



CIRCLES  
OF  
LIGHT

BUILDING A  
WORLD

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2021

A celebration of the  network's efforts throughout the world.



# BUILDING A WORLD OF PEACE, JUSTICE AND HEALING

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**Issac S. Thomas (Qatar)**

Global Council Trustee for URI Multiregion

**The Circles of Light Committee wishes to thank all Global Council Trustees and Regional Coordinators for their participation in the selection of stories, spokespersons and music/dance pieces. This event is a true collaboration between all to elevate the amazing work of the URI network, especially the Cooperation Circles.**

**A Cooperation Circle (CC or URI member group) is a self-organizing group of at least seven members from at least three religions, spiritual expressions, or indigenous traditions—including atheists and agnostics. Cooperation Circles work on two levels: by giving people of different backgrounds a chance to work together, and by tackling important community issues.**

# PROGRAM

## Welcome

### Emcees:

Daisy Berexa, USA  
Biswadeb Chakraborty, India  
Daniel Eror, Bosnia and Herzegovina

### Spokespersons:

Father Stephen Adrian M. Villaester, The Philippines  
Tanya Sablok, India  
Issac S. Thomas, Qatar  
Dr. Omar Ahmad Tayeh, Jordan  
Mirjona Hoxhallari, Albania  
Geoffrey Manasseh, Malawi  
Geneva Blackmer, USA  
Vilma Rosaura Palax Tuy, Guatemala

### Remarks

Kiran Bali, MBE JP, United Kingdom

## Reflection on URI's Purpose Statement

The Rt. Rev. William E. Swing, USA

## Stories and More

Southeast Asia and the Pacific  
Asia  
Multiregion  
Middle East and North Africa  
Europe  
Africa  
North America  
Latin America and the Caribbean

## Membership

Ezra Fairley-Collins, USA  
Maria Crespo, Argentina  
Francisco Morales, Argentina

## Closing

Emcees  
Spokespersons  
The Rt. Rev. William E. Swing, USA  
Kiran Bali, MBE JP, United Kingdom

## URI Song

Kristin Hoffmann, USA

# EMCEES

## **Daisy Berexa, USA** **URI Senior Advisory Council Member**

Daisy Berexa is a full-time volunteer and graduate student at American University where she is pursuing a Masters in Science in International Relations and Business. She was previously a consultant and Subject Matter Expert in Liquidity, Stress Testing, and Securitizations. Her business experience includes consulting for Promontory Financial Group, Head of Liquidity Management at MUFG Union Bank, Managing Director for Promontory Asset Finance as well as securitization, investment management, and credit roles at Banc of America Securities, Provident Financial, WestLB, and Charles Schwab Investment Management. Daisy is a Trustee of The University of Nebraska Foundation, was President of the Junior League of San Francisco from 2008-2010, and is an active member of Cross-Cultural Solutions in South America. Additionally, Daisy serves on the Investment Committee of Planned Parenthood Northern California. Daisy was born in Colombia, South America, and is married to Steven Berexa, Global CIO for Equities at Allianz Global Investors. Daisy and Steven reside in Arlington, Virginia with their dog Zaza.

## **Biswadeb Chakraborty, India** **National India Team Coordinator and Regional Coordinator for URI Asia: India, East Zone**

Biswadeb Chakraborty holds a BA degree in accounting. He was raised in a family with strong spiritual values and commitment. Since 1996, he has been involved in community organizing and serves in a leadership role with Ektaan Cooperation Circle. Biswadeb is an accomplished musician and songwriter, dedicated to using music as a medium for awakening inner consciousness, building bridges of respect across social barriers, and uniting life on earth.

## **Daniel Eror, Bosnia and Herzegovina** **Global Council Trustee for URI Europe**

Daniel Eror was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, obtained formal education at University of Sarajevo, Master studies of Economy and Management, with a focus on Human Resources as well as Master program of Interreligious studies and Peacebuilding at Faculty of Catholic Theology Sarajevo, The Faculty of Islamic Studies Sarajevo and Faculty of Orthodox Theology Vasilije Ostroski Foča.

Active member of civil society, with 14 years of progressive experience in the fields of intercultural dialogue, reconciliation and peacebuilding mainly working with young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as abroad.

He is a founder and president of Youth for Peace CC, organization which positioned itself as one of the most prominent youth-led organizations in BiH, working in field of peacebuilding. Active member of United Religions Initiative network for several years and URI Global Council Trustee and URI Europe Treasurer since 2018. In Religions for Peace Europe serves as a co-president of the Organization.

