



**UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE 2015 ANNUAL REVIEW** 



# -THE-WORLD IS IN A STATE OF CONFLICT RIVALING ANY TIME IN HISTORY

PREJUDICE, HATE, VIOLENCE, SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION DOMINATE THE HEADLINES EVERY DAY



URI is a **global community** of people connected by a desire to heal the world.

Contributions from individual donors support a worldwide network that energizes interfaith peacebuilding work across 95 countries.

# HUMAN CONNECTION IS THE ANSWER

URI IS A DIVERSE COMMUNITY THAT WORKS TOGETHER TO OVERCOME SHARED PROBLEMS & ACHIEVE REAL PLACE

#### **EUROPE**



53 COOPERATION CIRCLES
18 COUNTRIES

"With a gift to URI we know our contribution goes to support a vast network of individuals throughout the world working to build peace. Cooperation Circles are there, on the ground, working to address conflict and able to respond to crisis as it happens."

SABAHAT RAFIQ AND NAVEED SHERWANI, URI DONORS

### **RESPONDING WITH CARE**

Responding to the worldwide crisis, the URI community put out a global call to help refugee families. Inspired by seeing an Austrian CC's work, Marianne Horling started a similar program in Germany through the Interkultureller Kreis URI Bonn CC. Through art workshops, CC

volunteers from different religious backgrounds taught refugee children the German language and how to express their feelings about their journey. Marianne observes, "The children paint the great desire in all of us: to be united on this world in peace."

ONE THAN ONE

REFUGEES WERE REGISTERED IN GERMANY ALONE

SOURCE: BBC NEWS



"URI's network gives us
the means to address
misconceptions, and by
discussing them openly, we
can help people of different
backgrounds to understand
each other."

SOTHEARAT SEOUNG, REGIONAL COORDINATOR FOR URI SEAPAC -WEST ZONE

#### SOUTHEAST ASIA & THE PACIFIC



47 COOPERATION CIRCLES
8 COUNTRIES

## **BROADCASTING PEACE**

Religious and cultural stereotypes prevent people from truly being able to see one another, leading to divided communities where conflict persists. With URI's support, Sothearat Seoung started a public radio program called "Religions Unite to Build Culture of Peace and Justice." He invites audiences to engage people

of different faiths in dialogue, addressing persistent prejudices and finding ways to cooperate for the good of their communities in Cambodia. For many listeners, the program serves as an introduction to the concept of religious diversity and social harmony.



#### **ASIA**



267 COOPERATION CIRCLES
10 COUNTRIES

"Thanks to being part of URI, we came away with a renewed motivation to promote interfaith harmony in our daily lives."

ASHER NAZIR, CC COORDINATOR FOR URI PAKISTAN

## A SEASON OF SHARING

In Pakistan, constant extremist attacks and religiously-targeted terrorist bombings drive Christians and Muslims away from each other out of fear. **COPE Pakistan CC** provides an opportunity for the two communities to see each other's religions as a source of kinship rather than a threat. Through a

joint Christmas-Eid celebration, they experienced each other's holy days on a human level, which allowed them to better understand one another. Since then, Muslim families have organized donations for Christian families in need at Christmas.



"As part of URI, our CCs were able to work together and improve conditions for a disadvantaged group in our community."

FATHER JOHN NG'OMA, URI MALAWI NATIONAL COORDINATOR

#### **AFRICA**



190 COOPERATION CIRCLES
32 COUNTRIES

# RECLAIMING DIGNITY

In Malawi, prisoners endure horrific conditions in congested cells, with many dying daily from inhumane treatment and lack of basic medical care. In response, five CCs - Umodzi CC, Lunzu CC, Lower Shire CC, Matindi CC, and Blantyre CC organized a prison visit, together with a medical volunteer, to provide basic healthcare and distribute soap, sugar, and bread to the prisoners. This event was part of a larger initiative to construct a hospice within the prison where treatment and food can be distributed to sick prisoners. Reuben Lizi from Lower Shire CC said it was a sobering reminder that even as incarcerated people, "they need our love and care to give them hope."



PRISONS, 1 IN 20 PRISONERS DIE ANNUALLY DUE TO DISEASE, OVERCROWDING AND BAD NUTRITION.

