

**Your Excellencies, distinguished
panel of religious representatives,
ladies and gentlemen, It is an honor
to be seated with you on this panel.**

**My dear brothers and sisters,
For too many years, we have talked
but not acted.**

**For too many years we have heard
the disenfranchised calling out in
pain and suffering, and, so far, we
have only handed out Band-Aids.**

**For too many of us these serve as
metaphors for our own lives.**

Perhaps the problem is that too many of us expect something to be done by “others” whoever they may be.

Every year we cry out about injustice, but because we haven't found those with whom we can cooperate, not much gets done.

The United Religions Initiative (URI) is composed of citizens from all over the world committed to working together for peace.

**We are a Cooperation
Circle, and as part of the
greater URI, we share an
appreciation for the rich
diversity of religions and
spiritual traditions through
which the one family of
humanity finds so many ways of
pursuing reverence for life, love
of one's fellow beings, and
humility and gratitude for the
gift of creation.**

World interfaith Harmony Week is an example of United Nations events that call on people of all faiths to take local action while connecting with the global community.

My small congregation is already forming a cooperation circle that will focus on the SDGs.

Now is the time for religious leaders of communities large and small to courageously step forward and invite their congregants to step forward with them.

What was once only a strong spiritual admonition to see the human family as one and to treat all people as brothers and sisters has now become a fundamental requirement for a sustainable future.

Only by building bridges of cooperation and trust amongst peoples can we effectively address unnecessary crushing poverty and paucity of resources and adequately organize ourselves to protect the global commons, such as the oceans, the climate, and the rainforests – the living systems upon which civilization depends

Perhaps kindness instead of saber rattling is what we can use to promote this change,.

Mark Twain said that (Q) Kindness is a language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see.(Q)

In the Chaos of interreligious strife, there is no space to accomplish any of the SDGs.

While Spirit moves us to action, it is we who must fulfill that imperative, because we do the physical work here on earth.

In hindsight we are sorry we didn't act.

And so we find the courage to forgive ourselves and promise to be more observant and more active in the effort to meet those SDGs.

And we feel better, but we cannot hold life sacred and at the same time seek security by placing at risk existence in its entirety.

Our civilizations are mired in an old paradigm that believes that to end war, we must go to war.

(Does this sound the least bit sane?)

We must work together in our homes, communities, temples, mosques, churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship,

**transcending differences of race,
religion, and nationality, to eliminate
these unacceptable, universal threats
to the SDGs.**

**With our omissions acknowledged
and our own inactions put behind us,
we resolve anew to be more loving,
more patient, more feeling, more open,
more accepting of all the differing
viewpoints of different individuals,
faiths and organizations.**

Now we can recommit to being more conscientious, more focused on implementing the SDGs and taking better care of ourselves, all human beings, all sentient beings and the earth, herself.

If we still get angry at our neighbors, or sit in judgment of others, or turn away without really looking, then we are still trapped in that old paradigm.

And then we think ... There will come another opportunity to act, so we'll be ready for that.

**In my faith, Tikkun Olam is a
commandment from God to heal the
world...it is not a suggestion**

**Our most obvious problem is that we
expect that the work of others should
bring not only the forgiveness
of mistakes and inactions, but,
having made a choice to be better,
bring an instantaneous
transformation to ourselves.**

**The good news is that life is not a
movie nor is it a novel whose
beginning, middle and end
have been written and sealed.**

Life is not static, it is work in progress.

But it is a work that requires, to put it bluntly, WORK

The purpose of the myriad of blessings That traditionally observant Jews recite each day is not only to remind us of G-d's presence and blessings.

It is a reminder that life is not simply a matter of having made a choice, it is about constantly choosing and giving oneself the time to choose.

And, so, One of the beautiful things to consider is the idea of new beginnings... a fresh start.

And we are asked to do so in a way that reaches deeply into ourselves in order to find that spark of the Divine that recognizes that same spark within all of creation.

Of course, we can think of any moment in time as an opportunity for a fresh start, but that fresh start is not only intended to get back to "square one." It is intended that we begin a new year of accomplishments that help bring about true Sustainable Development, It also prompts us to take a good look at the past year and how we have

lived it.

Did we really work to keep the promises that we made to ourselves and all our fellow spiritual leaders as well, to work toward achieving the SDGs?

We all make little slips in the way we conduct ourselves when it comes to keeping promises based on lofty ideals, It's OK to make mistakes.

We are not perfect.

We are, however, expected to TRY to be perfect.

Is there any real chance of our becoming perfect? Probably not, but we can do so much even while

living with our imperfections..

We are asked by our faith paths to go out and do the work without waiting for a consensus or approval or even a vision of what the work will ultimately accomplish.

What we do have, is a vision of what we can do NOW, as we work toward the SDGs, that will support all living beings and our home, the Earth.

The risks of not focusing on accomplishing the SDGs will not disappear with inattention.

Silence under current circumstances is complicity.

Our faiths require us to speak out.

Our sense of awe for the mystery that has given us life, and our love for one another will inspire our actions.

We need a paradigm shift to create a true end to the wars that despoil our planet which make sustainability a hollow word. This paradigm shift is the emerging consciousness of our planet for everyone and everything on it.

Not only are we expected to make the effort, we are asked to do so in a way that reaches deep into ourselves in order to find that spark of the Divine within us that recognizes that same spark within in all of creation.

This August body, our United Nations, holds the keys to the future of sustainability and this is the place where the work will get done.

Thank you once again your Excellencies and panelists for having me join this panel and for the opportunity to share my views on what we as religious leaders must do to bring about the implementation of all the SDGs.

Thank you to you, Sara Rahim for representing the youth who are dedicated to the SDGs. We need your strength, your skills and your willingness to continue the efforts to see the dawning of an age in which all of the SDGs are met and in practice

My thanks also to the United Religions Initiatives for the clear delineation of the SDGs and ways to implement them, and to the co-sponsors of this event...especially my colleagues of the Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns here at the United Nations which is a committee dedicated to the spiritual imperative to bring the SDGs to all of those living on this earth and to the earth herself. And, thank all of you attending here because of your commitment to bringing about a world change based on accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals.

**May each of us find the strength
within ourselves to do the work
to make it so.**

Thank you all for listning.