

“Rejecting Terrorism, Promoting Peace with Justice: Religions Respond”

A Statement by the Executive Committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace 24 October 2001, New York, NY USA

We, the members of the Executive Committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, have gathered in New York City with religious leaders from around the world to find common cause in working against terror and violence and for peace with justice.

The terrorist attacks that took place on 11 September 2001 cannot be justified by the teachings or principles of our respective religions. Nothing in any of our traditions permits the killing of innocent persons. Such actions, when committed in the name of religion, profane true religion. Furthermore, we cannot allow the responsibility of mistaken individuals to be assigned to entire groups of people or religious communities.

Those who perpetrate such crimes must be brought to justice in accord with relevant laws; however, the process of bringing terrorists to justice must not result in the loss of more innocent life. Some of our religious traditions have strong principles of non-violence, while others hold restricted notions of the legitimate use of force for self-defense. Despite these differences, we are all united in the view that military action is an inadequate instrument to fully address the challenges we confront.

As the international community seeks to counter these acts of terrorism, we are gravely concerned that the actions taken – however intended – may fuel a perception that somehow these events are part of a clash between civilizations or religions. We reject such notions on two grounds. First, terror and violence infect all human societies and are not the burden of only one culture, people or religion. Second, in our over 30 years of experience in multi-religious cooperation, we have discovered that our various religions and cultures share much in common – certainly more than what divides us.

We are committed to countering these dangerous misperceptions by deepening the dialogue among religions and cultures. Such dialogue can provide the mechanisms to increase our understanding of one another and enable us to discern shared values, such as tolerance, justice, human dignity, and peace. Genuine and honest engagement with one another allows us to discern deeply shared values, and these provide the basis for active collaboration across the boundaries of religion, culture, and nation to address the broad problems affecting humankind.

As we enter more deeply into dialogue, however, we must acknowledge the burden of history. We are painfully aware that too often religion has been used to injure, to divide, and to oppress. Religious Communities have allowed narrow, intolerant and extreme interpretations of our religious teachings to create divisions and hostilities among peoples. Such attitudes have helped to foster a climate in which violence grows. True dialogue offers the opportunity to bring healing for past wounds, and can lead to a

strengthening of solidarity and resolve to build human societies that both respect difference and seek the well being of all.

Such a truly global community must promote and defend the essential value and dignity of every person – a principle disregarded by the terrorists who perpetrated the crimes of September 11. We must resist the view that by accident of time and place and birth, one person is somehow more deserving than another. We celebrate and reaffirm that each of our religious traditions, in its own way, proclaims that the intrinsic dignity and value of every person is rooted in our respective traditions religious understandings of the sacred character of reality. Together we must seek that which assures the preciousness and respect for life, and work to build societies that respond to fundamental human needs.

To this end, we acknowledge that many persons have genuine experiences of oppression and that whole societies suffer from poverty, violence and injustice in the context of the current world order. High levels of global disparity are fundamentally unjust and incompatible with true global security. We need to work collectively to strengthen institutions – political, economic, and social – that can redress such grievances and begin to eliminate the root causes of injustice that can contribute to the false path of terrorism.

We assert that addressing these grievances in no way condones terrorist actions. Rather, it can serve as one of the most effective ways to reduce and gradually eliminate the elements that motivate individuals to commit such terrible acts. This effort will require all states and peoples to strengthen their commitments to mutual cooperation, and our religious communities are both prepared and well positioned to support such cooperation.

We believe that the United Nations and its family of agencies is the natural forum for renewed global cooperation, and our responses to these tragedies must strengthen, not erode, our commitment to the aims and principles embodied in the United Nations Charter. We call on the United Nations to convene a special session of the General Assembly on Terrorism, and to develop a comprehensive international convention to counteract terrorism that builds on existing international law. **Finally, we renew our call for the full implementation of the International Criminal Court.**

The World Conference on Religion and Peace has over 30 years of commitment to building collaboration among the world's religious communities in pursuit of genuine and lasting peace. Today, we renew this call to dialogue and cooperation among religions in the arenas of conflict transformation, human rights, disarmament and security, peace education, and child welfare. Through our programs in these areas, we are committed to working with the United Nations, other international organizations, governments and people of goodwill everywhere to seek justice and reject terror, and to build a global society that strives to ensure true human security, dignity, and the well being of every person.