

WORLD

International Association for Religious Freedom



Reflecting on the IARF Strategic plan at the IARF International Council meeting (from left to right): Dr Alexei Krindatch, Russia; Dr Mohinder Singh, India; Rev Polly Guild, USA; Bhiksuni Chueh Men, Taiwan; Mrs Kathy Matsui, Japan. (Photo by Mrs Kayoko Yokota)

IARF STRATEGIC PLAN 2001-07: A SUMMARY FOR MEMBERS

By Andrew C Clark, IARF General Secretary

PART A

1. IARF Statement of Purpose

Context: Historically, the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) was founded in 1900 as an organisation to bring together people “striving to unite Pure Religion and Perfect Liberty”.

Today a wide range of religions and beliefs exist which have a positive and constructive contribution to make to human society. Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the freedom to hold, practise and respectfully bear witness to such religions or beliefs, whether inherited or chosen.

Purpose: The purpose of IARF is to work for freedom of religion and belief because it is a precious human right that potentially enables the best within our religious

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May 2001
ISSN 1028-2955

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Introduction: The process of creating this Strategic Plan began in January 2000 and that year “IARF World” readers both assisted with the questionnaire and read the results. The Executive Committee met in November 2000 and gave its broad guidance on the outline preparation of the plan. The plan was finally amended and adopted unanimously by the International Council at its meeting in March 2001.

This article is a summary of the main points and ideas. [A fuller text can be made available on request, and readers are also encouraged to send in their opinions and suggestions.](#) These will be summarised and given to the International Council.

Each reader, chapter, or member organisation is encouraged to assist in the fulfilment of this overall plan for the next six years.

Strategic Planning



Rev Yukiyasu Yamamoto, representative of Tsubaki Grand Shrine, Japan (right) expressing the Japanese interest in the important role of young adults in the IARF and Mr Yuji Inokuma (left), interpreter and assistant to Rev Yamamoto (Photo by Mrs Kayoko Yokota)

lives, or our search for truth or enlightenment, to flourish. It requires:

- Freedom from oppressive interference or discrimination by the state, government or society's institutions on the grounds of religion or belief;
- Mutual understanding, respect and the promotion of harmony, or at least "tolerance," between communities or individuals of different religions or beliefs; and
- An essential accountability by religious communities to ensure that their own practices uphold the fundamental dignity and human rights of their members and others.

Thus IARF works with and for:

- Groups from different religious traditions or beliefs (normally those which share its values), and
- Communities suffering from religious persecution or discrimination.

2. The values which underlie our organisation and affect its character

These are sometimes more helpfully expressed as compatible pairs.

- Truth-seeking and Self-criticism
- Openness and Liberality
- Mutual Respect and Tolerance
- Transparency and Accountability
- Diversity, Inclusiveness and Representation
- Voluntarism and Civil Society
- Cultural and Age Sensitivity

3. The plan is based on five propositions derived from an analysis of the current situation

The propositions which the Council accepted are given below:

3.1 IARF should develop its specific area of specialisation utilising existing organisations as sources of information and allies, and avoiding competition or duplication. We should achieve a reputation for specialising in a particular approach to religious freedom work.

3.2 IARF should develop programmes that are intrinsically about religious freedom, its preconditions, development and the consequences to communities of its denial. This will entail the replacement of the Social Service Network programmes with differently-focused practical work and initiatives.

3.3 From this, we propose that IARF should develop itself as a practical, programme-based international non-governmental organisation working on improving the situation of religious freedom in the world through a process of carefully designed programmes. Such programmes will be operated by and implemented through the IARF's International Secretariat, Regional Offices, national chapters and member organisations around the world.

3.4 There are six constituencies on which IARF's programmes should be focussed. Through these constituencies, which are not sufficiently included either in IARF's current work or that of other

organisations, IARF will therefore propose a substantial series of programmes that will enhance its overall objective in the world. They are: the IARF family, young adults, opinion-shapers and/or decision-makers, communities which are the victims of persecution and denial of religious freedom, other religious freedom (or human rights or religious) organisations, and small civil society organisations.

3.5 It therefore is vital for IARF's approach to extending religious freedom for it to increase the number of member organisations which are affiliated to it, and develop a wider use of associate member status to draw in sympathetic allies. This will particularly entail offering opportunities to those organisations' younger members to meet with their contemporaries.

4. Specific objectives for IARF from 2001 to 2007

The objectives noted below will subsequently be allocated to the short, medium or longer term timeframes for their commencement. The list that follows is not exhaustive, but paints the broad picture of some specific programmes for the whole plan period (which will be implemented at different stages). The plan itself includes engaging a person to research and keep the International Secretariat closely aware of the religious freedom issues around the world as they are reported.

4.1 To promote greater religious freedom in up to eight major areas of current persecution or discrimination in the world through constructive intervention including programmes. The issues need to be clearly identified for a given area and sharply focused on manageable specific objectives before being adopted.

- Discrimination against a few selected religious minorities or new religions, in particular European countries from Ireland to the Ural Mountains. Currently, this includes the emergence of tendentious legislation against so-called “cults” or “sects.”

- Treatment of established Christian and Muslim communities in the Indian Sub-continent in the context of India as a model of multi-religious coexistence.

- To understand, and work through, Muslim minorities to prepare an approach to the Islamic countries regarding religious freedom of non-Muslim minorities.

- To devise and implement a strategy for developing a dialogue with a government such as: with Iran concerning the Bahá’í and Zoroastrian religious communities, or S Korea concerning the Buddhists, or Egypt concerning the Coptic Christians, or the Philippines regarding the treatment of the indigenous peoples with regard to their religion.

- The development of preventive strategies for areas where there is latent religious tension between communities of faith.

- Treatment of all religious groups in an atheistic country such as Vietnam or China.

- A South American religious freedom issue (possibly linking indigenous peoples of the whole American continent).

- An African religious freedom issue (possibly in Northern Nigeria).

4.2 To develop and launch a Voluntary Code of Practice for religious groups towards their own members, and to discuss it with the major and traditional re-

ligious groups and New Religious Movements (NRMs).

4.3 To create an interlocking world network of 200 young adults concerned with maintaining standards of religious freedom, some of whom will assume leadership roles. This network will constantly be renewing its own membership and contributing to the leadership of IARF.

4.4 To assist victimised community groups suffering from religious oppression in 5-10 countries. The aim would be to create projects with those communities that both help practically and highlight the suffering which has arisen from violent or highly discriminatory acts of religious intolerance.

