



Fall 2011

INTERACTION

A URI PUBLICATION

General assembly-style voting in Oakland, CA

THE YEAR OF THE PEOPLE

This has been, in many ways, the year of the people. From Tahrir Square to Tel Aviv to the Port of Oakland, people are rising up to say “enough.” And whether they are saying “enough” to oppressive political regimes or to unfair financial policies, all of these movements have something important in common: people are ready to have their voices heard in systems, whether political or economic, that have long disenfranchised them.

Giving people a voice has been at the center of URI’s agenda from the beginning, and for many URI Cooperation Circles (CCs), this means addressing one of the most pernicious forms of oppression: entrenched poverty.

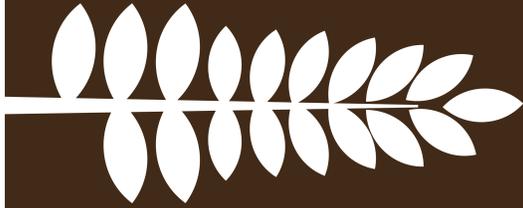
In West Bengal, India, for example, where the caste system perpetuates inequality and leaves millions of people on the sidelines of society, URI groups help tribal and “low-caste” communities gain access to government benefits while offering direct services like health care and vocational training that enable people to begin breaking down social and economic barriers.

“For decades these people were denied their legitimate demands and deprived of their rights,” said Biswadeb Chakraborty, URI’s Regional Coordinator in the region. “We are entering deep into their hearts and establishing good faith, addressing the problem of discrimination in our own way.”

The same philosophy underlies the work of the Bhatta Brick Kiln Labourers Association CC in Pakistan, which represents a class of 50,000 poor and largely isolated workers. Since it joined URI in 2002, the group has secured government I.D.s and health benefits for thousands, negotiated wage increases, provided legal aid and health clinics, and opened 12 schools for workers’ children.

And in rural Latin America, Cooperation Circles are supporting traditional craft production and sustainable agriculture to help the poor gain economic stability and revive their communities.

continued inside



Dear Friends,

Greetings of love and peace.

In the United States, across religious and cultural traditions, the end of the calendar year marks the season of giving. It is a time when we look around us and take stock of the things we value the most—our families, our friends, our communities, and whatever are the causes that move us to action—and give to them as an expression of our gratitude and our compassion.

At URI, what moves us to action is peace. When we create dialogue and cooperation among people of different faith traditions, we build peace. When we work for justice, be it social justice for tribal communities in India; economic justice for the poorest and most marginalized in the United States; or environmental justice in a deforested community in Africa, we build peace. When we work to heal the wounds of conflict—wounds on our bodies, our minds, our communities and our nations—we build peace.

It is this common goal that unites URI's more than half a million members around the world, that brings new Cooperation Circles into the URI community each year and inspires them to take action. And it is this goal that binds our incredible community of supporters to us and to our work.

So as you take stock of the things you value the most this year, please consider making a donation to URI, and support our work to make peace a reality everywhere.

In gratitude,

Charles P. Gibbs
Executive Director

To donate, visit www.uri.org/get_involved/give or contact Regan Murphy, rmurphy@uri.org, 415-561-2300 x17

ENVISIONING PEACE

In February 2011, two URI Cooperation Circles on opposite sides of the world—NaYA CC in Irbid, Jordan and Think Peace Media and Communications CC in Houston, Texas—joined forces to launch an international photo competition for peace. 1000Kalema, or “A thousand words,” solicited photos from peacemakers around the world that told the story of their work and their dreams. The result of the contest was not just the three winning photographs, shown below, but a body of peacebuilding images that will be displayed in galleries around the world over the coming year to spark dialogue about how we can make our visions of peace a reality. The official opening exhibit in the United States will be held from February 3-March 11 at the University Museum at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. Visit 1000Kalema.org for more dates and details.



Friendship, by Sudipto Das, 1st place



Cultural Treasures, by Houssein Kazma, 2nd place



Belfast's Wall, by Alison Leigh Lilly, 3rd place

THE YEAR OF THE PEOPLE

cover story continued

Each of these small, local actions has a significant impact on the lives of the people they touch, giving people resources and resilience to rise above their circumstances and take the reins of their own lives. Giving them a voice.

While less visible than the mass protests that have roiled the world this year, work like URI's is a movement in its own right. The more people of different faiths can align around issues of economic justice and take action on the ground, the stronger our movement will grow. And the more our members can work together regionally and globally, the louder our voices will be at the policy level.

All around the world people are seeking a more equitable society, putting the spotlight on important issues—unemployment, student debt, declining incomes, deepening inequality, etc.—and the urgent need for systemic change. The work of organizations like URI in mobilizing people to take concrete action in their communities and creating change on the ground will be critical to sustaining whatever high-level gains are achieved.

new cooperation circle spotlight

BUMBLEBEE GLOBAL RENEWAL PROJECTS

In March, 2010, the coastal city of Pichilemu, Chile was devastated by a 6.2 magnitude earthquake and tsunami. Months later, the nearby Pueblo de Vidas community received a precious gift: a shipping container painted with cheerful images of village life and filled with essential supplies. The shipping container, whose empty shell was later used as a building by the local school and community, came from elementary school children in the suburban Melbourne community of Footscray.

