

Planning and process for global consultation on Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom

The Global Christian Forum's commitment to conduct a global consultation under the theme 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' continues with detailed planning for the gathering to take place in Tirana, Albania from Monday 2 – Wednesday 4 November.

The consultation aims to bring together leaders of churches currently under duress with leaders of churches, global Christian organisations and groups committed to accompany them.

The consultation is an initiative of the GCF, together with numbers of churches and Christian organisations that reflects much of the breadth of the GCF itself. This includes the

Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), Pentecostal World Fellowship, World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

Tirana, the capital of Albania, has been chosen as the location for the consultation as that nation experienced an extended period of religious repression under the former Communist regime. In that time, all religious groups, including Christian and Islamic communities, saw religious liberty curtailed, their leaders arrested and sometimes martyred, and property destroyed and confiscated.

It is planned that at least half of the 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' gathering will be held in Tirana, Albania from Monday 2 – Wednesday 4 November. *Continued on Page 2*

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of the *GCFNews* for 2015. As the GCF focuses on the global consultation on 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' in Albania in November, so in this issue there are reports on the planning, preparations and connections for that important gathering.

You will find here, too:

- stories from two national Christian Forum's, from Indonesia and The Netherlands;
- a personal link between the GCF and a global initiative to eradicate extreme poverty;
- an article published in the Vatican newspaper on the GCF – written by the Catholic Church's representative on the Global Christian Forum Committee!



The Planning Group for the DPM Consultation meet 'on site' in Tirana, in March. They joined with Albanian church leaders and other global representatives to focus on the flow and details of the gathering. Clockwise from top left:

1. L-R: Archbishop Ramiro Moliner Inglés, Apostolic Nuncio to Albania; Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania; Larry Miller.
2. L-R: Ms. Ariela Mitri from Caritas Albania; with Rev. Prijo-Lisa Penttinen (Lutheran, World YWCA) Planning group member.
3. L-R: Deacon Jimmy Danho (Lebanon), Associate Secretary, Middle East Council of Churches; Godfrey Yogarajah, Executive Director, Religious Liberty Commission, WEA.
4. L-R: Archbishop Anastasios; Larry Miller (back to camera); Bishop George Frenzo, Gen. Sec. Catholic Bishops Conference, Albania; Bishop Andon Merdani, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania; Pastor Akil Pano, General Secretary, Evangelical Alliance of Albania.



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Martyrdom' consultation participants will come from churches currently experiencing situations of persecution and violence.

Regionally Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East will be represented, as will the global North.

Following the GCF's own experience there will also be a 50-50 balance between participants from what is often called the 'traditional/ecumenical' churches and those from 'evangelical/pentecostal' backgrounds.

The consultation process will ensure time is given to sharing of experiences and perceptions of persecution, both in groups and plenaries. There will also be time for cross-fertilisation of ideas as well as hearing informed wider perspectives through presentations.

This will be further supported by theological reflection and worship

during the participants time together.

Towards the close of the gathering themes and insights will be drawn together and commitments to next steps made.

In taking time to listen and hear from those experiencing persecution as well as to share information, it is hoped that a better understanding of the complexity of issues within the arena of Christian persecution will be gained.

Importantly, it is not the aim of the consultation to devise a 'global plan' to deal with the issues of discrimination, persecution and violence.

However, it is the organisers' prayer that communities and individuals currently facing situations of discrimination, persecution violence will feel the support of the wider body of Christ.

Through this dynamic encounter

leaders of churches and church organisations will be better informed and able to articulate their responses together and within their own constituencies.