4.5 To be a resource for the international interest in Religious Freedom by providing:

- An effective dedicated website, inter-linked with other significant websites or IT resources on questions of religious freedom, possibly as a medium of interactive teaching or e-Learning.

- Educational resources such as literature or drama in local languages which disseminate information in an attractive form for their intended readers, perhaps neo-literates or young people.

- Provision of periodic events such as congresses or conferences dedicated to addressing specific problems that face practitioners, whether voluntary individuals or paid staff, in the field of implementing religious freedom programmes. For all such events, the follow-up support to participants will be very important.

5. Identification of organisational consequences

5.1 Activities: The starting point for the International Council is the Overall Statement of Purpose and the Specific Objectives for IARF (see above). This plan proposes the optimum feasible level of activities possible with IARF’s current and potential resources of all types.

5.2 Membership & Associate Membership: IARF needs eventually to increase its membership in both of its categories: individuals/chapters and member groups. This will probably only occur as a result of really effective programmes which arouse interest. Initially, especially young people whom we have noted are not “joiners” nowadays, may not want membership—and even less so if that involves a regular financial commitment!

(Continued)

IARF representatives at the United Nations in Geneva and New York Dr Gianfranco Rossi, Switzerland and Mrs Sue Nichols, USA (Photo by Mrs Kayoko Yokota)



Strategic Planning

The strategy which will require the most staff time and energy will be that of encouraging growth in the number of member groups; new ones will need to be visited and educated about IARF. The value of Member Groups is that they can disseminate IARF's message much more widely *amongst their own "ready-made network" of members.*

5.3 Governance and Constitution:

There may be some minor changes to be introduced at the 2001 International Council concerning the way in which the representatives from each of the major regions on the International Council are nominated and elected. There appears to be little reason for IARF as a largely self-perpetuating body of governing trustees, which includes its main stake holders, to change its governance in order to commence to implement this strategic plan. It would be wise to review this in the mid-term between Congresses, around 2004.

5.4 Staffing: To undertake a programme of the type envisaged in this plan there will need to be a substantial commitment to a basic staff complement of:

- 4.5-6.0 FTE (full-time equivalent) posts in the International Secretariat in Oxford, and
- 0.5-1.5 FTE in each region and at the United Nations. Each region will need a coordinator in order to develop the programme in the area.

To undertake new work in Africa and South America may require "an Americas Coordinator" for the continent, in which case s/he will need to have Spanish as well as English language skills, and similarly an "Africa Coordinator" with French or Swahili.

5.5 Funding and Fundraising: In Part C it is shown how the additional budget expenditure will grow from £96.5K in 2001 to £381.5K in 2006 and 2007.

The Executive Committee's policy decision in November was that IARF could plan on the basis of underwriting the new programme from its reserves for two years as necessary.

The budget forecasts are made for the different sectors to indicate how the fundraising will need to progress in order to support the programme as it grows. A full-time fundraiser will need to be employed from the outset as part of the International Secretariat.

6. The impact which implementation will have on the character of IARF and its work in the years ahead (2001-07)

- IARF will develop as a small, professionally organised voluntary organisation with a clear overall objective.
- Its natural allies and partners will tend to be religious bodies and human rights agencies which share our values, as well

as those who are suffering persecution or discrimination.

- Its programmes and projects will be very sharply defined and consciously avoid the tendency to conflate religious freedom with other noble global causes as a strategy for attracting participants.

- It will rely for its moral validity on the support of a network of chapters and member groups worldwide. Without "a community of origin and concern" there is a danger that "the professional staff" will become the heart rather than the hands of the organisation. The congresses, International Council and regional gatherings will also need to play the role of trusteeship of "The spirit of IARF."

- Its funding will have a new reliance on larger corporate donors, who have yet to become committed, and there will be pressures to tailor programme design to meet donors' objectives.

- In due course, IARF's profile should rise in the media, and sharpen its identity. Much depends on the extent to which we choose to work discreetly to achieve progress diplomatically, and on what issues we may surface and face controversy, such as with a Voluntary Code of Practice which engages with religious establishments.

After strengthening its organisational capacity, we would hope to see IARF's work making the five broad types of practical contribution as outlined in Part B Religious Freedom Programmes:

PART B

Membership:

It should be borne in mind that IARF has evolved with, and is maintaining, two complementary organisational bases. These are chapters and member



IARF General Secretary Andrew Clark (left) and Dr Mohinder Singh at the Council Meeting (Photo by Mrs Kayoko Yokota)

organisations. The chapters, branches and their individual members exist and carry IARF's name and identity as the sole purpose for all that they do.

The member organisations however constitute a reciprocal network: to varying degrees they have interests that coincide with those of IARF, and to that extent they contribute to its organisational identity, management and programmes. These two bases can give rise to problems of organisational cohesion.

a. The gradual growth of chapters and individual membership:

Objective: To reach a net growth in membership of the order of 5% pa from 2006 onwards.

Strategy: To engage the existing chapters and members in the Strategic Plan as it affects their area until the 2002 Congress and then to work hard on implementing the programmes so that the level of interest and enthusiasm is raised locally. This will lay the groundwork for subsequent initiatives of outreach beginning in the period January 2003 to December 2005. Our goal is to achieve a net increase in membership of 1-2% pa in 2003 and 2004, and 3% by the end of 2005.

b. Increasing the spread and number of member and associate member groups:

Objective: To increase the number of member or associate member groups by 100-150 from the current 86 to above 200 by the end of the Plan period (2007).

Religious Freedom Programmes

1. Practical Support for Affected Communities: The background to this work would be for regional coordinators and coordinating councils, chapters, member organisations or occasionally the International Secretariat to identify communities that have suffered from the denial of their religious freedom.

The aim would be to try to reach the community itself and those who have been victimised, rather than to focus on the

higher profile individuals who may have been forced to seek asylum abroad.

Practical support programmes should be designed to assist the local community for a period of a few weeks or months up to a maximum of three years. Thus, the design will focus on rehabilitation (replacing what was lost) rather than "development." It should address the immediate problems and not create long-term dependency. The victims of religious intolerance should be approached as a group from the outset.

Chapters or member groups should consider whether such programmes are relevant in areas to which they have access. The personal information that arises from direct contact with victims in their communities should be carefully handled to bring home to the public in various countries, and in support of our work at the United Nations, what is the human cost of the denial of religious freedom.

