

United Nations and United Religions Initiative: A PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE



URI at the United Nations (clockwise, starting from the top): URI Global Council Chair, Kiran Bali; Mussie Hailu, Monica Willard and Victor Kazanjian at the Alliance of Civilizations; the 2015 joint URI-UN anniversary celebration in San Francisco; the URI Representatives to the United Nations; URI youth representatives at the UN; the 2015 joint URI-UN anniversary celebration at Grace Cathedral.

From the very beginning, the United Religions Initiative has taken inspiration from the United Nations. In fact, it was at the UN's 50th anniversary celebration, held in San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, that the impetus for creating a "United Religions" came to URI president and founder Bishop Swing. "We were intoxicated by a vision," he recalls. "If there was a United Nations, what about creating a United Religions?"

Over the decades, the connection between URI and the UN has flourished. All over the world, URI Cooperation Circles celebrate the UN International Day of Peace and World Interfaith Harmony Week. In fact, several URI groups have won the World Interfaith Harmony Week contest, an international honor sponsored by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. URI delegates regularly take part in UN events, including a yearly youth delegation. In 2015, URI was invited to join the UN's 70th anniversary.

Today, URI's connection with the UN is stronger than ever. URI Executive Director Victor Kazanjian and URI Representatives to the UN Mussie Hailu and Monica Willard are actively building connections with the UN and related agencies who will have the most direct impact for URI Cooperation Circles.

"We hope to build more partnerships to be in closer contact with UN agencies," Victor Kazanjian says. "It allows the UN to see us as a partner in distributing programs, and allows us to be a partner in strategic policy work that affects the communities in which we work around the world."

The partnership is especially fruitful because it embraces the specific strengths of each organization. Reaching people on a grassroots level has historically been a challenge for the UN, whereas URI excels at community education. "We can get things into the hands of people at a grassroots level, and translate high-level policy statements into a context they find relevant and useful," says Victor Kazanjian. At the same time, the reach and impact of the UN is a considerable advantage for smaller URI groups whose voices need amplification.

Monica Willard, URI Representative to the United Nations in New York, adds: "the URI presence at the United Nations and our grassroots programs around the world add spirit, focus, prayer, and multi-faith cooperation to help build strong communities and a more caring world."



UN and URI: A JOINT JOURNEY



Bishop Swing hires a small staff in San Francisco, CA, USA; the URI team begins work with David Cooper, professor at Case Western University, and Dee Hock, developer of VISA and the Chaordic Alliance.

1993

The United Nations asks the Right Rev. William E. Swing to gather representatives of all nations and religions at Grace Cathedral in preparation for the UN's 50th Anniversary, sparking an idea for a "United Religions."



1996



URI signs its Charter in Pittsburgh and at the UN Headquarters in New York, New York, USA.

2000

URI becomes a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) affiliated with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI).

2002



URI expands its accreditation to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

2007

The URI-UN group goes on to host nine events highlighting the International Year of Reconciliation.

2009



The UN Alliance of Civilizations selects URI's Traveling Peace Academy as one of the 10 most innovative and successful grassroots initiatives aimed at promoting mutual understanding among people and cultures.

2010

Interfaith Mediation Centre, a URI Cooperation Circle in Kaduna, Nigeria, wins the \$25,000 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Grand Prize for their event "Imam and Pastor: From Vengeance to Forgiveness."

2013



URI sends youth representatives to take part in an annual event with Malala Yousafzai, beginning an annual practice of send youth URI ambassadors to the UN.

2014

URI celebrates its 15th anniversary together with the United Nations' 70th anniversary at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, CA, USA.

2015

Faiths Together Uganda, a URI Cooperation Circle in Africa, receives third prize for the World Interfaith Harmony Week contest.



2017

URI and United Nations Population Fund Sign a Memorandum of Understanding, affirming a partnership in uplifting human rights.

2018



URI enters a bright future with many new UN partnerships on the horizon.