



british chapter of the  
international association for

# religious freedom

belief with integrity

**Newsletter**

**December 2010**

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## CHAIRMAN'S GREETINGS

Blessings to you for Christmas and 2011

*Richard Boeke*

Please contact me, or contact Feargus O'Connor if you have questions about coming events. Please renew your membership as a Christmas Gift to the IARF. WE NEED YOU.

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## GEOFF USHER

You will remember that Geoff retired as our Treasurer at the 2010 AGM and was replaced by **Jeff Teagle**. In his pre-Christmas letter of 10 October 2010 Geoff reported his retirement from Upper Chapel, Sheffield, after exactly 19 very happy years. By the time that you read this he, Ann and Andrew will be established, hopefully in good order, at 3 Hughes Street, Potts Point, NSW 2011, Australia, back home again. We are assured of a warm welcome, if any of us being in Sydney calls in, but please try not all to arrive at the same time. Geoff became our Treasurer following the faithful service of Annette Percy who was our Treasurer longer than I can remember. Most of us will remember Geoff more as chairman before he changed roles. He was always thorough, organised (with a fat file of everything that had come in since the previous meeting). He had an effective means of getting subscriptions paid and the rare skill of being both decisive and listening to and, when right, being swayed by the arguments of others. Thank you Geoff for all that you have done for use. We all wish you well in your retirement (or next career) Down Under.

Roderick Ramage

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## REPORT ON 33<sup>rd</sup> IARF CONGRESS

4 to 7 September 2010 and Pre-Congress Events 1-3 Sept (Commissions, the Inauguration of the YOUTH Congress and the centenary celebrations of IALRW Congress by Charanjit AjitSingh.

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers of all those events and especially Richard Boeke, Robert Papini and Thomas Matthew for the opportunity to participate in all these events. It was a real privilege and a joy to be at the Catholic Renewal Centre to experience the visible presence of young people from across the globe mingling together and creating a buzz of activity and engagement which was inspirational. It was also a great opportunity to meet old acquaintances and develop new friendships.

1<sup>st</sup> of September was the first for me to attend the inauguration of three key pre-meetings; the inauguration of the Youth conference in the morning with all its pomp and pageantry, young people welcoming the elders with garlands of marigold, red tilaks applied on the foreheads and fragrant water sprinkled before entry into the hall. I was seated on the stage with others including Robert Papini and we all were asked to say a few words to the gathering of the young. Their planning and commitment were highly commended.

In the afternoon the opening ceremony for the centenary celebrations of International Association of Liberal Religious Women's centenary was attended by approximately 200 women out of whom 60 were Japanese. There was a Japanese female choir and a Geneva based Christian choir who made the ceremony highly enjoyable. Prayers were said by women from different religious traditions and denominations present: Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian. As the Sikh woman who was to offer the prayer, did not come, I offered to say a Sikh prayer which I also translated. It was appreciated that a Sikh woman in the audience filled in the gap!

The ceremony concluded with the symbolic pouring of water, which women had brought from their own places in different parts of the world, into a big vase, 'The streams are many and yet the water is one, our life-giving source.'

In the evening IARF/WCF Commissions' twenty members met informally for a sumptuous dinner at Gokulum Park Hotel. That was followed by five panellists from Commission Two; Revd Richard Gilbert, Father Albert Nambiaparambil, Revd Richard Kellaway and me, introducing their papers about their plans and ideas with a view to implementing the UN decade of Interfaith Cooperation for the next four years. The papers had been sent to Richard prior to the event and he had compiled it as a booklet for ease of reference, which helped enormously. The meeting was ably chaired by Dr Homi Dhalla. Some of the key points from the presentations were the following.

