

UN General Assembly President Hosts World Interfaith Harmony Week in New York

Michael Balcomb
February 7, 2012
Director of Communications, UPF International

The 2012 World Interfaith Harmony Week came to a dramatic and moving conclusion with a program at the United Nations General Assembly hosted by the President, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, and attended by high-level representatives of the United Nations Secretariat, Member States, religious leaders, and the United Nations NGO community, including the Universal Peace Federation.

“We recognize and celebrate the values that are shared across religious traditions,” said Mr. Al-Nasser. “These common principles form a common ground that unites us in our rich diversity.” The General Assembly President went on to note that the United Nations was itself established in pursuit of universal values such as peace, freedom, human rights, dignity, and the oneness of humanity, which are also espoused by many of the world’s religions.

Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro urged the interfaith community to speak out against extremism, advance tolerance, and stand firm for social justice, dignity, and mutual understanding. “Although faith is the glue that often bonds communities and cultures around the world, it is too often used as an excuse to emphasize differences and deepen divisions,” she said. “Only by finding common cause in mutual respect for shared spiritual and moral values can we hope for harmony among nations and peoples.”



General Assembly President H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser with interfaith speakers



General Assembly President H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser and Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro

The Search for Common Ground

The first group of speakers addressed the theme of the event, the search for “Common Ground for the Common Good.” H.E. Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, said that the Pope and Church leaders had repeatedly called on all believers to reject religiously-motivated violence. Yet the solution is not, as some would advocate, the rejection of religion itself, since the denial of God has led to greater cruelty. “People who do not acknowledge God know no boundaries,” he said.



More than a thousand people filled the United Nations General Assembly Hall

Monica Willard, President of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations, said that interfaith dialogue was already playing an important role in bringing peace. “Interfaith harmony is alive and well and carried out daily around the world,” she said. “But it isn’t publicized widely. We need an institutionalized way to share these stories.”

Dr. Marc Scheuer, Director, Secretariat of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, and Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of Religions for Peace, both stressed the value of diversity and inclusiveness. “The world’s religions are different. These differences are profoundly defining,” said Vendley. However, he identified a basis for multi-religious cooperation: the shared conviction that "honoring the Divine is directly linked to honoring and protecting the inviolable dignity of every person." He applauded United Nations agencies that are engaged in concrete projects with religious communities.

Philippe Kridelka, Director of the UNESCO Liaison Office in New York, agreed. “The imperative of dialogue has never been more important than it is today,” he said “We know what happens when dialogue breaks down. The fabric of society is quickly torn but not easily mended.”

Acharya Shri Shrivatsa Goswami from India commented that Hinduism’s pride is that it celebrates diversity, which makes dialogue possible. At the same time, there is less division between the religious and secular spheres of life. “There is no department of life that can be divided from religion,” he said, quoting Mahatma Gandhi.

The first session was brought to a close by a moving performance of “The Hope of All Ages,” written and conducted by David Eaton and performed by the New York City Symphony Chamber Ensemble.

Following this, the delegates turned to the contributions that religions could make to advancing four key areas of focus identified by the President of the General Assembly: Mediation of Conflict, Disaster Prevention and Response, Revitalization of the United Nations, and Sustainable Development.



New York City Symphony Chamber Ensemble



The audience listens attentively

Conflict Mediation

H.E. Mrs. U. Joy Ogwu, Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, said that the misuse of religion is at the heart of the problem. “If we promote mutual dialogue and respect, there will be greater harmony among religions and also among nations. We need to educate our young people to be a new generation of peace. In this respect, women have a most important role to play.”

Dr. Prof. M. Din Syamsuddin, Muhammadiyah and Indonesia Ulama Council, stated that it was very important that religions should not be misused and abused to justify violence. Rabbi David Rosen, American Jewish Committee Department for Interreligious Affairs, agreed, saying that religious leaders “have the capacity either to make the situation all the more intractable, or to make it all the more soluble by creating a context of greater mutual respect.” Ignoring religion encourages extremist elements to take center stage. Therefore, we must empower the “religiously responsible voices.”

One of the founding principles of World Interfaith Harmony Week is that religious leaders should take the time to teach their communities about the ways in which God is present in faiths other than their own. In this spirit, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, founder of the Cordoba Initiative, quoted not from the Qur’an but from the Bible: “As Jesus taught, all the commandments of God are enfolded into the two major commandments, love God and love the neighbor,” he said. “The real battle front is not between religions but between all the moderates of all faiths and all the extremists in all faith traditions.”

