



Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony

www.interfaithcities.org

Executive Secretariat: 2101 L St NW #800, Washington, DC 20037, USA

Email: secretariat@interfaithcities.org

Attn : The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre
Amman
Jordan
Submitted on the World Interfaith Harmony Week website

March 3, 2017

ACTIVITIES REPORT

In my capacity as Managing Director of “Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony,” I have to honor to submit this official report to the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre to explain and document what “Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony” (MCIF) is all about and what was accomplished in 2016/2017.

Events that took place before the official “Interfaith Harmony” window of 2017

The idea to develop a network of cities that would support the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week first came from reading the EUCLID report on discussions held by the EUCLID representatives during their April 2016 visit, notably with HRH Prince Ghazi bin. With initial EUCLID support, the current Managing Director assumed global leadership of the initiative now known as “Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony.” An official website was launched in July 2016, after which a model Proclamation was developed in English and French, on the model of the Proclamation issued by the Mayor of Halifax in 2015.

Between September 2016 and February 2017, “Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony” formally came into existence thanks to the support and participation of the following mayors/cities:



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City	Country	Mayor/Signatory	Date
Bangui	Central African Republic	Emile Nakombo	September 15, 2016
Amman	Jordan	Aqel Biltaji	September 25, 2016
Banjul	Gambia	Abdoulaye B J Bah	October 12, 2016
Tucson	United States	Jonathan Rothschild	February 1, 2017

Bangui's participation as founding city was especially meaningful because this city (and indeed the entire country) was tragically affected by interfaith violence in 2013 and 2014.¹ In this difficult context, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bangui Dieudonné Nzapalainga, together with the president of the Central African Islamic Council Imam Oumar Kobine, and the president of the Evangelical Alliance, Pastor Nicolas Gbangou came forward to denounce violence and plead for interfaith harmony. They were globally recognized for their courage and determination:

- Pope Francis came to Bangui and declared that city's historic cathedral as first in the world to be dedicated for the 2015 Year of Mercy
- The 3 religious leaders received many accolades and awards including the Aachen Peace Prize²
- Archbishop Nzapalainga was created a Cardinal by Pope Francis in 2016
- The 3 leaders were invited as VIPs at the inauguration of the democratically elected new President Faustin Touadéra, who

¹ See for instance at: <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2014/02/27/religious-violence-is-out-of-control-in-the-central-african-republic>

² See at <https://www.cordaid.org/en/news/religious-leaders-car-lauded-four-freedoms-award/>



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immediately pursued an active policy of interfaith harmony (by visiting the Mosque, hosting a Ramadan dinner, etc.).

It was therefore fitting that Bangui would be the first city invited to co-establish the network of “Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony.” It also of profound importance that the city’s mayor would have been so supportive.

The two next mayors/cities to be invited by the Secretariat were **Banjul** and **Amman**.

Having had the privilege to meet the Mayor of Amman during the 2016 Prize ceremony, Pr Cleenewerck of EUCLID did the introduction to the Mayor’s office, and it was equally to be commended that Mayor Aqel Biltaji signed the Proclamation 10 days after Bangui’s Mayor.

The City of **Banjul**, capital of The Gambia, was also invited in view of the fact that the 2017 winner of the World Interfaith Harmony Prize was Euclid University (headquartered in The Gambia). This meant that the “Interfaith Cities” network could count on EUCLID’s support to help organize another World Interfaith Harmony Week event in the Gambian capital. The Proclamation was approved by the Lord Mayor on behalf of the Municipality on October 12, 2016.

Even though our initial vision was to create a network of seven cities during the first year, it was more realistic to start ‘squarely’ with four. It was very fitting, for many reasons, that the city of **Tucson** in Arizona (United States) came forward with its Proclamation officially dated February 1, 2017, marking the first day of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.

