



**ASSEMBLY
THEME PAPER**

Welcoming the Other:

A Multi-Religious Vision of Peace





INTRODUCTION

Since its first World Assembly in 1970, *Religions for Peace (RfP)* has convened representatives of the world's religious communities to foster collaborative action for Peace.

Representing diverse faith traditions and every region of the world, over 600 religious leaders will convene in Vienna, Austria, in November 2013 as the 9th World Assembly of *Religions for Peace*.¹ Assembly delegates will come from the *RfP* network of ninety national inter-religious councils and groups, five regional councils, one world council and global networks of religious women and religious youth. Delegates include Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Indigenous, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Shinto, Zoroastrian religious leaders. *Religions for Peace* is the world's largest multi-religious organization.

Each religious tradition represented in *RfP* has its own positive vision of Peace, which includes its understanding of human dignity, individual and communal flourishing, the obligation to be in harmony with others and the natural world, and its notion of ultimate fulfillment. In *RfP*, each religion's positive vision of Peace is respected as being sincerely held by the believers of that religion. While great care is taken to avoid a "syncretistic" blending of the beliefs of diverse religions, *RfP* recognizes that diverse religious visions of Peace do provide the bases for carefully discerning elements of a positive, multi-religious vision of Peace.

From its beginning, *RfP* has labored to discern and express elements of a shared positive vision of Peace. This is done by discerning and expressing consensus through shared values, rather than in terms of the differing doctrines that are unique to each religious tradition. Elements of a shared positive vision of Peace have been discerned and expressed in all previous *RfP* Assemblies.

Each religious community's positive vision of Peace not only provides pointers to and offers glimpses of Peace to its followers, it also helps those believers to bring into the light the profound gaps, contradictions and personal and social failures that mark human experience. From its beginning, *RfP* has labored to build a values-based consensus on the major threats to Peace, such as war and the vast proliferation of arms, extreme poverty, environmental degradation, preventable child mortality and thwarted childhood development, and major abuses of human dignity and human rights.

Ultimately, an emergent consensus on shared positive elements of Peace is related to an emergent consensus on the threats to Peace. While the elements of a shared positive vision of Peace give helpful direction on the ways forward, they also bring into bold relief the major threats to Peace.

Since its founding, *RfP* has been committed to taking concrete action to build Peace based on consensus achieved in terms of shared values. Action can be focused on positive efforts to build up a shared positive notion of Peace, or it can be focused on addressing the threats to Peace. Typically, *RfP* action programs involve or at least imply both dimensions.

¹ *Religions for Peace* is grateful to the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) for its generous partnership in the Assembly.

Every *RfP* structure – from global to local – is a platform for action for building Peace. Importantly, advancing Peace today – including addressing the threats to Peace – is simultaneously a local, national, regional and global challenge. A great strength of *RfP* is that it can tackle these problems in a complementary and coordinated fashion.

The 9th World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* will address the urgent need to “*Welcome the Other*” through multi-religious action. In Vienna, Assembly participants will share examples of multi-religious action to ensure human dignity, promote citizenship and advance shared well-being. By collaborating on shared positive elements of Peace grounded in diverse faith traditions, *RfP* seeks to counter the rising tide of hostility toward the “other.”

I. DISCERNING PEACE

Previous World Assemblies of *Religions for Peace* (1970, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1999 and 2006) have discerned both positive elements of Peace and common threats to Peace, shared by our respective religious traditions. The following two sections, *Shared Elements of Peace* and *Threats to Peace*, have drawn extensively from these *RfP* World Assembly Declarations.

SHARED ELEMENTS OF PEACE

Peace as Central to Our Different Religions

Peace is central to each of our respective religions. Each – in its own way – both knows and anticipates Peace to be a holistic state of personal and social existence that is far more than the mere absence of conflict. Each of us comes to *RfP* committed to the foundation for peacemaking found within his or her respective religious tradition. We believe that a special charge has been given to all men and women of religion to be concerned with all their hearts with peacemaking. Each of our religions has its own way of calling for a “change of heart” that can nourish a spirit of sacrifice, humility, and self-restraint essential to building Peace.

Shared Commitment to Peace

Our respective faiths compel us to work together to build Peace. Together, we will advance the common good and search for solutions to common problems. We are resolved to serve together, each in the way most keeping with the convictions of his or her spiritual family and local circumstances. We will engage our respective religious resources to help us bring Peace within our own hearts, among our religious communities, among nations and with the natural world.



With Hope

Our shared commitment to Peace is made full of hope, despite the heavy legacy of past violence, grave peril of the present and anxious uncertainty of the future. Our religions teach us that Peace is possible. Sustained and motivated by our respective spiritual traditions, we believe that love, compassion, selflessness and inner truthfulness are more powerful than hate. The spiritual resources of our religious traditions give us strength to dedicate ourselves to the tasks ahead.

Acknowledgement of Failures of Religious Practice and Misuse of Religions

We confess in humility and penitence that religious believers have very often betrayed their commitments to Peace. With deep sadness, we acknowledge that our religions have all too often been misused in support of nonreligious purposes, including cultural and political violence. We reject the misuse of religion as a pretext for violence and terrorism and we re-commit ourselves to the authentic Peace teachings of our respective religious traditions.

