



World Congress Recognised by United Nations



Congress Participants in Budapest, July 2002

The contribution of the United Nations to freedom of religion or belief will be more effective if non-governmental organisations like IARF play their part. This was the challenge that the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Professor Abdelfattah Amor, put to participants attending IARF's World Congress in Budapest. Government legislation and international standard setting are not enough, he said, unless civil society helps to reinforce universal ethical principles. Religious communities have an important role to play in promoting attitudes of tolerance and educational practices of mutual understanding and respect, he added.

In his presentation to the Con-

gress, Professor Amor detailed the growing activities of his mandate as a voluntary expert who challenges governments to respect international standards and to develop domestic measures to prevent intolerance based on religion or belief. Amor emphasised the importance of preventive work, especially working with schools, to promote tolerance. In this vein, he called on religious communities and educators to follow up the recommendations of the Madrid Conference held last November (*IARF World*, March 2002, page 6). This work is especially urgent in the aftermath of increasing inter-religious tension and the undermining of human rights protection since September 11th 2001, he noted.

Amor's presence as a keynote speaker at the Congress was a testament to the fact that IARF and its work are being increasingly recognised by the United Nations. During the Congress, Prof Amor presented the Albert Schweitzer Award to Dr Gianfranco Rossi, the retiring representative of IARF at the UN in Geneva, serving from 1996-2002. Dr Rossi has spent more than 20 years coming before the UN Commission on Human Rights to inform the international body of the plight of victims of human rights abuses, especially in minority religious communities. He has thus laid the foundations for IARF's continuing work at the United Nations.

On other international news, one

continued on page 2...

..from page 1

of the most lively plenary sessions at the Congress was an International Panel, which was moderated by Professor Kevin Boyle, Special Adviser to Mrs Mary Robinson, the out-going UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. With a great wealth of academic and professional experience, Prof Boyle helped put religious free-

dom issues in a global perspective for the audience. Participants on this panel included Swami Agnivesh, bringing the views of a Hindu activist in India; Dr Azza Karam, originally from Egypt, speaking to challenges facing Muslim women; Bhiksuni Chueh Men, IARF Council member from the Republic of China, addressing

the ordination of Buddhist nuns; and Aaron Rhodes, Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, commenting on legal challenges across Europe. Audience members had the opportunity to ask very pointed questions of panelists, which resulted in one of the more engaging sessions at the Congress.

Freedom of Religion or Belief: The European Experience

Each Congress is held in a different part of the world to provide opportunities for participants to learn about how religion and belief has developed in that region. For non-Europeans, coming to Central Europe was an integral part of trying to comprehend – through voices, buildings, events and tours – how Europe understands the role of religion in the context of its sometimes violent, intolerant, and expansionist past. Europe has also been the cradle of so much creativity in every sphere.

European panellists at the Congress shared experiences on what had happened to them, their families, religious communities, and countries. This history was also recorded in the book IARF commissioned from Karel Blei, a Dutch scholar, and which was distributed to all Congress participants. The reality though was expressed in the voices of nine panellists.

In Religion & Ideology: (the past)

Ernö Lazarovits, a Hungarian Jew, described the survival of his community through years of genocide; Franz von Hammerstein, a German Christian, recalled his imprisonment under Hitler and his post-war work for reconciliation; and, Anezka Ebertova, a Czech Christian, reviewed the social work of religious communities in Europe, but also noted the errors of prejudice and discrimination which have too often discredited religion in this region and created a tragic on-going legacy.

In Religious Differences: (the present)

Robert McKee, a minister with the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, reviewed the religious divisions in Northern Ireland and how integrated education could help to cross these barriers; Tatjana Peric, a writer from Bosnia, spoke

to the situation for religious minorities in Serbia; and, Krassimir Kanev, Associate Professor of Sociology at Plovdiv University in Bulgaria, addressed the international standards that govern church/state relations in Europe and how they have affected the exercise of religious freedom.

In Religion & the State: (the future)

Horst Prem, President of the Bavarian Unitarians, addressed attempts to formulate a new European Constitution, which could incorporate a great diversity of ethical and religious doctrines; Rafail Fainberg, Executive Director of an inter-religious institute in Moscow, gave an overall view of interfaith work in Russia; and Alexei Krindatch, IARF Council Member, described the problems of church/state relations in Russia and noted that education was critical for addressing intolerance.

Freedom of Religion and Belief: Europe's Story

Karel Blei's book, *Freedom of Religion and Belief: Europe's Story* can be obtained from the IARF Secretariat and our Europe and Middle East Coordinator. Price £15+£2.50 postage. Your Chapter or Regional Coordinator can also assist with enquiries. Blei's speech can be found on our website.



Facilitators and some participants from the interfaith workshops

Résumé Sheet from Congress Participants

Project Type	East Asia	Europe	N America	South Asia	Totals
Conferences/Religious Education	6	7	3	4	20
Interfaith	13	23	7	11	54
Religious Freedom Issues	3	4	3	2	12
Using Information Technology	5	3	1		9
Teaching Virtues	16	9	11		36
Voluntary Code/DOR	1	6	10		17
Other	4	3	2		9
Totals	48	55	37	17	157

Notes: 'Europe' category also includes the Middle East and Africa; 'North America' includes Australia and New Zealand; and 'South Asia' includes Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. The 'Teaching Virtues' project ideas were related to sessions at the Congress run by the Virtues Project.™

Next Steps: Encouraging Local Action

The focus of our 31st World Congress event was on taking ideas into the realm of action. Hence, the real measure of the success of this gathering will be how many local interfaith and specific religious freedom projects will evolve from everyone's hard work in Budapest.