2. Non-formal Diplomacy to Reach and Communicate with Implicated Governments: IARF is represented at the United Nations and has access to the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, Professor Abdelfattah Amor. There are other opportunities too with issues such as those identified in Part A 4.1 above, where a non-formal diplomatic approach can complement the more usual human rights campaigning-advocacy style. The assumption is that decision-shapers will listen and respond to well designed presentations away from any publicity.

3. Young Adult Programmes: We have chosen Young Adults as a "priority group" and given ourselves a specific objective: "to create an interlocking world network of 200 young adults concerned with maintaining standards of religious freedom, some of whom will assume leadership roles" (in Part A 4.3).

4. Developing a Voluntary Code of Practice: The policy paper on Religious Freedom adopted by the International Council in March 1998 remains our working document with the Code of Practice that it contains. However, there is a

need for the demand for religious freedom to be accompanied by a widely owned Voluntary Code of Practice. The intention is to demonstrate an equally responsible recognition that, while personal belief is beyond regulation, the practice of one's religion or belief religion does impinge on other people who can become victims of malpractice.

The proposal is that IARF should consider a process for developing a Voluntary Code of Practice that meets the approval of human rights and religious establishments. No religious group can be made to endorse it, but hopefully the exercise of faith groups explaining why they disagree with it will either cause us to improve it, or cause others to ask more critical questions of them.

5. Preventive Strategies: On the assumption that some situations do lend themselves to prior analysis and action, IARF should develop "a preventive strategy locating programme work in vulnerable areas before acts of religious intolerance recur or occur." In India, for example, certain areas are known to be vulnerable to "clashes" on the basis of religion, sometimes at the time of a festival or when there is tension over a religiously-based dispute. Designing preventive work would be a real challenge for a local IARF branch. We expect this aspect of the plan to emerge after the 2002 Congress at the beginning of 2003 in the form of practical proposals as to what can be done for prevention.

Finally, we need to reflect on the major underlying assumptions that the successful implementation of these broad types of programme objectives will necessarily contribute positively to the increase in religious freedom that is IARF's ultimate goal.

PART C

Financial Implications: The different types of expenditure have been identified as follows.

1. *The International Secretariat.* The cost

(Continued)



Mr Gopal Ratnam (second from left) leading one of the discussion groups at the IARF Conference in India (Photo by the IARF Indian Chapter)

(Strategic Planning Continued)

of maintaining the basic administrative structure of the IARF. The Programme Administration, part of which would be co-ordinated and guided from the International Secretariat in Oxford, would also include the professional fundraiser's salary and costs.

2. *The Regional Administrative Structure*, although it is also used for the maintenance of the IARF's present structure world-wide, will become fully involved in engaging the membership in the work.

3. *Religious Freedom Programmes* become the central purpose for which IARF exists at the beginning of the 21st century.

Looking beyond the year 2003, the IARF would "settle" into an organisation spending very roughly a total of £575K in 2001 prices, of which £175K (30%) would be core International Secretariat costs. £185K (32%) would be Programme Administrative structure costs, £120K of which would be for the worldwide network of IARF, and £65K

Oxford-based. Finally, the direct Religious Freedom Programme expenditure would be of the order of £215K (38%). Thus, 70% would be programme-oriented and 30% for the maintenance of IARF.

Currently IARF has an overall income of approximately £200K per year, excluding existing fundraising as an item. Up to 80% comes from two principal sources, the Unitarian Universalist Association and Rissho Kosei-kai. By the end of the year 2003, it should be clear whether the proposed programmes are attracting outside grants and donations, and whether the membership is beginning to see benefits to which it will contribute more substantially.

In Conclusion: We have sufficient reserves to contemplate starting such programme initiatives. It is a matter of critical analysis, reflection and seeking guidance with spiritual discernment as to whether these proposals are the right ones. Once convinced, it is then a matter of courage and faith to commit IARF to this new course.

UN Conference on Religious Education

IARF is currently doing research on Religious Education in preparation for the UN's "International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination." This conference will be held in Spain in November 2001. We are trying to collect information on how different countries have implemented a Religious Education curriculum in public schools. If you have information on this topic, you can contact Zarrin T Caldwell, Issues and Research Coordinator, at Zarrin@iarf.net.

IARF Conference in India

The 10th National IARF conference took place in India from the 8 to 10 December 2000 at Tumkur, Karnataka. The conference theme was “Interfaith Cooperation Towards Strengthening Civil Society in India.” The renowned Shri Shri Dr Shivakumara Mahaswamiji blessed the occasion, lit the lamp and gave the opening address. A keynote speaker, Rev Dr Abraham, Director of the South Asia Theological Research Institute, Bangalore, spoke of the violation of human rights which are quite rampant in India, despite the fact that its constitution contained fundamental rights which were deeply influenced by the UN Declaration of Human Rights. He attributed this to structures like patriarchy, caste-hierarchy, religious authorities, faulty economic patterns, institutions and the state. Some of these structures used modern idiom but were basically feudal. To prevent human rights violations, people have to be made aware and victims have to be organised. Another keynote speaker, Justice VS Malimath, former Chief Justice, Karnataka and Kerala High Courts and former member of National Human Rights Commission, said that practices by one religious group should be carried out without causing

hindrance to others practising their religion. Shri Chikkanayappa, Past District Governor, Rotary International, stressed the need to be vigilant against violations by persons in positions of power.