Human Dignity and Oneness of Humanity

We affirm a common humanity in which all men and women are recognized as human beings endowed with inalienable dignity, and with rights and responsibilities that flow from that dignity. We recognize that each of our respective religious traditions has its own understanding of the foundation of human dignity and common humanity, whether these are perceived as God-given, a reflection of divine nature, derived from cosmic laws, or understood as an inherent sacredness or oneness with the universe. By affirming our common humanity, we are also able to affirm our other forms of identity, such as religion, race, age, sex, ethnicity and status, as part of the wonderful diversity of human life.

Obligation to Stand on the Side of Those Denied Rights, the Poor and Oppressed

Our religious traditions call us to care for one another and to treat the problems faced by others as our own. The vulnerability of each person calls us to respond to the vulnerability of all. Beyond that, our religious communities know that they are especially called to stand on the side of the most vulnerable, including those denied rights, the poor and the oppressed.

Those Denied Rights: We affirm our religiously rooted commitments to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We recognize these rights as a foundation for a just and human society. Human rights are an essential part of the total and holistic Peace we seek. We build trust through the protection and preservation of human rights, including religious freedom, for all peoples. The love of Peace is incompatible with the violation of basic human rights.

The Poor: Development is integral to Peace. We recognize that we have a religious obligation to stand on the side of the poor. We can build trust by the creation of economic systems that can help provide for the well-being of all and that conserve and respect the ecological balances of nature. We are committed to the legal empowerment of the poor, who are too often excluded from the legal benefits of citizenship in their own states due to the lack of legal registration. And, we are committed to the elimination of extreme poverty, which shackles the efforts of countless poor to lift themselves out of poverty.

The Oppressed: We are called to protect the weak from the oppressive domination of the strong. Only a truly free people can constitute a productive and cooperative society. We have a vision of a world in which international relations are more just, and in which the armaments necessary to maintain these structures can be safely reduced.

Conflict Resolution

War and violent conflict are preventable. Their prevention requires both practical and spiritual efforts. In the practical realm, we advocate for justice and we recognize the ideal of non-violent means of conflict resolution. In the spiritual realm, we need to advance reconciliation, which requires a willingness to repent, to ask for and grant forgiveness, and to acknowledge that the purpose of historical remembrance is not to sow the seeds of future conflict, but to ensure that the evils of the past are never repeated. While some religious communities have teachings that can be described as *just war* theories, these recognize that war is a last resort and represents a failure to resolve conflict non-violently. Building trust for conflict resolution depends on mutual dependence rather than on mutual terror.

Disarmament, including Weapons of Mass Destruction

With one voice, from our various traditions of faith, we insist that nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction are immoral and criminal, and that stockpiling such weapons with the intent or threat to use them erodes the very foundation of moral civilization. We recognize the relationship between disarmament and development. Disarmament can free resources for development and the proper investment of our energies in life and the future.

Women

We affirm that all human beings are born free, that they are equal in dignity and rights, and that discrimination on the grounds of sex is incompatible with human dignity. Religious women are, first and foremost, irreplaceable and co-equal partners in peacebuilding. All believers – men and women alike – share the responsibility to address violence against women.

Children

The sacredness of life, honored in our religious traditions, founds our belief in the ultimate meaning and value of the child. The sacredness of life compels us to be a voice of conscience. The grim realities of needless child deaths, under-development and exploitation demand our outrage because they exist; they demand our repentance because they have been silently tolerated or even justified; they demand our response because all can be addressed. Our traditions inform us that societies will be judged ultimately by the condition of their most innocent, most dependent and most vulnerable members – their children. Children's rights belong in the mainstream of human rights. Educating children about the beliefs and values of their own religious tradition and those of others is of paramount importance in seeking a peaceful world. Families are the first educators of children, and should be supported, sustained and strengthened by their respective religious communities. Our children are the most visible sign of that which binds us together in the human family.



Environment

The creation of a harmonious relationship between mankind and nature is an indispensable part of the struggle for Peace. Religious people know that they are called to stand with the poorest and weakest members of society. Today, we must extend this concept of solidarity to the environment. We are interdependent, not only with other humans but also with the entire natural world. We are committed to sustainable development, which includes living in harmony with nature.

A Culture of Peace, Common Healing, Common Living and Shared Security

A Culture of Peace: We are committed to building a Global Culture of Peace in which the diversity of cultures can be affirmed and celebrated, just as the commonalities are shared and celebrated.

Common Healing: The power of healing must come from religious and other ethical and spiritual resources. Healing is evident where, after long struggle, injustice is being transformed to justice, oppression to freedom, discrimination to equity and violence to Peace.

Common Living: Our shared religious ethics make us responsible for our neighbors and those in need; they help us draw on our respective religious sources of love, duty and responsibility as the foundations that undergird the establishment of justice.

