

Religions for Peace

World Council of Churches
10th Assembly
Busan, 2013

Esteemed Members of the Assembly:

Greetings. *Religions for Peace (RfP)* extends to the World Council of Churches (WCC) its heartfelt good wishes and principled solidarity on the occasion of its 10th Assembly.

RfP greatly values WCC's irreplaceable role in advancing multi-religious dialogue and cooperation for Peace. *RfP*—the world's largest multi-religious organization—is honored and pleased to regard WCC as a fraternal partner.

Commitment to Multi-religious Action for Peace. *RfP* is committed to advancing principled multi-religious action on the basis of carefully discerned *shared elements of Peace* and *shared threats to Peace*. Rooted in diverse religions, these are expressed in terms of shared values, and great care is taken to avoid a “syncretistic” blending of the beliefs of diverse religions doctrines.

The WCC's authentic Christian vision of Peace and its discernment of the central threats to Peace are irreplaceably important to the *RfP*. They contribute powerfully to the basis for common action in *RfP*.

Shared Elements of Peace. A central element of the *RfP* multi-religious vision of Peace is the recognition of human dignity and the unity of humanity.

RfP affirms a common humanity in which all men and women are recognized as human beings endowed with inalienable dignity, and with the rights and responsibilities that flow from that dignity. *RfP* recognizes that each distinctive religious tradition has its own understanding of the foundation of human dignity and common humanity, whether these are perceived as God-given, a reflection of divine nature, derived from cosmic laws, or understood as an inherent sacredness or oneness with the universe. By affirming our common humanity, *RfP* is also able to affirm our other forms of identity, such as religion, race, age, sex, ethnicity and status, as part of the wonderful diversity of human life.

Threats to Peace. From its beginning, *RfP* has labored to build a values-based consensus on the major *threats to Peace*, such as war and the vast proliferation of arms, extreme poverty, environmental degradation, preventable child mortality and thwarted childhood development, and major abuses of human dignity and the human rights that flow from it.

Rising Hostility: A New Threat to Peace. Today, *RfP* is adding to its historic threats to Peace the rising tide of hostility, in society and within and among religious communities. Hostility

toward the “other” takes the form of intolerance, and too often violence. The targets of hostility are often vulnerable populations, including members of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, refugees, migrant workers, and immigrants. Hostilities arise from all sectors of society – governments, individuals, organizations and social groups.

A growing number of governments are placing restrictions on religious beliefs and practices by minority religious groups. Attempts to contain the spread of fanaticism often breed greater hostility. Attempting to curb terrorism worldwide, fundamental principles of human rights are often violated by states, fostering greater insecurity. Efforts to combat extremism often contribute to the demonization of entire groups, resulting in the loss of fundamental freedoms.

RfP respectfully turns to WCC for its own discernment of and potential collaboration in responding to the rising tide of hostility.

Welcoming the Other — Discerning a New Shared Element of Peace.

RfP will work to discern at its next Assembly (November 2013) if there is an emerging multi-religious consensus that a shared positive vision of Peace calls on all people of faith to “welcome the other.” *RfP* is grateful that representatives of WCC will partake in this Assembly.

In its preparatory work, *RfP* is convinced that “welcoming the other” requires robust support for tolerance. Diverse faith traditions can promote tolerance in both law and society and on a more basic level in their cultivation of an essential existential respect for the other.

“Welcoming the other” also calls each religious community in its own terms to go beyond tolerance by pro-actively standing in solidarity with the dignity, vulnerability and well-being of the “other” with the full force of its respective spiritual and moral teachings. Such teachings can include the willingness to bear innocent suffering, return good for evil, forgive the unforgivable and cultivate unrestricted compassion or love for enemies.

Advancing human dignity “welcomes the other” when it protects human dignity whenever or wherever it is threatened. Importantly, “welcoming the other” also includes the commitment to stand in solidarity with the positive flourishing of the “other’s” human dignity. As religious communities, we are called to advance the full flourishing of human dignity through the comprehensive development of human beings on all levels: physical, intellectual, affective, artistic, moral and religious. “Welcoming the other” includes the proactive commitment to help the “other” to develop and unfold his or her human dignity in the holistic terms of a shared positive vision of Peace rooted in each believer’s religious tradition.

“Welcoming the other” is also advanced whenever we work together to overcome threats to shared well-being. We are called to work together to promote spiritual and moral virtues—rooted in each tradition in its own way—essential to building up shared well-being. These are virtues such as honesty, tolerance, care for others, respect for nature, the willingness to stand in solidarity with, and even sacrifice for, the well-being of all, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In addition, “*welcoming the other*” by advancing shared well-being necessarily includes efforts to build just political and legal regimes that honor the rights of all, fair and ecologically balanced development schemes, common healing, common living, and common security.

We “*welcome the other*” when we work together to resist threats to shared well-being and when we stand in solidarity with the human dignity of all. We can do this by welcoming each person into the co-building, co-nurturing and co-stewarding of our shared well-being, which includes respect for nature and developing in harmony with it.

RfP relies on the WCC to be a leading religious force in “*welcoming the other*” in its various activities, including its commitment to multi-religious action.

“Innocent Suffering” in a Multi-religious Context.

Diverse religious communities—each in its own way—have an appreciation for innocent suffering.

In *RfP*, Christians, including many who are part of the WCC, have shared what some have termed “The Law of the Cross,” a conviction that evil is to be confronted and transformed by the followers of Christ in the way Jesus confronted and transformed it. The irrational, destructive, life-denying aspects of evil—both personal and structural sins—are to be transformed by replacing all forms of evil with good. Christians have shared that for Christ, this involved voluntary suffering, and that baptism into his death and resurrection invites all Christians to share in their Lord’s willingness to bear innocent suffering in love.

Members of the WCC have—and may they continue to do so—shared their priceless religious experience in *RfP*’s multi-religious work of building Peace. This, in turn, has invited members of diverse other traditions to share their respective heritages of the spiritual meaning and healing power of innocent suffering. In turn, these teachings have significantly influenced *RfP* multi-religious action programs.

Modestly and with humility—respectfully acknowledging large religious differences—*RfP* finds that there is a slowly growing appreciation across diverse traditions of the power of innocent suffering.

This is a cause for great joy. For, if (only) an eye transformed by mercy can see mercy, so, too, a heart willing to suffer for the “other” can recognize the seed of that great love in another heart wherever he or she may be found.

RfP extends its gratitude, esteem and good will to WCC.