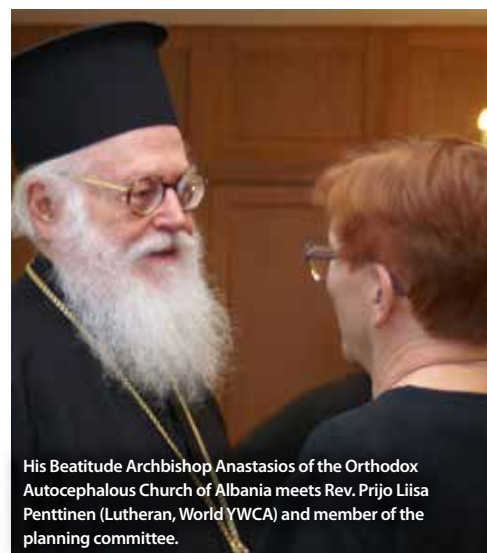
As part of the preparation for the consultation, research is underway on a 'glossary' of the language of persecution, since the way words are used has an impact on how people understand and respond to the issues.

Similarly, data is being collected in order to map the scope of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom, globally at this time.

As a gathering of those involved in and concerned about the many aspects of Christian persecution, the consultation will allow churches and Christian organisations to be informed as they shape their lives and priorities in their constituencies and traditions.



Fr Andrzej Choromanski, left, with the Archbishop Ramiro Moliner Inglés, Apostolic Nuncio of Albania.



His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania meets Rev. Prijo Liisa Penttinen (Lutheran, World YWCA) and member of the planning committee.



Two World Evangelical Alliance members of the DPM Planning Group in deep concentration: (left) Dr. Thomas Schirmacher and Dr. Christof Sauer.



The spire of St. Paul's Catholic Cathedral reaches above the city of Tirana. The main hub of activity at will be the new Albanian Orthodox Cathedral (see next story), morning prayers will be said at different church locations, including here.

'New' Tirana cathedral to host 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom' consultation

The 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' consultation will take place within the recently consecrated 'Resurrection of Christ Cathedral' and associated conference centre of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, in Tirana.

The new cathedral was consecrated by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on 1 June, 2014.

The Albanian Orthodox community suffered alongside people of all other faiths – including Catholic and Protestant Christians as well as Muslims - when in 1965, Communist dictator Enver Hoxha, declared Albania to be the world's first atheistic state. No form of religious observance, public or private was permitted.

Many hundreds of priests, clergy and imams lost their lives or were imprisoned.

Churches, temples and religious buildings were confiscated or destroyed, including the original Orthodox cathedral in Tirana. The land was confiscated and a 15 story hotel was built on the site.

Following the fall of the Communist regime in 1997 the Albanian Orthodox Church was down to about 22 clergy. From that point the Church has had to rebuild in many ways.

Work on the Resurrection of Christ Cathedral offices and conference centre was begun in 2006 on an alternative parcel of land, within walking distance of the original location.

In a touch of irony, both the hotel and cathedral will be used by participants during the 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom' consultation.



Resurrection of Christ Cathedral, consecrated in June, 2014.



The associated Conference Centre.



Inside the dome: Christ Pantocrator mosaic.



Internal view, including chandelier.

KimCain/GCF



The welcoming entrance.



Artist, Christos Papanikolaou, completes a mural in the new Nativity of Christ chapel, telling some of the story off the rebirth of the Church in Albania.

KimCain/GCF



The FUKRI leaders meeting, in Jakarta late March, welcomed Larry Miller GCF Secretary and Joy Lee (GCF events coordinator). They are (from left to right,) Rev. Guntur Subagyo, Baptist Union Indonesia (PBI); Rev. Elifer Rajagukguk, Fellowship of Pentecostal Churches Indonesia (PGPI), Rev. Gomar Gultom, Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), Rm Agustinus Ulahayanan, Catholic Bishops' Conference Indonesia (KWI), Rev. Dr Larry Miller, Joy Lee, Rev. Fr Daniel Byantoro, Orthodox Church of Indonesia (GOI), Rm Edy Purwanto, General Secretary, Catholic Bishops' Conference Indonesia (KWI), Rev. Yerry Tawalujan, Fellowship of Indonesian Evangelical Churches Indonesia (PGLII), Missing: Rev. Robinson Nainggolan, Fellowship of Pentecostal Churches Indonesia (PGPI).

