MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Dear Friends:

You will, I feel sure, find the work of your fellow religious believers reported in this Newsletter to be inspiring. So many religious communities are cooperating so well around the world through Religions for Peace (RfP).

The selected news items for this month’s Newsletter represent only a small fraction of work: Religions for Peace affiliates are doing to build peace by working to stop war, help eliminate extreme poverty and protect the earth.

Every month I look forward to sharing selected activities that are being advanced by our global network: a World Council of senior religious leaders from all regions of the world; six regional inter-religious bodies; ninety national ones; a Global Women of Faith Network and a Global Interfaith Youth Network.

Sincerely,

Dr. William F. Vendley
Secretary General

IN THE NETWORK

SYRIA: CENTERS OF PEACE FOR CHILDREN ESTABLISHED

The brutality of the conflict in Syria has left local communities deeply injured, traumatized, often displaced and increasingly isolated, plagued with distrust and suspicion. With no political solution in sight, people are gravitating toward closer affiliations with and reliance upon their own religious and ethnic peers.

Religions for Peace, in partnership with senior religious leaders in Syria, has established two new Centers of Peace for Children in Syria.

The Centers of Peace for Children are funded by RfP and are serving a critical need for children and their families who have lost their homes, their livelihoods and sometimes one or more members of their family.
The Centers are providing physical, educational and psychological support to help ease their suffering, including offering classes in arts, music, sports, science and public health. Importantly, the centers are teaching about the values of peace, truth, honor and love.

*RIP* continues its strategy in Syria designed around the creative and efficient engagement of religious communities and their leaders (understood as including women and youth) as well as their facilities and institutions in activities to advance peace and the common good of all on both the national and local levels. Working with local religious leaders, *RIP* provided humanitarian assistance which facilitated convening across sectarian and ethnic lines. These convenings—in-turn—are used as delivery platforms for activities related to peace and reconciliation.

To date, four child friendly spaces have been created where 499 Syrian children from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds have received care and support. Around 165 Syrian families (1,000 Syrians) have received emergency food supplies.

These strategic humanitarian activities, taking place in Al-Hasaka, Damascus, Homs, Huran and Tartus regions, are also providing social platforms for peace related workshops and activities.

*RIP* also continues to work extensively with and has secured the commitment of a working group of 150 diverse Syrian religious leaders (including youth and women) from across Syria and in expatriate communities to form a non-partisan *Syrian Inter-religious Council (RIP*Syria).

**Sudan: Interfaith Delegation Meet Sudan Foreign Minister to Discuss Apostasy**

From 15 May to 23 June, Meriam Yehya Ibrahim sat in prison in Sudan, preparing for her sentence of flogging and hanging because of her commitment to practice her chosen faith, Christianity.

Mrs. Ibrahim refused to renounce her faith, the religion of her mother, despite warnings from the court that she would be tried for apostasy from Islam, the religion of her father.
Mrs. Ibrahim’s story has received international attention, including from RfP leadership.

On 16 June, Dr. William Vendley [Secretary General of Religions for Peace] and Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, National Director, Office for Interfaith and Community Alliances, Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), [Co-President of RfP] participated in an interfaith delegation visit with the Sudanese Foreign Minister, H.E. Ali Karti, in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the meeting was to voice concern regarding Ms. Ibrahim’s case, listen to the perspective of the Sudanese authorities and discuss solutions to the crisis.

During the meeting, the Sudan Foreign Minister told the delegation of faith leaders that, historically, Sudan has been a tolerant society, where Christians and Muslims have lived in harmony. He explained that the crux of the problem regarding Ms. Ibrahim is Sudan’s criminal law of 1991, which was used as the basis for her sentence. The law contradicts the constitution of 2005, which guarantees religious freedom. He noted that there is enough scope for a compassionate and fair resolution of the case.

Foreign Minister Kati invited the delegation to Sudan to witness the relations between religious communities there and discuss their concerns with religious, government and community leaders.

Dr. William Vendley suggested to him that such a delegation should be led by African interreligious leaders.

Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Director of External Relations, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers; Finn Church Aid, who facilitated the meeting, remarked that "the upheaval that Mrs. Ibrahim’s case has caused provides an opportunity to enhance partnership between Sudan and the global interreligious community.

Other RfP leaders, too, have called for Ms. Ibrahim’s release including Revd. Thomas Wipf [Moderator, European Council of Religious Leaders-RfP] and Mr. Stein Villumstad [General Secretary, European Council of Religious Leaders-RfP], whose open letter to European Union top officials can be read here.

