

Press Release

To: News Editor

Religions for Peace International Youth Committee Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya: “Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security: World’s Religious Youth Working Together”

In solidarity with the people of Kenya, the 3rd annual meeting of the *Religions for Peace International Youth Committee (IYC)* was held in Nairobi between 15th and 18th of December 2008 under the theme *“Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security: World’s Religious Youth Working Together”*.

At the beginning of 2008, Kenya, believed to be an “island of peace” in a relatively turbulent region, witnessed unprecedented post-election violence. The Kenyan nation was unfortunately thrust into the global arena for all the wrong reasons; not for its sporting prowess in long distance runners, or abundant wildlife. During this dark period in Kenya’s history it was evident that when violence erupts the youth too became victims, perpetrators and even defenders of their communities. Whereas, the Kibera slum in Nairobi was seriously affected by the violence, some religious youth under the umbrella of the Soweto Youth Group opted for a different path – that of mobilizing their peers irrespective of ethnic or religious background to protect both family and friends. They held several peace forums to discuss underlying issues that were critical in restoring peace, displaying the power of intercultural engagement and multi-religious cooperation for peace. The youth demonstrated leadership in peace building and were responsible actors in the mission for positive change. The IYC delegates made a solidarity visit to the Soweto Youth Group in Kibera, and exchanged experiences with the youth who uniquely and courageously opted to confront violence and advance shared security.

The International Youth Committee held a public event in which emotional project presentations were made. Ms. Avigail Moshe from Israel shared her experience with the *Religions for Peace Jerusalem Young Adult Forum* stating that *“the Kibera visit was not only significant and inspiring but also a lesson to take as a message to the young people in Jerusalem”*.

In his presentation on the Asia and Pacific regional youth network, Mr. Yoshinori Shinohara from Japan said that the *“religious youth provided a space for open discussion with the senior-most representatives in the conflict because they represent hope and the future”*.

On her part Ms. Soher El Sukaria from Argentina sharing on her experience with the inter-religious youth movement in Latin America, stated that the *“youth perspective is invaluable in multi-cultural integration”*.

Ms. Parker Diggory from the United States of America while speaking on the Network of Seminarians project acknowledged that *“if religious leaders were involved in multi-religious collaboration from the onset of their careers then they would have skills and relationships to counter crisis when they occur”*.

In his key address, Mr. Hassan Omar Hassan, the Vice Chairperson of the Kenya National Human Rights Commission (KNHCR), presented a strong case for *“Non violent youth response to conflict”*.

On behalf of the youth, Ms. Stellamaris Mulaeh, the IYC Coordinator, paid a courtesy call to the Minister for Youth in the Government of Kenya, Hon. Prof. Hellen Sambili on the last day of the meeting and briefed her on the deliberations at the 3rd IYC Meeting in Nairobi.

Violence is a global phenomenon with individual and communal security threatened by armed conflict, human rights' abuse, genocide and state-sponsored repression, exploitation of children, gender-based violence (GBV), as well as violent crime. Reality dictates a much broader understanding of violence in the world that includes the effects of poverty, disease and environmental degradation. Extreme poverty threatens individual security and it is especially sad that millions of people, especially children, are lost to preventable and treatable diseases such as Malaria, Tuberculosis (TB) and Cholera and Typhoid.

Religion has the unique ability to convene the power, energy and spiritual strengths of religious youth to make positive difference and bring the story of hope to the world community. They have a key role to play in confronting violence and advancing shared security. The world's youth have hitherto been key actors in brewing conflicts where they've been both victims and perpetrators. They must now be involved in initiatives that bring about peace. Multi-religious cooperation leads to millions of believers working together for peace. The International Youth Committee reaffirmed its solidarity with the initiatives of multi-religious youth in the world to confront violence and advance shared security drawing inspiration from the Soweto Youth Group to reconnect with society for peaceful coexistence.

[End]

Signed in Nairobi, Kenya.

This 6th January, 2009



Stellamaris Mulaeh
IYC Coordinator and ARYN Co-Convener

Established at the 2006 World Youth Assembly in Hiroshima, Japan – *Religions for Peace* Global Youth Network harnesses the energy and commitment of religious youth leaders all over the world to advance the mission of multi-religious cooperation for peace. The *Religions for Peace* International Youth Committee (IYC) leads the work of the Global Youth Network and its membership represents the major world religions in the six regions of the world – Africa, Asia and Pacific, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East, and North America.

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