To get everyone thinking of concrete plans, the Congress featured lectures and day-long workshops on 6 selected themes. These themes were on: 1) Teaching tolerance & other virtues; 2) Exploring a Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities; 3) Using information technology (IT) to advance the cause of religious freedom; 4) Setting up interfaith encounters; 5) Designing programmes; and, 6) Building strategic plans, based on IARF's 2001-2007 work agenda.

Congress participants were asked to concentrate on just 1 of the above topics and then to turn in 'résumé sheets' at the end of these sessions. These sheets encouraged individuals to write down ideas for projects that

they could implement in their own communities, based on what they learned. A total of 157 résumé sheets were turned in. Regional Coordinators synthesised all of these ideas at the end of the Congress for potential follow up work. (See summaries of reports by region.)

For the many people who were not able to attend the Congress in Budapest, there are still ways to get involved! We have put copies of main Congress lectures on our web site. Click on 'World Congress' on our home page at www.iarf.net. This action will transport you to the Congress page where you will find key lectures posted from the Congress. Also, if you have a great idea for your region dealing with the subject of religious freedom, please fill in your very own 'résumé sheet' on the site and submit this to your Regional Coordinator. (If you do not have computer access, please contact your Coordinator who will be happy to send you copies of requested lectures and/or a 'résumé sheet'.)

Regional Reports

Congratulations to over 150 participants from the Congress who turned in 'résumé sheets' proposing further action in their communities! Ideas for religious freedom projects range from specific religious freedom issues to interfaith activities to launching educational initiatives. By this time next year, we hope that IARF will have several really good projects underway in each region. The ideas submitted represent some next steps for our organisation and are summarised by region below:

North America (37 résumé sheets)

Regional Coordinator from North America, Richard Kellaway, reported that Congress participants from this region were eager to carry on the work of the Congress when returning home, especially within their local faith communities and interfaith organisations. Working with young people, and the related task of developing appropriate teaching material, was a priority for several participants. Although various concerns were raised about IARF's work on a *Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities* (see article on page 8), a few individuals from this region hoped the *Code* could eventually be used as a teaching tool. A project with indigenous communities in South America was proposed. Kellaway himself is committed to making the existence of IARF better known beyond the Unitarian Universalist community in the North American region.

South Asia (17 résumé sheets)

Regional Coordinator from South Asia, Zulfikhar Akram, met with Congress participants from countries ranging from Sri Lanka to Bangladesh to the Republic of China. Because of the vast diversity of this region in terms of religions, cultures, and issues to be addressed, partici-

continued on page 4...

..from page 3

pants preferred to focus upcoming work on their own communities and countries, potentially linking up in the future for other projects with countries in the region. Among ideas put forward were: a youth camp in Indonesia; a programme to create better relations among the Indigenous, Muslim and Christian communities in the Philippines; and promoting interfaith education among children and youth in India. Overall, said Akram, participants agreed broadly, and in principle, to network more effectively and to help each other develop better programmes related to the promotion of religious freedom and interfaith understanding.

Europe (55 résumé sheets)

Covering a very broad region of

Europe, Middle East and Africa, Regional Coordinator Ilona Szent-Iványi Orbók oversees a network of 33 member groups. At the Congress, there were also participants from Macedonia, Armenia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Norway – countries where there is little IARF activity to date. Several participants suggested work with young adults to improve understanding about different cultural and religious heritage in the region. Organising a variety of interfaith activities, including exhibitions with a special emphasis on religious freedom, were among priority areas for many participants. A number of individuals attending workshops on Information Technology were eager to see more effective use of IT, including a discussion forum on the web for religious freedom topics.

East Asia (48 résumé sheets)

Takahiro Miwa, representing the Japanese Liaison Committee for the IARF, summarised the perspectives of over 100 Japanese participants at the Congress. As religious discrimination is not a major topic in Japan, an idea was put forward to invite religious minorities to events to introduce their problems. As with all of the other regions represented at the Congress, the Japanese were also eager to see more work done with young people, including 'encounter journeys', individual initiatives for teaching tolerance, and holding religious summits for youth. As Japanese religious understanding is primarily based on 'self-realisation,' there were serious questions about whether a *Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities* was appropriate for their society.

Young Adult Reflections

A total of 83 young adults participated in the 31st World Congress in Budapest. They came from 10 faith and belief traditions and 17 countries. Reflections of some of the participants follow:

Nora Kuntz, Hungary

Having so many young adults in my hometown of Budapest was the culmination of my personal interfaith development. I started learning about interfaith work in a Christian environment at the World Council of Churches many years ago. Last December, I was fortunate

to experience the united *Shramadan*, (*gift of labour*), the holy work of the young adult programme in Gujarat, India. After all this, I was extremely excited to be involved with the IARF World Congress in Budapest. I saw the participants as being agents of mutual tolerance and understanding – an extremely important message not only for myself, but also for Hungarian society.

For the young adults, we tried to create a programme whereby we could have first hand experience of other faiths and cultures. The creative workshops and the circle groups were

a great opportunity for us to share our own traditions. As I was one of the leaders of the drama group, we tried to help the young people to see how drama can help solve real conflicts by offering a unique way of learning about communication. At the World Congress, the young adults could experience the refreshing spirit of religious freedom, but our work must not stop at this stage. The most important follow-up of this gathering has to be a network among the young people, who have already started activities in their own communities. We can share, have faith in each other, and pass on new ideas. Budapest must not remain the same. Your home cannot remain the same. We have many things to do.

