

Project “Towards the creation of a spiritual forum for world peace at the United Nations”

PROPOSAL FOR CREATING A SPIRITUAL OR INTERRELIGIOUS FORUM FOR WORLD PEACE IN THE UNITED NATIONS

**Fourth draft, for consultations only
(May 2006)**

Background

The idea of having something like a spiritual forum at the United Nations is old. The present initiative finds its roots in the proposal made by Lama Gangchen in 1995, calling for the creation of a “United Nations Spiritual Forum for World Peace”. Although the idea raised great interest, after three years it was clear that such an initiative, because of its very nature, asks for a collective leadership. Then, the ongoing project started aimed at developing, through a collective work and a wide process of consultation, a new proposal which must be agreeable to a broad spectrum of religious institutions and spiritual leaders, politically viable, economically feasible and consistent with the process of reform going on in the UN.

A key step in this process took place in May 2004 at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, near Geneva. The first workshop of the project convened volunteers from different regions of the world, with links to six world religions and several international interfaith organizations. Two main outcomes resulted from that workshop: (1) The establishment of a *Partnership Committee* which will steer the project in its coming stages (see the list of its current members at the end), and (2) the preparation of a first draft for the proposal.

Between July and October 2004 the members of the Partnership Committee undertook consultations in their own religious and institutional entourage, asking for views and suggestions aimed at improving the proposal. With those inputs, a second draft was prepared during December 2004, which was used -between January and April 2005- for a first round of consultations within the global community of religious and spiritual traditions and movements, as well as with the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The outcomes of this consultation were examined and assessed by the Partnership Committee in its second workshop, held 2-5 May 2005 again at the Chateau de Bossey. There, the decision was made to prepare a revised draft of the proposal – which is presented here below-- to be used in a second and wider round of consultations. This new round will also include key actors, such as Member States of the United Nations which have supported the recent resolutions of the General Assembly promoting inter-religious dialogue as well as religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation, and pertinent UN agencies, programs and projects which are relevant for the forum proposal.

The most significant changes made in this May 2006 updated version of the Fourth Draft deal with the implementation strategy. It is the suggestion of promoting the declaration by United Nations of a “*Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace*”. In that context, the UN would convene a “spiritual (or interreligious or interfaith) forum for world peace” under its neutral umbrella, with a specific mandate and a fix term, which would facilitate internal dialogue and cooperation within the religious/spiritual constituency as well as concerted actions for peace with relevant partners (UN agencies, governments, other organizations of the civil society) along that decade.

The process

Preparing a proposal for the DECADE and implementing this new strategy asks for a wide partnership, able to bring together in a big WE those interfaith and religious organizations committed to interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The support of member states will be also essential for having the General Assembly calling for a “UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace” and, eventually, convening an interreligious forum for organizing it.

Thereafter, the Partnership Committee has adopted for the period 2006-2007 a strategy and work program based in a participatory process aimed at promoting the active involvement of three key institutional actors in the designing and backing of the spiritual forum proposal. They are (1) the potential member organizations of a spiritual forum; (2) the Member States, which are expected to mobilize the political support required to have this initiative eventually approved by the General Assembly; and (3) the UN Secretariat and other pertinent UN agencies and authorities.

Special efforts are being made to get feedback from and develop partnership with recently launched initiatives, such as the “Alliance of Civilizations” and the “Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace”. Thereafter, a new collective referent would be created or new alliances will be promoted, if needed.

The work program will be periodically revised in order to adapt it to the very dynamic context in which the reform of the United Nations is taking place.

The Draft Proposal

Executive Summary

This proposal is aimed towards the creation of a spiritual (or interreligious) forum for world peace in the United Nations, which would help to mobilize 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 and peaceful world.

The current strategy adopted by the project focuses on 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, as explained below. Would such a forum demonstrate during that testing period that it is a powerful instrument for building sustainable peace around the world, its mandate could be extended.

