

# REPORT

March 22, 2021

UNITED  
*Liaison Committee*  
NATIONS

This is a summary of the United Nations Liaison Committee Report held on March 22, 2021. This report presented a perspective of the vision of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the importance of championing religious freedom and the promotion of social, moral, and spiritual values.

This report brought into discussion the impact of COVID-19 on health and education, focusing on the limitations created due to the restrictions during the pandemic that severely affected religious freedom all around the world. It also drew attention to global issues as presented by the United Nations, that may affect human rights and religious freedom in certain countries in the near future.

Pastor Nelu Burcea, PhD

*GC Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Associate Director,  
United Nations Liaison for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and  
the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA)*



*“Let none sit in calm expectation of the evil, comforting themselves with the belief that this work must go on because prophecy has foretold it, and that the Lord will shelter His people. We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience.”*

Ellen G. White - 5T 713.4

# AGENDA

March 22, 2021

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- 01 Meditation and prayer - Abner De los Santos
  - 02 Review committee terms of reference
  - 03 Adventists at the United Nations – reaffirming our values and vision
  - 04 United Nations reports - the impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights & Religious Liberty
  - 05 Trends - An overview of the global issues which affect Human Rights
  - 06 Future events and activities
-

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## MEDITATION & PRAYER



Abner De los Santos



# REVIEW COMMITTEE

## *Terms of reference*

### MEMBERS

De Los Santos, Abner, Chair (GC)  
Diop, A Ganoune, Vice-chair (GC)  
Burcea, Nelu, Secretary (GC)

Beardsley-Hardy, Lisa M (GC)  
Blanchard, Gary (GC)  
Johnson, Orlan (NAD)  
Koh, Linda Mei Lin (GC)  
Krause, Bettina (GC)  
Landless, Peter N (GC)  
Mikov, Paul  
Ng, G T (GC)  
Costa, Williams S Jr (GC)  
Orion, Daisy J F (GC)  
Small, Heather-Dawn K (GC)  
Wilson, Ted N C (GC)  
Zinke, E Edward (Layperson)  
Teewen, Frank (ADRA)  
McFarland, Todd R (Legal Advisor)

# UNITED NATIONS

## *Liaison Committee*

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Review relations between the Church and the United Nations.
2. Ensure appropriate development of bilateral relationships between the Church and the United Nations.
3. Develop awareness of Church-United Nations activities.
4. Prepare proposals to provide General Conference participation in worthwhile initiatives of the United Nations and other international bodies.
5. Maintain perspective and give counsel on United Nations developments in the areas of human rights, religious freedom, health, education, humanitarian aid, and other areas of mutual interest.

### AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

1. Power to act.
2. Power to act.
3. Power to act.
4. Recommend to the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) (GCC-S).
5. Power to act.

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# ADVENTISTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS

*Reaffirming our values and vision*

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For more than a century Seventh-day Adventists have been active promoters of religious freedom. We recognize the need to champion freedom of conscience and religion as a fundamental human right, in harmony with the instruments of the United Nations. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a presence in 209 countries. With some exceptions, however, Adventists constitute a religious minority, and have at times been subject to restrictions and discrimination. Consequently, they have felt it necessary to stand up for human rights.

*This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM),  
June 29-July 8, 1995*



Religious liberty includes the fundamental human right to have, adopt, or change one's religion or religious belief according to conscience and to manifest and practice one's religion individually or in fellowship with other believers, in prayer, devotions, witness, and teaching, including the observance of a weekly day of rest and worship in harmony with the precepts of one's religion, subject to respect for the equivalent rights of others.

*Excerpt from General Conference Working Policy (2014-2015) pages 353-355*



The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) department promotes and maintains religious liberty, with particular emphasis upon liberty of conscience. Religious liberty includes the human right to have or adopt the religion of one's choice, to change religious belief according to conscience, to manifest one's religion individually or in community with fellow believers, in worship, observance, practice, witness, and teaching, subject to respect for the equivalent rights of others.

*General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Church Manual, 18th Edition (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2010) pages 92-93*



The General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department is responsible for developing global religious liberty strategies and programs for the Church. This program will include appropriate strategic contacts and relationships with various governments, the United Nations, especially the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Commission, and the United States Congress and State Department.

*Excerpt from General Conference Working Policy (2014-2015) pages 353-355*



The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, one of the original core departments of the Church, was established to promote and maintain religious liberty, with particular emphasis upon individual liberty of conscience. In so doing, the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department is involved in government relations, inter-church contacts and, where indicated, networks with non-governmental organizations which have kindred goals in upholding religious freedom. The department not only works for the religious liberties of both individual church members and organized entities of the Church, but also supports the rightful religious liberties of all people.