Kevin Virtue, Canada

It is easy to see my life in my little corner of the world as more important than it really is. Every now and then I need to be reminded of how big,



Young adults about to perform an indigenous spiritual dance from the Philippines

complex, diverse and wonderful the world is. This reminder came to me at the IARF's World Congress. There I was exposed to the sights and sounds of many different traditions and was honoured to be a part of an event and a group of people who not only accepted, but also relished, diversity.

The Young Adult Program (YAP) before the main Congress took place for two main reasons. One, it gave young adults from all over the world a chance to meet each other, to dialogue, and to affirm our reverence in our own and others' beliefs. This was achieved through personal and group meetings which allowed us to share our traditions and experiences. One of the highlights was a cultural and spiritual evening where individuals sang songs, danced, and recited prayers.

The second main focus was to discuss the RFYN (Religious Freedom Young Adult Network). Under the guidance of Ramola Sundram (Young Adult Program Coordinator), this network is pooling the resources of young adults from around the world to uphold and/or achieve religious freedom and promote strong positive relationships between faith traditions.

Mohseen Kausar Shaik, India

In Budapest, I was thrilled to meet young adults from different parts of the world. The YAP before the main Congress gave us a valuable opportunity to discuss our experiences of religious freedom in small groups. We put forward ideas on how to promote interfaith dialogue and religious freedom. The Congress also provided me with more information about religious oppression.

The happiest moment of the Congress for me came when I was able to share my experience of the international interfaith youth project organised by IARF in Gujarat, India in December 2001. The main project activity was to repair a mosque and reconstruct a temple for Muslims

and Hindus respectively. Young people from outside and within the local communities proved that there can be "unity in diversity" with our work symbolising understanding and co-operation. (See full story in *IARF World*, March 2002.) There were 7 people from the Gujarat project present at the Congress. Other young adults joined us to prepare a drama presentation about the Gujarat experience at the Closing Ceremony of the Congress. The presentation was well received and seemed to inspire others. This is a memory I will always cherish.



*Paul Kendrick and Ryoko Sasagawa
reciting their haiku*

Paul Kendrick, USA

During a creative writing workshop at the YAP, we watched a moving video about the story of Mona Mahmudnizhad, a Bahá'í teenager who was executed in Iran in 1983 because of her religious beliefs. Since many of the people in the workshop were Japanese, our group decided to use the Haiku form to express our emotional reaction to Mona's story. The Haiku was read in English and Japanese.

*Remember Mona
In hate our faith grows weaker
Please no more martyrs*

I found this experience symbolic for the whole conference, as the poem we wrote was a true cultural interchange for the objective of religious freedom.

This should be a time when we are all learning pragmatic ways we can help our communities strive for religious freedom. We need hope, but that will count for little if we are not prepared for the work of ameliorating religious conflicts.

Ryuji Kojima, Japan

I felt honored to join the IARF YAP in 2002. It was a precious opportunity to meet, communicate and collaborate with young leaders representing diverse religious groups from around the world. Small group discussions that took place every day were a highlight. Topics of conversation sometimes covered the agonies or joys of one's daily life. By the end of the programme, we became more open to each other and could share sympathy as human beings, regardless of differences. I believe that making continuous efforts to meet and talk face-to-face, in this way, is one way to resolve conflicts among different religions, although it seems a long path. How wonderful it was during the Congress to see a young Jew and Muslim from Israel standing side-by-side translating each other's prayers!

Presentations by representatives from different beliefs and areas were also meaningful. I obtained first-hand knowledge about current global concerns. Finally, discussions about the Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN), a young adult initiative to take responsibility for global advancement of religious freedom, was also significant.

Ramola Sundram, Young Adult Programme Coordinator

I was thrilled by the dedication of the facilitators during our programme. The whole group of young adults was very impressive and gives us hope for the future. I am now working on the follow-up to a number of project proposals. Some require funding and this is a crucial aspect. For more information about the RFYN see page 7.

Congress Evaluation

The 31st World Congress drew 453 registered participants to Budapest and 123 of these turned in evaluation forms, a 27% response rate.

There were a number of positive elements to the Congress which bodes well for IARF's future. We received, for example, significant recognition from the United Nations which will open doors in international circles, over 80 young adults brought enthusiasm and critical engagement to the Congress, over 150 project ideas were proposed, and there was a high level of participation and interfaith dialogue in circle groups.

Outreach to more traditional major faith communities drew in a significant presence of Muslims (19), Shinto (18), Hindus (9), Jews (5), and more Orthodox or Roman Catholic Christians (11). There were 7 people from 4 of the new (post 1945) religious movements and, in sum, 22 different faith or belief traditions were present. Of those who identified themselves, 37% were Unitarian, 24% were Buddhist, and 17% Christian (various denominations).

Based on analysis at the Oxford Secretariat, some clear patterns emerged to signal how people felt about different aspects of the programme. The Young Adult Programme, circle groups, entertainment

programme, and physical arrangements at the Congress all received high marks with over 75% of the sample. Religious/worship sessions, workshops, 6 topic lectures, and regional meetings were satisfying to 71–59% of the sample. Of course, the degree of satisfaction much depended on the session(s) which participants attended as various choices were offered. The international panel, for example, was particularly appreciated.

The most serious critiques arose with some aspects of the ceremonies, main lectures, some of the panel discussions, and the General Meeting. Speakers, format, time factors, and delivery (including translation and acoustics) were among factors cited as problematic. There was also a perceived need to reform IARF's communication and governance structures. Certainly, we have much to learn from this feedback as future Congresses are planned.