Common Security: Common security requires a holistic understanding of interdependence between all peoples and the natural world. Security is more than the elimination of armaments. The security of some can never be permanently achieved by creating insecurity for others. A proper sense of security requires both trust and the risk of shared vulnerability. 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 ethical convictions of our diverse religious traditions provide a foundation for suggesting a vision of shared security. Shared security requires all sectors of society to acknowledge our common vulnerabilities and our shared responsibility to address them.

Special Partnership with the UN

We recognize that the United Nations has committed itself to many of the shared elements of Peace that we have identified. We urge that the UN be strengthened and we commit to principled partnership with it.

SHARED THREATS TO PEACE

The following are deeply held and widely shared expressions of threats to Peace taken from the *RfP* Assembly Declarations. These same threats to Peace have been further elaborated in Assembly Commission Papers.

Failures of Religious Practice

The practices of our religious communities are often a divisive force in the world. We – and the members of our communities – often fail to practice our respective tradition's deepest commitments to Peace. Moreover, we have done too little to build inter-religious understanding and community among ourselves on the local level where prejudices run strong.

Religion Hijacked and Misused

Religion is being abused in support of violent threats to Peace – by extremists using religion to incite violence and hatred, by unscrupulous politicians manipulating sectarian differences for their own ends, by those seeking to exploit victims of poverty and human rights abuse, and by the sensationalist media scapegoating religion in situations of conflict.

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.

Spiritual Crisis

Great dangers and deep pain remain in the uncertainty of our age. Our global society suffers a spiritual crisis so deep that positive changes are prevented. As the search for identity accentuates long-repressed differences among peoples, disintegration and exaggerated individualism threaten the international order. In response, we call not for an uncompromising secularism but for authentic religion, which we believe must be a powerful force for human rights, freedom and non-violent political transformation. The impulse of religion must be toward Peace, not war.

Forces that negate human dignity are strong and all around us. The spirit of sacrifice, humility and self-restraint, which will further respect for human dignity and advance justice, development, freedom and Peace, is needed. Religious people have too often failed to take the lead in speaking to the most important ethical and moral issues of our day and more importantly, in taking steps toward change.

Religious groups must avoid the danger of becoming instruments of economic, social or political agendas, thus losing their spiritual-prophetic dynamism.



Conflicts, Violence and Proliferation of Arms

We live in a world in the grip of many forms of violence, both direct and structural. Violent conflict, including war and terror, persists. Disarmament remains an urgent need as dangers of armament and its proliferation continue. Resources that could be spent on development are being poured into research, manufacture and stockpiling of such weapons – conventional, nuclear and chemical. In particular, we note the twin menace of deadly nuclear weapons and desperate national insecurity.

The conflict characteristic of the Cold War has given way to today's conflicts fueled by nationalistic, ethnic and religious forces. The destructive impacts of these conflicts are heightened by the increased destructiveness of the arms that are readily available. The instruments of international peacemaking and peacekeeping are not sufficiently developed to facilitate the resolution of conflict.

Perpetuation of the memory of grievances and suffering is constantly recalled and even exploited.

Political, Economic and Social Injustices and Turmoil (Inequity and Inequality)

Many states are experiencing decreasing social cohesion, leading to increased violence and weakened abilities to achieve moral consensus across group lines.

Human rights abuses and social and cultural violence threaten people around the world. Tyrannical systems and elitist ruling groups prevent multitudes of people from participating in the shaping of their own future. People living in societies ruled by sheer power unlimited by impartial law are subject to grave abuses of their civil and political rights and the refusal of social, economic or cultural justice.

Socially recognized divisions can set individual against individual, group against group, majorities and minorities against each other, resulting in inclusion or exclusion, privilege or denial, dignity or deprivation. The rights embodied in international legal instruments can never be realized apart from the actualization of the common ethics embodied in all religious traditions.

Disenfranchisement of Women, Children and Families

The rights and well-being of women, children and families are constantly in jeopardy. Discrimination, repression, denial of opportunity, oppressions, exploitation and exclusion – all such violations of human rights are debasing these groups and civilization at large. There is a need for women's equal participation not only in family life, but also in the leadership of communities and social and political institutions.

Systemic inequities in the distribution of opportunities and resources persist between men and women in all countries. We are to be held accountable for the impact of violence, including that which occurs in our own homes, in war and in conflicts among religious groups. We are to be held accountable for the victimization of children – through child labor, sexual exploitation, and forced military service.

Poverty, Diseases and Lack of Opportunities

Extreme poverty and global health remain obstacles to building Peace. The absence of sufficient meaningful employment and the continued marginalization of many people mark societies worldwide.

Famine and disease have accompanied violence. HIV and AIDS have reached epidemic proportion throughout the world.

We are to be held accountable for the ravages of poverty on children – malnutrition, the toll of preventable diseases, stunted growth, lack of education and opportunity, and the denial of hope.

Environmental Degradation, Natural Resource Depletion and Natural Calamities

The earth is threatened increasingly by human exploitation and misuse of the environment in quest of material prosperity. Human greed is destroying the natural environment on which we all depend. We are endangering future generations by our depletion of nonrenewable natural resources, our pollution of air and water with chemical and radioactive waste, and our over-exploitation of the soil in many parts of the world.

