

# European Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace Lille Declaration on a Culture of Peace

27 May 2009

## *Preamble*

Our various religious traditions call us to promote a culture of peace. They promote peace based on their holistic understanding of the inviolable dignity of human life in relationship to their awareness of its sacred origin. Peace of the heart and mind and peace of society are intrinsically linked. Peace and justice are inseparable, as are truth and reconciliation. Peace is for the hungry to be fed, the poor to be sustained, the sick to experience care, the oppressed to be released and the marginalized to have a voice. Peace is protection against violence, and it is experienced when warfare and armed conflicts are translated into development and nation building.

Each particular culture is unique and can be understood as a set of shared meanings and values that inform a way of life. In our use of the term, a “culture of peace” refers to those peace-related meanings and values that can be widely shared by the world’s diverse cultures. Thus a culture of peace respects and is built from the contributions of the distinct and diverse cultures in the world. Religion is closely linked to culture and is a vital source for fostering a culture of peace.

## *I: The Role of Religions in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace*

**1. The spiritual dimension of religions:** Religions cultivate the human spirit through spiritual practices that aim at the realisation of genuine peace both within each believer and in the wider human family. Its power can show itself in the ability to bear the unbearable, find hope where there appear to be no grounds for hope and in forgiving the unforgivable. It is also manifest in the disclosure of beauty and the cultivation of virtue.

**2. The ethical dimension of religions:** From the spiritual depths of religions spring ethical systems which guide the lives of millions. Religious leaders on all levels can speak with moral authority on values that are deeply held and widely shared by most religious traditions and which correspond to the values in a culture of peace. Among these are respect for the inviolable dignity of each person expressed in concern for human rights, justice, compassion for the afflicted, care for the earth and its creatures, and non-violence.

**3. The social dimension of religions:** Religious traditions have vertical and horizontal structures that give them unique channels for influence and exchange of ideas and insights. In every town and village there is a place where people gather for worship: a church, a mosque, a synagogue, a temple or a gurudwara. Through

varying types of networks these are linked to similar places in other locations, and to national and international bodies, thus allowing the interests of the grassroots to be heard by national and international leaders, and national and international insights to be disseminated to the local level. All religious traditions emphasise the importance of education, instruction and formation of children and young people. This social dimension of religions provides great potential for furthering a culture of peace.

**4. The cultural dimension of religions:** All religions relate to culture and can contribute to building traditions that support peace by interpreting sacred texts and traditions and applying them under changing circumstances. Thus they bind together the lives of past, present and future generations. Explicitly and implicitly religions tell and retell stories which form the identity of the faithful and define their relationships to others. Religious narratives have the power to confirm and to challenge the present order of things.

## ***II: Elements of a Culture of Peace***

**1. A culture of peace is a way of living together in society which ensures the dignity of all.** In a culture of peace the equal value of men and women is affirmed, as is the equal value of all regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation. A culture of peace promotes responsible stewardship of the natural environment and justice between the generations and permeates our relationships from the local to the global level.

**2. A culture of peace fosters tolerance and dialogue.** Tolerance can help in the search for harmony in difference and affirms the standards set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It should not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accept that others adhere to theirs. From genuine tolerance follows a recognition of freedom of religion. A culture of peace leads to dialogue and supports the knowledge, respect and appreciation of the other as elaborated in our Berlin Declaration on Interreligious Dialogue (2008).

**3. Conflict is intrinsic in all cultures, but must not be allowed to lead to violence and oppression.** Conflicting interests and views are not in themselves a threat to peace. They present a challenge to creatively harmonise different interests. In a culture of peace everyone should strive to transform situations of conflicting interests so that their power and dynamism are channelled into creative development which promotes peace and harmony.

**4. A culture of peace is a culture of mutuality and shared security.** A culture of peace nurtures mutual respect which allows all to participate with integrity in society. Promoting a culture of peace implies exploring together the concept of shared security, the recognition that the wellbeing and security of individuals and groups depend on that of the others, as elaborated in the 2006 Eighth World Assembly of Religions for Peace and the Religions for Peace World Summit of Religious Leaders on the Occasion of the G8 Summit, Hokkaido, Japan, 2008.

## ***III: Ten Commitments to work for a Culture of Peace***

As senior religious leaders in Europe we commit ourselves to further a culture of peace:

1. We will explore, emphasise and nurture those spiritual resources in our individual traditions which promote the values which are fundamental to a culture of peace. We will promote responsible interpretations of texts and traditions that are used or misused to promote strife among people.

2. We will lead by example and as role models seek to address conflict among ourselves and representatives of our religious traditions with peaceful means, transforming situations of conflicting interests into opportunities for dialogue and cooperation.

3. We will foster spiritual growth among people within our religious traditions and develop the formational side of our religions encouraging people to play a role in society as promoters of values of peace while showing in practice their respect for those with other religions, convictions or points of view.

4. We will ensure that the values of a culture of peace are known and promoted in all institutions and settings where there is religious education or training for children, thus ensuring that new generations grow up well equipped to meet the challenges of plural societies where people of different backgrounds must live together peacefully.

5. We will seek opportunities to promote policies and decisions in the political sphere that further peace, and we will lift our voices, if possible together across religious divides, against forces which promote violence and block dialogue.

6. We will encourage all those within our faith communities who are involved in practical work of charity to understand themselves as ambassadors of a culture of peace and thus find inspiration to strengthen and develop this practical caring expression of our religions.

7. We will foster interreligious dialogue among all people in Europe and on all levels, from the local communities to national and international leaders. We will encourage all to take note of the principles for interreligious dialogue spelt out in our Berlin Declaration on Interreligious Dialogue (2008).

8. We will explore the life and activities of our own religious communities self-critically to understand how and when they can be an obstacle to peace. We will engage in intra-religious dialogue with, and when necessary confront, those who belong to our own religions but whose practice of traditions are incompatible with peaceful coexistence.

9. We will be open to cooperation with all people of good will and all institutions, religious or not, who are promoting the basic values of a culture of peace.

10. We will make our explorations together and the content of this declaration known to religious people across our continent, and we will have a lasting commitment to its values and ideas recognising that a culture of peace can only be realised in full in the long term as new generations are fostered and learn from the insights as well as the shortcomings of our present generations.