern (well-known artist interpreter of the role of Mary from The Passion of Christ) and her son, Tudor Aaron Isidor.

Maia Morgenstern was invited by the Federation of the Jewish Community from Sighetu Marmatiei to visit the synagogue. I was present too at this event. She was very friendly and simple, fascinating and warm. In the music of the Jewish chorus she entered in the synagogue, bringing joy and emotions to the waiting ones.

The president of the Federation from Sighetu Marmatiei received her with an emotional speech than

he invited Ms. Maia to accord a speech.

Her speech was inspiring and pointing to the necessity of keeping the Jewish tradition and values, mentioning the great son of the Sighetu, Mr. Elie Wiesel. Than she waited for questions or impressions.

More people took the word. I asked for permission to speak, and received it.

I said:

"My name is Tatomir Ion-Marius, and I want to say that I m happy that you are among us and I wish you health and many blessings. May Peace Prevail on Earth!".

Maia Morgenstern: "Thank you. May Peace Prevail on Earth! Our children and we need that indeed. Thank you."

Followed a short poetry moment, then the time run out and before her going, children (and not only they) approached her for autographs.

When I arrived to ask for an autograph, I mentioned the WPPS (World Peace Prayer Society) and I asked her to write me the prayer "May Peace Prevail on Earth" down for me.

She wrote it me in Romanian - Fie Pace Pe Pamint - and signed.

I thanked her, and returned back to my work

(\*I had asked for permission from my supervisors to leave my workplace for 1 hour and 30 minutes, time which I will recuperate-I didn't t wanted to miss such an event).

The first attachment is this writing-

Fie Pace Pe Pamint (\*May Peace Prevail on Earth)-and signature

The second attachment contains-

Pentru dl.Tatomir (For Mr.Tatomir)-and signature

It was a beautiful time and I m glad I was able to participate at this extraordinary event. Many blessings to Ms. Maia and her son, and:

May Peace Prevail on Earth! Fie Pace Pe Pamint!

by: Tatomir Ion-Marius

For further information contact:

[tatomir@usa.com](mailto:tatomir@usa.com)

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## **2.g) Govardhana das - URI friend - about the religious life in Hungaria**

*E-Mail July 2006 from Govardhana das. He is member of ISCKON (Hare Krishna) in Hungary and participated in the URI conference in Brussels 2005. Thank you, Govardhana das, for the information*

Now I have more meetings with other religious people. I met 2 Catholic priors in their own monasteries. It was interesting, we discussed about the life in the convent. We plan an interfaith conference in autumn, the lecturers we have now: Evangelical, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish and we, Hindus. In the TV we are invited every second weekend to discuss different topics of life.

Last weekend one of the under-secretaries of the Hungarian Parliament was coming to our temple in Budapest and met with Eastern religions (Buddhist, Baha'i and Hindus). I have organized the meeting, it was really nice.

We Hare Krishna's have a nice bio-village in Hungary, Krishna-valley. The Ambassador of India will come there at the end of this month. If you go to [www.krisna-volgy.hu](http://www.krisna-volgy.hu) on the internet, you find the website, there is also a German and English version, so you can watch our activities.

I'm happy about the next year URI program in Antwerp. I hope URI Circles in Europe are growing.

All the best!

Govardhana das

For further information contact:  
[Govardhana.SRS@pamho.net](mailto:Govardhana.SRS@pamho.net)

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### **3. URI global**

#### **3.a) In July 3 new CCs approved**

*We give a cordial welcome to the 3 new CCs (CC = Co-operation-Circle = URI membership-group). May peace be with you and your new CCs.*

E-mail written by María Eugenia Crespo, August 2006

In the midst of the pain of violence hitting our dear world URI keeps growing. Welcome three more groups that have been approved to join our community to create cultures of peace, healing and justice.

Love,  
Maria

**For further information please contact:** María Eugenia Crespo  
[mariaecrespo@fibertel.com.ar]

**CCS APPROVED ON JULY 12<sup>TH</sup>, 2006**

## **AFRICA**

### **MOZAMBIQUE**

#### **Inter-Religious CC Namaacha**

**Purpose:** Be instrumental to establish peace.

**Description of activities:** Our highlights of activities so far has been regular interfaith meetings where we discuss and take decisions jointly

To take action against our common enemies like HIV/AIDS, Malaria, TB, cholera, combat against poverty, crime and to educate and establish good relationships for peace in our locality, in the nation, Africa and the world.

Our action for the future is to collaborate with all like minded institutions and to work for Peace.

*Alexandre Z. Vilanculo Sabino Machara,*  
Mozambique, AFRICA  
+258.827351950

### **NIGERIA**

#### **Nigerian United Religions Cooperation Circle– NUR-CC**

**Purpose:** Making interfaith and inter-religious harmony

**Description of activities:** We usually address student and children about the importance of peace and visiting religious leaders advising them to stop preaching of extremism.

*Muhammad Nuhu Yasin,*  
77 Creek Road, Potharcourt, Nigeria, AFRICA  
+ 080.37547945  
nuhuyasin@yahoo.com

## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

### JORDAN

#### Jadara Interfaith Action CC

**Purpose:** To bring peace to our region through facilitating inter-religious dialogue and understanding, and by taking actions and initiatives which brings people from different religions closer together.

