

WORLD RELIGIONS LEADERS TO SPEAK WITH ‘ONE VOICE’

MARITES N. SISON, Religions for Peace newsletter, 18 May, 2010

Religious leaders from around the world are gathering in Winnipeg next month to urge the richest nations to boost their efforts to address poverty, climate change and conflict.

“Our hope is that we can speak with one voice...that we both encourage and challenge world leaders to really give serious attention to commitments they made since 2000,” said Archbishop Fred Hiltz, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Canadian delegation to the 2010 World Religions Summit, which Archbishop Hiltz will lead, includes 22 member denominations of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) and 24 other faith-based organizations. Indigenous leaders from Canada will also attend.

In a statement, Elder David Courchene of the Anishnabe Nation Eagle Clan in Manitoba made it clear that aboriginal people intend to participate “in a very serious way, where we can make a contribution equal to any other belief system in the world.”

The summit will be held at the University of Winnipeg from June 21 to 23, just before the meetings of the G8 and G20 in Huntsville, Ont., and Toronto on June 25 to 27. The G8 is a group of seven of the world’s leading industrialized nations (France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, US, Canada plus Russia.); the G20 is made up of the finance ministers and central bank governors of 19 countries, plus the European Union.

Faith leaders are expected to finalize “A Time for Inspired Leadership” a statement that will be presented to the G8 political leaders. “...we expect leaders to put first the needs and values of the majority of the world’s population, of future generations and of Earth itself,” say faith leaders in a draft statement. They also note that half of the world’s population lives in poverty. “A record one billion people are now chronically hungry and one in seven does not have the food needed for basic life.”

For the first time in the summit’s six-year history, there will be significant youth representation and participation. According to Archbishop Hiltz, youth want to play an active role, not sit on the sidelines. “They want...to sit in [on] sessions, [and] to make their own statement...,” he said. “I think it’s wonderful.”

This is the sixth annual summit since 2005, when the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams [and a Co-President of the *Religions for Peace* World Council] and the Rev. Jim Wallis, a leading American evangelical, led faith leaders in urging G8 nations to fulfill their commitment to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Adopted in 2000, the MDGs range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV-AIDS and providing universal primary education by 2015.

The summit is “not a case of saying [to G8 leaders] ‘You failed, you failed,’ ” said Archbishop Hiltz. “What we want to do is say, ‘Let’s...really make some serious renewed effort towards significant steps of realization.’”

In its own statement, the United Church of Canada said that addressing poverty “is

the most important means we have to relieve the greatest suffering and this is always the first claim of right relationships. We invest in peace because we are called never to give up hope for a world freed from the destruction and agony of war.”

The Rev. Karen Hamilton, general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches [and a Co-President of the *Religions for Peace* World Council] and key organizer of the World Religions Summit, has urged Canadians to take part in advocating for the MDGs by meeting with their elected Member of Parliament and holding him or her to account “to the promises they have already made and to the promises they will make.”