



TOKYO PEACE ROUNDTABLE

*Beyond War and Towards Reconciliation:
Convening Multi-Religious Peace Roundtables*

Religions for Peace



公益財団法人
世界宗教者平和会議日本委員会
Religions for Peace

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Participants of the Tokyo Peace Roundtable at Rissho Kosei-kai

SUMMARY

A Multi-Religious Leaders' Consultation

Building on a legacy of convening faith leaders to collaborate for peace, for over fifty years, and given the triple planetary crisis of climate change, public health pandemic, and war, *Religions for Peace's* World Council, a coalition of religious leaders representing their religious institutions and faith communities, called for a Peace Roundtable.

Unlike the traditional mediation or track II diplomacy contents, the objectives of these Peace Roundtables are to gather faith leaders surviving in the midst of conflicts, to identify and assess the specific roles which multi-religious leaders working together, effect, enable and catalyse, in war-torn and humanitarian contexts; identify the various strategies employed by multi religious platforms (including Interreligious Councils) in reconciliation and rebuilding social cohesion efforts; and assess the specific value-added of multi religious humanitarian support provided in diverse contexts, culling the lessons learned in how such humanitarian efforts contribute to (re)building socially cohesive contexts.

Diverse religious leaders came together in person, together with some government representatives, from **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine**. Also virtually linked in, were leaders who shared their experiences of humanitarian work in conflict settings, supported by the *Religions for Peace* established Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund, from **Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo/DRC, Thailand**, and more from **Ukraine**.

For the faith leaders to agree to travel thousands of miles, is an act of grace. In times when political leaders (and many of their religious allies) are, literally, at war, religious leaders in their midst coming together should not be underestimated. With the opportunity to sit across one table from one another, in a safe space, in a country untainted by geopolitical alliances, to share their perspective and experiences, to disagree – civilly – and to debate as they break bread together, faith leaders leaned into the challenges and opportunities, of reconciliation.

Discussions highlighted unique contexts and revealed many shared characteristics of the challenges faith leaders confronted in conflict settings. The comparative experiential narratives revealed the common difficulties of dealing with political dynamics which mitigate against attempts to create opportunities, or spaces, for reconciliation. Many pointed to the politics of religious institutions themselves, as limiting the room for manoeuvrability for relatively more peaceful rhetoric, in some cases mirroring or exacerbating national disagreements. Some lamented that religious discourses lent themselves equally well for purposes of war as to peace, and in that process, also lead to a splintering of the religious infrastructures themselves.

While there was a clear difference of opinion on whether reconciliation could already be possible amidst ongoing war or whether the war had to be halted for reconciliation to begin, there was general consensus that dialoguing for peace must not cease. Being a minority of women's voices among the gathered leaders, did not prevent the women of faith present, from **South Sudan** and **Ukraine**, from highlighting the challenges of sexual and gender-based violence, and describing their attempts to contribute to policies within their own faith communities and institutions, as well as their work with secular policy makers.

The value added of inter or multi religious platforms, and actions, as well as multireligious humanitarian support, was attested to, in all conflict settings. A strong argument was made, based on the discussions and experiences shared, for courage forged in facing similar adversities together, even if on opposite sides of a conflict, as well as enhanced accountability to one another as faith leaders. Forgiveness and reconciliation, all agreed, is *“hard work that starts in the small encounters, enabling self-reflexivity rather than finger pointing, and carving out a well within the heart for empathy and humility”* (**Mr. Elias Szczytnicki**). The seminal Peace Roundtable concluded with the faith leaders calling for continued dialogues in the same vein, and committing to recognise their responsibilities to *...“serve as peacemakers, bridge builders, and to heal our war-torn communities.”*



Participants of the Tokyo Peace Roundtable gather for a group photograph

BACKGROUND

From Kyoto to Tokyo

*“In addition to the triple planetary crisis of climate breakdown, air pollution and biodiversity loss, and the immense suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts are raging across the world”, United Nations Secretary-General, **Antonio Guterres***

The above quote is from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as he addressed the General Assembly, in August of 2022, updating them on a year’s worth of work around “Our Common Agenda”. In his presentation, Guterres also warned that the risk of nuclear confrontation is “*more acute than it has been for decades*”, referencing several simultaneous armed conflicts, taking place in almost every corner of our world.