From Richard Gilbert's presentation

- Mosque controversy at ground zero has split citizens, politicians and religious groups, those in favour support it as a symbol of interreligious understanding and cooperation, others are exploiting the masses against the building
- Building your own theology- adult religious education curriculum, awareness of truth claims and five warning signs for religion as described by Theologian Charles Kimball in his book *When Religion Becomes Evil* and the responsibility of the religious progressives to speak out prophetically
- Ideas for future-giving practical shape to Karen Armstrong's Charter of Compassion by the IARF enabling the organising International Interfaith camps or journeys
- Affirming Convictional theology, 'By their fruits shall ye know them.'

From Father Albert's presentation

- The limits/ boundaries of religious language
- Is there salvation outside the church?
- Importance of examining one's own language and sensitivity to the other (eg recent incident in Kerala when a professor's hand cut off as some people felt that he was disrespectful to Muhammad)

- Appreciation of the difference in Interfaith language and not to exclude those who don't believe in God
- Dialogue is important

From Revd Richard Kellaway's presentation

- Mission of IARF- whether to focus on religious freedom or free religion and where should the emphasis be
- IARF a diverse organisation, not very strong in the USA as other organisations are engaged in Interfaith dialogue, a great success story in Japan and India
- Greater support to fellow chapters such as Philippines, Japan and India as well as to IARF members involved in personal travel to make contact with other members
- More funding for human rights education in India.

From Charanjit's presentation

- IIC's role in bringing Interfaith organisations together through IION
- Changing Interfaith scene locally and globally, human rights and community cohesion issues in Europe and the need to collaborate
- Using Kochi experience and celebration of 75 years of WCF as a spur for future activities
- Special focus on 21<sup>st</sup> Sept UN International Day and Interfaith Week 21-24<sup>th</sup> November
- Collaborative action for Human rights by faith and Interfaith organisations together, eg the issue of head covering –hijab, turban , skull cap

Homi Dhalla's Comments

- 'Either we learn to walk together holding hands or we kill each other', Pope John Paul 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 1986. Vatican 2 opened the door to interpretation by the Catholic Church
- Veil is a big issue in the world.
- There have been problems in India in different areas. There are 180 million Muslims in India. Christians were attacked a couple of years ago and IARF have been involved in dialogue with the state of Karnataka.
- Religious leaders have a role to play in such situations

After a detailed discussion about points raised through various presentations, it was decided to follow up these issues in circle groups. A very good start was made to get the Commission Two going about its work and to come up with recommendations to the IARF council.

2nd September

The day began with prayers from the Unitarian, Hindu and Muslim traditions by young people

With Guji Takahiro Miwa in the Chair, the session began with the sharing of Rissho Kosei-kai prayer, 'Namu Myoko Rengo Kyo' from the Mahayana tradition. Revd Norio Sakai, president IARF Japan Chapter suggested that the IARF should consider future programmes at the grassroots level. He said that exchange programmes between chapters in different countries would help foster friendly relations and mutual spirituality. To start off such exchanges should begin between India and Japan and between Japan and USA. The President of India Chapter, Mr V Rengapashyam welcomed Revd Sakai's suggestion and said that South India would be happy to host the Japanese participants. As there is a Japanese Consulate in Chennai, it would be more practical. 15 colleges observe Hiroshima and Nagasaki days and campaign against nuclear bombs. Mr Shabir Muhammad mentioned that all chapters in India commemorate these days as well as the International Day of Peace, Non-violence Day and Human Rights Day. They also conduct Human Rights Education Workshops. Revd Miwa mentioned that 300 young people were supported through the IARF.

Revd Peter Richardson explored the right to religious freedom as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 18 and 19. He also shared with us how we can enhance mutual spirituality by understanding how freedom grows within us. He

stressed the importance of three inner stages of development that are critically important and which are found in all religions -tolerance, dialogue and transformation. He also said that IARF is in a strong position to support each of these three stages.

