

# Network for Inter faith Concerns

## Christian-Muslim News Digest Issue 2 2007

### **Christian-Muslim News Digest**

#### **In Malawi**

##### **Christian-Muslim Relations Seminar**

A seminar at the Centre for Social Concern (CFSC) at St. Francis Parish attracted delegates from all over Africa to promote interfaith dialogue at the end of May 2007. The seminar was organized by the African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching (AFCAST). Contributor, Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, explained the importance of using the social teachings of the Catholic Church to endorse dialogue, morality, and the promotion of human rights for all people. Similarly, Saiti Jambo, a representative of the Muslim Association of Malawi, also expressed the importance of using Qur'anic teaching to support dialogue, peace, and coexistence between faiths. Other issues, including Muslims expressing their discontent with the Catholic Church for not abiding by the Religious and Moral Studies syllabus (2000), were discussed as some Muslim children are being taught the Bible in school. (*Catholic Information Service for Africa, June 6, 2007*)

#### **In Nigeria**

##### **Religious Leaders Discuss Sacrilege**

Sheikh Abdullahi and Pastor Ezekiel gathered to discuss the habit of using holy books while being sworn into public office in Nigeria. The two religious leaders found common ground in expressing their concern of disgracing sacred texts and consistent corruption among the leaders. Sheikh Abdullahi said, "I think it's time we disallowed our leaders from playing with God by swearing on the holy books. Otherwise, Nigeria will continue to be plagued with the wailing of lack of good governance manned by God-fearing leaders. May Allah help us save Nigeria from the tragic consequences of this sacrilege." (Isiaka Wakili, *Daily Trust*, "Sheikh Abdullah – Sacrilege As Usual," May 27, 2007)

##### **Christian-Muslim Dialogue Advocated by President**

Nigeria's president, Umaru Musa Yar'adua, pledged on June 11, 2007 to form a committee of Christian and Muslim leaders to support and discuss peace throughout the country. Umaru Musa Yar'adua explained, "I am President today not because I am better or wiser than anybody but rather because that is the will of God. That imposes on me enormous responsibility. And for that, I consider every Nigerian who has meaningful contribution on the way forward for our nation as my adviser." (*Nigeria First*, "...Pledges to Set Up a Joint Religious Committee," June 12, 2007)

On June 19, 2007, President Yar'adua expressed his hope for the government to build bridges between religious groups as the nation would not be able to successfully strive without harmony. Consequently, one advance in this direction has been to consider compulsory religious studies in schools in hopes students will receive "moral training." This consideration hopes to help combat the administrations current war against corruption. The president mentioned that organizations like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) provide direction and wisdom to the government. The Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, called for a more successful and

effective Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC). Essentially, the Sultan to Nigeria said, “join hands to make it [religious crisis] a thing of the past.” (*This Day*, “FG to Create Harmony Among Religious Groups,” June 19, 2007; Ben Agande, *Vanguard*, “FG May Introduce Compulsory Religious Education in Schools,” June 19, 2007)

## **In Kenya**

### **Christian and Muslim Leaders Speak Out Against Violence**

Religious leaders in Kenya released a statement on June 16, 2007, the International Day of the African Child, to declare their unified support to stop the violence against children, including the growing problem of child trafficking. Leaders from various religious communities, each of whom are a part of the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, signed the declaration. They included: Catholic Archbishop Ndingi Mwana A’Nzeki, Anglican Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi, Professor Abdulgafur El Busaidy of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, and Rashmin Chitnis of the Hindu Council. (*Catholic Information Services for Africa*, “Faith Leaders Decry Widespread Violence Against Children,” June 21, 2007)

### **Muslims Praying at a Christian School**

In North East Kenya a secondary Christian school has been shut down for not allowing their Muslim students to pray on school property. The school, sponsored by missionaries from South Korea, came under scrutiny from the predominantly Muslim community for violating their constitutional right to worship. The proprietor of the school, Lee Wonchoel, defended the school by explaining that since it was sponsored by Christian missionaries; only one faith should be practiced. Discussions regarding the future of the school are still being worked out. Meanwhile, the school remains closed. (*Muchemi Wachia for Daily Nation*, June 14, 2007)

## **In Ghana**

### **Faith Groups are asked to Condemn Moral Corruption**

Georgina Wood, Lady Chief Justice in Ghana, seeks a moral approach to combat moral corruption. She called for Churches and Mosques to speak out against “trafficking of cocaine and corruption,” noting that the only way to deal with the problem “head on” is through the help of religious groups. This is in an effort to use Supreme Court Judges as nation builders and to play a significant role in the development of the nation with the help of faith groups. (Ebenezer Hanson, *Public Agenda*, “Georgina Wood Charges Churches, Mosques to Condemn Moral Corruption,” June 4, 2007)

## **In Egypt**

### **Christians and Muslims: Brothers before God**

A forum at Cairo University released a new edition of *Christians and Muslims: Brothers before God* in Arabic by Father Christian van Nispen. It was released by The Center for Civilization Studies and Dialogue Between Cultures at Cairo University. Nispen brings a weighted forty years of experience and research to the work. Advocating for how Muslims and Christians worship one and the same God within their own understanding, Nispen is highly respected among both groups. In the book he outlines several important factors for maintaining successful dialog between groups which include: inner freedom, mutual respect, appropriate dialogue partners, and the ability to abandon prejudices. (Salmá Anwar, *Arab-West Report*, “Christian and Muslim Brothers Before God,” February 28-March 06, Art. 2, Week 9/2007)