This project was part of a program led by Bumblebee Global Renewal Projects Cooperation Circle, which pairs Australian communities with communities in other parts of the world, helping them raise funds and mobilize volunteers to send shipping containers to those in need.

The containers, which are routinely repurposed by the receiving community, are designed not just to provide humanitarian aid but give people resources and inspiration to build a sound economic basis of their own.

The first containers were sent to Monrovia, Liberia in 2006 following its civil war, and used by locals as an education unit, commercial kitchen and tourist center to support the



A shipping container sent to Liberia in 2006.

local wildlife. A similar effort is underway to support endangered tigers in India's Ranthambore National Park.

Bumblebee also recently helped a Somali immigrant community in Australia send a container to a school in their homeland. Other such projects are planned for Zimbabwe, Nepal, Kenya, South Africa and the Philippines, as well as two more shipments to Somalia to support medical needs of women.

For more on these and other stories from the URI network, visit www.uri.org or contact Julian Foley, URI News Desk at newsdesk@uri.org



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FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP THROUGH SERVICE

Standing in the hot sun scraping paint off a wooden railing on a recent October day, Mohd Hanaffi, a Muslim, and Jerrison Chai, a Buddhist, broke out into song. Soon their whole group—25 young people from the different faiths and countries of URI's Southeast Asia and the Pacific region—was singing, scraping and sanding together, while a crowd of curious children looked on. When they were done, fresh red paint glinted in the sunlight. It was a welcome sight at this Hindu school for orphans and other needy children, where aesthetics often take the back seat to more pressing needs.

Mohd, Jerrison and the other youth were repairing the railing as part of a URI Young Leaders Program training in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from October 3-6.

Many religions and faith traditions place a high value on service to others. Tikkun Olam in Judaism upholds the sacred responsibility to repair the world. In the Quran, followers of Islam are said to have been “raised to serve others.” And Christian scripture refers to “servant leadership.”

“Engaging in service with people of different faiths teaches youth to put their shared values into action,” said Matthew Youde, a coordinator for the Young Leaders Program, which has led six international trainings this year. “It also helps them bridge differences and build strong and lasting relationships.”

This strategy is the centerpiece of a new URI high school chapter program, being piloted this year in the San Francisco Bay Area, which will engage students in

four diverse local schools in interfaith and multi-cultural community service and provide them mentoring through URI's Bay Area Interfaith Young Adult Network.

Service is also used by URI Cooperation Circles (CCs) to build interfaith community all around the world, especially in places where divisions run deep. The Iraq Youth for Dialogue and Coexistence CC, for example, ran a youth camp in Baghdad recently in which 100 young people of different faiths came together for seminars, workshops and service in the community.

In planting trees and painting a local school, the CC wrote, the youth “sent a message to the world that they want to rebuild Iraq.”

URI'S PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

URI's President's Council is a group of 23 business and philanthropic leaders, mostly from the San Francisco Bay Area, who volunteer their time and expertise to help ensure URI's financial and organizational health. We are thrilled to welcome to the council three new faces this year:



"There is no better organization than URI that attempts to diffuse the tensions between religious traditions, while also promoting cooperation and progress with all the people of the world."

George Marcus, Chairman and founder of Marcus & Millichap Company; Chairman of Essex Property Trust; and Regent of the University of California.



"URI has captured my heart with its sincere and enduring passion for building much needed bridges between religions to dispel intolerance. It makes a real difference in real people's lives and I am honored to be one of its latest foot soldiers."

Sabahat Rafiq, consultant in Islamic finance and Sharia compliant banking; and Board Member of Islamic Networks Group.



"URI is such a vital organization in today's volatile world. I was inspired to be part of URI first by the vision, but what really grabbed me was the plan and approach to make this vision a reality. URI is the best example I have ever seen of bringing the old adage, 'think globally, act locally,' to life."

Michael Smerklo, Chairman of the Board and CEO of ServiceSource; Board Member of the Greater Bay Area Make-A-Wish Foundation.

URI's growing network

Nineteen new Cooperation Circles have joined URI since May 1, 2011, bringing our total to 530 grassroots interfaith groups in 78 countries.

