

President's Message, January, 2008

Dear Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist friends around the globe,

As the western world welcomes the year 2008, there are serious challenges facing some of our co-religionists around the world. Post-election violence in Kenya is troubling and posing a small degree of threat to our upcoming Leadership School scheduled for Nairobi in February. A few days before those riots began, Pakistan suffered the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Below you will find a communication from Inderias Bhatti, the National Director of Unitarians in Pakistan and my reply as President.

Usually, as a minister in our faith, I try to present a New Year's message that is optimistic, upbeat and hopeful that the coming year will bring positive change. Perhaps at this turning of the year, I am not feeling as upbeat because of these tragedies affecting people I know, but I am still hopeful. Certainly both of those torn nations need positive change as do so many others facing war, economic crisis and election challenges.

It occurs to me that our shared religion calls us to turn away from despair. Of course we must acknowledge the weaker side of humanity that can lead to appalling varieties of evil. In spite of all good will, bad things do happen. But should we allow that human weakness to win? I think not. Social evolution is not a short term thing. Sometimes it takes generations. In my nation of Canada, there are many stories of immigrants who came and worked hard in low paying jobs not so that they could have a better life, but so that their children could have a better life. And as generation succeeded generation, laws changed for the better of all citizens. Around the world there are inspiring stories of men, women and groups that have patiently worked against oppression of all kinds eventually bringing about positive change.

Unitarianism is a religion that places a lot of faith in the good side of human nature. We celebrate the best of what we are and the best of what we think we can be. In times when despair threatens, we have to hold on to that faith in human nature.

I certainly expect that African Leadership School will go ahead on schedule, and that all who are planning to come will feel safe to do so. It may be that our liberal and accepting approach to religion will in future become part of the change that is most needed, in Africa and around the world.

Here's to a positive and safe 2008

Brian

Here's the message from Inderias:

Dear Fellows,

With sorrow and grief we the Unitarians in Pakistan condemn the assassination of the former Prime minister Ms. Bhutto in a suicidal attack in Rawalpindi. As per by Doug Muder in the story of Midwinter we the Unitarians in Pakistan has been waiting for a turn since long. The turn of Love; The Love that always seeks to do Good to help and heal; never to hurt or destroy; The Turn of PEACE; The turn of Democracy; The turn of Security of the common people; the turn of ****

The return of Ms. Bhutto was a hope of the turn to the Unitarians in Pakistan. The turn of equality in our great many challenges from our very existence in Pakistan; the turn of positive changes for our gain and growth but her brutal assassination has rather turned all our expectations to hopelessness.

With our prayers for her eternal rest in Peace; the condolence to her husband; children; family tribe; friends; associates and all Pakistan who are greatly shocked with this untimely loss. We salute the brave daughter of Pakistan. We announce three days mourn in this grief.

May be the Turn would come again with its strength to break the bounds of Darkness and hopelessness and bring new shine and warmth upon us. May be **** May be **** May be **** May be **** May be **** May be **** May be ****

With Sorrow and grief, I am,

Inderias Dominic Bhatti,
National Director,
Unitarians in Pakistan

Dear Unitarian Friends in Pakistan,

On behalf of the ICUU Executive and Unitarians and Universalists around the world let me offer our condolences, thoughts and prayers for your torn nation. It is a tremendous sadness weighing on all citizens of the world, when hatred and intolerance leads to terrorism and violence. It does not really matter whether these actions are based on religion or politics or greed. What matters is that nations are taught to hate other nations, tribes are taught to hate other tribes, religious followers are taught to hate those of other religions and even brothers and sisters

are turned against each other. The 'why' is almost irrelevant. It is the teaching of hate we must end.

Too many of our Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist colleagues around the world have suffered through such inhumane indignities in years and decades past.

We can only hope and pray for peace and for a turning from violence. As Inderias Bhatti, National Director of the Unitarians in Pakistan wrote: "The turn of Love; The Love that always seeks to do Good to help and heal; never to hurt or destroy; The Turn of PEACE; The turn of Democracy; The turn of Security of the common people; the turn of ****"

In Faith and Peace,
Rev. Brian Kiely
Unitarian Church of Edmonton
President, International Council of Unitarians and Universalists