**Description of activities:** Our most memorable activity as a CC has been taking part in the “National Days for Interfaith Youth Service” 21-23 April 2006, as we took part in activities held by Jordan Interfaith Action CC at Theodor Schneller School for the less advantaged, implementing a set of exercises as to promote peace through sports. Now as Jadara Interfaith Action CC will be the first of kind working in the north of Jordan, we are planning to hold several activities such as seminars, workshops and conferences as to promote for interfaith and religious dialogue amongst local communities, mainly targeting Youth as being agents of effective change in the society.

*Amer Bani Amer,*  
21110, Irbid, Jordan  
+962.7.959.111.21/+962.2.709.5699

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### 3.b) International Day of peace, September 21, please participate

*E-Mail sent by Monica Willard about the international Day of Peace*

*May the world be peaceful and all the people living together in peace and harmony. Thank you for the effort and the information*

For further information please contact

[MBWillard@aol.com](mailto:MBWillard@aol.com)

Dear URI Members,

The International Day of Peace, September 21, will be more complete with your participation. The URI will make a report to the UN again this year. For those who have already begun to make plans, please share them with Barbara for our website. [barbara@URI.org](mailto:barbara@URI.org)

There is also a request from the International Day of Peace Vigil to post your activities on their website. <http://www.idpvigil.com/commitments/addForm.php>

Here are three events that will take place at the United Nations on September 21.

The day begins with Secretary-General Kofi Annan ringing the Peace Bell. This ceremony precedes the annual Department of Public Information Youth Observance. The URI is one of the cosponsors of the youth event along with the World Peace Prayer Society and Pathways To Peace. Mrs. Annan has been a part of this event since it began in 1997. This year is the final year of this SG's administration, so we want to make the International Day of Peace most special.

Another event at the UN on the International day of Peace is the second annual Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. This is being planned by the Tripartite Forum. As a member of this planning committee, I have been sharing with the Member States and UN Departments and Agencies that URI CCs are planning events to observe the IDP. Your prayers, plans and observances make a big difference in anchoring and expanding this global call for Interfaith cooperation for peace!

Below is the e-mail from the IDP Vigil.

Many Thanks.

May Peace Prevail on Earth,  
Monica Willard

*Dear Supporting Organizations of the IDP Vigil,*

*The International Day of Peace is less than three months away and time to remind our members about their participation in the IDP Vigil again on 21 September.*

*In cooperation with the United Nations Department of Public Information, we have been asked to provide a listing of planned events for this year's International Day of Peace (IDP). This information will be used to show United Nations officials the grass roots support for IDP. It will also demonstrate how far reaching the IDP Vigil has become.*

*While the list is not meant to be all-inclusive, we would like it to be representative of global participation in the IDP celebrations and Vigils. If you have not already done so, would you **please ask your membership to post their planned activity, to the extent presently known, on: <http://www.idpvigil.com/commitments/addForm.php>** As always, updates on the posted activities can be submitted at a later date if necessary.*

*We have posted your organization's logo on the IDP Vigil website and have linked into your home page at <http://www.idpvigil.com/organizations.html> to show your support for this effort.*

*We again acknowledge your commitment to peace and your active participation in making a complete day of non-violence a reality.*

*May Peace Prevail On Earth,  
George D'Angelo  
International Day of Peace Vigil*

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### **3.c) Imams, Rabbis, Children of Abraham share the same prayer for peace**

*E-Mail forwarded from Mike Abkin, participant in the URI youth CC  
[mikeabkin@earthlink.net](mailto:mikeabkin@earthlink.net)*

**From:** Libby & Len Traubman  
**Date:** May 2, 2006 4:07:42 AM EDT  
**Subject:** Imams, Rabbis, Children of Abraham share the same prayer for peace

The "adults" must now run to keep up with the young, new breed of peacemakers who will travel the Earth to meet and succeed.

**Jewish Ari Alexander** ( [AriAlexander@children-of-abraham.org](mailto:AriAlexander@children-of-abraham.org) ) from Providence, Rhode Island only "yesterday" was fresh from his life-changing Seeds of Peace -- <http://seedsofpeace.org/> -- summer camp experience when he studied at the Univ. of Pennsylvania, then earned European masters degrees in Comparative Ethnic Conflict, and in Modern Middle Eastern Studies, living in England, Belfast, Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem.

**Muslim Gul Rukh Rahman** ( [GulRukh@children-of-abraham.org](mailto:GulRukh@children-of-abraham.org) ) grew up in Pakistan during the Afghan-Soviet war and the horrors of armed conflict and the massive displacement of people. Her preoccupation with regional and international conflicts and conflict management led her to volunteer care of Afghan refugees and a work as a journalist in the Arab and South Asian media about human rights and social, cultural and economic issues.

Now **Gul and Ari together have created Children of Abraham** -- <http://children-of-abraham.org/> -- to overcome barriers between young Muslims and Jews around the world through photography, Internet dialogue, and face-to-face meeting.

Yesterday's e-mail from Ari and Gul reveals their pride in a **participating Muslim teen, Dania Pratiwi, 19** ( [DaniaPratiwi@yahoo.com](mailto:DaniaPratiwi@yahoo.com) ).

Dania's identity and world has been expanded, and now she's touching yet others.

Thanks to the intelligence, courage and hard work of Gul and Ari, two young adults -- a Muslim and a Jew -- pioneers, cultural creatives, **the new breed of citizen leaders who are on the increase.**

Read Ari and Gul's words:

"There is nothing we could say that would be as sweet, as real and as powerful as what 2004 Children of Abraham participant Dania Pratiwi (aged 19) has written for the Jakarta Post, published yesterday.