In view of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the “great controversy” and the climactic events of human history involving union of church and state, eliminating the free exercise of religion, and resulting in persecution of the faithful remnant, the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department monitors and seeks to interpret prudently current trends that may reflect the prophetic scenario.

*Excerpt from General Conference Working Policy (2014-2015) pages 353-355*



Justice - Unfortunately, the world is rampant with injustice and a fallout of injustice is strife. Justice and peace join hands, as do injustice and war. Poverty and exploitation breed discontent and hopelessness, which lead to desperation and violence. On the other hand, “God’s word sanctions no policy that will enrich one class by the oppression and suffering of another.”

Justice requires respect for human rights, in particular religious liberty which deals with the profoundest human aspirations and undergirds all human rights. Justice requires nondiscrimination, respect for human dignity and equality, and a more equitable distribution of the necessities of life. Economic and social policies will either produce peace or discontent. Seventh-day Adventist concern for social justice is expressed through the support and promotion of religious liberty, and through organizations and departments of the Church which work to relieve poverty and conditions of marginalization. Such efforts on the part of the Church can, over time, reduce resentment and terrorism.

*This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on April 18, 2002 in Silver Spring, Maryland*



The Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly supports freedom of speech in general, and freedom of religious speech in particular. Although freedom of speech is guaranteed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, efforts continue to limit speech at both the national level and at the United Nations. In both settings, significant focus has been placed on limiting speech that offends the religious beliefs of the hearer. Seventh-day Adventists affirm sensitivity and respect in all communication. We are thus concerned about speech designed to offend religious sensibilities. However, we believe that ceding the right to the state to control religious speech creates a far greater threat to the autonomy of people of faith than that posed by offensive speech. Indeed, there are numerous examples today of states citing a desire to protect religious feelings to justify the forceful silencing of peaceful religious speech.

*This statement was approved and voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on June 23, 2010, and released at the General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia, June 24-July 3, 2010*



While both the United Nations and various religious bodies have proclaimed the first decade of the 21st century as a decade for the promotion of peace and security in the place of violence in its various forms, a new and insidious dimension of violence has emerged: organized international terrorism. Terrorism itself is not new, but worldwide terrorist networks are. Another new factor is the appeal to so-called divine mandates as the rationale for terrorist activity under the guise of culture war, or even “religious” war.

*This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on April 18, 2002 in Silver Spring, Maryland*



Seventh-day Adventists are committed to the unchanging biblical truths which reveal that human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Based on the creation account in the book of Genesis, we believe in the God-given and immutable equality of all persons in all times, all places, and all circumstances. We are all descended from Adam and Eve, our original ancestors, who make all humanity one family (Gen 3:20). Even the tragic results of human choice to rebel against God have not erased the enduring relationships between all human beings. Distinctions of race, ethnicity, caste, and tribe are used to sinfully segment and divide the fundamental unity God intended all human beings to experience with Himself and each other.

*This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee in Silver Spring, Maryland on September 15, 2020*

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## UNITED NATIONS REPORTS

*The impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights & Religious Liberty*

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# REPORT

## OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)  
pandemic on the enjoyment of human rights  
around the world

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**A** IMPACT ON HEALTH

**B** IMPACT ON POVERTY AND LIVELIHOODS

**C** IMPACT ON EDUCATION

**D** IMPACT OF EMERGENCY MEASURES

**E** IMPACT ON CIVIC SPACE

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## A. IMPACT ON HEALTH

As at 20 March 2021, more than 121 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2.6 million deaths, had been reported to the World Health Organization.

The ability of many States to respond to a pandemic of the current magnitude has been compromised by years of underinvestment in public health services and a lack of universal access to health care.

Overwhelmed public health-care systems have led to disruptions in people's access to health care for other non-COVID-19 conditions, both physical and mental.

Lack of access to public health care has excluded people with limited financial resources to undergo testing, thus contributing to an acceleration in infection rates.

According to a recent report, in 67 countries, 90 per cent of the population will have no access to a COVID-19 vaccine, while certain wealthy countries have already purchased enough doses to vaccinate their entire populations three times over by the end of 2021.

## B. IMPACT ON POVERTY AND LIVELIHOODS

The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequality in the world.

According to World Bank estimates, the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic crisis has forced 88 million to 115 million people in the world into extreme poverty, reversing a decade of progress in poverty reduction efforts.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), between April and June 2020 alone, 495 million full-time jobs were lost, with nearly half of the global workforce at risk of losing their livelihoods.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic may add between 83 and 132 million people to the almost 690 million people in the world considered undernourished in 2019.

