



THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION
OF THE
5TH WORLD ASSEMBLY

1989

The Fifth Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace has met in Melbourne, Australia. It records its gratitude that it met in a nuclear-weapons-free zone. We came, nearly 600 of us, from many of the world's religious traditions and from some 60 countries. A women's meeting and a youth meeting preceded the main conference. Thirty-five percent of the participants were women, fifteen percent youth. Though we are of different religions, we have all come with a common commitment to seek peace, pursue justice, and preserve the sacredness of nature

Signs of Hope

We share many feelings. First we feel a sense of hope, stimulated because of developments in the international arena occurring since 1987. The Central American Peace Process brought progress toward the resolution of the tragic conflicts in that region of the world. Fighting has ended between Iran and Iraq, and hope for a speedy conclusion of fighting in Afghanistan follows the planned withdrawal of Soviet troops from that country. Progress has been made toward the withdrawal of South Africa from Namibia and the complete independence of that country. In the field of disarmament, the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, concluded by the United States and the Soviet Union, will lead to the dismantling of certain classes of nuclear weapons. The recent world conference in Paris condemning the use of poisonous gas in warfare may indeed lead to the end of the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons.

Many people have shared the hope for the potential end of the Cold War. Freedom and democracy have become realistic goals in countries long noted for their dictatorial systems. In some nations where the concept of the national security state has resulted in internally repressive regimes, democratic practices are once again emerging with the prospects of renewed rights and freedom. Changes in the Middle East increase the potential and the necessity for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be resolved. The agreement reached at the Vienna Conference (CSCE) raises new hopes for human rights in Europe. The worldwide ecological crisis is creating a new awareness of our global interdependence and the necessity to find ways of preserving the environment. The concept of the sacredness of the land and our unity with it is deeply felt in many places in the world. In many countries, people of differing cultures and religions are striving to find ways of creating pluralistic societies. And around the world, religious people are meditating and praying together for peace as in Assisi, 1986; Mt. Hiei, 1987; and elsewhere.

Second, we share a sense of anticipation as the 20th century draws to a close. We hope to enter the next century with a better understanding of our common humanity and common destiny. The conflicts and problems of the 20th century should not be allowed to enter or destroy the 21st century. Signs of hope exist. In Europe, a political-economic community will come into being in 1992, committed to unity within and peaceful relations without. Hong Kong and Macao will be reunited with the People's Republic of China by the end of the cen-

“We share a sense of anticipation as the 20th century draws to a close. We hope to enter the next century with a better understanding of our common humanity and common destiny. The conflicts and problems of the 20th century should not be allowed to enter or destroy the 21st century.”

tury, ending an era of colonial rule. There is growing consciousness of the need to resolve the global debt crisis and create a more just and sustainable economy. This is accompanied by critical self-examination by many national governments of their economic, social, political, and cultural policies. Words such as freedom, identity, minority rights, openness, and reconstruction now have new meaning. A vision of a world community is beginning to take shape.

Third, there is an increased awareness of the importance of moral values in human life. Humanity can shape matters of life and death. We need not be subject to blind fates or political forces beyond our reach. Rationality and technology are not the ultimate values of human existence. Human rights are not to be defined by or for political and other conveniences, but defended because of their inherent values.

Fourth, the United Nations is being revitalized as nations have once again begun to use the U.N. as an effective instrument for achieving and sustaining peace, justice, and freedom. We rejoice that the United Nations peacekeeping force has been awarded the 1988 Nobel Peace Prize. The special effort of the U.N. to conclude a Convention on the Rights of the Child has focused concern upon the world's children, those who will inherit the situation we have created for the 21st century.

Fifth, education systems involving the media and other forms of communication are being developed in order to educate people for peace and justice, creating respect for all peoples, cultures, and faiths.

Finally, a willingness on the part of many religions is emerging whereby they contribute their finest and deepest inspirations, and cooperate with each other and with all who share common concerns in order to achieve lasting peace; a humane social and physical environment; a world not suffering from poverty, oppression, and often avoidable sickness and death, including the ravages of AIDS; endemic wars; discrimination; and the other powers that plague our peoples.