Enjoy. This is a brief glimpse into exactly why we do the work we do."

**Hear Dania, the young Muslim woman**, calling to all of us:

"I learned that we can always turn our enemies into friends.

I also learned that we may be different, but inside we're brothers.

The Imams and the Rabbis have shown us.

And **now it's my turn, and your turn, to show the world that we can come together peacefully** instead of killing each other."

Now feel the freshness, intelligence and faith of a new, young peacemaker with the power to tell her story.

The power to touch us.

The power to show us how we can touch others and be better, now.

Re-defining power.

- L&L

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Published in The Jakarta Post -- Sunday, 30 April 2006

On the Web at

**Imams, Rabbis share the same prayer for peace**

Dania Rari Pratiwi, Contributor, Jakarta

An e-mail came to my inbox about two months ago. It was from Ari Alexander, co-executive director of an organization called Children of Abraham. It's an organization that fosters dialog between young Jews and Muslims from all over the world. This project is based on the Internet, so we can enter the dialog from any place in the world. I've been a member since 2004.

In his e-mail, Ari, an American Jew, asked me if I was interested in attending the Second World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace, due to take place in Seville, Spain from March 19 to 22. When I read his e-mail, my first reaction was: Is this a joke? We all know there are problems between Muslims and Jews, which cause us to fight and hate one other. I have met a lot of Imams in my life and they all agreed that Jews are the enemies of Muslims. They are infidels. We cannot be friends

with them. I remember an Imam saying in a sermon, "Jews are our biggest enemy. We have to kill them, or they will kill us first." Scary. And now this congress will gather together Imams and Rabbis and hope they will make peace? Interesting!

I replied to Ari's e-mail immediately, telling him that I'd love to attend the congress as a Children of Abraham student, and see how the Imams and Rabbis made peace -- instead of killing each other. In response, Ari sent me a list of questions and said the Children of Abraham could send four (of its 147) students to the congress. The list of questions would help them choose the four lucky students. They would judge us based on our answers, so I gave them the best answer I could possibly give.

It took almost a week for them to decide who the lucky four were. I got more nervous by the day. I checked my e-mail every morning and evening with no avail. Finally, on March 3, I received an e-mail from Ari saying I had been chosen to represent Children of Abraham students at the congress. I was speechless and jumped from my chair to run around my house. I was very happy! March 3 was also my 19th birthday and Ari's e-mail was the best birthday gift I've ever had. Later, Ari told me that Children of Abraham could only send two students, not four, to the congress, and they chose me to be one of two. It was indeed an honor for me. I only had two weeks to get everything ready for Seville. It was probably the busiest two weeks of my life, and my excitement grew.

It stayed with me until my flight to Seville from Madrid. I was on the same flight as some Rabbis -- an Indonesian traveling alone. When I saw the Rabbis on the plane, I suddenly felt hesitant. I'm going to meet the enemy, I said to myself. Will the Imams and the Rabbis make peace? Are we going to be OK during the congress? Before we landed in Seville, I asked God to fill the hearts of the Imams and Rabbis with love, so they could share it with each other.

The congress organizer picked us up at the airport by bus. When I entered the bus, I felt like a stranger. The bus was full of bearded old men in black suits, and they were all staring at me, a girl wearing a brown sweater, jeans, sneakers, backpack and a look of exhaustion. A complete stranger. Some of them smiled and some of them gave me a "who-the-hell-are-you" look while I struggled to find a seat. Finally I found a seat beside a man with a white beard and black hat. He introduced himself as a Rabbi from Israel. "You should come to Israel someday," he said. "You'll learn a lot of things there. I can arrange a visa for you if you are interested." I smiled at him and thought, a rabbi has just offered me a visa for Israel. Please tell me, God, is this reality or am I hallucinating after a 20-hour flight?

When we arrived at the hotel, we didn't have much time to rest because we had to attend the opening ceremony. I was very sleepy, so I took a shower to refresh myself and prepare for the ceremony. I met Ari and Gul Rukh Rahman at the ceremony. Gul, a Pakistani Muslim, is a co-executive director of Children of Abraham too. I was very happy when we met. I've been working with them for two years via the Internet, and it was the first time I'd met them in the flesh. Ari also introduced me to Yasser Salimi and Pearl Gluck. Yasser is a Children of Abraham student like me, and Pearl is a filmmaker. She was going to make a documentary film of us during the congress. They are my good friends. They knew that it was my first time to meet Jews, so they encouraged me to talk to the Rabbis. I was pretty scared at first. Talk to the Rabbis? What if they don't want to talk to me because I'm a Muslim?

Ari and Gul introduced me to some Rabbis during dinnertime, and I was surprised when I found out that the Rabbis were very nice and friendly. They were just like my grandpa, wise and full of love. I remember a Rabbi held my hand with his trembling hand and smiled. We did not speak -- there was no need. We just smiled at each other, which was worth more than a thousand words for me. The Imams and the Rabbis sat together during dinnertime. They talked, laughed, even hugged each other. It was amazing for me to see an Imam and a Rabbi embrace and laugh together. So we're no longer enemies, I thought. We're friends now.