Dorothee Gehrman introduced her paper 'Looking Back to Move Ahead' by sharing her 50 years with IARF. She mentioned the 1910 Berlin conference and the importance of the connection made between religion and freedom: Not enlightenment, not negation, not freedom to get out of religion, but freedom to truly get into religion!' She mentioned that in the multi-religious age the question of syncretism is controversial. She pointed out that the concepts of Global Ethic and reverence for life are probably the lowest common denominators. She acknowledged that religions can coexist in the East much more than in the west.

Revd Steve Dick raised the issue of how IARF is organised and the issue of identity, Does the organisation match what it aspires to?

He said that in IARF Governance Instrument there is no mention of the community. He posed a number of questions in relation to its expectations and achievements in the next decade, its unique selling point in the crowded interreligious field and whether any merger or coalition has been considered. He also gave the example of the specially designed Bedouin tent near St Ethelberga in London, a space for dialogue on equal terms.

Steve also talked about the changing environment and the young people's conference. He said that the loyalty of the young people is not to the institution but to its aims and it will be a different organisation in future.

Dr John Taylor: there is now a coalition of 70 interfaith groups for Interfaith Cooperation for Peace representing the grassroots to influence the work of the UN. They intend challenging the policies and values at the UN at their next meeting in New York.

Kim Beach referred to his wife Barbara's keynote address 'Making Women's work new' to the Women's conference which is taking place at the same time. He posed the question to IARF/WCF, 'Are we focussed on free religion/liberal religion? What is it that brings us together? Is it 'spiritual freedom, ' his favourite term for he felt that freedom is a spiritual and moral reality. It is a precious gift.

Guji Miwa concluded the session by asking us to reflect on

- How to connect myself and yourself
- How to connect myself and the world
- How to connect myself and God (consciousness)

Then the two commissions worked in their separate groups for the remainder of the day, Commission One on the aims and purposes and Commission Two on programmes. In our joint discussion it was agreed that the recommendations of the two commissions be put together as one document to be presented to the Council and to those interested on the morning of 4<sup>th</sup> September which was done. It was also acknowledged that there may be issues related to the constitution which needs to meet the legal requirements of the Charity Commission in UK . (Copy of the recommendations has already been circulated)

Charanjit AjitSingh, Secretary for Commission Two

33<sup>rd</sup> IARF CONGRESS AT KOCHI September 4-6 2010

This is a short report of my reflections about the congress. There were 700 people who attended the conference, a big delegation from Japan, more than 200 young people and a significant presence of women which was heartening.

I managed to attend the following events:-

- Inaugural ceremony including Dalai Lama's speech on 4<sup>th</sup> September
- Circle groups on day 2 and 3
- Plenary 1 Role of Religion in promoting human rights and Plenary workshop 1
- Part of the General meeting
- Workshop on Women as agents of Social change
- Europe and the Middle East Chapter meeting

- Plenary 2 on Science and Religion and Plenary workshop 2
- Workshop on health and healing
- Led Sikh worship on 7<sup>th</sup> morning
- Plenary 3 on Hindus , Muslims and Christians: How can they live together in India and Plenary workshop 3
- Chapter Workshop presentation
- Final session on Peace Action: Gandhian Strategies & Children's Theatre and
- The closing ceremony

I also attended part of cultural programmes. We also had the opportunity to attend an Interfaith Iftar service and meal at the local cultural centre.

It was also good to meet people informally especially young people from Afghanistan and of Tibetan origin and those studying Chennai and Bangalore who were happy to be at the congress. They shared their aspirations and concerns quite openly when they felt that they would be listened to and their opinions will be valued.