Poor quality housing and living conditions increase the risk of infection and the spread of the virus,<sup>12</sup> with approximately 1.8 billion people worldwide living in homelessness and inadequate housing, often in overcrowded conditions and lacking access to water and sanitation.

At a time when access to water and sanitation are a key to ending the pandemic, more than 3 billion people worldwide have inadequate access at home to water and soap to ensure basic hygiene.

Around the world, some 71 per cent of people, including almost two thirds of the world's children, have no social security coverage, or only partial and inadequate coverage. Women working in the informal economy frequently lack social protection.

*[Source: <https://undocs.org/A/75/258>]*

## C. IMPACT ON EDUCATION

The pandemic has created a disruption worldwide in access to education, a key enabling right for the realization of human rights more generally.

Large-scale school closures have affected nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries.

For those without supportive and well-resourced home environments, including access to the Internet, the impact may be catastrophic, with lifelong effects, as many children may never be able to close the gap in their education caused by the pandemic or, in some cases, even return to school.

School closures make girls and young women more vulnerable to child marriage, early pregnancy and gender-based violence, which decrease their likelihood of being able to pursue their education.

## D. IMPACT OF EMERGENCY MEASURES

Many measures taken by States to control the spread of COVID-19 have had a negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights.

Lockdown measures and restrictions on the free movement of persons have increased the risk of isolating particularly vulnerable groups, including older persons and persons with disabilities, with consequences for their mental health and physical well-being.

A rise in gender-based domestic violence by intimate partners and family members has been reported during lockdowns.

For some children, lockdown measures have increased their risk of being subjected to physical or psychological violence at home and limited the possibility of contact with trusted adults to whom such violence might otherwise be reported.

## E. IMPACT ON CIVIC SPACE

The pandemic has had a considerable impact on public participation and access to information, with many channels for engagement moving online, excluding those segments of the population who had limited or no Internet access.

Civil society organizations as well had to adjust to COVID-19-related restrictions, which often reduced their ability to have direct access to communities and those in need.

A number of countries have placed restrictions on access to legitimate information and data related to COVID-19... These efforts have resulted in the suppression of free expression, including threats to and the detention of media personnel, medical professionals, and others.

Social media users as young as 14 years of age have been arrested for publishing COVID-19-related videos or posting online stories that are critical of authorities. At the same time, the spread of misinformation relating to COVID-19 has undermined health responses, with deadly consequences, a problem at times exacerbated by some political leaders and government officials.

Health-care workers, too, have been intimidated, detained and sometimes convicted for expressing their views regarding the situation inside hospitals.

Human rights defenders, lawyers and political activists also have been detained, prosecuted and subjected to intimidation and surveillance for criticizing government responses to the pandemic.

The right to peaceful assembly has at times also been a casualty of the pandemic, with restrictions often going beyond what was strictly necessary from a public health point of view, and protesters and organizers of protests facing criminal charges.

[Source: <https://undocs.org/A/75/258>]

# REPORTS

## Human Rights

### TORTURE

#### Report

[Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#)

January 2021 | A/HRC/46/26

### CHILDREN & ARMED CONFLICT

#### Report

[Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict](#)

December 2020 | A/HRC/46/39

### MINORITY ISSUES

#### Report

[Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#)

March 2021 | A/HRC/46/57

[Source: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx)]



# REPORTS

## Human Rights

### PRIVACY Report

[Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy](#)

January 2021 | A/HRC/46/37

### FOOD Report

[Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food](#)

December 2020 | A/HRC/46/33

### INTOLERANCE Report

[Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief](#)

January 2021 | A/HRC/46/67

# REPORTS

## Human Rights

### REPORTS OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
*Report*

[Countering Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim Hatred to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief](#)

February 2021 | A/HRC/46/30

**GENDER  
EQUALITY**  
*Report*

[Gender-based violence and discrimination in the name of religion or belief](#)

August 2020 | A/HRC/43/48

**RELIGIOUS  
INTOLERANCE**  
*Report*

[Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance](#)

October 2020 | A/75/385

[Source: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx)]

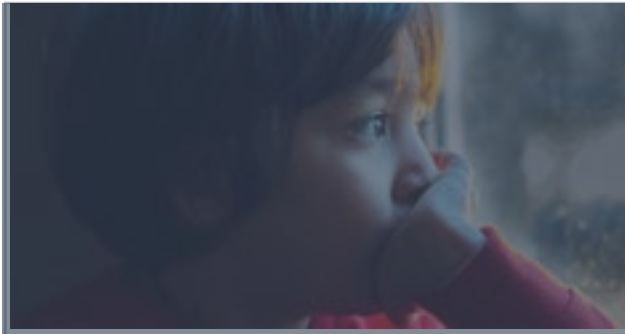
# UNITED NATIONS

## News 2021



[UN envoy continues efforts to access Myanmar, amidst increasingly brutal crackdown](#)