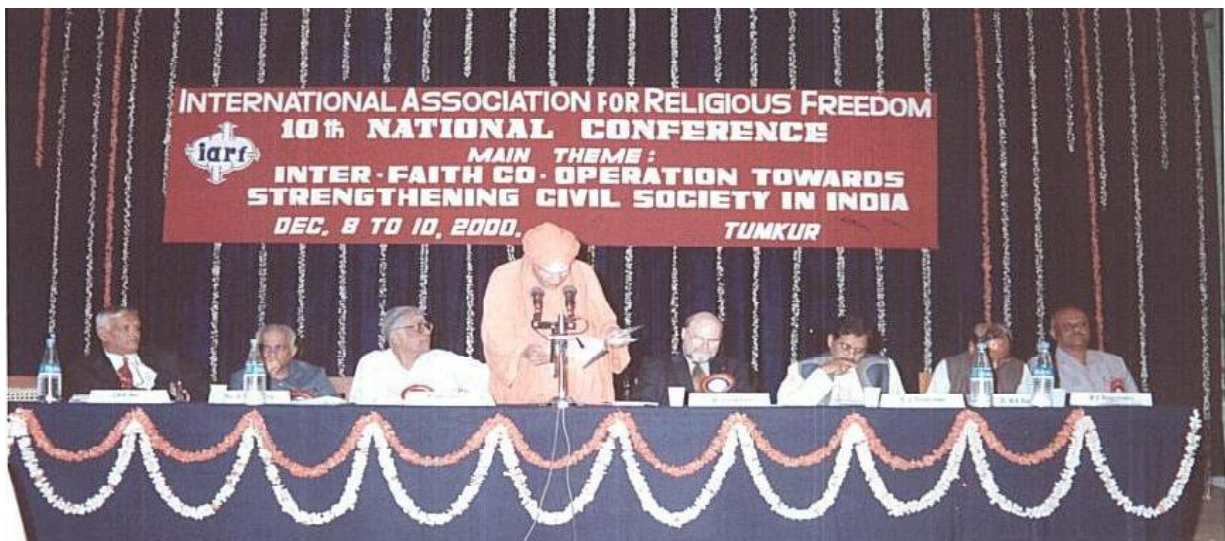
Shri Harish Jain, recently retired IARF Coordinator, highlighted the need to have an effective network of grassroot groups to achieve the objectives of IARF. This implies that the groups could initiate steps quickly to bring about awareness and solutions to relevant issues. He said that it was imperative that the branches and member groups also interact and network with local organisations with similar objectives to achieve greater impact. Ms Zehra, Mr Akram, Mr Paul and Mr Kannavalli, participants in the pre-Congress Young Adult Programme, spoke of their positive experiences and the Indian Chapter and branches were urged to conduct relevant programmes for young people.

The conference provided a forum for members of IARF branches and others to meet and network with each other, assimilate new ideas on IARF and plan for activities of IARF in the coming years.

Lively interactive sessions provided the opportunity for participants to dis-

cuss issues raised and focus on realistic action plans. Andrew Clark, IARF General Secretary, coordinated the session on the IARF Strategic Plan for 2001-2007. He led the delegates step by step through a particular programme designing exercise, focusing on the objectives, methodology, input for resources and planning, output, evaluations and assumptions. The delegates were then divided into groups and were asked to discuss and prepare a programme to be implemented by them keeping the local factors in consideration. Presentations were made of the programs and observations in turn were made by Andrew Clark. Delegates felt that the session was informative and provided new insights into programme planning.

It is hoped that the conference will help both the functioning of the branches of the Indian Chapter and contribute to the strength and stability of the Chapter. The determination of the Chapter Secretary, Mr CNN Raju, who mobilised the requisite resources both human and financial, was indicative of the hard work of all those involved. Sincere appreciation is due to everyone who contributed to the success of the conference. *(From Amity, IARF Indian Chapter Newsletter)*



(From left to right) Mr CNN Raju, Rev Dr K C Abraham, Mr M Subramaniam, Shri Dr Shivakumara Mahaswamiji, Andrew Clark, Dr C Parameshwara, Dr M A Khan, Mr M V Ramachandra (Photo by the IARF Indian Chapter)

WCF / IARF Conference in North America

By Rev Abhi Janamanchi, Unitarian Universalist Minister of Clearwater, Florida

An interfaith conference on the theme "Religions in Dialogue: Moving from Conflict to Trust" was held at the Unitarian Universalist Church in St Petersburg, Florida from 11 to 14 January 2001. It was sponsored by the World Congress of Faiths (WCF) and the IARF-US Chapter. The conference drew 75 participants from various faiths or beliefs including Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, Scientology, Brahma Kumaris, Theosophy, Hindu, and Protestant. The programme included keynote speeches, panel discussions, circle group discussions, and worship services on topics related to fostering interfaith dialogue and promoting religious harmony in a pluralistic society. Mr Jim Kenney, International Director, Council for a Parliament of World Religions, in his speech "Making a World of Difference: The International Inter-religious Connection," emphasised how religion and spirituality can be a more effective witness to the world's issues. He reiterated the need to replace fear and hatred about religions with understanding and respect by engaging with and learning more about our neighbours. Andrew Clark, IARF General Secretary, in his address "Spirituality & Logic" outlined a process by which spirituality and logic could go hand-in-hand in designing relevant programmes.

Dr KL Seshagiri Rao from the University of South Carolina spoke about the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. He said that both Gandhi and King saw non-violence as a way of life that upheld ideals such as freedom, justice, peace, and human dignity. He challenged participants to live in truth and continue the work of Gandhi and King. Dr Hal French also from the University of South Carolina in his speech, "A Place of Meeting Rivers," talked about the five principles of dialogue and how deeper dialogue could lead to transformation and service. There were two panel discussions on interfaith dialogue in which the panellists spoke about their life experiences and how engaging with people from other faiths and cultures had enriched their lives and deepened their com-

mitment to the common good.

The conference also hosted workshops on Hinduism, Theosophy, Scientology, and Humanism, which were well attended.

An important outcome of the conference has been the formation of a Florida Branch of the IARF. The Branch has as its members individuals from seven different religious and spiritual groups and is in the process of electing its officers and creating a mission statement that promotes the principles and purposes of the IARF.

Rev Dr Kristen Harper, Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society of the Daytona Beach area, Florida, leading an interfaith celebration (Photo by Richard Boeke)



International Interfaith Network

By Ramola Sundram

An important meeting of international interfaith organisations took place at Harris Manchester College, Oxford from 18 to 20 March 2001. The participating organisations were the:

Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions
Interfaith Youth Core
International Association for Religious Freedom
International Interfaith Centre
Millenium Summit for Religious and Spiritual Leaders
Minorities of Europe
Peace Council
Temple of Understanding
United Nations Spiritual Forum for World Peace Initiative
United Religions Initiative
World Conference on Religion and Peace

World Congress of Faiths
World Faiths Development Dialogue
World Fellowship of Inter-religious Councils

Other organisations who played a facilitating role were: Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World, Inter Faith Network of the UK, Soul for Europe, and World Interfaith Congress.

The sessions were extremely constructive and there were several tangible outcomes including the creation of an International Interfaith Network, which will facilitate better communication and collaboration. For more information contact the International Interfaith Centre at 2 Market Street, Oxford OX1 3EF or at e-mail address itc@interfaith-center.org.