Indonesia Christian Forum: on learning together as Christians

A recent meeting of the Indonesian Christian Forum (abbreviated 'FUKRI' in Indonesian) highlighted the positive contributions this national Forum had made to the churches and to individual participants since it was launched just over three years ago. It also gave participants an opportunity to engage in a lively discussion on matters of discrimination and persecution of Christians in the Indonesian context.

Comments such as “new levels of cooperation”, “an important space for learning”, “creating space for a ‘minority within a minority’” and building “fellowship that allows for autonomy” were said in relation to their continuing work together as a ‘Forum’.

On questions of the experience of being a Christian minority within Indonesia, the church leaders’ comments reflected a fairly common understanding of the language of ‘discrimination, persecution and martyrdom’ and what it means in real-life situations. It was felt that in the Indonesian situation it was not uncommon to experience some form of discrimination, which sometimes lead to religious persecution in some places. [See sidebar, ‘Church and discrimination in Indonesia.’]

The occasion for the discussion was a meeting of FUKRI as they welcomed Larry Miller (GCF Secretary) and Joy

Lee (GCF Events Coordinator) into their midst at the end of March.

The Rev. Gomar Gultom (from the Communion of Churches in Indonesia) said the national Forum has brought a new level of cooperation since FUKRI was officially launched at the second global gathering of the GCF in Manado, Indonesia in 2011. He and others said, now the discussion that was needed was to ask whether FUKRI needs to institutionalize itself so it can be effective in talking on behalf of Christianity in Indonesia.

On a practical level, Rev. Elifer Rajagukguk of the Fellowship of Pentecostal Churches in Indonesia, said FUKRI has been an important space for learning.

He said he has gained a great deal from the Catholic leadership about influencing and relating effectively with the government, so that, for example, last year the Pentecostal

fellowship learned how to prepare their constituents more effectively for the national presidential election.

Belonging to the national Forum was a much more personal thing for Rev. Fr Daniel Byantoro of the Orthodox Church: FUKRI has created a space for the voice of the Orthodox Church, a ‘minority within a minority’, to be heard, he said. He noted improved respect among the churches whereas the Orthodox had previously been viewed with suspicion. Similarly, Rev. Guntur Subagyo, of the Baptist Union thought FUKRI has been a good common space that builds fellowship but allows for the autonomy of each church. Coming from a ‘congregationalist system’ he said, Baptists really appreciated this.

The Indonesian Christian Forum was launched in 2011 at the second Global gathering of the GCF in Manado, located on the island of

Sulawesi. There had been strong cooperation amongst the churches prior to the event and the Manado gathering gave them an opportunity to formally launch their own national Forum.

In that time FUKRI has:

- Conducted a Celebration of Christian Unity (2013) with about 60,000 people present in the national stadium in Jakarta. Large church events in Indonesia are not uncommon, but cooperation across denominations on this scale was unique and in the process may have created the world's largest 'Celebration of Christian Unity' for its own sake and not part of an institutional event. The main impact was to raise the awareness of unity among Christians in Indonesia.
- Held monthly FUKRI leadership meetings in Jakarta (participants take turns hosting the meetings in their church offices).
- Organised various working groups and seminars on specific topics, such as politics (for example: how to prepare Christian politicians for participation in parliament), media, and education.

Dr Miller presented an update on activities of the GCF, in return.

He said the GCF is now starting to meet the second part of its purpose, that is, bringing churches together to 'address and explore together common challenges,' which was called for by the participants of the Second Global Gathering in 2011.

He highlighted the two global initiatives currently under way, as examples. One, he said is the persecution of Christians and the other is the issue of mission/proselytism (in the context of other churches).

Christianity and discrimination in Indonesia

Church leaders in Indonesia claim Christians are often subject to 'discrimination' which can extend, at times, to definite 'religious persecution' in various areas in the nation.

In a discussion at a meeting of the Indonesia Christian Forum last March, participants said that Christians in Indonesia could generally expect to face some kind of discrimination.

Some Christian minority groups, such as Orthodox Christians, however, said the experience of being Christian is more akin to religious persecution as they were consistently mistrusted and misunderstood. They felt like a 'minority within a minority'.

