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In Inter-America, Congress promotes religious freedom across the region
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March 30, 2015 | Medellin, Colombia | Shirley Rueda/IAD Staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Inter-America held its second religious liberty congress in the city of Medellin, Colombia, Mar. 18-19, 2015.

After the religious liberty congress, the church in north Colombia held a festival of religious freedom where more than 4,000 people gathered in Medellin’s Plaza Mayor.

The conference gave church leaders in the Inter-American Division (IAD) territory the opportunity to talk about the importance of strengthening relations between church and state, as well as reinforcing the presence of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) across the region.

Top church leaders emphasized the need for the constant defense of religious liberty among all the countries operating its administrative offices and institutions.

Adventist World Church President Pastor Ted N.C. Wilson spoke to the 300 delegates on the commitment of the Adventist church when defending freedom of religion for people of all faiths.

“I am very proud because the Seventh-day Adventist Church has maintained a firm position that persons with a religious perspective different from ours be defended because we believe they have the right to freedom of conscience,” said Pastor Wilson. “We have the obligation to ensure that people from whatever social, educational, economic and ethnic situation can enjoy freedom of conscience.”

A country with a history of struggles and religious freedom issues, Colombia was an important country in which to host the congress because of the advances in religious liberty achieved during the last few years, said Roberto Herrera, public affairs and religious liberty director for the church in Inter-America.

Coordinator of Religious Affairs in Colombia, Dr. Lorena Rios, spoke of the IRLA and its influence in ensuring that issues are reflected in the law of religious liberty in the country.

Colombia is being watched by the world because we are going through a key process for peace and postwar and the church has played a key role through chaplaincies,” said Rios. “The government will establish the framework so the church can operate towards that.”

Although there are no countries in the IAD which restrict religious freedom to individuals “our leaders in all of our countries must remain vigilant and continue strengthening relationships with government authorities in favor of this religious liberty cause,” said Herrera.

During the event, Pastor John Graz, IRLA’s secretary general, made reference to the difficult global scenario where religious wars occur often.
“One of the great questions we have to ask ourselves is whether we are willing to sacrifice freedom of expression for security and peace, and that is the reason why, when we have the privilege of living in a country like Colombia and other countries in Latin America, where there is religious freedom, we have to take time to thank God, country and government,” said Graz.

Dr. Graz received a special award for the more than 30 years of service in favor of religious liberty around the world.

Congress delegates participated in presentations on the importance of church-state relations and how to improve them, how to meet a government official or influential person, the role of the state and the church from a theological perspective, the Muslim minority in Europe, the issue of the law against religious defamation, the role of Christian universities in strengthening church-state relations, and more.

For Kern Tobias, president of the church in the Caribbean Union, religious liberty is enjoyed in the dozens of islands that belong to the region. Religious freedom has been crucial when upholding the freedom of worship of some individuals as well as issues with university students presenting exams on Saturday, he added.

“The government across our islands respects the Adventist Church highly because they know the church is contributing to society through our schools and hospitals so we continue to stay active in promoting religious liberty in our territory,” Tobias said.

Ada Maria Funes, an Adventist lawyer in Honduras, said the congress brought reaffirmation and a boost to continue fighting for the rights of individuals back in the Central American country when it comes to religious liberty. There are some challenges because there is little legislation in Honduras to favor church members.

“We have had to face many challenges with a lot of ignorance regarding the rights of our members as well as on the part of the authorities,” said Funes. Currently, the church through her services has been able to collaborate with law schools to train lawyers and train in educational institutions on religious liberty to facilitate the cases that come up on students testing on Saturdays.

“We have about one case per week where we deal with Adventist students who need to present their tests on days other than Saturdays, so we are working on changing the legislation to assist in these cases,” Funes added. During the Religious Liberty Festival Pastor Wilson reminded religious freedom promoters and members to continue lifting the flame of religious liberty and challenged the church to fulfill its mission with the message for salvation.

“What a tremendous responsibility we have to proclaim Jesus’ message in the context of religious freedom,” said Pastor Wilson. “The mandate of the great God is to be a messenger of the cross and help people understand that religious freedom is a gift from heaven.”

