



CONTACT:

For further information, contact the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions at (312) 629-2990.

Religion in the Age of Terror: Chicago Organization Gives First-Ever Interreligious Award to Ugandan Multi-faith Peace Group Working to End Religious Intolerance and Violence

CHICAGO – May 27, 2004 - The Board of Trustees of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions announced today the first recipient of The Paul Carus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Interreligious Movement. Bishop McLeod Baker Ochola II and the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI), a multi-faith peace group in Northern Uganda, were selected from international nominees for their work to end violence in their region.

The role of religion in an increasing violent world will be one of the main issues addressed by international attendees of the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, Spain July 7-13, where Ochola will receive the award. Violence has affected Ochola personally. His daughter's abduction early in the struggle led to her death and a landmine killed his wife 10 years later.

"God's way is non-violence and peaceful dialogue," declared Bishop Ochola, vice chair of the ARLPI, in an April 2004 interview with *The New Vision*, Uganda's leading newspaper. "That is why great people like Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of Peace, Gandhi of India, Martin Luther King Jr. and of course Nelson Mandela and many others who are like them, deliberately chose the way of God – not because they are cowards but because they know that war does not solve problems."

The Bishop and his fellow Anglican, Roman Catholic and Muslim religious leaders have been anything but cowards in their seven-year long struggle to bring a peaceful solution to the 18-year old war that has devastated the people and many of the villages of the Acholi region of Northern Uganda. Chiefly, the ARLPI has served as a link between the LRA Rebels (Lord's Resistance Army) and the Ugandan Government, a position that has, at times, made them a target of both groups.

At one point, the rebel leader issued orders to kill the religious leaders. On a number of occasions, carefully planned peace talks have been sabotaged by one of the groups breaking promises. On occasion some of the religious leaders have narrowly escaped death.

Nevertheless, the religious leaders group, with widespread popular support, has kept at their peacemaking task. The Bishop is emphatic that the role of ARLPI is not to mediate peace talks. There are others in the international community to do that task. According to the Bishop, religious leaders should be a bridge that builds the level of trust and confidence on both sides, and their strategy is to put pressure on the rebels and the government to stop fighting and talk peace.

“Those dying in the Army are our children,” Bishop Ochola told *The New Vision*. “The rebels are also our children...why should we continue killing ourselves.”

The actions of the religious leaders extend to other areas as well. Local organizing, peace education and advocacy especially for children are among their priorities. In 2003 the group spent four nights sleeping in the cold streets of Gulu during the rainy season together with thousands of child night-commuters who every night seek safety in the town. Every year ARLPI organizes peace rallies and prayers in the main towns affected by the war. They help people express their deep desires for an end to the violence. In 2002 they started the Acholi Education Initiative, a scholarship foundation to help student orphans in secondary school.

“I have tried to change the game from confrontation to cooperation,” Ochola said to *The New Vision*. “I have attempted to encourage both sides to aim for mutual satisfaction not victory because it is more rewarding to turn enemies into friends.”

This award honors Paul Carus, editor-in-chief of Open Court Publishing Company who took a leading role in the 1893 Parliament of the World’s Religions and was a bridge builder between the Occident and the Orient and Buddhism and Christianity. Carus’ passion and commitment to the quest for religious and spiritual understanding was illustrated by his lifelong dedication to providing an open forum for the ideas of such diverse religious leaders and scholars such as Pierce, Russell, Mach, Dharmapala, Swami Vivekananda, Shaku Soyen, and D.T. Suzuki. In his honor, The Paul Carus Award seeks to recognize, celebrate and affirm outstanding work in support of the international interreligious movement and the efforts of religious and spiritual individuals, communities and organizations towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

The Carus Family provided the monetary award of \$50,000 dollars. This prize will be given to support the local efforts of the ARLPI. The announcement will take place today at the Cliff Dweller’s Club in Chicago, Illinois. The award will be presented to Bishop Ochola and other members of the ARLPI at the fourth Parliament of the World’s Religions to be held in Barcelona, Spain, July 7-13, 2004.

About the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions

The Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions is a Chicago-based, interreligious organization that cultivates harmony between the world’s religious and spiritual communities and fosters their engagement with the world and other guiding institutions to achieve a vision of a peaceful, just and sustainable world. Approximately every five years, the Council organizes and conducts a Parliament of the World’s Religions, an interreligious gathering of thousands of international attendees from various religious and spiritual backgrounds who convene to find inspiration and renewal and forge new pathways to peace. For more information, visit: www.cpwr.org.

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