The next day, I noticed the congress organizer had designated a room of the hotel for praying. I was surprised to find that Muslims and Jews would be praying in the same room. The Muslims used the room early in the morning. We laid out our prayer mats and joined together in prayer. After that, we folded up our mats so the Jews could use the room. When the Jews finished, they readied the room for the Muslims. They put everything away so we could put our prayer mats back. One day, I asked one of the Imams about this, and he told me, "I believe we're not just sharing the same prayer room. We share the same prayer too -- to let peace rule the world." I knew he was right, somehow.

We had a chance to go to the city that day. I went with Pearl and Yasser, but I lost them in the city. I panicked. Thankfully, two Imams and a Rabbi found me and took me with them. We found an old cathedral and went in together. The cathedral was very old and beautiful. We spent some time in the cathedral before we realized we might have missed the shuttle bus, so we rushed back to the bus shelter. When we were in the bus, I realized something and started to laugh. I went inside the cathedral with two Imams and a Rabbi. How cool is that?

I usually stayed in the lobby with my Children of Abraham friends at night, after the congress session finished. Sometimes an Imam or a Rabbi joined us, and we had a discussion together. I enjoyed my time with them. One night, when we were having a discussion, I saw some Imams gathered in the lobby. They sat in a circle and started to sing a song in Arabic. Some of them clapped their hands. The circle grew larger and larger as they sang, and I noticed some Rabbis had joined the circle too. Someone brought a flute and started to play. The Rabbis clapped their hands with the Imams. The singer sang another song, and suddenly some of them stood up and started to dance in the circle. They danced and sang together all night long. It was funny to see how the Imams and Rabbis danced together and laughed. They were like brothers.

Some Imams and Rabbis were very concerned about Indonesia. They asked me a lot of questions about Indonesia, about the tsunami, the political situation, the economy, the bombs and the terrorist attacks ... everything. They also asked me about Judaism in Indonesia. I told them that I had never met a Jew in Indonesia, and most people in Indonesia are prejudiced against the Jews; that Jews are bad people, infidels, the enemy. I've heard these things said since I was a kid -- I was raised in a Muslim family and attended a Muslim school for 12 years -- kindergarten until senior high school. I also realized that it's hard to talk about promoting a Jew-Muslim relationship in Indonesia. I've tried for two years, since I joined Children of Abraham, and people made me stop. I think it's impossible to promote a Jew-Muslim relationship in Indonesia. When I told this to an Imam at the congress, he smiled at me and said, "It takes time and a lot of patience. But it's worth trying. Regard this as a challenge, and don't give up. Ever."

I met a lot of great Imams and Rabbis there, and I learned a lot of things from them. I learned that we can always turn our enemies into friends. I also learned that we may be different, but inside we're brothers. The Imams and the Rabbis have shown us. And now it's my turn, and your turn, to show the world that we can come together peacefully instead of killing each other.

On my way to the airport, I sat beside a Rabbi on the bus. He didn't offer to arrange me a visa or give me the "who-the-hell-are-you" look. And I wasn't a stranger anymore. The Rabbi was smiling at me and greeted me. "So little girl, tell me," a Rabbi asked me (and yes, he called me little girl) "How did you enjoy the congress?" I smiled at him and said, "I met a lot of grandpas at the congress. How do you think I enjoyed it?" He held my hand and we laughed together.

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### **3.d) URI Website – special *Idea of the Month***

E-Mail written by Sally Mahé

For further information please contact [smah@uri.org](mailto:smah@uri.org)

Dear URI friends,

Each month beginning in June, 2006 there will be a special *Idea of the Month* posted to the front page of website [www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org) to participate in the International Day of Peace. These ideas are contributions from CCs. For June, the idea comes from the Foro Espiritual de Santiago para la Paz CC in Chile. Many thanks to Gerardo Gonzalez, contact person.

Please visit the [www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org) each month to see ideas.

Best wishes,

Sally Mahé

Director, Organizational Development  
United Religions Initiative

*"The interfaith community sees a thousand challenges and 6 billion opportunities."*

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### 3.e) Light Up the World to share with URI!

Thema: **[uri-contacts] Light Up the World to share with URI!**  
Datum: 14.09.2005 22:45:46 Westeuropäische Sommerzeit  
Von: [smahe@uri.org](mailto:smahe@uri.org)  
An: [uri-contacts@uriglobal.org](mailto:uri-contacts@uriglobal.org), [bishop@diocal.org](mailto:bishop@diocal.org)  
Kopie an: [Patricia@gratefulness.org](mailto:Patricia@gratefulness.org)  
*Internet-eMail:*

Dear friends,

Please go to this website - and find your CC!?

<http://www.gratefulness.org/lightup/world.htm>

A few months ago, URI's Global Council accepted the request from [www.gratefulness.org](http://www.gratefulness.org) to partner with them on a special project called "Light up the World".

They wanted to include the global community of URI CCs among other "light-providing organizations" on their website.

URI is deeply grateful to [gratefulness.org](http://gratefulness.org)!

If you wish, please contact Patricia Carlson [patricia@gratefulness.org](mailto:patricia@gratefulness.org) directly to say thank you for this monumental and beautiful work... and also, to report any problems. For regular updates, URI in San Francisco will send them updated information every three months.

Also, please read on in their website and try out other links - "Light Candles" and view by "Countries". Each is a delight!

I have included Patricia's message below.

Love and peace,  
Sally

#### FROM PATRICIA:

Dear Sally,

At long last, Light Up the World is online (see link with this message),

radiant with the compassionate work of URI Cooperation Circles. If you see any changes needed, please let me know. We were able to find individual web addresses for many Circles, and included the overarching URI address

in other cases.