Highlights for me were

- The inauguration ceremony with the performance of the Japanese yoga group, the Japanese choir, prayers from 9 faith traditions and the Chennai folk girls dance
- The speech on compassion by Dalai Lama. He talked about the development and of religious belief in humanity over a longer timescale of 3000 to 4000 years. He said that when things are beyond our control belief in a higher being' God or Buddha gives hope and inspiration. He said that the development of science and technology over the last two hundred years brings us immediately what we want. In 20<sup>th</sup> century technology brought a lot of destruction, 200 million killed. He reiterated that material development does not bring inner peace and his message was of compassion for all on this planet. He said the basis of genuine harmony is to 'keep your own faith and respect the other tradition, otherwise there is conflict in the name of religion. He expressed the wish that the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be the century of Dharma in which the values of love and compassion and mutual respect are fostered.
- The session on the role of religion in promoting human rights in which Swami Agnivesh, Indian human rights activist, Revd Peter Moraes and Mrs Marzia Rawhani, a human rights lawyer participated. Each of them brought their own perspective on the promotion of human rights but I was particularly struck by Mrs Rawhani's research and how she made the link with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and religion, religion being the root of human motivation which enables us to embrace the higher notions of justice. She highlighted the religious persecution of the Bahai community in Iran, a community that refuses to consider themselves as victims but reach out to others with love and compassion
- The session on science and religion was equally inspiring with three very different contributions by Dr TP Srinivasan, Swami Jithamananada Maharaj , Revd Abhi Janamachi and Dr Steven Leeper. Dr Leeper gave the practical examples of creating a culture of non-violence and for the elimination of nuclear weapons. He mentioned the work of Hiroshima peace culture Foundation and Hiroshima memorial services in different parts of the world in August. 'Mayors of Peace' a campaigning organisation was also mentioned. The Swami made a connection between science and religion and gave examples from the Vedic times from Upanishads of 'the finite in the Infinite.' He said, 'In 1981 science got shattered and fell at the feet of prayer. Thought is the most powerful thing in the world, Thought can cascade the body. He laid stress on basic oneness of existence and interconnectedness of holistic universe. Interiorisation of God is important which can be achieved through the recitation of Aum. He ended with engaging the audience in recitation which was quite inspirational.
- Plenary on how Hindus , Muslims and Christians can live together was also illuminating. Challenges of communalism and religious extremism are there in India although secularism is a positive concept which confirms religions, recognises and celebrates them. Dr Radha Krishnan, a Gandhian scholar raised the issue of why only three faiths were considered and not the Sikhs, Bahais, Buddhists and Zoroastrians.

He said, quoting Mother Teresa that there are three 'I's who are great enemies of living together. They are ignorance, irreverence and intolerance. He said that a new religious outlook is needed to understand religion and make our children proud of it as better and worthier human beings. Later on the children from his institute gave a superb performance on how they cultivate Gandhian values of dealing with conflict and of living together .

- I also found the workshop on Women as agents of social change helpful. The two examples, one from South India of the work of a Women's rights lawyer who also runs a refuge and the other a Japanese woman whose mother and other members of the family were victims of Hiroshima bombing presented their work in a moving yet sensitive way. I thought they were real role models for peace and human rights.
- The session on health and healing mentioned some of the research done in the field. However, I did not see a closer link being made between faith and healing.

Things which could be improved

- Inauguration was too long, too many speeches about the Dalai Lama before he arrived, no wonder there was a grand exodus after Dalai Lama's speech
- Many people missed the keynote speech, there needed to be a break after the speech of Dalai Lama and reconvening would have helped.
- Only a few managed to get to the grand photo session
- Plenary workshops could be crisper, time lost in summarising the morning session left less time for questions
- Improved balance between religious representation especially in the country in which the congress happens. For example, the Sikhs form 2% of India's population but only two young Sikhs attended. There was no Sikh contribution from the stage in any of the plenaries.

On the whole the Congress had huge successes and IARF came out as a much stronger organisation. I feel that the Congress was well worth attending and that I gained an enormous amount and it was a good learning experience. I felt really rejuvenated. The visits and companionship were a true bonus. I am already looking forward to the next Congress.

