

Campaign aims to foster respect for religious freedom, religious sites

CHICAGO (CNS) – Catholic Extension has joined the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations to engage youth around the globe in raising awareness of religious freedom and cultivating interreligious respect through a campaign called #forSafeWorship.

The campaign is part of a global call to action to foster solidarity and protect religious sites and worshippers.

Catholic Extension is collaborating with the alliance, known as UNAOC, through a special storytelling project “designed to celebrate the universality of religious sites as symbols of our shared humanity, history and traditions,” said a news release from the Chicago-based organization.

Participants are asked to film a short, amateur video – in any format – about a sacred space, big or small, and describe its beauty or particular significance or history in the local community.

In the video submission, participants are invited to identify a religious site and answer these questions:

- What does this religious site mean to you?
- Why is it important to you to ensure that this site is protected?
- What can you do about it?

To submit a video and to view example videos, participants can go to: <https://bit.ly/2NE6jw7>. The main Catholic Extension website is: <http://catholicextension.org>.

“For more than a century, it has been central to our mission to build churches and church facilities to ensure that people are able to worship as part of a vibrant faith community regardless of their circumstances,” said Father Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension.

“We are honored to collaborate with the United Nations on the #forSafeWorship campaign to shine a light on the sacred spaces that are so central to our lives,” he added.

All participants will be invited to a special discussion with U.N. staff that will be arranged by Catholic Extension in March. One participant will be selected to attend a U.N. forum on religious tolerance in another country in the coming year.

UNAOC was launched in 2005. The initiative seeks to foster international action against extremism by forging international, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. “The alliance places a particular emphasis on defusing tensions between the Western and Islamic worlds,” according to the U.N.

The alliance and a global network of partners – including international and regional organizations, civil society groups, foundations and other entities – work in four program areas to improve cross-cultural relations between nations and communities at the grassroots level. These areas are youth, media, education and migration.

Catholic Extension has been supporting the work and ministries of the nation’s mission dioceses since its founding in 1905. It raises funds to help build up faith communities and construct churches in these dioceses, which are rural, cover a large geographic area, and have limited personnel and pastoral resources.