

Observations Concerning the IARF

General Meeting

July 24-25, 2007

Clearwater, Florida

Report for UUA Board of Trustees

Background: IRAF was founded in 1900, under a different name, as an organization to bring together people “striving to unite ‘Pure Religion and Perfect Liberty’”, today the IARF’s purpose is to work for freedom of religion and belief. At this time there are about 100 members in four voluntary membership classes: member (UUA is in this category), associate member, individual member, and chapters. There is one chapter in the U.S. located in the Boston area. The IARF has a long and interesting history in which the UUA has had significant prominence as well as contributed substantial financial support.

Between 45 and 50 persons attended this meeting from Japan (about 16 percent of attendees), the Philippines, Taiwan, India, Bangladesh, Israel, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK, Canada, and the U.S. (close to 30 percent of attendees).

As Will Saunders reported in April, 2006 the IARF is in trouble, both in terms of management and financially. Perhaps at this time more aptly put...the IARF is in extreme crisis. The meeting in July was scheduled in an effort to hold the organization together and to bring its constitution in line with what is required by United Kingdom law, including reporting obligations to Company’s House and the numerous financial problems resulting from the move 15 years ago to Oxford, England, from Germany. Mr. Joss Saunders, British Attorney, was hired by the IARF to legally assist in these efforts and spent the better part of the first day explaining IARF status as both a non-profit and a company, the situation IARF faces in constitutional terms, and how the IARF can move forward to save money and govern itself.

The most recent IARF Secretary General was fired and this involved a costly negotiated severance. Most of the staff has left or been let go. Cost of operations in the UK has been astronomical. Although the legal entity of IARF will remain in the UK for the time being (end of December?) the administrative operations are in the process of being moved to Japan, where the staff will be a primarily voluntary one. Strict Japanese law prevents the legal entity from moving to Japan.

Problems:

- 1) The membership is “iffy”. Many reported members no longer contribute financially and there are members who no longer can be located, which means decisions need to be made about what constitutes membership.
- 2) Categories of membership, who gets to vote, and number of votes per category.
- 3) Little effective programming is happening, although there do seem to be efforts being made by young adults (I was unable to ascertain UUA young adult involvement).
- 4) Significant financial difficulties.

Future: Plans are to move IARF legal identity from Oxford to Sheffield because the treasurer is there. Administration is moving to Osaka, Japan. The shift from operating with paid staff to volunteers can only work as long as it is a temporary measure. The overriding issue is what kind of support and programs will be necessary to sustain IARF. It was felt that a visionary person is needed to lead and sell the vision to other religious organizations. The U.S. chapter of IARF (Boston) will be sending a letter to local congregations for the purposes of educating them on the work of IARF and the need for leadership.

The Board is aware of Rev. Bill Sinkford's opinions on the future of IARF. At this meeting he indicated it is getting more and more difficult to see a positive future and if the decision is to close IARF, the organization can "die" respectfully. If this decision is not made IARF will "die" on its own, and that could be very disrespectful.

The next scheduled IARF Congress is in India in 2010. The Indian delegate indicated the Congress will not be able to be held there if there is a possibility of IARF is possibly not going to continue.

Joan Lund