

# *The Community Voice*



UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE  
GREAT LAKES

July-Sept 2019

What a Spirited  
Quarter it was!!!

Youth day  
celebrations across  
the network

Young people in  
Refugee Camps  
Learning to Live  
Together in Uganda

Combating  
malnutrition  
among expectant  
mothers in  
Burundi

URI  
represented  
at the  
Religions for  
Peace  
Assembly

Conservation  
Children's  
Summer Camp  
in Rwanda

URI-GLs  
Visibility in  
the  
International  
Spaces

Documenting  
URI's grassroots  
action

A story of ARLPI's  
The Mato Oput  
(Reconciliation)  
Ceremony

Kenya CC Visits



Our membership in Action

Top left-Children in a conservation summer camp (IDEA Rwanda CC), Kenya CC visits to Undugu Family of Hope (Right top), Visionary Women CC (left bottom) & Change Mind change Future partners in a tree planting campaign (bottom right)

# Our membership in Action



Top left REC CC in Uganda reach out to young people in refugee camps, Interfaith Youth for Change CC in Burundi uses sports to connect young people (top right), SANGWA CC in Rwanda on equal opportunities for young people (Bottom left), Women of Peace & Advocacy in Burundi on a health campaign for Expectant mothers (bottom right)



Top: Membership Certification for Undugu Family of Hope (Left) and Visionary Women (Right). Bottom: Kenya CC visits to Change Mind Change Future CC (left) and Kenya Interfaith Network on Environment Action (KINAE) –Right.

# Highlights of the Quarter



Abassoddor Mussie Hailu (middle) explaining the Golden Rule to friends in Gulu-Northern Uganda during the documentation of the LRA insurgency

We had quite an eventful quarter with our membership engaging in a number of activities in their own prime.

It was a time to celebrate youth efforts around the globe during the International Youth Day (August 12<sup>th</sup>) as well as the International Day of Peace (September 21<sup>st</sup>) and through URI's rotational approach through some modest support, CCs like IDEA Rwanda, Interfaith Youth for Change in Burundi and Twinkle Initiative were supported to join the world in celebration of these two special days. Other members like Fire Women Association in DRC, SANGWA CC in Rwanda, Restoring and Empowering Communities (REC CC), Women of Peace and Advocacy in Burundi also had some actions targeting women and young people as well. We cannot forget the CC Visits to a few of our members in Kenya namely: Change Mind Change Future, Kenya Interfaith Network on Environment Action (KINAE), Undugu Family of Hope and Visionary Women.

Finally, URI has also during this quarter undertaken documentation of the grassroots efforts of some of its members namely ARLPI, Faiths Together Uganda, Golden Women Vision in Uganda, AFFCAD and others from the other regions of URI. We also bring you in series a story of reconciliation from Northern Uganda. Its written in part and shall be completed in our next edition (October-December). Plus we shall also be sharing some of the stories and experiences of some of the survivors of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) War in Northern Uganda. Hope you find this edition enjoyable and informative as well!

# URI at the 10<sup>th</sup> World Assembly for Religions of Peace

URI's Executive Director, Victor Kazanjian, and our CC member, the Founder Restoring and Empowering Communities (REC), Ms. Nageeba Hassan, the Women of Faith from the world, and several other faith based bodies, participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> World Assembly for Religions of Peace in the city of Lindau Germany, under the theme, "Caring for our Common Future". Ms. Nageeba Hassan recollects her experiences from this convention on the "understanding that, we all belong to different families or circles that intersect like a web. Her reflection on what happens to a web is that any point affects the rest of the web". The web represents relationships, with each one of them very special and for a purpose. Thus we need to care for each other wherever we are for our own peace and for peace for the world". **Reflections of Nageeba Hassan Founder of REC CC-Uganda**



URI Executive Director (Extreme right) and others at the World Religions of Peace Assembly in Germany



# URI-GL Gaining Visibility in the International Spaces

During this same quarter, our works as the Great Lakes network gained international recognition where we have been invited in different international platforms to showcase and make the world appreciate our interfaith approach to peacebuilding. We participated at the UN Africa Regional High-level Conference on Counter-Terrorism and the Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism in Nairobi during which our Regional Coordinator, Despina Namwembe gave a presentation on URI's work and approach to Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returning Foreign Fighters. Others on the same theme have been with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), IGAD, and others. We have also gained recognition through our members leading a faith based campaign in building civic consciousness in ensuring effective service delivery in Uganda and so many other important milestones.