Please let your CC contacts know. Since URI is such a prominent

presence  
on the globe at this point, you may want to consider posting a link to  
this feature on your site.

We are indeed grateful to you and your staff for your great generosity  
in  
helping us launch this interactive globe, full of inspiration!

With warm best wishes,  
Patricia

<http://www.gratefulness.org/lightup/world.htm>

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## **4. European and Global interfaith news**

### **4.a) World Peace News from the World Peace Prayer Society**

*We would like to present the article about Israel and Iran out of the WPPS newsletter to you,  
thank you very much, Dagmar Berkenberg, for the information.*

E-Mail from: Dagmar Berkenberg **World Peace Prayer Society August 2006**

Dear English speaking friends of the World Peace Prayer Society,

our US office has written an e-mail newsletter, which I would like to  
enclose for you. The usual "Global Link Newsletter" will be sent to you  
in autumn again.

I wish you relaxing summer days!

MAY PEACE PREVAIL IN OUR HEARTS  
MAY PEACE PREVAIL IN OUR COUNTRIES  
MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH

World Peace Prayer Society (NGO)  
Randorferstraße 9  
81673 München

Tel: +49 89 435 690 66  
Fax: +49 89 688 29 28  
[www.worldpeace.de](http://www.worldpeace.de)  
[dagmar@worldpeace.de](mailto:dagmar@worldpeace.de)

Peace Will Prevail, Even in the Middle East – Believe It!  
[By Hagit Ra'anana, WPPS Peace Representative, Israel](#)

Recent events took me by force back to June 1982, the first week of what we  
chose to name "SHLOM HAGALIL" Galilee's Peace (what a sad laugh!). My  
beloved partner for life paid with his life, but all those precious wasted lives  
made no difference! Here we are 24 years later back at square one. We forget  
that nobody can ever win any war! It brings no solutions, it cannot heal the

wounds, it cannot reveal any seeds of peace. Period!

I spent a day with families and children at Nahariya, knocking on shelters' doors seeking for the children, to be with them, to acknowledge the fear and remind the peace in the hearts. During the visit we were fortunate to survive 5-6 Katyushas that were overthrown in less than 1000 meters around us. In the afternoon I visited in two Israeli-Arab neighboring villages also under the missiles shower. As you know, even missiles don't know the different between faiths; it cannot distinguish between Jews, Muslims, and Christians!



My contacts are with 2 local hospitals in Tsfat and Nahariya (both were stricken directly) where they run special program for the hospital employees' kids. I also collaborate with special youth center in Tsfat for the Ethiopian new immigrants' children. It is huge blessing for me to spend time with my greatest teachers, the children. Some of them already sitting in shelters non-stop for ten days, they are so brave, even in total chaos they capable to be happy and experience joy. We prepare little paper Peace Poles. I give the kids little origami peace dolls saying: "May Peace Prevail on Earth"; they love it and always want more. To the grownups I brought exercise books written by my spiritual teacher, Masami Saionji, translated to Hebrew about: "Think Something Positive."

So you see, the journey continues exactly the way we design it... the only question is when humanity would realize it is time to make it different.

Shalom/Salam/Peace on Earth!

### Peace Prayers for Middle East from Iran

*By Hossein Khangostar, WPPS Peace Representative, Iran*

While Lebanon's and Israel's children are killed under war bombardments between Lebanon and Israel and while leaders of countries are in silence, the world's children are agog for them.



For this important event, Roya, one of the active members of WPPS in IRAN, inaugurated a World Peace Prayer Ceremony with a group of Iranian children and prayed for peace in Lebanon and Israel.



They prayed MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH once for each country in the world, but they prayed 7 times for

Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran.

Roya has decided travel to some countries, especially to countries that are in war and convey our Society's prayer MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH to those people by planting a Peace Pole.

We hope the war between Lebanon and Israel will be terminated.

May Peace Prevail on Earth.  
May Peace Prevail in Lebanon.  
May Peace Prevail in Israel.

MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH

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#### 4.b) Prince Charles' recent speech at Al-Azhar University, Cairo

Thema:	<b>[uri-contacts] Prince Charles' recent speech at Al-Azhar University, Cairo (founded 969 C.E.).</b>
Datum:	27.03.2006 07:32:56 Westeuropäische Sommerzeit
Von:	<a href="mailto:KATHARLOW@aol.com">KATHARLOW@aol.com</a>
An:	<a href="mailto:uri-contacts@uriglobal.org">uri-contacts@uriglobal.org</a> , <a href="mailto:uri-discussion@uriglobal.org">uri-discussion@uriglobal.org</a>

The Prince of Wales' speech delivered at Al-Azhar on 3/21/2006.

Unity in Faith

I

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been enormously touched that you should have considered inviting me to speak at this most venerable and ancient place of worship and learning. You have done me the greatest honour through your invitation, and indeed through conferring this much treasured honorary doctorate on me, and I count it a very special privilege to visit the University of Al Azhar and, indeed, to return to Egypt – a country for which I have a particular affection and which, for many, has a sacred significance as the place of refuge for the child Jesus.