We are to be held accountable for the destruction of our children's inheritance as the environment is permanently damaged and non-renewable resources are consumed.

II. RISING HOSTILITY

“ Shared security requires all sectors of society to acknowledge our common vulnerabilities and our shared responsibility to address them.

– Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security, *Religions for Peace* 8th World Assembly (2006)

Since *Religions for Peace* last assembled in 2006, an alarming trend with tremendous implications for achieving Peace has accelerated worldwide. A rising tide of hostility, in society and within and among religious communities, threatens the shared security people of faith are working to achieve.

Hostility toward the “other” takes the form of intolerance, and too often violence. The targets of hostility are often vulnerable populations, including members of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, refugees, migrant workers, and immigrants. Hostilities arise from all sectors of society – governments, individuals, organizations and social groups. A growing number of governments are placing restrictions on religious beliefs and practices by minority religious groups. Attempts to contain the spread of fanaticism often breed greater hostility.

Regretfully, some groups within our own religious communities misuse religion to foster hostility toward others. Sectarian and communal violence is dividing societies, fueling violent conflict, and destroying innocent lives. Harassment, intimidation and abuse are aimed at the most vulnerable



populations among us. Prejudices within our own religious communities are particularly troubling. By impugning the dignity of others, members of our own religious traditions are contradicting the most sacred tenets of their own faith tradition.

Intolerance and violence in all manifestations are obstacles to Peace. Religious communities, leaders and people of faith must confront hostility toward the “other” as an obstacle to our shared security and a profound threat to Peace.

INTOLERANCE

There is a strong tide against tolerance and respect for human dignity on all continents. Intolerance is increasingly reflected in the laws, policies and actions of governments worldwide.

Governmental restrictions on individuals and groups, often rationalized on the basis of security threats, fuel intolerance and fear of the “other,” and threaten human dignity, good governance and shared well-being.

Governmental restrictions on religion are proliferating. By one measure, three-quarters of the world’s population now live in countries with high levels of restrictions on religion.² The percentage of countries with high levels of governmental restrictions on religion has increased from 29 percent in 2007 to 40 percent in 2011.³

Official restrictions on religious beliefs and practices take many forms. These include:

- › Banning particular faiths;
- › Imprisoning religious leaders;
- › Placing restrictions on religious minorities;
- › Stigmatizing religious groups as dangerous sects or cults;
- › Criminalizing religious conversion;
- › Desecrating holy sites, places of worship and religious symbols;
- › Restricting religious literature or broadcasting;
- › Discriminating against religious groups in employment, education and housing; and
- › Failing to protect individuals from religious discrimination, harassment or abuse by private individuals and groups.

In addition to the above list, there remain powerful and divergent views among diverse governments regarding the criminalization of blasphemy versus the protection of freedom of speech.⁴

At a time when many countries are undergoing major political changes, in many countries progress toward democracy is coupled with attacks on minorities.

² Pew Research Center, The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion*, (September 2012).

³ Pew Research Center, *supra* n. 2.

⁴ In this context, it is important to note the historic achievement of United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 (12 April 2011) on the need to adopt “measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief,” in the context of re-affirming all fundamental freedoms of religion and belief. The successor General Assembly Resolution UN GA Res. 66/166 was unanimously adopted on 19 December 2011. The *RfP* Middle East-North African Council has formally moved to receive HR Res. 1618 as a shared basis for elements of its collaborative work.

Governmental counter-strategies against rising religious extremism often exacerbate hostility. Attempting to curb terrorism worldwide, fundamental principles of human rights are often violated by states, fostering greater insecurity. Efforts to combat extremism often contribute to the demonization of entire groups, resulting in the loss of fundamental freedoms.

Social hostility toward individuals and groups, fuelled by intolerance and fear of the “other,” also threaten human dignity, good governance and shared well-being. Growing social hostilities include:

- › Social harassment and stigmatization of religious groups, minorities and other vulnerable populations;
- › Religious groups enforcing their religious norms on others.

There is a correlation between government restrictions on religion and social hostility among religious communities. The growth of governmental restrictions is accompanied by increased measures of social hostility.⁵ A recent study has found that the correlation exists most strongly where governmental restrictions favor one religion over others, and where social hostility takes the form of sectarian violence.⁶

VIOLENCE

“ 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.

— Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security, *Religions for Peace* 8th World Assembly (2006)

Intolerance often leads to violence.

The number of countries experiencing sectarian or communal violence between religious groups is growing. Social hostility toward religion, religious communities and individuals of faith takes the form of:

- › Religion-related armed conflict or terrorism;
- › Mob or sectarian violence;
- › The use of violence by private actors in the name of religion;
- › Religion-related harassment, intimidation or abuse (over attire for religious reasons, for example); and
- › Malicious acts and crimes inspired by religious bias (harassment and intimidation; displacement from homes; destruction of holy sites; abductions; physical abuse; killings).