The Catholic Church participant and members of churches from the Indonesia Communion of Churches, said they would commonly describe their situation as one of being discriminated against.

However, at times of religious and political upheaval, such as occurred the 1990s when secular conflict erupted in some areas of Indonesia, all Christian groups equally faced the reality of religious persecution, the church leaders said.

Between 1999 and early 2002 a period of inter-communal violence between Christians and Muslims

broke out in some regions, mainly along the Maluku archipelago and particularly the Ambon and Halmahera Islands.

The church leaders said that forms of discrimination for Christians in Indonesia included churches having difficulty in obtaining permits, being rejected legally and silenced in not being able to have their voice heard in the public arena.

They said, in some parts of the country there were attacks on churches, forced closure of worship and Christian gatherings by government officials, and threats against clergy by local communities.

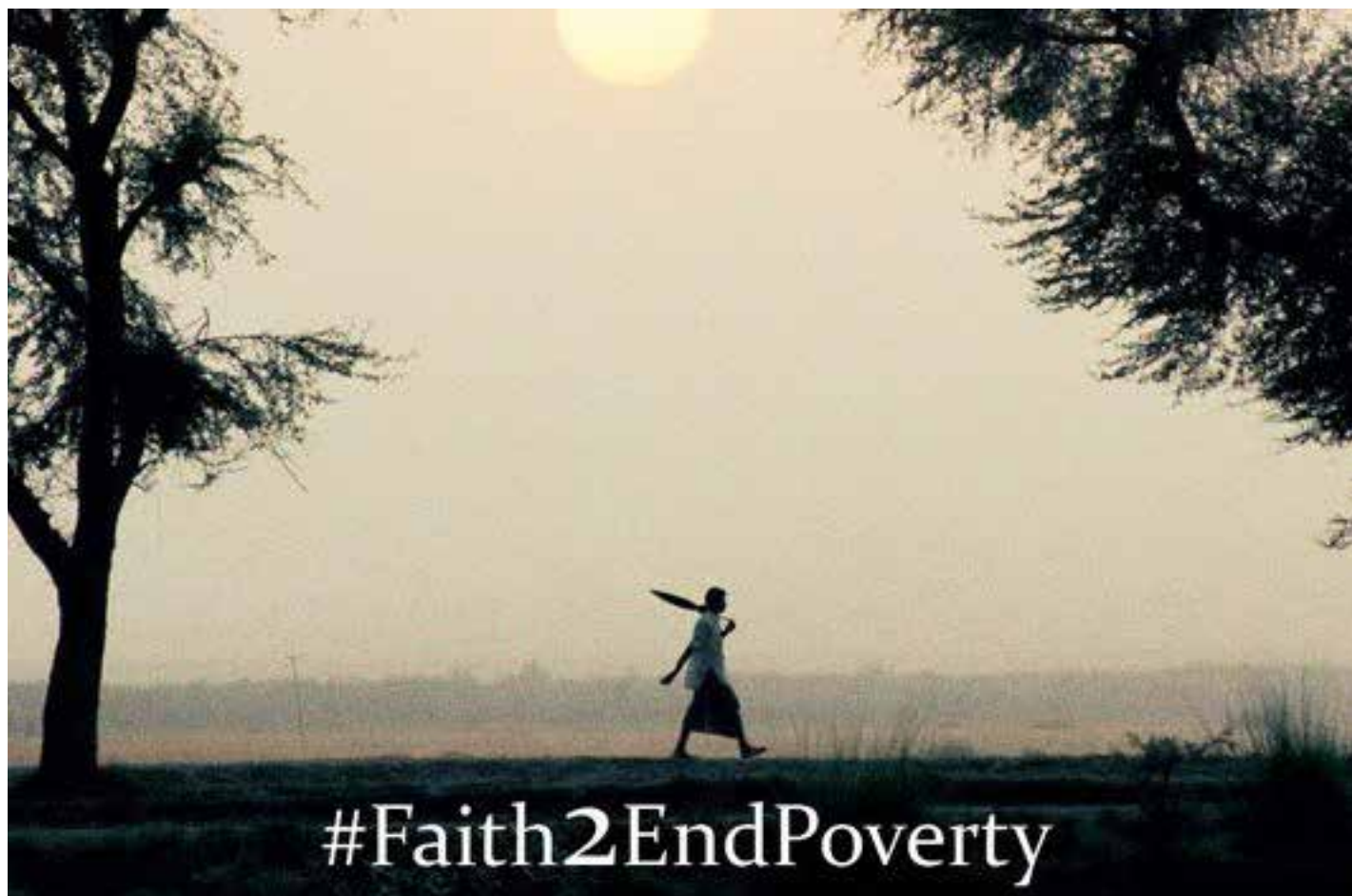
They agreed that this amounted to

religious persecution.

The Indonesia Christian population makes up about eight percent of the total national population of 253 million people. With about 87 percent of the population following Islam, Indonesia has the largest population of Muslim people in any one country in the world today.



Raising awareness of Christian unity in Indonesian: In 2013 FUKRI held a gathering in the national Stadium in Jakarta. Here church leaders light a flame of unity during the celebrations.



Ending Extreme Poverty: GCF people find themselves connected in support

When the World Bank, working globally with 'faith-based networks', announced a special effort to finally eradicate extreme poverty across the world over the next 15 years, it was not a surprise to discover several GCF-connected individuals, churches, and organisations involved.

On April 15, some 36 international faith-based organisations, meeting in Washington D.C. endorsed a 'Moral and Spiritual Imperative Statement' to end extreme poverty by the year 2030.

The statement was drafted by a multi-faith group convened by the World Bank.

Members of the group included Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson as a representative of the Reformed Church of America and Rev. Nicta Lubaale as General Secretary of the Organization of African Instituted

Churches – both of whom are members of the GCF international committee.

Moreover, although acting in their own right, several global bodies in relationship with the GCF were signatories to the 'Moral and Spiritual Imperative Statement'. These included the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches, World Vision International, the Salvation Army, and Anglican and Catholic organisations.