The Regional Coordinators, URI-GL and URI Horn of Africa at the UN conference on Prevention of Violent Extremism in Nairobi (right) and URI-Great Lakes Staff at CSO Exhibition in Kampala (left)

# Visits to our Membership in Kenya



Kenya being the latest addition to the URI-Great Lakes network necessitated the need for visits to the prime operational areas of our members to appreciate their efforts and the environment in which they operate. For the start we visited 5 CC groups, namely: Change Mind Change Future, Kenya Interfaith Network on Environment Action (KINAE), Mother Earth Network (as coordinated by KINAE) Undugu Family of Hope and Visionary Women. Each of the CCs in their unique ways, are faced with an overwhelming outcry for development programmes that address charitable needs especially for the CCs working in the Kibera and Korogocho slums. As we do continue with the grassroots appreciation in Kenya, the members so far anticipate a revival of CC interactions, need for contact person and more financial connections to increase impact and relevance in their locus. Our special thanks go to Eric Ogallo, Edwin Nzomo, Aisha Mohammad, Jeremiah Omondi, and Calvin Jodisi for the warm reception and continued resilience. We also salute Jeffrey Kibet of One Child One Tree network for the tree campaign experience.



Top in pictures: Visit to Undugu Family of Hope, the Regional Coordinator in a chat with Edwin Nzomo founder. Bottom: is a tree planting campaign in Korogocho slum by “the One Child One Tree Network”- friends of Change Mind Change Future

# Taking Stock of Actions in the Network... we documented



URI Executive Director, Rev. Victor Kanzaian, the URI Global Envoy, Ambassador Mussie Hailu, the URI Director of Global Communications & Strategic Planning, Isabelle Ortega and the URI-GL Regional Coordinator, Despina Namwembe during the profiling of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) role in the peace process of LRA insurgency

During the month of September we had a Documentary program with the Visionaries Crew from the US and they captured some of our membership in action, some of which will air in the United States on Public Televisions and globally online in June 2020. From Uganda, we captured works of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), Golden Women Vision in Uganda, Action for Fundamental Change and Development (AFFCAD) and Faiths Together Uganda CCs. The same crew also filmed the URI global gathering in June. The filming is purposed to showcase URI leaders into communities to learn more about URI's work on the ground. The three sites visited included Uganda, India - Kerala and Varanasi (at the Assembly) and San Francisco. This initiative is also hoped to open doors for creating more visibility of the enormous works of our members globally, as we continue to find more creative ways of reaching out to each and every corner that URI has presence globally. Our deep appreciation goes to all the leadership and members of all the CCs which participated in this noble cause.



# IDEA Rwanda's Conservation Summer Camps for Children

Initiative for Development and Environment Awareness.( IDEA-Rwanda) CC took environmental matters to children by organizing a week long conservation summer camp. This was in partnership with Dian Fossey Gorillas Fund International and Conservation Heritage Turambe. As young minds, they were awakened to their role as little ones to protect the planet from destruction in terms of being mindful of their activities with nature like drawing water, collecting firewood, preserving trees, proper garbage disposal and other nature within their environment among others.



Children during the conservation summer camp in Rwanda



# Using Sports for Dialogue for Youth in Burundi



The Interfaith Youth For Change CC based in Burundi celebrated the international youth day on 12th September 2019 with a joyful football match that opposed the Interfaith Youth for change FC football team against the HAWASHINDWI football team. The match was used as a strategy to get young people to appreciate URI's purpose for interfaith harmony, and creating cultures of peace for everyone. Being a country that is coming out of a history of ethnic civil conflict, the football teams represented the diversity within themselves based on ethnicity and religion. It was amazing to see how football can make people forget their differences and embrace each other in support of their teams. **Story shared by Abel Mpawenimana-Founder Interfaith Youth for Change**

The peace match during the Youth Day Celebrations in Kigali

# REC CC Connects with Young People in Refugee Camps



Like in any society, conflict of any form is inevitable, our members, Restoring and Empowering Communities (REC) chose to guide young people in Rwamwenge Refugee settlement in Uganda on “Learning to Live Together”. This is part of the Conflict Transformation program the group runs in partnership with Interreligious Council of Uganda (IRCU). Though it might sound simple to do, for communities that are very diverse in nature yet having to scramble for a few resources and opportunities within their reach, can be a big turning point for individual transformation. The stories from this interaction were impeccable.