5 Correlation is not necessarily causation.

6 Pew Research Center, *supra* n. 2.



III. WELCOMING THE OTHER

There may be an emerging multi-religious consensus that a shared positive vision of Peace calls on all people of faith to “*Welcome the Other*.” “*Welcoming the Other*” includes robust support for tolerance. Diverse faith traditions promote tolerance for the “other” in both law and society and on a more basic level in their cultivation of an essential existential respect for the other. “*Welcoming the Other*” calls each religious community to robustly advance tolerance. “*Welcoming the Other*” also calls each religious community to go beyond tolerance by pro-actively standing in solidarity with the dignity, vulnerability and well-being of the “other,” with the full force of its respective spiritual and moral teachings. Such teachings can include the willingness to bear innocent suffering, return good for evil, forgive the unforgivable and cultivate unrestricted compassion or love for enemies.

TOLERANCE

““ Tolerance is an active recognition of diversity and means respecting the otherness of the other with whom we differ religiously, culturally, or otherwise, with compassion and benevolence.

— European Council of Religious Leaders, *Religions for Peace Declaration on Tolerance: Our Commitment to Justice, Equality and Sharing* (2010)

““ Tolerance is not only a cherished principle, but also a necessity for peace and for the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

— UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995)

““ Tolerance is one of the fundamental values essential to international relations in the twenty-first century and should include the active promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with human beings respecting one another, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language, neither fearing nor repressing differences within and between societies but cherishing them as a precious asset of humanity.

— UN Millennium Declaration (2000)⁷

The true nature of tolerance, its full implication, is perhaps best understood by its opposites: the ugly faces of intolerance, prejudice, discrimination, marginalization, and deprivation that shape the daily life of hundreds of millions even today. Victims of intolerance are the stigmatized “others.” The “other” is the stranger, the alien, the person from a different culture, faith tradition or nation. The “other” may be discriminated against because of gender, poverty, race, faith, color, physical or mental status, caste or culture. Today’s struggle for a culture of Peace and civilization of universal brotherhood must address the prevailing conflict between tolerance and intolerance.

Tolerance means not imposing one’s views on others; in short, essential existential respect for the “other.”

⁷ UN Resolution on the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, UN doc. A/RES/56/6 (21 Nov. 2001) (recalling the UN Millennium Declaration, UN doc. A/RES/55/2 (8 Sept. 2000)).

“ Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human.... Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

– UNESCO Declaration, Art. 1.1

Promoting tolerance must not be confused as a proxy for lack of conviction, indifference or neglecting one’s values.

“ Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence.... The practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s convictions.

– UNESCO Declaration, Arts. 1.2, 1.4

“ Conflicting interests and views are not in themselves a threat to peace. They present a challenge to creatively harmonise different interests. In a culture of peace everyone should strive to transform situations of conflicting interest so that their power and dynamism are channeled into creative development which promotes peace and harmony.”

– European Council of Religious Leaders, *Religions for Peace Lille Declaration on a Culture of Peace* (2009)

Tolerance is at the heart and center of other fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly.

“ Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others.


– UNESCO Declaration, Art. 1.2

Tolerance is embedded in both national and international law. In national law, states promote tolerance through just and impartial legislation, law enforcement, judicial process, and administration; and by making economic and social opportunities available to each person without discrimination. Nondiscrimination is a core principle of international law reflected in the United Nations Charter,⁸ and international human rights declarations and treaties.

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, for example, declares “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Art. 1) and “everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth ... without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” (Art. 2).⁹ Rights contained in the Universal Declaration that promote tolerance include the rights of everyone to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” including “freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance” (Art. 18); “freedom of opinion and expression” (Art. 19); to recognition as

8 “The Purposes of the United Nations are ... to achieve international cooperation in ... promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion...” UN Charter (1945), Art. 1.

9 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).



a person before the law (Art. 6); to equal protection of the law (Art. 7); to a nationality (Art. 16); and to education that “shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups.” (Art. 26)

“ Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law.

– UNESCO Declaration, Art. 1.3

RfP in the past has affirmed its support for national governance and international norms that promote tolerance, and for the cultivation of an essential existential respect for the other.

As men and women of faith, however, our faith traditions also call us to take a step beyond tolerance. A positive multi-religious notion of Peace – rooted in our respective religious traditions – goes beyond state-centered legal regimes and the cultivation of an essential existential respect for the other, however enduringly important these remain. Our respective faith traditions call for profound active solidarity with the “other.”

FAITH-BASED IMPERATIVES

Indigenous Spiritualities

According to the ancestral teachings of Indigenous Peoples – transmitted across generations – all human beings are the children of Mother Earth and the Universe. Together and complementing each other, we are to walk the sacred path of life.

Living well implies knowing how to live in harmony and in balance, first of all with our own self, with peoples living in communities close to us, and then with others – people of diverse cultural and faith traditions. Furthermore, it is essential to live in harmony and balance with Mother Earth and all life that exists.