We are grateful for these signs of hope, because five years ago the Nairobi Assembly met in a context of despair. Yet we are also realists. The nuclear threat still exists. Chemical weapons have been used in recent years. Many countries face incredible debts and remain in conflict with external economic powers, states, transnational corporations, and financial institutions. Torture and other forms of inhumanity are still rampant. The apartheid system in South Africa continues its defiant, oppressive course.

The excesses of consumer waste are often revealed in patterns of exploitation of people and depletion of resources. The environment is still polluted without sufficient thought for the consequences. "Small" wars are still being fought with tragic consequences. Militarism still dominates many societies. The problems of refugees continue. Political and religious fanaticism violates human rights and freedoms. All forms of discrimination persist against women, ethnic, religious, and racial groups, indigenous peoples, and marginalized sections of society.

As people of religion, we ask what we can do to preserve the changes that have improved the human condition and to address those problems that remain. Human greed, self-interest, and pride will not disappear just by a change of the century. We must keep alive the conviction that the achievement of human happiness and fulfillment is dependent upon higher spiritual powers, powers which enable us to believe that peace is possible.

As people of religion we have responded to a call to build peace through trust. We realize that there are many definitions of trust. Therefore we must first break down the walls of mistrust. For us, trust is active. We must acknowledge the manifold causes of mistrust that beset us as individuals, as people, even as religions. When we ask what creates fear in others, we sometimes forget that the fears of others may stem from our insecurities and fears, our greed and selfishness, our striving for power and possession, our arrogance and ignorance.

We are sustained by a spiritual trust - our belief in the creative forces within the universe by which we are given life, in which we find beauty, by which we perceive truth, by which we live in hope. That spiritual trust is liberating and enabling. It is based on our living in harmony with the sources of our being, with other humans and with all of nature.

Building Peace Through Trust

How, then, do we build peace through trust?

1. We build trust through disarmament and through the strengthening of institutions for conflict resolution. This kind of trust implies risk and vulnerability, because it depends on acceptance of mutual dependence rather than a reliance on mutual terror. In the field of disarmament, however, the recent development gives us hope that further progress can be made by reducing inter-continental ballistic missiles by 50 percent; stopping all nuclear weapons tests; banning the production and use of biological and chemical weapons; reducing conventional arms and arms trade; and adopting a comprehensive program of disarmament, including eliminating all nuclear weapons, by the year 2000.

To facilitate this process we have to develop confidence-building measures by broadening zones of peace and nuclear-free zones; by preventing an arms race in outer space; by converting from military to civilian economy; and by shifting military-based research to peace-oriented research. In this way, the resources used for military purposes may be directed toward social, beneficial use, and thus disarmament and development can be linked.

We recognize the role of the United Nations as one of the most effective conflict-resolution structures in the light of its recent achievements, and want to help strengthen its role through our cooperation with it. At the same time, in its capacity as a religious Non-Government Organization at the United Nations, Religions for Peace has to serve all the more actively as an instrument of reconciliation wherever it is possible, particularly in those situations in which religious issues and forces contribute to the conflict. In this context we would welcome

the convening of an International Conference on the Middle East under United Nations auspices.

2. We build trust through the protection and preservation of human rights for all peoples. This kind of trust implies responsibility, a readiness to be accountable for the well being of all, particularly those who are powerless or marginalized in our societies.

Women and children are the most vulnerable groups in our societies. Forced labor, drug usage, and sexual exploitation all provide examples of the denial and degradation of their basic human rights. They are the first victims of war and they constitute over 80 percent of the present 13.5 million refugees. Because of these problems, we reaffirm our support for the efforts of the U.N. Development Fund for Women. We also support efforts to conclude the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. The rapid decimation of indigenous peoples and of their unique culture goes hand in hand with the degradation of our environment. Because of this plight, we strive for the speedy and full adoption of the draft U.N. Declaration of Indigenous Rights.