**Story contributed by Nageeba Hassan Tegulwa, Founder REC CC**



REC's Youth Day celebrations in the Refugee camps

# Combating Malnutrition among Expectant Mothers

It was also a charitable move by our members, Women for Peace and Advocacy in Burundi CC to reach out to expectant mothers with food donations. The campaign was also purposed to awaken the women on the fight against Hepatitis B and C through sensitizations and screening. Such efforts have helped in appreciating the magnitude of issues affecting women's health and the associated development needs they may have. This is all thanks to the Rotary Club of Burundi **Update from Denise Bantegeyeko**



Women receiving food rations from Women of Peace and Advocacy in Burundi



# SANGWA CC's Girls' Empowerment Celebrations

For SANGWA CC, the youth in Gatsibo district celebrated their day by engaging the youth especially girls in equal representation in leadership spaces nationally by empowering them to break the chains associated with the cultural norms and practices that normally hinder the Girl Child navigation through the socio-economic and political landscape.



Youth at SANGWA CC receiving an empowerment session during the youth Day celebrations in Kigali

# ARLPI's Mato Oput (Reconciliation) Ceremony



ALPI religious leaders during the reconciliation process

On Saturday, June 15, 2019, the URI's Cooperation Circle (CC), the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), in Northern Uganda, had performed the inter-religious dialogue, with the people of Lapyem and Cobo clans, in Payira kingdom, at Laguti sub-county, Pader District, Acholi sub-region, Uganda. About 300 years ago, there was a man called Onyang of the clan of Lapyem, who got married to the most beautiful lady called Lapanga of Cobo clan, in, Payira kingdom, Acholi sub-region. The newly married couple soon gave birth to a daughter called Atono, who was also beautiful, like, her mother!

No wonder, one day, a dear friend of her father paid a courtesy visit, to her parents. However, as soon as, the friend of her father saw her, he was profoundly impressed, by her beauty! The man, immediately, made a covenant with her dear parents, for her to become the future wife of his first-born son! This covenant was duly sealed, by allowing the man, to put a golden bangle around her left wrist! All this was done, according to Lwo culture, concerning arranged marriages, by parents, for their innocent children, who knew absolutely nothing about such arrangements!

However, when, Atono, had become a young mature girl, she completely disagreed with her dear mother about this arranged marriage between her and the first-born son of her father's friend. Instead, Atono, soon fell in love with another young handsome man of her own choice, from a different clan within Payira kingdom. To make the matter, even worse, Atono had the gut, even, to remove the golden bangle, from her left wrist, and threw it away, in total defiance! [Go to Next Page](#)

# ARLPI's Reconciliation Story ...Cont'd



The reconciliation process

In order, to assert, her total freedom of choice, Atono, had to elope with the young handsome man of her own choice. The young man soon made her pregnant. However, her mother had become very furious with her, for letting the family down, by breaching the covenant made, by her dear parents. When Atono, returned back home, late in the evening, her mother who was completely mad and full of anger, against her, suddenly, hit her, so hard, at the back of her head at the same time ordering her to put back the golden bangle, she was wearing around her right wrist!

The mother, then, madly, kicked her, with all her might, on her lower abdomen cutting off the umbilical cord between her and the baby inside her womb! The mother, thereafter, invited her three sons to finish up the job of beating her! However, when the young boys hit her once, there was no response from her, for she was already dead together with the baby in her womb!

When the sad news of her tragic death reached her uncles, the uncles came and wanted, to revenge her tragic death! Thus, there was a chaotic situation in the village, where Atono was killed, by her own mother! Consequently, Atono, was hurriedly buried, together with the dead baby, inside her womb, in the same grave! This was totally against the Lwo culture!

