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May 27, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN staff

The Seventh-day Adventist world church today launched a united prayer campaign for the nearly 300 girls who were abducted by a militant group six weeks ago in Northern Nigeria.

Church officials are urging members to use the social media hashtags and slogan #unitedinprayer for #nigeriagirls to join local Church leaders in Nigeria in praying for the incident, which has captured global media attention.

Bassey Udoh, president of the Adventist Church’s Eastern Nigeria Union Conference, called for Adventists to pray for the girls’ peaceful release, peace of mind for their families, and wisdom for government officials negotiating with their captors.

In an incident that has gained international media coverage, the militant group Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of at least 276 girls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok area of Borno State on April 14. Media reports said the girls have forcibly been converted to Islam.

“Boko Haram” translated from the Hausa language means “Western education is a sin.”

“These girls are being denied their right to education, which is what will help them to improve their lives and to be the best they can be,” said Heather-Dawn Small, director of the Adventist world church’s Women’s Ministries department. “The environment they’re living now is one that’s limiting who they are as women.”

Dwayne Leslie, associate director of the Adventist world church’s Public Affairs and Religious liberty department, said that Boko Haram’s recent media attention for the mass kidnapping is part of the group’s ongoing violation of religious freedom in the region.

“This violent sect has been engaged in a long-running and systematic war against Christians and moderate Muslims in northern Nigeria,” Leslie said. “I’m deeply saddened by the gross violations of human rights and religious liberty and pray for the safe return of these young girls. It is my prayer that the residents of northern Nigeria will ultimately have their right to freedom of religion fully protected under the law.”

A Church spokesman said members can continue using social media tools for other united prayer efforts.

“The hashtag #unitedinprayer will also be an ongoing way for us to call the Adventist Church to pray for specific issues,” said Garrett Caldwell, the Adventist Church’s associate Communication director for public relations.
Adventists to join others in support of May 31 World No Tobacco Day

World Health Organization’s 2014 emphasis is raising tobacco taxes

May 27, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of many groups joining the World Health Organization to mark May 31 as World No Tobacco Day.

The Adventist Church is supporting this year’s theme, “Raising Tobacco Taxes,” which is a core policy recommendation of the Church’s 1996 statement on tobacco.

A statement from the World Health Organization said, “A tax increase that increases tobacco prices by 10 percent decreases tobacco consumption by about 4 percent in high-income countries and by up to 8 percent in low- and middle-income countries." The statement also said, “Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death globally and is currently responsible for 10 percent of adult deaths worldwide.”

Dr. Peter Landless, Health Ministries director of the Adventist world church, said increasing taxes on tobacco is one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce the use of tobacco, especially among those who are young or poor. “While we respect freedom of business in the marketplace, we should also respect the freedom for citizens to establish policies that curb the single most preventable cause of death,” he said.

Adventists—long known for a promotion of healthful living—were on record against tobacco more than a decade before the denomination was officially established in 1863.

As developed counties toughen their restrictions on smoking, tobacco companies increasingly focus on developing countries, where they face less resistance. Adventists are continuing anti-tobacco initiatives through the denomination’s worldwide network of churches, schools and hospitals.

In the Southeast Asian country of Cambodia, where smoking rates are approximately 40 percent among men, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency has implemented anti-tobacco projects since 1995. Government health officials could once be seen smoking during meetings, which prompted ADRA to partner with other non-governmental organizations to help reduce the smoking rate down from 70 percent in the mid-1990s.
“ADRA is currently working on more awareness education through its rural based development programs and partners where smoking rates have not reduced nearly as fast as in the urban centers,” said Mark Schwisow, director for ADRA Cambodia.

In the Eastern European Country of Bulgaria, data reveal that 45 percent of people between the ages of 25 and 64 smoke, said Valerie Dufour, Health Ministries director for the Adventist Church’s Inter-European Division. The Adventist Church in Bulgaria is one of several group advocating for the reinstatement of a ban on tobacco, which was rescinded by Parliament in 2010, Dufour said.

In the Western European nation of Portugal, the Adventist Church has held smoking cessation programs since 1967, Dufour said. More than 4,000 programs have reached some 60,000 smokers in the country.

The Adventist Church first brought the world a smoking cessation program in the 1950s, which was later named “Breathe Free.” In July, the Church will release an updated version of the program to include new research and methods. The new Breathe Free was rewritten in collaboration between the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency and the Adventist Church’s Loma Linda University.

“We pray that this will serve as an impetus to renewed energy in the Church’s efforts to make the difference in the lives of many wishing to break the habit,” said Landless, the Health Ministries director. “My prayer is that we will answer this call. The need is clear and our duty defined.”

Mission to urban areas continues with major outreach in Manila

Church president speaks at evangelism series, celebrates birthday by welcoming new church members at baptismal ceremony

May 22, 2014 | Manila, Philippines | ANN staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “Mission to the Cities” initiative held a major outreach series in Philippines this month, with the Church’s president, Ted N. C. Wilson, serving as the speaker.

Wilson hosted a “Revelation of Hope” evangelism series in Manila at the Philippine International Convention Center from May 4 to 17. The program also included a health expo before the program each evening.

The series was a comprehensive urban evangelism project titled, “Hope Metro Manila 2014: iCare.” The project included 76 sites in Manila, and is part of the denomination’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division’s urban evangelism focus.
There were more than 3,100 baptisms in the metropolitan region in connection with the series.

The series included a special Saturday service at the Cuneta Astrodome in nearby Pasay City on May 17. Approximately 13,000 people attended the service to hear Wilson’s Sabbath sermon, which focused on the interconnectedness of God’s love and law.

“The reason we obey is not because we’re trying to earn favor, not because we are earning our way to heaven by being obedient,” Wilson said, “we are obedient through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us because of our response to the great love of what God has done for you and for me.”

Wilson also told the audience he was happy to have celebrated his birthday the previous Saturday by being part of a baptismal ceremony.

“This is one of the greatest birthday presents I could ever receive, to be at a baptism here in the Philippines,” Wilson said of his 64th birthday.

Other major urban outreach projects have been held, and more are still being planned. For more information, visit missiontothecities.org.