

The Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security  
Religions for Peace Eighth World Assembly

August 2006

Preamble

Representing all major religious traditions and every region of the world, more than eight hundred religious leaders from over one hundred countries convened in Kyoto, Japan as the Eighth World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace to address the theme, "Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security." We, the Assembly Delegates, come from the global Religions for Peace network of local, national, regional, and international inter-religious councils and groups, as well as networks of youth and women of faith. We recognize and build on the significant contributions and statements of youth and women of faith made in their respective assemblies.

The first Religions for Peace World Assembly that convened in Kyoto in 1970, and every Assembly since, affirmed deeply held and widely shared religious principles that still inspire our search for peace with justice today. We share a conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family, and the equality and dignity of all human beings. We affirm the sacredness of the individual person and the importance of his or her freedom of conscience. We are committed to the ethical values and attitudes commonly shared by our religious traditions. We uphold the value of life manifest in human community and in all creation. We acknowledge the importance of the environment to sustain life for the human family. We realize that human power is neither self-sufficient nor absolute, and that the spirit of love, compassion, selflessness, and the force of inner truthfulness ultimately have greater power than prejudice, hate, enmity or violence. Meeting in Japan, the nation that experienced the horrors of nuclear attacks, we commit ourselves to continue to struggle toward comprehensive nuclear disarmament and against the proliferation of arms.

The first Assembly of Religions for Peace declared: "As men and women of religions, we confess in humility and penitence that we have very often betrayed our religious ideals and our commitment to peace. It is not religion that has failed the cause of peace, but religious people. This betrayal of religion can and must be corrected." It is crucial now to engrave the reflection of our respected predecessors deeply in our hearts. Today, we live in a world in the grip of many forms of violence, both direct and structural. Violent conflicts within states and across borders, carried out by both state and non-state actors take lives and destroy communities. They cause more civilian than military casualties and their disproportionate impact is on vulnerable populations.

Religious communities in particular must play a central role identifying and confronting violence in all its forms and manifestations. The world's religions have experienced abuse by those who seek to misuse religion for their own purposes. In ongoing violent conflicts around the world, religion is being used as a justification or excuse for violence. We must regretfully accept that some groups within our religious communities have indeed sought to employ violence. We must reject this and recommit religions to the way of peace. Religious communities and leaders must stand up, speak out, and take action against the misuse of religion.

The diverse and interconnected threats currently experienced by innumerable members of the human family call for a much broader understanding of violence in the world. The world's religious communities must play a central role partnering with one another and all sectors of society, to prevent and stop war, expose injustice, combat poverty, and protect the earth.

The time to do this is now; and our key to confronting violence is cooperation based on mutual respect and acceptance.

## Confronting Violence

Today, genocide, state-sponsored repression, terrorism, and other forms of human rights abuse violate international law, target innocent civilians, and threaten the safety of many communities. State laws restricting human rights and civil liberties are also a form of violence. Conflict-related disease, famine, displacement and environmental catastrophes constitute serious threats to life. Violence against women and children, including rape, forced pregnancy, enslavement, forced labor, prostitution, the use of child soldiers, and trafficking, has become a tactic of warfare in many conflicts.

Direct physical threats are the most commonly offered definition of violence, but the reality of the diverse and interconnected chronic threats to human survival experienced by millions calls for a much broader understanding of violence in the world. Economic injustices leading to extreme poverty and hunger kill 50,000 people each day. Preventable and treatable diseases kill millions. Twenty-five million people have already died from AIDS, while approximately forty million more are living with HIV and AIDS, and the impact on our communities is devastating. Many corporations, especially at the multinational level, set their business interests without concern for values that foster sustainable development. Environmental degradation and dwindling resources threaten our planet's ability to sustain life.

The poor, the powerless, and the most vulnerable populations disproportionately suffer the consequences of violence in all its forms, ranging from armed conflict to extreme poverty to environmental degradation.

Unfortunately, religion plays a significant role in some of the most intractable and violent conflicts around the world. Religion is being hijacked by extremists, and too often by politicians, and by the media. Extremists use religion to incite violence and hatred and foster sectarian conflict, contrary to our most deeply held beliefs. Religious people need to recognize the reasons why religions are being hijacked, such as through manipulation and misuse of their central principles. Politicians often exploit and manipulate sectarian differences to serve their own ends, frequently dragging religion into social, economic and political disputes. The media also contribute to the scapegoating of religions in conflict situations through disrespectful representations. They also too easily identify parties to a conflict by religious labels and present religion as a source of conflict without reporting the diversity within religious traditions and the many ways that religious communities are confronting violence and working for peace.

## A Multi-Religious Response

As people of religious conviction, we hold the responsibility to effectively confront violence within our own communities whenever religion is misused as a justification or excuse for violence. Religious communities need to express their opposition whenever religion and its sacred principles are distorted in the service of violence. They should take appropriate steps to exercise their moral authority to oppose attempts to misuse religion. There are religious and ethical imperatives for multi-religious cooperation to resist and reject violence, prevent it when possible, as well as promote reconciliation and healing. Our religious traditions call us to care for one another and to treat the problems faced by others as our own. Violence against any individual is an attack against all and should prompt our concern. Religious communities know that they are especially called to stand on the side of the most vulnerable, including the poor, the marginalized, and the defenseless. Our religious traditions acknowledge the fundamental vulnerability of human life. The vulnerability of each person should make us recognize the need to

respond to the vulnerability of all persons.