New Format for the 2002 Budapest Congress

The concept of a Congress starting on three sites, travelling on the third day, and convening into a plenary session in Budapest, Hungary has been reconsidered for practical reasons. A five-day Congress in Budapest followed by tours to Koloszvar and Prague organised by the local committees is now being arranged and will provide an enjoyable experience which requires less travelling for all the

participants. The dates of the Congress have been brought forward by one day and it will now start on Sunday 28 July and continue until Friday 2 August 2002. The lovely building housing the School of Economics on the banks of the River Danube has been chosen as the venue.

There will be a Congress Book and Public Lecture: "Religious Freedom: Europe's Story" by Dr Karel Blei, for-

merly the General Secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church and an author on religious matters in Europe. The aim is to tell the story in an interesting way that will help participants to understand this continent. This is the theme of the Congress which will be related to today's world. There will also be a Young Adult Programme from 26 to 28 July 2002.

Full details of the Congress and Young Adult Programme and how to register will be in the forthcoming issue of IARF World to appear in September 2001.

IARF European Conference

The IARF European Conference will be held at Bad Boll, Germany from 26 to 28 July 2001. The theme is: "Human Rights in Europe: Is the European Union Charter of Human Rights Safeguarding Religious Freedom?"

The keynote speaker is Prof De Waart of Amsterdam University. Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler will focus on the European Parliament and there will be three speakers from Central and Eastern European countries: Hungary, Czech Republic, and Poland. Interactive workshops will enable further discussions and practical work to be carried out. Further

information is being sent to European IARF members and groups. Details can also be found at www.ev-akademie-boll.de. Contact Ilona Szent-Ivanyi Orbok, IARF Europe and Middle East Coordinator at e-mail address oszilon@freemail.hu.

The European Liberal Protestant Network will be holding their conference on "Non-Dogmatic Christianity" immediately preceding the IARF Conference in the afternoon of the 26 July.

Details will be sent to the group. Contact David Steers at e-mail address 0003979S@student.gla.ac.uk.

UK Conference

From 5-7 August 2001, a conference entitled "The Future of Multi-Faith Britain" will be held at the University of Leicester, England. It is co-sponsored by the British Chapter of the IARF, World Congress of Faiths (WCF), and the Leicester Interfaith Council. For details, contact The World Congress of Faiths at 2 Market St., Oxford OX1 3EF or Richard Boeke at e-mail address r.boeke@virgin.net.



View of Budapest from the Castle (Photo by Ramola Sundram)

A Global Review of the Denial of Religious Freedom

By Zarrin T Caldwell

Although freedom of religion is guaranteed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, Professor Abdelfattah Amor, recently noted that “the situation with regard to intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief is alarming.” This article reviews what the absence of religious freedom actually entails in selected countries. Where relevant, we have also added notes about IARF’s involvement.

Most of the information below was synthesised from a range of materials available over the worldwide web. Owing to space limitations, we have left out some high-profile cases like the persecution of Christians in Sudan and the Falun Gong in China. We are sure there are many other cases about which we do not know. Hence, we are happy to hear from our members so we can keep our knowledge up-to-date!

Central Asia: Afghanistan. An international outcry erupted in early March 2001 over the Taliban’s destruction of two Buddhist statues in the Hindu Kush mountains in Afghanistan. Known as one of the area’s renowned archaeological treasures, the statues were created in the third and fifth centuries and their destruction was denounced by the United Nations and governments around the world, including Muslim states. Press reports from India quote former Foreign Secretary S K Singh, once India’s Ambassador to Afghanistan, as noting, “It is out of sheer desperation that the Taliban have destroyed these artifacts. Basically, they are angry about the UN sanctions imposed on them in January and about their failure to get recognition from the international community. It is a shameful act of barbarism and the loss it has caused is irreparable.”

Professor Kaleem Bahadur from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi added, “Breaking idols is not Islam. ... Jews lived in the Islamic state in Prophet Mohammed’s time. They had religious freedom. Islam tells you to re-

spect other religions and the feelings of their followers. And where Muslims are in a majority, it is their duty to protect the minorities and their religious places.” Bahadur went on to note that the Taliban’s actions are likely to hurt the image of Islam and may make life more difficult for Muslim minorities in other countries.

For their part, the Taliban claim that the statues are idols and such depictions are forbidden in Islam. Central Asian experts add that the Taliban may be using the demolition of the statues as means to unite a multi-ethnic Afghanistan in the name of religion. The *BBC* describes the Taliban as comprised of Afghans trained in religious schools in Pakistan along with former Islamic fighters, the Mujahedin, whose goal is to create a pure Islamic state based on Islamic law.

The issue of the destruction of the statues was discussed at the IARF International Council meeting. Our UN representative in Geneva, Gianfranco Rossi, has since raised this matter in an intervention on the subject of religious intolerance at the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in March 2001.

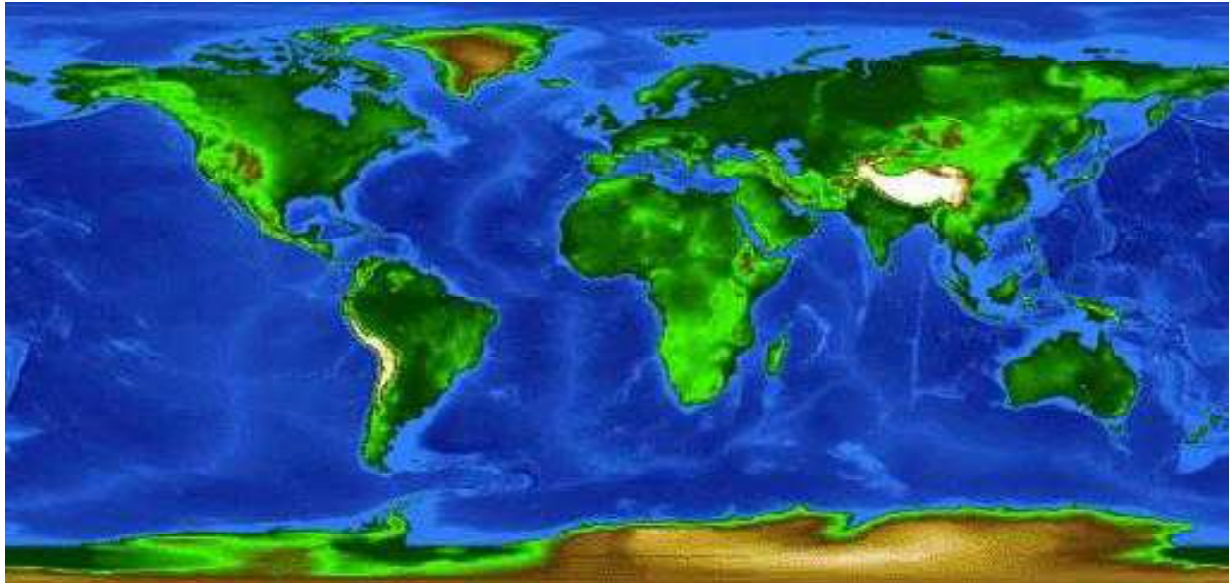
South Asia: India. India is in the remarkable situation of being the home (indeed birthplace) of so many religions, all of which are protected by the Constitution. Nevertheless, current problems of religious intolerance are a cause of continuing concern. Hindu nationalists are perpetuating violence against Christians, Muslims, and groups such as the Dalits, members of the oppressed (formerly “untouchable”) castes. According to *Worldwide Newsroom*, India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is under pressure from its ideological wing, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak San (RSS) to construct a temple at the disputed site of Ayodha, where Hindu nationalists destroyed a centuries-old mosque in the early 1990’s. At the time, the incident led to violence around the country in which scores of people were killed. Tensions are also rising over a shrine claimed by Hindus and Muslims in the state of Karnataka.