A copy of the statement can be read at: <https://www.rebelmouse.com/Faith2EndPoverty/>

It is the first time the World Bank has become involved in this way with faith-based organisations. Under the leadership of President Jim Yong Kim the World Bank has reached out to

religious groups.

It is reported that Kim referred to his own religious heritage – his mother was a Christian theologian in Korea – at a launch of the Statement in Washington.

Kim said, "Faith leaders and the World Bank Group share a common goal – to realize a world free of extreme poverty in just 15 years.

"The moral imperative can help drive the movement to end poverty by 2030 by inspiring large communities ... to advocate for governments to do the same.

"These commitments from religious leaders come at just the right time – their actions can help hundreds of millions of people lift themselves out of poverty," Kim said.

Vatican newspaper highlights GCF

The Vatican's authoritative and widely circulating newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, reported in a recent edition that the GCF is adding a "new dimension to ecumenism".

Written for a readership that includes many Catholic priests, bishops and cardinals worldwide, the article by the Rev. Dr Fr Andrzej Choromanski, said the formation of the GCF was a response to a "considerable lack" within the ecumenical movement. Traditionally there "had been no place where representatives of the so-called 'historic churches' (Catholic, Orthodox and post-Reformation Protestant churches) and those identified as 'recent churches' (Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic) could join together around one table."

Fr Choromanski has been the representative of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the GCF's International Committee for since July 2014. This is his first article on the GCF, and reflects his insights on the movement, which he had not known well prior to his appointment.

Writing in the 05 February edition of the paper, Fr Choromanski says the "GCF appeared at a time when the historic ecumenical movement was looking for original and creative ways forward."

"In the years of its development," he says, the GCF has "developed its own ecumenical identity based on gathering around the same table representatives of 'old' and 'new' expressions of Christianity.

"It especially intends to promote new relationships among those Christian communities which have not yet been in conversation with one another or have developed a

relationship only with a select group of partners."

Fr Choromanski also notes that the GCF "stresses that there is no expectation of abandoning theological differences but rather receiving them from each other as enriching gifts."