Nuclear confrontation, in 1970, led to religious leaders, representing diverse faith traditions and institutions, from different parts of the world, coming together, to found *Religions for Peace*. The idea behind the founding then, remains pertinent today, even more so, given the simultaneity and enormity of the crisis facing humanity. Convening together as religious leaders is not a minor event, it is a statement, and a moment of geopolitical significance, at multiple levels. Convening them and enabling them to represent their institutions' strengths, to serve, together, common needs, including those of the most vulnerable, through inter-religious platforms, is a unique forte of *Religions for Peace*. Honing the skills of multi-religious diplomacy, and multi-religious service, for peace writ large, from running informational campaigns in their countries, to food distribution, to mediation of conflicts, to advocating with lawmakers to amend laws, is what *Religions for Peace* leaders, and their Interreligious Councils, do, and do well.

Religious leaders command unparalleled moral influence, in a world where 8 out of 10 people profess a particular religious affiliation. Religious institutions, whether places of worship or NGOs, serve the basic needs of hundreds of millions of people around the world – including the developed countries – and are front line humanitarian service providers. Some religious leaders today are closely affiliated with several political leaders, or parties, in many nations, and as such, wield political authority. Faith leaders, and their institutions, are therefore, combined moral, financial, and political heavyweights.

This is why the World Council (governing Board) of *Religions for Peace*, in February of 2022, urged for a meeting of faith leaders to address the multiple armed conflicts taking place, spurred by the seriousness of the nuclear threat looming as a result of the Russian assault on the Ukraine conflict, and with urgent concerns about food insecurity and dire poverty cascading over multiple parts of the world. If ever there was a time to convene to support traditional diplomacy and peacebuilding, and to offer their services to serve the common good in the midst of conflicts, it is now.

The idea of Peace Roundtables, which convene, on an equal footing, multi-religious leaders experienced in serving their communities, precisely in times of war, was thus born. The Roundtable(s) would look beyond the immediate moments and cycles of violence, finger-pointing, and apportioning of blame. Instead, the focus would be to assess, together, how to emerge from the ongoing conflict(s) towards a post-conflict reality. The conversations would be steered towards exchanging practical narratives of building social cohesion, as well as diverse reconciliation efforts, based on different conflict settings.

But this idea was not born in a vacuum. Rather, the religious leaders who have served with one another on *Religions for Peace's* Interreligious Councils, and leadership structures, were harvesting processes of diplomacy harvested over many years and tried in different contexts. They were also keen to respond to multiple calls based on deliberations during their tenth World Assembly in Lindau in 2019, and specific global consultations on “Faith and Diplomacy,” which took place on 2020 and 2021, each focusing on the perspectives and experiences impacted by gender and intergenerational knowledge, respectively. Lessons learned affirmed the need to create ‘safe spaces’ where religious leaders can come together to discuss, assess, reflect critically, and inspire one another, as well as others struggling to cope with (re)building broken infrastructure, healing social divisions, and redressing trauma.

In essence, the objectives of the Peace Roundtables are, to:

1. **Identify** and assess the specific roles which multi-religious leaders working together, effect, enable and catalyse, in war-torn and humanitarian contexts;
2. **Identify** the various strategies employed by multi religious platforms (including Interreligious Councils) in reconciliation and rebuilding social cohesion efforts;
3. **Assess** the specific value-added of multi religious humanitarian support provided in diverse contexts, culling the lessons learned in how such humanitarian efforts contribute to (re)building socially cohesive contexts.

Locating a country where religious leaders sitting on opposite sides of a conflict could agree to come, with a certain level of confidence in a relatively unbiased political setting, proved challenging. Until *Religions for Peace*-Japan, supported by WCRP Support Parliamentary Group, Japan Parliamentarians’ Group for Initiatives of Change (IC), and the International IC Association of Japan, offered to host.