Charanjit AjitSingh

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#### FOR YOUR DIARIES

(for details, see below - *some events subject to change*)

15 Jan'y 2011	celebration of 500 <sup>th</sup> anniversary: of the birth of Michael Servetus
19 Feb'y 2011	conference on ethics, ecology and the interdependent web
8-10 Mch 2011	IARF/WCF conference at the Brahma Kumaris World Retreat Centre
16 & 17 Apl 2011	Servetus worship service, British Unitarian General Assembly
12 May 2011	AGM
Oct or Nov 2011	Servetus Society at Servetus Museum in Spain
2012	European IARF Conference in France?

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#### **World Sacred Music Festival at Brighton** - report

This year's festival on the theme Divine Voices and took place 14 to 17 October 2010, with a pre-event concert on Saturday 11 September.

The line-up, including:

- Rizwan and Muazzam Qawwali Sufi group from Pakistan;
- Cantor Steven Leas and the London Jewish Male Choir;
- Barbara Furtuna, a stunning a cappella polyphonic Christian group from Corsica;

- Renaissance specialists The Clerks Group, performing their new work The Hours, with input from local Brighton faith groups, including the Coptic Christians, Progressive Jewish Synagogue and local Sufi order;
- Unni Lovlid, traditional Norwegian vocalist; and
- Palestinian vocalist Reem Kelani

The WSMF@B increasingly runs events throughout the year, not just in October and is planning to start working beyond Brighton too.

<http://www.worldsacredmusic.org/>

Kate Whyman



#### ADVENT CONCERT report

The snow caused the cancellation of our planned evening concert on 1 December at the Horsham Unitarian Church in honour of the memories of Rev Austin Fitzpatrick and Bishop Arpad Szabo. Both these leaders in the IARF had died in the previous few months. Ten members came however in the afternoon of 1 December and enjoyed the presentations by Marcus Braybrooke and Jason Squires on "Our Interfaith World," and Marcus sold three copies of his new book, Meeting Jews – The Struggle to Bring God Down to Earth.



#### MICHAEL SERVETUS, 500 YEARS

15 January 2011, Saturday, noon to 4 pm.

Saturday Rosslyn Hill Church - Hampstead

Noon "Bring & Share" Lunch & Registration. (£5 donation requested). 1 pm Rev. Cliff Reed leads a worship service using the new worship packet on Servetus, which he has prepared. This opens Celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the birth of Servetus (1511-1553), a Unitarian martyr for Religious Freedom, burned at the stake with his books in Geneva, 27 October, 1553. Discussion – then Jaume de Marcos from Barcelona!.

At 3:30 open meeting of British Chapter.



#### ETHICS, ECOLOGY AND THE INTERDEPENDENT WEB

19 February 2011, Saturday, 10 am to 3:30 pm.

A conference on to be held at the Croydon Unitarian Church, .

Speakers to date include BBC Presenter, Rev. Peter Owen-Jones, Vinod Kapashi (Jain) and Datuk Leslie Davidson (correspondent below). We also have invited Datuk Mike Steel of the Orangutan Appeal (who has not confirmed). A theme of our conference is to promote cooperation between various concerns to help create a sustainable future for people, animals, and the life of our planet.

£5 donation requested. "Bring and Share" lunch. Coffee, tea and juice provided.

Croydon Unitarian Church seats almost 200. Depending on successful publicity & weather, I expect between 60 and 120.

The Church is at #1 The Flyway, an 8 minute walk from the East Croydon Station.



#### IARF/WCF CONFERENCE

8 to 10 March 2011, Tuesday to Thursday.

The Brahma Kumaris Global Retreat Centre (8 miles south of Oxford)

A good Sabbath to you!

In planning for the retreat, it would help Sister Maureen, Feargus O'Connor and me if you would answer the following four questions as soon as possible. Other than a thank you donation to Brahma Kumaris, we expect the only charge will be a £30 registration fee.

Most important is your answer to the first question !!