Haiti: RfP Haiti Planning for Future

Today Haiti is still recovering from the devastating earthquake that struck Port au Prince and the surrounding area in 2010.

RfP Haiti was established in the aftermath of this disaster to provide multireligious support to people who needed comfort, assistance and solidarity. At times, the Vodou community was blamed for causing the earthquake due to curses.

These unfounded allegations brought further untold and unnecessary suffering in already vulnerable communities, and bred suspicion and even hatred. The establishment of RfP Haiti by Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Muslim and Voodoo leaders came at the ideal moment to condemn such false allegations and aid struggling communities.
Since its initial stages, *RfP Haiti* has been actively engaged with Haitian authorities to help move the country forward as a democratic society, responded to humanitarian suffering and social marginalization, and—importantly—has proved that religions can cooperate together even in divided societies.

From June 15 to 19, *RfP Haiti* was visited by Mr. Stein Villumstad [General Secretary, European Council of Religious Leaders - RfP] to conduct a joint review of its four-year history.

The consultations included a one-day workshop in which the leaders of *RfP Haiti* developed program priorities and discussed ways to strengthen the organization’s reach and impact. Faith-based organizations operating in Haiti, including Islamic Relief, Lutheran World Federation, Catholic Relief Service, FinnChurch Aid, Christian Aid and Norwegian Church Aid expressed interest in working with *RfP Haiti* to strengthen its impact in Haitian society.

*RfP Haiti* will convene later this summer for a retreat to follow up on issues raised during the consultations.

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**Vatican: RfP Leaders Demonstrate Solidarity for Vatican Invocation for Peace**

On 8 June His Holiness Pope Francis hosted a historic peace summit at the Vatican with Israeli President Shimon Peres, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and religious leaders of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths to pray for thanksgiving, forgiveness and peace in Jerusalem.

Religious leaders were invited to use faith as the common ground on which to foster shared well-being and build peace.

Patriarch Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, [Honorary President of RfP], Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Bishop of Palestine and Jordan, [Member, Middle East North Africa Council of Religious Leaders - RfP]; and Chief Rabbi David Rosen, Honorary Advisor to Israel’s Grand Rabbinate, International Director, Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee, [Co-President of RfP] participated in the Summit at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Francis.
Rabbi David Rosen expressed to “Vatican Insider” his hopes that the event will be “the beginning of something even better”. He envisions possible future developments such as “a permanent council of local religious authorities (with international support) that could prepare a charter for interreligious coexistence in the Holy Land; a joint statement on Jerusalem; and religious institutions perhaps serving as support for political peacemaking.”


A major outcome of the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 was the agreement by member States to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post 2015 development agenda.

As 2015 approaches, interest in the future framework is growing. This momentum is fueled by basic questions such as "what must be done?", "how should it be done?", and "how should reaching the goals be financed?" Beyond these vital questions, there is a more basic question as to why the goals are necessary. It is a question that goes to the heart of the moral imperative for development.

To address this concern, Dr. William Vendley [Secretary General of RJP], spoke at a gathering at the United Nations titled: "What’s Behind What People Want: Perspectives on Values for the SDGs" that was held on 12 June and convened by UNDP and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. It was moderated by Mr. Olav Kjørven, Special Advisor to the UNDP Administrator on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The high-level speakers included: representatives from the Missions of Honduras and Bhutan; H.E. Monsignor Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Science; Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the MDGs and Dr. William Vendley.

Dr. Vendley noted during his remarks that there is a broad moral consensus among the world’s religions that supporting the development of others is a religious obligation. Holistic development includes the vital values of food and medicine, but it is also concerned with intellectual, moral and religious development. A multi-religious consensus on holistic development includes concern for the flourishing of the other as well as oneself.

The event allowed prominent personalities to engage in a discussion on the values and moral imperatives that can undergird and guide the global commitment to sustainable development. Information from the symposium will be presented to policymakers in a way that will increase chances to influence the SDGs agenda and goals setting debate.
Indonesia: Pilot Program of Code of Conduct on Holy Sites Inaugurated

*RFP* continues to promote the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites together with partner organizations Search for Common Ground, Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights and One World in Dialogue.

A pilot project of the Code was recently inaugurated at the Norwegian Embassy in Jakarta. The pilot program has been in planning stages for some time, and funding from the Norwegian government helped to advance its implementation. The Indonesian Search for Common Ground, The Inter-religious Council of Indonesia and *Religions for Peace Indonesia* are serving as the implementing partners.

The pilot project will focus on awareness raising and education through the use of modern media and development of a comic book that will be made available to youth in religious communities and in schools.

The inauguration of the pilot project in Indonesia represents a significant step forward in testing out the Universal Code on the ground.