This fourth draft has been prepared by the Project’s Partnership Committee - a group of volunteers from different spiritual traditions and linked to various international interfaith organizations - in the framework of a wide process of consultation among leaders and key members of the religious/spiritual international community. This process, aimed at jointly developing a collective consensual proposal, includes at this stage key member states and pertinent UN officials. When this proposal can reflect a wide consensus, systematic efforts will start in order to win political support from the UN member states and to have this initiative eventually approved by the General Assembly and implemented.

Concept, objectives and functions

The United Nations is the main political forum for world peace. Preventing wars and promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts are among its core functions, together with building the social, economic,

environmental and political conditions for durable peace. In the ongoing reform of the United Nations, civil society is being called to play a growing role in the pursuit of the United Nations' objectives and goals, in partnership with governments and other relevant social actors.

Over the years opportunities have been created for the religious and spiritual non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to participate in ECOSOC and DPI activities and in the United Nations world conferences. Nevertheless there is increasing recognition of the need for a permanent space within the United Nations for the religions and spiritual traditions, organizations and movements to be involved more actively in building world peace. Responding to this need, the creation of a "spiritual (or interreligious) forum for world peace" within the UN would provide an open, neutral and participatory space at the global public level for meeting and jointly developing useful ways of cooperation among all those religious and spiritual institutions which are committed to accompany the United Nations in fulfilling its mandate of building and consolidating peace around the world.

Such a forum would facilitate:

- dialogue among different faiths, spiritual traditions and related civilizations, which would lead to increasing mutual understanding and respect;
- 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.

In such a spiritual (or interreligious) forum at the United Nations spirituality would be seen as an active force, offering service and solidarity rather than directives and judgments.

How might one envision such a forum?

Much careful discussion would be needed through the ongoing consultation process about the most convenient way of organizing and operating a "spiritual (or interreligious) forum for world peace" within the United Nations, not only among potential member organizations but also with United Nations leadership and agencies and with all concerned governments. In the meantime, some ideas on these matters are suggested in this fourth draft in order to facilitate the discussion.

The forum's members would be civil society organized groups 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.

The representatives of the member organizations could constitute the body or Assembly of the forum. They would operate as a network and most of their communication would be done through Internet. 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.

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.

Whatever would be its institutional structure, the spiritual 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 goals of the United Nations and to play a leading role in those fields where they have experience and institutional capabilities to help achieve those goals, in association with other member organizations which share a common mission. In summary, the Forum would be created not to compete with its member organizations, but to empower them.

Immediate objective and strategy to achieve it

Although, because of its functions, the kind of body envisioned above would be expected to become in the long run a permanent organ of the United Nations, it seems reasonable and wise to start by creating a 'spiritual or interreligious forum for world peace' with a specific mandate for a given period, which could become a permanent organ only if it demonstrates that it is a powerful instrument for building sustainable peace in the world. A possible strategy to move in that direction would be promoting the declaration by the United Nations of a “*Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace*”. In that context, the UN would convene a “spiritual (or interreligious or interfaith) forum for world peace” under its neutral umbrella, with a specific mandate, which would operate along that decade in the framework of the functions and goals outlined above. The International Day of Peace (September 21st) of 2008 is tentatively suggested as propitious date for installing the Forum and launching the proposed “***United Nations Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace 2008-2017***”. Thereafter, every year along the Decade the International Day of Peace would be used all around the world for promoting the Decade’s objectives, assessing the progress made and strengthening interreligious partnership and commitment.

Foreword:

(ϕ 01) This draft proposal is aimed towards the creation of a spiritual or interreligious forum for world peace in the United Nations. This proposal is the first step in a wide process of consultation, starting among the global community of religious and spiritual traditions, organizations and movements, including those already accredited to the United Nations. This process will be enhanced as information is shared and advice is sought with many others, especially with member states which have shown commitment to interfaith cooperation for peace, as well as with the appropriate offices and agencies of the United Nations.

(ϕ 02) When this proposal can reflect a wide consensus, systematic efforts will start in order to win political support from the UN member states and to have this initiative eventually approved by the General Assembly and implemented.