- 1) Do you plan to come to the 8-10 March retreat?  
YES NO MAYBE
- 2) Would you like us to ask the Trustees of the International Interfaith Centre whether they would like to join in planning this as an Interfaith Summit Meeting?  
YES NO MAYBE
- 3) Whatever your answer to question 2, what topic or theme would you like for this retreat?
- 4) What speaker and/or group leader would you like us to invite?

Please send your answers to Richard Boeke [r.boeke@virgin.net](mailto:r.boeke@virgin.net)

16 St. Mary's Gardens, Horsham RH12 1 JP United Kingdom

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#### UNITARIAN ANNUAL MEETINGS

15-18 April 2011, Friday to Monday.

Swansea University.

Worship Service on Servetus to be arranged in conjunction with the GA Worship Panel.

NB Our 2011 AGM will be held not during the GA meetings but instead on 12 May 2011. See below. Although the IARF has its roots in the Unitarian movement and the majority of the British Chapter's members are Unitarian, the IARF is not an Unitarian body. There has been a feeling for a long time that we need to widen out membership and that holding our AGM during the GA meeting, which is convenient for many members, is an obstacle to wider membership. For this reason the committee decided that it is time to make a break and to hold our AGM at a separate time. We very much hope that you will agree with this decision and support the new arrangement.

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#### ANNUAL MEETING

12 May 2011, Thursday, noon to 4 pm.

Dr Williams Library, 14 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0AR

Bring and share lunch. Coffee, tea and juice provided. Speaker TBA.

The notice of the meeting will be sent nearer the time.

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#### CONFERENCE ON SERVETUS

October or November 2011 Details not yet confirmed.

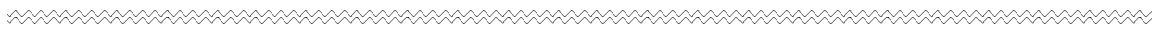
Zaragoza, SPAIN & visit to Servetus Museum.

Sergio Baches, director of the Instituto de Estudios Sijenenses "Miguel Servet" wrote to Richard Boeke as follows:

#### Servetus Year 2011

The Michael Servetus Institute in Spain is delighted to inform you of the Opening Ceremony at Servetus' birth town, Villanueva de Sijena, for the commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of his birth (1511-2011). This opening event was held November 13th, 2010. This Opening Ceremony is part of a full-fledged program that we, at the Institute, have been preparing with the Government of Aragon.

You can access to the program for November 13<sup>th</sup> by clicking this link:  
<http://www.miguelservet.org/servetus/news.htm>



## LEGAL NOTES

As reported by Beckett International (<http://becketinternational.wordpress.com/>)

Wellington, New Zealand – The nation’s Jewish community has begun mounting a legal case against the government in a bid to overturn a ban on the kosher slaughter of meat, the Jewish Chronicle reported on July 29. The legal case is likely to focus on the ban’s apparent violation of New Zealand’s Bill of Rights, which protects the right for a person to practice their religion, and its possible breach of the Animal Welfare Act, which contains provisions for religious rights. Community spokesperson David Zwartz said that attempts to convince Agriculture Minister David Carter to reverse the ban on shechitah had failed.

Reuters reports on the first official celebration in Russia of a new holiday, approved by President Dmitry Medvedev, that commemorates the conversion of the nation to Christianity in 988. This is the latest step Kremlin has taken to affirm its current and historical relationship with the Orthodox Church. Rights groups have criticized the holiday as undermining Russia’s secular constitution, while members of the nation’s Muslim minority have noted the exclusionary nature of the holiday

RIYADH – Two Saudi clerics, Islamic jurisprudence scholar Mohamed al-Nujaimi and cleric Ayed al-Garni, have declared Muslim women exempt from wearing full veils in France, but added they should avoid visiting as tourists, Reuters reported on July 25. The comments by the two clerics come two weeks after French lawmakers passed a bill under which women could be fined for appearing in public with the all-covering burqa or the niqab, which leaves the eyes exposed.