18 March 2021



[Mental health alert for 332 million children linked to COVID-19 lockdown policies: UNICEF](#)

4 March 2021



['If you don't feed people, you feed conflict', UN chief tells Security Council](#)

11 March 2021



[US death penalty must be abolished, rights experts urge President Biden](#)

11 March 2021



[Myanmar crackdown has led to likely crimes against humanity, Human Rights Council told](#)

11 March 2021



['Hell' in Yemen, with millions 'knocking on the door of famine' WFP's Beasley warns](#)

10 March 2021

[Source: [news.un.org/en/news/topic/human-rights](https://news.un.org/en/news/topic/human-rights)]

# UNITED NATIONS

## News 2021



[COVID contributed to 'starvation', executions in DPR Korea, Rights Council hears](#)

10 March 2021



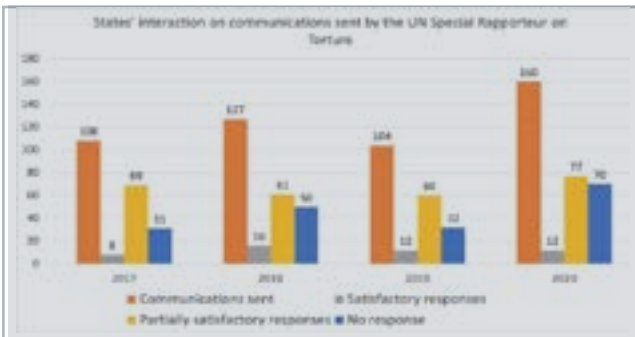
[EU must place social justice 'at its core' to lift people out of poverty](#)

29 January 2021



[Guterres welcomes US decision to re-engage with the Human Rights Council](#)

8 February 2021



[Countries lack commitment to banning torture, rights expert charges](#)

8 March 2021



['Pernicious evil' of racism pervasive in 'all regions and all societies' – UN chief](#)

20 March 2021



['Hell' in Yemen, with millions 'knocking on the door of famine' WFP's Beasley warns](#)

10 March 2021

[Source: <https://news.un.org/en/news/topic/human-rights>]

# 5 TRENDS

*An overview of the global issues which affect Human Rights*

# HUMAN RIGHTS

## Issues

Adequate Housing  
Administration of Justice  
Albinism  
Business and Human Rights  
Children  
Civic Space  
Civil and Political Rights  
Climate change  
Coercive measures  
Conscientious objection to military service  
Corruption and Human Rights  
Cultural rights  
Death penalty  
Democracy  
Detention  
Disability and Human Rights  
Disappearances  
Discrimination

Education  
Environment  
Executions  
Food  
Forced evictions  
Freedom of opinion and expression  
Freedom of peaceful assembly and of association  
Freedom of Religion and Belief  
Health  
HIV/AIDS  
Human Rights Defenders  
Human rights education and training  
Human Rights Indicators  
Humanitarian action  
Independence of Judiciary  
Indigenous Peoples  
Internal Displacement

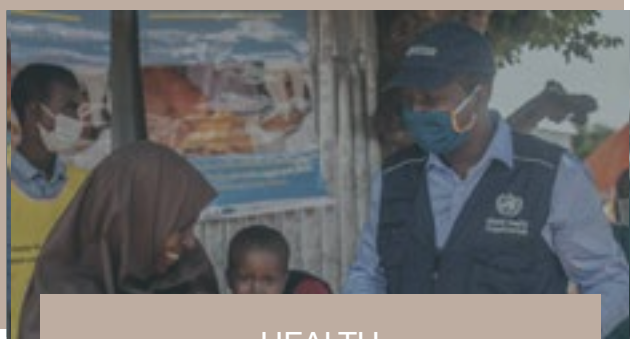
International Order  
International Solidarity  
Land and Human Rights  
Leprosy  
LGBTI people  
Local Government and Human Rights  
Mental health and human rights  
Mercenaries  
Migration  
Minorities  
Nationality  
Older persons  
Plans of Action for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights  
Poverty  
Privacy  
Private military and security companies  
Racism