I would like to begin by paying tribute to the man who first encouraged me to accept the invitation to speak here, a dear friend and graduate of this great university, Shaikh Zaki Badawi. His sudden death in January was a profound shock and an immense sadness to many of us across the world. He was a man of real wisdom and learning. With the humility of a true scholar, he made his great knowledge accessible to others – and did so with an irresistible

sense of humour. I am so pleased and proud that his widow Lady Badawi is with us for this occasion.

I do not claim to be a scholar, other than having studied history at the University of Cambridge – not quite as old as this one, but I do have a great interest in exploring the Abrahamic tradition into which I was born. This tradition has shaped me and made me who I am. Today I stand before you as one belonging to the family of faiths connected by that tradition.

II

The roots of the faith that we share in the One God, the God of Abraham, give us enduring values. We need the courage to speak of them and affirm them again and again to a world troubled by change and dissension. That is the message which, above all, I wish to leave you with today. First, and highest among those values of our common inheritance, and born of our love of God, must always come respect for each other, and for His creation. Our respect for all

God's creatures and for the environment is the expression of our respect for the Creator whose inspiration is the entire manifest world.

Secondly, and following from this, our beliefs and values call out for peace and not conflict. We may have a human weakness to criticise and to compete with each other. But what we have in common, as people of faith, calls us beyond this towards mutual respect and understanding.

Thirdly, the great Abrahamic traditions speak of a faith which rests in the heart beyond the limitations of our intellectual knowledge and judgement. Wherever we are placed in our human society, whatever the advantages or disadvantages we have in ability or education, we perceive the truths of our faith with the 'eye of the heart'. The Prophet Moses reminded us that the heart is the seat of faith: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart". I believe that the great faiths speak through their sacred texts to the heart, and that faith itself is heart-felt.

But while I cherish the connections within the history of our different Abrahamic Faiths, I do not want you to imagine for one moment that I think that they are one and the same. There are differences, and we should celebrate them. But in the things that matter most, we have a common root. In my view, God's purpose should never be in doubt: it is to bind us closer together! Unity through diversity... Indeed, it has always moved me that the Holy Koran has a verse: "O Mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other)."

III

I first voiced my thoughts publicly on relations between Islam and the West in 1993, in a speech at another great university, Oxford. Something I said then has troubled me ever since. I said:

...despite the advances in technology and mass communication in the second half of the twentieth century, despite mass travel and the intermingling of races...misunderstandings between Islam and the West continue. Indeed they may be growing.

Tragically, the intervening twelve years have confirmed my fears and, for so many, those years have been profoundly bleak. My heart is heavy from witnessing the never-ending death and destruction – the kind of death and destruction I understand only too well, having experienced the loss of my beloved Great Uncle, Lord Mountbatten, at the hands of terrorist bombers in 1979. Images of communities torn apart by religious conflict are deeply harrowing – from Bosnia to Baghdad, from Chechnya to Palestine – evidence of just how far misunderstandings have continued and escalated. Violence, so often justified in the name of religion, effects a terrible hardening of hearts. What good can possibly come of all of this?

In that same speech, I talked about the history of Europe and the Islamic world – how they were inextricably entwined, and how, through the centuries, the giving and taking on both sides had contributed so greatly to what we have become today. History shows what giant leaps of creativity in knowledge – in science, literature and the arts – have occurred when the members of the Abrahamic family have worked together. Can we not draw inspiration from the great explosion of knowledge and understanding which took place under the Abbassids between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, when their capital Baghdad was a world centre of learning; or from Islamic Spain between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries, when in cities such as Cordoba and Toledo, the work of Christian, Muslim and Jewish scholars led to the flowering of the Renaissance? We need to remember that we in the West are in debt to the scholars of Islam, for it was thanks to them that during the Dark Ages in Europe the treasures of

classical learning were kept alive.

But in that same speech I also spoke of how, sadly, despite this fertile flow of ideas, many on both sides had still been left with uncompromising prejudices towards each other's cultures. This lingering mutual distrust persists, and with dreadful results. I think of the experience of Muslims living in Europe who are subject to varied and continuous expressions of Islamophobia by fellow-Europeans. I think of Christians living within some Muslim nations, who find themselves fettered by harsh and degrading restrictions, or subject to abuse by some of their fellow-citizens. And I think of dreadful acts of terrorism and violence across the world, carried out in the distorted name of faith.

I believe with all my heart that responsible men and women must work to restore mutual respect between faiths, and that we should do all we can to overcome the distrust that poisons so many people's lives. This, of course, is made infinitely more difficult by the stereotypes and absurdities propagated by certain sections of the Media. In my own very modest way, through the work of my Prince's Trust, my Foundation for the Built Environment and my School of Traditional Arts, I have sought to find ways to integrate communities and to celebrate the virtues of Islamic cultures in the United Kingdom. As these programmes develop across other countries, I hope that they may serve as a model for communities elsewhere. Even from small projects and examples the foundations of mutual respect, consideration and courtesy can be rebuilt, sometimes through the physical design of people's surroundings – surroundings which can help to enhance our shared humanity rather than treat us as technological adjuncts to the increasingly mechanistic world around us.

#### IV

The legacy of misunderstanding and conflict between religions has had a central role in the terrible history of war and violence. And none

more so, of course, than the truly apocalyptic cruelty and destruction caused by the two unholy, secular "religions" of Communism and Fascism.