Participants of the Tokyo Peace Roundtable

LEVERAGING MORAL INFLUENCE FOR THE JOURNEY OF PEACE

The inaugural convening of the *Tokyo Peace Roundtable*, held on 20-23 September in Tokyo, Japan, was attended by diverse religious leaders, faith activists, and government representatives from **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine**. These representatives from conflict-affected countries convened with *Religions for Peace* leadership from across the globe to understand and share multi-religious contributions to reconciliation and explore ways of working together to move forward processes of reconciliation and peace.

Also at the Roundtable were leaders who shared their experiences of humanitarian work supported by the Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund (established by *Religions for Peace*), from **Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo/DRC, Thailand, and Ukraine**.

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE AS “ENGINEERS OF THE ENCOUNTER” IO

The mission of the *Tokyo Peace Roundtable* was articulated during the opening interfaith prayer led by *Religions for Peace* Japan board member, **Rev. Munemichi Kurozumi**, Chief Patriarch of the Kurozumiyko Shinto, and **Ven. Eigen Onishi**, a Board Member of *Religions for Peace* Japan and Chief Priest of Jyoujyu-in at Kiyomizudera Temple. **Rev. Kurozumi** framed the *Tokyo Peace Roundtable* as an effort to “seek ways for resolving conflict without violence” so that the world no longer has to “rely on killing as a final resort to resolving problems.” **Ven. Onishi** brought up an issue that would be a reoccurring theme throughout the roundtable, the interconnected nature of humanity. According to the Buddhist principle of dependent origination, every being and phenomenon is connected, therefore, it is incumbent on humanity to embrace dialogue and cooperation.

Rev. Nichiko Niwano, President of Rissho Kosei-Kai and *Religions for Peace* Japan, also emphasised how the interconnected nature of humanity compelled him to advocate and work towards peace. His faith teaches him that “you experience the joy of others as your joy and their suffering as your suffering” which necessitates him to work with others to advance their shared enrichment. **Rev. Nichiko Niwano** called on the faith leaders who convened for the *Tokyo Peace Roundtable* to “find realistic ways for religious leaders to demonstrate the full potential of their work in this chaotic world” and harness the power of faith communities to advance reconciliation.

Rev. Niwano noted the historic commitment of *Religions for Peace* to this mission, citing the preamble to the Declaration of the 10th World Assembly of *Religions for Peace*:

“Our alliance honours our religious differences, even as it serves the peace for which the human heart hungers. We gather in hope, convinced that the sacred calls all humanity into shared responsibility for our common good, care for one another, the earth, and its entire web of life.”

The assembled leaders of the *Religions for Peace* movement echoed the calls of **Rev. Nichiko Niwano** for religious leaders to respond to the conflicts that rage around the world while recognising the invaluable opportunity offered by the *Tokyo Peace Roundtable*. As **Prof. Azza Karam**, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, observed, “this is an opportunity for faith leaders to be together and reflect on peace with peace as well as to identify actions these leaders can take for peace.”



(Left to Right): Rev. Nichiko Niwano, H.E. Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis, and Ven. Gijun Sugitani

An essential element of this reflection on peace was grappling with the very nature of peace. As **Dr. Kezevino Aram**, President of the Shanti Foundation and Co-Moderator of *Religions for Peace*, drew the attention of roundtable participants to, “*peace is not merely the absence of war.*”

His Eminence Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis, Primate of the Metropolis of Chalcedon for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Co-Moderator of *Religions for Peace*, asserted that “*true peace is not achieved by force of arms, but love that does not seek its own.*” While many people carry scars and trauma from war, he affirmed his belief in the power of reconciliation, quoting **His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew** who said that “*to reconcile is to heal the wounds of history.*” Assembling faith leaders from conflict-affected countries for the *Tokyo Peace Roundtable* was an important step towards reconciliation as there is “*no reconciliation without dialogue.*” As **His Eminence Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel** said, dialogue is “*a source of solidarity*” and “*a hope for peace.*”



(On Screen): Dr. Kezevino Aram [India]

“The degree of entanglement between the destinies of peoples...imposes a conscious sense of belonging to humanity as a large family and to the earth as our comprehensive homeland.”