He is certified trainer for work with youth, with expertise in the field of conflict transformation, dealing with past, human rights and discrimination.

# KEY SPEAKERS

## **Kiran Bali, MBE JP, United Kingdom** **Chair, URI Global Council of Trustees**

Kiran Bali, MBE JP is a global organizational leader and spokesperson in areas of interfaith understanding, environmental justice, women's empowerment, and peacebuilding through selfless service and multidisciplinary approaches. Kiran was honored by HM Queen Elizabeth II with the Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire accolade in 2008, and has received a number of international awards for her achievements. Kiran approaches solutions to climate change through advocacy and empowerment of grassroots communities with knowledge and information. She launched the Hindu declaration on climate change in India and spoke at the launch of the inter-faith declaration on climate change in New York. As a UK magistrate, Kiran underpins all her initiatives with the principles of social justice, compassion, and equity toward creating safer, healthier, and stronger inclusive communities.

## **The Rt. Reverend William E. Swing, USA** **URI Founder and President Emeritus; Former Episcopal Bishop of California**

William E. Swing, 7th Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California (1980-2006), was born in Huntington, West Virginia. He graduated from Kenyon College and Virginia Theological Seminary, and holds six honorary degrees. Bishop Swing served as a priest in Wheeling, Weirton, and Chester, West Virginia. He also started a church at Waterford Park Race Track in Chester, pioneered homeless work in San Francisco, and played a critical role in saving St. Luke's Hospital. He served on the Board of the American Foundation for AIDS research for 20 years. He was instrumental in starting a capital development bank in Oakland, CA. He is known as an outspoken leader about the standing of gays and lesbians in the church. He led the radical expansion of the Bishop's Ranch in Healdsburg, California. Bishop Swing is the Founder and President of the United Religions Initiative. He is married to Mary Taylor Swing, and has two children and three grandchildren. Bishop Swing is an inspirational speaker and an author, most recently of *A Bishop's Quest: Founding a United Religions*, and *The Sacred and the Silly: A Bishop's Playful and Eventful Life*. Both books are available on Amazon.com; the proceeds of book sales will benefit URI.

# SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (SEA-PAC)

## Spokesperson: Father Stephen Adrian Villaester (The Philippines), Pakigdait Inc. CC

Father Stephen Adrian M. Villaester was born in Cebu City, The Philippines and is the son of Bishop Stephen L. Villaester. Adrian graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from St. Peter's College, a Master's Degree in Theology from All Nations Anglican Church Academy in Texas, USA, and was ordained as a Parish Priest. In 2013, he became a volunteer in **Pakigdait Inc. CC**, where he was appointed the chairman of the Interfaith Youth Council (IYC) and connected with the Red Cross Philippines for the rehabilitation project for the beneficiaries of Typhoon Sendong. He then worked for EcoWEB, a local Civil Society Organization, and was assigned to the project Livelihood that focused on the affected communities of Typhoon Yolanda. From 2017 to the present, he rejoined Pakigdait Inc. CC and focused on working for peace and interfaith growth in the most vulnerable communities of Mindanao, especially in the Bangsamoro Community.

## Story from Cambodia: Young leaders inspired to make an environmental difference

The **Interfaith Youth Circle of Cambodia CC (IYCC)**, located in Svey Rieng, Cambodia, works on issues concerning climate change, farming, poverty and migration. IYCC has been able to unite Christians

and Buddhists to collaborate and find sensible solutions to deal with farming practices and population displacement induced by global warming. IYCC provides resources, programs, and training to farmers from diverse faith backgrounds. Members also bring people of different religions together and provide a space to address their common problems caused by challenges from climate change and poverty. Kak Kong Yong presents the efforts of IYCC.

## Music from Australia: Sydney World Music Chamber Orchestra - Warriors

*Composed by Richard Petkovic, Maria Mitar and Nichols Ng*

**Sacred Currents Inc. CC** is an initiative of Richard Petkovic that aims to produce arts and cultural projects that facilitate a shared experience that transcend differences and creates community. Sacred Currents CC manages the annual Sydney Sacred Music Festival (just completed their 11th Festival), whose purpose is to showcase diverse devotional music, art, and ceremony. They create art (music, theatre, visual, etc.) to promote understanding of the cultural and spiritual diversity present in Australia. Additionally, they facilitate arts projects that use collaborative and inclusive cultural development processes to empower their participants. They uphold their purpose by running an intentionally interfaith Festival and by creating new music projects that showcases the power and innovation possible in a multicultural community. The Sydney World Music Chamber Orchestra is made up of people from different ethnic backgrounds: Croatian, Uyghur,



**54 CCs**  
**8 Countries**

Aboriginal Australian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indonesian, Ukrainian and Buddhist, Muslim and Christian faiths. You can find more about their music at [www.culturalartscollective.com.au](http://www.culturalartscollective.com.au) and the Festival at [www.sydneysacredmusicfestival.org](http://www.sydneysacredmusicfestival.org).

