

Pre-Assembly Regional Consultation Reports

Advancing *Shared Well-Being* as
Multi-Religious Vision of Positive Peace



Religions for Peace 

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AFRICA

The concept of Positive Peace is defined by the unfolding of human dignity dependent on building the common good. It is based on a set of religio-cultural and ethical values that bind individuals to behaviors that advance the well-being of others. The unfolding of human dignity is also dependent on structural capacities that create and sustain peaceful and just societies. Peaceful and just societies are linked to functional societal structures that validate the potentials of everyone to pursue socio-economic activities that create prosperity. These are dependent on certain pillars of the modern nation states that inform the personal to the common. African religious leaders, alive to the realities of our Member States, and the fragility of societal governance structures, hope inculcate the culture of positive peace. We therefore urge and commit to:

- Build strong families as the fundamental and foundation structure for ensuring the unfolding human dignity is nurtured, protected and enhanced.
- Faith leaders to promote a culture of positive peace through positive messaging, tolerance and constructive dialogue. This should be achieved through their sermons and regular interaction with their congregations.
- The development and nurturing of partnerships between Faith leaders, women and youth leaders/institutions, and other actors including government, UN and AU agencies, media, academia and other civil society actors which is important in furtherance of positive peace.
- The continuous capacity building of faith leaders on aspects of positive peace that will enhance their effective engagement on mechanisms to promote ethical values and structural pillars to promote positive peace their respective societies.
- The deliberate strengthening of all the faith networks at the local, national and regional level to serve as agents of change and platforms for unity and dialogue.
- Religious leaders, women and youth to embrace principles of good governance and Integrity while sharing best practices and key lessons for credibility and value-based learning.
- The continuous advocacy of the ethical regulation of media content to lessen divisive propaganda and fake news, while encouraging media outlets to promote and highlight high ethical values and standards in the society.
- The inclusion of Comprehensive and Universal Peace Education into the normal school curricula, to enable members of the society, especially the youth to learn about concepts of positive peace from early on in readiness for appreciation of religious diversity to boost their active participation in the advancement of peace.
- All the faith leaders to unite, develop common talking points and speak with one voice on denouncing behavioral and social ills like corruption, greed and the selfish accumulation of wealth in society that undermine the quest for positive peace. Faith leaders need to hold the Governments accountable to the general society while condemning injustices with a common voice.
- All the faith leaders to advocate for religious freedom in their countries and advocate for religious liberty for minorities.

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ASIA

Asia Women of Faith Network promoted the following observations and recommendations:

- There is a strong need for all people to learn to live together. There is a need to empower and increase the equal participation of women and youth in the political life of the nation by promoting and practicing UN Security Council resolution 1325
- That *RfP* & *RfP* Asia train in TOT (Training of Trainers) model some representatives of the Executive, Women/ Youth on how to strategically use social media to promote harmony and peaceful coexistence.
- Due to the issue of corruption limiting human development and as a way of promoting peace, *RfP* should consider forming an active partnership with relevant organizations such as Transparency International.

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EUROPE

Observations

- The two conceptions of Positive Peace presented in the World Assembly Commission Paper are different, but also inter-related and complementary. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) conception suggests 'eight pillars' of peace derived from statistical, empirical research and analysis. *Religions for Peace's* conception of 'Shared Well-Being' proposes that most religions possess 'shared moral values', which can inform and enhance more empirical notions of Positive Peace.
- The Council noted that whilst the IEP conception of Positive Peace is useful and important, in order to achieve a genuine state of Positive Peace in our societies we need not only the type of outer social transformation and functioning institutions which IPE highlights, but equally as importantly, inner personal development and peace. Our religious and spiritual traditions provide us with the guidance and teachings to transform ourselves into more peaceful, humble and loving human beings; and this process of personal transformation needs to occur in parallel with societal development and transformation.
- A religious conception of Positive Peace comes not only from a sense of duty or obligation to create peaceful societies, but from a deep desire to be in a loving relationship with the divine, the planet, and all other human beings. A religious approach to Positive Peace demands that we not only recognize the human rights of others, but also be cognizant of the responsibilities we have as individuals, to our God/s, our religious traditions, and ourselves, to act with kindness, love and compassion towards all living beings.
- We also recognize that forms of education which not only imparts knowledge and information, but also takes a more holistic and values-based approach to the development of young people is integral to the formation of peaceful individuals, communities and societies. A balanced education of hearts and minds is essential for a holistic, inclusive and equitable human development.