Over the centuries, as societies have evolved, we can often see two distinct reactions to this ruinous legacy. Some hold ever more tightly to their religion, as a source of stability in their lives – and, as conflicts rage, they identify other traditions only as threats. Others become disenchanted with religion altogether; with the whole concept of metaphysics and a dimension beyond ourselves. They abandon any faith in God, and see religion itself as "backward," "primitive" and "wrong". This disenchantment and indifference poses a danger for our inheritance of faith, universal values and a living tradition. Coupled with an obsession with materialism and trivia, it is a threat across the world, not least to our own traditional Christian culture.

In Europe, it was partly in reaction to the apparently ceaseless wars between different Christian denominations that many sincere people came to think that if we could only create truly secular societies in which the bigotry, violence and pedantry that people associated with religion would disappear, the underlying sources of conflict would be removed, and we would all get on better. They hoped that if, in the place of institutionalized religion, the material wellbeing and security of the people could be enhanced and protected through the discoveries of science, then the march to harmony, progress and human happiness would continue unopposed.

Inevitably, it has not turned out to be quite so easy. As we are finding, scientific knowledge, which has brought us all so much that we value and are privileged to take for granted, is not the same as Wisdom. For it is Wisdom alone that can reveal to us those universal and eternal truths that lie at the heart of all the great traditions. In many people's lives today these truths, which

provided our forefathers with a secure framework for their existence and with a clear set of ethical values, have become obscured, have disappeared entirely from their lives. This is not a phenomenon peculiar to the West. We see it in each strand of the Abrahamic faiths.

The implications of this loss run deep. For I believe that moderation comes from the Wisdom passed down to us through tradition. Extremism exploits our loss of respect for tradition. Loss of religious certainty is pushing many to take refuge in new absolutes which, like any primitive belief, tolerate no doubt or reservation, but lead to various forms of extremism.

We need to recover the depth, the subtlety, the generosity of imagination, the respect for Wisdom that so marked Islam in its great ages. Islam called Jews and Christians the peoples of the book, because they, like Muslims are a part of a religion of sacred texts: the Koran, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament. And what was so distinctive of the great ages of faith was that they understood that, as well as sacred texts, there is the art of interpretation of sacred texts – and this is a difficult and subtle art that gave rise in Islam to great principles of interpretation and great schools of jurisprudence.

Between the text and the meaning of the text – between the meaning of God's word for all time and its meaning for this time – falls the act of interpretation. It was Islam's greatness to understand this in its full depth and challenge. And this is what you, at this great and historic institution, can give not only to Islam, but, by example, to all the other children of Abraham.

Today, too often, there seems to be a tendency to read texts as if they needed no interpretation, as if we could read their meaning on the surface. That does violence to the Divine word, and violence to the word eventually leads to violence to the

person, and to the world.

When all we can hear in sacred texts is simple certainties, when all we can see in God's multicoloured world is black and white, we begin to divide humanity into simple oppositions: the good and the evil; the pious and the profane; us and the enemy. And this then leads to hatred and violence. For it is then that we lose the single most important principle that unites the Abrahamic faiths: in Judaism, "Love your neighbour as yourself" ; in Christianity, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them" ; and in Islam "No-one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself".

V

If we are to heed these teachings, to ensure that the voice of moderation can continue to be heard, and to oppose extremism, what do our understandings of God, implicit in our faiths, have to say that might help us? First of all, the Good Lord surely does not mean us to kill each other – that is in all our traditions. Secondly, in a world of abstractions, materialism and loss of spiritual meaning, surely those of us who share a faith in something beyond merely ourselves, beyond the ego and the passions, beyond the worship of science for its own sake, who have faith in a harmonious universe that balances mind, body and spirit, the heart and the head, in an understanding of the divine order that is God's mysterious and loving gift to the created world – surely, surely we should be uniting together on the basis of our shared beliefs? Surely the wisdom I have referred to earlier should warn us that far from fighting each other, or arguing about futile abstractions, we should be working together in the face of the immense environmental crisis threatening our entire planet? What, then, can we learn from Islam that will help us re-integrate ourselves with Nature?

Can we not see the urgent need before it is too late to blend the intuitive genius of the East with the practical genius of the West?

Central to the teachings of all our faiths is an emphasis on respect for each other. This is much more than a political argument about the rights of minorities. Muslims, Christians and Jews are united in believing in the dignity and value of the individual. Each of us is unique and of unique value to God. When we know ourselves, our frailties and weaknesses, we can see the importance of understanding towards others – of seeing the other's point of view.

Respect for others, and for what is precious to others – in other words good manners, civility, and a willingness to listen – ensures respect towards our own values and ideals. The recent ghastly strife and anger over the Danish cartoons shows the danger that comes of our failure to listen and to respect what is precious and sacred to others. In my view, the true mark of a civilized society is the respect it pays to minorities and to strangers. Generous, hospitable welcome to strangers and to those on their travels is justifiably a proud element of Arab culture. We in Britain have made great efforts to welcome people of other faiths, and to enable them to preserve their unique identities, while at the same time accommodating themselves to British culture. There are now more than a million and a half British Muslims. They enrich British society in countless ways, as, I am sure, do the Christian minorities in Muslim nations.

As people of faith, we know, too, that the human spirit is called to the horizon of eternity. We sense intuitively that we are too frequently focussed on the external world, which so often discounts what cannot be measured and weighed. But how can we measure or weigh Faith, Beauty, Loyalty, Joy, or indeed Love itself – all the things that make life worth living and help define the essence of our

humanity? Do not these qualities represent an inner reality? And, when we speak of an inner reality, we are in fact speaking of that dimension which sees beyond the material – in other words, we are speaking once more of the heart. We speak metaphorically of the heart as the source of compassion – the "charity" to which St. Paul refers in one translation of the Bible – which, for Christians, is the supreme virtue.