Living well in community with others implies complementing each other, practicing values such as reciprocity and sharing. Reciprocity establishes a balance in the relationships among people; it is an important component for the establishment of harmony and generates a sense of equality among human beings.

Living well and “*Welcoming the Other*” cannot be achieved through individualism, but by recognizing that we are all connected and responsible for the life we are creating for ourselves, others in these times and for future generations.

— A spiritual leader in conversation with the *RfP* Secretary General

Hinduism

Hinduism “welcomes the other” by advancing the virtue of respecting all religions that includes embracing a notion of citizenship, striving for Peace and gender equality. Hindu teachings include:

- › *Sarvadharmasambhava* (“Equal attitude toward all religions.”) This implies religious tolerance.
- › *Ahimsa paramo dharmah* (“Non-violence is the highest religious duty.”) This means that we must renounce violence and instead follow the path of Peace.
- › *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (“The whole of the earth/globe is a family.”) This means that all the people living in all parts of the globe are a big loving family.
- › *Yatra Narayas tu pujoyante ramante tatra Devata /Yatrais tu na Pujayante Sarvas tatrapphalah Kriyah* (“The gods reside at the place where the female is worshipped and all activities are unsuccessful where no respect for females exists.”) This means that women should enjoy equal rights with men and be given the full freedoms, rights and respect that that entails.¹⁰

In Hindu culture, interdependence and interconnectedness are considered the foundation of well-being. The world is to be seen as one family and the implication here is that there is a collective responsibility for community and societal issues.

Actions that weaken the community diminish the individual. Equally, the community is strengthened by the contributions of the individual. People work together to care and provide for each other, rather than focus on individual needs

Buddhism

Buddhism teaches that the very distinction between one group and another, between insider and outsider, between citizen and alien, is a dangerous illusion. The renowned Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, teaches that in Buddhism there is no such thing as an individual self.¹¹ His point is that we are so profoundly interconnected by history, culture and biology that the very notion of a separate individual is a false illusion. Radical awareness, understood as awakening or enlightenment, reveals authentic human existence in the selflessness of the Buddha.

In the Buddhist tradition, our connections are meaningful; our separations are an illusion. When we believe in the illusion of separation, not only do we deceive ourselves, but we follow a path that will bring us great suffering. If you and I are ultimately awakened, we recognize that you cannot be the “other.” You cannot be an alien, a foreigner. When we are awakened, there is “no self” to be separated from the “other.”

10 Swaamee Aprtemaanandaa, Jee, “*The Respect for all Religions*” (September, 2012), available at: <http://www.trcb.com/religion/hinduism/the-respect-for-all-religions-peace-global-citizenship>.

11 Thich Nhat Hanh, “*Being Peace*,” 2005.



Judaism

The book of Leviticus, the third book in the Hebrew bible, states, “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”¹² This passage has been interpreted as welcoming the “other” living among us and asserting the oneness of human kind and the almightiness of God.

“There shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.”¹³ Moses gives God’s law: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”¹⁴ “You shall not strip your vineyards bare ... leave them for the poor and the alien.”¹⁵

The Biblical principle of welcoming and protecting the stranger was not without historical context. According to Joshua, and throughout Jewish history, Jewish refugees have been joined by non-Jews also fleeing drought, famine, slavery, persecution and invaders.¹⁶ The duty of protecting strangers vulnerable to xenophobic violence was an important principle for Jews during biblical times and remains so today. As Rabbi Hillel, the great teacher of the first century A.D. replied when accepting a challenge from a non-Jew to recite the entire Torah while standing on one foot, “What is hateful to you do not do to others. That is the whole Torah, all the rest is commentary.”¹⁷

Christianity

In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to “*Welcome the Other*” for “What you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do unto me.”¹⁸ “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God We love because God first loved us.”

Affirming the paramount Jewish imperative of “love of God and love of neighbor,” Jesus taught in the Parable of the Good Samaritan that the religious “other” (the Samaritan) was a true neighbor when he assisted a man found beaten and bleeding on the road. In the teaching, Jesus tells his interlocutor (a Jewish lawyer) to “go and do the same yourself.”¹⁹

Jesus told his followers that when they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and those in prison, they were doing it to him. When they failed to do those things, they failed to serve him.²⁰

12 *Biblos*, Leviticus 19:33-34.

13 *Biblos*, Exodus 12:49, Leviticus 24:22.

14 *Biblos*, Exodus 12:21, 23:9.

15 *Biblos*, Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22.

16 *Biblos*, Joshua 9:3-27.

17 UNHCR 2012 Dialogue on Faith and Protection “*The Protection of Refugees under Jewish Law: a short introduction.*”

18 *The Bible*, Mathew 25:40.

19 *The Bible*, Luke 10: 29-37.

20 *The Bible*, Matthew 25:45.