AUSTRALIA	Bumblebee Global Renewal Projects
INDIA	Dalpur Sree Sree Gyanananda Saraswati Ashram
JORDAN	Voices from Iraq
KENYA	Somali Forum for Progress
NETHERLANDS	Stichting Interreligieus Beraad Segbroek
NIGERIA	New Era Educational and Charitable Support Foundation
PALESTINIAN TERRITORY	We are Palestine
PERU	ETSA
PHILIPPINES	Cebu City Interfaith Muslim-Christian Youth for Peace and Development Pathfinders' Commune United Muslim & Christian Peacemakers SEA-K Association Value Laden Professional Circle
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	BRIDGES The Coalition of Welcoming Congregations of the Bay Area The Interfaith Experience The Interfaith Gateway The Interfaith Observer Women Transcending Boundaries

CIRCLES OF LIGHT 2012



SAVE THE DATE
March 17

Musaique in San Francisco

For sponsorship opportunities, visit www.uri.org

GLOBAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT

The Rt. Rev. William E. Swing

GLOBAL COUNCIL CHAIR

Yoland Trevino

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs

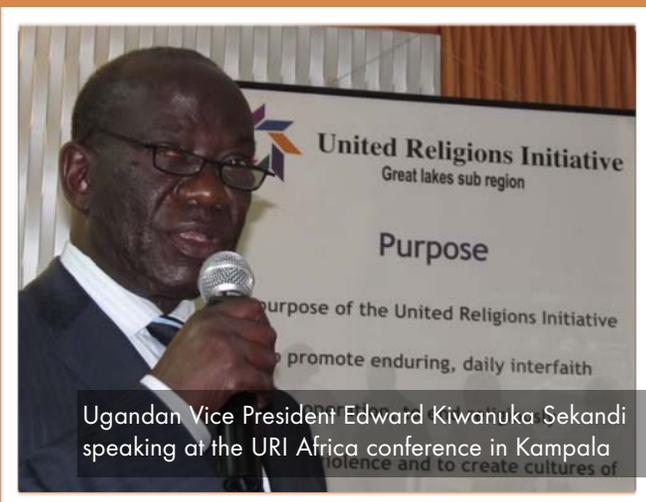
ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Debra Ballinger Bernstein

updates from the field

A FORCE FOR PEACE IN AFRICA

The ruthless al-Shabaab militant group is making inroads into the Great Lakes Region of Africa, recruiting vulnerable youth to carry out a retaliation campaign for their governments' peacekeeping and military operations in Somalia. In August, URI-Africa's Great Lakes office hosted a two-day meeting of religious, interfaith, civil society, government and military leaders from throughout the region to discuss the positive role religion can play in countering extremism and building peace and security. This important meeting laid the groundwork for a multi-national campaign to prevent extremist recruitment of youth in the region, which URI hopes to launch next year.



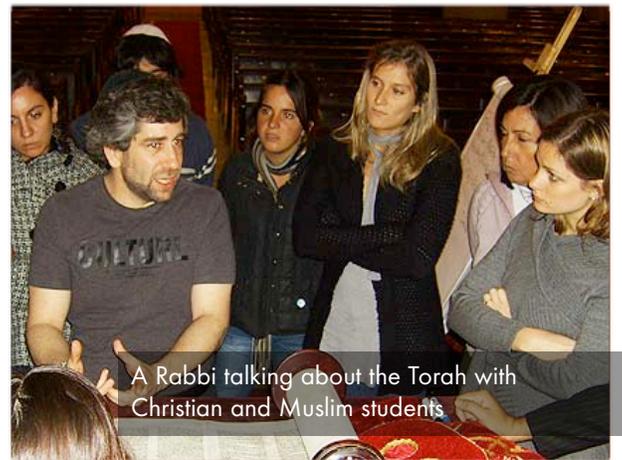
Ugandan Vice President Edward Kiwanuka Sekandi speaking at the URI Africa conference in Kampala

BRIDGING THE MIDDLE EAST - WEST DIVIDE

The Euphrates Institute, a URI Cooperation Circle, held a groundbreaking summit on October 28-29, "Our World Beyond 9-11," to examine relations between the Middle East and the West and share successful models of peace and cooperation. URI Executive Charles Gibbs was one of seventeen distinguished speakers from the U.S., the Middle East and Canada who presented their work to an audience of 150 participants. Other Euphrates programs designed to improve Middle East-West relations in the post-9-11 era include Warriors for Peace®, a leadership development initiative; travel study for students; and a campus fellowship program.

WELCOMING IMMIGRANTS

During times of economic hardship and global upheaval, immigration can become not just politically but also emotionally charged. In June, URI's Middle East and North Africa region joined forces with URI-Europe for a conference to discuss ways interfaith groups can help immigrants integrate into their host communities, and help host communities welcome the strangers in their midst. The result of this conference, held in Morocco in partnership with the Anna Lindh Foundation, is a new handbook for NGOs on immigrant integration that is being produced by the URI-MENA office in Amman, Jordan.



A Rabbi talking about the Torah with Christian and Muslim students

SCHOOL OF LOVE

In 2009, the Escuela de Amor Cooperation Circle (CC) received a grant through URI from the U.S. Embassy in Argentina for a program to engage Muslim, Christian and Jewish university students in dialogue, exchange and community service. The program was so successful in shifting attitudes toward religious diversity in the community, the CC and its partners were invited to launch a second phase aimed principally at law enforcement personnel. Youth leaders from the program will help religious leaders lead a series of seminars on religious practices and cultural sensitivity, which will ultimately be integrated into the training curriculum for new police recruits. The program will be connected with URI's Young Leaders Program, which will provide a training for workshop leaders. Cooperation Circles in Venezuela and Peru are also exploring this model in partnership with their local embassies.