Although each Congress is intended to cover its costs, there has been a substantial deficit both after the 1999 and 2002 Congresses. We have tried to ensure that we had as full representation as possible from weaker economies, particularly including young adults, but this has necessitated a large amount of sponsorship. Costly air travel, less willingness and/or abil-



Morse Flores, from the Ibanag/Kalinga tribe in the Philippines, who played the Tungali (nose flute)

ity of older IARF members to travel, together with the cost of the registration fee and accommodation, are serious constraints. Certainly these factors present a major challenge to the new International Council when planning for the next Congress in 2006.



Koto players at the World cultural evening

RFYN (Religious Freedom Young Adult Network)

Background

Young adults have been working with IARF member groups for many years and have been involved in specific IARF projects. However, we wanted to increase the diversity of faith traditions and to develop a more cohesive and effective group.

About Us

We are creating a global network of young adults with the capacity and commitment to take actions that enhance religious freedom. By 2007, we aim to have 200 in the RFYN who will be active participants in this network. At present, we are working with an age range of 18-35 years.

Our Objectives

- To gain a deeper knowledge of religious freedom issues locally, nationally and globally.
- To become familiar with the concepts underlying article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and its application to IARF's Statement of Purpose.
- To learn through action by creating small and large scale projects that enable interfaith encounter to take place, especially in areas where religious intolerance threatens religious freedom.

Process

We will encourage young adults to get involved at the following levels: 1. Showing interest in the cause of freedom of religion and belief; 2. Taking a first step, such as attending an event; 3. Becoming more seriously engaged with the issues; and 4. Being regularly active. (We will also seek to identify IARF 'resource people' who may not currently be active, but on whom the RFYN could call for assistance.)

Projects

Potential projects could be of the following variety:



Chananel Rosen, Sawsan Tellawi and Rachel Benedict in front of the Holocaust memorial, Budapest

Small scale projects

Composed of multi-faith core teams (minimum of 3 to maximum of 10 in each team), which would plan and carry out activities.

Larger multi-faith projects

Examples of these would include the Gujarat project 2001/2, and an educational study tour in the Philippines (see *IARF World* 1/2002).

Religious freedom research

Having young adults help to identify and contribute to research on situations of religious intolerance within their own area.

The aim is to have each project supported by an advisor or mentor. Guidance and coordination will also come from the Young Adult Programme Coordinator (YAPC) and Regional Coordinators.

Assumptions

- Organising and sustaining this network will engender interfaith harmony and understanding and

a greater awareness of religious freedom issues.

- Young adults will learn from these projects (in an enjoyable, rewarding setting) and will be able to impart some of the knowledge gained.
- The presence of young adults who have gained leadership skills and knowledge about freedom of religion and belief issues will be beneficial to the upholding of religious freedom within society.

Funding

So far, our major projects have been funded by member organisations and one trust. We are, however, seeking funding from other sources. If anyone can assist in any way with fundraising ideas or donations, however small, please contact Ramola Sundram, ramola@iarf.net, at the IARF Secretariat. You can also contact your Regional Coordinator or Chapter.

For more information about the RFYN, look on our website or get in touch with any of the contacts above.

The Metamorphosis of the ‘Voluntary Code’

At the 31st World Congress, there was heated debate about the IARF’s initial work *Towards a Voluntary Code of Conduct for all Religious and Belief Communities*. (See article in *IARF World*, March 2002.) Participants’ opinions ranged from supportive to opposed. Although the idea of a *Voluntary Code of Conduct* was included in IARF’s Strategic Plan for 2001-2007, members had yet to be given a chance to become engaged with its development. Hence, the debate about the *Voluntary Code* at the World Congress provided some very necessary input.

Since the Congress, the Executive Committee of IARF’s International Council also met in England and, among other matters, further discussed this project. Based largely on the opinions expressed at the Congress, a two-pronged approach was recommended. Firstly, it was decided that a special IARF committee would be appointed to develop more detailed guidelines for IARF membership applications. Such internal guidelines are expected to evolve from the Policy on Religious Freedom adopted by the Council in March 1998. Secondly, work will continue on the development of a *Voluntary Code of Conduct* that is more broadly based and for audiences both inside and outside the IARF family. At the Congress, the word ‘code’ itself was problematic. Although intended to represent a ‘code of honour,’ some felt that the implication was of a ‘penal code.’ The new document is likely to be renamed (a ‘*Declaration of Responsibility*’ was one suggestion) and will be based initially on input from IARF members, followed by a diversity of other religious groups.

The following Q&A attempts to answer some of the questions about the *Voluntary Code* that came up during the Congress.

Why is IARF doing this work?

The Statement of Purpose for IARF calls for “An essential accountability by religious communities to ensure that their own practices uphold the fundamental dignity and human rights of their members and others.” Sadly, it has been the case that some religious groups in society do not adhere to these high standards. For example, there are instances – fortunately almost always the exception – where practices such as the abuse of minors, suicide, unethical financial dealings, denial of access to medical services, or incitement to violence are known to, or practised by, the religious group in question.

Such abuses have led to a ‘backlash’ by governments that has, in turn, allowed them the excuse to create restrictive legislation limiting religious freedom generally. Stemming this tide and fostering a dialogue about the rights and responsibilities of religions is a valuable role that IARF can play. Officials from the United Nations and various governmental and non-governmental institutions have been very interested in our work on this topic. They see this as an area where a respected voluntary organisation has the integrity to take on a controversial topic, and can try to be helpful to all parties. Ultimately, the purpose of the project is to make a contribution to the climate and attitudes towards religious freedom by demonstrating that religious and belief communities understand what constitute responsible limits.

Was the document at the Congress an agreed draft?