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA

## LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN



43 COOPERATION CIRCLES
13 COUNTRIES

"As part of the URI community, we work together to overcome the deep divisions across race, religion, and culture which permeate our communities."

ENOÉ TEXIER, REGIONAL COORDINATOR FOR URI LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

# DIVERSITY IN ACTION

Annual URI Regional Assemblies around the world bring together interfaith groups, policymakers, grassroots peacebuilders and thematic experts. The latest URI Brazil Assembly was an affirmation of the communal commitment to change in the face of divisions of race, religion, and culture. The vision for this gathering was to promote dialogue and interaction between URI Cooperation Circles and to create joint action strategies. The attendees, like Elianildo Nascimento, a lawyer and government advisor, and Genivalda Cravo, URI Global Council Member and a holistic therapy guide, worked side by side, planting trees together "to symbolize the rooting and fruiting of our [URI] family ties."



### RELIGIONS REPRESENTED

ANANDA MARGA, BAHA'I, BRAHMA KUMARIS, BUDDHIST (TIBETAN, ZEN), CANDOMBLE, CHRISTIANITY (ANGLICAN, CATHOLIC, LUTHERAN, MESSIANIC, PRESBYTERIAN), DEUSISTS, ESPIRITA, ESPIRITU, HINDU, HARE KRISHNA, INDIGENOUS, ISLAM, JUDAISM, MAÇONARIA, SHINTO, SPIRITUALIST, SUFI, TAOIST, UMBANDA, UNIVERSAL CHURCH, XAMANISMO

#### **NORTH AMERICA**

"The connections and relationship building opportunities provided by URI – like URI's partnership with the United Nations – have given us the chance to bring people of all ages together in extremely profound and impactful ways."

RITA SEMEL, FORMER URI GLOBAL COUNCIL CHAIR AND DONOR



65 COOPERATION CIRCLES
2 COUNTRIES

## A PATHWAY TO THE UN

Young leaders and grassroots activists have strong voices and vital ideas for bringing justice and peace to our world. Too often they are denied access to government representatives and international platforms, limiting their potential to create change. URI North America sponsored young CC leaders from Kashi Foundation CC, Sun Devils

Are Better Together CC, and Silicon Valley Interreligious Council (SiVIC) CC to travel to the United Nations Headquarters in New York City for World Interfaith Harmony Week, which connected them with influential policymakers and gave them a voice to help extend their global reach.



## MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



75 COOPERATION CIRCLES
13 COUNTRIES

"The worldwide network of supporters of URI helped us to magnify the impact of this global synchronized prayer, commanding the attention of international news agencies to report on this positive news from the Holy Land and Middle East."

ELIYAHU MCLEAN, FOUNDER OF ABRAHAMIC REUNION CC

## A GLOBAL PRAYER

On a mountain overlooking the Israel-Syria border, the Abrahamic Reunion CC hosted a prayer circle where Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders offered prayers of peace to direct the world's attention to Syria's plight. When they gathered as an interfaith group of Israelis and

Palestinians – including sheikhs, rabbis, reverends, and other faith leaders – they bridged the separation between their communities and engaged in a public act of solidarity with each other on behalf of a neighboring war-torn country suffering extreme violence.



"As part of URI, our voices are amplified and united to educate the global population about the danger of nuclear weapons and influence international policymakers to remove the nuclear threat once and for all."

THE RIGHT REV. WILLIAM E. SWING, URI
PRESIDENT AND MEMBER OF VOICES FOR
A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS CC

# VOICES FOR PEACE

We live in the shadow of 15,000 nuclear devices poised to destroy life on Earth. Voices for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons CC is responding to the crisis by engaging influential people from across the political spectrum, as well as scientists and academics, to speak out for a world free of nuclear weapons. Recently, the Cooperation Circle created a video to sway the hearts and minds of policymakers and to call for the eradication of nuclear devices.