In addition to creating the website, brochure, draft proclamations and forming a supporting team, MCIH also coordinated the organization of specific events in the participating cities and at **UNESCO** in Paris. For 2017, it was deemed preferable to focus on the 3 international cities + UNESCO while letting the Prize ceremony hosting by Amman be that city’s first year event.



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Overall Purpose of 2017 Events

The main purpose of the 2017 events was to officially announce and present the formation of the “Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony” initiative at suitable events organized to support the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. These events would also demonstrate the capacity of the “Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony” Secretariat to act as an effective point of coordination with its international partners to make these events a success.

The secondary purpose was to create awareness of both the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week and Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony at the UNESCO level, in order to encourage observance of the week at UNESCO and also through the National Commissions.

The longer term purpose, which we hope to have accomplished, is to have established a sustainable structure and model that will encourage an increasing number of cities around the world to officially endorse and support the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.

On Saturday February 01, 2017: Banjul Event

On Saturday February 2017, the Municipality of Banjul opted to publicly present its declaration (originally signed) on the occasion of the Banjul Interfaith Celebration graciously hosted at the EUCLID headquarters. The speakers were:

- Special Guest of Honor Representing the Mayor of Banjul City, the BCC Public Relations Officer Mr. Sandigie Njie;
- The Rev. Pastor Robert D Mendy; Pastor at the Pneuma Ministries in Yuna;
- Dr. Pierre Gomez, Associate Professor & Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences at the University of the Gambia;
- Mr. Abdul Karim Kamara, Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of Languages at the University of The Gambia.



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Photo above: Sandigie Njie, representative of the Banjul City Council, reading the Proclamation



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MAYORS AND CITIES FOR INTERFAITH HARMONY 2017 | BANJUL

Photo above: Presentations and discussions at the High Table, with a audience of about 30 attentive listeners.

The reading of the Proclamation is posted as a video at:
<https://youtu.be/Oq3JXxeEp1Y> and was featured in the Gambia national news.

More details at: <http://www.interfaithcities.org/banjul-gambia-2017-event/>



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Also on Saturday February 01/04, 2017, Tucson (Arizona, USA)

The Proclamation issued by City of Tucson (Arizona) was officially dated February 1, 2017 and was announced at the Interfaith event hosted by the Tucson Islamic Center.



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Photo above (Tucson Islamic Center Facebook): time of discussion at the Tucson Islamic Center



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MAYORS AND CITIES FOR INTERFAITH HARMONY 2017 | TUCSON

Photo above (Tucson News Now): time of prayer and meditation at the Tucson Islamic Center



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Photo above (Saraiya Kanning), from article below:

<http://www.tucsonweekly.com/tucson/cultivating-community/Content?oid=7428685> which states “Tucson's youth interfaith dialogue, sponsored by the Islamic Center, was supported by Mayor Jonathan Rothschild through a proclamation. Tucson is the first of four cities to formally proclaim participation in WIHW through the Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony initiative.”

Press coverage: <https://news.azpm.org/p/news-articles/2017/2/3/105678-tucson-islamic-center-invites-students-to-interfaith-conversation/>



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<http://www.kptv.com/story/34428787/youth-come-together-for-interfaith-harmony-discussion>

<http://www.tucsonnewsnow.com/story/34428787/youth-come-together-for-interfaith-harmony-discussion>

YouTube (News): <https://youtu.be/JZM3M8qpBEI>

Details (with copy of City Proclamation) at:

<http://www.interfaithcities.org/tucson-arizona-2017-event/>

Thursday February 03, 2016: UNESCO (Paris)

At the outset of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017, the Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony Secretariat contacted the Permanent delegations associated with the Participating Cities at UNESCO in Paris.

Responding positively, the Permanent delegations of Central African Republic, Eritrea, Gambia and Jordan agreed to hold a meeting hosted by Cultural Attaché Suheil Shaheen at the Permanent Delegation of Jordan.

The four UNESCO-based diplomats discussed plans to make the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week a UNESCO-cosponsored and observed event, to be organized in cooperation with Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony.



