



Mission Commission 'one Body, one Voice' John 17:23

AGORA-NEWS

December 2010

AGORA WEA MISSION COMMISSION WORLD FORUM

Agora is the Greek word for market place, forum, where people gathered for dialogue, discussions, sharing information or just for being together (Acts 17:17). **Agora** is an open forum for the MC Associates, MC Task Forces and Networks as a complement to the magazine **Connections**. Brief texts and news for publication in **Agora** can be sent to our office: bekstrom@world-evangelical.org

Agora is also available at our www.weaconnections.com

Read in this issue of **Agora**:

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Streams under an Oak...Musings*

Winter has come to Sweden and it is minus 12 degrees Celsius outside. We knew this would happen but it is still a strange feeling after so many years in the nice and warm climate of Brazil. Today (Nov 30th) my friends and colleagues meet in São Paulo to re-launch the Brazilian Evangelical Alliance and I wished I had been there. For several reasons, of course.

We live in a globalised world but there are still important differences between countries and continents. And it is possible that we still have some kind of stereotypes in our

minds when we try to generalise what is typical for each region. We heard these generalisations in the two main conferences that I, and many of you, attended this year, the Edinburgh and the Cape Town events. Edinburgh was very European some said. Cape Town very American, was also a common comment. A voice from the Global South called for revenge: "next time we will do it our way"!

I am really glad for the global-ness of the Mission Commission. It starts with our Global Leadership Council with people from 11 countries, six from the South and five from the North. Our staff team is equally geographically balanced although we lack female representation. The Global Dialogue Forum and the Global Roundtable are clear expressions of our deep commitment to listen and to respect the cultural and ecclesiastical diversity of our worldwide mission community. I am sure we can do more and better. However, I believe that we together can continue to provide an exemplary model of building global relationships and co-operation, accepting and respecting our differences. And this is possible living up to the core values, expressed in our By-laws: The Mission Commission values Evangelical, Trinitarian missiology, grace-characterized relationships and mutual accountability, grass roots needs-analysis and strategic vision, churches, mission agencies and training programs, collegiality and servant hood, reflective practitioners and forward thinking.

Bertil Ekström



*As MC Staff we wish you MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A
BLESSED NEW YEAR!*

GLOBAL MISSION COMMISSION CONSULTATION 2011



The next Mission Commission Global Consultation will be in November, 6-10, at the Christian Centre Schönblick, in Swäbisch Gmünd, Germany.

Please, book the date!! November 6-10, 2011

The Conference Centre is located 45 minutes by car from the Stuttgart International Airport, the closest international airport.

The dates for the Mission Commission Global Consultation are slightly changed:

- Start: Sunday November 6, as from dinner. Throughout this whole Sunday you are welcome to arrive at the conference centre and to register.
- Departure: Friday November 11, after lunch. The Friday morning is still part of the consultation.
- For those who need accommodation due to early arrival or late departure, alternative accommodation will be advised.

Training seminars will be offered before and during the MC consultation with a limited number of participants. Apart from the time before the main consultation, two afternoons during the consultation will also be dedicated to the continuation of the training seminars. When registration starts in January 2011, you will be able to sign in for one of these seminars. Guarantee you place making your registration as soon as possible!

The following training seminars are planned for:

- Starting on Friday, November 4, with lunch:
Mission Documentation and Writing, led by Dr *Miriam Adeney*.
Maximum number of attendees: 15
- Starting on Saturday, November 5, with lunch:
Integral Missionary Training, led by Dr Rob Brynjolfson. Maximum number: 20
Stewardship in Mission, led by Rob Martin. Maximum number: 15

How to Start and Strengthen National Mission Movements, led by David Ruiz. Maximum number: 15

There will also be a **Missional Pastors' Pre-consultation** starting on Saturday, November 5, with lunch. Maximum number: 50

All these pre-events will finish Sunday, November 6, with dinner, in order to join the start of the main Mission Commission consultation. Further information on the consultation will follow early January 2011 when registration will also be available.