Bhai Mohinder Singh, a Sikh who made the long trip from Birmingham in the United Kingdom to attend the event, said although global issues require global solutions and structures to implement them, the role of compassion and forgiveness cannot be overlooked. “As religious and secular extremism becomes more sophisticated, exercising increasing compassion becomes a vital necessity,” he said. “Where there is forgiveness, there is God himself.”

Disaster Prevention and Response

“Why should the UN engage with faith communities?” asked Dr. Azza Karam of the United Nations Population Fund. “The fact is that 40 percent of basic health care is provided by faith-based communities, and in conflict zones it is as high as 70 percent. Although the UN and faith-based organizations are not the same, we need to be sensitive to the impact of religion.”

Bill Canny, Catholic Relief Services, also testified to the vast scope of faith-based contributions to disaster response, health and education, noting that although disaster response is in no way tied to acceptance of any religious belief, it is important to recognize the existence and importance of spiritual and psychological needs following crises. “The spiritual dimension must be recognized,” he said. “We ask the UN and other organizations to give us space to minister to these spiritual needs.”

This latter point was endorsed by Yuka Saionji, Byakko Shinko Kai and the Goi Peace Foundation, who spoke with deep emotion about the impact of the help that Japan received following the earthquake and tsunami last year. “Religious organizations played a key role,” she said. “Churches and temples alike became evacuation centers and have continued on as community centers.”

Renewal of the United Nations

One of the highlights of the program was a moving performance by the Children’s Theater Company. One by one, bright young children—the youngest only five years old—confidently recited “Peacemaker’s quotes,” drawn from the scriptures of all religions and from more recent sources such as Einstein, Gandhi, and King. Their finale song, “One,” brought the entire audience to its feet for a standing ovation for the power of youth.



The Children's Theater Company



Hanifa Mezouli (Office of the President of the General Assembly) and Thomas Walsh (UPF)

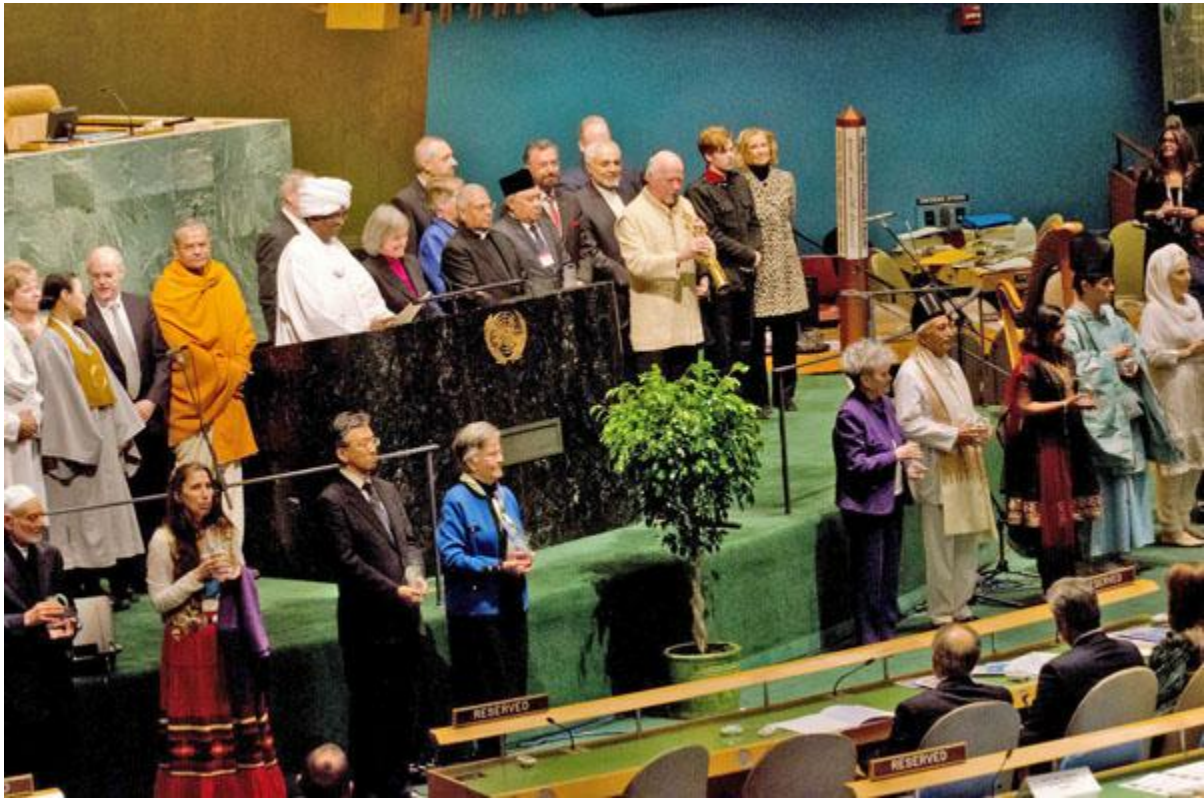
“Faith can be a strong ally of the United Nations,” said Katherine Marshall of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, USA. “Although the United Nations is not a faith institution, it is nevertheless a product of all the world’s faiths and the universal human longing for peace.”

