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July 22, 2015 | Victor Hulbert, communication director, Seventh-day Adventist Church, UK & Ireland.

On the day that Serbia’s Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, was chased away by stone-throwing protesters at a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia and
Herzegovina, a rich mix of 70,000 Seventh-day Adventists representing almost every culture on the planet found themselves in joint, heart-felt worship at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas.

Very moving, for two of the worshippers, was the sight of a joint banner, the six flags of Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Slovenia, stitched together and prominently draped over the 5th level balcony to the right of the stage. It was a moving symbol of forgiveness and unity in the context of a service that focused on the hope that Seventh-day Adventists have in a Saviour that can and does change lives.

Dejan Stojkovic is Serbian. He now lives in the UK where he works in Teen's ministry. When just a teen himself he escaped military service in the war that split Yugoslavia, fleeing across the border in a hearse on its way to a funeral. The break-up of his country was painful to him and his family. His father had worked as a pastor whose ministry crossed cultural and ethnic boundaries.

That pain became bittersweet when he met the young lady who now sits by his side. Deana comes from what, geographically and politically, is 'the other side of the fence'. She is from Croatia, but ended up without passport or nationality – so today the passport she travels on is Bosnian. She equally works for the church within the Communication and Media department of their Trans-European Regional office in St Albans, England and has discovered that love has no barriers. Dejan and Deana have now been married for five years. They don't mind what flag is flying, for them the flag to fly most high is the one for Jesus.

To see the 'six-flag' banner hanging above the 70,000 Adventists was, for them, a meaningful emphasis of what it means to be part of a global church family, representatives of 168 countries meeting in worship, and singing together 'Lift Up the Trumpet and loud let it ring, Jesus is coming again'.

Up to 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys died at the hands of Bosnian Serb forces amid the break-up of Yugoslavia. Serbia had backed the Bosnian Serbs. On Saturday, 11 July, Mr Volvic had been attempting a gesture of peace, apology and reconciliation in joining with other world leaders at a ceremony in Bosnia-Herzegovina to pay respects at the Srebrenica graveyard where more than 100 newly found remains were to be buried with 6,000 other massacre victims.

However, he became a target of abuse, the hissing crowd hurling rocks and bottles at him.

"I regret that some people haven't recognized my sincere intention to build friendship between Serbian and Bosniak people," he said later. "I still give my hand to the Bosniak people. I will continue with that ... and always be ready to work together to overcome problems."

It is a sad story that clearly is not yet complete. Even more sad that it is not unique but has been repeated in multitudes of ways in countries around the world. Rwanda saw its own genocide – and yet has also seen amazing stories of reconciliation and healing. In South Africa we have seen once divided communities coming together.

Even in Adventist meetings this past week people have sometimes strongly expressed very different points of view, particularly on issues surrounding the ordination of women, and may have had to agree to disagree, or graciously accepted the results of a disappointing vote for them. However, on Saturday, despite such differences, they were able to sit and worship together under the same united flag. As World Church President, Pastor Ted Wilson said in his sermon, "Don't get stuck on one side or the other of the road – keep in the middle of God's Word."

Evidence of this was seen both in the morning and the afternoon programme. Church members thrilled to see the way God was drawing communities together, be it health ministry in Jakarta,
major evangelism in Zimbabwe, or one committed lady in an un-entered part of China who has planted ten churches.

For Dejan and Deana, holding hands in a dome filled with Adventist members from so many different cultures and background, many in national costumes, and with even the music and scripture coming in a multitude of languages, this is a little picture of the future. "The Book of Revelation paints a wonderful picture of heaven", Dejan enthuses. "It describes a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." [Rev 7:9 NIV] United in Christ, today was just a tiny glimpse heaven.

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

It can be an isolating experience for Seventh-day Adventist Church members who hold high public office: this was one of the key messages to emerge from a unique gathering of Adventist public officials earlier this month in San Antonio, Texas. Some 21 leaders from ten countries—ambassadors, ministers of state, members of parliament, a senator, a deputy chief justice, and high-level officials within international organizations—came together for a lunch meeting on July 8 to discuss both the challenges and opportunities facing Adventists within the public realm.

Elder Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Adventist world church, attended briefly and encouraged his fellow church members. “You are the Esthers, the Josephs, the Daniels of our world,” he said. “You make a difference in an arena that most of us never touch. And never forget you are there for a purpose; you are where God has placed you. Yes, you serve your country, or a particular legislature. But most importantly, because you are a Seventh-day Adventist, you are working under the very highest authority: Jesus Christ our Savior. You are called to be unusual ambassadors for Christ.”

Those seated around the table spoke frankly about the need for better networking between Adventists who serve their governments, and about the loneliness that often comes with serving in a political or civic role. Some expressed their disappointment that holding elected office is sometimes seen as “off limits” for faithful church members—a sign that someone has compromised their integrity. All spoke about their desire to carry their spiritual values into the public realm and to reflect Christ’s character in their service to their country.
Senator Floyd Morris, Senate President of Jamaica, was voted as the first president of WAPOA. Philippine Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, Bienvenido V. Tejano, was chosen to serve as the association’s secretary, and Damaris Moura Kuo, president of the Religious Liberty Commission of the Brazilian Bar Association’s São Paulo Division, was selected as its public relations officer.

According to Senator Morris, the first order of business will be to identify more Adventist public officials—whether they serve their national government, or their local city council—and invite them to join the association. The group plans to communicate regularly and to organize a meeting of the association in 2017.

The gathering was hosted by the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department of the Adventist world church, and took place during the General Conference Session, which some of the public officials were attending as delegates.

Dr. Ganoune Diop, the newly elected director of PARL for the world church, says he hopes the association will promote a vigorous dialogue between Adventists who hold prominent and often-influential positions. “These men and women need our support and our prayers,” he says. “They are first and foremost our brothers and our sisters, but they are also called to represent Christ’s kingdom and His values within often-difficult and sensitive circumstances.”

Those who are interested in the association can contact the Adventist Church’s PARL department through its website, www.adventistliberty.org.