

Religions for Peace

In the Name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.

May God bless and send peace upon the Prophet Muhammad and all of God's emissaries to humankind.

Caring for our Common Future – Advancing Shared Well-Being

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His Excellency President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of Germany; Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General of Religions for Peace; Excellencies; Eminences; and Distinguished Guests:

I address each of you by your name and your beautiful qualities. Peace and God's blessings and mercy be upon all of you.

We meet here today in this great forum, hosted generously by the State of Germany, and at the invitation of Religions for Peace, of which I am happy to be an affiliate. We meet here today to share our common concerns, our hopes for peace, and the pain of the world today so that we may talk about the future.

Discussing the future is, in reality, in one way or another, the same as discussing the present, as the future is but the fruit of the present. In the ongoing development of the state of affairs, the future is formed by the present, just as the present is formed by our past—consequents are formed from antecedents and branches from their roots.

The present is the grounds on which the future is forged: hence, genuine concern about the future must be reflected in concern for the present; otherwise, it is merely a vain wish. Every hope for a better future, if not built upon work occurring in the present, is not truly hope; rather, it is delusion. Such is the state of those who neither cultivate the land nor sow seeds yet await the harvest.

Predicting and forecasting the future is not a form of divination or speculation but an investigation of what we know of the present, according to the law of causality on the level of phenomena; it is the inviolable law of life: what we do in our present shapes our future.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the destinies of nations are intertwined with one another: there is no future for some of us, if we do not care for the future of all. Such is the nature of the age in which we live. All of humankind is on one ship, like the one described by the Prophet Muhammad—God's peace and blessings upon him—in the parable of passengers on a two-story ship, in which those on the lower deck wished to make a hole in the hull of their part of the ship (in order to draw water so that they wouldn't have to disturb those at the upper level where the drinking water was stored). According to the parable, if those on the upper deck

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allowed those on the lower deck to carry on with what they wished to do, “they would all perish; if they instead worked together, they and everyone else on the ship would survive.” Like the passengers on this ship, we are bound by our shared destiny and path. None can be saved without a course of action designed to save everyone. There is no Ark of Noah; instead, there is only the ship of solidarity and cooperation between people of goodwill, faith, and wisdom.

Planning seriously for the future has become a pressing duty that can no longer wait. Each time we delay actions we know we must take in order to ward off harm for the future of humanity, we are setting future generations upon courses they will not be able to reverse, such as population growth, civil wars, migration, environmental degradation, and the growing disparities between the rich and the poor.

Before us lie the promises of a civilizational failure that has degraded the value of the human being. What is the purpose of venturing into outer space, seeking out other planets, when we are incapable of taking care of our own planet’s environment—when are still incapable of living in harmony with our fellow human beings, our neighbors, on our own planet?

This failure, if it continues, does not bode well for a better future. Many voices have sounded alarm bells, alerting us to the failure of the contemporary model of civilization in which humanity as a whole has bought into, in the hopes of prosperity and stability.

Last century, we experienced the phenomenon of globalization with two forces acting on us simultaneously. On the one hand, we have the all-encompassing pressure to abolish religious and ethnic identities and restructure the world with one identity. On the other hand, there are those desperately clinging to narrowly defined identities, with all of the hate speech and xenophobia that come with that, focusing on differences, instead of searching for what we have in common.

For the first time in history, we now have the technological capability to annihilate the human race: with the spread of extremist thought in all its forms, the misuse of this capability is quite possible. On the other extreme, this unguided technological development has extended the human lifespan through the manipulation of the human genome along with its resultant ethical dilemmas.

All of this has led to a widespread sense of anxiety, apprehension, uncertainty, and loss of trust. Hence, it is more imperative than ever before for humanity to strive ardently to keep moral progress in pace with scientific progress so that it may inform and augment these innovations with the values of goodness, love, and peace.

In spite of our technological advancements, mass communication and global transportation have not been able to erase from our memories the long-standing misconceptions various peoples have held of one another. Instead, we have seen tragic and senseless acts carried out by various peoples against others without any jurisdiction from either a religious or temporal authority. Hence, the misconceptions have multiplied

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and increased the accumulated historical rancor that reinforce every day the suspicions of those who predict a clash of civilizations.

Terrorism, with the efficiency of its methods and its polarizing force, poses an existential threat to all peace lovers. It can be said that all religions stand accused—some consider them responsible for violence and war. Some even call for the removal of religion from the public sphere, for they consider it a factor that divides rather than one which unites—one that harms and does not benefit.

Nevertheless, in spite of the changing, dark view we see before us, we cannot forget that there is a very bright side: the majority of humanity, both in the East and in the West, still believes in the possibility of coexistence, rejects the rhetoric of violence and hatred, and engages in civic initiatives, public service campaigns, and coalitions of solidarity, such as this conference of ours.

The rhetoric of hatred that has infected the body of humanity invites us to despair from one another and calls us to fight for self-preservation, which, in reality, leads to annihilation and to ignoring the many commonalities that unite us. Our greatest defense against this rhetoric is to keep the flame of hope alive in our hearts and not let despair seize the hearts and minds of people.

The shared values of humanity are universal values that rational minds do not differ over—they are not affected by the changing times, the contingencies of place, or human tendencies. This is because such people have foundations and roots that protect them from the vicissitudes of time and the abuses of those who are destructive. These shared values must be restored for people everywhere, and they are found in the messages and calls of all the prophets. They are the unchanging values of peace, which are confirmed by reason and human welfare.

People of all the various religions backgrounds around the world continue to strive for peace, and prayers continue to be made to attain peace. Our collective efforts must increase: the spirit of solidarity and cooperation must emerge and produce initiatives on the ground proving to the world that religion, at its core, is a force of mercy for the worlds. It is time for religious leaders to demonstrate greater effectiveness and greater involvement in the concerns of human societies to rationalize and ward off the specter of wars and deadly strife.

This is our vision in the United Arab Emirates, which offers a model of happy coexistence between different religions and ethnicities, framed by initiatives that have delegitimized extremists. Among these initiatives are the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities and the American Peace Convoys of the Abrahamic Family. Abu Dhabi recently witnessed the Document on Human Fraternity signed by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. We also participated on behalf of the Forum for Promoting Peace supporting the historic Mecca Declaration organized by the Muslim World League that was signed by more than 1,200 scholars representing diverse Islamic thoughts.

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All of this reflects a dynamic and positive movement in the region in which hatred and violence are rejected, and the true narrative of religion—of love and tolerance—is presented. That is our shared story and vision that we all share with you in this great forum, supervised by my good friend, Dr. William Vendley. Our meeting gives hope and renews the conviction that the day when we reject stereotypes and hatred and foster the feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood in humanity and love of goodness will indeed be a bright day in the history of humanity. And so here, from Germany, we join the call of religions, the call of all humanity, the call of love and harmony—the call to work towards a future that honors humanity everywhere.