His Eminence Shaykh Dr. Abdullah Bin Bayyah, President of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace and Co-Moderator of *Religions for Peace*, underlined the necessity of the *Tokyo Peace Roundtable*, noting how critical the interconnectedness of humanity is, and in turn, the link to a healthier global ecosystem. With local wars and violence threatening global security directly and indirectly, it is patently clear that



(On Screen): H.E. Shaykh Dr. Abdullah Bin Bayyah
[United Arab Emirates]

“Peace is an integral whole and that any breach of it will have effects on human beings everywhere.”

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha and Co-President of *Religions for Peace*, asserted that a requisite of peace in the world is



“establishing a sustainable peace in ourselves and around us.” If *“we all want peace, we need to change ourselves”* and if *“we want to change ourselves, we need to address our mind.”* Quoting the Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO, **Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh** declared that *“since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”* As *“God is the giver of love and peace”* then the *“mind should be immersed in God like fish in water.”*

(On Screen): *Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh [United Kingdom]*

A TOOL FORGED IN CONSENSUS: THE CHARTER OF FORGIVENESS

After faith leaders highlighted the imperative of convening to advance peace and reconciliation, **Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh** provided a framework to work towards this goal, the *Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. On 20 August 2019, at the 10th World Assembly, *Religions for Peace* adopted the *Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation* out of the conviction *“that transforming violent conflicts requires the healing of historical wounds and painful memories, forgiveness, and reconciliation.”* **Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh** quoted the Preamble that states the following:

“The vision of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the process of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation are to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek justice, harmony and sustainable peace. Fostering and practising forgiveness has the power to transform memories and deep-seated responses to legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions. Faith and spiritual traditions guide and inspire us to awaken the best of our human potential, by practising compassion, mercy, kindness, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to positively reshape our destinies.”



(Left to Right): Rev. Megumi Wada, Mrs. Margaret Barsaba

FAITH LEADERS AND/IN CONFLICT

“Let us hope that the global solidarity experienced by the people of Ukraine, will encourage us to be generous to the Global South once this conflict is over” Dr. Pavlo Smytsnyuk, Director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University.

Learning from the Encounter

Assembled representatives from **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine** discussed how faith leaders affect and are affected by conflicts. Despite the uniqueness of each context, some common features, and oddities, were identified.

Neutrality vs Political Entanglement Within and Outside of Religious Institutions

Despite each country having its own unique context, interventions from the roundtable participants revealed that there were shared dynamics, particularly concerning the precarious position of faith leaders in trying to respond to violent conflicts without being drawn into them. Religious leaders spoke about their faith compelling them to speak out in favour of justice and truth. However, they also spoke of the challenges of dealing with the political contexts, and the risk of being entangled in and compromised by temporal political conflicts. As a religious leader from **Ethiopia** stated,

“When religious leaders lose their neutrality, they lose their power.”

But it is not only the politics of the nation that was highlighted. Intra-religious politics was noted as an added layer of challenge for religious leaders. *“Church politics has an impact during conflicts and some of us have to consider the implications and to deal with those too”* noted **Mr. Vakhtang Kipshidze**, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Synodal Department for Relations between Church, Society and Media. **Dr. Mohammad Habash**, Founder of the Studies Center for Enlightenment and Civilisation Research, reflecting on the ongoing Syrian dynamics also noted that *“political ideas challenge religious ideals, and compromise the soft power of religious means”*.

The Splintering of Religious Institutions

When faith communities become ensnared in conflict, religious institutions can splinter, precipitating fraternal violence between co-religionists. **Ethiopian** representatives spoke of the schisms in faith communities between government loyalists and those sympathetic to opposition movements. Orthodox and Muslim leaders visited the Army during the Tigray conflict, leading some Tigray religious leaders to establish their own parallel institutions.

Religious institutions being engulfed in political conflicts was also a concern in the war between Ukraine and Russia, with intra-Orthodox tensions stemming from disagreement over ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Ukraine between His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy of the Moscow Patriarchate and His Beatitude Metropolitan Epiphanius of the Kyiv Patriarchate. In addition to transforming political conflicts into religious ones, this entanglement of religion in war can make faith leaders primary actors in violence. As a religious leader from **Syria** observed,

“Sometimes religious leaders are part of the problem, not the solution.”