No, definitely not. A draft document was brought to the Congress so that those participating in the workshops *Towards a Voluntary Code of Conduct* would have some material to work with. This draft represented the initial thoughts of a small ad hoc drafting

committee that was brought together several months before the Congress. The committee itself was not unanimous about the best way to approach the task. Nevertheless, it did list topics for discussion, which included treatment of members, pressures related to membership, public presentation, and specific areas of conduct like financial dealings, religion in education, and medical practices. (A skeleton ‘contents only’ checklist was provided at the General Meeting.)

Thus, the draft was never meant to be a final version. Already there are many new ideas and still a great deal of work to undertake. The IARF International Council will only review a new version in March 2004, after much more input from IARF members around the world.

Does the ‘tone’ of the Code have to be negative?

One way of protecting freedom of religion is if only “a bottom line” is drawn to indicate which conduct has to be questioned. Hence, the first draft was written consistently in the negative. Nevertheless, many Congress participants felt that it was more important to look at the principles behind the injunctions and argued that more positive language would better motivate religious groups to be more self-disciplined. So, a document with more balance between positive and negative language, as well as more balance between Eastern and Western views, is likely to emerge in time.

Where do we go from here?

The IARF Secretariat encourages member organisations and chapters to hold discussion groups and forums on the concept of “an essential accountability” by religious and belief organisations, starting with themselves. We would like to get more input on the elements that IARF member organisations and chapters would like to see

Consultations in Switzerland and India

IARF has continued to support the UN Special Rapporteur's preventive strategy to use school education against intolerance. The role of educators was already illustrated in the booklet "Religious Education in Schools: Ideas and Experiences from around the World" which was prepared by IARF for the UN conference in Madrid in November 2001. Both before and after the Budapest Assembly in July 2002, two smaller consultations were held to put the global concerns into more specific contexts.

Muslim and Christian educators met in Geneva in June 2002. They



Contributors to the consultation on religious education, Geneva

came from multi-cultural societies and told, for example, how they taught about Islam in New York City after 11 September 2001, how they prepared Muslims to understand Christian neighbours in Nigeria or South Africa, or how inter-faith trust could grow in national and international schools in Switzerland. Taking up the theme "Religious principles and educational methods for Muslims and Christians to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief", they first reviewed scriptural and traditional bases for religious tolerance, and then shared experiences of different approaches to religious education.

They agreed on a series of principles for teaching religion in religious institutions, for teaching about religions, sometimes in state schools, and for learning values for life from religions. One should avoid value judgements about others' beliefs, show respect for freedom of belief in making critical enquiry, and promote responsibility for human rights. Teachers should open perspectives of religious pluralism, encourage visits, choose respectful textbooks, use role-play to empathise with others, promote teacher-training, not least for women, and use audio and visual

materials like inter-religious calendars to explore issues of freedom of religion.

A second consultation in Bangalore, India in October brought together educators, including IARF members, from India, Sri Lanka and Switzerland. They came from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Zoroastrian and Christian communities. Everyone was preoccupied by the communal violence that has affected India and by the civil war that has been tearing Sri Lanka apart. Participants addressed

the problems that prevent cultural heritages that once safeguarded tolerance from being learned and applied today.

Hindus urged that pluralism be safeguarded by taking values both from Hindu culture and modern secular/humanist principles. It was alarming that some new history text books were silent on Gandhi's assassination by a fanatic and that the Gujarat riots had stirred such violence. Concern was expressed by Muslims about education where they felt that their contributions were ignored or caricatured; a shared history and shared festivals need celebration rather than any inflammatory distortion.

Buddhists from Sri Lanka described the introduction of comparative study of religion to prevent abuses such as proselytism or separatism in the teaching of religion. The ethical contribution of religious teachings about tolerance were needed as Sri Lanka reconstructs after war. Skills of meditation could complement physical education for full human development. A Zoroastrian spoke for all in urging education which respects all expressions of Truth as a way of human transformation for freedom, peace and justice.

..from page 8

in any document which eventually emerges (whether a 'Voluntary Code' or a 'Declaration of Responsibility.')

The Oxford Secretariat has developed a discussion paper intended to assist IARF members in defining the concept, content, format and details of this document. Regional Coordinators, chapters and member organisations should have received a copy by email or post. If you would like a copy of this discussion paper, please contact your Regional Coordinator, or Ms Zarrin Caldwell at the Secretariat (tel: 44-1865-202-744 or at zarrin@iarf.net). **We encourage you to hold discussions on this important topic and to get feedback to your regional coordinators no later than 31 October 2003.**

In due course, religious and belief communities outside the IARF family will be invited to consider where they stand and to give input. The process of taking our ideas out to the wider society must, however, await further internal consultation and the initial guidance of the Council in March 2003.

In Memory

On August 1, 2002, on his 80th birthday, Rev Yukitaka Yamamoto passed on. He was the 96th Shinto High Priest (Guji) of Tsubaki Grand Shrine, an IARF member organisation. The late Guji Yamamoto was an IARF International Council Member from 1981 and served three terms as the treasurer from 1984 to 1993. He was elected as Vice-President in 1993 and became President of IARF in 1996.

His unconditional commitment to peace began in the battlefield in 1943. He prayed to survive from day to day and dreamed of an end to war as he was watching the Southern Cross in the sky above the dense jungle in New Guinea. He survived there for nearly two years. He then returned to Japan as one of 12 survivors from 2200 comrades and rebuilt his shrine.

Twenty-five years later, in 1968, Guji Yamamoto was warmly welcomed by his Unitarian and IARF friends to participate in the Unitarian

Universalist Association General Assembly at Cleveland, Ohio. He then attended the 20th IARF Congress held at Boston in 1969. This was his first debut to the international setting to realise his dream for world peace.

