



URI InterfaithNews.Net - February 2006

Welcome to the e-zine InterfaithNews.Net sponsored by **United Religions Initiative** (URI) and **s.a.f net**.

*Reacting to religious fanaticism and the challenges of advancing and sustaining a more equitable civilization, a global interfaith movement has sprung from the grassroots of religion and spirituality. InterfaithNews.Net (INN) seeks to chronicle this movement by focusing primarily on positive interfaith and religious news, events, and resources.*

Dear Readers,

If I were to see a cartoon, or God-forbid an actual photograph, of Baha'u'llah in the media, I would be stunned and extraordinarily upset at a media outlet so disrespectful of the Baha'i injunction against direct portrayals of its Founder. Thus I can well understand Muslim fury over the now Europe-wide publishing of a cartoon depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist. What I cannot understand is the sheer rage that elicits kidnappings, flag burning, and threats of violence. Let there be no doubt that this was a grievous disre of a billion or so Muslims—and yet it is, was, and shall undoubtedly remain perfectly legal in any open society.

Add a fresh element to the "clash of civilizations:" the cherished Western belief in freedom of speech and press versus the cherished Islamic belief in the sanctity of the Prophet. To the westerners: freedom can be a dangerous thing indeed when it flies in the face of basic and universal human dignity. You do it no honor when you blithely insult one sixth of humanity. To my Muslim friends and colleagues: do threats of violence against Danes and Westerners do anything to carry forward justice and equilibrium in your home countries or in the world?

Closer to home, a Christian seminary president in Minneapolis, USA recently said "it would probably be an overreaction to firebomb these men's houses," referring to film directors who cast an openly gay man in the role of a Christian (and heterosexual) missionary (I live in St. Paul, the "other half" of the Twin Cities of Minnesota). Again I ask—how does this implicit threat advance your religious agenda? By this I mean the one proclaimed by Christ, the one in which loving your neighbor is the most important law after the law of loving God? To all: can we not instead focus our energies on bringing greater justice, on bringing greater love and reconciliation, to our societies?

With these thoughts in mind, the January / February 2006 issue of InterfaithNews.Net carries four articles and editorials focusing on the prospects for peace in the Middle East and the role of interfaith dialogue in getting there, as well as an inspirational letter from Mussie Hailu; a "faithful" state of the union; and a report on interfaith watchdog efforts in Africa.

Peace be with you,  
 Stephen A. Fuqua  
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### **Carving the Path for Muslim-Jewish Dialogue**

The need for a continuing dialogue between Jews and Muslims is all too apparent in the world's news. Professors Judea Pearl, father of slain journalist Daniel Pearl, and Akbar Ahmed share some of the findings from their three-nation tour of "The Daniel Pearl Dialogue for Muslim-Jewish Understanding," which show a path ahead for productive and meaningful dialogue between members of these two great religions.

**Read the article**

### **Interfaith dialogue in Israel-Palestine**

Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer of the American University in Washington, DC writes about the important, though as yet largely potential, role for interfaith dialogue in the continuing Middle East peace process. One interfaith organization making real strides in bringing together the region's religions is the Interfaith Encounter Association, as recognized in their receipt of the Immortal Chaplains Foundation's Prize for Humanity (also covered this month).

**Read the article**

### **Reflecting on Hamas and the Prospects for Mid-East Peace**

URI Executive Director Charles Gibbs offers his reflections on the recent victory of Hamas in Palestinian Parliament elections—beginning with despair and ending in hope.

**Read the article**

### **Israeli, Palestinian & 'Katrina' Heroes To Receive "Prize for Humanity"**

The Interfaith Encounter Association, a thriving dialogue group bringing together members of Israel and Palestine's religious groups in cities across the region, will this weekend be a co-recipient of the Immortal Chaplains Foundation's Prize for Humanity.

**Read the article**

### **U.S., West African Interfaith Leaders Vow to Consolidate Region's Peace Efforts**

“Liberian Vice President Boakai Tells Monrovia Conference, Peace Depends On People Seeing Improvement in Their Lives”

**Read the article**

## **Interfaith Organization Releases ‘Faithful’ State Of The Union Address**

In January, the National Council of Churches of Christ, through their Faithful America project, released a provocative look at the “State of the Union” from an faith / interfaith perspective.

**Read the article**

## **A Letter to Friends on the Pathway to Peace**

At the turn of the new year, Mussie Hailu, Vice Chair of the United Religions Initiative’s (URI) Global Council, wrote a touching and inspiring letter to URI members worldwide. Though written specifically to the URI, its content is broad and I commend it to all participants in the global interfaith movement.

**Read the article**

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