WEA-Religious Liberty Commission: Research and Analysis Report

Efforts on to Weaken Hope in Muslim World

November 12, 2010

Islamic countries have opposed reforms under the garb of fighting “Islamophobia” for over a decade. They have overseen the passage of numerous resolutions against “defamation of religions” at the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council since 1999 seeking legitimacy for and promoting restriction of the freedom of speech in nations. This month, they are putting forward another such resolution for voting at the General Assembly which can have serious ramifications for the freedom of expression and religion especially in the Muslim world.

A group of 57 states with large Islamic populations, known as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, has introduced resolutions condemning defamation of religions at the UN every year. These declarations – which allege a systematic attack on Islam after the 9/11 attacks in the US – urge governments around the world to enact special laws to ban any speech that would insult, criticize or offend any person’s religion, particularly Islam. Though non-binding thus far, these resolutions are gradually empowering Islamic governments to oppose the growing demand for democracy and associated rights by their people besides paving the way for a legally binding international ban on criticism of religion.

Most governments of these Islamic nations seem to be caught between a growing popular demand for political reforms and an increasing resistance to the Western-style democracy by hardline Muslim groups, both non-violent and violent. In other words, movements for and against democracy are visible in the Muslim world. However, the Saudi Arabia-based-and-

dominated Islamic Conference – which projects itself as a central authority for the entire Islamic community, the Muslim *Ummah* – is snubbing progressive Muslims and siding with the hardliners.

Recent elections and developments in many Muslim-majority countries, especially in Asia, indicate that the people are seeking moderation and tolerance in their societies – a glimmer of hope – but at the same time extremist groups are also mounting pressure on the governments to remain socially and religiously conservative. This can be seen in Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Afghanistan and Indonesia among other nations.

The people of Pakistan voted against Nawaz Sharif's right-wing Muslim League party in the 2008 general elections, and supported the centrist Pakistan People's Party led by Asif Ali Zardari, who is now the President. One of the pledges Zardari had made during the elections was to repeal the blasphemy law. Zardari seems fairly moderate in his religious views, but at the UN, his government not only votes in favour of but also initiates resolutions meant to promote blasphemy laws. This is understandable because Saudi Arabia's backing is crucial for Islamabad which has to face its enemy India, its giant neighbour.

Zardari is also helpless before the right-leaning military of Pakistan and the intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, or the ISI, which are visibly Islamists and more powerful than the civilian government. Given the weakness of the government, persecution of Shi'a and Ahmadi minorities as well as that of Christians and Hindus has increased in the recent years. And what has fuelled the harassment of these minorities is the country's blasphemy law (Section 295 and 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code).

Over 10 accused under this law have been murdered before the completion of their trial. On November 7, a Pakistani court sentenced to death a young Christian woman, Asia Bibi, in Punjab province for alleged blasphemy. Also, last July, at least nine Christians were killed and over 45 houses were burned in a Christian hamlet in Korian village of Gojra town in central Punjab over a rumour that some pages of the Quran were burnt. The attackers, masked and carrying sophisticated guns, were believed to be from an Islamist militant outfit, the Sipah-e-Sahaba, linked to the Afghan Taliban. Its offshoot, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, is believed to be the al-Qaeda's front in Pakistan.

In Bangladesh, an alliance led by Sheikh Hasina's leftist Awami League party won 263 of the 300 contested seats in parliament in the 2008 general elections. The Islamist Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami party (an ally of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party) won only two seats, which shows a lack of popular support to Islamist extremism in the country.

Also, on June 29, 2010, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh scrapped the 1979 Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, which allowed formation of religious political parties and legitimised military rule. However, Hasina, seemingly under pressure and to play a safe game, may not fully implement the court's ruling which can potentially ban Islamist parties.

In 2008, the Maldives (the only nation after Saudi Arabia that claims a 100-percent Muslim population) became a presidential democracy with moderate Muslim and democracy activist Mohamed Nasheed as the new President. Multi-party democracy came after 30 years of dictatorial rule by conservative President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Nasheed's party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) is seen as a relatively liberal Muslim party. However, Gayoom's conservative Dhivehi Raiyyathunge Party has a simple majority in the 77-member People's Majlis (Maldives' unicameral Parliament) and opposes the largely liberal policies of Nasheed's government. Even the Muslim brotherhood party of the Maldives, the Adhaalath Party – an ally of the ruling MDP – opposes reforms in the Muslim society that Nasheed wants to bring in.