Despite noting the need for caution so as to not be ensnared in political conflicts, the assembled faith leaders from conflict-affected countries also observed that faith communities cannot entirely withdraw themselves, particularly as innocent faithful fall as victims of war or houses of worship are bombed. A representative from **Ukraine** stressed that in the ongoing war, Churches, Mosques and Synagogues are being destroyed, illustrating that all communities suffer during conflict.

Cease Conflict and then Reconcile, or Seek to Reconcile Amidst Conflict?

“If we are speaking about reconciliation, I do not believe we should wait for the end of the war,”

Mr. Vakhtang Kipshidze, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Synodal Department for Relations between Church, Society and Media

In addition to contending with the precarious position of faith leaders and religious institutions during war, the roundtable participants argued about the question of when processes of reconciliation should begin. Generally, two schools of thought seemed to dominate. One arguing that for reconciliation to begin, the cessation of violence was a prerequisite. Another argument was that reconciliation itself could be a path to end violence. Despite the disagreement, there was some consensus over the importance of religious leaders coming together, even as conflict is ongoing, and the powerful message that sends.

As **Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf**, President of *Religions for Peace* Europe, said, *“Let’s be courageous to agree that we don’t agree, and still come together.”* **Rabbi Joseph Potasnik**, Honorary President of *Religions for Peace*, having just returned from a mission to visit Ukrainian refugees in Poland, asked

“How do we convince political leaders that compromise is in their political interest, when we ourselves do not compromise?”

“Dehumanising those on either side of the conflict”, argued **Rabbi Potasnik**, *“turns us all into beasts”*. *“We still need to see the face of God in our enemy”*, noted **Archbishop Yevstratiy Zoria**, Archbishop of Chernihiv and Deputy Head of the External Church Relations Department of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.



Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf [Switzerland]

Archbishop Yevstratiy Zoria [Ukraine]



The Paradox of 'using' Religious Justifications and the Advantages of Interreligious Platforms

Dr. Habash lamented the paradox of how sometimes the same holy books are used to justify war, and to urge for peace. *"Yes, there are religions for peace, but there are also religions for war". "As faith leaders," he argued, "we must be against any war, any weapons, any violence... for there is no honour in war."* *"The road to reconciliation even in the height of conflict," he argued, "requires an active struggle against cultures of hate by embracing other faiths and beliefs as one's own."* To do so, he affirmed, is possible through interreligious platforms which habituate faith leaders and societies, to come together as a matter of normal. Such platforms, or spaces, can be key to the work of reconciliation even as conflicts break out.

"The road to reconciliation even in the height of conflict requires an active struggle against cultures of hate by embracing other faiths and beliefs as one's own".



Dr. Mohammad Habash [Syria]

Archbishop Albert Chama, Primate of the Church of the Province of Central Africa, also weighed in on the strategic and pragmatic value added of interreligious platforms. As religious leaders working together, *"[in interreligious spaces], we can encourage each other to be more risk taking, than if each one of us is working alone."* Also by coming together in voice and action, he noted, *"we can change each other's hearts and become partners [rather than] constant adversaries."* Ultimately, as he and other faith leaders argued, *"we have to struggle against the monopoly of God, or of heaven."*

Gendered Dynamics

Mrs. Margaret Barsaba, Chairlady of the South Sudan Women of Faith Network from South Sudan, was one of the few voices to speak as a woman of faith about the context of women of faith in conflicts. She highlighted the ‘blowback’ on women, in the midst of conflict, noting that the frustrations felt by many men who felt disempowered by the war, were oftentimes inflicted on the women within families. As women of faith serving the needs of their communities, **Mrs. Barsaba** also noted that they had deeper, wider, and more intimate access within their communities, and could therefore gauge social dynamics, particularly impacts on women, children and the elderly, in ways male faith leaders could not. But there is another value added women of faith bring to reconciliation efforts, as also articulated by **Her Excellency Dr. Olena Bohdan**, Head of State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience: speaking with the power of women’s experience and the nuanced realities of women’s voices, to political and religious leaders, and appealing to them, should not be undermined, they argued. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that women of faith spoke up for peace only. As further discussions between participants illustrated, women officials can often be as determined to argue for some form of justice before any attempts at reconciliation, as some male leaders.