PORT LEUCATE – Two Muslim women wearing bukinis, swimming attire that covers the whole body, were banned from a public swimming pool at the Rives des Corbieres holiday camp in Southern France, the London Mail reported on July 22. The incident came ten days after French MPs voted to outlaw the burka in public places. The new law, which brands the garment ‘an insult to the country’s values’, means women will be fined or jailed for hiding their faces in public. Regional government official Marie-Paule Bardeche said: ‘This is an issue stemming from the holiday centre’s own regulations. ‘They state men and women must wear ordinary swimwear for hygiene reasons. Men are not even allowed to wear long shorts in the water.’

MADRID – Parliament rejected on July 20 a proposal to ban women from wearing Islamic veils that only reveal the eyes in public spaces, the AP reported on July 20. Following a lower chamber debate, 183 lawmakers opposed the ban, 162 voted for it and two abstained. However, the Socialist government has said it favors including a ban on people wearing burqas in government buildings in an upcoming bill on religious issues to be debated after parliament’s summer vacation break. The nonbinding proposal had been put forward by the leading opposition Popular Party, which portrayed it as a measure in support of women’s rights. The ruling Socialist Party opposed the ban.

The Sikh Times runs an article on the uncertain future of both Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan. The religious liberties afforded both religious communities is examined before, during and after the height of Taliban rule. With only one non-Muslim parliament member, Sikh Awtar Singh, governmental enforcement of religious rights for minorities—as found in the nation’s constitution—often goes unrealized.

DUBAI – Ahmad Mohammad Bin Thani, head of Dubai police’s general department of airport security, announced that Dubai will not be using full-body scanners in either of its two airports as they “contradict Islam, and out of respect for the privacy of individuals and their personal freedom,” AFP reported on July 6. Several European nations have tested the technology, including France, Britain and the Netherlands. Japanese and South Korean airports have also started test programs. The machines have remained

controversial due to privacy worries, as they generate images of passengers' entire bodies.

PARIS – The parliament is debating a bill that would ban the wearing of full Islamic veils in public, the BBC reported on July 6. The bill envisages fines of 150 Euros (£119) for women who break the law and 30,000 Euros and a year jail term for men who force their wives to wear the burka. A vote on the proposed legislation will be taken next week before a full vote in the senate in September.

TEHRAN – The culture ministry has outlined a number of approved "Islamic" haircuts for men in a journal, AFP reported on July 5. "The proposed styles are inspired by Iranians' complexion, culture and religion, and Islamic law," said Jaleh Khodayar, who is in charge of a "Modesty and Veil Festival" later this month where they are to be promoted. Clerics have called for firmer action against un-Islamic dressers and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came under fire last month for expressing opposition to a tough police crackdown on immodest attire.

B from the IARF secretariat, Osaka

in the case of Asia Bibi

TO: The President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari  
The Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Yousaf Raza Gilani

FROM: The Council of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)

DATE: Saturday, November 27, 2010

The International Association for Religious Freedom calls upon President Zardari, Prime Minister Gilani and the leadership of Pakistan to consider closely the case of Asia Bibi, the Christian woman who has been sentenced to death under section 295 C PPC by Additional Sessions Judge Mr. Muhammad Naveed Iqbal on November 8th, 2010 in Sheikhpura.

The death sentence which is applied in cases of "blasphemy" under current Pakistani law is exceptionally severe, and does much to harm the country's image internationally, given that Pakistan is signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We join in the calls made for the President and Prime Minister to exercise their prerogative to grant clemency, then further to ensure that Asia Bibi and her family come to no harm, in view of the threats that are being made to their lives in connection with the prospective pardon.

Respectfully submitted,  
Council of the IARF

### **International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)**

Secretariat Office, Osaka, Japan

b) in the case of the massacre at the Assyrian Catholic Church of Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad

President of the Republic of Iraq, Jalal Talabani

The Office of the President of the Republic, Baghdad

Thursday, 11 November 2010

Dear President Talabani,

The century-old International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), which holds General Consultative status at the United Nations, was the world's first interfaith organization. It works today for understanding between the religions.