# ASIA

## Spokesperson: Tanya Sablok (India), CC Liaison Officer, URI Asia: India - North Zone

Tanya Sablok is currently serving as the Cooperation Circle Liaison Officer for URI North India and Afghanistan and holds a Master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. Tanya has worked at the grassroots, especially with women, children and youth throughout her college days and beyond. She has contributed to building various interfaith educational resources. She is passionate about interweaving humanitarian and peace values toward unravelling the questions around prefabricated social structures in order to bring positive peace through an interfaith and educational approach.

## Story from Sri Lanka: How a Bo tree brought together people across faiths

Trincomalee, the most diverse district of Sri Lanka, is where Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim communities coexist. Various incidents have taken place among the religious communities over the past few years. **URI CC of Trincomalee** has been actively involved in playing a vital role in maintaining peace in this community. A Bo tree was a key reason behind a major conflict in the district. The leaders of the URI CC of Trincomalee took the lead in resolving the conflict between Tamils (Hindus) and Sinhalese (Buddhists) in the village. After that, discussions were initiated by the URI CC of Trincomalee

with the two parties, the religious leaders, and the government officials.

## Music from Bangladesh: *Untitled*, a rare original piece

*Composed by Baul Noshier Kha and performed by  
Debashis Das*

This is a rare original number by Baul Noshier Kha. It speaks precisely of the unity of God who is revered by human beings with different names. The Baul (Mystic Wanderer) uses metaphors to emphasize his arguments for unifying the World Fraternity despite all racial, cultural, and philosophical differences.

Debashis Das is pursuing a degree from the Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka. Debashis was born in a culturally enriched family. Currently, he is connected with Performing Arts in Dhaka. He has a great interest in Academic Research on Theology, as well as Culture.

Debashis Das is a member of the **Vanguard of Light CC**. Alor Jatri (Vanguard of Life CC) has a lot of experience in multifarious work in the social welfare and humanitarian fields. They have Christian, Muslim, and Hindu members in their group and they are also working with other religious groups, which will soon be part of their circle.

They also host interfaith meetings and social activities in various sacred places of different religions. They are very keen on engaging young people in interfaith dialogues, and organize interfaith youth encounters



**397CCs**  
**13 Countries**

with adults with experience in different areas. They are given the space to raise critical questions like nuclear disarmament, political division of the country, and misinterpretations of scriptures. This group has supported URI development in Bangladesh.



# MULTIREGION

## Story from Israel: Spokesperson: Issac S. Thomas (Qatar, Global Council Trustee for URI Multiregion)

Issac S. Thomas is a young leader from Kerala, India. He joined URI at the age of 13 and has been working amongst youth since then. Initially part of the South India Sri Lanka region, he was one of the first candidates to train in the Young Leaders Program (YLP), and later became the Youth Ambassador for the region. He founded **Global Youth Movement (GYM) CC** in 2017 and joined the Multiregion. Under his leadership, youngsters have grown and thrived as individuals, and as a group, concentrating on platforms like interfaith, intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, conflict resolution and reconciliation, women and youth empowerment, environmental protection and sustainable development, disarmament of nuclear weapons, advocacy for human rights, etc. His vision, work ethic, and ability to build bridges have kept him steadfast in his mission as a peace multiplier. He is also the coordinator of the 'One Billion Youth for Peace' movement by Cosmic Community CC, and an active member of the Youth Ministry of Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Outside of URI, being a Bachelor of Technology graduate in electronics and communication, he works as a Network Engineer in Doha, Qatar. He strongly believes that URI is a global family and sticks to the motto 'Think globally and act locally.'

## Story from Israel: A personal account about being a young Palestinian in Israel

**Jerusalem Peacebuilders CC** (JPB) is an interfaith, non-profit organization with a mission to create a better future for humanity across religions, cultures, and nationalities. Integral to that mission is the belief that the future of Jerusalem is the future of the world. JPB's interfaith programs focus on uniting Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans and providing them with the opportunities, relationships, and skills they need to become future leaders for peace in the global community. A passion for peace drives their mission and partnerships power their program. The idea for JPB took root on the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

## Music from the United States: Golden Rule

*Composed by Pato Banton and performed by Pato Banton, Antoinette Rootsdawtah and friends*

"Minister Pato Banton" is a Grammy nominated reggae legend that has recorded and toured the world with The English Beat, Steel Pulse, UB40 & STING (to name just a few). Although his four-decade career has also earned him a place in the British Music Hall of Fame and a BBC Lifetime Achievement Award for his tireless community work to reduce gun crime, his journey has increasingly transcended the music business into arenas of youth outreach, teaching in schools and colleges, writing new curricula for children with learning disabilities, and Global Spiritual Ministry.