He soon committed himself deeply to the long tradition of IARF, building encounter, dialogue, tolerance, and cultivation of spirituality by associating with other religions. He saw IARF as a unique organisation in which people can communicate with others through true intentions and he strongly believed that, through opening our minds more, a wonderful trust between individuals was created.

Through participating in IARF activities, he was convinced that Shinto could be understood not only by Japanese people but also those outside Japan. Through introducing Shinto (not proselytising) internationally, he could participate in building peace in the world.

For almost 35 years, Guji Yukitaka Yamamoto adored IARF and sincerely



Guji Yukitaka Yamamoto

devoted himself to the organisation. His successor, the 97th Chief Priest, Guji Yukiyasu Yamamoto, is carrying on Guji Yukitaka Yamamoto's vision and his serious commitment to the IARF.

Canada

IARF does not have a strong presence outside of Unitarian circles in Canada, and there are currently many interfaith groups working in nearly every large city. One strategy for becoming better known and more effective, therefore, is to work with existing interfaith bodies. Members of IARF in Toronto have been working for some time with the Scarborough Mission, a Catholic missionary order that has an active Interfaith Desk. This group organises two major events each year. In the spring, there is a visit to a place of worship. Participants attend a religious service, share a meal, and a program on interfaith issues is presented. In the fall, an issue-based program takes place.

IARF was asked to work with

the Mission this fall in developing a program on religious freedom. On October 20, 64 people, representing a number of faith groups, met in the suburban mission centre. The meeting opened with a Hindu prayer. Following a welcome and introduction to the day, Ellen Campbell presented some background on IARF and on religious freedom, looking at some historic roots, such as the Edict of Torda in Transylvania, tolerance during the reign of Akbar, a Mogul emperor, (both during the 16th century), and the tolerance in Spain during the time of the Moors. She discussed the three requirements for religious freedom developed as part of the IARF strategic plan: freedom from government interference, tolerance, respect between religious groups, and respect for the human rights of their own

members by religious communities.

Father Damien MacPherson, a Franciscan priest, gave a challenging keynote address, in which he spoke of both the persecution of Catholics and the persecution which they themselves had practised. He brought the issue up to date with some information from the United Nations on present threats to religious freedom.

A period of personal reflection gave participants an opportunity to reflect on three questions: What does religious freedom mean to you? Have you – or other members of your faith group – experienced violations of your religious freedom, in Canada or elsewhere? Have you – or other members of your faith group – ever been accused of violating the religious freedom of other faith groups? After about ten minutes, there were refresh-

Open day for IARF members

Place:

Harris Manchester College, Oxford, England,
March 27, 2003 from 10am-4pm.

Purpose:

To consider IARF's work in the years ahead.

What should be our priorities?

How can we improve our organisation?

You will have the opportunity to give your opinions and ask questions.

Please notify the Secretariat or your Regional Coordinator by March 20 if you wish to attend.

Please note that participants will be responsible for covering all their own costs. We can assist with reserving accommodation if we are contacted in advance.

If you are not able to attend in person, we would appreciate your comments and/or questions. Please entitle them "Open day March 27" and send them by email or post to your Regional Coordinator or the IARF Secretariat by March 20 at the latest.

IALRW in Budapest

120 people from 11 faith traditions and 16 countries participated in the 2002 conference of the IALRW (International Association of Liberal Religious Women, an IARF member organisation). It was held in Hungary from 24-27 July. The theme of the conference was *Women's Role in the 21st Century: Action for Peace*. The conference was presided by Kayoko Yakota. Johanna Boeke who has contributed to IALRW for many years was chosen as the new President. Akiko Sekine and Azam Bayburdi were elected as Vice Presidents. Contact: Rev Joanna Boeke for further details about the conference and IALRW. Email: jopie@boeke.fsnet.co.uk, address: 16 St Mary's Gardens, Horsham, Sussex RH12 1PJ.



Kayoko Yakota and Jopie Boeke

..from page 10

ments and informal conversation, and then the participants moved into small groups for discussion of the questions. The discussions were thoughtful and often moving as people related personal experiences.

At the end of the afternoon, the group reassembled. Instead of a formal

reporting back, there was a "popcorn response." Asked "What was most meaningful or significant in this afternoon's program for you?" individuals responded briefly. There were many people who had things to share. The day closed with a Muslim chant. (A follow-up meeting will take place on 2 March 2003.)



Another opportunity for informal discussions

IARF Members on TV

On November 9th, Ellen Campbell (Vice-President of the IARF) and Kevin Virtue (Young Adult attendee at the 2002 Congress) were interviewed on a show called Horizons TV, sponsored by the Horizons Interfaith Council in Toronto, Canada. Ellen and Kevin talked about their experiences at the Congress, the Religious Freedom Young Adult Network, and the goals and focus of the IARF in general. The first airing of the interview was on November 24th on Rogers Cable in the Greater Toronto area. There will be three more viewing dates after January 26th 2003.

Middle East

UK

For the first time in two years, in October 2002, an Israeli organisation – the Interfaith Encounter Association (the IEA is a member group of IARF) – and a Palestinian organisation – the Nablus Youth Federation – held a joint conference in the Holy Land that was open to the general public. The conference entitled, “The Humanity of ‘the Other’”, took place at the Tantar Center in Jerusalem. Participants, both men and women, were from secular and religious backgrounds and included Jews, Christians and Muslims from across Israel and the Palestinian National Authority.