As a result, Atono and her dead baby, in her womb, had become vengeful spirits (*iacen*) against all those, who, had maliciously killed and buried them, together, in the same grave! According to numerous testimonies, we have heard from members of the two clans, Atono and her baby, as, vengeful spirits, have already killed more than 1000 innocent people from her mother's side! Atono, has also killed more than 200 to 300 people, from her father's side! **Story contributed by Gladys Aciro (To be continued in the next Edition)**

# A Story of a Survivor of the LRA War



I was abducted by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) rebels at the age of 11 years way back in 1993. While there with fellow abductees, i had to be given a man, and my fate landed me to an old man for a husband. In 2003, I was involved in a deadly bomb blast which deeply sliced my breasts sending me to hospital with several other injuries on my chest and other major organs. I lost an arm which got amputated but survived death miraculously with the rescue of the Uganda Defense People's Forces (UPDF) and while in their care, I had a vision comforting me that “you will not die”. It took me 3 months to fully recover although the pain in my chest and breast is still persistent from the bomb blast. I am now married to another man but his family sees me as an outcast and helpless because I have one arm. My biggest challenge is taking care of my four kids who are all girls. I though appreciate Golden Women Vision in Uganda for giving me psychosocial support to help me

overcome the trauma from the war. ■ *Story as narrated by a beneficiary of Golden Women Vision in Uganda’s psychosocial support program.*

The URI Global Envoy, Ambassador Mussie Hailu , with the women of Golden Vision in Uganda CC during the documentation conversation of their experiences of the peace process of LRA insurgency

# Another tale of a Survivor of the LRA War



**B**ack in 1989, while in the market with some of my 6 children some of whom are dead now, I saw a dark cloud of smoke coming right from my home. It then dawned on me that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) had attacked us. I then remembered that my 14 year old son was trapped in the house. My little boy died from the fire, we could not rescue him as the rebels had ransacked the entire place. I lost my mind from the trauma of watching helplessly as my son was being consumed by fire. After 2 days, the government agents took me in to secure the remains of my boy, and I found part of his body had been feasted on by dogs. We had nothing to do but to pick up his remains for a descent burial. This was too much for me to bear and as all of this was going on, I felt like committing suicide to put an end to this agony. After a while, I had to seek refuge elsewhere with my remaining family of now 5 children because it was so traumatizing to go back to the same house. My husband had also died few days after the scuffle. It has taken me all these years to return to my home due to that heinous experience. Thus I have just returned home this year-2019 only to find my home already sold by the same men who killed my child I now fear going back and now that I am of old age and homeless, I only rely on the mercy of good Samaritans to shelter us and give us handouts. My only source of refuge is Golden Women Vision in Uganda. I thank them for picking me up and connecting me with a new family of fellow women who went through a similar experience like me. *Story as narrated by a beneficiary of Golden Women Vision in Uganda's psychosocial support program.*

URI Executive Director, Rev. Victor Kanzanjian, the URI Global Envoy, Ambassador Mussie Hailu, the URI Director of Global Communications & Strategic Planning, Isabelle Ortega and the URI-GL Regional Coordinator, Despina Namwembe during the profiling of the peace process of LRA insurgency in Northern Uganda

# IDP Celebrations in Kenya



URI Africa & East African Ramgarhia Board in partnership with other organizations celebrated International Day of Peace in Kenya. As you know the International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by the United Nations General Assembly. Each year, the International Day of Peace is observed around the world on 21 September. The theme for this year is 'Climate Action for Peace'. This year's theme focuses on the importance of combatting climate change as a way to protect and promote peace throughout the world. Climate change poses a substantial threat to international peace and security.

Recognizing the importance of the theme of this year United Religions Initiative-Africa & East African Ramgarhia Board organized the celebration of the 2019 International Day of Peace in partnership with Kenya Interfaith Network on Action for Environment (URI CC), Mother Earth Network (URI cc), All African Conference of Churches, Baha'i International Community Addis Ababa Office, Unity Earth (URI CC), Global Peace Foundation and African Media Initiative.