**79 CCs  
Worldwide**

Pato and his wife Antoinette Rootsdawtah were both presented with the prestigious Unity Earth "Keepers Of The Flame" Award, appointed as "Goodwill Ambassadors of the Golden Rule" by Ambassador Mussie Hailu of URI, and officially invited to join as members of the Evolutionary Leaders Circle, a project of the Source of Synergy Foundation. Now based in Southern California, he continues to record and tour the world extensively, conveying a positive and very spiritual message, while simultaneously serving as a Teacher, Counselor, Mentor, and Minister "of the verb" to his Fans, Friends, and Spiritual Family."

Pato and Antoinette are founders of the **Pato Baton's Spiritual Family CC**, formed in 2010 as the group traveled around playing music and finding other like-minded people. Their ministry grew on itself; it started slow but is now in another organic formation of getting more onto the global interfaith stage.

Their gatherings are their biggest highlight. They were all meeting online through Zoom or Facebook, and then they decided to get together annually. They now host spiritual picnic gatherings based on family reunions. It's now a tradition; once a year or twice a year they all meet for a picnic and a cruise. It's an interfaith thing. All beliefs are welcome. People come together and share with one another.



# MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

## Spokesperson: Dr. Omar Ahmad Tayeh (Jordan), Global Council Trustee for URI Middle East and North Africa

Dr. Omar Ahmad Tayeh is from Amman, Jordan and has a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology with experiences in the private sector, public institutions, NGOs, and educational institutions. Dr. Tayeh is one of the founders of the Arab Council for Gifted and Talented, Jordanian Psychological Association, and Jordanian Volunteer Center. He worked as a general director for one of the biggest schools in Jordan, and was the President of the Private Schools Council. He has also established cultural exchange programs between Jordan and the USA, Germany, Italy, and other Arab countries. Dr. Tayeh is interested in subjects related to education, peace, cross-cultural Issues, human rights, and religions.

## Story from Jordan: Helping refugees in the time of Covid-19

Tahani Irfan Ruhi is a journalist, lecturer, trainer, and human rights defender who strives for social change by holding the media accountable for its social responsibilities. Throughout her 27 years of experience, she managed to correlate contemporaneous social issues with the rights of minorities, refugees, and gender equality in the media realm. In addition, she also engaged in raising awareness projects pertaining to media, as well as social action endeavors, related to human rights and minority rights.

Tahani is a speaker/panelist at various local and international conferences, and Interfaith dialogue events, as a Baha'i religion representative of Jordan. Furthermore, she is hosting an ongoing round table discussion with eminent media figures on a vast array of topics related to empowering youth, religious coexistence, social justice, minority rights, and other social issues to attain a unified vision which would translate into the media realm with its necessary implications.

She was key in founding **Naya CC**, where members have been actively engaged in interfaith, coexistence and community service. Examples of their activities are helping Iraqi refugees to integrate in Irbid society where Naya CC is located, empowering women who suffer domestic violence (some members of the group are expert social counselors), helping the needy and less fortunate families, and spreading religious tolerance.

## Music from Morocco: Improvisations

*Composed and performed by Jawad Aidaoui*

**Dialogue for Peace CC** is a group of Arab Muslim Sunnis, Jews, Amazigh (Tashelheet, Tamazighet, and Tarefeet) and Sahrawis (nomads) who come together to increase their understanding about the importance of intercultural dialogue to build peace and respect among people of different faiths. Members have participated in international gatherings that bring Arabs and Israelis together to work collaboratively in achieving peace in the Middle East. Some are members of YALA, an initiative that uses social media and technology to bring young people together to build an online academy and



**91 CCs**  
**16 Countries**

an online musicians' forum. YALA also organizes sports and cultural activities. They are active in Euro-Arab and Euro-Med intercultural exchanges and dialogue.

Jawad Aidaoui is a member of Dialogue for Peace CC.

# EUROPE

## Spokesperson: Mirjona Hoxhallari (Albania), Member of Udhetim i Lire CC

Mirjona Hoxhallari is a young leader from Albania that wants to live in a better community. To make this possible she started working as a junior coordinator in the Association “Udhetim i Lire – Liberi di Viaggiare” in 2018.

