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U.S. Chapter Board

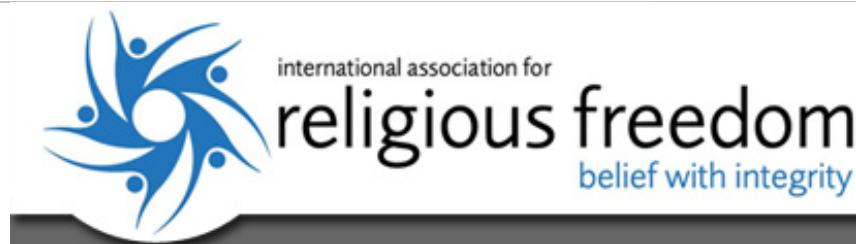
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Chapter Leaders Meet

By resolution of the United Nations assembly, the first week in February was World Interfaith Harmony Week—an ideal time for an IARF meeting on February 6th at the Reading, MA, Unitarian Universalist Church. Present were chapter chair Hal French and board member Sri Kota, IARF Council member Doris Hunter, and Advisors John Berthrong, Eric Cherry, Gale Maynard, and Nyla McCulloch.

Doris writes:
The meeting's focus was to relate our personal experiences as participants in the 33rd Congress held

last September in Kochi, India. I spoke, and moving presentations were given as well by Nyla McCulloch, Gale Maynard, and Eric Cherry from the UUA International Office. Each of us related how unforgettable the

experience was, with the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whose message of compassion gave hope for our world. In addition, we experienced rich encounters with people of many faith traditions in our circle groups and in

Cont. on page 2 sidebar



Front: H. French, D. Hunter.
Back: J. Berthrong, N. McCulloch, G. Maynard, Sri Kota

The Cost of Freedom

Hal W. French

Nikos Kazantzakis, in *Report to Greco*, relates an incident in his boyhood which shaped his lifelong obsession with the pursuit of freedom. He was part of a religious minority in the Cretan town in which he grew up. Periodically, minority members would agitate for greater rights, only to be crushed. On one occasion three protest instigators were executed. The following morning his harsh, rough father took him out of his home, where, rounding a corner, they saw the three hanging figures. Repulsed, the boy tried to leave, but his father

did an incredible thing, lifting the protesting boy, forcing him to kiss the bare feet of the three men, honoring them. "Who killed them?" the boy asked his father. "Liberty," the father responded. This was the cost of freedom, and an indelible imprint was made on the young Kazantzakis.

We don't normally experience anything like that intensity of feeling about what our cherished freedoms have cost. Think of the freedoms guaranteed in the Bill of Rights to our Constitution. Think of Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. And think

now of the situation in Egypt where desperate citizens have placed their lives on the line for freedom. We don't yet know how these changes which have already come will play out, there and in other Middle Eastern countries, but we do hear the cries for freedom; we do know something of what freedom may cost.

One writer, Frank Fredericks, founder of World Faiths, sees interfaith components in the Egyptian revolution, with Muslims attending and protecting Coptic Christian

Continued on page 2

Chapter Leaders, cont.

conversations during meals and workshops. The experience of being in India gave all who attended a perspective on that diverse culture and its ancient tradition.

After the meeting, Professor Hal French, chaired a board/advisors meeting. We discussed the future of the Chapter, including plans for a conference in February of 2012. We also look forward to meeting you at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in Charlotte, NC, in June, <http://www.uua.org/ga/>. We hope to see you there, and thank you for your continual support of the Chapter and IARF.

UU General Assembly
Charlotte, NC
June 22-26
IARF Reception 6pm
June 24, Westin Hotel

Servetus 500th
Birthday event to
follow.

Visit our booth in the
International Village
of the Exhibit Hall.

Plan to Come!

IARF US Chapter
conference
February, 2012
Hilton Head, SC

The Cost of Freedom, cont.

worship services at Christmas and Christians responding by shielding mosques all over Egypt, protecting Muslims at Friday morning prayers before the protests would commence.

On my recent trip to Boston to meet with IARF Board members and Advisors, I was struck once more by all of the markers of freedom, walking along sites on the Freedom Trail. We have known something of the cost of freedom, and we are engaged in interfaith activity, protecting religious freedom.

As Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer have recently written, interfaith activity is no longer merely an opportunity reserved for small groups of people; it is becoming a civic imperative and a public necessity. Can this become a dominant force in troubled countries, where freedoms of various forms may now be in ferment? Can we, as we are able, enter that fermenting mix, as defenders and celebrants of each of our cherished freedoms?



prepares to open hearings on the threat of homegrown Islamic terrorism, President Obama's deputy national security adviser visited a mosque on Sunday to reassure Muslims that "we will not stigmatize or demonize entire communities because of the actions of a few." nytimes.com.

Religious Freedom News

The IARF continues to monitor violations of the right to freedom of belief around the world. Richard Gilbert sent a posting to the Sightings website -[Iran's Baha'i Minority Suffers Increasing Persecution](#) by Elise Auerbach. Excerpts follow.

"Seven leaders of Iran's Baha'i community were sentenced to twenty years in prison by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran last August, a sentence that was reduced to ten years in September. They were convicted on serious but baseless charges including 'espionage for Israel,' 'insulting religious sanctities' and 'propaganda against the system.' They had also been charged with *ifsad fil arz* or 'corruption on earth.' These charges could have resulted in death sentences. The seven leaders were convicted after a trial that failed to adhere to international standards for fair trials."