*(ϕ 03) Volunteers for a **Partnership Committee**, which will steer the project in its coming stages, came forward or were proposed during the workshops held at the Chateau de Bossey, Geneva, 8-11 May 2004 and 2-5 May 2005. They had links to various world religions and international interfaith organizations (see annex 1) The Committee has prepared this draft proposal and has made its revisions after receiving various suggestions about the earlier drafts. Accompanying the ongoing process of consultation and promoting a wide alliance for preparing and launching a Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and*

Cooperation for Peace and a Forum to facilitate its implementation will be the committee's main responsibilities in the present stage..

PREAMBLE

(ϕ 04) The vision for the creation of a spiritual or interreligious forum for world peace at the United Nations is developing at a propitious time. This project must be set in a wide context of achievements and aspirations to recognize and strengthen spiritual energies and ethical values demonstrated in the world-wide activities of the United Nations since its foundation; these include, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the spiritual vision of Dag Hammarskjöld who once said “Unless the world has a spiritual rebirth, civilization is doomed”.

(ϕ 05) Denominational, spiritual and interfaith organizations have been increasingly established to promote dialogue and to improve cooperation among religious and spiritual communities to uphold peace, justice and the integrity of Nature. Many religious and spiritual bodies, movements and organizations are already recognized by the United Nations, and actively engaged in relationship with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Department of Public Information (DPI). The current United Nations reform discussions include a major concern for United Nations - Civil Society relations. In any definition of “We the peoples...” there can be an important role for the leadership, membership and networks of religious and spiritual organizations, movements and traditions.

(ϕ 06) An important step forward was taken in this direction in July 2000 when the United Nations ECOSOC established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, although it is still far away from the aspiration to have a “Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples”, and to have as wide, inclusive and independent a membership as some could have wished.

(ϕ 07) More recently, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations. Its main task has been to produce a set of practical recommendations for the Secretary General on how the United Nation’s relationship with civil society, as well as with the private sector and parliaments, could be improved.

(ϕ 08) In its report in June 2004, the Panel of Eminent Persons urged multi-constituency strategies and a shift of focus from "*generalized assemblies to specific networks*" as well as the need to "*galvanize, support and incubate partnerships in operations and deliberations*". The Panel was also of the view that some civil society constituencies deserve greater attention by the United Nations because of their explicit representational roles or wide memberships. The “trade unions” and the “religious and spiritual groups” were explicitly mentioned. According to the Panel, the latter are important because they “*provide powerful community leadership, shape public opinion, provide advice on ethical matters, facilitate reconciliation between conflicting communities and identify the needs of vulnerable groups*”. (1)

(ϕ 09) Although the Panel did not suggest the creation of a specific organ for this constituency, it recommended in general the creation of a new kind of partner for accreditation by the UN: the network partners, defined as *trans-national networks and caucuses that include a significant number of organizations either active on a given issue or from a particular constituency*.(2) The spiritual forum outlined in this proposal would fit perfectly in this new category of partners, if created by the United Nations.

1 We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance. Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations, United Nations, New York, June 2004, paragraph #156

2 Ibidem, paragraph # 138

(ϕ 10) In his response to the Panel's report, the Secretary-General of the United Nations states that "*multi-stakeholder partnership can help the United Nations to devise innovative answers to critical questions*" and that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals will depend on such a kind of collaborative approach. Furthermore, he agrees that "*main constituencies of NGOs should themselves take steps to form groups or broad networks for participation in United Nations activities*"; this would make it easier to conduct the issue-based, multi-constituency processes recommended by the Panel.³

(ϕ 11) On December 2004, the General Assembly of the United Nations in its fifty-ninth session approved two important resolutions while dealing with its agenda item on **Culture of Peace**. The first one, labeled **Promotion of interreligious dialogue** (A/RES/59/23), "*invites the Secretary-General to bring the promotion of interreligious dialogue to the attention of all Governments and relevant international organizations and to submit a report thereon, including all views received, to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session*". The second resolution, labeled **Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation** (A/RES/59/142), together with "*affirming that interreligious dialogue is an integral part of the efforts to translate shared values, as reflected in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, into actions*", provides a strong value frame based in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for promoting religious harmony and cooperation, and urges the Governments and the States to fully respect those rights and promote those values in their respective countries. The commitment to interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace has been reiterated by the General Assembly in its 60th session through two new resolutions which update the previous ones (A/60/L.4/Rev.1 and A/60/L.10). 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. Furthermore, not only does the recent High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change reaffirm the need for addressing root causes of conflict and for improving mechanisms of peace-building, but the Secretary General's Report "In Larger Freedom" in March 2005 underlines the centrality of human rights for peace and security and raises important questions about reforms in human rights procedures. It would be important to maintain access for civil society in such reform measures.