It is alleged that Hindu nationalists want to build temples at 900 of India’s historical monuments most of which are Islamic cultural sites.

While Muslim communities are normally safe and respected, there have been occasional violent communal clashes over the past 50 years, sometimes reciprocal, involving these communities and a small minority of hard core Hindu groups. Today, such Hindu nationalists are increasingly focusing on the Christian community. A 1999 report from *Human Rights Watch* chronicles persecution against this community over the past several years. Attacks have ranged from the killing of priests and raping of nuns, to the physical destruction of churches, and forced conversion of Christians to Hinduism. Possible underlying motivations for these attacks include both a response to what is seen as proselytism by some Christians and an effort to rally the tribal population for political ends. There is dispute in any given circumstance over whether such attacks are random, or part of an organised campaign.

In a more hopeful vein, the *Hindustan Times* reported in January that people donating and receiving blood following the devastating earthquake in India had cut across the communal divides between Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. They cited a case of over 100 Muslim youths who had saved the lives of nearly 100 Hindu quake victims by donating blood. Dr Mumtaz Ali Khan, a Muslim member of IARF’s International Council, has given testimony before the US Commission on International Religious Freedom in Washington.

Far East: Vietnam. According to press reports, both Buddhist and Christian leaders continue to face arbitrary detention and arrest in Vietnam. Although such practices have been in existence since the victory of the Communist Party in the mid-70s, the issue has recently achieved more prominence with a US congressional hearing on the topic held in February and sponsored by the *US*



Map created using data of the NOAA Geophysical Data Center (USA)

Commission on International Religious Freedom. Witnesses at the hearing chronicled persecution against Buddhists, Catholics and Protestants in Vietnam.

Although Communist authorities have characterised the hearing testimony as “baseless and fabricated,” human rights advocates have called for the imposition of US trade sanctions against Vietnam over this matter.

Recent developments include the detention of Father Van Ly, a Catholic priest; the detention of Thich Quang Do, a leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam; and the arrest of Le Quang Liem, a Hoa Hao Buddhist sect leader. Late last year, police apparently used force to dispel 3000 of the Hoa Hao Buddhists taking part in a public ceremony. Communist authorities have also reportedly outlawed Protestant churches that have won large followings among the region’s indigenous minorities in recent years. Professor Amor from the UN visited Vietnam in 1998, but was not permitted to meet with many key religious representatives.

The Communist Party newspaper claims, “We have many times clearly stated that there is nobody arrested in Vietnam because of religion or their beliefs. The fact that some Buddhists and followers of other religions have been

detained is because they committed offences against Vietnamese law and should be dealt with under the law.”

Despite this “official” position, religious leaders in Vietnam have cited a new wave of oppression in the country and have jointly announced an alliance, the Vietnam Interfaith Council, to promote religious freedom. Some hold the view that the government is restocking its holdings of political and religious prisoners to use as bargaining chips for the upcoming debate on the ratification of the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement.

The Cao Dai, another religious group based in Tay Ninh which also suffers persecution in Vietnam, approached IARF for membership through their US office, the Cao Dai Overseas Mission. They have since been accepted as associate members by the Council.

Europe: France. Religious freedom advocates are closely watching developments in France related to legislation introduced last summer to curtail the activities of “sects or cults” in that country. Known as the About-Picard bill, the legislation seeks to modify existing laws and was adopted by the French National Assembly last June as a means to restrict “groups of a sectarian nature.” According to *Le Monde*, the private bill was

designed to target those religious groups found guilty of criminal offences and which are either regarded as “detrimental to the public order,” or “dangerous for the integrity of the human personality.”

While generally supporting the intent of the legislation, religious representatives from across the spectrum have also criticised the French proposals for, among other things, targeting about 170 religious organisations, including those considered more mainstream. Of special concern was the creation of an offence of “mental manipulation” which many religious groups felt opened the door to excessive interpretation.

Based on the reservations expressed by a range of religious representatives, the Minister of Justice, and various human rights groups, the French Senate apparently made some language changes to the draft law. However, the legislation is still considered quite restrictive. Joseph Grieboski, president of the *Institute on Religion and Foreign Policy* in Washington, DC., has expressed concern over the French proposal believing that it synthesises “an almost militant anti-religiosity spreading throughout Western Europe that is influencing the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Eu-

(Continued)

(Global Review Continued)

rope.” He added that these emerging democracies do not have the kind of legal protections that countries like France do and, hence, overly broad laws could lead to more human rights violations. As of press time, the French Senate had voted in favour of the anti-cult law, but it was awaiting further action in the House.

IARF’s General Secretary has been approached by one of the affected groups. He asked them to consider whether any alternative legislation could be proposed which would meet the reasonable concerns of the State to protect its citizens. Certainly, IARF’s intent to develop a Voluntary Code of Practice may help to better define responsible religious practice.

Europe: Georgia. Following various attacks against Jehovah’s Witnesses, such as property destruction and burning of literature, the Georgian Parliament adopted a resolution on 30 March condemning religious violence. *The Keston Institute* reports, however that, on the same day, “the parliament adopted a constitutional amendment giving the Orthodox Church a special role in society,” a move which has aroused concern from other religious groups. The amendment regulates relations between the Church and State across a number of areas, but those from minority faiths are concerned that the amendment does not clearly specify the position of other religious bodies. Disinclined to support any constitutional agreements with other faiths, a statement from the Orthodox Church noted that, as the traditional faith of the Georgian people, the Church had “the right to be regarded above other faiths.” Regrettably, mobs of Orthodox extremists have been accused of recent violent attacks against peaceful religious gatherings of other faiths.