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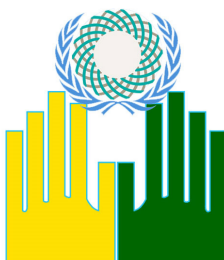
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MAYORS AND CITIES FOR INTERFAITH HARMONY 2017 | UNESCO

Photo above, from left to right: Cultural Attaché Suheil Shaheen (Jordan), Ambassador Hanna Simon (Eritrea), Cultural Attaché/Deputy Permanent Delegate Désiré Achille Baboula (Central African Republic), Cultural Attaché/Deputy Permanent Delegate Yahya Jobe (Gambia); holding the Proclamation issues by their capital cities.



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Photo above: the representatives of Central African Republic, Gambia and Jordan also discussed means to create greater awareness and recognition for the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week and “Interfaith Cities (MCIH)” at the level of UNESCO.

More details at:

Thursday February 07/14, 2017: Bangui, Central African Republic

Initially scheduled to take place on Tuesday, February 7, the event had to be postponed by one week on account of a national state funeral. On the 14th at 10 PM, the country’s national school for magistrates and civil administrators (ENAM) graciously hosted the country’s first public event



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celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week. At the high table were featured:

- The Deputy Mayor of Bangui
- The Director of the ENAM
- The EUCLID representative in the country
- Several professors from the university of Bangui

In addition to an audience of ENAM students (future civil servants and military officers), the Christian community was represented by Fr Richard Tende. Also in attendance was Genaro Bernal of the United Nations MINUSCA.



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Photo above: The Deputy Mayor arriving at the ENAM and is greeted by the ENAM Director as well as representatives of the University of Bangui and EUCLID.



Photo above: The Deputy Mayor reading the Proclamation.



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Photo above: Group photo with the lecturers and attendance.



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Photo above: the speakers and organizers.

Press coverage (French, page 2): <http://www.interfaithcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/EUCLIDE-article-Bangui-Le-Democrate.pdf>

More details: <http://www.interfaithcities.org/bangui-central-african-republic-2017-event/>

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, gratitude is expressed to the four mayors:

- Mayor Emile Nakombo of Bangui



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- Mayor Aqel Biltaji of Amman
- Mayor Abdoulaye B J Bah of Banjul
- Mayor Jonathan Rothschild of Amman

This report and Mayor and Cities for Interfaith Harmony wish to acknowledge the amazing support received from:

- Alexis N'dui-Yabela, Director of the ENAM in Bangui (host)
- The rector and professors of the University of Bangui who spoke at the event
- Irfan Sheik (Coordinator for events in Tucson)
- Apollinaire Molaye, EUCLID coordinator in Bangui
- Pr Laurent Cleenewerck (EUCLID international support)
- Mohammed Loum (Coordinator for events in Banjul) and with him all the speakers and participants
- The Permanent delegation of Central African Republic, Gambia, Eritrea and Jordan to the UNESCO, notably Ambassador Hanna Simon (of Eritrea to France and UNESCO) and the Permanent delegation of Jordan for hosting the meeting.

Summary and Perspectives:

The core objective set forth during the summer of 2016, namely to create a network for mayors and cities committed to the support the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week has been achieved thanks to the formalized participation of four important and symbolic cities, including 3 capitals.

If support is forthcoming, it is the intention of the Secretariat to continue to develop the network, first to reach the initial goal of 7 cities, and then the next symbolic goal of 49 cities. It will be important not only to establish a network but also to coordinate ongoing actions every year, the overarching goal being (1) to promote awareness of and participation in the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, including of the Common Word document, and (2) to actually see measurable improvements in interfaith harmony wherever threatening tensions exist.

“Mayors and Cities for Interfaith Harmony” also intends to continue its cooperation with the Permanent delegations to UNESCO to obtain



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UNESCO headquarters support first, followed by the participation of the National Commissions (one in each country).

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Irene' followed by a stylized surname.

Irene Cleenewerck

Managing Director

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