(ϕ 12) More recently, on March 2006, the "Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace" was launched with the participation of more than fifty member states, at least four agencies and offices of the United Nations system and a number of NGOs, most of them members of the New York based Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations. The goal of this promising initiative is to "*deliberate, on an open-ended basis, how interfaith dialogue and cooperation can contribute to effectively address opportunities and challenges to peaceful co-existence.*"

(ϕ 13) The emergence of such recommendations, initiatives and opportunities tellingly illustrates that there sometimes appears to be a vacuum in which there is no place in United Nations policies and programs for spiritual values such as compassion, respect, unselfishness, equality, solidarity and reverence for Nature. These are urgently needed to fulfill universal responsibilities such as finding non-violent methods to overcome conflicts, eliminating racism and caste discrimination, eradicating poverty, upholding human rights, protecting the environment, promoting gender equality, enhancing solidarity and ensuring education and health care for all. Sometimes the contributions of civil society have been hindered or ignored, at other times civil society has itself fallen short of its own goals, or has lacked coordination.

(ϕ 14) The clear need for a dialogue of civilizations and the clear need for improved United Nations - Civil Society relations give a sense of urgency to strengthen and, where appropriate, to coordinate all existing opportunities for contributions from religious, spiritual, interfaith and secular bodies. These could then serve as a

³ Report of the Secretary-General in response to the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations, United Nations, General Assembly, 13 September 2004, Doc. A/59/354, paragraphs 4-8.

proven foundation for the creation of a spiritual forum at the United Nations where spirituality would be seen as an active force, offering service and solidarity rather than directives and judgments.

THE NEED FOR A SPIRITUAL OR INTERRELIGIOUS FORUM

(ϕ 15) Many valuable efforts are made by groups and individuals inspired by religious, spiritual and value-based secular convictions, but there can be a danger of competition or duplication among them. A spiritual or interreligious forum, conceived not as a new or separate non-governmental organization, but as a facilitating network under the neutral umbrella of the United Nations, could serve to further cooperation among all contributors of spiritual and ethical insights and energies, thereby making their contributions more effective and more accessible to the wide range of United Nations activities and stakeholders.

(ϕ 16) Religious and spiritual traditions, organizations and movements promote the spiritual motivation, renewal and development of their members, and they look, in one way or another, for the building of social harmony and international peace with justice, as well as for the deepening of inner peace. Religions and spiritual movements have significantly contributed towards the development of a culture of peace. They can foster world peace by promoting, throughout their wide constituencies, values such as mutual respect, solidarity, compassion and social justice. At the same time, they acknowledge that religions and spiritual traditions have been sometimes used by some religious, social and political leaders to justify wars and different forms of violence and oppression.

(ϕ 17) The United Nations is the main political forum for world peace. Preventing wars and promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts are among its core functions, together with building the social, economic, environmental and political conditions for durable peace. Over the years opportunities have been created for the religious and spiritual non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to participate in ECOSOC and DPI activities and in the United Nations world conferences. Nevertheless there is increasing recognition of the need for a permanent space within the United Nations for the religious, spiritual, interfaith and like-minded secular organizations and their leaders to be actively involved in building world peace.

(ϕ 18) The creation of a spiritual forum could provide a space for dialogue that addresses both common visions and differences. Demonstration that such dialogue is a necessary method and a possible achievement could make a direct impact on reaching goals of peace and security, justice and sustainability, understanding and reconciliation.

THE CONCEPT, OBJECTIVES AND GENERAL FUNCTIONS OF SUCH A FORUM

(ϕ 19) To fulfill this need it is proposed to create a spiritual or interreligious forum for world peace within the United Nations. This could provide an open, neutral and participatory space at the global public level for meeting and jointly developing useful ways of cooperation among all those religious institutions, spiritual organizations and movements, interfaith organizations and value-based secular groups which are committed to accompany the United Nations in fulfilling its mandate of building and consolidating peace around the world.

