

World Leaders Discuss Global Evangelism in South Africa

One of the most diverse groups of Christian leaders is gathered in Cape Town, South Africa, this week to discuss the future of world missions.

Some 4,200 selected participants from 198 nations are meeting for the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, the third such gathering in the last 36 years.

Unlike other contemporary global evangelism events, Cape Town 2010 comes closest to reflecting the broad diversity in the evangelical world, which has growing and influential populations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In addition, some 40 percent of participants are between the ages of 20 and 40, and roughly one-third is female, CBN News reported.

"We have worked to engage evangelical leaders on all continents," said Doug Birdsall, chairman of the Lausanne Movement. "This is the first congress of its kind in the digital age, and we're praying it will herald a new moment for the church."

Another 100,000 Christians in 98 nations were to participate through an eight-language website that includes video from the conference and encourages dialogue in various chat rooms. But for the first three days, officials say "malicious attacks" kept the 700 GlobalLinks sites from operating properly. They said a virus brought into the center on a mobile phone also caused Internet connections to slow or crash.

"We have tracked malicious attacks by millions of external hits coming from several locations," said Joseph Vijayam, IT chair of the Lausanne Movement.

He said two volunteers from Bangalore, India, who came to the

conference to do basic IT tasks, helped repair the computer problems. "I believe God in His sovereignty brought them to us," Vijayam said.

Noticeably absent from the event was a delegation of 200 Chinese church leaders, who were barred from attending by their government. Two Chinese church leaders, one from the house church movement and the other from the government-sanctioned Three-Self Church, eventually were allowed to attend, CBN News reported. On Monday night Lausanne attendees showed their solidarity by standing and praying for the church in China

The Lausanne Movement, founded by Billy Graham, held its first congress in Switzerland in 1974. The event resulted in the Lausanne Covenant, which is considered one of the most significant documents on world evangelism in recent church history. Delegates at Cape Town 2010 will also produce a major document designed to set priorities in world missions.

Each day conference attendees discuss one of six major challenges to global evangelism, including truth, reconciliation, pluralism, priorities, integrity and partnership. Addressing truth on Monday, Carver Yu, president of the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong, said atheism was on its way to becoming the new religion as atheists campaign against Christianity with evangelistic zeal.

"Christians must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ fearlessly because He is the way, the truth and the life," Yu said, according to the Christian Post. "Only He can lead us away from the present state of godlessness."

Responding to the challenge of pluralism, Yu said truth cannot prove itself by anything other than itself. "Jesus did not prove Himself by appealing to anything other than Himself and the transformative power of his life," Yu said. "Likewise, we can only prove to the world that Jesus is the truth by His

transformative power in our lives, which is something that the world cannot refute, not even the pluralists.”

Tuesday focused on reconciliation, as delegates addressed the need to reconcile creation, the poor and divided people groups. At one point, a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Messianic Jew shared the podium and discussed God’s power to heal long-held animosity.

“As a Palestinian, it’s very difficult to reach out to my enemy,” said Shadia Qubti, who serves with Musalaha, an interdenominational ministry seeking to reconcile Jewish and Palestinian believers. “But as a Christian Palestinian, I have the ability to do that. Because Jesus gives me the eyes to see them as He sees me, Jesus gives me the confidence to go against my society; He gives me the power to embrace them.”

Daniel Sered, director of Jews for Jesus in Israel, emphasized the power of reconciliation in healing ethnic conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

“When Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs can say to one another, ‘I love you in Jesus’ name,’ the world will see the powerful reconciliation work of the good news,” Sered said. “The only hope for peace for the Middle East is truly Jesus.”

Intercessory prayer has been ongoing throughout the congress, and Christians are participating around the globe. Conference participants are able to see where intercessors are praying through a Google Earth program. A map on the convention center wall lights up the part of the world is praying for the congress at which hour.

Maureen Bravo, a member of the strategic prayer team, said the conference has been an uplifting display of Christian unity.

“Beautiful faces, all colors and shapes, national and ethnic garb, sounds of many languages-all creating a beautiful buzz, a patchwork, a network of Christians, glorifying the Creator

together,” she said in an email update to intercessors. “These lovers of God are hugging and kissing, mixing and blending, laughing and crying, listening and sharing their lives, ministries, hopes, dreams and challenges with each other.”

The prayer effort will continue through Sunday, when the conference concludes.