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**URI WINS COVETED UNITED NATIONS RECOGNITION FOR INNOVATION
Executive Director to Address Top Leaders at Rio Meeting**

San Francisco, CA May 26, 2010 – San Francisco-based URI (United Religions Initiative) has been awarded a coveted spot at the Marketplace of Ideas held during the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on May 27-29. Its Traveling Peace Academy conflict resolution training program was among 10 projects selected as “the world’s most exciting and innovative...civil society projects advancing intercultural understanding.” URI’s Executive Director, Charles Gibbs, will address a crowd of over 2,000 high-level leaders from business, government, religion, international organizations and academia at the Alliance’s third annual gathering.

The Traveling Peace Academy was developed in a pilot program led by URI leaders and conflict resolution expert Dr. John Paul Lederach of Notre Dame University in response to the urgent need for peace-building skills in conflict zones where URI members work. It was launched in the Philippines and India in 2009, and is poised to expand into Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh next year, on a trajectory to reach conflict-prone communities throughout URI’s global network.

The training, based on principles of interfaith cooperation and partnership building, has proved transformational. In southern India, it resulted in the re-opening of churches and resumption of peaceful worship in Kerala after decades of closure due to a conflict between two branches of the Syrian Church that claimed many lives. In the Philippines, the program helped leaders ease rising tensions between Muslims and Christians in Metro Manila, and is also being applied in efforts to end the violence that has raged in the southern province of Mindanao.

Pioneered by URI, this inclusive, cross-religious approach to peace building was recently lauded by a U.S. State Department taskforce as one that can “greatly foster social cohesion and help transform sectarian tensions into habits of collaboration based on mutual respect.”

URI was selected from more than 180 candidates to participate in the Marketplace of Ideas at the UN Alliance of Civilizations' annual summit, a forum for showcasing civil society innovation. The Alliance was established in 2005 as a political initiative to build bridges across nations, cultures and communities; its summits bring together a cross-section of government and civil society leaders to “agree on joint actions to improve relations across cultures, combat prejudice and build lasting peace.”

For more information, or to schedule an interview with Charles Gibbs, please contact Regan Murphy or Barbara Hartford at 415-561-2300 or by e-mail at rmurphy@uri.org and bhartford@uri.org.

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About URI:

URI is global network of more than 470 grassroots organizations dedicated to peace and justice through interfaith and cross-cultural cooperation. Its nearly half a million members are overcoming distrust and hostility every day for the good of their communities—mediating religiously motivated conflict; building schools, orphanages and health clinics; campaigning for citizenship rights and more in 75 countries. They touch the lives of an estimated 2.5 million people each year. The network is led by Executive Director Charles Gibbs, President William Swing, and an elected 29-member Global Council of Trustees from 19 countries.

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