In several of the Newly Independent States, and certainly in Russia, religious organisations outside of traditional ones (such as Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism and Islam) have often had to go through a difficult registration process. Those concerned with religious freedom issues certainly kept a close eye on Russia’s passage of a law on religion in 1997 which

was effectively designed to limit the activities of foreign religious organisations. The direction that President Putin will take policies on this subject still remains somewhat unclear.

Africa: Nigeria and Ivory Coast. Following the burning of churches and other forms of harassment in Northern Nigeria, dozens of Christian families have started to flee to the neighbouring country of Cameroon. While various state governors in Northern Nigeria have begun to adopt the Islamic legal system of Sharia, they also claim that this law is for Muslims only and that Christians will not be affected. Nonetheless, Christian news reports have indicated that this is not the case and they cite the recent migration of Christian families to demonstrate the negative impact of the implementation of Sharia law on those who are not Muslim. Following the implementation of Sharia law in several states in Northern Nigeria last year, Muslim extremists have burned several church properties. The *BBC* also reports that there was terrible bloodshed last year when at least 2000 people died in fighting between Christians and Muslims. This occurred in a neighbouring state of Kaduna that has a much larger Christian population.

Similar unrest has been taking place in Côte d’Ivoire. Christians and ethnic southern Ivoirians were singled out for attacks in a riot in the capital of Abidjan late last year. The fighting began when thousands of supporters of an ethnic northern Muslim-based political party protested a court decision to ban their Muslim leader from standing in parliamentary elections. Press reports indicate that, across the north of the country, police officers and soldiers have been shot and wounded, churches have been burnt down and Christians and southerners have been threatened and their homes, vandalised. There is fear that such violence may lead to a northern Muslim versus southern Christian civil war.

IARF presently has very few member organisations in Nigeria. However, as part of our Strategic Plan, we intend gradually to build up contacts and programmes in Africa after the next Congress.

Book Review: Freedom of Religion Under the European Convention on Human Rights

*By Carolyn Evans
Oxford University Press, 2001
£40 (Hardback)*

This book focuses on freedom of religion as defined by the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and proceeds to examine the case law that has developed around this topic. In sum, the author argues that the bodies responsible for protecting freedom of religion or belief under the Convention have often failed to recognise the importance of these rights to individuals. She claims that the European Court and the Commission of Human Rights have applied laws relating to freedom of religion on an inconsistent basis, have often based their reasoning on vague tests, or have used unclear definitions.

This text is based on sound historical research and successfully lays out some of the very complex issues surrounding freedom of religion or belief in the European context. For example, it reviews case law dealing with such controversial areas as religious education, proselytism, and various legal restrictions on certain religious practices. As such, the book is an excellent reference for those doing work in the field. It is not, however, an easy read and those who are not lawyers may be daunted by the “legalese.”

Religious Freedom on the Web

By Zarrin T Caldwell

As part of the strategic planning process underway at the IARF Secretariat in Oxford, we have taken the time to review web sites that focus primarily on religious freedom issues. Dozens of web sites dealing with this subject now exist. While IARF does not necessarily endorse any of the following sites, nor take positions on their diverse content, we did find some especially useful sites that we thought were worth referring to our membership. Please note that the list below does NOT include sites dealing with human rights in general, or with most interfaith initiatives. We have also excluded several US-based sites dealing with religious liberty concerns.

UN and General:

The UN web site for freedom of religion can be found via the office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/hrissues.htm>. From this page go to “Religious Intolerance.”

The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief monitors these issues on a worldwide basis. Their very thorough web site at <http://www.hri.ca/partners/forob> includes reports from the UN and relevant documents. Clicking on “Country Analysis” will take you to maps of the world from where you can find the text of different countries’ constitutions on this topic.

One of the most popular sites is at <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>, a site maintained by the *Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance*. It has good background information on different religions, as well as links to very extensive papers, essays, and bibliographies on the subject of religious tolerance.

A Brussels-based site called *Human Rights without Frontiers* has produced country by country reports since 1997 on freedom of conscience and religion. This can be accessed via <http://www.hrwf.net>.

Amnesty International has only recently launched an Interfaith Network for Human Rights. The developing site is at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/interfaith/index.html>.

News:

The *Interfaith Newswire* has access to press releases and links to religious web sites across the globe. It is at: <http://www.humanitarian.net/interfaith/>.

Religion News Service at <http://www.religionnews.com/> contains news about religion, ethics, spirituality and moral issues.

A subscription based service, <http://www.newsroom-online.com>, or *Worldwide Newsroom*, purports to widen the scope of news coverage to include questions of ethics and religion.

Worldwide Faith News has a database of news releases and policy statements from world faith groups. They are at: <http://www.wfn.org/index.html>.

The International Coalition for Religious Freedom which can be found at <http://www.religiousfreedom.com> and affiliated with the Unification Church has a helpful link (“News”) to the top international stories on religious freedom.

US Perspectives:

The US State Department offers some of the most thorough reports on country violations of religious freedom. Click on http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/.

The US Commission on Religious Freedom at <http://www.uscirf.gov> is an independent monitoring body whose website has extensive congressional testimony.

The Centre for Religious Freedom at *Freedom House* has a national campaign to defend persecuted Christians and a report entitled “Religious Freedom in the

World.” They can be found at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion>.

Subject Specific Sites:

A website titled “Christians in Crisis” chronicles persecutions against Christians and can be found at: <http://www.members.aol.com/biblprof/crisis.htm>.

A site at <http://www.hrchina.org/topics/religion.html> has links to articles and papers specifically related to religious persecution in China.

The Keston Institute at <http://www.keston.org> monitors freedom of religion and researches religious affairs in communist and post communist countries.

IARF Favorites:

Global ethics was a particular area of interest for our organisation in the 1990s. A site based in Germany, at <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/stiftung-weltethos/>, focuses on inter-religious research, education, and encounter.

IARF shares office space, and cooperates closely with, two other organisations in Oxford—the *International Interfaith Centre* and the *World Congress of Faiths*. These are at: <http://www.interfaith-center.org> and www.worldfaiths.org.

