

# Religions for Peace

Speech of Secretary General William Vendley  
*Religions for Peace* 10<sup>th</sup> World Assembly  
Lindau, Germany

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Your Excellency President Steinmeier  
Your All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch  
Your Eminence Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah  
Eminences, Venerables, Excellencies, Brothers and Sisters All

Your Excellency President Steinmeier, your presence and your words move and encourage us greatly. It is good that we gather here in Germany, this land of great cultural heritage, hospitality, and genius. We are greatly pleased to be in partnership with the German Foreign Ministry in its commitment to advancing the role of religions in building Peace.

Brothers and Sisters, entering this hall, we did not leave our religious hearts at the door. Each stepped through the door pulled by an undertow, a sea of Sacred Mystery so deep, so good, so healing that our experiences of it have called us to unite in an alliance of common action. Ours is an alliance of care, of Mercy, of Love.

Our alliance honors our differences, even as it serves the Peace for which the human heart hungers.

We are about 900 here from 125 countries, but we represent a far greater, ever-growing, and ever-radiating alliance of goodness that *Religions for Peace* gladly serves.

In the light of this radiating goodness, we acknowledge with sorrow all the ways—subtle and gross—that we and our religious communities have fallen short. Our hearts grieve over the misuses of our faiths, especially the ways they have been twisted to fuel violence.

The burdens of the human family are known in this room. We know too well the blood of war, how it kills, maims, and destroys the lives of the innocent. We know the crushing weight of extreme poverty, how it stunts, humiliates, and plunders. Ten percent of our human family is desperately poor. We know there are 65 million of us who no longer find shelter in the sanctuary of their homes. They are refugees, internally displaced and persons on the move. We know we have entered a terrifying new arms race, one that includes modernizing nuclear arms, weaponizing space, new energy weapons, and weaponizing artificial intelligence coupled with robotization. Meanwhile, our earth is being cooked, the rainforests decimated, the seas poisoned, the web of life choked.

We are also experiencing what might be called a “meta-crisis” of our Modern Order, the Order that lies behind the United Nations and the agreements our States have made on human rights, the rule of law and international trade. Freedoms of all kinds and the protection of minorities have come under attack around the world. While on the economic front, a meager handful of the richest persons have more wealth than the bottom four billion. Exacerbating the political and economic dimensions of this meta-crisis of Order, there is today a “meta-crisis” of truth which challenges the notion of “truth,” while “fake news” is tailored for commercial or political gain. Today, we’re buffeted between inconvenient truths and convenient fabrications.

Our heart’s inner-most experiences of the Sacred and our outer-most social lives cry out to be seamlessly connected in a state of *positive* Peace that *Religions for Peace* has called *Shared Well-Being*.

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Together, we will advance *Shared Well-Being* by launching a global movement for the protection of religious sites targeted to wound our communities' hearts and shred the cloth of our connection. We must become a living "Ring for Peace" that surround endangered holy sites.

We can advance *Shared Well-Being* by fully welcoming women of faith. Women from the Middle East and North African Region will share with us the vital roles of women as agents of Peace. Women must be further mainstreamed into all *Religions for Peace* work, mechanisms, and leadership.

*Shared Well-Being* will be furthered by our learning from our brave brothers and sisters from countries suffering deadly conflict, including Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. Each country's religious colleagues will convene privately to strengthen one another as partners, peacemakers and healers. Here, also, our religious friends from North and South Korea will help construct conditions for Peace on the Korean Peninsula.

We can promote *Shared Well-Being* by throwing ourselves behind the *Interfaith Rainforest Initiative* that is serving all by protecting the rainforests and the Indigenous Peoples who are their caretakers. The entire web of life depends on the Rainforests and their original caretakers.

We will further *Shared Well-Being* through our Commissions on "Positive Peace," "Preventing and Transforming Violent Conflicts," "Promoting Just and Harmonious Societies," "Promoting Integral Human Development," and "Protecting the Earth." These five commissions are the "seedbeds" of our future common action.

Even as we tackle these urgent threats to Peace, we will not have done our duty unless we also further discern together the elements of *positive* Peace as *Shared Well-Being*.

At root, we are relational: radically related to the Sacred and to all that is caused by or embraced by the Sacred. As radically relational, our well-being is intrinsically "shared." Helping the other, we are helped; injuring the other, we lacerate ourselves. In short, our different traditions recognize that the Sacred establishes us as both responsible for and dependent upon each other and the earth that sustains us.

We must discern *Shared Well-Being* in relation to the "meta-crisis" of Modern Order. This can seem abstract but doing so will undergird and focus our common action for Peace.

*Shared Well-Being* calls us to preserve all the ways the Modern Order supports our human dignity, and it also calls us to offer in a constructive spirit any complementary contributions from our religions.

For example, our religions affirm the Modern Order's recognition of the foundational importance of freedom. At the same time, our communities are called to show by example the Sacred grounding of freedom that leads through the despair of nihilism, that rejects the narcissism of mindless consumerism, and that expresses itself as radical care for all.

To the irreplaceable importance of human rights, our religions add their foundational concern for the cultivation of virtues, those habitual orientations to value that unfold and sculpt our human potentials, including our potentials for the most elevated states of Mercy, Compassion and Love. Becoming virtuous is hardly a solitary act; rather, it is an act of "solidarity," one that strengthens greatly needed tolerance. The cultivation of virtue tackles the ignorance, individual egoism, and group egoism that mutilate authentic community.

*Shared Well-Being* also calls for a robust notion of the "common good" that can serve all of us in our efforts to virtuously unfold our rights-protected human dignity.

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The paramount common good for each in this room is the Sacred, even as we understand it differently. The common good also includes the earth with its air, water, soil and web of life. These latter serve and call all of us to a shared and grateful responsibility. The common good is further composed of all the civic virtues, including justice, and all the value-based institutions that would help each to virtuously unfold her or his rights-protected human dignity.

Each person is to draw from the common good; each is to help build it up. In turn, our societies are “good” to the degree that they honor and support each member’s virtuous efforts to unfold his or her rights-protected human dignity.

Pioneering empirical research is underway by the Institute for Economics and Peace on the drivers of *positive* Peace. Combining our multi-religious insights on *Shared Well-Being* with these ground-breaking empirical insights will provide an especially rich base for our common action for *positive* Peace.

Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters, we each passed through the door into this room pulled by our experiences of the Sacred to join our alliance of common action. It is an alliance of care, of Compassion, of Love. How wonderful to have stepped together into this room! Now, let us joyfully re-commit to working shoulder-to-shoulder, each linking her or his inner-most experience of the Sacred with our shared care for our human family and common home on earth.

Thank you for your kind attention.