Bosnia-Herzegovina also went through a pilot phase before establishing the Code as a regular project.

Another pilot project in the Holy Land has attracted considerable interest and support both within and without the Holy Land, including international media.

Global: Index Finds Declining Levels of Peace Globally

The Global Peace Index (GPI), founded by Mr. Steve Killelea, Executive Chairman and Founder, Institute for Economics and Peace, [International Treasurer and Trustee of RFP](http://www.religionsforpeace.org) launched its 2014 Report on Wednesday 18 June in London.

The GPI - the world’s leading benchmark for measuring the peacefulness of nations - measures peace according to 22 qualitative and quantitative indicators identifying the most and least peaceful countries, tracks trends in violence and conflict, and calculates the economic impact of violence.

The Report found that world global average peace score deteriorated slightly since last year, mainly due to global increases in terrorist activity, the number of conflicts fought and the number of refugees and displaced people.

The top three most peaceful countries are Iceland, Denmark and Austria, while the three least peaceful countries are South Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria.

The Report also found that economic impact of containing and dealing with the consequences of global violence last year was estimated to be US$9.8 trillion. This is equivalent to 11.3% of global GDP - twice the combined GDP of African countries. [Read more.](http://www.religionsforpeace.org)
Nepal: *RfP* Nepal Combats Religious Conflict

In Nepalgunj, a city in the Western area of Nepal, many social conflicts stem from religious disputes. The link between social conflicts, religion and communal violence in the city are prominent. The tensions in Nepalgunj, primarily between Hindus and Muslims, bear a history of periodic violent disputes. Inter-religious marriage and the use of public land are just a few examples of incidents that have generated violence within the city.

To defuse inter-faith tensions, a two-day workshop, organized by UNDP, IRCN and *RfP* Nepal, brought together 35 participants representing the Buddhist, Baha’i, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, Sikh, and other faiths. Participants reflected on social tensions and committed themselves to establishing inter-faith networks that can serve to resolve religious and social conflicts. In the workshop, Yogi Manhanta Chandra Nath [President of *RfP* Nepal, Nepalgunj Chapter] and Maulana Abdul Jabbar Manzari, [Vice President of *RfP* Nepal, Nepalgunj Chapter] shared their experiences in resolving over a dozen conflicts during the past two years.

The workshop was important as it provided a space for religious leaders to openly and safely discuss inter-faith tensions and commit to take concrete steps to address them. A Social Goodwill Committee was also formed in Nepalgunj to help strengthen the capacity of multi-religious networks to resolve religious tensions. The religious leaders, representing various faiths, pledged to do all that they can to maintain religious harmony in Nepalgunj.

Peru: Interfaith Action for Climate Change

Peru will host the 20th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in December 2014. Representatives from more than 190 countries will assess the effects of actions taken by countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In preparation to the run up of this global gathering in Peru, the Inter-Religious Council of Peru- *RfP* held an Interfaith Fast, Prayer and Advocacy Day for Climate Change on 17 June to raise awareness about the need for a binding global agreement climate change.

The event was lead by Most Rev. Salvador Pineiro, Archbishop of Ayacucho and President, Peruvian Catholic Episcopal Conference; Rt. Rev. William Godfrey, Anglican Bishop of Peru; Ms. Laura Vargas [Executive Secretary, Inter-Religious Council of Peru- *RfP*]; with the participation and support of Mr. Elias Szczynicki [Secretary General and Regional Director, *RfP* Latin America and the Caribbean].
The Fast, Prayer and Advocacy Day in Peru followed the Interfaith Call to Fast for Climate Justice launched by 28 religious organizations during the 19th session of COP that took place from 11 to 22 November 2013 in Warsaw, Poland.

Global efforts, within the RfP Movement, to mobilize action and ambition on climate change, are also being planned, including the RfP and the World Council of Churches co-hosting of an Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, in New York 21-22 September 2014. One of the objectives of the Interfaith Summit is to convey the faith communities’ concerns and proposals to decision makers. The Interfaith Summit will also adopt a statement that will convey a message on the threat of climate change and the importance of a fair and ambitious outcome of the international climate negotiations. It will be directed to heads of states, international negotiators, and faith communities, and be presented to the United Nations Secretary General. The statement will be issued, translated, and widely disseminated for other religious leaders and actors to sign after the summit.

Italy: RfP and FAO Explore Partnership to Address Global Food Crisis

The elimination of poverty requires focused attention and action on many fronts. Religious communities have large and uniquely important assets related to the resolution of many of the challenges essential to the elimination of poverty.