“We all need to update our mentality to meet the challenges of our time,” said Ven. Dr. Chung Ohun Lee, Won Buddhism International. “Interreligious understanding and cooperation may be the most effective instrument for world peace because religions are a vital agent for change.” She referred to the Buddhist understanding that everyone and everything are interconnected. “Interfaith dialogue may help everyone to see the ties that connect us all.”

Rev. Michael Beckwith, who leads the Agape International Spiritual Center, a California megachurch, quoted from Hans Kung, saying “There will be no peace in the world without peace among religions; there will be no peace among religions without dialogue among religions.” Yet there are different levels of peace, he said. At its worst, peace is based on exclusivity and separation. “Peace at its best is meeting at the center of our being,” he said. “Science makes the world a neighborhood; but religion makes a brotherhood and sisterhood.”

Sustainable Development

H.E. Mrs. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, invited all the participants to continue their investment and engagement, including an invitation to visit her country for the upcoming Rio+20 conference in June. “We need to balance material and human development with protection of the environment,” she said. “Civil society, including religious societies and institutions, have an important role to play. Let us strengthen and renew broader efforts for sustainability.”



Taj Hamad (UPF) and Deborah Moldow (World Peace Prayer Society) conduct the Interfaith Tree of Harmony Ceremony

The program was brought to a close by an “interfaith tree of harmony ceremony” symbolizing the commitment of all faiths and traditions to the future of the planet and the work of the United Nations. One by one, representatives of eleven faith traditions poured water representing wisdom and healing onto the roots of a tree symbolizing the entire human family. The music of saxophonist Paul Winter interweaved the ceremony.

“What we have achieved here today is significant,” said President Al-Nasser in his concluding remarks. “Let each of us assume the task of interfaith harmony as our personal responsibility, for as was so clearly demonstrated here today the fruits of religious dialogue and understanding offer the hope of a new era of peace for all humanity.”



The Salvation Army New York Staff Band



Roberto Mukaro Borrero



Some of the religious leaders and program speakers with General Assembly President Nassir Al-Nasser at a post-event luncheon



WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK 2012

COMMON GROUND FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Member States and Civil Society in the spirit of UN Resolution A/65/5

The United Nations General Assembly Hall
Tuesday, February 7, 2012 • 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

SPEAKERS

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser
President, 66th Session of the General Assembly

In cooperation with the
NGO COMMUNITY AT THE UNITED NATIONS



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H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser

President of the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser was elected President of the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly on 22 June 2011. Mr. Al-Nasser has contributed to advancing the multilateral agenda in the realms of peace and security, sustainable development and South-South Cooperation over four decades. Mr. Al-Nasser served as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations in New York (1998-2011), during which he represented his country on the UN Security Council for two-year term of Qatar as non-permanent member (2006-2007), Ambassador to Jordan (1993-1998), Minister Plenipotentiary at the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations in New York (1986-1993), Consul-General for Qatar in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (1975-1981), at the Embassy of Qatar in Islamabad, Pakistan (1975), and as Attaché at the Embassy of Qatar in Beirut, Lebanon (1972). Mr. Al-Nasser was educated in Doha and Beirut and is a recipient of numerous decorations and awards.



H.E. Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro

Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

H.E. Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro of Tanzania took office as Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations on 1 February 2007. Dr. Migiro served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation from 2006-2007 – the first woman in the United Republic of Tanzania to hold that position since its independence in 1961. Before that, she was Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children for five years. As Foreign Minister, Dr. Migiro spearheaded Tanzania's engagement in the pursuit of peace, security and development in the Great Lakes Region. Dr. Migiro was also Chair of the Southern African Development Community Ministerial Committee of the Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation and President of the UN Security Council during its open debate on peace, security and development in the Great Lakes Region. Prior to Government service, Dr. Migiro was a member of the Faculty of Law at the University of Dar-es-Salaam. Dr. Migiro obtained a Master of Laws from the University of Dar-es-Salaam and a Doctorate in law from the University of Konstanz in Germany.