When we face problems of understanding between cultures and religions, is not what is missing just that perception: the perception of the heart which is kind, moderate and full of acceptance? This is the perception in which we can all share and which is brought to mind by the writings and example of the great mystics in our different traditions – people like Julian of Norwich, Rabbi Isaac Luria, and Imam Muhammad Idris al-Shafi. Do not these great men and women, with their perennial wisdom, tell us of the need to balance our often aggressive and superficial behaviour with a more gentle, contemplative attitude – a turning from the head to that domain of the heart where the goodness in our common humanity is to be found? Let me be clear: this is not an argument about contemplative withdrawal, but rather a prescription for active engagement in our dealings with others. After all, we share together a tradition of revelation that has informed the very essence of our faiths. Interestingly, science is beginning to discover the order and harmony inherent within Nature – something that was revealed to the ancients thousands of years ago. Surely this indicates a profound truth about the pattern of the inner life and its relationship with God's mysterious pattern for the manifested world?

VI

I believe we have a shared duty to speak for the principles of our religious faiths. I believe we must protect the integrity of all our traditions – Muslim, Christian and Jewish –

acknowledging and celebrating our rich diversity which, at the end of the day, is our only guarantee against the domination of a uniform, monocultural, global culture, whether religious or secular.

And I believe that, to defend the realm of the spirit against materialism, and the transcendent dignity of each one of us against extremism and self-idolatry, we must foster, encourage and act upon that which embodies the divine attributes of mercy and compassion. That calls for calmness and the exercise of restraint. And, if I may say so, it requires all those who are in positions of authority in our different faiths to preach clearly and consistently to others the eternal value of these Divine attributes.

Some three thousand years ago King Solomon, the son of David, said, "Where there is no vision, the people perish". I can only say that I look forward to a world in which we

share a vision that acknowledges our differences with respect and understanding; that recognises what others hold sacred – and to a world in which we see that we cannot, and must not, abuse our great traditions and their teachings as a weapon in the service of selfish, worldly power.

I have no illusions about the difficulty of this task. But I believe it is one which now, above all times, we must undertake, and undertake together. There is no other way to preserve the innermost values of our faiths which we hold most dear. We must work together to create a world in which the fruits of faith – understanding, tolerance and compassion – enrich and safeguard the world of our children, and our children's children. We must not let slip this opportunity and this challenge in an age which requires our determined, committed and heartfelt efforts to live in peace together.

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#### **4.c) Three-day World Religious Summit in Moscow**

*Thank you Herman Krause for this information provided by Qantara.de on the website. Have a look at the address below you also find pictures from the conference there.*

##### **World Religious Summit in Moscow - Promoting Religious Dialogue**

More than 150 representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism took part in a three-day World Religious Summit in Moscow. The world's religious leaders exchanged views about the role of religions in dealing with conflicts. By Hermann Krause

The world religious summit was definitely one of the biggest events of its kind that ever took place in Moscow. The unique meeting was initiated by the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexi the Second.

Its main objective was however not really religious in nature, but rather political. The world's religious leaders worked out ideas about how their congregations can contribute to finding solutions to global political problems on the agenda of the G 8 summit in Saint Petersburg.

##### **Denouncing attempts to justify extremism by religion**

Metropolitan Kyrill is in charge of the Patriarchate's foreign policy. He explained that terrorism and extremism, xenophobia and tolerance had been the main topics in Moscow:

"What should the churches do in order to help defuse tensions? All religions have a common basis. That's why our message should be based on a moral and ethical approach. Even if we address political problems, we should stay away from political declarations."

It's not always easy to draw a clear line between politics and religion. And one cannot overlook the fact that the world religious summit in Moscow did have a political function after all: Before the start of the G8 summit in Saint Petersburg, it was to demonstrate to the world that the Russian President does attach great importance to the dialogue between the world's different religions.

Where as in the old days of the former Soviet Union, people were persecuted for their religious beliefs – things have now radically changed, and the new role of religion in Russia is to help establish peace and to contribute to the wellbeing of Russian society.

### **Building bridges between different religions**

The world religious summit in Moscow was officially organised by an interreligious council consisting of representatives of various religions – among them Aser Allijew, one of the leading representatives of Islam in Russia.

"In Islam, there are clear rules governing the relations with other cultures," Allijew says. "For example, there is a rule spelling out how a Muslim should behave in a Christian or Buddhist monastery. And one of the main tasks concerning the education of young Muslims is to build bridges between different religions."

So far, Chechen rebels who justified some of their terrorist activities with the Koran, have not been able to convince Russian Muslims of their views. Approximately twenty million Muslims live in Russia. So it is not surprising that the Russian government tries to improve relations between Christians and Muslims, as well as between Russia and neighbouring Islamic states.

Definitely not on the agenda in Moscow were relations between various Christian denominations, in particular those between the Russian Orthodox and the Catholic Church which have been improving lately.

Yet another religious leader who was conspicuously absent from the Moscow summit was the Dalai Lama. The organisers of the summit were concerned that the Russian foreign ministry would refuse to issue a visa to the Dalai Lama out of consideration for China.

Hermann Krause

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