Yet, these large potential assets have not been systematically operationalized; worse, religious communities are vulnerable to being manipulated by and becoming complicit in ethnic or other forms of conflict.

On 22 May, Dr. William Vendley [Secretary General of RfP] and Drs. Adalberta and Armando Bernardini [Representatives to FAO of RfP] met in Rome with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, to look into the development of a joint partnership strategy that would mobilize and equip religious communities to cooperate in the reduction of poverty.

The RfP delegation also met with Ms. Marcela Villarreal, Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization, Office of Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development, Mr. Rolf Hackbardand, Deputy Director of OPC and Mr. Rodigo Castaneda Sepulveda, Chief of the Partnerships Unit of FAO.

The discussion took on a multi-phase approach which includes establishing pilot projects in some of the poorest countries in the world in which RfP Interreligious Councils exists.

In the longer terms, RfP and FAO together will explore ways of equipping and building greater capacity for action among RfP National and Regional Interreligious councils for multi-religious action relevant to the elimination of poverty.
Muslims and Christians in Africa Work Together to Prevent Malaria

14 May, 2014
Source: livescience.com

The Faiths Act Sierra Leone Program trains leaders from different faiths to work together and take action.

The program uses the social capital of faith communities to spread messages to even the most remote places, sites where there is always a church or mosque, but not necessarily a medical clinic. Sierra Leone may lack public health provisions, but it does have many people of faith. This program has proved such institutions can be powerful agents of positive behavioral change.

Since 2011, the program has enlisted 680 Muslim and Christian leaders in Sierra Leone in training more than 16,000 members of their congregations and volunteers within their communities. We have worked with the Sierra Leonean government as well as the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone—RfP to ensure we are complementing the National Malaria Control Program. Read more

Mother See of Etchmiadzin to Host International Conference on Syria

10 June 2014
Source: Asbarez (Armenian News Network)

The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin will host international consultations on “The Crisis in Syria: Challenges for Religious Communities” on June 11 and 12.

The consultation, organized under the leadership of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, [Co-President of RfP], will bring together representatives of Christian Churches from the Middle East, Syria, Russia, Europe, and the United States.

The consultations will focus on the following topics: “Political developments in Syria and the humanitarian perspective,” “The Presence of Christians in the Middle East and testimonies of developments in the Arab World,” “The Armenian communities in the Middle East and Syria and their perspectives.”

The opening ceremony will take place at Matenadaran’s Vache and Tamar Manukean Hall and will be presided over by His Holiness Karekin II. Armenian Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamian and Secretary General of the World Council of Churches Olav Tveit [Co-President of RfP] will be present at the ceremony. Read more.
The Point of the Pope's Visit: What Was the Most Successful Part for Israel

29 May, 2014
Source: The Jewish Daily
By: Chief Rabbi David Rosen [Co-President of RfP]

Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority have all hailed Pope Francis’s whirlwind pilgrimage as a success — and indeed, the very fact that it went as smoothly as it did was no small achievement for all involved. Pope Francis’s global superstar status guaranteed media focus on local voices and images wherever he went.

The primary declared purpose of Pope Francis’s visit was to meet in Jerusalem with the head of the Christian Orthodox world, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the first meeting of reconciliation between the two separate (and for most of history, mutually hostile) strands of Christianity.

He also sought to convey a message of peace and empathy for the peoples of this region. However, in addition, Francis intentionally used his visit to Israel to reiterate the Church’s special bonds with Judaism and the Jewish People. Not only did he state this explicitly at the meeting with Jewish religious leaders at Hechal Shlomo, but it was also powerfully reflected at the impressive event hosted by President Shimon Peres. Read more

Kenya: National and County Cohesion and Integration Dialogue Forums Launched

10 June, 2014
Source: AllAfrica

President Uhuru Kenyatta today launched the national and county cohesion and integration dialogue forums and urged leaders to deal with the challenges facing the country instead of hyping them.

He reminded the leaders of their responsibility to serve the cause of national cohesion by treating every Kenyan equally.

“They know that under the new Constitution they chose for themselves, leaders are obliged to serve every Kenyan equally and impartially. Kenyans know from bitter experience that political enmity threatens our very nationhood,” he said.

Citing the challenge of religious extremism, the President said Government will not allow anyone to threaten the peace and security of Kenyans.

He commended the National Council of Churches of Kenya, the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya-RfP, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission and the Danish International Development Agency for partnering with Government to promote harmony in the country. Read more.
Delegates Attend International Interfaith Conference in Kosovo

May 2014
Source: Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George

HE Mr Anthony Bailey, Grand Magistral Delegate for Inter-Religious Relations of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George, attended and spoke at a three day International Interfaith Conference ‘Religion and Politics: Enhancing Interfaith Dialogue as a Means of Democratic Development’ organised in Prizren by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo in partnership with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and the Community of St Egiddio.