Previously, for two years, she was a Board Member of the National Youth Congress in Albania. During this time, she participated in different activities related to peacebuilding, hate speech, preventing radicalization and violent extremism, environmental issues, active citizenship, communication, lobbying, advocacy, and youth activism that have been organized at local, national, and international levels.

Her vision for the future is closely related to the creation of inclusive local communities for all groups. As junior coordinator of Association “Udhetim i Lire – Liberi di Viaggiare” she has taken and wants to undertake concrete initiatives which show society the importance of living in peace. She sees peace as it relates to herself, from an individual perspective, as well as how it connects to others and applies to different areas such as education, environment, culture, good governance, rural development, etc.

## Story from United Kingdom: A personal account on the importance of interfaith and interfaith dialogue

Riaz Ravat, BEM DL, is the Deputy Director of St Philip's Centre, a charity rooted in the multi-faith environment of Leicester, the UK's most ethnically diverse city. Riaz

heads up the Centre's religion and belief training packages to corporate bodies, and runs a number of other significant inter faith projects. His other responsibilities include community relations engagement, financial administration, media communications, crisis management, and business and partnership development. Among many of his accolades and honors, Riaz is the Secretary General for **BARAZA CC**.

BARAZA means “council” or “meeting place” in Swahili. A Baraza can be an informal meeting or an official council. In spatial terms it is a place where people meet to chat, exchange ideas, and solve problems. BARAZA CC is an independent, non-profit organization, founded by the same team which is responsible for the concept, realization, and organization of the international touring exhibition. BARAZA offers an international digital platform to promote dialogue and understanding between peoples. Working hand in hand with international experts, members develop ideas and projects, and present them to patrons and sponsors. This way, they address simultaneously, the rise of nationalism, intolerance and racism, islamophobia and anti-Semitism, which are on the rise everywhere, but especially in schools.

## Music from Bulgaria: Rise and Shine, Sunshine

*Authentic Bulgarian folk song performed by Agleya, Valeria and Sarah, under the guidance of vocal pedagogue Marieta Petrakieva*

*United talents, through the magic of music and their voices, take us to the spiritual, mysterious and sacred world. United, despite our differences, we stay strong*



**60 CCs**  
**25 Countries**

*and for centuries, these words have been at the heart of the most important things in our lives - to be together, one whole! The iconic Red Church is a natural scene of the performance – the temple functioned as a Christian church from the 4th to the 14th century, and now is a “temple in ruins”, declared as a cultural monument of national importance.*

**BRIDGES CC** is a non-governmental and over-confessional organization which brings together people of faith from different religious traditions represented in Bulgaria. The main goal of the forum is to be a platform for dialogue between Christian denominations and to present, and popularize, the peaceful model of co-existence between Orthodox Christianity and Islam in the country. Among many activities, Bridges CC coordinates youth camps with young people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

# AFRICA

## Spokesperson: Geoffrey Manasseh (Malawi), URI Malawi Country Coordinator

Geoffrey Manasseh is a peacebuilder, interfaith youth educator, and advocacy activist. Geoffrey graduated with an advanced diploma in construction engineering from Combon Technical College. He attended school for two additional years of training on psycho-social studies before completing another three years of training on peacebuilding and dialogue management. Currently, he works as a country coordinator at URI, serves as a technical advisor of the Wildlife and Natural Resources Conservative and Rehabilitation Trust, works as a Southern Africa Interfaith Youth Development Officer, and is a Psycho-Social advisor in the Malawi Eastern Region. He is also the founder and assistant director of the Nkhudzi Bay Utale Organization.

## Story from Nigeria: How an enemy can become a friend, and together pathways to peace prevail

Former enemies in an ongoing, deadly Nigerian conflict, Christian Pastor James Wuye and Muslim Imam Muhammad Ashafa reconciled their differences to stand as an example to their community and honor both their faiths' teachings to "love your enemy."

In the 1990s, Pastor James Wuye and the Imam Muhammad Ashafa led opposing sides of a deadly conflict in Kaduna, Nigeria. Each man was deeply rooted in his own faith tradition. Pastor James had felt a strong calling to the Church since graduating high

school. Imam Ashafa was the thirteenth generation in his family to become an Imam. Both men felt a passion to unify and energize their faith communities, and to protect them against perceived threats.