## **Christian-Muslim Clash**

On May 11, 2007 clashes between Christians and Muslims in Behma, Egypt, south of Cairo, broke out after reports that the Coptic Christian community was building a church in the area without a permit. According to security reports, hundreds of Muslim and Christians clashed among each other throughout the weekend setting fire to shops and homes. The Egyptian government requires permits for Christian buildings and maintains a strict policy regarding the construction or enlargement of churches. This issue has been an ongoing grievance for the Coptic community. In the end, 59 Muslims were charged with arson and spreading sectarian strife. (*Reuters*, "Ten Hurt in Christian-Muslim Clashes in Egypt," May 11, 2007; Aaron Klein, *WorldNet Daily*, "Muslims Attack Christians Accused of Building Church: Inflammatory Islamic Sermon Triggers Fires at Homes, Shops," May 14, 2007; *Reuters*, "Egypt Arrests 59 Muslims After Clash With Copts," May 12, 2007)

## **In Israel/Palestine**

### **Christians in Gaza**

On June 14, 2007, during a Fatah and Hamas fight in Gaza, the small Christian community there was targeted. The Rosary Sister School and the Latin Church was attacked and set on fire. Both the school and the church were completely ransacked leaving everything from sacred objects to computers destroyed, estimating more than \$500,000 worth of damage. At the time of the incident, none of the nuns were present. Neither Fatah nor Hamas have taken responsibility for the damage. However, a Hamas Cabinet Minister visited the site, denounced the attack, and promised to repair the damages. Msgr. Manuel Musallam, the Holy Family Parish priest, explained that, "Christians have been living in peace and security with Muslims for many years, but those who attacked us are trying to sabotage this relationship." Although, Msgr. Musallam is not worried about Christian-Muslim relations, the Christians within the community are fearful of their future. (Khaled Abu Toameh, *The Jerusalem Post*, "Gaza's Christians Fear for Their Lives," June 18, 2007; Judith Sudilovsky, *Catholic News Service*, "Gaza Priest Says Nuns Compound was Ransacked, looted During Fighting," June 19, 2007)

## **In Pakistan**

### **Christians Threatened in Pakistan**

A threatening letter was distributed, at the beginning of May 2007, to Christians in Charsadda, Pakistan (the North West Frontier Province) demanding that they "Convert to Islam within 10 days . . ." or "all Christians will be executed" (*Asian News*). Some officials in the area claim that the incident is merely a "joke." However, others have taken the threat seriously. In any case, this has spread fear among the 15 million Christians in Pakistan. The Charsadda Christians have appealed to both the provincial and federal authorities requesting that matters be dealt with among those that are responsible for sending the letter. Pakistan Minorities Alliance Chairman, Shahbaz Bhatti, publicly condemned the threats by religious extremists. However, the authorities have yet to respond to the threats in any more significant ways. (*Pakistan Daily Times*, May 19, 2007; *Asia News*, May 11, 2007)

### **Nursing School Closed for Blasphemy**

The management of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Science closed a nursing school after Muslim students at the school found Qur'an verses desecrated when verses regarding manners and drinking water had been erased from a wall. Consequently, the Christian principle (who was on leave at the time of the incident) and both Muslim and Christian students were suspended from the school. Although the police chief involved in the incident explained that he did not know who to blame, the suspensions were enforced to defuse tension within the community.

(*Associated Press*, "Pakistani Nursing School Closed, Christian Principle Suspended for Alleged Blasphemy," June 2, 2007; *Reuters*, "Pakistan Shuts College, Suspends Staff Over Blasphemy Allegations," June 5, 2007)

## **In Australia**

### **Christians and Muslims Agree to Mediation**

For nearly five years, Catch the Fire Ministries, a Christian organization, and the Muslim Community in Australia have been at odds with each. In August, Catch the Fire Ministries was taken to court again for vilifying Muslims when the president of the ministry, Danny Nalliah, tried to show what Muslims believe using the Qur'ān. In addition, Daniel Scot, also from the ministry, explained how the Qur'ān promoted killing and looting. Consequently, the ministry was indicted for eliciting religious hatred under the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001. Since then, the Supreme Court has vindicated Catch the Fire Ministries. In addition, on June 22, 2007 a mediation meeting took place between the Islamic Council of Victoria (IVC) and Nalliah and Scot from Catch Fire Ministries. The group issued a joint statement despite IVC's complaints against the ministry. Both groups agreed to recognize: 1) the dignity and worth of every human being; 2) the right to express religious beliefs; 3) the right to debate and criticize religion in a democratic society; and 4) the value of people of other faiths. (*Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal*, "Joint Statement of the Islamic Council of Victoria Inc., Catch The Fire Ministries Inc., Daniel Nalliah and Daniel Scot," June 22, 2007; *Barney Zwartz*, *The Age Newspaper*, June 1, 2007; *Joshua Chan*, *Christian Today*, June 3, 2007)