



The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

# Our Purpose Is Our Power

As URI enters its second chapter, we embrace the Purpose Statement and celebrate the work of our Cooperation Circles in promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, ending religiously motivated violence, and creating cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. URI's Purpose Statement emerged from hundreds of conversations over four years exploring the importance of having a statement that would inspire people to get out of bed every morning and live it out in their daily lives. This centrality of purpose, based on shared values, allows diverse initiatives of grassroots interfaith Cooperation Circles to flourish around the world.

" Through daily interfaith cooperation, we have witnessed the formation of mutually inspiring relationships that have translated into authentic friendships. URI's grassroots Cooperation Circles foster public dialogue and understanding underpinned by mutual respect and acceptance. Their trust has served to create tightly-knit communities whilst strengthening social cohesion and constructively transforming our diverse global society. It is my honour to participate in such an extraordinary effort."



won Kali

Kiran Bali, MBE JP, URI Global Council Chairperson

" URI wasn't created to be a "feel good" organization. Its intent was to be countercultural in regard to ending religiously motivated violence that has prevailed in real life over so many centuries. There has to be a better way for faith groups with competing religious loyalties to engage. At URI, this is realized through our interfaith Cooperation Circles. We believe that through daily interfaith cooperation and by creating cultures of peace, justice and healing, religiously motivated violence will end."



arin Z.

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



" URI Cooperation Circles bring peace, justice

from the violence of war and the impact of

injustice, as well as to a world scarred by

environmental devastation. It is my great

privilege to witness these stories of URI

peacebuilders reaching out to a world in

hands on a daily basis. By drawing on the

humanitarian force for good in the world."

need with compassionate hearts and helping

wisdom of all traditions, URI is a spiritual and

and healing into the lives of people suffering

Vida HK

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



# URI has grown to include 649 Cooperation Circles in 84 countries in what is now the largest grassroots interfaith network in the world.

## Our network consists of people like you:

#### Cooperation Circles

Cooperation Circles are the heart of URI. Self-governing and self-funding, they bring people of all traditions together to address the most pressing issues facing their communities.

#### **Global Council**

URI's Global Council is democratically elected by our Cooperation Circles to serve as our Board of Directors, providing leadership, governance, strategic direction and fiduciary oversight to URI.

#### President's Council

The President's Council is comprised of prominent individuals from around the world who offer their substantial experience, business and organizational expertise, and financial support to help build URI's growing global presence.

#### **Regional Support Staff**

Led by the Regional Coordinator, the Regional Support Staff energizes the network of Cooperation Circles in seven geographic regions and one transnational region.

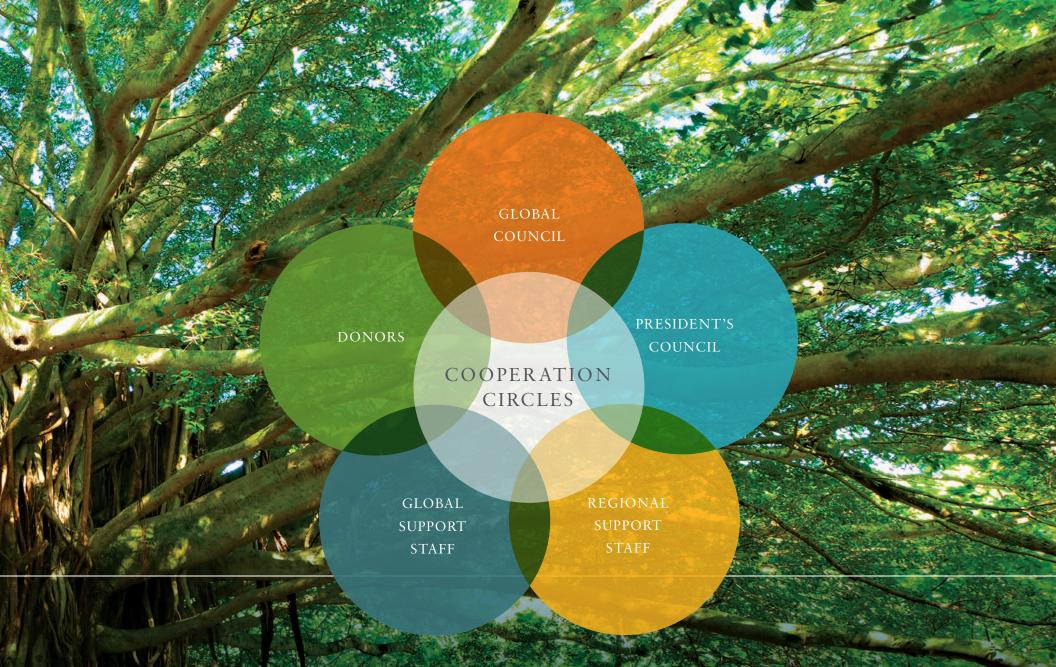
#### **Global Support Staff**

Under the leadership of the Executive Director, the Global Support Staff works in partnership with the entire network to support Cooperation Circles.