Mrs. Margaret Barsaba [South Sudan]



Her Excellency Dr. Olena Bohdan [Ukraine]



MULTI-RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO CRISES

After the interventions from representatives from conflict-affected countries, leaders from *Religions for Peace*'s regional bodies presented on their experiences advancing peace and reconciliation in their respective regions to offer examples demonstrating how multi-religious collaboration can be used to respond to conflict. **Rev. Dr. Albert Chama**, Archbishop and Primate of the Church of the Province of Central Africa and Co-Chair of African Council of Religious Leaders - *Religions for Peace* (ACRL), asserted that the power of religious leaders is their ability to engage their communities, particularly young people who yearn for a brighter future. In ACRL, faith leaders look at the root cause of problems and seek to steward dialogue for reconciliation between conflicting parties.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf explained the way *Religions for Peace* Europe was addressing the fallout from the war between Ukraine and Russia. Interreligious Councils throughout Europe are working to welcome Ukrainian refugees who had been displaced by conflict. These same multi-religious bodies also took firm stances in defence of Russians living in Europe who were targeted by people looking for outlets for their anger against the Kremlin. *Religions for Peace* Europe also reached out to **His Holiness Patriarch Kirill**, Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and former member of the European Council of Religious Leaders, to urge him to “*protect and support people of all religious traditions, and all human beings*” and to use his “*influence and wisdom to petition the political authorities in Russia, to unconditionally oppose this brutal violence...and to call for an immediate return to dialogue and negotiations.*”

Drawing attention to the importance of multi-religious collaborative action in addressing historical wounds, **Rev. Dr. Yoshinori Shinohara**, Secretary General of the Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace* (ACRP), explained the context for the creation of ACRP. “*It was in 1976 that ACRP was founded to build peace through cooperation among religions in Asia. At that time, the scars of World War II remained, and regional conflicts and civil wars were taking place in Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, and other countries under the Cold War structure.*” As **Rev. Shinohara** noted, ACRP’s commitment to aiding the vulnerable was on display at the 1st ACRP Assembly in Singapore when they chartered boats to help Vietnamese refugees. Through ACRP’s programmes on peacebuilding, environmental protection and human rights, one can see that “*this spirit of immediate action...has been carried forward to today’s ACRP.*” ACRP’s commitment to reconciliation is apparent in its work trying to ease the tensions between Japan, the Koreas, and China, harnessing the power of faith communities working together to overcome painful histories.



(Left to Right): Ms. Yasuko Miyoshi, Rev. Dr. Yoshinori Shinohara, and Rev. Dr. Masahiro Nemoto

Mr. Elias Szczytnicki, Secretary General and Regional Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Religious Leaders – *Religions for Peace* (LACCRL), further elaborated on the role of faith leaders in promoting reconciliation and healing wounds. **Mr. Szczytnicki** raised the issue of truth, asking “*How can we take steps towards reconciliation if the facts of the past are not known?*” In Latin America, this need for truth was the impetus for the creation of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to address crimes and atrocities committed during authoritarian regimes and civil wars.

As **Mr. Szczytnicki** explained, faith leaders were critical actors in these commissions. In Argentina, the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas de Argentina* (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons in Argentina)—the first official commission in Argentine history with the participation of a Methodist pastor, a Jewish rabbi and a Catholic bishop—uncovered the ways antisemitism was mobilised by the junta as a weapon of the state. While similar commissions in Peru, Chile, and Guatemala brought diverse faith leaders to discuss the ways religious communities had been subsumed into political conflict, they also revealed the ways interfaith work can be a powerful force for peace. In Chile, “*the Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile (COPACHI), created by the Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, and Methodist Pentecostal Churches, and Jewish Community, was the only institution aiding the victims in the first years of the dictatorship.*”

To further illustrate the power of multi-religious collaboration in responding to crises, recipients of support from the Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund (MRHF) presented on their work. The Moderator of the session, **Ms. Deepika Singh**, Associate Secretary General and Director of Programmes, in her introductory remarks provided a brief background on the Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund, a unique funding mechanism established by *Religions for Peace* in 2020 to support multi-religious work addressing and responding to humanitarian crises. The Fund has provided 37 seed grants across the globe, including 17 to those initiatives and projects that support and assist those most affected by conflict.



