Justice at a Time of Costly Witness
I am Maurice Mondengo. I am a Baptist Minister from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a nation at war since 1996. My country is one of the biggest countries in Africa with nearly 60 million people divided into 450 different tribes. We are one of the richest countries in the world, but we as a people we are very poor.
The war in Congo has killed more than 5 million people since 1996. Because of the war we have [some of the] largest number[s] of widows and orphans in the world. Freedom of expression, peace and justice are the biggest issues in my country.

Those who raise their voice to denounce these situations often have a hard time and their life is often in danger.
It’s Time

It’s time, yes, it’s time
Let’s sow seeds of peace
In the hearts of the children
So that tomorrow when our children grow up
With or without us
They will live peacefully...
Let’s always avoid violence
Close to our children, let’s avoid any violence
So that tomorrow when they grow up
Our children will live in a world without any violence...
It’s time, yes, it’s time!
Let’s build a peaceful world
A world of freedom and responsibility
In the hearts of our children
It’s time, yes, more than ever....
More than ever
It is time for a justice revolution and justice revolutions almost always begin with one
The journey of Gideon begins with the context of incredible challenge and faith that emerges with the revolution of one who decided to move forward for justice even in the midst of uncertainty.
The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.

2 Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.

3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country.
4 They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys.

5 They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it.

6 Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help
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The name of the village is Shoi which in their local dialect means “peace.”

Peace is under siege
14 The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

15 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”
Take the first step on what you already know what to do

The forces of injustice that continue to flow through our world whisper in our minds that we should stay as part of the silent majority because we cannot make a difference.
The Islamic State is “responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control, including Yezidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims.”

John Kerry, Secretary of State
United States of America
Thousands of individuals lifted their voice and issued a call so strong and resolute that if for just a moment the world paused to stand for justice in the maelstrom of genocidal evil
Live like Joseph – Learn skills that will help people have the food they need and to address physical hunger in the midst of scarcity

Live like Moses – Learn to build a legal system that gives everyone – rich and poor, male and female – access to justice through a fair legal system

Live like David – Learn to live within a system of accountability and to refuse to abuse privilege, position or opportunity
Revolution of One: Gideon

Live like Jeremiah and many of the prophets – Learn to be committed to speaking truth and working for justice in the public square even when it carries a personal cost.

Live like Esther – Learn to use influence to protect a group of vulnerable people who were about to experience persecution.
A Time of Costly Witness

- 77% of the world or 5.3 billion people live in contexts characterized by religious persecution, discrimination or restrictions (2015 Pew Research Report)

- As the most globally diffuse religion, Christians are the most persecuted faith community worldwide, and face restriction, discrimination or persecution in over 60 countries

- In the last 10 years religious hostilities have led to the death of over 300,000 people (Stark and Corcoran, *Religious Hostility*, 2014)
• On average every year over 7,000 Christians are killed for their faith (Schirrmacher, *Sorrow and Blood*, 2012)

• On average 20 Christians are martyred every day
In Europe, Jewish anti-Semitism is on the rise
A Time of Costly Witness

85% of the people living in the Asia-Pacific region experience government restrictions and social hostilities because of their religion.
In 2014 more Christians in China were sentenced to prison for crimes of their faith than in any year since the Cultural Revolution.

In 2014, over 1,000 churches were damaged or destroyed by the Chinese government.
In Sudan, the government is dropping bombs on civilians and hospitals in the Nuba Mountains in the midst of international silence.
A world where all too often racism is tolerated and sometimes promoted

A world where there is extreme poverty

There are far too many who have limited access to water
A Time of Costly Witness

7,000 were lost to Ebola in West Africa and thousands in South America fear the Zika virus.

A world producing millions of refugees, some of the highest numbers of refugees witnessed in the last 60 years.

A world where there are 27 million slaves.

A world full of show trials and false imprisonment and far too much incarceration.
A Time of Costly Witness

Eritrea remains the “North Korea” of Africa with 2,000-3,000 Christians imprisoned for their faith.
We submitted the testimony of Terhas and 18 others including Christians, Muslims and a child soldier and submit them to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea
Easter is full of passion and promise weaving together a tapestry of individuals.
Revolution of Two: Easter Witnesses
Revolution of Two: Easter Witnesses

The blood of persecution calls for unity among the Church

The story of Easter is not that of conquering injustice but of resurrection love that calls us to a new kingdom

Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.
Revolution of Two: Easter Witnesses

They took Jesus to a private house where a select group that included false witnesses had been gathered.
John 19:38-42

38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.
40Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

41At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.

42Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.
When face-to-face with the forces of injustice that bring death into our world, personal and corporate, do we respond as these Easter witnesses?
In the past decade, the Christian community in Iraq has plummeted from approximately 1.5 million to 300,000.

About half of those who remain are internally displaced.

24,000 Christians have fled to Turkey, 11,000 to Lebanon and 7,000 to Jordan.

Since 2003, the government has illegally seized 70% of Christian homes in Baghdad.
Revolution of Two: Easter Witnesses

The very distinct possibility that in the next 5-10 years you could see the virtual extinction of the historic church in Iraq

The Yazidi community:

5,838 Yazidis have been kidnapped
18 Yazidi Temples destroyed
12 Yazidi massacres have occurred on Sinjar Mountain
3,758 Yazidis remain in the captivity of ISIS
I am going to hold onto the cross of Christ. I refuse to convert. I prefer death. I prefer death to abandoning my religion and my faith.

Young mother in Iraq
Killed for her faith
Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.
These were individuals whose faith in Christ was a private affair without public proclamation
They choose to stand as public disciples of their Lord Jesus Christ
Their actions come not in the light of the resurrected tomb but in the darkened death of the cross when there seemed like there could be no difference
You are living in the comfort zone and living in fear. We are in the conflict zone and we are experiencing victory every day.

Pastor in Lebanon
Baptists and Religious Freedom

John Smyth & Thomas Helwys were key Baptist founders

Baptists were among the first English writers on behalf of religious freedom
Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish in the least measure.

Thomas Helwys
It is the will and command of God, that... a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or Anti-Christian consciences and worships, bee granted to all men in all Nations and Countries: and they are only to be fought against with the Sword which is onely (in Soule matters) able to conquer, to wit, the Sword of Gods Spirit, the Word of God.

Roger Williams
Religious freedom builds upon Genesis 1 (*imago Dei*) and a deep respect for human dignity and the value of every individual’s conscience.

Religious freedom is vital to building democratic societies.

Religious freedom enhances individual and societal security.
Religious freedom produces stronger economies

A positive relationship between religious freedom and 10 of the 12 pillars of global competitiveness as measured by the World Economic Forum.
Baptists and Religious Freedom

Innovative strength is more than 2x as likely among countries with low religious restrictions and hostilities.

The world’s 12 most religiously diverse countries each outpaced the world’s economic growth between 2008 and 2012 with the active participation of religious minorities in society often boosting economic innovation.

Religious freedom guarantees other human rights.
Religious freedom is the normative standard within the international community.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
Human Dignity:
Promotes respect for human dignity and freedom of conscience for all regardless of their faith.

Democracy:
Nurtures tolerance for diverse opinions, open civil societies, rule of law & democracy.

A Freedom Litmus Test:
When religious freedom flourishes so do other democratic freedoms like speech, association & assembly.

Security:
When protected, extremism is minimized, hedging against violence and enhancing security.

A cornerstone freedom
Revolution for Justice

1. Pray

2. Be informed

3. Choose an Issue

4. Be an advocate
5. Be a Friend with those on the Margins

6. Develop a Personal Spirituality of Peace and Justice

7. Get your Church and your Community Involved
8. Bridge the biblical gap

Christians are celebrating the Eucharist while entire populations are vulnerable to the weapon of grain... Can our Eucharist be called Christian if it abandons countless young people to their sad fate in regions where “the other half of the world is dying”? How can we truly be nourished by the body of Jesus Christ, while a minority is satiated, and yet each year millions of people have no food and face an empty granary?... Our churches today expose us to the dangers of atheism each time we celebrate the Eucharist in areas where no one is working to create conditions that would allow hungry people to feed.

Jean-Marc Ela
West African Theologian
Revolution for Justice

9. Take the First Step
Revolution for Justice

Join the revolution and pursue justice at time of costly witness