#### Donors

Our donors, as partners and members, make it possible for URI to live into our core principles and practices so that we can fulfill our mission as a grassroots interfaith peacebuilding movement.

# Cooperation Circles are the center and life of URI



I see URI as an enormous banyan tree. A tree whose trunk is deeply rooted in the earth and whose branches stretch to all the corners of the world. Yet the banyan tree is no ordinary tree, for each branch sends down its own roots creating an anchor that is connected to a larger living network. Therefore, the banyan tree - like URI - is an organism with many centers, each drawing life from its own unique location while remaining interconnected as a whole.

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

#### PROMOTE ENDURING, DAILY INTERFAITH COOPERATION



Uganda Africa



New friends and colleagues Sheikh Musa Khalil (left) and Pastor Joshua (right) at a URI Africa gathering in Uganda



### Forging Lasting Friendships and a Commitment to Peace

Cooperation Circle leaders from all over Africa gathered for an interfaith training program hosted by URI Africa's Great Lakes office to deepen relationships and confront growing violence and injustice. This gathering sparked a friendship between two religious leaders who would never have met had it not been for URI. Pentacostal Pastor Joshua, who hails from the Cooperation Circle Faiths Together Uganda, stood before the assembly to recognize his new Muslim friend, Sheikh Musa Khalil: "His personal devotion to Islam and association to URI inspires me to find common values among all. We are now and will always be brothers." The gathering also provided a safe space for stories of atrocities and survival. Lilly Misenga from the Fire Women Association in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) shared her brutal account of the Second Congo War, prompting Rwandan Isabelle Nizeyimana from Reseau Culturel SANGWA to share her inspiring work of reconciling Hutus and Tutsis despite losing her family in the genocide. The connection of these powerful women, and their commitment to work together, instilled a renewed sense of urgency and hope to heal religious and tribal divisions.

"URI unlocked our potential as a grassroots interfaith organization. It's our wish that many young people and organizations join this great cause of peacebuilding."

— Michael Buyondo, Faiths Together Uganda Cooperation Circle, Mukono District

## PROMOTE ENDURING, DAILY INTERFAITH COOPERATION



Bosnia and Herzegovina Europe

## Overcoming a History of Division

URI European youth leaders gathered as part of the largest international peace event in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, marking the 100th anniversary of the events that triggered the first World War. At "Peace Event Sarajevo," they worked with youth of all religions to develop new strategies for tackling the problems of division and strife in their communities. URI Youth Ambassadors Lejla Hasandedic, a Muslim, and Vedrana Damjanovic, an Orthodox Christian, presented at the Peace Event. They have spent years building bridges in their home of Bosnia and Herzegovina despite the history of violence between their two communities. As URI Youth Ambassadors and members of Europe Youth Leadership Cooperation Circle, they prove that young people of different cultures and faiths can work together for enduring daily interfaith cooperation.



"Islam and Orthodox Christianity were once two different worlds and enemies in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Now the two of us, Lejla as a Muslim and I as an Orthodox Christian, are young leaders who work together to create a peace for current and future generations."

- Vedrana Damjanovic, URI Youth Ambassador and member of Europe Youth Leadership CC, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Europe Youth Leadership members (from left to right): Rosen Dimov, Vedrana Damjanovic, Lejla Hasandedic, Charlotte Dando and Anna Mustonen in Sarajevo

#### END RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE





Middle East

### We Refuse to be Enemies

Abrahamic Reunion Cooperation Circle leader Eliyahu McLean gathered more than 100 Jews, Christians and Muslims together in Nazareth to pray and share perspectives on the possibilities for peace in the region. Eliyahu told a story of traveling on a bus that was attacked. His friends urged him to seek revenge. Instead, he shared that this gathering of URI sisters and brothers from different faiths was his "revenge" – a "Jihad for peace." At the same time, amid the sirens, gun and bomb blasts, and unparalleled chaos, URI Cooperation Circle Tamera and Grace – Movement for a Free Earth helped organize "We refuse to be enemies: a Vision Camp for Israel-Palestine" in the West Bank. Working through personal pain and tears, people from different religions shared stories, engaged the larger worldwide community through social media and crafted a public statement decrying the violence.

Participants of "We refuse to be enemies: a Vision Camp for Israel-Palestine" gather in a circle in the West Bank (Photo: Ludwig Schramm)



"I will never give up, especially now. We need and must find all our powers to bring the vision of peace and create a future without war! This is the only way for this planet to survive."