For many of the group, it was the first time to meet ‘the other’. It was a conscious decision to focus discussions solely on religious perspectives, especially when the range of political views was so wide. Especially moving were the Muslim Friday prayer and the Jewish prayer for the beginning of Shabbat. Muslims, Jews and Christians sat together witnessing,

learning and respecting each other’s prayers. Equally special was the session on Friday night in which songs were shared and taught from the different traditions.

During the concluding session a phone call was received from the Mayor of Nablus. He gave encouragement to the group saying that what they were doing was the paradigm of what needs to happen – that people will join forces and create mutual understanding and trust – something that the leaders appear unable to achieve.

Over the past year, the IEA has organised more than 30 programs, attracting over 800 participants. The most active section is the Women’s Interfaith Encounter. The IEA has recently been recognised by UNESCO and the UN for their work.

Further activities have taken place and for more information and reports from the IEA, visit www.interfaith-encounter.org or email msyuda@phys.huji.ac.il

The British Chapter has held meetings in two locations, Manchester and Croydon, to report on and share experiences from the IARF Congress. In Manchester, there were opening and closing devotions, reflections on the IALRW conference, detailed reports of the Congress events and a talk with slides about the post-Congress tours. In Croydon, there was a special ceremony to celebrate the life of Rev Yukitaka Yamamoto, IARF President from 1996-1999. Four participants from different faith and belief traditions gave their perspectives on the Congress and a progress report was given by Ramola Sundram on the RFYN (Religious Freedom Young Adult Network). Andrew Clark engaged the group in a back-to-basics look at the concept, possible content and format of what religious people can say about religious responsibility.

Rev Geoff Usher produced a full Congress report which is available from the IARF Secretariat.

Visit our website

Based on feedback from participants at the World Congress, we are redesigning the web site for better navigation. Check it to find local events on ‘Member Pages’, worldwide religious freedom information at ‘Global Issues’, and a review of IARF’s programme priorities under ‘About Us’.

Bookmark the site, tell your friends, and use it as a resource to get connected to the IARF network!

www.iarf.net



Japan

The Japan Liaison Committee (JLC) of the IARF has now carried out two study visits to learn more about the traditional customs and spiritual beliefs of the indigenous people of their country. In August 2001, the JLC visited the *Ainu* people, living on Hokkaido Island, in the north. In October 2002, seven members from Konko Church of Izu, Rissho Koseikai, Itto-en, and the IARF Japan Chapter went to Taketomi-jima. The island is situated at the south-west end of Okinawa Prefecture. The *Ainu* in Hokkaido are genetically closest to the *Ryukyu* people of Okinawa, although they live more than 3,000 kilometers apart (see *IARF World* October 2001).

Does Taketomi-jima have a special significance?

We chose the island as it appears to be one of the areas still retaining some of the indigenous religious traditions. For a thousand years the areas of Okinawa and Hokkaido were not managed by the Japanese central government. It is 2,000 kilometers away from Tokyo. The islanders were particularly influenced politically and culturally by the Chinese Dynasties. Now sightseers exceed the few hundred residents.

Can you tell us about some of the spiritual beliefs of the *Ryukyu* people of the island?

There are a lot of “sanctuaries” called *Utaki* around the island. They are primitive “sacred places” such as rocks, tree roots, hills, forests, caves, wells and so on. A priestess serves the deities at

the *Utaki*. Offerings of rice, salt, flowers and incense sticks are made. Every *Utaki* has its own legend derived from myths. Approximately 1,500 years ago, mainland Shinto was influenced by Buddhist temples and stupas as Shinto shrines were constructed. The older form of Shintoism, Proto-Shinto, enshrined a divine existence within rocks, trees, and mountains, but there were no statues or buildings in which to worship. The spiritual traditions of the *Ryukyu* resemble the Proto-Shinto tradition.

Are there particular spiritual leaders?

There are two different kinds of spiritual leaders in Okinawa - both of them are female, and they play an important part in the community. The *Yuta* is a Shaman and when people have spiritual questions in Okinawa, they visit the *Yuta's* house to seek guidance. The *Noro* are priestesses for the *Utaki* and come from a special family lineage. They are highly respected by the local people. (However, there is no full time salaried person to manage each *Utaki*.)

Why were the burial customs of special interest?

Generally, cremation is usual in Japan, but the style of burial in Okinawa is completely different from that of mainland Japan and has been greatly influenced by Confucianism. The emphasis is not so much on just the memory of the deceased person but symbolises the entire family. Each tomb is in fact a kind of mausoleum,

at least 5 square meters and the large ones are more than 25 square meters in size. The shape is unique and is called a “tortoiseshell tomb”. It is supposed to resemble a pregnant woman lying on her back with outstretched legs. Her big domed abdomen is metaphorically called “tortoiseshell”. The entrance to the tomb is closed with plaster. When someone in the family dies, they break the plaster open and bring the corpse into the mausoleum, close it again with plaster, and leave it for a few years (of course, the ceremony is held periodically). The family of the deceased gather in front of the entrance to offer prayers and food. After a certain period, they reopen the entrance to purify the corpse by cleaning the bones, putting them in a vase, and enshrining the vase in the position decided by the status of the deceased person within the family. This long funeral is ended by closing the entrance again with more plaster. The ceremony produces a sense of togetherness crossing over between the generations and the ancestors. In Okinawa, a “tomb” is the very “womb” to be born again to another world from the present world.

Is this traditional burial ceremony still common?

These unique mausoleums have faced two crises in modern times. The first was when many were destroyed during the Pacific War. The second crisis is now going on as traditional funerals are not being held. The mausoleums are disappearing and simple grave-stone tombs are increasing.

What customs are retained by Okinawan people living outside the area?