At the UN Human Rights Council, "Mohammad Javad Larijani, the

Secretary-General of Iran's High Council for Human Rights . . . insisted that no Baha'i is persecuted because of his or her Baha'i faith, but rather because of their engagement in illegal activities—completely evading the issue that perfectly legitimate activities or beliefs [such as Baha'is gathering for worship] are construed as 'illegal,' that the evidence for such 'illegal' activities is generally non-existent, and that the legal procedures that try and convict people on such charges are woefully inadequate." For more, see <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/>

U.S. From New York Times, March 6. "A crowd of 500 gathered at the bottom of Times Square on Sunday to protest upcoming Congressional hearings on radicalization within the Muslim community, arguing that the hearings threaten to single out one religious group unfairly." March 7. As a Republican congressman

Robert Papini, staff of the IARF Secretariat, monitors news on the freedom of belief, which he posts at <http://rfyn.tumblr.com/>. These items are from his recent posts.

PAKISTAN Robert called on American members to contact US Congress members on behalf of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five who is now in a Pakistani jail with a death sentence. She was convicted last month of blaspheming the prophet Muhammad by refusing to become a Muslim, which under Pakistan's laws, allowed the court to sentence her to death. Ed.: [Good news!](#) An appeal hearing has been granted. And on February 11, Pakistan's Ministry for Religious Minorities survived the recent Cabinet reduction, with Shahbaz Bhatti reappointed a member of President Asif Ali Zardari's Cabinet. Bhatti became the first-ever **Continued on page 4.**

Visiting the Khasi Hills

John Rex

On Tuesday, September 7, I left Kochi with a special group of four distinguished Unitarian Universalist friends, for the Khasi Hills in North East India. As I had been there before many times, I had been asked to "lead" this group. Our program in the Khasi Hills began with a ride to the small village of Kharang not far from Shillong. Our mentor and guide for our four-day visit was Bah Khlur Mukhim, now a professor at Lady Keane College in Shillong, who had been my coworker for all of the six months of my ministry in the Khasi Hills in 1998-99. Bah Khlur had arranged for all five of us to attend as honored guests the elaborate dedication of the addition to the Christopher Rex Memorial Hostel, a program that included songs and dances from student groups, speeches from a number of distinguished persons, a ribbon-cutting at the site of the new addition, and a special luncheon.

Later the same day, our group visited the Annie Margaret Barr Children's Village in Kharang, which has been built with funds that include a major donation from a family member of one of my fellow travelers. I didn't know what to expect, but when the crowd of small children came on the verandah to greet us, I was completely taken.



Tamil Nadu Tour

Jack Darr

Before the 2010 Congress in Kochi, about twenty of us, mostly Unitarians from Europe and North America, organized by Richard Kellaway, toured Tamil Nadu. Forging friendships with the other conferees was a major highlight of this tour. The people of Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state in India, have Dravidian roots and speak the Tamil language. They have not adopted Hindi in schools or administration. But the state of Tamil Nadu preserves some of the finest Hindu temples in the country, having largely avoided the 12th-century destruction Muslim anti-idol campaigns visited upon Northern India.

Our bus tour afforded us an excellent expedition

At my request, our program for the next few days focused on visiting with people and seeing as much as possible of Khasi Unitarian churches. It included time with Bah Khlur's wife and their baby daughter, who was born just a few days before our visit.

After saying moving goodbyes, on the final day our group set out together, in the long, arduous, yes, terrifying drive downhill to the airport in Guwahati, and our flights home.

For more personal insights on this journey and the Khasi people, with photos, please see home.iarfus.org/home.



R.Gilbert, B.Darr, J.Rex, Bah Khlur, J.Gilbert, photo: J.Darr

Read the latest news
from the international
office at

www.iarf.net

through the history of regime change and temple construction in this part of the world. We visited 7th-century rock temples and monolithic shrines in Mahabalipuram, and we hot-footed (literally—it was high noon and we were shoeless) through two 8th-century temples in Kanchipuram, all built for the Pallava rulers. We experienced life in the 11th-century temple and palace built for the conquering Chola dynasty in Tanjore, complete with blessing by an elephant (for those who put 10 rupees in his trunk). We wandered through the massive temple complex in Madurai, begun by the Pandyas (7th–10th centuries) and added to by successive dynasties until completed in the 18th century by the Marathas.

These temples were built to

honor Shiva, his consort Parvati, Krishna, Vishnu and sometimes Ganesha. The locals use them for everything from sleeping in one temple and a food line in another to seeking divine assistance in finding a mate or in conceiving a child. In many of the temples, we were the only tourists; others were there to go about their usual temple pursuits.

While temple visiting in the major cities was the main theme of our tour, we spent many hours observing rural and village life as we traveled over 500 kilometers from the state's northeast corner to its southwest edge. Huts in some villages were of mud and thatch, in others we would see stucco. Prosperity, if it existed, was invisible and trash was

Continued, page 4

**United States Chapter
International
Association for
Religious Freedom**

It's a new membership year. Please renew or join! Visit our website iarfus.org or send your dues to Harold French, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208

IARF Dues:

- \$30 - Individual
- \$50 - Household
- \$10 - Student



Barr Children's Village, Khasi Hills

Tamil Nadu, continued

endemic. Although most Tamils are Hindu, and Christian churches are few and far between, not all are Hindu. On one of our travel days, we witnessed hundreds of people traveling long distances by foot for the healing powers said to exist in the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Good Health in Velankanni.



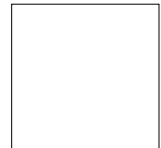
Religious Freedom, continued.

Christian to hold a Cabinet position in Pakistan, despite calling for a review of the blasphemy laws and defending Asia Bibi.

CANADA From the Deccan Herald, Feb 10: 'Quebec province's legislature has unanimously voted to ban the *kirpan* from assembly premises, weeks after four Sikhs were denied entry for a parliamentary hearing for refusing to surrender their ceremonial daggers.'

**U.S. CHAPTER
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
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