After a mutual friend brought them together, the two men slowly built mutual respect, and decided to work together to bridge the divide between their communities. The two men eventually formed the **Interfaith Mediation Center, Kaduna, CC** - an interfaith, grassroots organization that heals rifts between Christians and Muslims throughout Nigeria. With over 10,000 members, they now train former militia members to become peace activists.

Today, Imam Ashafa and Pastor James work together to act as an example to their communities that peace is possible. They teach members of youth militias methods to resolve their conflicts peacefully, rather than through infinitely escalating violence, and have even led successful efforts to rebuild the churches and mosques that had fallen during their conflict.

## Dance from Somalia: Dhaanto

*Traditional Somali dance performed by members of Somali Youth Civic Organization (SYCO)*

SYCO members present Dhaanto, a style of traditional Somali music and folk dance. It is cultural folk dance native to Somali-speaking areas in the Horn of Africa region. One of the most popular Somali dances, Dhaanto is played at nearly every Somali festive celebration.

The Dhaanto dance-song was revived in the early 20th century where it was used to raise the 'spirits' of soldiers, and was often sung on horseback. Dhaanto



**239 CCs**  
**32 Countries**

became popular in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, and quickly spread to other Somali occupied territories in the Horn of Africa. In the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, this dance is very popular, and annually, you will see ethnic Somalis perform versions of the Dhaanto at the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Day in Jigjiga. Additionally, the genre was employed in Islamic poetry.

# NORTH AMERICA

## Spokesperson: Geneva Blackmer (USA), Global Council Trustee for URI North America

Geneva Blackmer is the current Program Director for **The Interfaith Center** at Miami University. She holds a B.A. in Religion and an M.A. in Religious Studies from Athens State University. She is a first-year interdisciplinary Ph.D. student in Theology at Amridge University. She serves as an At-Large Director for the **Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council** and an Administrative Director for the **Interfaith Council of Southern Nevada**. As an intern and historian for CRES, she helped found the Kansas City Interfaith History Project, in conjunction with her published thesis. She has previously worked with the Interfaith Council of Metropolitan Washington on Emergency Services Resource Outreach and the Parliament of the World's Religions on their Climate Commitments Project.

## Story from Nevada, USA: A personal account about inspiring young leaders

Rico Ocampo was born in Zacatepetl, Mexico, and immigrated to the United States in 1992. He currently serves as the Executive Director for Anytown Las Vegas, their mission is to establish, empower, and equip youth to be the next wave of today's leaders through organizing, civic engagement, and leadership. His vision is to create the next generation of leaders who end systemic racism and structural inequities.

When he is not working with youth or advocating for

immigrant communities, Rico is championing interfaith peacebuilding efforts by serving as the URI North America Treasurer and member of the Leadership Council.

**Camp Anytown CC** has been able to put together 20 youth leadership camps with over 1,400 youth participants. During each Camp Anytown CC, students participate in workshops, discussion groups, and team-building activities throughout the weekend. This programming enables the staff and curriculum to educate on a personal level in an emotionally-supportive environment. Workshop topics include race, ethnicity, gender, power, privilege, and religion. Students are challenged to look at their cultural memberships and belief systems and to assess how their interactions with others are colored by their developed perceptions. Camp Anytown CC works from the premise that we live in a multicultural society and that young people are the nation's future. Therefore, youth need to be sensitized to the experiences of diverse groups if, as decision-makers, they are expected to make fair judgments in improving the quality of life for the entire nation regardless of ability, ethnicity, faith/religion, and gender.

## Music from Florida, USA: Hevenu Shalom Aleichem

*Music arranged and performed by Rev. Dr. Grace Telesco (Darshan Center), featuring a preview from forthcoming JAM documentary "Rising from the Ashes"*

**JAM & ALL Interfaith CC** connects people through conversation and education to create peace, harmony, and understanding. They hold community roundtables,



**95 CCs**  
**2 Countries**

conferences, panels, picnics, spiritual services, and much more! JAM & ALL Interfaith CC envisions a world where Earth and all its inhabitants are honored and cared for; all people are valued equally and treated equitably; differences are explored, appreciated and heartfully embraced; and all spiritual paths and faith traditions coexist harmoniously. Based in South Florida, they are celebrating their 20th Anniversary this year – come join the conversation!

# LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

## Spokesperson: Vilma Rosaura Palax Tuy (Guatemala), Founder and Vice-President of Los Descendientes de Guatemala CC

Ms. Palax Tuy is a community builder and peace educator who has worked with a variety of non-profit organizations in Guatemala. She is the founder and Vice-President of the Integrated Association for the Development of the Descendants of Guatemala. The organization works to protect the environment and promote sustainable development in the county of Xajaxac in Solola, Guatemala, through programs for productive change and ethical economic development, with a focus on the preservation of indigenous culture and language, ancestral teachings and medicine, archeology, and the environment.