Ben Dotsei Malor
Master of Ceremonies

Ben Dotsei Malor is the Communications Adviser to the President of the UN General Assembly. His main position is Chief Executive Producer of UN Radio in the Department of Public Information. Before joining the United Nations in 2003, Ben worked for more than 12 years with the BBC World Service in London, where he became the Deputy Editor of one of the BBC's flagship news and current affairs radio programmes, Focus on Africa. At UN Radio he has initiated and launched a new and popular weekly programme called *UN and Africa*. Ben has also served as the Spokesperson and Acting Chief Public Information Officer for the UN Mission in Liberia, (UNMIL) from 2006-2008. Ben was also the UN Humanitarian Spokesperson in Pakistan after the earthquake of October 2005. He served for one year as an Associate Spokesperson for the Secretary-General of the United Nations, where he dealt mainly with peacekeeping issues.



Roberto Mukaro Borrero
Taino Indigenous Flute

Roberto Mukaro Borrero is a historian, artist, and advocate dedicated to the promotion of his indigenous Taino heritage, as well as a gifted musician. He represents the Wittenberg Center for Alternative Resources at the UN, and as President of the United Confederation of Taino People's Office of International Relations and Regional Coordination. He is Caribbean Focal Point on the International Indigenous ICT Task Force, and as Chairperson of the NGO Committee on the United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (CONGO Special Committee). A former radio host and producer for WBAI Pacifica Radio's "Circle of Red Nations," Roberto was appointed in 2007 to UNICEF's Indigenous Leaders Consultative Group for Latin America and the Caribbean. He served on staff at the American Museum of Natural History's Department of Education.



H.E. Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt
Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations

His Excellency The Most Reverend Francis A. Chullikatt, Titular Archbishop of Ostra, Apostolic Nuncio, is Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations. He was born in Bolghatty, India, and ordained a priest for the Diocese of Verapoly in 1978. He completed a doctorate in Canon Law and entered the diplomatic service of the Holy See in 1988. He served at the Apostolic Nunciatures in Honduras, various countries of southern Africa, and the Philippines, at the Mission to the United Nations in New York and at the Secretariat of State in the Vatican. He was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to Iraq and Jordan on 29 April 2006, then was ordained Titular Archbishop of Ostra on 25 June 2006. He was appointed Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in New York on 17 July 2010. Archbishop Chullikatt presented his Letter of Appointment to Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, on 15 September 2010.



Monica Willard
President, Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations

Monica Willard is the main UN Representative for the United Religions Initiative (URI), a grassroots interfaith organization with members in 80 countries. She is currently serving as President of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations, an NGO Committee since 1972. Since 1997, she has helped organize the annual International Day of Peace Student Observance at the United Nations with the Department of Public Information, and serves as Co-Chair of the International Day of Peace NGO Committee. Monica was a founding member of the Tripartite Forum, a ground breaking, informal group of Member States, UN System Agencies and Religious NGOs working together to bring the voice of faith into peace and development issues. She received the 2009 Spirit of the United Nations Award from the NGO Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns, and was Chair of the 49th Annual DPI NGO Conference at UN Headquarters in 1996.



Philippe Kridelka

Director, UNESCO New York Office

Philippe Kridelka was appointed Director UNESCO Office in New York and Representative to the United Nations, and assumed his post in 2010. He joined the Belgian Diplomatic Service in 1987. He was First Secretary at the Belgian Embassy in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran from 1989-1992, when he returned to Brussels as Deputy Director of the Central European Desk. Mr. Kridelka was transferred to Warsaw, Poland as the Counsellor at the Belgian Embassy. He served as Counsellor to the Belgian Representation to the European Union-World Trade Organization (WTO) desk and as Diplomatic Advisor to the Belgian Deputy Prime Minister before being appointed in 2002 as Ambassador of Belgium to the Republic of Singapore and to the Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam. Mr. Kridelka was appointed Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Belgium to UNESCO in 2005 and served as Director of Cabinet, Office of the Director General of UNESCO from 2009-2010. Mr. Kridelka holds a Master's Degree in Law.



Dr. Marc Scheuer

Director, Secretariat of the UN Alliance of Civilizations

Marc Scheuer is director of the Secretariat of the Alliance of Civilizations, a political initiative under the auspices of the UN Secretary General. Most of his previous activity has been with the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, France) in the fields of political advice and cooperation and of human rights protection. As a director of political advice and cooperation in that Organization, he has notably been in charge of conflict prevention programs and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives. He coordinated the Council of Europe's early response to 9/11 events, including addressing the roots of terrorism and contributed to the development of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Before joining the Alliance, he was the director of the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, managing a team of lawyers who assist the Commissioner in making country assessments and policy recommendations. A doctor at law from Louvain University (Belgium), he has been a long-standing member of the Board of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) and a lecturer at Robert Schuman University (Strasbourg).



