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June 22, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, USA | Bettina Krause

The plight of those imprisoned for their faith should be higher on the agenda of international watchdog agencies and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, says world church United Nations liaison, Ganiuone Diop, PhD.

Diop made his comments on return from Geneva, Switzerland, where he represented the church at the United Nations Human Rights Council, which began a three-week session June 15 at the Palais des Nations. While there, Diop attended key meetings and discussion panels, and met with Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Diop, who regularly attends United Nations’ meetings in Geneva and New York, says that, in general, the issue of religious freedom tends to be treated as a less-important “younger sibling” in the pantheon of human rights.

“Yet, religious freedom is foundational and it’s interconnected with all other human rights,” says Diop. “A state that respects an individual’s right to hold, practice, or change their religious beliefs, is a state that most likely protects human dignity in other ways, as well. Human rights can’t be artificially separated out; they’re intertwined.”

Prisoners of conscience were the focus of one meeting Diop attended in Geneva. Apart from occasional high-profile cases, says Diop, the tragedy of men and women who are imprisoned for religious reasons is one that receives relatively little publicity.

“This needs to change,” Diop adds. “In many countries today—in the Middle East or central Asia, for instance—religious minorities face legal sanctions simply for practicing their faith, or sharing it with others. We must never forget our brothers and sisters who pay a terrible price for staying true to their conscience.”

Diop says the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department of the Adventist world church is looking for ways to establish a better tracking system for church members who suffer unjust imprisonment, and to coordinate an appropriate response. He points to the recent two-year ordeal of Antonio Monteiro, an Adventist pastor in Togo, as just one example of how religious biases can complicate legal proceedings. Monteiro was jailed under a spurious “conspiracy to murder” charge, but was ultimately acquitted.

The UN Human Rights Council continues its work until July 3. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, opened the session with an overview of current pressing issues. He named the plight of migrants attempting to escape poverty, war, or repression for a better life in Europe, South-East Asia, and Australia. He also spoke about the crisis in Syria, the rise of violent extremism around the globe, and the challenge of protecting and promoting the rights of women. According to High Commissioner, the basic message of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that, “States owe their people justice, equality and dignity, under the rule of law.”
Adventist Church in North America expresses condolences for the tragic shooting in Charleston, South Carolina

The division's president, Dan Jackson, calls for open and honest discussion on the realities of racial division in the U.S.

June 18, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, USA | NAD Staff

The president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, Daniel R. Jackson, issued the following statement on June 18, 2015 in response to shooting death of nine people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South, Carolina:

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is heartbroken by the senseless killing of the Reverend Clementa Pickney and eight other worshipers during Wednesday evening service in their church. We are saddened by the heartache it has caused their family, the members of the Emanuel AME Church, and the Charleston community. We extend our deepest condolences and continue to pray for the victims and their families.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church condemns not only the killing of any person, but also the hatred, based on a person's race, that apparently motivated this shooting. We believe that God loves all of His children equally, regardless of race, gender, religion, or lifestyle, and we are called to do the same.

We again call for open, honest, and civil conversation about the realities of the racial divide that continues to plague this country. This conversation must focus on the rights and equality of every member of our communities.

We stand with the people of Charleston and indeed across North America that strive to be agents of peace, love, and grace in their communities.

To bring a lasting change we, as a church, must always treat all people with the love and compassion that Jesus modeled for us. While last night in Charleston, hate took the lives of nine innocent people, we know that in the end love will win.

“We once again pray for the day when all of God’s children will treat each other without suspicion, bias and hatred. As the Apostle Paul reminds us: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28, NKJV)’”

Uganda's president pledges support for unfinished Adventist church
Yoweri Museveni contributes resources for the construction of a church in Central Uganda

June 17, 2015 | Kampla, Uganda | Samuel Mwebaza, Uganda Union Communication Director

President Yoweri K. Museveni has pledged to support the unfinished Kikandwa Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Central Uganda Conference. The president’s pledge came when he made a stopover to the church in Kikandwa to pay his respects to the late Babumba Luttamaguzi Edidian who was brutally killed in 1981. The president was on his way to Dwnaio in Kiboga district to commemorate the Heroes Day, which honors the struggle to liberate Uganda.

President Museveni pledged to contribute 200 bags of cement and 200 pieces of iron sheets towards the completion Kikandwa Adventist Church. Pastor Moses Kalibbala, who was on the ground when the president visited, expressed his appreciation of behalf of the church and also offered a prayer for him. While speaking to Kalibbala on phone, he has confirmed that all the 200 bags of cement promised were delivered on June 11, and the that the iron sheets were on their way. Kalibbala said the church is working tirelessly to complete the plastering and roofing work for the church.

The land for the Kikandwa Adventist church was donated by the family of the late Babumba Luttamaguzi, a former Seventh-day Adventist prominent church member, who together with several other church members and close friends were killed by government forces in 1981 their homes, which were in the neighborhood of the Kikandwa Adventist church.

It is believed that during this time, president Museveni was hiding in one of the aforementioned home and wouldn’t have survived if the people in the home didn’t hide him.

This is not the first time President Museveni has extended similar help to the Kikandwa church. Last year 2014 in the month of July, he also made a similar stopover and also donated 200 bags of cement together with 200 iron sheets. So when he come over this time and found work was not yet completed, he then directed that more help be offered to have the Church fully completed.