



Declaration of Montserrat on Religions and the Building of Peace

10th April 2008



Misleading information on the origin of conflicts requires a clear cut analysis of the relation between religious feelings and violence, in order to advance towards the building of peace through its prevention and peaceful resolution. Unless we carefully analyse and communicate this relationship, some media and many people in the world will continue to wrongly think and perceive that religion is often fuel for violence. Indeed, violence is mostly originated at the level of power, resources and ideologies, and religion is often misused to stir up these conflicts.

In the year 1994, in the city of Barcelona, an important meeting of representatives of different faiths and religious organisations took place,⁽¹⁾ and the participants unanimously concluded that, based on our common humanity, common vision and the shared values of fraternity, human solidarity and love, religions should never again be the origin of confrontation but of conciliation.

The dramatic and endless conflicts in the Middle East, as well as recent tragic developments in other parts of the world, require solutions prompted by the awareness, commitment and involvement of religious leaders and civil society, which must urge political will and action to the decision-makers. Within this framework, the imposition of a double standards policy by some countries is a

⁽¹⁾ The 1994 Barcelona Declaration: Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace, UNESCO. www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/declarations/religion.pdf

threat to peace and stability and complicates the role of religions that are working for justice in such complex environments.

We are witnessing a growing deterioration of global governance. This is visible in various issues: from climate to finance, from law to social justice, from human rights to decent work. These threats have created a sense of lack of security at the human level.

In moments of crisis, religions must provide hope and trust to humankind. Moreover, it is particularly relevant that religions help to maintain values in an increasingly valueless economic and social global system. Civil society, based on universal human values, has become a central player in addressing global issues for another kind of governance.

It is therefore through an alliance of values that religions and civil society can act on political institutions, at the local, national and international level to provide hope, justice and progress.

As stated in the Alliance of Civilizations Report and others,⁽²⁾ we must enhance efforts to bridge the divides between religions and cultures through dialogue and concrete action because religions and cultures are intertwined. We must overcome the misperceptions, stereotypes, biased language and concepts reproduced by the media and frequently echoed by irresponsible leadership. Religions must stay together to co-exist harmonically and work jointly to build a common future. We must challenge attitudes that spread the appearance of links between religion and violence, extremism and even terrorism.

⁽²⁾ Report of the UN High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations: www.unaoc.org; Dialogue Among Civilizations Process, www.unesco.org/dialogue; Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace: resolution by the UN General Assembly A/RES/61/221, www.un.org/ga/61/; Rio Declaration on “Alliance of Civilizations, Interculturalism and Human Rights”, Rio de Janeiro, December 2007.

In this context, there is a most urgent need to promote action which can counteract the present situation and trends, based on force and imposition. We must encourage action-oriented behaviours and attitudes, and widely spread knowledge on the real root causes of the conflicts –including, when appropriate, the misuse of religions and ideologies. We must provide possible solutions to build peace in the minds of people, particularly in the minds of social and political actors as well as the mass media.

Therefore, assembled in the inspiring mountain and abbey of Montserrat, and within the framework of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reconfirm our full endorsement of the principles enshrined in the Declaration, as well as in other international documents and agreements, that guarantee the right and full respect of freedom of religion and other beliefs, and encourage dialogue and interaction with people of other belongings and identities, whether they be believers or not. In this respect, rapid and efficient encounter and sharing among representatives of religions and with national and international policy-makers appears to be essential, especially to identify common values and standards to learn to live with our differences.

We underline the significance, nowadays, of identities which, leaving aside extremisms, become the firmest base for an effective model of international coexistence.

We are convinced that a culture of dialogue, alliance, non-violence and peace must be built with full respect for human rights, the UN Charter and the rule of law. Such a shared culture of peace needs to give creative expressions to the teachings of the world's religious traditions, which have stressed with a sense of otherness and brotherhood that we are all responsible for one another. In political terms, the only security that is practically possible and morally sound is “shared security”. We voice loudly our resolved support for all those committed to such a shared project.

We call on religious leaders at all levels, from the highest hierarchies to the grassroots level, to enhance and exercise their crucial role as actors of peace and mutual understanding.

We call on civil society, the institutional actors and the media to work, hand in hand, to diligently and tirelessly, with resolve and imagination, to achieve and go beyond the Objectives of the Millennium and, in this way, accelerate the transition from the use of force to word and dialogue, from violence to intercultural and interfaith harmony, from clash to alliance, from an economy of war to an economy of global development, from a culture of war to a culture of peace, based on justice and freedom.

We make a special appeal to the religious, educational, academic, scientific and artistic community as well as to intellectual associations and think tanks. Because of their very nature, they should be champions in the teaching and learning of human rights, tolerance, values and better gender balance.

We invite all cultural expressions to participate in the building of and international architecture through intercultural dialogue which shall strengthen a shared culture of peace.

We call upon media to contribute to avoid the wide dissemination of stereotypes and biased images, and to promote better understanding between different cultures and religions.

We call on political leadership, governments and international organizations – and particularly through an in-depth reformed United Nations system – to unite their efforts, guided by the “democratic principles”⁽³⁾, to face the challenges threatening human kind. We are convinced that if humans want, they can transform the

⁽³⁾ Constitution of UNESCO, 1945

world. As it is acknowledged by all religions, nothing is beyond the distinctive human creative capacity.

Montserrat, Barcelona, 10th of April of 2008

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² These personalities were not present in Montserrat and gave their adhesion to the declaration after this was approved and signed.