He says, a "mix of all Christian traditions and a blend of people from the Global South and North, East and West create the unique character of the Forum.

"Thanks to this denominational, cultural and geographical diversity, the participants can benefit greatly from the experience of the Forum where they can speak with one another, pray for one another, and together gain insights into common concerns in order to respond to them more effectively."

One of its practical attributes, he writes, is that it "facilitate(s) sharing on doctrinal matters and other relevant topical issues, especially where churches are not in agreement with one another."

L'Osservatore Romano publication is printed in seven languages and circulates widely throughout Italy and is well read globally. To read all of Fr Choromanski's article visits the Global Christian Forum web site: www.globalchristianforum.org



Fr Choromanski: 'GCF developing its own ecumenical identity.'



“The GCF appeared at a time when the historic ecumenical movement was looking for original and creative ways forward. Over nearly two decades, the GCF has developed its own ecumenical identity based on gathering around the same table representatives of “old” and “new” expressions of Christianity. It especially intends to promote new relationships among those Christian communities which have not yet been in conversation with one another or have developed a relationship only with a select group of partners. With no pretension of replacing existing ecumenical organizations and institutions, the GCF aims to create a “new space” where church representatives can freely meet with a view to reflect on the whole breadth, depth and width of global Christianity. However there is no formal membership in the GCF, only participation. A mix of all Christian traditions and a blend of people from the Global South and North, East and West create the unique character of the Forum.”

Fr Andrzej Choromanski, L'Osservatore Romano (excerpt)

Netherlands Christian Forum: retreat and focus on current issues

Local encounters on the issues facing the church globally became the focus for the annual retreat of the Netherlands Christian Forum (NCF) in March, reports GCF consultant Hubert van Beek.

Held at the Conference Centre Mennorode, Elspeet, Netherlands, on 18-19 March, the program of this third annual retreat of the Netherlands Christian Forum was centred again on the sharing of faith stories.

Since the meeting took place during Lent, participants were asked to focus on the meaning of the cross in their faith life. That gave a special touch to the gathering.

The small groups of eight to ten people had two sessions of an hour and a half, and had no difficulty filling the time.

The thematic emphasis at the retreat was on the events in Syria and Iraq. Fr Samuel Dogan, a priest of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the Netherlands — a community of about 20'000 — gave a moving testimony of the suffering of the Syriac Christians in Syria and Northern Iraq.

He also spoke about the Yezidy's and other minority groups in the area, who are equally victims of the persecution by the jihadists of the Islamic State.

Anmar Hayali, originally from Iraq and the coordinator of SKIN, the grouping of migrant churches in the Netherlands, put the persecution of Christians in the wider context of the witness of the churches over the centuries in the Middle East.

The two presentations were followed by a good discussion on

how churches and politicians in the Netherlands can assist Christians in the Middle East.

The week before the retreat, His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, visited the Netherlands and spoke about the same issue. He had made a strong impact in the churches, the media, and the Parliament, which he was invited to address.

In this context, I was given the opportunity to share information about the upcoming GCF-convened consultation discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom, scheduled to take place later this year in Tirana, Albania.

In another plenary, a young woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who has lived in the Netherlands for some 14 years, was interviewed about her experience as a migrant Christian in Dutch society and Dutch churches.

This led to a lively exchange on issues that are relevant for all churches in the Netherlands, established ones as well as evangelical and Pentecostal ones.

She said she eventually found her place in the International Christian Fellowship, a mixed community of local and migrant Christians. There are now some twenty-five local groupings of this kind in the country.

SUPPORT THE GCF

The Global Christian Forum welcomes your financial support. Contributions to the 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' consultation 'Solidarity Fund' will enable leaders of persecuted churches to participate in this crucial event. Average cost per person (travel, room, board): 2,000 Swiss Francs / 1,925 € / US\$2,150. An undesignated contribution will help the GCF continue the rest of its unique and valuable work.

To make a donation online:

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<http://www.globalchristianforum.org/donate.html>

Donate securely via PayPal, in either Swiss Francs, Euros, or US Dollars.

To make a donation

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