The New York City Symphony Chamber Ensemble

David Eaton, Musical Director

Founded in 1926, the **New York City Symphony** remains one of New York's oldest musical institutions and has presented hundreds of concerts through its illustrious history. David Eaton has been the orchestra's music director since 1985. In addition to leading the New York City Symphony in its highly acclaimed Lincoln Center concert series he has conducted the ensemble in numerous concerts at Carnegie Hall, the Manhattan Center, Merkin Hall, Harlem's Apollo Theater, the United Nations and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As a guest conductor and composer he has conducted and recorded his own compositions and arrangements with orchestras in the United States, Europe, Asia, Canada, Israel, Central and South America and Russia.



Dr. William F. Vendley

Secretary General, Religions for Peace

Dr. William F. Vendley is the Secretary General of Religions for Peace, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition that advances concrete action for peace. He is a pioneer in advancing multi-religious cooperation to help resolve conflict, and has been engaged in multi-religious peacemaking efforts in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Iraq and other countries. Dr. Vendley is an advisor to a number of governments on matters related to religion and peace. He advised President Obama through his service on the Multi-religious Cooperation and International Affairs Task Force of the White House Faith Based Council. He was recently appointed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as one of ten members of US State Department's Advisory Committee on Strategic Partnership with Civil Society and is a Co-chair of the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group. Dr. Vendley is a recipient of the UNICEF Lifetime Achievement Award.



Acharya Sri Shrivatsa Goswami

Director, Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana

Acharya Sri Shrivatsa Goswami is a member of an eminent family of spiritual leaders and scholars at Sri Radharamana Mandir, Vrindaban. His writings on Vaisnavism, Krishna, Radha, the Hare Krishna movement have been published by the University presses of Princeton, Berkeley and others. He is the editor of the forthcoming volume on Chaitanya for the Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophy published by the American Institute of Indian Studies. Acharya Shrivatsa ji is the Director of Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana, an Institute of Vaisnava culture and studies at Vrindaban, whose Vraja Research Project is sponsored by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Govt. of India. Pope Benedict XVI invited him to represent Hindu tradition at the 25th anniversary of the World Day of Prayer at Assisi in October 2011. He is connected with several important international peace, interfaith and environmental movements like World Council of Churches, Religions for Peace, IRF, UNEP, UPF and others.



Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh

Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ)

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh is a Sikh faith practitioner. A civil and structural engineer by profession, he took early retirement to answer an inner calling. Bhai Sahib is third in line of spiritual leaders and serves as Chairman of the Sikh registered charity, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ). "Bhai Sahib" is a conferred title, acknowledging his historic contributions towards faith propagation and the conservation of sacred and historical Sikh shrines. He is an International Trustee of *Religions for Peace* and a recognized "Interfaith Visionary," holding the Juliet Hollister Award from the Temple of Understanding. He promotes intra/inter-faith cooperation and peace-building through shared values, locally and internationally.



H.E. Ambassador U. Joy Ogwu

Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations

H.E. Amb. U. Joy Ogwu, OFR, serves as the first female Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations. She is the immediate past Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria (2006-2007). In 2001, Joy Ogwu was appointed to lead Nigeria's the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) as the first woman Director General until 2006. Since 1988, Ambassador Ogwu has served as Presidential Delegate and Special Adviser on numerous Nigerian delegations to the United Nations General Assembly; and on the Multinational United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa (UNOMSA). In January 2002, Kofi Annan invited Professor Ogwu to serve as a member of United Nations Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters. She was appointed to serve as Chairman for 2006, the first African woman to serve in that capacity. Her first book, *Nigeria Foreign Policy: Alternative Futures* (1986), became a classic text for the study of Nigeria's Foreign Policy. Professor Ogwu holds the National Meritorious Service Award of Officer of the Order of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (OFR).