(ϕ 20) The concept of a spiritual or interreligious forum assumes both diversity and commonalities among a variety of religious, spiritual and value-based secular traditions, organizations and movements. A forum would not entail the creation of a new centralizing organization, a common multi-religious philosophical doctrine or any ironing out of rich religious and cultural diversity. Rather it would help the holders of each religious or spiritual tradition, and value-based secular organization to reaffirm or to discover in dialogue their common values, views and goals for concerted action to contribute to peace in the world.

(ϕ 21) A spiritual forum is expected to provide the space and channels for facilitating dialogue among people of all faiths and worldviews for a reciprocal understanding of the universal values in the United Nations Charter and of the ethical codes, practices and modes of organization of each other; this is a basic condition for mutual respect. A forum could clarify where there are common views on the major challenges faced by humankind and the pertinent goals pursued by the United Nations, for example the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A forum could identify specific areas for concerted action and could foster the undertaking of joint programs or activities by existing organizations. A forum could thus help to coordinate and mobilize the spiritual, material and organizational resources of various communities at every level of society in the pursuit of the United Nations goals.

(ϕ 22) Together with promoting partnership among its members, a forum could facilitate building up partnership between them and other civil society organizations, government agencies and social actors from the private sector in the pursuit of United Nations goals at global, national and even local level. In this regard, it is important to stress that many potential members of a spiritual or interreligious forum have large and well organized communities of followers in many countries which can become effective partners for implementing programs aimed at achieving those goals.

(ϕ 23) By encouraging and widening the practice of dialogue within and between members of different religions, spiritual traditions and movements and like-minded secular organizations a forum could contribute to identifying root causes of injustice and violence; this could lead to efforts for non-violent conflict resolution, especially where those communities and their leaders can promote justice and tolerance and can help to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

(ϕ 24) A forum could also offer a channel of communication and partnership between spiritual and political leaders by fostering values of sharing and caring.

(ϕ 25) It could help to build up relations of cooperation with the organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system which are responsible for social, cultural, economic and environmental development.

HOW MIGHT ONE ENVISION SUCH A FORUM?

(ϕ 26) A spiritual forum in formation should avail itself of all possible partnerships with the United Nations in consultation and implementation. Much careful discussion and preparation would be needed not only among religious bodies, spiritual organizations and ethical movements, all of which should have a sense of design and ownership for the proposed forum, but also with United Nations leadership and agencies and with all concerned governments. In the meantime, some ideas on these matters are suggested here below in this third draft in order to foster the discussion.

Membership

(ϕ 27) This is a sensitive matter which will have to be carefully discussed during the process of developing a consensual proposal and making it agreeable to the pertinent organs of the United Nations and member states. Some possible criteria follow.

(ϕ 28) The members of a spiritual or interreligious forum for world peace at the UN might fulfill the following criteria:

- to be constituted as a civil society organized group;
- to be of spiritual or religious nature, or including the spiritual dimension, in terms of its institutional goals and activities;

- to be operating at a global level or international scale and with local or national constituencies or relationships (organizations active only at local or national levels would not normally be eligible, although they could be linked to the forum through an international organization with which they might be associated);
- to be 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.

(ϕ 29) Any organized group filling these criteria which requests to be member of the forum would be accepted. However, while the forum would not have a fixed number of members, it should remain manageable in size and balanced in religious and regional constituencies. So, in some circumstances, it could be accessible to relevant local and national bodies.

Institutional Structure and Operation

(ϕ 30) The spiritual or interreligious forum could be organized in several different ways. The institutional structure envisaged below is only one possibility, with two variants. It is presented here to motivate the interchange of ideas on this matter during the consultation process. However other models might emerge which could make even clearer the need to be responsive to advice, encouragement and criticism as the proposal is circulated.

