IAD News

- The end of the 7th World congress is really a beginning,'says IRLA president
- Baptist leader foresees growing tension between religious liberty and secularism
- There should be no compulsion with regard to faith, says leading Muslim human rights advocate
- Leading Colombian politician challenges Congress attendees to unite for freedom

The end of the 7th World congress is really a beginning,’says IRLA president
Posted: 26 Apr 2012 09:00 PM PDT
Three days of reports, discussions, and presentations came to an end April 26 with a program honoring men and women who have "walked the extra mile for religious freedom."

Baptist leader foresees growing tension between religious liberty and secularism
Posted: 26 Apr 2012 09:00 PM PDT
Neville Callam General Secretary of the World Baptist Alliance (WBA), told 7th World Congress attendees that "the resolution of the tension between religious liberty and secularism is more easily described than achieved."

There should be no compulsion with regard to faith, says leading Muslim human rights advocate
Posted: 26 Apr 2012 09:00 PM PDT
"Freedom of religion in its Islamic context implies that non-Muslims are not compelled to convert to Islam, nor are they hindered from practicing their own religious rights," said Shammout.

Leading Colombian politician challenges Congress attendees to unite for freedom
Posted: 26 Apr 2012 09:00 PM PDT
Senator Charles Schultz of Colombia spoke to the IRLA Congress delegation in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, on Apr. 26, 2012. Schultz reported to the more than 800 attendees on the strides made toward religious liberty among
Now, it's time to go back to our home countries and put into practice all we've learned here," said Denton Lotz, IRLA president and recipient of a Lifetime Commitment Award for his many decades of work for religious liberty.

The end of the 7th World congress is really a beginning,'says IRLA president Inter-American Division  >  Communication Department

Libna Stevens  

Apr 27, 2012

Three days of reports, discussions, and presentations came to an end April 26 with a program honoring men and women who have "walked the extra mile for religious freedom."

April 27, 2012 - Punta Cana, Dominican Republic...Bettina Krause/IRLA

Three days of reports, discussions, and presentations came to an end April 26 with a program honoring men and women who have "walked the extra mile for religious freedom." IRLA President Dr Denton Lotz urged the almost 900 attendees at the 7th World Congress to see the occasion not as the end, but as the beginning of a renewed commitment to work for religious freedom of all people, no matter what their faith tradition.

Lotz, General Secretary emeritus of the Baptist World Alliance, has served as IRLA president for more than 12 years. He received a Lifetime Commitment Award recognizing his outstanding contribution to the cause of liberty around the world.

IRLA General Secretary Dr John Graz also received a Lifetime Commitment Award acknowledging his leadership of the organization, which has resulted in an expansion of the global activities of the IRLA. Graz expressed his surprise and appreciation, but said, "For those of us who are involved this ministry, every time we see someone motivated to work for religious freedom, that is our award."

Other awardees included individuals such as Miguel Nunez Duran, a Dominican Republic attorney who has been instrumental in the organization of the 7th World Congress, and Greg Hamilton, a US-based attorney and director of Northwest Religious Liberty Association, headquartered in Washington state.

Dr Delbert Baker, vice president of the IRLA, introduced the group certificate awardees saying that no matter whether they had worked at the grassroots or national level, each person had lived up to their solemn responsibility to further the cause of religious liberty.

Dr Bert B Beach, former secretary general of the IRLA, also addressed attendees, referring to himself as the "historical conscience of the IRLA." He spoke about the dramatic changes in religious liberty protection that have occurred during his lifetime, pointing out that when he graduated from college in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not yet exist. Beach is the only person known to have attended each of the world congresses, beginning in 1977, Amsterdam.

Beach drew on his years of experience with religious liberty work around the world to warn his listeners to "beware the windows of vulnerability" for religious freedom. He cited an increased level of persecution directed toward Christians, and said also that advocates should be aware that words they commonly use such as "secular" or "proselytism"-have vastly different meanings, depending upon the cultural context. Finally, he warned that advocates should not concentrate only on legal or constitutional protections for religious freedom, because society itself-its level of tolerance and respect for minorities-is often the more significant factor in the ability of individuals to worship freely.

The 7th World Congress for Religious Freedom took place in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, April 24 to 26. It was the first World Congress to be held in the Inter-America region and the
largest IRLA Congress to date, with almost 900 attendees and guests from 65 countries.

**Recipients of the 2012 IRLA Awards of Honor and Awards of Appreciation**

Award of honor, **Dr Alberto de la Hera**, for his work in promoting religious freedom for all as Director of Religious Affairs in the government of Spain, for his outstanding support of the International Religious Liberty Association for the past 20 years, and for his role in the organization of the annual Meetings of Experts

Award of honor, **Pastor Cesario Acevedo**, for organizing three Festivals of Religious Freedom, for hosting the first regional IRLA Congress in Inter-America, for hosting the 7th IRLA World Congress in Punta Cana, and for his support in promotion of Religious Liberty in the Dominican Republic

Award of honor, **Senator Charles Schultz**, for his successful leadership in the Religious Freedom Coalition in Colombia, and for his role in passing legislation which promotes the right of religious organizations to exist and to develop their activities under the protection of government.

