

Nairobi trip report 8-11 May 2024

I travelled to Nairobi, Kenya for the UN Civil Society Conference in support of the Summit of the Future. I went a day early to meet with the AEA (regional alliance) and EA Kenya (national alliance).

UN conference

This conference happens on an annual basis but it was different this year. Civil Society, largely led by CONGO (Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the UN), normally sets its own agenda. This year, the UN set the agenda. Levi Bautista, the head of CONGO, was very upset that the UN wanted the conference “in support of the Summit of the Future.” The major outcome of the Summit of the Future is a Pact for the Future, which is in the process of negotiation. It will be signed by world leaders prior to the General Assembly in New York in September. The Pact for the Future has 2 companion documents – the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations. The Secretary General says that this is a “once in a generation opportunity” to renew the mandate and institutions of the UN.

I had several objectives going into the UN Civil Society Conference. Having reviewed the draft Pact for the Future, “faith” and “religion” are notably absent. Apparently, they were there in a previous version but were removed by states. I also wanted to have multifaith dialogue included in the Peace keeping section of the Pact as it is most effective when supported by the state. My third objective was to gather faith leaders to have a common voice. It is always more effective at the UN to be part of a coalition.

It was challenging to find the faith leaders as it was not the “usual suspects” who participated. But I set up a WhatsApp group and sent the link to everyone I could find. Ultimately, we had about 30 participants in the group. We were able to meet as an Impact group and identify that we wanted to see faith included and particularly in peace keeping/peace building.

The next draft of the Pact will be released in the next 2 weeks so we will see what gets in. There will be one more opportunity for written comments so we are keeping the faith Impact group going until at least after the next draft.

It was important for the WEA to be seen to be present at this conference. Our faith group included leaders from Seventh Day Adventist, Latter Day Saints, Buddhists, Anglicans and Levi Bautista, who represents CONGO and the Methodists.

The closing ceremony had both the UN Sec Gen and the Kenya President speaking. They were quite inspiring. It shows the importance the SG places in the Summit of the Future.

AEA

I met with Master Obi Matlahaope on Wednesday morning. He is the regional secretary for Africa. We agreed to try to find a way forward to having a WEA presence in Nairobi. We have dedicated funding for this that is just sitting in the bank. So let’s start something and see where we get! Obi was on board with this. He followed up on Friday and we agreed to move forward with a shared position for 2 years and seek more funding for the future. This has been several years in the making so I am excited to see it move forward.

EA Kenya

I met with the new Gen Sec of EA Kenya – Kepha Nyandega. He has worked in the Christian world so is well networked. I think he is a good successor to Nelson Makanda (who is now Vice Chancellor of Africa International University). He is interested in having more interns from Kenya come to the WEA office in Geneva.

IFES

In addition to my work with the WEA, I am on the international board of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). The Chief Operating Officer for the IFES is based in Nairobi. He and his wife took me out for lunch on Saturday after the conference. They are making plans to move to the head office of the IFES, which is in Oxford, UK. They knew that Don and I have lived overseas several times so had lots of questions. I was happy to be able to share some advice.