

Proposal for a
DECADE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
AND COOPERATION FOR PEACEⁱ

This draft proposal is aimed at promoting the declaration by the United Nations of a “*Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace*”. In that context, the UN would convene an “interreligious forum for world peace” under its neutral umbrella, with a specific mandate and time frame, to facilitate the organization of the Decade.

Preparing a full proposal for the DECADE asks for a wide partnership, able to bring together in a big WE those spiritual leaders and organizations committed to interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The support of member states will be also essential for having the General Assembly calling for such a DECADE and, eventually, convening an interreligious forum for organizing it. So, this draft proposal is only an initial step in a long process of consultation and consensus building, including also pertinent UN authorities, agencies, and programmes.

A. Propitious times for a Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace

While the World is aware of the importance of a religious dimension in several recent local conflicts and international tensions, it also contemplates with hope the development of a number of religious and interfaith initiatives committed to peace building.¹

Furthermore, the *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and non-violence for the Children of the World*, launched by the United Nations on 2001 and implemented with increasing participation of organizations of the civil society, is creating at social level and among political actors the conviction that sustainable peace needs to be based on the respect of all human rights as well as mutual understanding, tolerance and solidarity, values and attitudes which are also usually promoted by religions and spiritual traditions and movements.

There is also a growing recognition within the UN of the role of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace, clearly expressed in recent resolutions of its General Assembly,² which promote “*interreligious dialogue*” as well as “*religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation*”. It is worth noting that these resolutions bring the “interfaith dialogue and cooperation” into the wider field of “*mutually inclusive and reinforcing initiatives on interreligious, intercultural and intercivilizational dialogues and cooperation for peace*”, with explicit reference to the “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative, launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in July 2005. The High Level Group for the Alliance, established by the Secretary General, is expected “*to recommend a practicable programme of action for States, international organizations and civil society aimed at promoting harmony among societies...which should consider practical strategies “to strengthen mutual understanding, respect and shared values among*

¹ It is the case, for example, of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), the Parliament of World’s Religions, the Peace Council, the United Religions Initiative (URI), the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Saint Egidio Community, the Focolari Movement, the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and many others.

² Resolutions A/RES/59/23, A/RES/59/142, A/60/L.4/Rev.1 and A/60/L.10

different peoples, cultures and civilizations”. The DECADE proposed here would make a strategic contribution to that objective.

Therefore, favourable conditions seems to be given for a collective and sustained effort aimed at better mobilizing the immense spiritual, human and organizational resources of the religious communities, spiritual traditions, organizations and movements, interfaith organizations and value-based secular groups, in partnership with the United Nations, its member states and other constituencies of the civil society, in the pursuit of a common objective: building a more equitable friendly and peaceful world. A *Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace* under the auspices of the United Nations would provide a global neutral umbrella for achieving that goal through increased partnership at global, regional, national and local levels.

B. Main features of the proposed DECADE

Although the preparation of a final proposal for the DECADE is still in process, the following features are suggested for further discussion:

1. Time frame: 2009- 2019, starting and ending on 21 September, the corresponding International Day of Peace, which would be used every year along the Decade all around the world for promoting the Decade’s objectives, assessing the progress made and strengthening interreligious partnership and commitment. That launching date would give 12 months to prepare and promote a final proposal and to get political support from member states, in order to present the corresponding project of resolution to the General Assembly in its 62nd session (September 2007), and another 24 months for formal preparatory activities. Furthermore, if launched in September 2009, the DECADE will overlap only one year with the ongoing Decade for a Culture of Peace, learning from that experience and deepening on its achievements in the complex world of the religious communities and interfaith organizations.
2. The leading social actors: Even though the member states and the UN agencies and bodies would be expected to play a significant role in the implementation of the DECADE, particularly at national level, it is suggested that a participatory approach be adopted which would give the main responsibility to pertinent civil society organizations gathered in an “*Interreligious Forum for World Peace*”, which would be convened by the United Nations.
3. The Interreligious Forum for World Peace could have the following characteristics:
 - a. Membership: The Forum’s members would be civil society organizations (including NGOs) of spiritual or religious nature, operating at a global level or at an international scale, and subscribing to the principles which inspire the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular respect for freedom of religion or belief and for cultural and religious diversity.
 - b. Main functions: The Forum, working in partnership with the Agency Leader (not yet defined), would be the main responsible for developing a plan of action for the DECADE, as well as for promoting and monitoring through its member organizations its implementation at all levels.
 - c. Other functions: Such a forum would facilitate:
 - dialogue among different faiths, spiritual traditions and related civilizations, which would lead to increasing mutual understanding, respect and trust;
 - designing and developing joint programs, projects and activities by the member organizations, working as partners in the pursuit of pertinent United Nations goals, such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, Dialogue Among Civilizations, enhancement of Human Rights and promoting a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence;