Dr. Prof. M. Din Syamsuddin

Chairman, Muhammadiyah and Indonesia Ulama Council

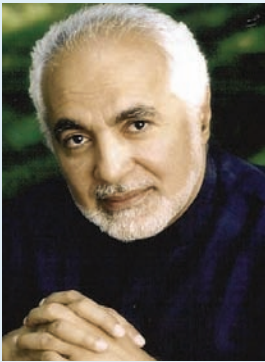
Dr. Prof. M. Din Syamsuddin is currently the Chairman of Muhammadiyah. Founded in 1912, Muhammadiyah is Indonesia's oldest Islamic organization, as well as one of its largest. He is also vice chairman of Indonesia Ulama Council. He is a Professor of Islamic Political Thought at State Islamic University, Jakarta; Chairman of the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC); Honorary President of *Religions for Peace* (RfP) and President and Moderator of Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace* (ACRP). He also serves on the International Contact Group (ICG) to provide advice to the concerned parties on the peace process in Mindanao, the Philippines. Dr. Syamsuddin holds a doctorate in Interdepartmental Program in Islamic Studies from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). He is the author of *Islam and Politics in the New Order Era* (2000) and *Religious Ethics to Build Civil Society* (2001).



Rabbi David Rosen

Director, American Jewish Committee Department for Interreligious Affairs

Rabbi David Rosen is Director of American Jewish Committee's Department for Interreligious Affairs and its Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding. From 2005-2009 he led the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, the broad-based coalition of Jewish organizations representing World Jewry to other religions. Rabbi Rosen is Honorary Advisor on Interfaith Relations to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and represents the Chief Rabbinate on the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. He is an International President of Religions for Peace; Honorary President of the International Council of Christians and Jews; on the Executive of the World Council of Religious Leaders (WCORL); and a member of the Elijah Institute's World Board of Religious Leaders. He is a founder of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel. Rabbi Rosen was a member of the Permanent Bilateral Commission of the State of Israel and the Holy See. In 2005 he was made a papal Knight Commander of the Order of St Gregory the Great for promoting Catholic-Jewish reconciliation and in 2010 was made a Commander of the British Empire by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II.



Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf

Founder, Cordoba Initiative

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf is the Founder of Cordoba Initiative, an independent, multi-faith, and multi-national project that works with state and non-state actors to improve Muslim-West relations. Programs include the Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow (MLT) and the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE), which empowers Muslim women globally. In 1997, he founded the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA). Imam Feisal is a Trustee of the Islamic Center of New York and a Vice Chair on the board of the Interfaith Center of New York. Imam Feisal has received many interfaith awards, and, in April 2011, Time Magazine named him among the 100 most influential people of the world. Born of Egyptian parentage and educated in England, Egypt, and Malaysia, Imam Feisal holds a Bachelor of Science in Physics from Columbia University in New York and a Master of Science in Plasma Physics from Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey.



Bill Canny

Catholic Relief Services

Bill Canny is the director of emergency operations at Catholic Relief Services. Based in Baltimore and overseas, he supervises a team that responds to disasters and helps communities to prepare for potential catastrophes. Prior to his current position, Mr. Canny was CRS' country representative in Haiti. He also served as secretary general of the International Catholic Migration Commission. His previous experience with CRS included posts in India as regional director for South Asia, in Baltimore as deputy director of the Eurasia region and the Africa region, and as country representative for Burkina Faso. Mr. Canny began his career with CRS in Djibouti in 1983 coordinating emergency food and shelter for Ethiopian refugees. Mr. Canny holds a B.S. degree in human services from the University of Scranton where he won a presidential scholarship, a master's degree in public health from the University of Pittsburgh, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Scranton in recognition of 25 years of humanitarian service.



Yuka Saionji

Byakko Shinko Kai and the Goi Peace Foundation

Yuka Saionji is Deputy Chairperson of Byakko Shinko Kai, spiritual organization dedicated to world peace and raising the consciousness of humanity that originated in Japan over fifty years ago. It was founded by Yuka's grandfather, Masahisa Goi, who advocated the universal peace prayer, "May Peace Prevail on Earth." Byakko hosts the annual interfaith "Symphony of Peace Prayers," where 10,000 people pray together with leaders from different religions. Yuka also works with Byakko's sister organization, the Goi Peace Foundation. Her recent work with Resilient Japan and NPO Miratuku has been to empower Japanese youth affected by the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011, based on the importance of community rising together and evolving in consciousness. Yuka has a degree in law from Gakushuin University and a published book in Japan called *The Notebook of the Heart*. Yuka works with youth around the world on projects for peace and with the World Spirit Youth Council.



