Religious freedom celebration in Brazil highlights peaceful co-existence
Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, and leaders of 20 faiths represented at festival

U.S. study of Adventists finds vegetarians live longer
Top news agencies report on study from church’s Loma Linda University

In Kenya, court’s interim order gives Adventist students Sabbath off
Some Adventist students were required to take exams on Saturdays

Adventist elected president of Swiss Bible Society
Theologian, Treasurer Mayer has served as VP since 2005

Religious freedom celebration in Brazil highlights peaceful co-existence
Top regional leaders of 20 faith groups pledged to continue advocating for religious freedom in Brazil during a weekend festival sponsored by the now 120-year-old International Religious Liberty Association.

A celebration of freedom of conscience, which highlighted the largely peaceful coexistence of faith groups in Brazil, drew nearly 30,000 attendees to the second World Festival of Religious Freedom on Saturday, May 25, in Anhangabaú Valley, an open plaza area in central São Paulo.

Edson Rosa, secretary general of the IRLA in South America, addressed the crowd on the need for continued work in promoting freedom of faith. “To be quiet and not speak out about it, we are allowing opportunity for people with prejudices that might hinder the full freedom of expression and conscience,” he said. “We therefore must speak out more about this.”

The festival spurred City Hall to declare May 25 as an annual “Religious Freedom Day,” and the weekend celebration was reported by the O Globo news agency.

The IRLA holds several regional festivals each year as an opportunity to thank countries and their governments for allowing religious freedom. IRLA’s first world festival was held in Peru in 2009.

In days preceding the downtown gathering, IRLA also sponsored symposiums with faith leaders and local government representatives.

On May 22, a group met for an International Symposium on Law and Religious Freedom at the Bar Association of Brazil. Bar president Marcos Costa addressed the group saying, “We will continue to support this committee because we believe it is a matter of respect and love for others,” he said.
In a separate interview, Damaris Kuo, who chairs the bar’s Commission on Religious Freedom, said even among the mostly peaceful coexistence of faith groups in Brazil, there are still situations every day where legal intervention is necessary to prevent a violation of rights.

Brian Grim, senior researcher at the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life, offered an overview of freedom of conscience. He said 40 percent of the world’s countries have major restrictions on religious freedom rights. Additionally, one-third of countries have rules that force people to profess some sort of religion, prohibiting atheism. In 31 percent of countries, Grim said, religious intolerance can often result in arrests.

On May 23, a hall of the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo hosted the International Forum for Religious Freedom. The meeting included freedom of conscience activists, lawyers and representatives from various religions, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Catholic Church, Assemblies of God, Baptists and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Today, roughly 65 percent of Brazil’s population identifies themselves as Catholic, 22 percent are Protestant, and 15 percent say they have no religious faith, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. The population of evangelicals has grown in recent years in the largely Christian nation.

Glauber Alencar, leader of the Council of Ministers of the State of São Paulo, said religious tolerance is important and continues to be a cornerstone of the council.

At the main festival ceremony on Saturday, government representatives included Gilberto Carvalho, who serves as chief minister of the secretariat of the president Dilma Rousseff. Another was São Paulo Councilman Paulo Frange, who authored legislation to mark May 25 as Religious Freedom Day in City Hall. Another attending legislator was state Representative Campos Machado, who has previously authored legislation highlighting religious freedom.

In other private meetings, religious leaders affirmed their stance on promoting religious freedom.

Odilo Scherer, archbishop of the Catholic Church in São Paulo, praised actions promoting religious freedom, saying that Brazil is a peaceful place because there are no laws forbidding a choice of faith and no persecution. Still, Scherer said there was a need for awareness to not exclude participation of religious people in society. “If you do that, it’s going to be a problem and an obstacle for religious freedom, especially when citizens who profess any religion have less opportunity and suffer discrimination,” he said.

Sheikh Jihad Hammadeh, chairman of the National Union of Islamic Entities, said the event was needed as “a way to reaffirm the commitment to a pluralistic society of mutual respect.” He also said he was content with Brazilian legislation that ensures a fundamental right of belief, but there is still work to do in educating people to tolerate beliefs different than their own. There are about 1,350,000 Muslims in Brazil.

Claudio Costa, president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Brazil, said the country is a model of peaceful co-existence of different religions. “Brazil can show other countries that it is good, healthy and right,” he said.

Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church, said, “Religious freedom is a gift from God that we should keep as a treasure.”
People who eat a vegetarian diet live longer than those who eat meat, according to a study of more than 70,000 Seventh-day Adventists. A study published yesterday in JAMA, a journal of the American Medical Association, said vegetarians experienced 12 percent fewer deaths over a six-year period of research.

The study, funded by the United States’ National Institutes of Health, was conducted by researchers at Loma Linda University, an Adventist institution in Southern California. Researchers tracked 73,308 Adventist Church members who follow the church’s dietary counsel of a plant-based diet to varying degrees.