— Lee Ziv, Musaique Cooperation Circle founder and Vision Camp organizer, Israel

#### END RELIGIOUSLY Motivated violence



The Philippines

# Countering violence with education and dialogue

For decades, the Mindanao region in the Philippines has been devastated by religious conflict between the country's Catholic majority and the local Muslim minority. The **Pakigdait**, **Inc Cooperation Circle** has played a major role in helping reduce violence and create the conditions necessary for peaceful negotiation in Mindanao. Pakigdait leader Musa Sanguila has spent years working within this conflict, leading workshops on intercultural and interreligious understanding and violence prevention, including coordinating the Church–Masjid Visitation Program. Through visits to various places of worship, members of different faith groups engaged in an educational process to debunk stereotypes. This program was crucial in building bridges between the government, military and rebel leaders. It also positioned Pakigdait leaders as key advisors to the peace talks, which recently established a settlement called the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.



"In Mindanao, I grew up in fear, constantly threatened by violence, and then I got off the ground to acquire strength and courage to face the realities of this 'war.' We have waited long enough in our generation. This might be the long awaited answer to the long agony of peacelessness."

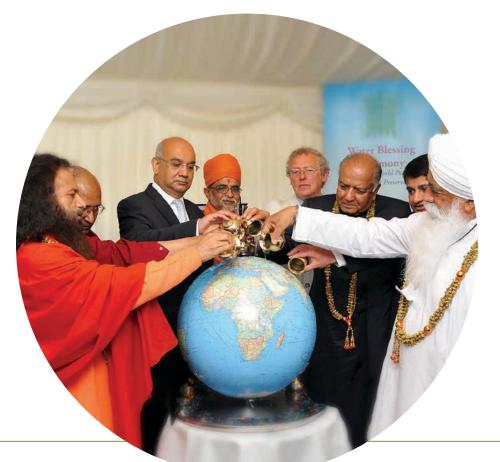
> — URI SEA-Pac Regional Coordinator Dr. Potre D. Diampuan, The Philippines



Pakigdait founder Musa Sanguila (far right) celebrates Iftar with members of the Philippine military (Photo: Richelieu Umel)

#### CREATE CULTURES OF PEACE, JUSTICE, HEALING FOR EARTH & ALL LIVING BEINGS





### Working for a greener, more peaceful planet

URI's commitment to the environment was established at its founding and reflected in our Charter in the words: "We unite to heal and protect the Earth." With this in mind, URI founder Bishop William Swing developed the **Ecological Resource Cooperation Circle** to provide guidance and resources to those in the field working on matters such as climate change, water rights, resource conservation and energy consumption. To date, more than 170 Cooperation Circles are working on issues related to the environment. **Global Interfaith WASH Alliance**, a Multiregion Cooperation Circle located in India, is a worldwide interfaith initiative that promotes safe water, sanitation and hygiene. **California Interfaith Power and Light**, a North America Cooperation Circle, has enlisted over 600 religious communities across the state of California, USA, to become part of their energy efficiency and "greening" program.

Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati (far left), co-founder of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, leads an interfaith water blessing ceremony at the House of Commons in London, with faith leaders and URI's Global Council Chair Kiran Bali, MBE JP



- "Recently a Cooperation Circle dealing with the environment sprang up in Japan. Another sprang up in Jerusalem. We recognize that the real ecological work of URI takes place in Cooperation Circles around the world."
- The Right Reverend William E. Swing, URI President and Founder

# CREATE CULTURES OF PEACE, JUSTICE, HEALING FOR EARTH & ALL LIVING BEINGS



# We are a family that has found each other

URI's Global Indigenous Initiative brought together thirty-three Indigenous leaders for a historic event called "Hidden Seeds of Natural Healing and Curing." Building on the work started in URI's Latin America and the Caribbean and North American regions, representatives from six continents reflected the cultural and spiritual diversity of Indigenous peoples. At this unprecedented gathering, participants shared sacred ceremonies and forged new partnerships; the gathering also addressed global issues around caring for the environment and recognizing the role it plays in sustaining life. The Indigenous leaders issued a call to honor Indigenous arts and culture, preserve sacred spaces and sites, address past injustices and meet the needs of Indigenous peoples throughout the world. The wisdom shared at this gathering, and the ongoing work of the Global Indigenous Initiative, now exists as a resource for the greater URI community and the world, supporting the work of creating cultures of peace, justice and healing.



"The opportunity to gather Indigenous people in an international, interfaith community allows us to learn from each other and enrich all community members. We need unity and diversity to have enough strength to promote human rights and justice in the world."

- Sofia Painiqueo, founding member of Aflaiai Cooperation Circle, Chile



Participants of "Hidden Seeds of Natural Healing and Curing" celebrate their first day of collaboration with song, dance and sacred ceremonies



As our network grows, its impact spreads. For your support and generosity, we thank you.



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