



PROMOTING
RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM
FOR ALL PEOPLE,
EVERYWHERE

INTERNATIONAL
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
ASSOCIATION

SECRETARY GENERAL'S
REPORT

OCTOBER 2019



JUAN MARTÍN VIVES 1980 – 2019

With gratitude and love we pay tribute to the extraordinary life of Juan Martín Vives, whose work in the field of religious freedom was marked by both his tremendous intellect and his deep compassion for humanity. His many contributions, both within his home country of Argentina and globally, will not be forgotten. As a longtime friend and contributor to the IRLA, he will be greatly missed. We mourn a life that ended too soon, but rely in complete confidence on the One who says, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

ADVOCATING FOR BRUNO AMAH



The IRLA continues to advocate on behalf of Bruno Amah, a Seventh-day Adventist layperson wrongfully convicted for murder and currently in his eighth year of detention in Lome, the capital of the west African nation of Togo. In April, the IRLA Secretary General visited Togo for the fourth time to meet with Mr. Amah, his legal counsel, and his family. Recent attempts at

negotiating a presidential pardon for Mr. Amah were unsuccessful. The IRLA continues to solicit support from others in the international community. Most recently, we presented a dossier on the case to Adema Dieng, UN Special Rapporteur for the Prevention of Genocide, who has some connections with Togo and has expressed an interest in the case.

United Nations Summit, Geneva



From left, Dr. Liviu Olteanu, Secretary General of the AIDLR, Dr. Ganoune and Dr. Adema Dieng, UN Special Rapporteur for the Prevention of Genocide

The Second Global Summit on Religion, Peace and Security was convened April 29 to May 1 in Geneva. The event was organized by IRLA's European affiliate, the Association International for the Defense of Religious Liberty (AIDLR), in partnership with the office of Dr. Adema Dieng, UN Special Rapporteur for the Prevention of Genocide. The high-level event

was attended by representatives of NGOs, faith communities, and embassies, along with UN personnel and other public officials. The goal of the event was to bring together all the relevant stakeholders for greater cooperation on global issues relating to religion, peace, human rights and security.



Religious Freedom Week, Brazil



A packed agenda of events and high-level visits marked Religious Freedom Week in the Brazilian city of São Paulo, May 24-27. Celebrations were coordinated by Adventist member and State Representative Damaris Moura, an attorney and long-time religious freedom advocate in the

country. She helped organize the week of events in partnership with the Brazilian Association of Religious Freedom and Citizenship (ABLIRC), and IRLA affiliate.

A special guest for the celebrations was IRLA Secretary General Ganoune Diop. Events held around the city brought together religious leaders, civil authorities, government officials, political representatives, and human rights associations. The purpose of the celebrations, according to organizers, was to “promote wide public respect for different beliefs in the face of the many tragedies and massacres that have occurred in the name of religion.” Several symposia focused on the foundational role played by religious freedom in society and the challenges of religious intolerance.



Dr. Diop (left) with João Dória, governor of the state of São Paulo. Credit: SAD PARL)

G20 Interfaith Summit, Japan



The IRLA Secretary General was a plenary speaker at the G20 Interfaith Forum held in Tokyo, Japan, on June 8 and 9. The event brought together various religious groups, nonprofit organizations and former political leaders to discuss issues of peace, welfare, the environment and other global challenges. Speakers included former British Prime Minister David Cameron, former New Zealand Prime Minister John Key and former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny.

Over the course of the two-day program, participants developed policy recommendations based on their discussions for the G20 world leaders, who met in Osaka on June 28 and 29 to discuss global issues.

The 2019 forum was the sixth, offering an annual platform where a network of religiously linked



institutions and initiatives engage on global agendas and provide a faith-based perspective on current challenges.

Human Rights Summer School, Portugal



Dr. Ganoune Diop was again invited to teach at the Summer School on Human Rights, an annual program sponsored by the Conference of European Churches (CEC). This year's program took place June 17 to 20 in Lisbon, Portugal. Students from different national,

ethnic and religious backgrounds were given an opportunity to study together and to receive inter-disciplinary training on populism, freedom of expression, hate speech, hate crime and how to prevent incitement to hatred in religious contexts.



The participants looked into the relation between a growing lack of respect of other people in communication, especially in social media, and the rise of political populism on a global scale.

Presentations were videoed to be added to CEC's extensive library of resources on current human rights issues.

IRLA Training, South Pacific



Dr. Diop and Adventist Church leaders in NZ met with members of the Muslim community. (Credit: Ben Martin)

IRLA Secretary General Ganoune Diop made a week-long visit to the South Pacific region in August to conduct a series of training programs. Together with local IRLA leaders, he visited Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australia. While in New Zealand, the delegation met with Muslim community leaders followed by a visit to the Al Noor mosque, one of the two mosque sites

where 51 people were gunned down in a terrorist attack in the city earlier this year.

In Vanuatu, the group shared about the work of IRLA with local faith leaders, government ministers, members of parliament and senior civil servants. In Sydney, Dr. Diop presented a workshop on religious freedom advocacy.



IRLA's 20th Meeting of Experts, Morocco



In September, IRLA Secretary General Ganoune Diop convened the 20th Annual IRLA Meeting of Experts in Fez, Morocco. The event brought together renowned scholars from a variety of academic disciplines to discuss the concept of “No Coercion in Belief or Non-belief.” The local hosts for this year’s event were Professors Amal Idrissi and Jeremy Gunn from the University of Rabat. Among the more than 20 scholars who presented papers at the meeting were: Cole Durham, Brigham Young University; David Little, Harvard University; Rosa Maria

Martínez de Codes, Complutense University; and, Nicholas P. Miller, Andrews University.

At this year’s event, the Meeting of Experts celebrated its 20th anniversary with a special opening session devoted to exploring the history and impact of this international think tank. Key individuals from IRLA’s past were invited to this landmark Meeting of Experts, including former IRLA Secretary General John Graz, and former IRLA president Robert Seiple, the first US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