Of the study’s participants, researchers said 5,548 were vegans, 21,177 were lacto-ovo vegetarians (also eating dairy products and eggs), 7,194 were vegetarians who also ate fish, and 4,031 ate meat infrequently. The rest of the study participants ate meat.

The findings confirm health benefits of eating a vegetarian diet, the lead study author Dr. Michael Orlich told Bloomberg News.

“People should take these kinds of results into account as they’re considering dietary choices,” Orlich told Bloomberg. “Various types of vegetarian diets may be beneficial in reducing the risk of death compared to non-vegetarian diets.”

Orlich, director of the preventive medicine residency program at Loma Linda University Medical Center, said the study was aided by studying subjects who have low rates of alcohol and tobacco use.

The Wall Street Journal today pointed out that the study said cancer still struck meat-eaters and vegetarians at similar rates. Also, a vegetarian meal doesn’t automatically make it a healthy one. Deep fried foods contain high amounts of fat, and some meats are healthier than others.

Researchers pointed out that the health benefits were even more beneficial for men. It remained unclear why women were less affected by a vegetarian diet. Future research will examine gender-specific reactions to certain foods.

Dr. Kathleen Kuntaraf, associate Health Ministries director for the Adventist world church, said a vegetarian diet is part of living a holistic, healthy life.
“More and more people are recognizing our principles from 150 years ago are truly scientific,” she said.

Seventh-day Adventists have long advocated a vegetarian diet. The founder of Loma Linda’s School of Public Health overcame resistance in the health community in the 1940s to produce a landmark study on the benefits of a vegetarian diet, discovering that such a diet indeed contained sufficient protein, among other benefits.

In recent years, Adventists have been noted as one of the longest living people groups ever studied. In 2008, “Blue Zones” book author Dan Buettner wrote extensively about the health principles of Adventists and their longer, healthier lifespans.

In Kenya, court’s interim order gives Adventist students Sabbath off

Jun 03, 2013
Nairobi, Kenya
ANN staff

Kenya’s High Court has issued an interim order for public schools to exempt Seventh-day Adventist students from attending classes on Saturday, the day Adventists observe as the biblical Sabbath.

The immediate order comes during a case involving the Adventist Church’s Kenya Union Mission against the Ministry of Education and 26 schools it said have not followed constitutional guarantee of practicing one’s religion. The court’s presiding justice will address the case again on June 6.

“We as leaders of the Kenya Union are happy and satisfied with the court case’s progress now that the educational institutional leaders will respect the constitution and stop denying Adventist students public service that the government intends to offer all Kenyans,” said Samuel Makori, executive secretary of the Kenya Union. “We hope the judge will rule in our favor because we are asking for what is provided in the bill of rights in our constitution.”

Makori said church leaders took the matter to court in July of 2012 only after extensive diplomatic efforts didn’t work.

“We engaged Adventist lawyers who handled the case both with patriotism and loyalty to their country,” he said.

Makori told The Standard newspaper that several students have been suspended at public schools for
not attending classes and exams held on Saturday. "We paid legal expenses from church money so we could obtain justice for our young people," he later said.

Adventists observe Sabbath from sunset on Fridays to sunset on Saturdays.

Steve Bina, Communication director for the Adventist Church’s East-Central Africa Division, said he hoped the ruling would be an example for other countries to follow. Bina said Adventist students in several other countries within the division are experiencing similar problems with some public school officials.

Adventist elected president of Swiss Bible Society

May 30, 2013
Aarau, Aargau, Switzerland
Herbert Bodenmann/APD/ANN

Delegates of the Swiss Bible Society elected Seventh-day Adventist theologian Reto Mayer as the organization’s president during their May 24 meeting, making him the first Adventist appointed to the post in the society’s 58-year history.

Mayer, associate treasurer of the Adventist world church’s Inter-European Division, based in Berne, Switzerland, has served as the society’s vice president since 2005. The Adventist Church joined the society in 1982.

"I hope that people see [the Bible] as an invitation from God, inviting them to live a personal relationship with Him," Mayer told the Swiss Bible Society in a May 24 interview. "The distribution of the Bible is close to my heart, so it’s a pleasure for me to participate in this work."

The Swiss Bible Society was founded in 1955 succeeding the former coalition of Swiss Bible Societies. Today, the society has 45 members, among others, cantonal evangelical-reformed churches, the Old-Catholic Church, independent evangelical churches, cantonal Bible societies, Christian societies and working groups in Switzerland that share the society’s charter of bible distribution.

The society promotes standards for translation, production and distribution of Bibles in Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein.

The Swiss Bible Society works with more than 146 national bible societies united as the global United Bible Societies to bring the Bible in easy and modern language and form closer to the people.
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