**Remarks for the Call for Peace Panel – Liceo Theatre, Gernika**

***“Interfaith Dialogue: The Role of Religious Leaders and Faith Actors in Fostering the Call for Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding”***

25 April 2025 | 09:30 Spain Time

***Speech by Dr Francis Kuria, Secretary General***

Esteemed and eminent faith leaders, United Nations and civil society colleagues, all those who join us here to seek peace, **warm greetings to you all.**

It is my **profound honour** to be with you in historic Gernika, Spain, a town that has transformed a history of tragedy into a **beacon of peace**.

It is also a true privilege to be joined here on this panel by such esteemed religious leaders, **each of whom exemplifies the peacebuilding power of faith communities.**

At the turn of the century, many believed that our world was charting a path towards secularism. **Yet today, 85% of the world’s population identifies as religious**, and religious communities continue to be centres of **unity and togetherness.**

In this world of believers, religious leaders hold a **unique position as changemakers, influential and trusted in both their local communities and on the global stage**. They are able to navigate between their congregants, civil society, and government in a way few others can.

For millennia, religious leaders have leveraged this power and influence to serve as **trusted moral influencers,** harbingers of peace in times of conflict.

For over fifty years, *Religions for Peace* has harnessed that influence to advance peace, justice, and harmony. **And we have proven** **time and again that true, sustainable peace is possible** when religious leaders **create coalitions that strive towards a shared sacred wellbeing.**

Leaders of our movement have affected real change.:

* In 1990, Muslim and Christian leaders from *Religions for Peace* Liberia **initiated the framework that became the ECOWAS Peace Plan**, including a ceasefire, roundtable conference, and peacekeeping force.
* In 1991, leaders and women of faith from *Religions for Peace* Sierra Leone mediated between the government and rebels during the civil war, **negotiating the release of 50 child hostages** and playing a key role in the Lome Peace Talks.
* In 2004, *Religions for Peace* Bosnia and Herzegovina influenced the government to implement their first law protecting religious freedom, and helped **reduce violence against religious institutions by more than 50%.**
* In the 2010s, members of *Religions for Peace’s* International Youth Committee came together around the world to launch the Arms Down! Campaign for Shared Security, and presented over 20 million signatures to the UN Secretary General’s High Representative for Disarmament.
  + In 2017, *Religions for Peace* successfully brought **a faith-based perspective into the UN’s Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that culminated in the Nobel Peace Prize of 2017**
* Since 2022, *Religions for Peace* has partnered with UNAOC to convene religious leaders from active conflict zones for the Tokyo Peace Roundtables. This year in July, we will bring leaders from **Ukraine and Russia, Palestine and Israel, and Myanmar together** to establish a framework for **sustained and coordinated dialogue.**

These are just a **few illustrations** of what can be achieved when religious leaders and other actors commit themselves to working **towards peace and reconciliation, as a collective**.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, who we mourn today, **whose life was a testament to the power of faith in action**, constantly emphasised the need for religious leaders to use their influence in this way.

When he hosted a delegation from *Religions for Peace* in The Vatican, he reminded us that “the religions, with their spiritual and moral resources, have a specific and unique role to play in building peace. **They cannot be neutral, much less ambiguous, where peace is concerned.”**

As a Catholic myself and a pursuer of peace, I am inspired by his legacy and the **dedication of each of you here today**. I look forward to learning from you in the coming days as we begin to **usher in this call for peace and shared flourishing, rooted in the sacred.**

May peace be with each of you.

Thank you.