

Mrs. Christina Lee Brown
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Speech at the *Religions for Peace* 9th World Assembly, Vienna, 21 November 2013

Happily we have gathered together in this magnificent city of Vienna to embrace the theme of “Welcoming the Other.” Like many of you, I passionately believe that “Welcoming the other” absolutely must include “Welcoming a Healthy Earth.”

The second World Assembly in Belgium in 1974 lifted up the environmental crisis, saying that our world needed a response from religious perspectives. Then, at 6th World Assembly in Italy in 1994, his All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who *happily* will be joining us tomorrow, spoke for all when he called for each of our religious traditions to *hold up* before the world the religiously mysterious beauty of the Earth and our religious obligations to protect and honor our *world's sacred earth*, explaining to us brilliantly “... that the way we respond to our natural environment directly reflects the Way in which we treat human beings.” Humbly I now stand here before you to encourage all of you, our world's religious leaders to learn from and echo His All Holiness' words so that together we will find new kinds of inspiring ways to “Welcome the Earth” so as to be truly “Welcoming to the Other.”

I accepted your kind invitation because of my many years of service As A Religions for Peace International Trustee, which has allowed me to witness and admire first-hand Religions For Peace's ever-expanding and impressive global movement.

I also accepted because of my extremely deep concern for the health of all of life, natural and human, and because of the absolutely terrifying rate at which we are currently daily destroying the health of *all*, therefore making many of us firmly believe that:

Religions for Peace indeed must now also become recognized as *the* leading *global* inter-religious force in protecting the health of *all of life* by honoring and caring for our earth and its Sacred Air, Sacred Water and Sacred Soil.

Prince Charles laments that we are daily encouraged to think of ourselves as disconnected from nature, perhaps even the “masters of nature,” and in the process we have lost touch with the holiness of nature, which has been left in our care in a exceptionally sacred trust.

He also believes, as many of us do, that to be restored to wholeness we absolutely must be reinstated consciously, spiritually and emotionally, within the vast and larger life of which we are all a part – the larger life that is

sustained by our world's Sacred Air, Water and Soil and are the sacred gifts of life belonging to each and every one of us equally from the great author of life.

The U.N.'s Millennium Ecosystem Assessment warns that "nearly two-thirds of the natural machinery that supports our life on Earth is being degraded by human pressure" and yet the reality is that this alarming news has scarcely drawn a response. Gandhi has told us, "The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."

My fellow Kentuckian and dear friend Wendell Berry has said, "...Industrial humanity has brought about phase two of original sin making us all Now ... absolutely complicit in the murder of creation," but I ask you, our global religious leaders: Who is listening?

Thich Nhat Hanh has been telling us, "The bells of mindfulness are sounding. ... All over the Earth where we are experiencing floods, draughts and massive wildfires, sea ice is melting in the Arctic, hurricanes and heat waves are killing thousands. Mother Earth is being destroyed and Mother Earth is angry ...and yet we continue to consume, ignoring the ringing bells."

As of November 20, over 4,000 souls have perished in the Philippines, and the count is rising daily. Over 5 million were made homeless. So I ask again: Who is listening?

It seems to me the challenge before all of us is twofold: We face an ecological crisis as well as populace suffering from amnesia. Do not underestimate the magnitude of this challenge. I believe that each of our religions is calling *each of us* to protect with love all that the mysterious and holy source of life has given us.

Many believe that. We will see positive change when *you*, our world's interreligious leaders, our beacons of love, begin to teach daily from your mosques, your synagogues, your temples and your cathedrals that the preciousness of human life cannot and must not *any longer be separated from the preciousness of the Earth*.

You, the religious leaders of our globe, have the allegiance of billions of believers, you are the prophetic voices that our suffering Earth has been waiting for. You are the voices of faith, of hope, and of charity which can and will create that unified interreligious voice that is so desperately needed and that will empower all religious believers to find new kinds of creative and inspired ways to "Welcome the Earth" as part of our "Welcoming the Other."

Fifty years ago at the young age of 16, I was among the 250,000 participants in the Civil Rights March on the Mall in Washington. It was on that August day that I *witnessed* for the first time in my life what I believe to be the absolutely remarkable power of successful interreligious leadership.

It was there that those very diverse religious leaders speaking from their hearts insisted that the racial atrocities that were blighting the United States of America were absolutely immoral and therefore completely unacceptable.

Because of their fervor, we, the 250,000 plus people of all ages, creeds and colors learned that day that, Yes, together, "We must overcome," and that yes, together, we shall overcome.

Two years ago, in September, my extraordinary husband of 43 years, Owsley Brown II, a fellow Religions for Peace International Trustee, died very unexpectedly and tragically from an extremely rare form of MRSA. His shocking and completely surprising death, I will always believe, was absolutely connected to our *daily* destruction of life's natural balance.

So I stand before you, a widow with a broken heart, and blessedly a grandmother of nine glorious, angelic grandchildren, asking you -- in the name of all of the children and grandchildren of our globe -- to please use this, your 9th World Assembly, to heed your own innermost religious obligations to create and lead an Interreligious Religions for Peace *global sustainable movement* that will restore our world and all of its people to moral and physical wellness.

For it is each of you who can and must teach us all to honor the miraculous connections between our natural and human world so that together we will learn that each of us in fact do hold the whole world in our very own hands.

My Louisville colleague, Dr. Kathleen Lyons, and I have brought you two small gifts from our Kentucky home. The first is this global toolkit, which is your invitation to please, become recognized as our world's inspired voice for the preservation of our Sacred Air, Sacred Water and Sacred Soil so as to create those healthy communities that are essential for the survival of all of life – human and natural.

Our other gift to you is your bookmark and personal key, which is a symbol of our prayer that you will continuously unlock your minds and hearts and those of your billions of followers in new kinds of ways so as to discover in fact that each of you are the true spiritual and interreligious guardians

And loving protectors of the health of all of life, I thank you, and, now, let's together, with all of our hearts: "Welcome the Other" by truly "Welcoming and Caring for our Sacred Earth."