



“Engaging Religions in the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes”

Wednesday, 5 February 2014

1:15 – 2:45 p.m. United Nations, Conference Room 2

United Nations Headquarters

This program was webcast and can be viewed at: <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/watch/engaging-religions-in-the-prevention-of-atrocity-crimes-world-interfaith-harmony-week/3157636484001>

URI worked with the UN Office on the Prevention of Genocide, UN Department of Public Information and Partnership for Global Justice on "Engaging Religions in the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes." Even though NY and the surrounding areas had severe snow and ice, over 100 people came to the UN to attend this program.

The Keynote address was given by Mr. Adama Dieng, the Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide. He cited the importance of engaging religions to help calm and end the growing increase in violent conflict in our world. He quoted the recent Pew Study on the increase of incidents of violence between religious groups and stressed the importance in engaging religious leaders to help stop the violence.

Ambassador Abdrakhmanov from Kazakhstan shared the importance of Interfaith Harmony in his country, including the four World Conferences on World Religions hosted by his country. Kazakhstan is a leader in promoting the Decade on Rapprochement of Cultures, 2012-2021. He also shared their commitment to nuclear abolition. Ambassador Jenne D’Arc Byoje from Rwanda came to hear Ms. Consolee Nishimwe, tell some of her experiences of living through the Rwandan genocide. Consolee, a Christian, along with her mother and sister, received shelter in the home of Muslims, who as a religious group did not participate in the genocide. Her gripping story was a testament to her faith and courage. Consolee’s book is “Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor’s Story of Pain, Resilience and Hope.”

Dr. Carol Rittner, a Roman Catholic Sister of Mercy, is also a Distinguished Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Her powerful presentation first acknowledged the involvement and complicity of religious leaders and congregations in atrocity crimes. Then she shared some stories that showed the positive impact that religious leaders made by offering protection, hope and kindness to people of various faiths who were being tortured and killed. She emphasized the importance of teaching and living the Golden Rule as a way to stop atrocity crimes as they begin to escalate, preventing the horrors of mass atrocities and genocide.

Our final speaker was Rabbi Roger Ross, one of URI's representatives to the UN. He shared the eight specific stages of genocide as outlined by Gregory H. Stanton, President of Genocide Watch: Classification, Symbolization, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Extermination and Denial. He offered examples of how religious leaders could make a positive impact by addressing growing hostilities when first identified, so that they could prevent escalation into atrocity crimes. His information, his examples and his ability to offer solutions encouraged everyone, especially religious leaders, to recognize what is happening in their community before it becomes violent. He encouraged leadership based on spiritual practices that respect the value of each person as a child of God, not as a specific religious member or ethnicity.

Dr. Hanifa Mezoui, Senior Advisor on Civil Society for the UN Alliance of Civilizations, moderated the panel.