

Subject: Press Release: Religious Leaders Urge G8 to Take Urgent Action

**World Religious Leaders Urge G8 Governments
to Take Action on Violent Conflict and Climate Change**
*—Religious leaders of different faiths from 25 countries convene
parallel G8 Summit for Peace in Hokkaido, Japan—*

(SAPPORO, JAPAN 4 July 2008)—Senior leaders of different faiths from *Religions for Peace*, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition, called on the Group of 8 (G8) governments to take bold action to address violent conflict and climate change.

The leaders were among the 100 who gathered for the “World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace” in advance of the G8 meeting in Hokkaido, Japan, held on 2–3 July 2008 at the Sapporo Convention Center. The senior religious leaders represented the world's major faith traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, Shintoism and Zoroastrianism.

“We are united in our call to the G8 to take bold action to address the threats that confront humanity, including the destruction of the environment and climate change, extreme global poverty and deteriorating food security, nuclear arms, terrorism and violent conflict. Addressing these threats requires urgent action by the G8,” the religious leaders said in a statement. [See full text below.]

“We must draw attention to the link between the health of the environment and war,” said the Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, Moderator of Religions for Peace. “In addition to killing people, disrupting the lives of entire societies and thwarting development, war destroys the ecosystem. We religious leaders urge the G8 governments to a reduction of total national defense and military expenditures and utilize the saved funds to establish an Earth Fund dedicated to environmental protection.”

On Friday, 4 July 2008, a *Religions for Peace* delegation delivered the call to action to Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in Tokyo, Japan. The delegation included H.E. Dr. Mustafa Cerić, Reis-I-ulema, Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Chief Rabbi Gutman, Chief Rabbi of Strasburg, France; Rev. Nichiko Niwano, Chairman, *Religions for Peace*–Japan; His Grace John O. Onaiyekan, Archbishop

of Abuja in Nigeria; and Sheikh Tayser Rajab al-Tamimi, Supreme Judge of Sharia Courts in Palestine.

H.E. Prime Minister Fukuda said he would to deliver the religious leaders' statement to his fellow G8 heads of state. "Our global challenges require cooperation among all sectors and peoples. It is now time for religious and political leaders to dialogue and work hand in hand to tackle our common problems," he said.

"Terrorism—the intentional killing of innocent people as a way of achieving political objective—is never morally justified whether it is perpetrated by individuals, groups or states," said Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*. He called on the G8 to cooperate with religious leaders to address the problems of terrorism and violent conflict.

Ms. Mehrézia Labidi-Maiza, a Summit delegate and Coordinator of the *Religions for Peace* Global Women's Network, highlighted the work that women of faith around the world already do to help stop violent conflict and protect the environment.

Ms. Stellamaris Mulaeh, a Summit delegate and the Coordinator of the *Religions for Peace* Global Youth Network, said she was encouraged by the religious leaders' commitment to work for future generations. "Youth must be involved in the advocacy as well," she said. "The voice of the voiceless must be heard. Also, we must use our churches and mosques and temples as platforms for advocacy and action."

The summit was organized by *Religions for Peace*–Japan and the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and supported by Ministry of the Environment and World Federalist Movement-Japan Religious Committee. Additional support was provided by Religions for Peace–International. The Hokkaido Summit follows similar work begun in multi-religious meetings held just prior to the G8 summits in Moscow, Russia (2006), and Cologne, Germany (2007).

The *Religions for Peace* World Council is advancing peacebuilding work around the world in seventeen states including Iraq and the Middle East region, Sri Lanka, and the Horn of Africa.

Religions for Peace is the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition advancing common action for peace since 1970. Headquartered in New York and accredited to the United

Nations, Religions for Peace works through affiliated inter-religious councils in 70 countries in six continents.

Call from Sapporo – World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace

On the occasion of the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit

July 3, 2008

Sapporo, Japan

INTRODUCTION

We, senior leaders of the world's religions, have convened in a World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace in Sapporo, Japan, just prior to the Group of Eight (G8) Hokkaido Toyako Summit. We are united in our commitment to peace, which includes our concern for the inviolable dignity of all people, the dire suffering of so many and the well-being of our shared Earth.

We carry forward important work begun in multi-religious meetings held just prior to the G8 summits in Moscow (2006) and Cologne (2007). We have been convened by *Religions for Peace*—Japan in partnership with the World Conference of *Religions for Peace*.

We are united in our call to the G8 to take bold action to address the threats that confront humanity, including the destruction of the environment and climate change, extreme global poverty and deteriorating food security, nuclear arms, terrorism and violent conflict. Addressing these threats requires urgent action by the G8.