#### **MULTIREGION**



46 COOPERATION CIRCLES

# CC MEMBERS INCLUDED

- THE HONORABLE WILLIAM J. PERRY, FORMER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
- THE HONORABLE GEORGE P. SHULTZ, FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE
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- AMBASSADOR THOMAS GRAHAM, JR, FORMER SENIOR U.S. DIPLOMAT
- DR. JONATHAN GRANOFF,
   PRESIDENT OF THE GLOBAL SECURITY
   INSTITUTE
- MS. MONICA WILLARD, URI REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN



# THANK YOU

Connections have been a cornerstone for URI's network. For 15 years, URI has fostered meaningful connections by building strong and enduring relationships among people of different religions, spiritual practices and indigenous traditions. Through the network's support, regional offices and Cooperation Circles have also made key connections to local authorities, government agencies and other likeminded organizations. The stories you've read here are merely a handful of examples of the incredible achievements of our Cooperation Circles around the world.

The proven success of the URI network demonstrates that interfaith peacebuilding works. It is the foundation for transforming cultures of violence and war into cultures of peace, justice and healing. By working together and leveraging the resources provided by the network, URI's connected interfaith coalitions address critical social issues in their communities and their regions - thereby responding to present-day conflicts, as well as helping prevent future conflict.

We have witnessed the predictability and consequences of religious and cultural "disconnection." While these disconnections get the headlines, connections make peace possible.

The sustainability of this vibrant, critical and global network is made possible by the passion and generosity of the partners who give to URI. We thank you for your steadfast support, and for the important part you play in helping bring peace, justice and healing to the world.

Kiran Bali, MBE JP, **URI Global Council** Chairperson

The Reverend Victor H. Kazanjian, Jr., **URI Executive Director** 

The Right Reverend William E. Swing, **URI President and Founder** 

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# **2015 HIGHLIGHTS**

# 91 NEW COOPERATION CIRCLES

In 2015, URI was proud to welcome a record-breaking 91 new Cooperation Circles – a 32 percent increase over last year. This growth also marks the entry of eight new countries into our global network, including China.

## URI - UNITED NATIONS JOINT ANNIVERSARY

A joint ceremony at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco celebrated the UN's 70th anniversary together with URI's 15th anniversary, honoring an inspiration and partnership that has held strong since URI's inception.

# INTERFAITH SPECIAL ON CHRISTMAS EVE

WWW.URI.ORG/CBS

CBS Television Network invited URI to produce an hour-long Interfaith Special on Peace broadcast on Christmas Eve. This special reached four million US households, as well as thousands of others globally through social media, classroom and community screenings.

# GROWING - OUR -NETWORK

# INCREASING — OUR — IMPACT

For the past 15 years, URI's growing numbers of Cooperation Circles have spread to 95 countries in what is now the largest grassroots interfaith peacebuilding organization in the world. URI plays a critical role in reducing violence and building cultures of peace, justice and healing.

## URI IS SINCERELY GRATEFUL TO OUR LEADERS FOR THEIR VISION, ENERGY AND COMMITMENT.

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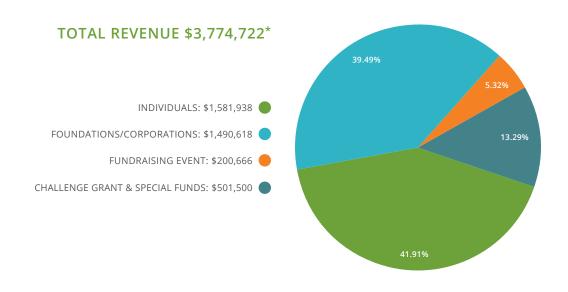
MONICA WILLARD, URI REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

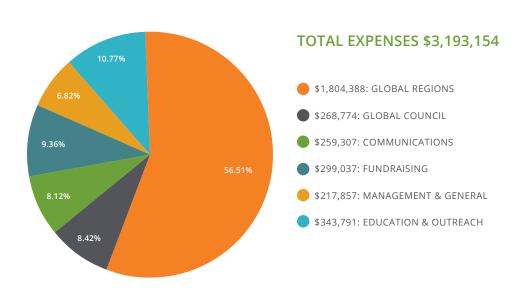
MUSSIE HAILU, NAIROBI PATRICK NICKISH.

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#### **KEY REVENUE & EXPENSE INFORMATION**

FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2015\*\*





<sup>\*</sup> URI ALSO RECEIVED \$865,266.20 AS A DONOR RESTRICTED CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC RESERVES. THIS AMOUNT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE 2015 TOTAL REVENUE.

<sup>\*\*</sup> COPIES OF THE AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.



# UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

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URI is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization which relies solely on individual contributions to further its global efforts.