In Afghanistan, which was ruled by the radical Islamist Taliban regime from 1996 until the US military operation in 2001, President Hamid Karzai has emphasised the importance of human rights, especially for women, and remains the head of the government for over eight years. While the Taliban seem to have gained control over most parts of the country outside Kabul, they do not represent the people of Afghanistan who are generally moderate. However, "moderate" Karzai has not been able to amend the Afghan Press Laws that prohibit criticism of Islam and a law that makes apostasy a crime punishable by death.

In August 2010, the Taliban killed eight foreign medical workers in a remote northeast region. The killing came soon after a video telecast of underground Christian prayer meetings on Afghanistan's Noorin TV. The names and faces of Afghan Christian converts were also shown which sparked riots and demonstrations throughout the country. Under pressure from extremist groups, Karzai promised strict action against underground Christian activities. A member of parliament called for Afghan Christians to be executed, publicly. The Karzai government banned some Christian aid agencies on accusations of missionary activities.

A similar trend can be seen in Indonesia – home to the world's largest Muslim population. This Southeast Asian nation is built on *Pancasila*, five principles: belief in the one and only God; just and civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives; and social justice for the all of the people. However, attacks on Christians and forced closure of churches are increasing thanks to the growth of extremist groups such as the Islamic People's Forum and the Islamic Defenders Front. While some local officials have been found to be

colluding with extremist groups, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is known as a fairly progressive politician. But he remains weak and hasn't been able to control the growing Islamist vigilante violence.

Even as large sections of Muslims are striving to bring change in their nations, the UN resolutions led by the Islamic Conference give more teeth to the State for religious repression and even greater political and social control, undermining those who want to promote democracy and tolerance. Since there is no one, acceptable-by-all definition of defamation of religions, the inevitable ambiguity can be exploited by Islamic regimes to resist even legitimate, democratic political opposition.

There is little room for doubt that the forces that are pushing the issue of defamation of religions at the UN actually want to resist demands by the modern world as well as by its own people and minorities for democracy and rights, including religious freedom. Also visible is their agenda against Muslim minorities, converts and reformers – the three entities Islamist groups and regimes hate the most.

However, as rights groups are lobbying UN member states, the support for the resolutions is constantly declining. Therefore, more non-Islamic Conference nations need to be briefed about the real intent behind these motions and the possible outcomes of their passage. Only then will it be possible to defeat the declarations each time they come up for voting.

This should be done urgently because the resolutions on defamation of religions also seek to export blasphemy laws to other countries, including in the West. While religious freedom is seen as belonging to an individual in the developed world, these decrees want religion itself to have rights – violating the very basis on which human rights stand.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) sponsors this WEA-RLC Research & Analysis Report to help individuals and groups pray for and act on religious liberty issues around the world. This report was researched and written by Fernando Perez, and can be used with attribution to WEA-RLC.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

2011

January

17-21 – Consultation on National Mission Movements – Nairobi, Kenya. Contact: Steve Kabachia – stevekabachia@yahoo.com and Duncan Olumbe - mwiga04@yahoo.com

March

14-17 COMIBAM - Mission Leaders Gathering, Panama. Contact: decarvalho@comibam.org

April

2-9 Vision 5:9 Network Assembly, Bali, Indonesia. Contact: Derek Wong –

Derek.wong@fconsult.net

5-9 – Lausanne Researchers Conference – Atibaia, Sao Paulo, Brazil – www.cra.org.au

June

1-4 Engage – Linking the Voices of Global Mission – Chicago, USA, organised by Cross Global Link - www.crossgloballink.org/

September

11-17 MANI – Movement of African National Initiatives – Consultation on Unreached People Groups in Africa – Abuja, Nigeria - www.maniafrica.com

October

10-14 6th Brazilian Mission Congress, Caldas Novas, Brazil.