Moral duty impels all people of faith to work for a greater justice. Warring political ideologies still curtail religious freedom in many countries. Religious fanaticism and intolerance only serve further to fuel insecurities. These struggles threaten world security. Often conflicts have both religious and political components, as in the Sudanese, the Afghan, the Israeli-Palestinian, and the South African cases. We must seek non-violent resolution of these struggles. In this regard, we are grateful for the effective role played by the U.N. and its peacekeeping forces. We also rejoice at the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we call on our respective faith communities to join in this celebration. The growing trust shown in the United Nations family of organizations gives us hope for the future.

3. We build trust by the creation of economic systems that provide for and assure the well being of all, and that conserve and respect the ecological balances of nature. This kind of trust implies that we are the inheritors of a bountiful nature of which we are the stewards, to protect it, share it, and pass it on to our children and their children in wholeness.

Economic systems must be measured by ethical criteria, by how justly they provide for the well being of all members of society, and by how they respect and use the environmental base that sustains all life.

Current economic systems do not measure well, as reflected in the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, the burden of debt which impacts every society; the exploitation of human and natural resources located in some countries which supports the affluence and technological growth of other countries; and the massive displacement of population caught up in rural-urban migration.

We renew the longstanding hope for the creation of a new international economic order, assuring more equitable distribution of goods and services and greater participation in decision-making by the people.

Aware that economic and political structures are often intertwined with the religious structures of society, we call on the world's religious communities to examine their links to the power structures, and their own economic activity.

Our religious traditions agree that nature is to be respected. We are both trustees of nature and dependent upon it. Evidence abounds regarding the abuse and degradation of our global environment. We have polluted the oceans with toxic waste, and cut down forests for short-term gain or to make way for industrial land usage. These and other careless uses of our resources have resulted both in the greenhouse effect and in the depletion of the ozone layer.

Realizing that the condition of our common future will be determined by our current environment and industrial practices, we call for increasing global consciousness of environmental issues. Our technological research should be directed toward the progressive upgrading of a sustainable global eco-system. Long-range planning for waste disposal, reforestation, and the conservation of non-renewable resources should be advocated and quickly implemented. We will indeed be held accountable for our stewardships of the inheritance we are to pass on to all living being in the 21st century.

Non-violence is love, and love is the most powerful force against injustice and violence. Readiness to suffer for truth and justice can be an effective non-violent action. The use or threat of violence destroys trust. Hatred and the misuse of anger are forms of violence. There can be no building of peace where violence is involved. The roots of violence lie in the human condition. Therefore, the cultivation of non-violent behavior, not only in our spiritual witness, but also through challenging media portrayals of enemies and glorification of violence, are necessary steps for peace and trust.

We need to challenge patterns of education which perpetuate prejudice and stereotypes, those in our textbooks, our religious teachings, our political rhetoric, wherever we focus on violence as power, prestige, and solution. Since "history" is often shaped by the powerful, we should recognize that the difficulty of oppressed peoples to escape from "unjust histories" destroys their ability to trust.

Religious communities and religious leaders can assist in global education, promoting positive learning experiences related to peoples of other cultures and other religions, in shaping their own religious curricula, and in monitoring those resources that are used in their respective communities. They can also model patterns of behavior that strengthen strong and loving family relations, which provide the context for transformative social behavior.

“Lead Us from Fear to Trust”

Lead us from fear to trust. Lead us from common terror to common security as we surrender our reliance on armaments, accept and love our enemies. Lead us from casualness to responsibility as we recognize in the suffering of others our oneness in the human family. Lead us from greed and selfishness to compassionate service as we acknowledge that the inheritance of the earth and all creation is not only to us, but to others and all succeeding generations. Lead us from ignorance to knowledge, from violence to non-violence, as we learn of one another, as we overcome our suspicions, as we grow in patience and the ability to love, and as we ourselves experience true inward peace.

Religions for Peace 