Mr. Elias Szczytnicki [Peru]

Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director of the Interfaith Center of New York and board member of Afghans4Tomorrow, spoke on the way this fund—the first multi-religious fund to support interfaith responses to humanitarian disasters—helped faith communities work together to establish a school and protect access to education for all, particularly girls. **Rt. Rev. Francisco Duque-Gomez**, an Anglican Bishop and President of the Colombian Interreligious Council, demonstrated how faith communities came together during a difficult time—the COVID-19 pandemic—to address the crisis of domestic violence and femicide.

Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace's* Interreligious Council of Thailand, provided an example of faith communities working in war conditions—the South Thailand Insurgency—to provide support to vulnerable families while strengthening social cohesion. **Dr. Taras Dzyubansky**, Director of the Ukraine-based Libertas Center for Interreligious Dialogue, concluded the session with an illustration of the power of faith to address the wounds of war, presenting on a MRHF-supported programme that provided care to those experiencing psychological trauma from war.



(On Screen): Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit [Thailand]



(On Screen): Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer [United States]



Participants of the Tokyo Peace Roundtable gather for a group photograph

MOVING FORWARD FAITHFULLY

Peace as a Journey Rather than a Destination

After the Roundtable dialogues and intensive discussion, the religious leaders from conflict-affected countries agreed to release a **Statement** affirming their commitment to reconciliation processes and to continued dialogue out of shared belief that their faiths compel them “*to serve a lifelong pilgrimage of Justice, to witness, and to speak [their] truths.*” As **Rev. Dr. Masahiro Nemoto**, Deputy Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, observed, “*coming together and adopting a joint statement is an achievement.*” Despite disagreement over ongoing conflicts, these assembled religious leaders were able to come together to speak openly with one another and discuss ways that they can serve efforts at reconciliation.

The religious leaders called for the following:

1. A *commitment* from all stakeholders to long-term processes of reconciliation, to avoid the reoccurrence of cycles of violence, based upon the need for healing and forgiveness and the charter thereof;
2. A *continuation* of multi-religious peace dialogue roundtables, to bring together religious leaders from all sides of conflicts to share wisdom and build multi-religious cooperation and peace.
3. A *recognition* of the sanctity of human life, and the imperative for all of us to continue to cultivate love for every single human being.”

The *Tokyo Peace Roundtable* concluded with the signing of this statement and reflections on efforts at promoting peace from Japanese religious and political leaders who hosted the dialogues. **Hon. Yukihasa Fujita**, the former Senior Vice Minister of Finance and Chairman of International Initiatives of Change (IC) Association of Japan, noting the power of faith leaders to respond to political conflict, drew attention to the fact that *“while it is difficult to change the minds of politicians, religious people can influence the hearts and minds of citizens who have influence over politicians.”*

Extolling the bravery of religious leaders in overcoming disagreements to come together for dialogue, **Rev. Yoshiharu Tomatsu**, the Chair of *Religions for Peace* Japan exhorted the world to embrace dialogue as a way of overcoming division, calling on people to understand that *“if we work together to understand each other and we never give up, someday we can realise reconciliation and peace for our lives and restoration of the world.”* **Rev. Kosho Niwano**, President-Designate of Rissho Kosei-Kai and Co-Moderator of *Religions for Peace*, encapsulated the shared belief in the invaluable nature of peace observing that *“our lives may be rich with material things, but if we are selfish and exclusive, we will not achieve peace.”*

In their own words, faith leaders said:

“While we differ on many aspects of our respective contexts, we are nevertheless able to come together as people of faith, and to pray together for those experiencing unimaginable suffering...”