Reprisals  
Right to Development  
Rule of Law  
Safety of Journalists  
Situations  
Slavery  
Social Security  
Terrorism  
Torture  
Trade and Investment  
Traditional values  
Trafficking in Persons  
Transitional Justice  
Treaty Body Strengthening  
Urbanization and Human Rights  
Violent extremism  
Water and sanitation  
Women's human rights  
Youth's human rights

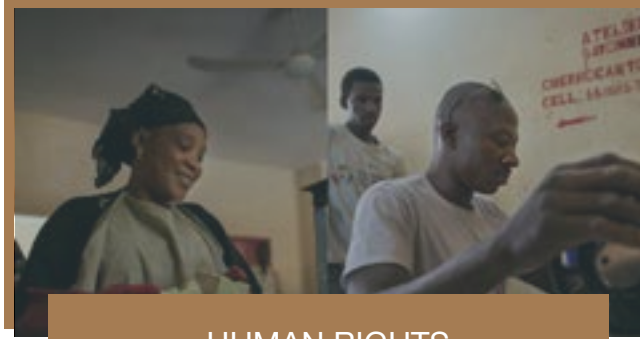


# OVERVIEW

## Global Issues



HEALTH



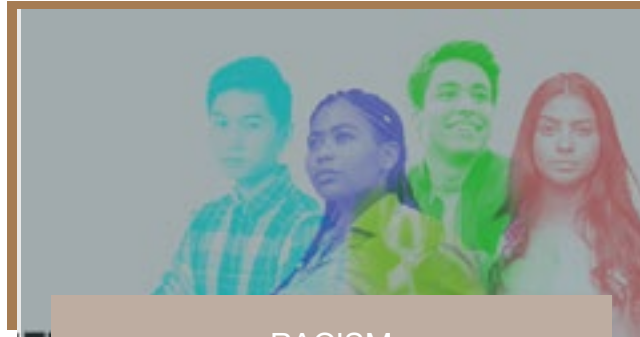
HUMAN RIGHTS



REFUGEES/ MIGRANTS



CHILDREN / YOUTH



RACISM



LGBTQ

# 6

FUTURE EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES





The second edition of the Unequal World International Conference was attended by 130 participants from 35 countries, including speakers from academic research community and international organizations.

There were participants from Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Egypt, Vietnam, Finland, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Oman, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tanzania, United Kingdom, USA, Mexico, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Perú, Ukraine.

The two-day conference brought together top researchers, speakers from international organizations, decision-makers, diplomats and academics from diverse cultural, religious and political backgrounds from all around the world to share their experiences and exchange their research results on current topics that impact education.

The conference theme was *The Right to Education – Transforming the World Through Inclusive Quality Education* and explored the right of education through a multidisciplinary approach. This second edition of the Unequal World Conference was scheduled to take place around the United Nations International Day of Education, and aimed to study the past, analyze the present and explore the future of education, through a multidisciplinary perspective. It was also interesting to research what contribution concepts such as peace, culture, religion, family, society, dignity, tolerance, religious freedom, equality, and solidarity have on education.

Education has been largely considered a fundamental human right and it has been enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations since 1948. According to UNESCO, there are 258 million children and youth that still do not attend school, and 617 million children and teenagers that cannot read or do basic math.

The conference raised awareness on current pressing global challenges, and provided opportunities for researchers to share values such as freedom, nondiscrimination, solidarity and justice that will enhance the future of human development.

# UNEQUAL WORLD

## Potential future events

### EDUCATION / HEALTH RIGHTS

24 January  
*International Day of Education*

7 April  
*World Health Day*

28 April  
*World Day for Safety and Health*

7 June  
*World Food Safety Day*

10 October  
*World Mental Health Day*

16 October  
*World Food Day*

### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM & HUMAN RIGHTS

21 March  
*International Day for the Elimination  
of Racial Discrimination*

5 April  
*International Day of Conscience  
and for the Dignity of Victims*

3 May  
*World Press Freedom Day*

22 August  
*International Day Commemorating the Victims  
of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief*

2 October  
*International Day of Non-Violence*

16 November  
*International Day for Tolerance*

10 December  
*Human Rights Day*

### WOMEN / FAMILY/ YOUTH RIGHTS

8 March  
*International Women's Day*

15 May  
*International Day of Families*

1 June  
*Global Day of Parents*

12 August  
*International Youth Day*

25 November  
*International Day for the Elimination of  
Violence against Women*

# FUTURE EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

In order to promote Religious Liberty, the SDA Liaison to the United Nations will write reports and articles on religious liberty or on topics that relate with human rights and will organize events such as Symposiums, Religious Liberty Concerts, Conferences, Diplomatic Luncheons and Dinners.