The special festival was highlighted by music and testimonies of religious freedom in Colombia, and included various awards to distinguished religious freedom promoters in Colombia and across Inter-America.

“God reminds us today that we are a remnant church, that religious liberty is a means that we should use to preach the gospel,” said Herrera as the torch of freedom was passed on from church leader to church leader.
Two Adventists Detained in Bangladesh

The Adventist Church asks members worldwide to pray

March 24, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN and Adventist Review staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church said Tuesday that two Adventists were detained in Bangladesh on unclear charges.

They have been released from custody ahead of a court hearing, church spokesman Garrett Caldwell said.

The Adventist Church is seeking to clarify the circumstances surrounding the case.

"While the Seventh-day Adventist Church places a high value on religious freedom and encourages respect for all religious traditions, we realize that misunderstandings may occur in areas of the world where we are a religious minority," Caldwell said. "It is our hope that the situation can be resolved as we work with local authorities to clarify the matter."

He asked Adventists worldwide to pray about the situation.

Bangladesh, which is bordered on three sides by India and Myanmar to its southeast, has the world’s fourth-largest Muslim population after Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. An estimated 86 percent of the population of 157 million is Muslim, followed by 12 percent Hindu and 1 percent Buddhist. Christians comprise about 0.4 percent of the population.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has nearly 18.5 million members worshiping in 140,000 congregations around the world. It also operates a network of hospitals and schools, and conducts humanitarian work through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency in more than 120 countries.

Adventist Church Offers Condolences After Plane Crash in France
March 25, 2015 | Berne, Switzerland | EUD News/APD

A Germanwings Airbus A320 plane carrying 150 people crashed March 24 in the foothills near Digne-les-Bains, in the Alpes de Haute Provence in southeastern France, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls told reporters.

Valls said he fears those aboard the flight from Barcelona (Spain) to Dusseldorf (Germany) may be dead. French President Francois Hollande also said no survivors were expected. "The conditions of the accident are not yet clear but lead us to believe there will be no survivors," Hollande said.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said there was a "high number of Spaniards, Germans and Turks" on the doomed Germanwings flight.

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South and West of Europe expresses its deepest sympathy and extends its heartfelt condolences to the families of all victims," stated the communication department of the Intereuropean Division EUD in a press release. "We share their pain and pray that the Lord may comfort and relieve their hearts."

Bruno Vertallier, President of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the South and West of Europe, mourns with the families of the victims of this tragic event. "I trusts that you will find the necessary support to go through this terrible reality of being cut off from your loved ones. I grieve with you."

According to the press release the Adventist Church is ready to offer assistance and support to each person affected by the terrible plane crash through its local churches and institutions in Germany, France and Spain.

Church leaders challenged to prioritize Mental Health during General Conference Week of Prayer

Wholistic Ministry Key in Outreach Efforts

March 27, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN staff

Church leaders were challenged to prioritize mental health in their ministry as well as in their own lives during a week of spiritual emphasis held at Seventh-day Adventist World Headquarters. The week of prayer was led by Dr. Neil Nedley who spoke to employees in Silver Spring, Maryland.
During the four-day series, Nedley emphasized the integration of spiritual well-being with that of physical, mental and emotional health.

Nedley underscored a wholistic approach to health ministry as an integral component in spreading the gospel. "The beauty of medical missionary work is that it not only offers healing now, but also for eternity."

There is a global need to understand and address these issues according to Dr. Peter Landless, director of health ministries for the world Church. "Mental health issues are no respecter of persons, even Adventists" said Landless when introducing Nedley.

Throughout the week, Nedley's topics included managing emotions, avoiding thinking errors, depression and living the psychological good life.

Nedley is a practicing physician in Internal Medicine with an emphasis in Gastroenterology, Mental Health, Lifestyle Medicine, and the difficult-to-diagnose patient. Nedley also serves as the President of Weimar Center of Health and Education in the U.S. state of California.

The week of prayer presentations were recorded by Hope Channel and are available for viewing HERE.