We discussed what we have learned over these three days about our own and other’s understandings of multi-religious contributions to reconciliation as a coalition of multi-religious leaders and representatives, what can we realistically do to move forward processes of reconciliation and peace.

We recognise our responsibilities to also seek to be sensitive to the power of the word, and of the imperative of truth, to serve as peacemakers, bridge builders, and to heal our war-torn communities.”

In their own words, this is their ultimate commitment, which distinguishes religious leaders from other constituencies:

“We commit to ongoing dialogues, because we believe that our faiths demand us to serve a lifelong pilgrimage of Justice, to witness, and to speak our truths.”

Beyond War and Towards Reconciliation: Convening Multi-Religious Peace Roundtables

Tokyo Peace Roundtable

21-23 September 2022

Statement

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We, leaders of religious institutions, bodies and faiths (Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam), from Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Russia, South Sudan, Syria and Ukraine, coming from contexts of conflict and war, have completed our meetings in Tokyo, on 21-23 September 2022, at the first multi-religious Peace Roundtable.

We are joined by leaders (Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, Shinto, Christian, Muslim and Sikh) who shared their experiences of humanitarian work supported by the Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund, from Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo/DRC, Thailand, and also from Ukraine.

While we differ on many aspects of our respective contexts, we are nevertheless able to come together as people of faith, and to pray together for those experiencing unimaginable suffering.

We are grateful to one another for the table we shared, and to our hosts, for convening us around this multireligious peace roundtable.

We discussed what we have learned over these three days about our own and other's understandings of multi-religious contributions to reconciliation as a coalition of multi-religious leaders and representatives, what can we realistically do to move forward processes of reconciliation and peace.

We recognise our responsibilities to also seek to be sensitive to the power of the word, and of the imperative of truth, to serve as peacemakers, bridge builders, and to heal our war-torn communities.

We commit to ongoing dialogues, because we believe that our faiths demand us to serve a lifelong pilgrimage of Justice, to witness, and to speak our truths.

Together We call for:

1. A *commitment* from all stakeholders to long-term processes of reconciliation, to avoid the reoccurrence of cycles of violence, based upon the need for healing and forgiveness and the charter thereof;
2. A *continuation* of multi-religious peace dialogue roundtables, to bring together religious leaders from all sides of conflicts to share wisdom and build multi-religious cooperation and peace.
3. A *recognition* of the sanctity of human life, and the imperative for all of us to continue to cultivate love for every single human being.

SIGNED by RLs

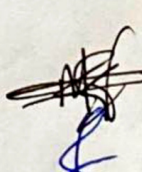
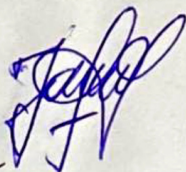
庭野 光祥

Kosho Niwano

Jhon Shabon

+ Obcharty Yerstety

Alehopolitan Sammanel



Margaret Barsaba

Ahmedih Jebel mohammed

Mohamad Habach

Vakhtang Kipshvaze



Rev. Kosho Niwano [Japan]



*Mr. Ymilikal Shiferaw Messulu
[Ethiopia]*



H.E. Hon. Issaka Sourwèma [Burkina Faso]



Prof. Azza Karam



*(Left to Right): H.E. Elder Metropolitan
Emmanuel, Rev. Dr. Ihor Shaban*



Ven. Eigen Onishi [Japan]



Rev. Munemichi Kurozumi [Japan]



*(Left to Right): H.E. Dr. Olena Bobdan,
Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf, Dr. Mark Owen,
Ustaz Ahmedin Jebel Mohammed*



(Left to Right): Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Rabbi Aharon Gurevich



(Left to Right): Rev. Megumi Wada, Dr. Mark Owen, Rev. Kosho Niwano



*Ustaz Ahmedin Jebel Mohammed
[Ethiopia]*



*(Left to Right): Mrs. Margaret Barsaba,
Ven. Eigen Onishi*



*(Left to Right): Mufti Albir-Hazrat Krganov,
Mr. Vakhtang Kipshidze*



*(Left to Right): H.E. Dr. Olena Bohdan, Rev.
Yoshiharu Tomatsu*

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