- building partnership between them and other civil society organizations, government agencies and social actors from the private sector in the pursuit of those United Nations goals at global, national and even local levels;
 - communication and partnership between spiritual and political leaders around issues dealing with peace;
 - building relationships of cooperation with the organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system which are responsible for social, cultural, economic and environmental development;
 - identifying root causes of religiously motivated injustice and violence in multi-faith societies, which could lead to non-violent conflict resolution as well as the promotion of justice and tolerance and elimination of various forms of discrimination.
- d. *Modus operandi*: The Forum would be expected to be active all along the DECADE working mainly as a network through Internet. Its Assembly would meet three times, at the launching of the DECADE, five years later for a mid-term assessment and by the end of the DECADE in order to project its activities and achievements into the future. This Assembly would have subcommittees or ad-hoc working groups on UN campaigns, goals, agendas etc. such as the Millennium Development Goals, Culture of Peace, Dialogue among Civilizations and Human Rights. There could be a Council, designated and mandated by the Assembly, as well as a small Secretariat or Coordinating Team, based at the UN Headquarters. One of its main functions would be to build up relations of cooperation with the pertinent organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system.
- e. *From a financial point of view* the spiritual forum would be expected to be mainly supported by its member organizations. Assistance from external sources should be diversified and that funding would be primarily allocated to projects and meetings.
- f. *Decision making and executive capacity*: The Forum would be more a place for developing trust and partnerships for joint action than a tribune for individual speeches or collective declarations. Decisions would be made by consensus. Whatever would be its institutional structure, the Forum would not be expected to operate as an executing agency, but as a space and umbrella allowing its member organizations to better support the implementation of the DECADE plan of action by playing a leading role in those fields where they have experience and institutional capabilities, in association with other member organizations which share a common mission. In summary, the Forum would be established not to compete with its member organizations, but to empower them for promoting in partnership the achievement of the DECADE's goals.

C. A Plan of Action for the DECADE

The Millennium Development Goals, Culture of Peace, Dialogue among Civilizations and Human Rights seems to be the main pertinent themes in the current agenda of the United Nations to be considered in a plan of action for the DECADE. Nevertheless, since there is a large number of relevant programs and activities being carried out by religious and interfaith organizations around the world, it would be better to have the Forum developing the plan of action based on the experience and priorities of its member organizations. Thereafter, the Plan of Action which would be proposed by the UN Secretary General at the launching of the DECADE and the inauguration of the Forum should be prepared in consultation with the potential member organizations of the Forum during the two previous years.

D. A tentative schedule for the preparatory phase

- July 2006 – June 2007: Development of a consensual proposal for the DECADE through consultations with key religious and interfaith organizations, member states committed to the cause of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace and pertinent UN officers.
- July 2007: A member state (or a group of them) registers the theme in the agenda for the 62nd session of the General Assembly.
- September 2007 – January 2008: A project of resolution on the DECADE is submitted by a group of member states, discussed and adopted by the General Assembly
- January 2008 – August 2009:
 - i. A small Secretariat for the DECADE is created
 - ii. An ad hoc working group with representatives of key religious and interfaith organizations is created to prepare, in consultation with other organizations, a draft for the “plan of action”, which should give only general orientations and maximum flexibility in order to allow the Forum to work later on in a creative way with a participatory approach.
 - iii. The organizations that meet the requirements to participate in the Forum are invited to apply and to get accredited, if needed.
 - iv. Fund raising starts.
- September 21st 2009 : The DECADE is launched and the Forum, inaugurated.

ⁱ This draft proposal is endorsed by the Partnership Committee (steering body) of the Project “Towards the creation of a spiritual forum for world peace at the United Nations” integrated by (alphabetical order):

Current members of the Partnership Committee

(Name, faith, organization)

Swami Agnivesh, Hindu, President of Arya Samaj; Peace Council, Councilor; Chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

Isthar Adler, Buddhist, Lama Gangchen World Peace Foundation (LGWPF).

Youssif Al-Khoei, Muslim, Shi’a tradition, Director Al-Khoei Foundation.

Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, Christian Catholic, Coordinator, Spiritual Forum of Santiago for Peace. Project Director.

Dr. Charles Graves, Christian Anglican, Secretary General, Interfaith International.

Eduardo Missoni, Christian Catholic, Secretary General, World Organization of the Scout Movement.

Deepak Naik, Hindu, Secretary General of Minorities of Europe and former member of URI Global Council

Elly Pradervand, Women’s World Summit Foundation (WWSF), Executive Director. Representative of the Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns – Geneva - CSVGC

Imam Abduljalil Sajid, Muslim Sunni tradition, President Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony in the United Kingdom.

Beatriz Schulthess, Maya Indigenous Spiritual Tradition, Member of WCRP Governing Board; Coordinator, Indigenous People’s Spiritual Consultative Council; member of the Latina American and Caribbean Women of Faith Network.

Dr. Rajwant Singh, Sikh, President of the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) and Executive Director of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation.

Sulak Sivaraksa, Buddhist, President of Santi Pracha Dhaman and Founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.

Yehuda Stolov, Jewish, Director of the Interfaith Encounter Association, Israel.

Dr. John Taylor, Christian, Representative at Geneva of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)