Opportunities

- Within European societies and communities there is arguably a much greater emphasis on the more material and institutional aspects of Positive Peace, than on the individual dimensions. Consequently, in the European context religion has an important role to play in communicating a more holistic understanding of Positive Peace, and the importance of personal development and transformation in achieving peace and harmony within our communities and societies.
- We can do this by drawing on our religious traditions and scriptures to identify and emphasize universal moral and ethical values; creating important connections within and between religious communities, and between religious communities and wider society. We can and should set a positive example through our own attitudes, words and actions: ensuring that we treat all beings with love, respect and kindness. We should also be more vocal in holding governments and politicians to account for their behavior in perpetuating armed conflict around the world; for developing and maintaining nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction; and for using or

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tolerating language and identity politics which drive division and hostility in our societies. We should do more to advocate for increased spending on policies and activities which contribute to more positively peaceful communities and societies.

Proposals for Action

- ECRL believes that as religious and community leaders we should use all means available (religious teaching, informal education, public and media engagement, etc.) to emphasize the shared values which exist across all European societies and communities. Consequently, we will produce a 'Declaration of Shared European Values' which articulates the core values Europeans from all religious and non-religious communities share, and which can help bring about positive peace in our societies.
- ECRL also believes it should encourage an approach to formal and informal education which highlights the universal values which are part of the foundation of our religious and spiritual traditions, and European societies – such as truth, justice and rule of law, compassion, forgiveness, respect for human dignity and freedom, and equality. There are already excellent examples of education programs which already integrate and emphasize these values, and ECRL could, and will, publicize and support these important initiatives. One possible way is to build a database of 'Education for Peace' schools and programs, which can be added to the 'Religion in Action' website.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARRIBEAN

Observations

The consequences of the actions of governments and public actors lead the role of religions, apparently and exclusively, to political concerns. Their faithful face the severe consequences of the political crises and the poorest cannot wait any longer to end the inclemency of the abuse of natural resources and social inequity.

“To listen the cry of the earth and the poor” (Pope Francis) is to move from expert and mercantilist knowledge to the wisdom from the actions that religions and spiritualities propitiate. The changes require imagination, to reconstruct our imagination and ethics, in order to promote a modest and austere life: A call to sobriety and to abandon arrogance and greed.

Religions and spiritualities, as representatives of the identity beliefs of the cultural diversity of our continent, are impelled to dialogue about the urgent goal to share well-being as a genuine path towards positive peace. The positive peace agenda brings the concept of “urgent” in our context as to become aware of the invisible violence, finding dialogue as the authentic peace generator through large, diverse and inclusive table conversations.

Interreligious dialogue restraint the fundamentalisms and/or integrisms that seek to impose their moral dogmas by law, validating guidelines of political radicalisms in our continent. This trend allows that, instead of subsidizing political responsibility, contaminates the dynamics that corruption evidences, "partisanizing" religion, that is, orienting it to a partisan politics.

In this sense, the generalized loss of confidence, which also affects the traditions of faith, together with the acute social crises mentioned, push all religious expressions to be part of a new visible platform with their ethical commitments responding these urgent demands that cry out for our joint actions and emphasize the need of shared well-being.

In this way, this scenario allows to visualize the dialogue of diverse religious faiths, becoming aware of these crises and, on the other hand through the public testimony of urgent cultural changes, promotes proposals towards authentic peace, transparent actions and the recovery of forgotten wisdom of those who hold power in greed.

Opportunities

Live with less to live better, overcome the ideology of unlimited growth.

To take seriously the anthropologies of other latitudes not merely Western, whose concepts of freedom can offer different imaginary for a more solidary economy and not strictly based on productivity, relational goods; as our World Assembly expresses: shared well-being.

The transition from a market economy to a market society must be reversed with the contribution of the spirituality of religions; community forms as a source of inspiration in the face of hyper-individualism: a more humane productive system, without the exploitation of nature and with the need for

interdependence. We must rediscover and share the whole ecological, relational and solidarity dimension of our traditions.

Action Proposals

The current scenario with crisis of trust and deterioration of the Latin American and Caribbean social interweave, brings a big task for the faith communities: the urgency of greater visibility of interreligious dialogue. We must broaden the borders of our dialogue, in order to respond to the urgent demand of our societies, to raise diverse religious, to join the demand of the governments of our continent; all for the development of inclusive, transparent, corruption-free and free-speech democracies.

To continue the eradication of social violence; and to propitiate the dignified migration flow as a human right.

Both religions and governments must avoid the ideological and partisan instrumentalization of the ethical, spiritual and religious customs of our peoples.