Islam

In the Holy *Qur'an*, the importance of “*Welcoming the Other*” is clearly stated: “O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made “you nations and tribes that ye may know one another.”²¹ The *Qur'an* teaches that believers should “serve God ... and do good to ... neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, [and those who have nothing].”²²

In 662 AD, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) fled persecution in Mecca and sought refuge in Medina. This *hijrah*, or migration, came to symbolize the movement of Muslims from lands of oppression to those of Islam. Moreover, the hospitable treatment of Muhammad by the people of Medina embodies the Islamic model of “*Welcoming the Other*” contained in the *Qur'an*. This responsibility is formalized in the fourth *surah* of the Holy *Qur'an*, which states that: “He who emigrates in the path of God will find frequent refuge and abundance.”²³

AN EMERGING MULTI-RELIGIOUS CONSENSUS

Diverse religious traditions make clear – each in their own way – that it is a fundamental religious duty, privilege and experience of fulfillment to “*Welcome the Other*.” Respecting each particular religion’s way of grounding its imperative to “*Welcome the Other*,” we are invited to discern “*Welcoming the Other*” as an element of the emergent *RfP* multi-religious positive vision of Peace. So understood, the commitment to “*Welcome the Other*” calls diverse religious believers to advance tolerance in the domains of law and state practice as well as in their existential orientation to others. “*Welcoming the Other*” also calls religious believers to a profound and proactive solidarity for the well-being of others with the full force of their respective spiritual and moral imperatives.

Is “*Welcoming the Other*” a “deeply held and widely shared” value among diverse religious communities? The Assembly is uniquely qualified to discern this urgent and timely question

ADVANCING HUMAN DIGNITY, SHARED WELL-BEING AND CITIZENSHIP

Our religious communities are essential actors to “*Welcome the Other*.” They can work to reverse the rising tide of intolerance by powerfully advancing tolerance. And they can go further: They are called to commit themselves in solidarity to the well-being of the other in accord with the full force of their respective religious traditions, which include such teachings as – each tradition on its own terms – voluntary renunciations self-sacrifice for the well-being of others, bearing innocent suffering, returning good for evil, forgiving the “unforgivable,” and offering unrestricted compassion or love for enemies.

Each religious community’s efforts to “*Welcome the Other*” through advocacy, education and other forms of action have profound and inestimable worth.

21 *The Qur'an*, Al-Hujurat 39:13.

22 *The Qur'an*, Al-Hujurat 4:36.

23 *The Qur'an*, Al-Hujurat 4:97-99.



Multi-religious efforts can complement the work of individual religious communities to “*Welcome the Other*.” Cooperation creates connections among religious communities that can greatly reduce the temptation to misuse religion as a false rationale for intolerance or violence. Cooperation also harnesses the different capacities of diverse religious communities in common problem solving, provides efficiency in areas of needed training, and positions religious communities for multi-stakeholder partnerships.

In particular, *Religions for Peace* can “*Welcome the Other*” through multi-religious action for human dignity, for shared well-being, and for a more robust notion of citizenship.

WELCOMING THE OTHER BY ADVANCING HUMAN DIGNITY

From its beginning, *Religions for Peace* has discerned a shared conviction on the central importance of human dignity. This is affirmed in the first and succeeding World Assemblies and in a wide variety of *Religions for Peace* fora.²⁴

Advancing human dignity “*welcomes the Other*” when we work to honor and protect human dignity whenever or wherever it is affronted. On the other hand, “*Welcoming the Other*” also implies more than the recognition of human dignity and the obligation to honor the rights that flow from it. “*Welcoming the Other*” includes the commitment to stand in solidarity with the positive flourishing of the “other’s” human dignity. As religious communities, we are called to both protect human dignity and to advance its full flourishing through the comprehensive development of human beings on all levels: physical, intellectual, affective, artistic, moral and religious. “*Welcoming the Other*” includes the proactive commitment to help the “other” to develop and unfold his or her human dignity in the holistic terms of a shared positive vision of Peace rooted in each believer’s religious tradition.

WELCOMING THE OTHER BY ADVANCING SHARED WELL-BEING

At the first Assembly of *RfP*, the religious leaders discerned a shared consensus not only on human dignity, but also on the conviction on “the unity of the human family.” Subsequent Assemblies have reinforced the notion of the unity of the human family by advancing the conviction that diverse religious traditions – each in its own way – teach their respective believers to care for others as themselves. These notions were further developed in Assemblies dealing expressly with themes related to shared well-being: “Common Healing” (1994), “Common Living” (1999) and “Shared Security” (2006).

In Kyoto, our 8th World Assembly (2006) recognized that the moral convictions of diverse religious traditions provide a foundation for confronting violence in its many forms and advancing a vision of shared security. Affirming the imperative to “*Welcome the Other*” by advancing shared well-being builds upon, broadens and deepens this vision.

²⁴ For example: European Council of *Religious Leaders*, **Moscow Declaration on Advancing Human Dignity** (June 2011) (“The dignity of the human person is at the core of all our religious traditions. Every individual human being is bestowed with such dignity which should be respected regardless of the person’s religious or moral status.”); *Religions for Peace* Middle East–North Africa Council of Religious Leaders, **Marrakesh Declaration** (November 2011) (“We pledge ourselves to work together to promote and protect the fundamental dignity of all, including their related rights and duties. We are committed to advancing respect for religious differences and the protection of freedom of religion across our region.”); *Religions for Peace*, **Restoring Dignity: A Commitment to End Violence Against Women** (2011) (“Religions recognize the fundamental dignity of every woman and man.... This dignity is inviolable. It is not given by cultures, states, societies, communities or individuals. It cannot be taken away by them. But the recognition of this dignity must be ‘restored’ whenever it is violated. It must be actively respected, honored and protected.”).