(ϕ 31) The non-fixed and changing number of members mentioned in paragraphs 27 to 29 above could constitute the body or Assembly of the spiritual forum. They would think of themselves as a network and most of their work would be done through Internet. This Assembly would have committees on UN campaigns, goals and agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals, Culture of Peace, Dialogue among Civilizations, Human Rights etc. Depending on its size and the resources available, the Assembly could have sessions every 3, 4 or 5 years. Would the forum be created to facilitate the implementation of a ***United Nations Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace***, as suggested below, its Assembly would meet at the beginning, middle and end of that period.

(ϕ 32) There could be a Council designated and mandated by the Assembly, which would be responsible for discerning priorities and strategies, as well as making statements on behalf of the forum. Two different approaches have been suggested as far as the composition and organization of this council is concerned: one of them emphasizes religious/spiritual balanced representation, while the other is action-oriented. In the former, the council would be designed in clusters in order to assure a fair representation of the various religions, spiritual traditions, and value-based secular movements within the forum's Assembly. In the latter, the council would be composed by the chairs or representatives of the committees created to cover the main agenda items chosen by the Assembly to accompany the priorities of the United Nations. This Council could do most of its work through sub-committees and by networking. It could hope to meet approximately once a year, ideally around the time and at the place of a pertinent UN conference in order to link the spiritual or interreligious forum with the UN agenda and, at the same time, to reduce costs.

(ϕ 33) A small Secretariat or Coordinating Team, composed by an Executive Secretary or Coordinator and three or four full-time staff or team members, possibly seconded from member organizations, could be based at the UN Headquarters, preferably both in New York and Geneva, and could develop contacts with other UN centers. One of its main functions would be to build up relations of cooperation with the organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system which are responsible for promoting sustainable human development - basic condition for genuine peace- and for preventing wars and promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts. A second function would be to coordinate the decentralized implementation of projects and activities encouraged by the forum, which would be executed by groups of member organizations associated with them and –whenever possible-- in partnership with other constituencies of the civil society, UN agencies and member states.

Authority

(ϕ 34) The **authority** which a forum could exert would essentially be a moral authority, analogous to the authority exerted by the United Nations itself and that exerted by religious and spiritual bodies themselves. Authority should not be understood so much in a hierarchical sense but in that of the compelling needs, the authenticity and the credibility of the visions and actions promoted by the forum. The expected presence in the forum of appropriate movements of youth and of women should provide such dimensions of authority and authenticity.

Activities and Agenda

(ϕ 35) Whatever would be its institutional structure, the spiritual 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 goals of the United Nations and to play a leading role in those fields where they have experience and institutional capabilities to help achieve these goals, in association with other members which share a common mission. In summary, the Forum would be created not to compete with its member organizations, but to empower them.

(ϕ 36) In this understanding, the spiritual or interreligious forum for world peace would be expected to define its agenda and priorities for action in response to the UN agenda and its changes over time. The following programs and goals of the current agenda of the United Nations illustrate the areas and issues around which a spiritual forum could focus cooperation and partnership:

- “Millennium Development Goals” : Promote active cooperation in humanitarian programs, including eradication of poverty, hunger, illiteracy as well as contribution of spiritual values to health care, social and gender equity and environmental sustainability.
- Decade for a Culture of Peace U.N. 1999-2008: Participation in conflict prevention and peace education; mediation and rehabilitation.
- “Dialogue among Civilizations” : Contribution of religious and spiritual traditions to this dialogue, including celebrating each others values and self critical reviews.
- “Human Rights Promotion”, including human rights education, protection of victims of intolerance and discrimination, and reparation for victims.

Finance

(ϕ 37) The following principles are drafted with a view to an eventual creation of a forum within the United Nations system:

- Ensure that diverse funding and staffing streams are developed and sustained for the health of the forum and its related work.
- Avoid dependence upon particular donors, for example avoiding that one donor should contribute more than one third.
- Member organizations should contribute at least half of the funds required for the operation (administration) of the forum. These contributions could take the form of staff secondment, hospitality for meetings, volunteering of resource persons, etc.
- The auditing of the Forum’s accounts should be fully transparent and undertaken by an external, independent organization which should also scrutinize the source of donations.
- The funding should be primarily allocated to meetings and projects. No more than 30% should be devoted to coordination and administration.
- The forum should be financed through voluntary contributions rather than through the General budget of the United Nations.
- At the time of launch, an endowment fund should be established which would eventually meet the basic running costs of the forum. In addition funds would be raised for specific projects.