## Story from Brazil: Rebuilding a temple with people for all faiths and traditions

Mae Baiana is a priestess of Candomblé (an African religion) and is a member of the [URI Brasília CC](#). When the Afro-Brazilian temple of which Mae Baiana is the priestess burned down, the other members of the URI Brasília CC mobilized the Brasília community to raise funds for rebuilding the temple. Then they planted a tree in the presence of representatives from various religions and traditions, and every year they gather in solidarity around this tree.

URI Brasília CC holds frequent meetings with its members and continues with its interfaith dialogue activities and

with the incorporation of new members. They organize activities related to human rights and religious diversity. We are in continuous contact with the Secretariat for Human Rights of the federal government for the implementation of public policies related to this subject. Additionally, CC members participate in interfaith gatherings and campaigns for Peace Education.

## Music from Latin America and the Caribbean: No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá

*Composed by legendary Argentine singer-songwriter Facundo Cabral, performed by Círculo Latinoamericano de Músicos CC*

[Círculo Latinoamericano de Músicos CC](#) was created by peace song composers that participated in URI Latin America and the Caribbean Music Festivals held in 2016 and 2017. The desire of members is to expand the values of peace, union, love, and human rights through music. Members live in different countries in the region. Through the festivals, they discovered that they share the same ideals and values, and decided to work together for peace in the world. They believe that music is a very important means of communication that provides great amplitude to the construction of the Culture of Peace, because music transcends barriers and divisions created by ideology and religion, and unites different beliefs and spiritualities.



**62 CCs**  
**17 Countries**

# MEMBERSHIP

## **Ezra Fairley-Collins, USA** **URI Coordinator of Individual** **Membership Development**

Ezra Fairley-Collins joined URI's staff as the Coordinator of Individual Membership Development in 2020. In this role, he works to provide opportunities for individuals to connect globally, take action in their areas of interest, participate in learning exchanges, and more. Ezra is a graduate of Wake Forest University School of Divinity in North Carolina. While at Wake Divinity, his passion for the interfaith community grew and developed into an imperative to ensure that all spiritual expressions have an equitable place at the table. Prior to beginning at URI, Ezra was the Intersectionality Program Manager at the Freedom Center for Social Justice, a national nonprofit working at the junctions of faith, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Ezra currently resides in Charlotte, NC with his family.

## **Maria Crespo, Argentina** **URI Director of Cooperation Circle** **Support**

Maria Crespo serves as the Director of Cooperation Circle (CC) Support from her office in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She maintains communication with CCs around the world, manages the CC approval process, and is the staff liaison for the CC Approval Committee. Maria moderates URI's listservs, assists with URI's social media activities, and oversees data collection for URI's CCs. Prior to this, she served as the Regional Coordinator for Latin America for five years. Maria originally became involved with URI in 1997 when she was appointed as a Trustee in the Interim Global Council. By profession, she is a bilingual school teacher. She is very involved in the Roman Catholic Church as a catechist and lay person, collaborating in the Episcopal Conference for Ecumenism, Relations with Judaism, Islam, and other religions. Maria is married and has five children.

## **Francisco Morales,** **Argentina** **Global Council Trustee for URI Latin** **America and the Caribbean**

Francisco Morales is an Urban Indigenous member of the Aymara community in Argentina. Francisco is a social science student and writer on issues of Indigenous worldview and Latin American thinking. Francisco has been a part of URI since 2008, when he and others founded Comunidad Cosmica CC. He was selected as URI Youth Ambassador in 2010 and serves as a member of the URI Multiregion Leadership Team. He has been a part of the youth facilitators team since 2017.

Currently, Francisco is also advisor to different social organizations on issues of interreligious dialogue and diversity in conflict situations. He is a member of the First Nations of America Student Community - CEPNA. Together, with other Indigenous writers, Francisco founded the Circle of Indigenous Written and Oral Knowledge.

# URI SONG: *You Are I*

## **Kristin Hoffmann, USA**

### **Vocalist, Composer, Sonic Ethereal Guide**

Kristin Hoffmann is a Juilliard trained singer-songwriter-musician with extraordinary artistic range. Her music has been heard on major record labels, film, and television. Kristin has performed throughout the world, collaborating with musical luminaries on projects ranging from individual albums to grand symphonic productions.