The deterioration of politics due to corruption made by its traditional actors, requires religions to subsidize the lack of commitments for shared welfare. Entrepreneurs, as well as factual actors of public policies and traditional politicians colluded in greed and illicit enrichment, leave on the religions' table the need to call for transparency and ensure that orientation and motivation are effectively towards shared well-being. In this sense, "religions in dialogue" can prevent the spread of these tendencies through inclusive dialogue and foster peace that unmask all invisible violence.

NORTH AMERICA

Key Concerns

- The importance of localization and the family unit must be emphasized. Whether this is defined as a nuclear family, an extended family, or even a religious community, much of the important interfaith work that communities need must start with these local units.
- Reconciliation is difficult if “old hurts” remain. This unresolved pain feeds intolerance and impedes restorative justice or reconciliation.
- One group pointed out, “The United States is in pieces.” This feeling is fed daily by media narratives and political events, particularly with the aftermath of the 2016 American presidential election, which has enhanced the global spotlight on issues of authoritarianism, social justice, and national democratic values in the country and broader region. One example of the fragmentation discussed is the inequality in laws across different states in the U.S. federal system. Moreover, the U.S. must come to terms with its “checkered past” and its historical treatment of minorities including Native Americans and African Americans.
- Many participants stressed the need for faith groups to speak in one voice before and in the aftermath of crises (through public statements, for example). Oftentimes, the voices of groups such as the religious right, such as right-wing Christian Evangelicals, are amplified or elevated as representatives at the expense of other faith groups.
- Overcoming ingrained prejudice in religious communities and “us vs. them” mentalities. This will require relationship-building in order to engage with people who do not necessarily agree with us. This can also mean finding points in common with groups we do not usually agree with (for example, signing a statement about an issue of mutual interest).
- There is a challenge in teaching and communicating “ancient traditions” in today’s contemporary, modern culture - particularly among youth. Moreover, as millennials outnumber the baby boomer generation as the largest population in America, they will continue to prioritize issues of social justice, pushing limits both outside and within religious institutions, and continuing to question traditional boundaries. It has been difficult for faith groups to adapt to changing times and encourage spirituality. This will require bold, inspirational leadership.
- “As religious structures, we need to serve and not be served.”
- “We need to move beyond dogma and into doing.”
- There is a gap between words and action and a need to, “put faith to work.” Members of the community are comfortable with listening to and learning religious scriptures, but there is a need to apply religious teachings and values (i.e. peace, tolerance, unity) to real-world, contemporary issues.
- “As a Hindu in the West Indian community, we go to temple on Sundays and we listen to scripture and then everyone goes home. As an activist that uses my faith as the reason that I do this work, putting those scriptures into action, I receive a lot of backlash from these temples.”
- Mental health (including suicide tendencies, gender justice, domestic violence) was listed as a key concern for the North American community. Religious leaders are often ill-equipped to address mental health concerns of their communities and are sometimes grappling with their own mental health issues. Compounding the challenge is the fact that many congregants are only comfortable

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turning to their religious leaders for guidance (fear of outsiders was one reason listed), but do not always receive the help they need.

- One group mentioned the danger of fake news and its consequences, including disseminating misinformation and fomenting violence. There is also a need to make information more accessible.

Role of Religious Resources

- Educate faith communities of North America through trainings in achieving multi-faith, sustainable peace (restorative circles, bystander intervention, non-violent communications).
- Create safe spaces to discuss pressing issues affecting the wider community. These spaces should be centered on inclusion and tolerance, and leadership should take a key role in leading discussions on sensitive tough issues.
- “We need to shake up the status quo because, really, what did the prophets do? They shook up the status quo.”
- “We need to offend because we have a fear of offense. We need to speak because we’re afraid of reactions.”
- Address secular issues that affect communities, for example taking action on forest fires in California. Communities have placed a high level of trust in their religious institutions, and as such, these entities can and should address secular issues that affect communities.

Further Capacity Building

- Participants agreed that there is a need to reach out to other local faith communities to share resources and best practices. One suggestion that was made was organizing a monthly book club or coffee hour to strengthen interfaith human connections.
- Representatives from Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus mentioned that certain religious language could be better reframed and articulated in a way that is more conducive to peace and progress. The group used the example of Hindu marriage rituals and pointed out that these practices may reinforce harmful behavior towards women.
- Leveraging new platforms (e.g. Massive Open Online Courses) to foster open spaces for discussion and facilitate the sharing of resources.
- Start interfaith work early - even at the elementary school level. One group suggested that children should be taught about other faiths and traditions (e.g. Ramadan) from a young age to enhance tolerance. One way to reach youth is through breaking down complex information or “gamifying” concepts and themes.