- The Forum could establish an advisory council/board on financial matters whose members would be from the world of funding, philanthropy, and business in order to secure funds when necessary. They could also advise on the management and investments of the endowment fund.

IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE AND STRATEGY TO IMPLEMENT IT

(ϕ 39) Since the functions that such a kind of institutional mechanism is expected to fulfil would continue indefinitely, it seems reasonable to expect that, in the long run, it should be given the status of permanent organ of the United Nations. But, certainly, such an organ should remain over time only if it proves to be useful for and functional to the purposes for which it was created. Consequently, it seems reasonable and wise to start by creating a 'spiritual or interreligious forum for world peace' with a specific mandate for a given period, –let us say, ten years--which could become a permanent organ only if it demonstrates that it is a powerful instrument for building sustainable peace in the world.

(ϕ 40) A possible **strategy** to move in that direction would be promoting the declaration by the United Nations of a “*Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace*” in the same way that there is now the “United Nations Decade for a Culture of Peace” (1999-2008) or the “United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development” (2005-2014). In that context, the UN would convene a “spiritual (or interreligious or interfaith) forum for world peace” under its neutral umbrella, with a specific mandate, which would operate along that decade in the framework of the functions and goals outlined in this proposal. Although the activities linked to the proposed Decade could go well beyond the limits of action of the forum, it would be like a dynamic focus assuring the accomplishment of a priority agenda. As far as time frame is concerned, this Decade could cover the period 2008-2017, giving at least two years for its promotion and organization. It is tentatively suggested that September 21st, 2008, the International Day of Peace, would be a propitious date for installing the proposed “spiritual (or interreligious or interfaith) forum for world peace” and initiating the Decade. If so, the International Day of Peace could be every year along the Decade an opportunity for assessing and encouraging the implementation of the Decade agenda all over the world.

ANNEX I

LIST of MEMBERS* of the Partnership Committee as of 12/05/2006

Family name	First name	Residence	Affiliation	
			Religion / Spiritual Tradition	Institution/Position/Title
FULL MEMBERS				
AGNIVESH or WATTAL (a)	(Swami) Ameeta	India India	Hindu Hindu	Arya Samaj , President Samaj Arya (Collaborator of Swami Agnivesh)
ADLER	Isthar	Albagnano, Italy		Lama Gangchen World Peace Foundation. (LGWPF)
AL-KHOEI	Yousif	London, England	Moslem, Shi'a tradition	Al-Khoei Foundation
GONZALEZ	Gerardo (Dr.)	Santiago, Chile	Christian Catholic	Coordinator, Santiago Spiritual Forum for Peace (CC of URI). Director, Project “Towards the creation of a Spiritual Forum for World Peace at the United Nations”
GRAVES	Charles (Dr.)	Geneva	Christian, Anglican	Interfaith International, Secretary General
MISSONI	Eduardo	Geneva, Switzerland	Christian, Catholic	World Organization of the Scout Movement, Secretary General
NAIK	Deepak	Coventry, UK	Hindu	<i>Minorities of Europe</i> , Secretary General
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			Religion / Spiritual Tradition	Institution/Position/Title
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SIVARAKSA or SUPAMANTA	Sulak	Bangkok, Thailand	Buddhist	Santi Pracha Dhaman, Director
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LEE	Christina	Castelgandolfo, Italy	Christian Catholic	FOCOLARI
PECCOUD s.j.	Dominic (father)	Geneva	Christian, Catholic	International Labour Office (ILO) Special Adviser for Socioreligious affairs
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MOSAAD	Mohamed (Dr.)	Cairo, Egypt	Moslem	Egyptian Interfaith Association , Executive Director

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* The members of the Partnership Committee participate in it as volunteers and in their personal capacity. Therefore, their participation doesn't necessarily imply a formal commitment of their organizations to this initiative.

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