

Religions for Peace

Special NAM Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development

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Your Excellency President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo of the Republic of the Philippines

Your Excellency Secretary of Foreign Affairs Mr. Alberto G. Romulo

Your Excellency President of the United Nations General Assembly Mr. Ali Abdussalam Trekki

Your Excellency Egyptian Minister of Endowments Mr. Mohamoud Hamdi Zakzouk

Your Excellencies and all Esteemed Participants,

It is a pleasure to thank the Republic of Philippines for their leadership in organizing this important event.

To go forward, religious believers must, first of all, acknowledge that their religions traditions have at times been abused by extremists. Then, standing together across all religious differences, they must reject this abuse.

Second, diverse religious communities and governments must work together on common problems. We need to put those problems squarely before us.

We know too well the blood of war, how it kills, maims and destroys the lives of the innocent. We know too well the crushing weight of poverty, how it stunts, humiliates and plunders. We know too well the children lost or held back by preventable diseases and denied educations. These and the abuses to our environment are genuine threats to peace. They are common problems. They call us to cooperative action.

Third, religious communities see—each from the angle of its own faith tradition—the soul deadening and often brutal impacts of denying the human spirit its fundamental openness to and freedom before that Transcendent Mystery that grounds our existence.

Pope Benedict’s speech to the United Nations on April 18, 2008, recalled the profound upheavals that humanity experienced coinciding with the formation of the UN. The Pope noted that when the meaning of transcendence is abandoned, freedom and human dignity are grossly violated.

Similar sentiments on the same topic abound in many religious traditions. Recently, Muslims have written to Christians on the “Love of God and the Love of the Neighbor,” underscoring that they are inseparably linked. We find teachings making a similar point in religion after religion. The Buddhist tradition, for example, emphasizes that voluntarily going beyond oneself in self-emptying compassion for the well-being of “the other” is the key to one’s own salvation.

So it is that—despite real religious and theological differences—the moral sensibilities of diverse religious communities converge in a shared conviction:

Our human family is faced with new, urgent and decisive threats to peace. Action that combines justice with forgiveness must be urgently taken. But, we can never take a merely expedient stance, a short-term position that undermines the inviolable dignity and freedom of every human person.

So it is that cooperative action among religious communities and between states for peace must express our common commitments to honor and protect the inviolable dignity of each person.

Three decisive steps are needed:

First, religious communities should unite to build the simple and honest mechanism that can serve principled multi-religious cooperation for peace on every level: local, national, regional and global. This is what the religious leaders in *Religions for Peace* have been laboring to do for forty years. The *Religions for Peace* World Council is joined by 70 national and 5 regional affiliated councils. All are action-oriented, many are already

cooperating with governments, but more governmental partnerships are needed.

Second, governments can and should better equip themselves for partnerships with religious and multi-religious bodies. How many Foreign Ministries have portfolios dealing with religious cooperation? Each government's main agencies—those dealing with domestic and those dealing with international affairs—need to become equipped to enter into principled partnerships with religious and multi-religious bodies in the service of the common good. In short, states need to build strategies and equip themselves for partnerships with religious communities.

Third, and finally, our common conviction on personal morality expressed as “do to others as you wish done to you” needs to be translated into a new political paradigm.

We need to forge a notion of “shared security.” Today, my security depends on yours. Yes, we can and do respect the need for state security. Yes, we are grateful for the expanded notion of human security. But, these are not enough. Today, no walls can be built high enough to protect ourselves from the needs of others. Their security has to be our concern. We are no safer than the most vulnerable among us.

In purely practical terms, we know we've got to work together. In religious terms, we've always known this, for each religion has advanced its own variation of “treat the other as yourself.”

Thus today, addressing the practical realities related to our vulnerability and following the great religious moral imperatives to care for the other coincide.

In conclusion, religious communities and governments have different and quite distinct identities, mandates and capacities. Cooperation between them should respect these differences, even as it helps us all to build the peace for which our hearts hunger.

Thank you.