The Grand Prior of the Constantinian Order, His Eminence Renato Raffele Cardinal Martino also addressed the audience in the section “What Real Difference Can Interfaith Dialogue Make?” where the other panellists were Dr Hamed A Aziz Al-Marwani, Member of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue Board of Directors, Dr William Vendley [Secretary General of RfP], Ambassador Rexhep Boja, Former Mufti of the Islamic Community of Kosovo and Kosovo Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Reverend Kristen Looney, Head of Education at Tony Blair Faith Foundation. The moderator was Mr Brian Pellot, Director of Global Strategy and Religious Freedom Editor at Religion News Service.

The high profile conference was sponsored by the British Council, the Royal Norwegian Embassy and the United States Embassy in Kosovo. The event took place between 23-25 May 2014 and was attended by over 190 leading faith, government, diplomatic and charitable organisations form across the world. Read more.

Ela Gandhi Coming

13 June, 2014
Source: Trinidad Express Newspapers

Ela Gandhi, Granddaughter of India’s Mahatma Gandhi, [Co-President of RfP], will arrive in Trinidad and Tobago on Tuesday as guest of the Inter-Religious Organisation-RfP and Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Centre.

Gandhi, of Durban in South Africa, along with Didi Sudesh Sethi of India, known as the most prolific Raja Yogini in the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University with over 55 years experience, and Sr Maureen Goodman of the United Kingdom with 38 years experience, will be guest speakers of a conference “Is Ancient Wisdom and Spirituality the Answer to Resolving the Issues of Modern Time” while here.

The conference is jointly hosted by the Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Centre and the Inter-Religious Organisation-RfP on June 19 and 20 at the Hyatt Regency. Read more.
Kenya: Clerics Demand Security Overhaul, Tolerance

17 June 2014
Source: All Africa

Nairobi — Calls to overhaul the internal security and intelligence systems have been reiterated by the Inter Religious Council of Kenya-RfP (IRCK-RfP).

The council members held a press conference on Tuesday in Nairobi to condemn the attacks in Mpeketoni that have left over 60 people dead over the past two days.

Sheikh Adan Wachu, Head, Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims, [Chairman of the IRCK-RfP], called on the government to compensate the families of the aggrieved, more so in view that the killers targeted men who were the breadwinners.

"It is incomprehensible that Kenyans can continue to be killed by criminals. We thus call upon his Excellency the President to do all that is within his powers to protect the lives and property of all Kenyans."

The religious leaders called on Kenyans to unite at this time of national sorrow urging them to continue living as brother and sister regardless of faith, colour, race, ethnic background or political affiliation. Read more.

Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP)
Moderator Din Syamsuddin [Co-president RfP] says he deplores the growing tension in the South China Sea, which has lead to racial unrest targeted at Chinese people in Vietnam.

The unrest has resulted in two deaths, dozens of injured and the forceful repatriation of Chinese nationals.

"Such actions will potentially cause instability and new conflicts in ASEAN and East Asia, whereas these regions have shown developments that are quite significant," he said in a statement made available to The Jakarta Post on Sunday.

Din said he called on the Vietnamese people to exercise self-restraint and hoped China and Vietnam could resolve their problems peacefully. Read more.

Conference Slams Racial Tensions in Vietnam

18 May, 2014
Source: The Jakarta Post

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UPCOMING EVENTS


25-28 August 2014: Asian Conference of Religions for Peace 8th General Assembly; Incheon, South Korea

20 September 2014: RfP International Executive Committee Meeting; New York, New York

21-22 September 2014: RfP and World Council of Churches and Interfaith Summit on Climate Change; New York, New York

Religions for Peace Welcomes New Staff

Lucas Barber
Mr. Lucas Barber is a Unitarian Universalist and convinced Quaker from Connecticut. Mr. Barber is currently pursuing a B.A in Peace and Global Studies at Earlham College.

Amel Butt
Ms. Amel Butt is currently a senior at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She is doing a double-major in Political Science and Economics, with a minor in History. Ms. Amel is a Shia’ Muslim from Pakistan, who was born in Iran and grew up in the U.S.

Edward Baxter
Mr. Eddie Baxter is a rising senior at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, where he is a student of Religion, Anthropology and American Studies.

Abbygail Parker
Ms. Abbgail Parker is a rising junior at Indiana University, majoring in religious studies, with a minor in Greek studies. She is a woman of Quaker faith.