The largest number of people originating from Okinawa live in Taisho ward, Osaka City (where the Konko Church of Izu, an IARF member group is based.) They still have their traditional food, music and dance, but not their burial customs.



Mr Ohama (left) from Taketomi-jima with Rev Miyake



Some *Utaki*

Letter to Members from the IARF President and Vice-President

Dear Friends,

While we are optimistic that both our fundraising efforts and the support of the membership will enable us to continue to be a force for change on religious freedom in 2003, we need to apprise you of our current financial situation.

Regrettably, the year 2002 now shows a deficit of approximately £40,000, with the Congress being the major factor in this result. While the Congress was considered an “investment project,” and an integral part of the Strategic Plan, there was a much lower number of fully paying participants than was expected. Further, it was recognised by the International Council in its meeting of March 2002 that outside funding for a variety of religious freedom programmes would require time to be in place. Thus, the Council accepted that deficits within the agreed plan in the last analysis might have to be covered by drawing on our reserves in 2002 and 2003. Unfortunately, the developments on the stock markets have made this approach unfeasible.

IARF’s staff members are working hard to raise funds for programmes. These include global initiatives at the United Nations, con-

tinuing work on religious and human rights education, and building the young adult network. The adoption of the Strategic Plan 2001–2007 by the International Council in March 2001 has led to active plans engaging the IARF with a sharper focus on programmes related to religious freedom. (Please refer to our project list on page 19 of the March 2002 issue of *IARF World*). Ultimately, in addition to raising issues of education about rights to religious freedom, we are also seeking to identify communities suffering from a denial of their religious freedom and to develop practical programmes of support.

Regional offices are being asked to be more financially self-sufficient with income from members in their own region rather than from the International Secretariat. Safeguarding our ability to develop positive programmes to combat increasing religious intolerance in the world, is the key challenge. In sum, the International Council will have to face some difficult decisions at its next two meetings in March 2003 and 2004, which may well affect how, or to what degree, the Strategic Plan can be taken forward.

Both the UUA (Unitarian Universalists of America) and the RKK

(Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan) remain committed to a high level of support, but they expect the chapters and member organisations to recognise that IARF now requires increased contributions. We have already approached IARF Chapters and member organisations to increase their level of support.

We are now extending our appeal to individual readers of *IARF World*. If you can help:

- Please send a donation to your Regional Coordinator. (See the back of the newsletter for contact details). Cheques should be made payable to “International Association for Religious Freedom”. Your Regional Coordinator will issue you with a receipt, and inform us.
- Alternatively, credit card donations can be paid in any currency to the IARF Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) account in the UK. Please request a CAF donation form directly from the Secretariat.
- Finally, can you consider making a legacy in favour of the IARF to ensure its future? (See the article on page 15).

If you have any queries, please contact the Secretariat or your Regional Coordinator.

We are most grateful for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Eimert van Herwijnen &
Ellen Campbell
IARF President &
IARF Vice-President



Key Points from the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of IARF's International Council met in England in early November 2002. Major items for discussion included an analysis of IARF's World Congress held in Budapest and a review of the current financial situation of the organisation.

As a follow-up to the General Meeting held in Budapest, it was agreed to recommend to the full Council to establish a By-Laws Drafting Committee to undertake a major review of the current by-laws. The review should refer to the existing Constitution of IARF (Memorandum and Articles of Association) and to propose simple and clear

procedures to debate or endorse the recommendations of the International Council. In its meeting, the Executive Committee also proposed to amend slightly the *Statement of Purpose* of the organisation to reflect that IARF members in different regions or countries may elect to focus on any one of the statement's three prerequisites related to religious freedom, including mutual understanding between faith traditions. Much discussion ensued at the Executive Committee meeting about the organisation's proposed work on "*Towards a Voluntary Code of Conduct*" and the reactions to this work among participants at the World

Congress. (For more updates on the status of this initiative, see page 8).

The Executive Committee also consulted on the current financial situation of the organisation, including deficits from the Congress and the difficult financial climate which has weakened the organisation's reserves (see article on page 14). The International Secretariat will continue investigating ways to cut expenses and will give priority in the months ahead to both raising funds and bringing in committed contributions. The full International Council will meet in late March 2003 to consider these financial challenges and review the options.

Gifts and Legacies

"It won't bring the day any nearer", my father said when he suggested to me that I ought to visit a solicitor and write my Last Will and Testament. I was only 21 years old at the time, and he seems to have been right!



Most charities, and especially those related to religious affairs, depend for their future on the generosity of long term supporters who want to ensure the continuity after their death of a key institution which was important to them in life. The sum of money bequeathed is usually a percentage of the residue of their estate after their family has been provided for, rather than a fixed amount of money, so that it keeps pace with inflation when the will is implemented many years later.

Legacies can be ear-marked for special purposes, usually quite broad

like "youth work" or "work in X continent", "promoting religious freedom" or "interfaith work", according to the



donor's keen interests. Very large sums can be made into an endowment from which only the interest can be spent. The person leaving the will, or mak-

ing a large gift during their lifetime, needs to take simple legal advice which is appropriate to avoid taxes, and to ensure that his or her wishes are followed.

If you already have made a will, then it is a small amendment to add a clause that "X% of the residue should go to the IARF at 2, Market Street, Oxford, UK for its general (or any specific) purposes".

We shall increasingly depend on this kind of income, and do ask our supporters to consider including the IARF in their wills.



It was forty years ago that my father advised me, and I have altered my will twice since then. When alive, it is good to know that in years to come your will to help IARF will be appreciated by future generations.

Andrew Clark,
General Secretary

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