A strong advocate for peace and ocean conservation, Kristin has appeared internationally at environmental concerts and conventions, TEDx San Francisco, The Emoto Peace Project concert in Tokyo, the signing of The Fuji Declaration at Mt. Fuji, and with The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London. In August, 2016, the symphonic version of her "Song for the Ocean" was performed at Sydney Opera House by a choir of 800 Australian children.

For the last 10 years, Kristin has been the singer for the internationally acclaimed show, BELLA GAIA, a multimedia theater experience created in conjunction with NASA. Kristin has been a guest blogger for multiple magazines including Gandhi's BE Magazine, Elephant Journal, The Ecologist, and The Purple Fig, addressing worldly issues through the lens and vehicle of music. She is currently on the board of FIONS (Friends of Institute of Noetic Sciences), an active member of the esteemed group Evolutionary Leaders, and a musical ambassador for the organization UNITY EARTH. She has recently travelled to Ethiopia, Australia, India and "The Holy Land" (Jordan, Israel, Palestine) to share the message of universal peace and love.

Kristin's songs reflect her personal luminosity, her warmth, and her talent for bringing out music's healing power. She composed You Are I to celebrate URI's 20th anniversary in 2020.



URI wishes to thank the generosity of key contributors and COL donors to make this event a reality. Thank you for your vision in creating a world of Peace, Justice and Healing.

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URI wishes to thank the following individuals and organization for the generosity of time to help coordinate the COL event. Thank you for your contribution on a daily basis in creating a world of Peace, Justice and Healing.

## CIRCLES OF LIGHT PRESENTERS (LISTED BY ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

### **Southeast Asia and the Pacific**

Father Stephen Adrian M. Villaester, Pakigdait CC  
Kak Kong Yong, Interfaith Youth Circle of Cambodia CC  
Richard Petkovic and Sacred Currents CC

### **Asia**

Tanya Sablok, CC Liaison - North India  
Sasitharan Sarma Kurukkal of the Kovil  
Pemaredna Thero, Buddhist Religious Leader  
Pastor P. Wijayathasan, Christian Priest  
Subramuniam Sharma Kurukkal  
Sapthiha Jeevaraj and URI CC of Trincomalee  
Debashis Das, Vanguard of Light CC

### **Multiregion**

Issac S. Thomas, Global Council Trustee  
Duna Milhem, Jerusalem Peacebuilders CC  
Pato Banton, Antoinette Rootsdahtah and Pato Baton 's Spiritual Family CC

### **Middle East and North Africa**

Dr. Omar Ahmad Tayeh, Global Council Trustee  
Tahani Irfan Ruhi, Naya CC  
Jawad Aidaoui, Dialogue for Peace CC

### **Europe**

Mirjona Hoxhallari, Udhetim i Lire CC  
Riaz Ravat, BEM DL, BARAZA CC  
Agleya, Valeria and Sarah, Marieta Petrakieva from Bridges CC

### **Africa**

Geoffrey Manasseh, Malawi Country Coordinator  
Pastor Dr. James Wuye, Interfaith Mediation Centre, Kuna CC  
Imam Muhammad Ashafa, Interfaith Mediation Centre, Kuna CC  
Somali Youth Civic Organization

### **North America**

Geneva Blackmer, Global Council Trustee  
Rico Ocampo, Camp Anytown Las Vegas CC  
Rev. Dr. Grace Telesco and Jam&All CC

### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

Vilma Rosaura Palax Tuy, Los Descendientes de Guatemala CC  
Adna Santos, known as Mãe Baiana, URI Brasília CC  
Círculo Latinoamericano de Músicos CC

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### **Circles of Light Committee**

Salette Aquino  
Kiran Bali, MBE JP  
Biff Barnard  
Samira Fatma Baručija  
Daisy Berexa  
J. Robert Coleman  
Maria Crespo  
Naoufal El Hammoui  
Daniel Eror  
Susan Hoganson  
Gail Moore  
Rabbi Stephen Pearce  
Rita Semel  
Morgana Sythove  
Alice Swett  
The Rt. Reverend William E. Swing  
Issac S. Thomas

### **Key Speakers**

Kiran Bali, MBE JP  
The Rt. Rev. William E. Swing

### **Emcees**

Daisy Berexa  
Biswadeb Chakraborty  
Daniel Eror

### **Membership**

Maria Crespo  
Ezra Fairley-Collins  
Francisco Morales

### **URI Song**

Kristin Hoffmann

### **Special Production Thanks to**

Eduardo Aquino  
Gaea Denker  
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Angelina Vladikova  
Laura Sue Wilansky  
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Regional Coordinators and Global Support Staff

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