The Chief Guest was H.E. Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, Advisor of the President of Kenya on Cohesion, Peace and Conflict Resolution.

The Keynote Speaker was Dr. Iyad Abumoghli, Principal Coordinator, Faith for Earth Initiative, UN Environment. *This grand peace event took place at Dasmesh Hall at Ramgarhia Gurudwara Pangani on Muranga Road on Saturday September 21<sup>st</sup> 2019.*

The event also held in commemoration of the 550<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev ji.

**Story continued on the next page.**

The URI Global Envoy, Ambassador Mussie Hailu, and former URI Africa Trustee, Rattan Channa with the other delegation during the IDP celebrations

# IDP Celebrations in Kenya



On the day of the celebration of the international day of peace Ambassador Mussie Hailu, Regional Director of URI-Africa & Representative of URI to United Nations & African Union on the occasion of the celebration of the International day of Peace announced that this year URI-Africa Peace Award will be presented to The Golden Women Vision from North Uganda in recognition and acknowledgement of the work of the organization in empowering women who the war victims of the North Uganda and for promoting a culture of peace, hope and dignity for the women who survived the tragedy of war.

Golden Women Vision works to improve the social-economic status of the people left vulnerable from the insurgency. Even after the conflict ended, the terror continued for many victims. Women were left battered and lost, some without limbs or living with bullet wounds. Widows were left without husbands and single mothers had their children taken by the LRA. These women were at a disadvantage for even basic survival.

**Story contributed by The URI Global Envoy, Ambassador Mussie Hailu .**

The URI Global Envoy, Ambassador Mussie Hailu , and former URI Africa Trustee, Rattan Channa with the other delegation during the IDP celebrations

# Peace Celebrations in Kenya



**W**e had a quite captivating International Day of Peace celebrations season during for this quarter with the very unique grassroots actions happening on the ground. Twinkle Initiative in Kenya embarked on a climate awareness campaign among school children using peace as a strategy to preserving nature.

In the slopes of Mount Kenya, lies a school where this year's international day of peace was held. The school was a choice informed by this year's theme and the belief that the children are no longer the future but the present and thus they ought to get informed on the effects of climate change.

Members of Twinkle initiative, a cc in Kenya and their friends went to the school and a conversation with students of the school who were in class six, seven and eight.

The discussion ranged from the importance of education, focus, discipline but most importantly peace and their duty to take care of the environment and climate related aspects. We reminded them that they owe nature the duty of care. The kids were excited on the challenge of being advocates of the environment as they felt included in the issue that ultimately affects them.

To commemorate the day, we planted 7 trees around the school and the head teacher promised to make sure they grow to big trees.

We also reminded ourselves a quote by a phenomenal woman laureate Professor Wangari Maathai who said, **'NATURE IS SO UNFORGIVING, IF YOU DESTROY NATURE, IF YOU DON'T OBEY THE RULES OF NATURE, NATURE WILL DESTROY YOU.'**

# International Day of Peace Celebrations in Kenya



**In** Kenya still, the Undugu Family of Hope embarked on a cleaning exercise within the slums of Kibera and Twinkle Initiative in Kenya embarked on a climate awareness campaign among school children using peace as a strategy to preserving nature.

*These and so many other initiatives targeting young people are needed in this era to help us have a safer world to live in.*

# International Day of Peace Celebrations in South Sudan



***In South Sudan,*** in the Lakes state region, two groups of youth from West Yirol and East Yirol went into a wrestling match among youth and community members. This was aimed at putting an end to inter-communal conflicts in the region. Peace messages were given by UNDP representatives from the UNDP, the Transnational Legislative Assembly and National Parliamentary Transitional Assembly.

# In loving Memory of David Mukisa



Death has robbed us of a humble community loving advocate and practitioner and a priest of the Orthodox fraternity, David Mukisa a founder of Friends of Community Health (FCOH CC) based in Eastern Uganda. He died from a fatal road accident along Kakira on Jinja road highway on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2019. We shall forever hold his memory close to our hearts. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

The late Mukisa extreme right next to his wife (top left picture), and next to fellow CC contacts (top right picture) extreme left (picture below) during his time in community service.