Just for inspiration, a site called <http://www.worldprayers.org/> has prayers from various faith traditions, including a prayer archive.

And last but not least is IARF’s web site at: <http://iarf-religiousfreedom.net>. At present you can find some good history of IARF on the site in addition to information on programs and the IARF Congress.

Watch this space as we hope to make big improvements to the site in the months ahead!

Issues and Research Coordinator

The IARF International Secretariat at Oxford welcomes Zarrin T Caldwell to the part-time post of Issues and Research Coordinator. Zarrin has been with IARF on both a volunteer and contract basis since February 2001.

Zarrin spent the past several years working as Assistant Director of Research at the Washington, DC office of the United Nations Association where she followed US Government policy on the UN and other international organisations. Prior to this post, she worked as an Account Executive at a PR agency in Washington. Between these positions and a range of overseas travels, she has done freelance work on several international seminars and conferences.

Zarrin has a Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication and a Master's Degree in Public and International Affairs. Recently married, Zarrin and her husband Mitch moved to England last summer due to his job transfer from the United States. At IARF, she will be monitoring religious freedom issues and



Zarrin T Caldwell (Photo by Ramola Sundram)

researching selected topics at the behest of the General Secretary. She herself is a member of the Bahá'í Faith and besides Bahá'í activities, does volunteer work with women's organisations and occasionally dabbles in creative writing as a hobby. Originally raised in Alaska, Zarrin is enjoying exploring the UK and Europe with her husband.

IARF Publications: Centennial Reflections

A book containing personal recollections of IARF over the last hundred years is now available. Copies are available from the IARF Secretariat at a cost of £10.00 plus £2.50 postage and packing.

Contact your Regional Coordinator or Chapter for the cost in your area and distribution points around the globe. The book will also be sold at the IARF Congress.

New IARF Member Groups:

Advayavada Buddhism Information Centre, The Netherlands: It is a small Dutch group of 50 members founded in 1995, acting as a discussion forum and information centre promoting a mainstream understanding of Buddhist traditions.

Kosciol Unitarianski, Poland: The first Unitarian Church was founded in Poland in 1565. This united Unitarian church re-emerged from the traumas of the 20th century in 1996 and pursues the main Unitarian beliefs.

Religious Information and Educational Centre, Hungary: It was recently founded by a small group of people from a wide range of faith traditions. It focuses its work on UN Article 18 and its implications for the recognition of religious groups in Hungary. It also works for harmony and cooperation across the different faith traditions.

Associate Member Groups:

Cao Dai, Vietnam (through their Overseas Missionary): This group in exile in the USA represents the Cao Dai religious group based in Tay Ninh, Vietnam and was founded on the basis of a spiritist approach in 1926. They currently have about two million members and are one of the persecuted major new religions in Vietnam.

Interfaith Fellowship for Peace and Progress, India: The IFPP was founded very recently in S India and has 243 members. It is connected to the Indian YMCA and has a very clear objective of interfaith dialogue and harmony across all the faiths.



Rev Ilona Szent-Iványi Orbók (Photo by Mrs Kayoko Yokota)

Europe and Middle East Coordinator

Rev Ilona Szent-Ivanyi Orbok is the new IARF Europe and Middle East Coordinator. She joined the IARF staff on the 1 April 2001.

Prior to her new appointment she worked for the Unitarian Church in Hungary for 20 years. Ilona had part of her training at Manchester College Oxford, UK, and the Meadville/Lombard Theo-

logical School Chicago, USA. She was ordained as a Unitarian minister in 1980. She has held many different positions in the Church. These have included Religious Education minister, responsibilities for youth activities, publications officer and senior minister of the largest Unitarian congregation. Between 1994-2001 she was the deputy bishop, running the Headquarters of the Church. She represented her church several times at different IARF, international Unitarian, or other ecumenical events.

She is not new to IARF, as she has actively participated in all IARF Congresses since 1981. She was also an IARF International Council member for the term 1993-1996.

Ilona married Attila Orbok in 1984. They have two children, Ilonka, born in 1986, and Csaba, Alessandro, born in 1995.

Ilona is also known for her good connections in the ecumenical and interfaith world. She is the Chairperson of the Board of the Hungarian Interchurch Aid, and a Board Member of the Hungarian Council of Christians and Jews.

The IARF Europe and Middle East office is based in Budapest. Office details are forthcoming.



D Kantharajan (Photo by IARF South Asia Coordinating Council)

South Asia Coordinator

We welcome Mr D Kantharajan who became Coordinator of the South Asia Coordinating Council on 1 May 2001. He is a graduate in Arts from St. Joseph's College, Bangalore and is a linguist. Mr Kantharajan is married with three grown-up daughters. He has been involved in many social, religious and cultural activities since his teens. He was trained as a National Field Coordinator of an international US-based organisation in preparing project proposals and contacting potential donors. As an ex-serviceman himself, he was a member of the Organising Committee in the Indian Army and the Churches and conducted various religious seminars, meetings and conferences. Just before joining the South Asia Coordinating Council (SACC) as a Coordinator, he worked as a National Field Coordinator at Habitat for Humanity, India which is mainly confined to transforming shelters into decent homes.

News of Former IARF General Secretaries

Rev Diether Gehrman (1972-1990) visited our Oxford office on 18 January together with his wife Dorle and the staff members at the Secretariat were delighted to welcome them. During their visit to England they also went to see the IARF's archives which are now located at Southampton University waiting to be screened and categorised. Rev Gehrman was accorded the honorary status of General Secretary Emeritus by the General Assembly at the IARF Congress, Hamburg, Germany in 1990.

Rev Dr Robert Traer (1990-2000) is currently staying in Oxford and the International Council members were so pleased to have the opportunity of meeting with him and his wife Nancy for dinner on the last day of their meetings.

Prof Dr Heije Faber (1933-1970) At the commencement of our International Council meeting we heard with sadness of the death of Prof Dr Heije Faber on 16 March 2001. We gave thanks for his life, and particularly for the distinguished service that he gave our organisation.

The International Religious Fellowship, an IARF member group, is holding their conference in the Jura, Switzerland on the theme of "Conflicts" from 21-28 July 2001. The second week, 28 July-4 August will include a cycle tour. For more details contact Christina Niederer, email stini@web.de.

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IARF WORLD

The IARF World is published twice a year by the International Association for Religious Freedom. Please send all communication to the International Secretariat.

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Registered in England and Wales, No. 2758658
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Bank: National Westminster Bank, Oxford High Street, Acc. No. 86069853