www.congressobrasileirodemişsoes.com

November

6-11 Mission Commission Global Consultation, Schönblick, Germany

2012

February

20-24 European Membercare Conference, Schönblick, Germany, www.membercareeurope.com

TRENDS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

*With a special focus on
the local, global & generational*



The Sixth International *Lausanne* Researchers Conference

*The impact of research on
mission and ministry*

Tuesday 5th to
Saturday 9th April 2011

Hotel Gran Roca, Atibaia, São Paulo, Brazil

Lausanne
Researchers
International
Network



AIMS:

- Network with other researchers
- Present a paper on your own work
- Share ideas with others doing similar work
- Sharpen your skills and insight

WHO SHOULD COME:

- Researchers from mission agencies
- Those working in research organisations
- Members of denominational research departments
- Christians involved in social or academic research
- Young researchers wanting to learn

LAUSANNE RESEARCHERS INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

The international network of church related researchers which promotes the sharing of skills, resources and materials and ideas is behind this conference. The network encourages researchers in their work and enables better communication between them.

ACCOMMODATION

The event will take place at the Gran Roca Hotel in Atibaia, about 45 minutes from São Paulo Airport, Brazil. Accommodation is full-board in single occupancy rooms. Discounts for: early booking and/or double occupancy.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Rev Dr Philip Hughes, Australia
Rev Dr Darrell Jackson, UK
Dr Peter Brierley, UK
Larry Kraft, Brazil and UK
Andreas Wolf, Germany
Dr Todd Johnson, USA



The articles should be approximately 1200 words in length and have a deadline of 1 January 2011.
I look forward to hearing from you!

Blessings,

Naomi A. Frizzell

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Lausanne World Pulse | Managing Editor | www.lausanneworldpulse.com

Bulletins and Websites

Many resources and updated mission information are available on the websites and in the bulletins of our networks, partners and associates. The list below is a sampler of some of the MC global partners.

MC related Networks:

International Missionary Training Network – IMTN - theimtn.org/tiki-index.php

Global Member Care Network – GMCN - www.globalmembercare.com/

Refugee Highway Partnership – RHP - refugeehighway.net/

Tentmakers International – TI - tentmakersinternational.com/

International Partnership Associates – www.betterpartnerships.net

Ethne - www.ethne.net/

Regional Mission Movements:

COMIBAM, Latin America – www.comibam.org

EEMA, Europe – www.europeanema.org

MANI, Africa – www.maniafrica.com/

CARIBBEAN – www.caribbeanevangelical.org

National Mission Movements

Africa:

Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association – www.nematoday.org/index.php

WENSA, South Africa - www.wensa.org.za/

Asia:

Philippines Mission Association - www.cybermissions.org/pma/

Indian Mission Association – www.imaindia.org

Singapore Centre for Global Missions - www.scgm.org.sg
Japan Evangelical Missionary Association – www.jema.org
Japan Overseas Missions Association – www.joma.mydns.jp
National C. E. Alliance, Sri Lanka - www.nceasl.org/NCEASL/missions/home.php
Korean World Mission Association – kwma.org/eng/index.html
Malaysian Center for Global Missions – www.mcgm.net.my

Europe:

Global Connections, UK - www.globalconnections.co.uk/
Swedish Mission Council - www.missioncouncil.se
Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelism – www.norme.no
Danish Mission Council – www.dmr.org
AEM, Switzerland – www.aem.ch (German)
EZA, Netherlands – eza.nl (Dutch)
AEM, Germany – www.aem.de (German)

Latin America:

Brazilian Association of Cross-Cultural Missions, Brazil – www.amtb.org.br (Portuguese)
COMIMEX, Mexico – www.comimex.org (Spanish)
FEDEMEC, Costa Rica – www.fedemec.org (Spanish)

North America:

Cross Global Link, USA – www.crossglobalink.org/
Mission Exchange, USA – themissionexchange.org/
Evangelical Fellowship of Canada - www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/

South Pacific:

Mission Interlink, Australia – www.missionsinterlink.org.au
Mission Interlink, New Zealand – www.missions.org.nz

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him – to the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16: 25-27)