The Children's Theater Company

Mehr Mansuri, Artistic Director

The Children's Theater Company (CTC) is a 12-year-old critically acclaimed, non-profit 501c3 organization awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts, NY State Council on Arts and the DYCD-Dept of Youth/Community Development for its innovation in ethical musical theater. Serving 4,000 children and youth locally and nationally, the Company's resident composers create new musicals that celebrate the triumph of the human spirit. Each musical is inspired by themes of the United Nations' Commemorative Calendar, including Human Rights Day, World Environment Day, Race Unity, Advancement of Women and World Interfaith Harmony Week. CTC has appeared on ABC's Good Morning America, NBC's Today Show and performed at the United Nations and for UNICEF appearing with Nelson Mandela. The Company received critic's choice reviews from the New York Times for its performances at the Dizzy Gillespie Theater donated by the Baha'i Unity Center.



Katherine Marshall

Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University

Katherine Marshall is a Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, and Visiting Professor in the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, and heads the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), that bridges the worlds of development and religion. She focuses on teaching and research on wide ranging topics at the intersection of development and faith. She has worked for four decades on international development, with many years at the World Bank, focused on Africa, Latin America, and Asia. She speaks and publishes widely and is a blogger for the religion section of the Huffington Post. She sits on several non-profit boards, including the Opus Prize Foundation, the International Selection Committee for the Niwano Peace Prize, and AVINA Americas.



Dr. Azza Karam

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Azza Karam, Ph.D. serves as a Senior Technical Advisor, at the *United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*. She coordinates global activities around mobilizing 'cultural agents of change', manages the Global Interfaith Network for Population and Development, and coordinates the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Faith-Based Engagement. She served as the Senior Policy Advisor in the regional Bureau for Arab States at the *United Nations Development Program (UNDP)*. With the support of the Ford Foundation, she founded the first Global Women of Faith Network during her tenure at *Religions for Peace*, while also advising on interfaith development work in Muslim nations, and served as the President of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations. In various countries in the Middle East, Europe and Africa, she has managed global developmental programmes, taught at a number of universities, and published widely on political economy, democratization, human rights, and religion.



Ven. Dr. Chung Ohun Lee

President, Won Buddhism International

Ven. Dr. Chung Ohun Lee is the founding head minister and guiding spiritual teacher of Won Buddhism of Manhattan (WBM, and the president of Won Buddhism International, established in 1994. Chung Ohun Lee is a recognized international leader in interreligious dialogue and cooperation. She has represented Won Buddhism at the United Nations since 1992. Important UN committee positions included: co-convenor of the conference on *Advancing Cooperation between the United Nations and World's Religions* (2008); Chair of *Intercultural Dialogue at the UN* (2004); Chair of the *Universal Ethics Millennium Conference at the UN* (2000); President of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN (1995-1997); and Founding Co-Chair of the Values Caucus at the UN (1994-1995). Ven. Lee is the Co-President of Religions for Peace since 1999. Dr. Lee edited, "*Vision for a New Civilization: Spiritual and Ethical Values in the New Millennium.*" She received full ordination in Won Buddhism in 1981, in Iksan City, South Korea. She holds a Ph.D. in Religious Education from NYU.



Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith

Agape International Spiritual Center and Association for Global New Thought

Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith is the founder of the Agape International Spiritual Center, a trans-denominational community of 10,000 members in Los Angeles, and thousands of global live video streamers. As president of the Association for Global New Thought, he serves as chair of the Gandhi King Season for Nonviolence, which was launched at the United Nations in 1998 and includes the Season for Interfaith and Intercultural Celebration. AGNT co-convenes the forum “Engaged Spirituality for the 21st Century” in partnership with the International Inter-religious Peace Council, which brings together individuals from every faith to discuss topics relevant to global healing. AGNT has also convened three Synthesis Dialogues with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Beckwith is an award-winning author, and a sought after speaker and meditation teacher.



H.E. Amb. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti

Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations

H.E. Amb. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti was born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. She received a Bachelor’s Degree and a post-graduate course in Economics at the University of Brasília, 1981. She joined the Brazilian Foreign Service in 1976, after attending the Rio Branco Institute, the Brazilian diplomatic academy. Her first destination abroad was the Brazilian Mission to the United Nations (1985-88). Upon returning to Brazil, she served as Executive Coordinator in the cabinet of the Minister of External Relations. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she also served as Deputy Press Secretary, Head of the Division of South America I, Director-General of the Department of Human Rights and Social Affairs and Director-General of the Department of International Organizations. She was responsible for the implementation of President Lula’s “Action Against Poverty” initiative. At the United Nations, she was Vice-Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee of the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development. She led the Brazilian Delegation to the negotiations that prepared the Monterey Conference on Financing for Development. She was a member of the ECOSOC Ad hoc Group on Guinea Bissau.