There are also practical grounds for cooperation. No group is immune to violence or its consequences. War, poverty, disease, and the destruction of the environment have direct or indirect impacts on all of us. Individuals and communities deceive themselves if they believe they are secure while others are suffering. Walls can never be high enough to insulate us from the impacts of the genuine needs and vulnerabilities of others. No nation can be secure while other nations are threatened. We are no safer than the most vulnerable among us.

The efforts of individual religious communities are made vastly more effective through multi-religious cooperation. Religious communities working together can be powerful actors to prevent violence before it erupts, diffuse conflict, mediate among armed groups in the midst of conflict, and lead their communities to rebuild war-torn societies. Religious communities are called not only to reject war and foreign occupation, sectarian violence, weapons proliferation, and human rights abuse, but also to identify and confront the root causes of injustice, economic inequalities, governance failures, development obstacles, social exclusions, and environmental abuses.

### Shared Security

The moral and ethical convictions of our diverse religious traditions provide a moral foundation for confronting violence in its many forms and for suggesting a vision of shared security.

Existing notions of security inadequately address violence in its many forms. National security does not necessarily ensure peace; in fact, it often promotes violence and foments insecurity. Armed conflict takes place between states, and increasingly within states and among non-state actors. Human security acknowledges the solidarity of the human family by approaching security from the perspective of human rights and needs. But defining human security in these terms fails to address adequately how these needs are to be met and who is responsible for ensuring them.

A well-developed concept of shared security articulates security needs, how they are to be met, and the necessary agents, instruments, and relationships to achieve it. Importantly, shared security would highlight the collective responsibility of all people to meet our common need for security.

Shared security requires all sectors of society to acknowledge our common vulnerabilities and our shared responsibility to address them. It is undertaken collectively by multiple stakeholders acknowledging that every sector of society must confront violence if we hope to do so effectively. It supports participatory and democratic forms of governance. Governments, international organizations, civil society, and religious communities themselves must all advance shared security. Effective shared security spans boundaries of geography, nationality, ethnicity, and religion. It marshals human responsibility, accountability and capacity wherever it exists.

Effective shared security, at all levels of community, meets national security needs; acknowledges and addresses both direct and chronic threats to individual physical security; and protects the poor, the powerless and the most vulnerable. It strengthens governance efforts and addresses the disparities and inequities of globalization. Shared security supports religious communities and religious leaders in their efforts to oppose the abuse of religion for violent ends and to build institutions for collaboration among governments, all elements of civil society and religious communities. A commitment to shared security enables multi-religious networks, such as the global Religions for Peace network, in their efforts to transform conflict, build peace, struggle for justice, and

advance sustainable development.

## Religions for Peace

Religions for Peace has become a major global multi-religious voice and agent for peace. Guided by respect for religious differences, the global Religions for Peace network fosters multi-religious collaboration harnessing the power of religious communities to transform conflict, build peace, and advance sustainable development.

We, the delegates of the Eighth World Assembly of Religions for Peace, are firmly united in our commitment to prevent and confront violence in all its forms and confident in the power of multi-religious cooperation to advance a common vision of shared security. We are determined to mobilize our religious communities to work together and with all sectors of society to stop war, struggle to build more just communities, foster education for justice and peace, eliminate poverty and advance sustainable development for future generations.

### A Multi-Religious Call to Action

As religious leaders, we commit ourselves to advance shared security through advocacy, education, and other forms of multi-religious action, and to share this Kyoto Declaration within our religious communities.

We call on all sectors of society – public and private, religious and secular – to work together to achieve shared security for the human family.

Specifically, the Religions for Peace World Assembly calls on:

#### 1) Religious communities to:

- Resist and confront any misuse of religion for violent purposes;
- Become effective educators, advocates and actors for conflict transformation, fostering justice, peacebuilding, and sustainable development;
- Draw upon their individual spiritual traditions to educate their members on our shared responsibilities to advance shared security;
- Strengthen peace education on all levels;
- Hold governments accountable for the commitments they make on behalf of their peoples;
- Network locally, nationally, regionally and globally to foster multi-religious cooperation among the world's religious bodies; and
- Partner with governments, international organizations and other sectors of society to confront violence and advance a new notion of shared security.

#### 2) The global network of Religions for Peace to:

- Foster high-level multi-religious cooperation around the issue of shared security;
- Build, equip, and network inter-religious councils locally, nationally, and regionally;
- Strengthen the global Religions for Peace network as a platform for collaboration to advance shared security;
- Further commit to actions for women's empowerment and women's human rights within its structures at all levels;
- Embrace the central position of religious women and place gender concerns at the center of the shared security agenda;
- Keep religious youth and their concerns at the center of its agenda and promote their full involvement in advancing shared security;

- Support and collaborate with the Peacebuilding Commission of the United Nations;
- Advocate practices that advance sustainable development and environmental protection; and
- Partner with all sectors of society, especially in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

3) Governments, International Organizations, and the Business Sector to:

- Support the efforts of religious leaders to address violence within and beyond their communities, and include them as appropriate in political negotiations surrounding conflict situations;
- Forge partnerships with religious communities to achieve the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, combat disease, and advance sustainable development;
- Harness advances in science and technology toward peaceful purposes and to eliminate poverty and advance sustainable development; and
- Seek out religious networks for their ability to reach vast numbers of people and their capacity to effect change.

We ask all people of goodwill to support and collaborate with religious communities as we work toward shared security for all.

These commitments and the calls to action that arise from them express our most deeply held and widely shared religious beliefs.

Kyoto, Japan  
29 August 2006