We are deeply concerned about the massacre by extremists at the Assyrian Catholic Church of Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad on Sunday 31 st October. Such devastating incidents are causing Christians, and other Iraqi religious minorities, to fear an inevitable demise of their presence in a land which has been their home for many centuries. The

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that between 300,000 and 400,000 Christians have been forced out of Iraq since 2003. With such incidents as this attack by extremists on the cathedral, the prospect of a permanent exile for these ancient communities of faith becomes more likely.

We wish therefore to add our voice to the many who are raising an appeal to your government regarding the situation of religious minorities in Iraq: The principle of freedom of faith - enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - must be central to your heroic struggle to establish a democratic modernity in your country. In a land where civilization was born, and where religion continues to give order and meaning to the lives of a majority of citizens, it shall be an enormous victory for the culture of human rights if mutual respect and tolerance between religions can be achieved. In this regard the world looks to Iraq as a testing-ground, within a region where democracy has still to penetrate fully, and in which religious minorities must often go without the securities enjoyed by Muslims - above and beyond the sectarian strife that Muslims too are enduring in Iraq at present.

By the same token, we must urge your intervention to grant clemency in the trial of Mr. Tariq Aziz. A death sentence for a Chaldean Christian under the present circumstances, with attacks on Christians taking place frequently, will send a very poor message to the world about Iraq's potential for a future of reconciliation. As Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi said recently, commuting the sentence would encourage reconciliation. We may add that it will ensure the Dawa Party cannot be accused of pursuing an agenda based on vengeance.

The communities of faith world-wide are in wholehearted support of your efforts toward peace in Iraq. Our interfaith community, the IARF, is hopeful that, as your government works toward stability and harmony, you will be able to put in place safeguards for the lives and livelihoods of Christians and other Iraqis of non-Muslim faith.

I am, sir, yours sincerely,

(signed) Most Rev. Mitsuo Miyake, President, IARF

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#### RESEARCH PROJECT INN RELATION TO RELIGION AND BELIEF, DISCRIMINATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Professor Paul Weller of Derby University, Faculty of Education, Health & Sciences & Professor of Inter-Religious Relations, wrote as follows on 4 October 2010

In October of last year I wrote to organisations then affiliated to the Network to inform them about a three year (2010-2012) research project on "Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)." Further background information on this can now be accessed via the project website at: <http://www.derby.ac.uk/religion-and-society>, from where you can download a project leaflet and other more detailed materials about the project. The project is part of the "Religion and Society" programme, supported by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The project is currently advertising for a one year temporary contract Project Researcher post to conduct the fieldwork. Outline details of the post can be found in the Word document attached, which has an internet link to further information and application forms.

I would be most grateful if you would continue to share information about the project and about this job opportunity among your networks. With thanks in anticipation of your interest and assistance and best wishes.

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**what, how much and who**

British Chapter of the IARF

The British Chapter of IARF was started in 1962 and its aims as stated in the handbook of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom (which it helped to found) are:

“To support the international organisation in encouraging free, critical and honest affirmation of one’s own religion, religion which liberates and does not oppress; the defence of freedom of conscience and the free exercise of religion in all nations.”

The British Chapter holds regional meetings from time to time, and publishes a newsletter, usually twice a year. Members also receive the IARF Journal World At the Unitarian Annual Meetings each April we organise a programme for those taking part in the Donate-One-Meal campaign (proceeds from which are donated to IARF social service projects) and organise a further meeting with someone speaking on a topic related to IARF.

Membership costs £15 pa (£10 of which goes to the international organisation and £5 to the British Chapter).

Subscriptions should be sent to: Jeff Teagle (see below). Cheques should be made payable to the 'British Chapter of IARF'.

|                          |                      |                                                                                                  |
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