Dominican Republic: Church celebrates religious freedom on the island

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May 2, 2012 - Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic....Bettina Krause/IAD Staff

A colorful festival-filled with music and drama-celebrated religious freedom as a gift from God and capped off a
week of scholarly presentations and panels at the 7th World Congress for Religious Freedom. The event was
held at Aula Magna on the historic campus of Universidad Autónoma in the nation's capital, Santo Domingo, on Apr.
28, 2012, and drew some 3,000 people from across the Dominican Republic, as well as many international
participants from the 7th World Congress.

Pastor Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church, spoke to those crowded into the
venue, saying that every Adventist Church member is called to be a "champion of religious liberty and freedom of conscience."

"Religious liberty and freedom of conscience is important for everyone in the world," said Pastor Wilson. "If we wish to be proclaimers of religious liberty and reach the world, we must base this proclamation on a relationship with God including a clear, clean, pure lifestyle as did Daniel and his three friends."

Pastor Wilson concluded by emphasizing that justice, fairness, and goodness are God's character,
and to be faithful to God and His Word until the second coming.

"As we carry the great banner of religious freedom not only in the Dominican Republic, but in the entire world, may we help the people to understand there is a God in heaven who gives freedom of choice. Where freedom is, there is freedom in His Law," Pastor Wilson said.

The festival event was the third held on the island, one which followed brought an opportunity to
celebrate the religious freedom held in the Dominican Republic and to recognize authorities of the
country who are ensuring equality and religious liberty issues, said Pastor Cesario Acevedo,
president of the church in the Dominican Republic.

Pastor Wilson and John Graz, Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association,
unveiled a bronze plaque that was cast in commemoration of the 7th World Congress-the first
IRLA World Congress to be held in Inter-America and the largest and most diverse, with almost
900 attendees from some 65 countries.

Dr. Aquilina Alcequiez, advisor to the Dominican Republic president for Religious Affairs, read out
the text on the plaque: "In remembering the 7th IRLA World Congress on Religious Liberty, held
in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, April 24 to 26, 2012. Religious Freedom is a gift of love from
God to every human being...The IRLA delegates, coming from 60 countries to attend the World
Congress, commend the Dominican Republic for its religious freedom. As million of believers are
suffering discrimination, torture, and death in the world, the delegates encourage the Dominican
people to join their voices with all people who love justice and freedom."

Representative of the president of the Senate of the Republic as well as the deputy leader of the
city of La Romana were awarded a plaque for their efforts in recently approving a law on religious
matrimonies and civil issues.
Festivals such as these are important and necessary to hold in countries where religious freedom is enjoyed, said Roberto Herrera, secretary general of IRLA for Inter-America, who has coordinated dozens of religious festivals throughout the Inter-American territory.

"We must continue to be grateful to local governments and taking the opportunity to speak more of religious freedom and what it means to every citizen," said Herrera.

A central feature of the program was a musical drama performed by young people, which told the story of religious freedom in song and drama.

Wally Amundson and Rene Gomez contributed to this report.

For more on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic, visit www.adventistas.org.do

To view photos of the event, click here.

image by Abel Marquez/IAD

Dr. Aquilin Alcequiez, advisor to the Dominican Republic president for religious affairs, read a bronze plaque cast in commemoration of the 7th IRLA World Congress held last week.