



ICRD Monthly Update

June 6, 2019

Dear friends,

This past month, ICRD gathered to commemorate its 20th anniversary at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Virginia. ICRD supporters from all around the world gathered to celebrate our history and, most importantly, to join us as we embark on the next 20 years of peacebuilding.

ICRD has worked on reconciliation, on religious narratives and education, and on conflict resolution and preventing violent extremism. But there are other great challenges facing the human community that we need to engage with. Climate change and refugee flows, for instance. ICRD has begun to incorporate green energy solutions into our program proposals in Colombia and Lebanon, where we seek to work with refugees and host communities through local interfaith partners. Then there is the challenge of exclusion in religious spaces. In addition



to specific initiatives that work with women of faith and young people, we are working to build gender and youth inclusion into our work across the board.

Importantly, the theme of our 20th anniversary dinner had us focusing on the role that the Center might play in reducing religious prejudice in the United States. ICRD has 20 years of experience building peace in international spaces around the world, but now that expertise needs to be brought back home. In 1790, President Washington wrote a letter to the Touro Synagogue, insisting that the government of the United States must give, “to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance...” All Americans should be able to, “sit in safety under [their] own vine and fig tree,” with “none to make [them] afraid.”

Can it be said that this describes our current state of affairs in the U.S.? The Tree of Life Synagogue shooting, Dylan Roof’s mass murder in Charleston and the Mississippi church burnings, nationwide mosque threats and the Wisconsin Sikh Temple attack – to name only a few – demonstrate the impact of a toxic rhetoric of xenophobia mixed with religious persecution that has erupted into our civil and political discourse in shocking extremes. Sadly, much of the hateful rhetoric comes from those who claim to be religious people.

There is a sacred Hadith in the Islamic tradition, a saying of The Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, in which he is asked, “*Who, O Messenger of Allah, is not a believer?*” To which he replied, “*One whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil.*”



It is easy in the face of such a surge of hatred and violence to lose hope, to get overwhelmed, to retreat into small spaces of security. But retreat is not the answer. More hatred is not the answer. We live in a time of “reciprocal prejudice,” where negative rhetoric and group conflict spiral ever more out of control, feeding on one another. Whether from political leaders, social and traditional media, or civil movements, this is reinforcing deep divides across the globe.

It is in listening and being heard that we encounter the humanity of the other and dispel the hatred and fear that corrupt our spirits and cause our compassion to decay. Sometimes the challenge seems insurmountable, but we can take heart in the fact that we have an enormous number of religious faithful in the world with whom we might create common ground, each doing their part. In the Jewish wisdom tradition, in the book of Perkei Avot, it states “you are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist.” It is not easy, but it is in recognizing ourselves in the other that we will quench the flames and regain the world.

It is time to take the discussion away from those with political or financial agendas, and **rehumanize** one another – to seek what the Quakers call “the light of the divine in the other.” It is time to recall the basic things that we share and that unify us. After 20 years of peacebuilding abroad, it is our own community that needs us. Join us as we forge ahead and build our efforts for reconciliation here at home.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Patton', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

James Patton

ICRD is making great strides in its 20th Anniversary Giving Campaign! As we make the turn inward, ICRD has set a goal of raising \$100,000.00 by the end of the year. As we bring our time-tested methodologies back to the US and prevent the spread of conflict and violent extremism around the world, there is increased pressure for our organization to staff-up, grow our office, and bring aboard new expert practitioners to build lasting and effective peace in the world. I implore you to please give a gift today, using the “donate” button below, or sign up for our monthly recurring donor list. Together, we can help make faith part of the solution and reverse the cycles of prejudice that threaten the stability of our communities and country!

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