Award of honor, **Attorney Damaris Dias Moura Kuo**, for her commitment to promoting and defending Religious Freedom in Brazil, and for her dynamic leadership of the Religious Freedom Association of the Bar Association of Sao Paulo, Brazil

Award of honor, **Dr Israel Leito**, for his promotion of Religious Liberty in the Inter-American region, and for his personal commitment to the success of the 7th IRLA World Congress—the largest IRLA World Congress ever to be organized.

Award of appreciation, **Dr Miguel Nunez**, for his work in promoting religious freedom as President of the Dominican Religious Liberty Association For his generous donation of time and talents, and especially for the many details he has cared for in organizing the 7th IRLA World Congress in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

Award of honor, **Pastor Roberto Herrera**, for his role in increasing awareness of Religious Freedom in Inter-America, for his outstanding capacity to encourage and mobilize people to support and promote Religious Freedom, for organizing the First IRLA Congress in Inter-America, and for supporting the organization of Festivals of Religious Freedom which have been attended by thousands of people.

Award of appreciation, **Attorney Alan Reinach**, for his passion in the promotion of religious freedom in the Western part of the United States, for the organization of the first North American Festival of Religious Freedom in Honolulu in 2008, and for his radio chronicles, reports of events, and publication of articles.

Award of appreciation, **Pastor Alvaro Niño Escobar**, for his patient and efficient work as leader of the Columbia Religious Liberty Association, and for his role in the organization of many events, including the largest Inter-American Festival of Religious Freedom in Bogota in 2009.
Baptist leader foresees growing tension between religious liberty and secularism

Neville Callam General Secretary of the World Baptist Alliance (WBA), told 7th World Congress attendees that "the resolution of the tension between religious liberty and secularism is more easily described than achieved."

Speaking on the theme of the day-"How to Live Together"-he cited as a part of the problem, the increasingly pluralistic nature of society. Society is multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, with people who speak varying languages, and from different backgrounds and upbringings. All this, said Callam, makes it difficult to agree on a minimal core of what is acceptable to all.

Callam, who regards secularism as an ideology that sets forth a vision of the nature of the state and how it should be ordered viz-à-viz religion, further said, "It is also very hard to communicate the ideas around which we need to coalesce and it's very difficult to gain that consensus and I believe, therefore, that it is easier to talk about than to secure the consensus."

He further argued that, "In the coming decades, the extent to which a comprehensive and satisfactory answer to this dilemma is found will determine both the sustainability of people's peaceful co-existence and the possibility of religious liberty remaining a human right to be respected by all. Hopefully, a conference like this will contribute to the resolution of this intractable dilemma."

Reverend Callam also disclosed that there are contrasting attitudes in the worldwide Baptist Christian community. Various regions of its approximately 110 million-member family have adopted different approaches to the issue of religious liberty and the challenges posed by secularism.

The BWA is the organization that serves as an expression of the essential oneness of the global Baptist family, which resides in six designated regions-Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean, North America and Latin America. In each of these regions, Baptist Christians, like other Christians, face the challenge of secularism in one way or another, said Callam.
There should be no compulsion with regard to faith, says leading Muslim human rights advocate

Libna Stevens  >  Communication Department

Apr 27, 2012

"Freedom of religion in its Islamic context implies that non-Muslims are not compelled to convert to Islam, nor are they hindered from practicing their own religious rights," said Shammout. April 27, 2012 - Punta Cana, Dominican Republic...Bettina Krause/IRLA

"Freedom of religion in its Islamic context implies that non-Muslims are not compelled to convert to Islam, nor are they hindered from practicing their own religious rights," said Shammout. "Many of the Qur'anic verses make clear that all people are free to choose the faith they want."

He also addressed the issue of apostasy in Islam—a concept he says has been often misunderstood and mis-applied. He concluded that the death penalty for apostasy was not prescribed by the Qur'an.

"I emphasize freedom of religion in the general sense—namely the right to choose one's faith prior to becoming a Muslim," he said.

He also warned that "Islamic respect for freedom and Muslims' awareness of its value cannot be established by force and coercion, for the enforcement of any democratic ideal would be no different from the 'just tyrannical' leadership."

Shammout, a lawyer and former judge in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, left that work to establish and direct the Arab Bridge Center for Development and Human Rights. This non-profit organization aims to foster moderation, with the avoidance of violence, to bring about change. It promotes respect and understanding among people of all religions.
Leading Colombian politician challenges Congress attendees to unite for freedom

Senator Charles Schultz of Colombia spoke to the IRLA Congress delegation in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, on Apr. 26, 2012. Schultz reported to the more than 800 attendees on the strides made toward religious liberty among faith groups in Colombia during the past two decades.

"The model of secular state is the best one for the protection of human and civil rights," stated Schultz as he reported on the history of secularism and its benefits in the 32 states or provinces in Colombia.

"There is a great need to unite further in defending religious liberty, as well as using legal instruments and procedural guarantees for human rights," he challenged. "We must remember that without rights there is no freedom, because the human being is a slave to his emotions and passions."

Until 1991, Roman Catholicism was the official religion of Colombia, and Senator Schultz was one of the prime movers behind that year's historic constitutional reform, which required equal treatment for all religions under the law.