The thrust of these previous Assembly reflections are twofold: 1) threats to any person's dignity, including his or her relatedness to others and the natural world is a threat to common well-being; and 2) "shared well-being" is the holistic state that truly honors and supports the flourishing of human dignity. Shared well-being – like human dignity – may be discerned to be a positive element of a shared vision of Peace.

"*Welcoming the Other*" is advanced whenever we work together to overcome threats to shared well-being. These threats include: exaggerated individualism (manifest as selfishness, greed and other vices); the misuse of religion to set diverse believers against one another; intolerance and violence against the "other;" governmental failures to honor human dignity and the rights that flow from it; exploitative or unjust economic systems; excessive armaments and the use of war and terror as a political tools instead of investing in mediation and reconciliation; and the failure to honor nature and develop in harmony with it.

"*Welcoming the Other*" is also advanced whenever we work together to promote spiritual and moral virtues – rooted in each tradition in their own ways – essential to building up shared well-being. These are virtues such as honesty, tolerance, care for others, respect for nature, the willingness to stand in solidarity with, and even sacrifice for, the well-being of all, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In addition, "*Welcoming the Other*" by advancing shared well-being necessarily includes efforts to build just political and legal regimes that honor the rights of all, fair and ecologically balanced development schemes, common healing, common living, and common security.

We "*Welcome the Other*" when we work together to resist threats to shared well-being and when we stand in solidarity with the human dignity of all. We can do this by welcoming each person into the co-building, co-nurturing and co-stewarding of our shared well-being, which includes respect for nature and developing in harmony with it. This Assembly invites us to discern together how we can better advance shared well-being as a way of "*Welcoming the Other*."

WELCOMING THE OTHER BY ADVANCING CITIZENSHIP

Our religious communities can "*Welcome the Other*" through multi-religious action for human dignity and shared well-being. These urgent global needs converge in many parts of the world as a third area for multi-religious action, the need for a more robust notion of citizenship.

Traditional understandings of citizenship focus on the legal right to belong to a particular country and the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen. Our Assembly theme calls us to advance the multi-religious grounds for advancing citizenship for all, rooted in legal regimes that protect human dignity. All people have basic rights and freedoms and deserve protection. Religious communities should actively help to ensure that governments fulfill their principle mandate of honoring and protecting the fundamental dignity, safety and well-being of all of their citizens, including their related religious and other rights. *Religions for Peace* promotes a vision in which all citizens hold certain basic rights regardless of their status as a member of a majority or minority group. These basic rights include the full rights of citizenship.



A contemporary notion of citizenship must also go beyond legal definitions of citizenship to ensure human dignity while allowing everyone to live peacefully in community. Social harmony is the result of the civility and stability of both society and the state.

“ A society is ‘cohesive’ if it works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility.

— OECD, *Perspectives on Global Development 2012*

States must establish policies and institutions that promote the integration, not mere assimilation, of the “other” into the majority culture. In society, minorities and their unique cultural and religious characteristics should be tolerated in the deep sense of “tolerance” outlined above. “*Welcoming the Other*” suggests that they should also be celebrated.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

If our widely shared understanding of Peace includes “*Welcoming the Other*,” every faith community and every person of faith is called, both individually and collectively, to resist threats to Peace that take the form of intolerance or violence, and to take positive action to “*Welcome the Other*.” These dual responsibilities constitute a vital component of the emergent *RfP* multi-religious vision of Peace.

“*Welcoming the Other*” in society, in every faith tradition, and through multi-religious action, means:

FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

- › Working to advance shared values and virtuous behaviors essential to “*Welcoming the Other*;”
- › Working to eliminate all forms of intolerance by states, by non-state actors, by civil society, by religious groups and leaders, and by individuals;
- › Speaking out on behalf of vulnerable individuals and groups;
- › Standing in solidarity with the human dignity of all persons by working to advance their genuine flourishing as co-builders of shared well-being; and
- › Leveraging the power of multi-religious networks to “*Welcome the Other*” by advancing human dignity, shared well-being and citizenship through concrete multi-religious action.

FOR STATES

- › Governance that is just and impartial;
- › Governance that ensures and protects the full enjoyment by all of universal human rights;
- › Remedies for victims of intolerance;
- › Social policies that recognize the dignity of displaced persons; and
- › Supporting and partnering with people of faith, religious communities and religious leaders in their efforts to “*Welcome the Other*.”

FOR ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL

- › Calling attention to all forms of intolerance by states, by non-state actors, by civil society, by religious groups and leaders, and by individuals;
- › Advancing tolerance for the “other;” and
- › Advancing solidarity in action for the “other.”

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