

Welcoming the Other

The 9th World Assembly of *Religions for Peace*
21 November 2013



Syrian Religious Leaders Call for Release of Two Bishops

The opening session of the 9th World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* began with a moment of silence for H.E. Metropolitan Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, and Bishop Boulos Yazigi, a Greek Orthodox Bishop in Damascus, who were kidnapped in Syria. Prayers and calls for these bishops' release were made throughout the day.

Father Samuel Gümüs, Special Representative of HB Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, called for the immediate release of the two bishops. Father Gümüs implored, "I appeal to conscience, principles, morals, and ethics of all peace lovers to spare no effort to bring about a safe and dignified release of Yohanna Ibrahim and Boulous Yazigi."

"These two bishops always worked for peace and a good life for all people," H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohamed Sohaib al-Chami, an Islamic scholar and a member of the *Religions for Peace* Interreligious Council of Syria, reflected. "They kidnaped our bishops but they also took our soul, our love, and our hope. We remember their big role and work. And we hope the smile will come reach to each of us and to all of Syria."

Mrs. Asmaa Kiftaro, President of the Syrian Muslim Women's Forum, shared a message of peace. Ms. Kiftaro declared, "Syria will rise again. The sons of Syria will serve their country. Peace and happiness and smiles will come back to the people of Syria."

Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General for *Religions for Peace*, said, "We stand in solidarity, our hands are in your hands, and we continue to pray."

Welcome the Stranger

Leaders of different faiths at the Assembly signed “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmation for Faith Leaders.” The declaration, written by a group of religious leaders in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is a commitment of religious leaders to “welcome the stranger” in their communities.

Dr. Volker Türk, Director of International Protection for the Office of the UNHCR, highlighted that, “The idea of asylum is a legal concept, but its roots, its morals, its values are rooted in all faiths.”

The declaration begins, “A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same.”

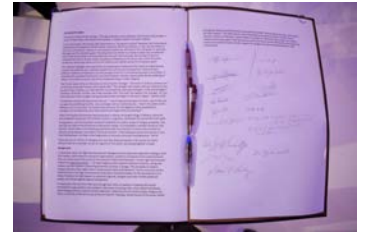
To view video excerpts from the press conference on “Welcome the Stranger,” click [here](#).

RfP Myanmar

Delegates from the recently formed *Religions for Peace Myanmar* briefed the media on their hope for continued success and collaboration during the difficult process of democratization. Collaboration among religious leaders during the Myanmar transition has been focused on shared values, such as child protection and development.

“Without development, there can be no peace,” said Myint Swe, President of *RfP Myanmar*. “It is our design that we are implementing development work in our communities.”

Father Joseph Maung Win, Director of Karuan Myanmar Social Services rejoiced, “Now that we are free. And being at the Assembly is a great opportunity for us, especially given the theme of the Assembly, ‘Welcoming the Other.’ For all of us, in all of our religions, we believe in welcoming the other.”





Plenary III: Welcome the Other in Just and Harmonious Societies

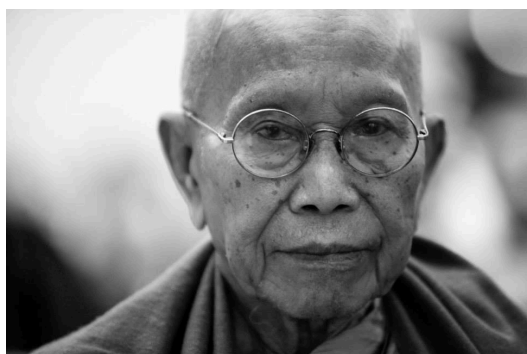
Today began with Plenary III: Welcoming the Other in Just and Harmonious Societies.

H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, received rousing applause when he said, "A minority is just as much a part of a nation as a majority."



Plenary IV: Welcoming the Other Through Human Development that Respects the Earth

The final plenary of the Assembly focused on Welcoming the Other Through Human Development That Respects the Earth. "How and where can we experience a reconnection with Mother Earth?" said Dr. Vinu Aram, Director of Shanti Ashram and Vice Moderator of *RfP*. "Mother Earth belongs to us as much as we do belong to her."



Interviews with Religious Leaders

Throughout this Assembly, several religious leaders were interviewed by *Religions for Peace* about what the *RfP* means to them. To watch some of the interviews, click [here](#).



Connecting Online at the 9th World Assembly of Religions for Peace

We encourage you to view the 9th World Assembly's [resources](#), including the Assembly's Theme Paper and Assembly Program, located on the *Religions for Peace* [website](#).

If you are not able to attend the Assembly this year, we encourage you to read the World Assembly Theme Paper to learn about how religious communities can welcome the other by advancing human dignity, shared well-being, and a more robust notion of citizenship.

Also, please follow us on social media to join the conversation about the Assembly:

- Follow [The 9th World Assembly of Religions for Peace](#) Facebook page. Please use the Assembly's official hashtag **#RfPAssembly** if you are posting your own updates.
- Join us on [Twitter](#) and post your thoughts on the Assembly using **#RfPAssembly**.
- Follow us on [Instagram](#) at **rfp_assembly** and post your own photos using the tag **#RfPAssembly**.
- Watch video highlights from the Assembly on our [YouTube](#) channel.
- Read our daily e-newsletters and updates to keep informed about events happening at the Assembly.