Tajeldin Hamad

Secretary General of Universal Peace Federation

Tajeldin Hamad is Secretary General of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), as well as of the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (WANGO). Among previous posts he has held are Secretary of the Executive Committee of DPI-NGOs at the United Nations, Executive Director for Interdenominational Christians for Unity and Social Action, and Chairman of the Organizing Committee of World Summit of Muslim Leaders in Jakarta and London. Mr. Hamad also serves as Chair of the Middle East Alliance for World Peace. He has travelled to over 80 countries, organizing and speaking at seminars, conferences, and meetings related to family, youth, women, education and interfaith dialogue. His book, *Culture of Responsibility and the Role of NGOs*, was published by Paragon House.



Rev. Deborah Moldow

The World Peace Prayer Society

Rev. Deborah Moldow is the Representative to the United Nations of the World Peace Prayer Society, an international organization promoting the prayer “May Peace Prevail on Earth.” She has led Peace Pole dedications and World Peace Prayer Ceremonies around the world. At the UN, Deborah holds leadership positions on the International Day of Peace NGO Committee, the Committee of Religious NGOs, and the URI-UN. She is a 2009 recipient of the Spirit of the United Nations Award. Deborah co-founded Unity Made Visible, a United Religions Initiative cooperation circle in Westchester, NY, and helps facilitate the Source of Synergy Foundation’s Evolutionary Leaders project. After 30 years of professional theatre, she was ordained as an Interfaith Minister. Rev. Deborah leads monthly Interfaith Sundays at the Chapel at Croton Falls.



Paul Winter

Living Music

Paul Winter is an award-winning saxophonist, bandleader, composer, explorer of the world's musical traditions and founder of Living Music and the Paul Winter Consort. He has been motivated for the past thirty years by the vision of a musical-ecological community, and has followed a steady course towards his unique "Earth Music," a vital celebration of the creatures and cultures of the whole earth. Paul's musical realm has long embraced the traditions of many of the world's cultures, interweaving widely diverse instruments and elements with the extraordinary voices from what he refers to as "the greater symphony of the Earth," including wolves, whales, eagles, and several dozen other species of "wilderness musicians."



The Salvation Army New York Staff Band

Bandmaster Ronald Waiksnoris

The Salvation Army New York Staff Band was established in 1887 here in the United States. It will be celebrating 125 years of continuous service. The band is made up of people employed by the Salvation Army and students. Each person must pass an audition to be admitted to the group. Former members of this band include Philip Smith, Principal Trumpet of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and Stephen Bulla, Chief Arranger for "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band. The band has toured extensively throughout the world. The band has shared the concert platform with talented performer such as Elton John, the New York Philharmonic, John Phillip Sousa, and others. The band has played at venues such as Royal Albert Hall, Buckingham Palace, Carnegie Hall and the Sydney Opera House. The band has over 60 recordings. The mission of the New York Staff Band is to play music that conveys a Gospel message



Dr. Hanifa Mezoui

Office of the President of the 66th General Assembly

Dr. Hanifa Mezoui has enjoyed a distinguished career with the United Nations for the past 28 years. In the last ten of those years, she has been Chief of the NGO Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) where she has established an impressive record of accomplishments. The Informal Regional NGO Network (UN-NGO-IRENE), was developed under her guidance as a critical channel for communicating key themes and programs between the UN and the NGO community, including marginalized groups in developing countries. Dr. Mezoui teaches at the French University, Sciences Po, Paris, France a course on "United Nations from Theory to Practice." She is also an Associate Fellow at UNITAR, specializing on MDG Training and Teaching. Dr. Mezoui holds a Doctorate in French Linguistics, an MA in French Literature, an MA in applied Linguistics and an MA in Business Administration from the University of Aix-en-Provence, France. As of September 2011 she joined the Office of the President of the 66th General Assembly as the Special Coordinator for the Third Committee and Civil Society.

Tree Ceremony

Participants

Christianity

Sr. Joan Kirby

Religious of the Sacred Heart & Temple of Understanding

Islam

Sheikh Omar S. Abu Namous

Islamic Cultural Center of New York

Hinduism

Swamini Sri Lalitambika Devi

Lalitamba Mandiram

Buddhism

Hiro Sakurai

Soka Gakkai International

Indigenous

Jacqueline Wolf Tice

Chickamauga Cherokee

Sikhism

Satkirin Kaur Khalsa

Dharma Worldwide

Judaism

Judith M. Hertz

Union for Reform Judaism

Baha'i

Carl Murrell

Baha'is of the United States

Jainism

Vaishali Shah

International Mahavira Jain Mission

Shinto

Rev. Masafumi Nakanishi

International Shinto Association

Zoroastrianism

Homi Gandhi

Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America