Action by all governments, civil society, private sector, religious communities and—in the final analysis—every member of the human family is required to advance the common good. We urge the G8 to respond in ways designed to engage these stakeholders in building our common future.

Religious communities have roles in building peace. Before outlining these roles, we acknowledge with genuine sorrow that all religions have at times been misused in fomenting violence. (1)

We reject this misuse of religions and commit ourselves to engaging our communities for the common good. Collectively, our religious communities are the world's largest social networks which reach into

the furthest corners of the earth and include countless institutions dedicated to caring for people. Religions share many moral traditions that can provide basic principles essential for just and harmonious relations among persons and communities. Moreover, religious traditions—each in its own way—cultivate spiritualities of compassion and love essential for genuine reconciliation and peace. Mobilizing these great social, moral and spiritual dimensions of the world’s religions in service of the common good is essential for the well-being of the human family. We are united in the conviction that all religions obligate their followers to work for justice among all peoples, and to care for one another and our common home, the earth. We commit to doing so.

OUR COMMITMENT

As religious leaders, we are committed to the path of multi-religious cooperation for peace. Religious traditions—each in its own way—summons their followers to the path of multi-religious cooperation for the common good. This path:

- Leads to senior religious leaders from all faith traditions and billions of believers working together for a positive and holistic state of peace;
- Enjoins the world’s believers to engage their moral heritages and spiritual traditions in taking individual responsibility for protecting our earth;
- Brings politicians, civil society and religious communities together to forge needed consensus on values that can serve as the basis of just and creative policies.

SHARED SECURITY

An overarching notion that we believe can help express the comprehensive character of our moral and religious concerns is “Shared Security.” Shared Security builds on the concept of Human Security by focusing on the fundamental inter-relatedness of all persons and the environment.

Shared Security includes a comprehensive respect for the interconnectedness and dignity of all life. It is based upon our mutual interdependence and the most universal and fundamental fact that all

humans live in one world. It recognizes that the well-being of one is related to the well-being of others and ultimately to the earth that we all share. It calls us to recognize that past, present and future are linked. Together, we must acknowledge past failings, face present challenges and accept our responsibilities to future generations.

Shared Security is concerned with the full continuum of human relations—from relationships among individuals to the ways that peoples are organized in nations or international organizations. It respects state sovereignty, but also supports democratic and transparent cooperation among states and peoples.

It follows that the security of one actor of international relations must not be detrimental to others. International actors who are responsible for global decision-making must act transparently and be open to the contributions of all stakeholders, including religious communities which represent a major part of civil society. A similar concern for a just world order, respecting different national and religious traditions, was made at the Moscow World Summit of Religious Leaders (2006).

As religious leaders, we recognize that there is a foundational moral imperative for advancing Shared Security: We are all responsible for one another's well-being.

CALLS TO ACTION

We call upon the G8 to include in their discussions and plans of action the following areas of concern:

1. The Destruction of the Environment and Climate Change

Japan, the host of this year's G8 Summit, possesses a spiritual term, *mottainai*, meaning "do not waste, use everything in a fashion commensurate with its true value." This concept recognizes the mysterious "giftedness" of all existence, and urges that natural resources must be used appropriately, while simultaneously encouraging responsible and sustainable consumption. The concept also provides a base for recognizing that it is unethical to burden future generations with excessive pollution or other gross environmental imbalances. Development must be environmentally sustainable.

We must also draw attention to the link between the health of the environment and war. In addition to killing people, disrupting the lives of entire societies and thwarting development, war destroys the ecosystem. Massive defense expenditures, a global total of US\$ 1.34 Trillion in 2007 according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, both directly assaults the ecosystem and squanders monies that urgently need to be directed to sustainable development. It is a grave contradiction to advocate for a reduction of global warming gas emissions while simultaneously maintaining or even expanding military expenditures.

We urge the G8 Summit to:

- Commit to a reduction of total national defense and military expenditures and utilize the saved funds to establish an Earth Fund dedicated to environmental protection.
- Establish a new binding framework to follow up the Kyoto Protocols that limits global average temperature rise to avert catastrophic climate change.
- Provide leadership to expand energy efficiency and conservation efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emission rates.
- Advance policies and practices that increase forestation and other forms of carbon dioxide sequestration.
- Recognize that trading “global warming gas emission rights” has at best limited value, and could disproportionately penalize the least developed.
- Facilitate major investments in the development of new sources of energy and technology essential to sustainable development, specifically without jeopardizing food security.
- Implement the recommendations contained in the Kobe 3R Action Plan (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle).

2. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The massive scale of extreme poverty at a time of unprecedented wealth is a moral scandal. Poverty is exacerbated by structural injustices in the global economy which must be addressed. At the mid-point of the Millennium Development Campaign, religious leaders gathered at the Cologne World Summit of Religious Leaders (2007).

They recognized an urgent need to not only fulfill the pledges, but in some instances, to exceed the commitments made. Meeting these challenges is even more urgent, not least due to the growing food crisis. Here again, we call for the funds achieved from the reduction of defense budgets to be allocated in support of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

We request the G8 Summit to:

- Take leadership to ensure the achievement of the MDGs, including delivery on the Gleneagles aid quantity and quality promises, particularly reaching the goal 0.7% of Gross National Income for Official Development Assistance.
- Provide urgently needed global leadership to address the growing crisis of food shortages, including needed emergency responses.
- Meet its pledges of increased resources to scale up the response to HIV and AIDS, Malaria, and other infectious diseases, and to ensure universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment and care services by 2010.
- Dedicate resources to empower women and girls as key agents in overcoming poverty.
- Make the legal empowerment of the poor a key objective in its development assistance strategies.
- Fulfill its commitment to ensuring a development friendly outcome of the Doha Round of trade negotiations.

3. Nuclear Disarmament

Mindful that the 2008 G8 Summit is taking place in Japan, the only country that has suffered the horror of a nuclear attack, we religious leaders stand in solidarity with our Japanese hosts to call for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. We believe that the attempt to militarily dominate the sea, space, neutral territories or states creates obstacles on the way to nuclear and conventional disarmament. We also believe that conventional disarmament and efforts to ban military technologies and initiatives that could provoke a new arms race should go hand in hand with efforts to advance nuclear disarmament.

We request the G8 Summit to:

- Pursue rigorous implementation of nuclear reduction and nonproliferation policies leading to the goal of total nuclear

disarmament. As stipulated in article 6 of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the five acknowledged nuclear-weapon states must act on their commitments to work toward eliminating existing nuclear weapons as rapidly as possible. States with nuclear weapons that have not acknowledged them must acknowledge their possession, make similar commitments to their elimination and enter into the NPT.

- Push for prompt ratifications and entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and commit to take no action leading toward the reintroduction of any form of nuclear weapons testing.
- Continue to demonstrate positive leadership for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and other global initiatives to control the transfer of nuclear materials and stop further proliferation.

4. Terrorism and Violent Conflict

Terrorism—the intentional killing of innocent people as a way of achieving a political objective—is never morally justified whether it is perpetrated by individuals, groups or states. Moreover, military responses to terrorism injure innocent persons, provide additional motivation for terrorist groups and endanger basic freedoms in the societies attempting to protect themselves from terrorism.

Violent military conflict—the attempt to settle serious disputes by military force—typically results in the loss of innocent lives, disruption of society, thwarting of development and destruction of the environment.

Every effort must be made to utilize non-violent means to thwart terrorism and resolve disputes to advance peace.

We call upon the G8 to:

- Provide global leadership designed to combat the victimization of groups based on culture or creed.
- Work to end occupation and establish just, honorable and comprehensive peace in all countries or territories which are occupied.
- Re-affirm and strengthen its commitment to standards of international law in its efforts to counteract terrorism and promote international security.

- Acknowledge and support the importance of multi-religious partnerships to help address the problems of terrorism and violent conflict.
- Work to limit the production and export of arms into areas of violent conflict.
- Promote a culture of peace by advancing non-violent conflict resolution and peace education.

CONCLUSION

The G8 has the responsibility to use boldness and wisdom to advance the common good in partnership with the religious communities and all other stakeholders.

We—leaders of diverse religious communities—re-commit ourselves to working together and with other partners of good will to address the threats that confront us all. While we labor to meet the challenges of our day, we are deeply mindful of religious traditions which have taught—each in its own way—compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation, and that these are essential for genuine peace.

We respectfully urge the G8 to recognize, facilitate and effectively support the importance of multi-religious cooperation, as it takes needed steps to advance the common good.

(1) We recall and embrace as our own an historic multi-religious acknowledgement on the misuse of religion: “As men and women of religions, we confess in humility and penitence that we have very often betrayed our religious ideals and our commitment to peace. It is not religion that has failed the cause of peace, but religious people. This betrayal of religion can and must be corrected.” (From the global multi-religious Declaration adopted at the *Religions for Peace* First World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, 1970.)