

(Document submitted to the Bossey Consultation on 8-11 January 2008)

**Draft 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 2010-2020 as a “*Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace*”.

Preparing a full proposal for such a DECADE requires a wide partnership, able to bring together 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, putting in place an institutional mechanism to implement it successfully.

Consequently, this draft proposal is one step in an already long process of consultation and consensus building, which includes also Member States as well as pertinent UN authorities, agencies, and programmes.

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

The world has become aware of the importance of the religious dimension in several recent local conflicts and international tensions. There is a growing recognition of the role played by religions in all societies. There is also a keen awareness that religions can be misused. There is also a sense of hope that comes from the development of a number of religious and interfaith initiatives committed to peace building.¹

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 the 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.

Within the UN the role of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace has been clearly expressed in recent resolutions of its General Assembly² 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 inter-religious, intercultural and inter-civilization dialogue 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 most recent of these resolutions, in December 2006, calls for the establishment of a “*High level dialogue in 2007 on*

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

inter-religious and inter cultural cooperation for the promotion of tolerance, understanding and universal respect on matters of freedom of religion or belief and cultural diversity, in coordination with similar initiatives in this area”³.

These favorable conditions give more reason to the call for an urgent 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, could provide such 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. The leading social actors: Even though the member states and the pertinent UN agencies and bodies would be expected to play significant roles in the implementation of the DECADE, particularly at national level, it is suggested that a participatory approach be adopted which would give major responsibility to pertinent civil society organizations, interlinked through an appropriate institutional mechanism.
2. Expected functions: A Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace would be expected to facilitate key tasks for pursuing its goals, such as:
 - Increased dialogue among different faiths, spiritual traditions and related civilizations, which would lead to increasing mutual understanding, respect and trust;
 - the design and development of joint programs, projects and activities by the appropriate organizations of the civil society, 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;
 - the building of partnerships 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;
 - the building of relationships of cooperation with the organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system which are responsible for social, cultural, economic and environmental development;
 - the identification of the 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.

³ UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/61/221 of 20 December 2006 on “Promotion of Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”.

3. Time frame: The DECADE would cover the period 2010- 2020, 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 sufficient time 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 63rd session (September 2008), and another 24 months for formal preparatory activities. Furthermore, if launched in September 2010, the DECADE will overlap only few months 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.
4. A UN Agency Leader: The DECADE needs to have a suitable "niche" and institutional host/partner within the UN. The recently created Council for Human Rights and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights would appear to be the most suitable UN organs to play this role.
5. An institutional mechanism to facilitate the implementation of the DECADE: The simple declaration of a UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace would be ineffective unless an appropriate mechanism, able to put in touch the large number and wide diversity of faith based organizations active around the world and facilitate their cooperation, would be created. Different mechanisms could be designed. *The Interreligious Forum for World Peace*, conceived by the Project "*Towards the creation of a spiritual forum for world peace at the United Nations*" (see annex I) is one of them. The religious and interfaith organizations which are being consulted during the process of developing a consensual proposal for the DECADE are invited to suggest ways of improving that approach or to propose alternative approaches.

C. The establishment of a Plan of Action

A Plan of Action proposed by the UN Secretary General at the launching of the DECADE should be prepared by the Agency Leader, in consultation with the appropriate state, UN and civil society actors during the two previous years. The Millennium Development Goals, Culture of Peace, Dialogue among Civilizations and Human Rights appear 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.

It should be borne in mind that there are a large number of relevant programmes and activities already being undertaken by religious and interfaith organizations around the world in the field of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace. Consequently, a Plan of Action should benefit from that experience, while adopting a flexible approach which would allow a high degree of initiative and participation by the partner organizations during the implementation of the DECADE.

D. A tentative schedule for the preparatory phase

- July 2006-June 2008: 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 2008: A member state (or a group of them) registers the theme in the agenda for the 63rd session of the General Assembly.

- September 2008 – January 2009: A project of resolution on the DECADE is submitted by a group of member states, discussed and adopted by the General Assembly
- January 2009– August 2010 :
 - i. A small Secretariat for the DECADE to be created in the UN Agency Leader.
 - ii. An ad hoc working group with representatives of key religious and interfaith organizations to be created to prepare -- in consultation with the Agency Leader, supporting member states and other pertinent organizations-- a draft for the “plan of action”, which should give only general orientations and maximum flexibility.
 - iii. The organizations that meet the requirements to participate in the institutional mechanism designed to facilitate the implementation of the DECADE are invited to apply and to get accredited, if needed.
 - iv. Fund raising starts.
- September 21st 2010: The DECADE is launched and the institutional mechanism, inaugurated.

ANNEX I

The United Nations would convene an “inter-religious forum for world peace” under its neutral umbrella, with a specific mandate and time frame, to facilitate the organization and implementation of the DECADE.

Such an Interreligious Forum for World Peace could have the following characteristics:

- a. Membership: The Forum’s partners would be mainly faith based civil society organizations (including NGOs), that operate at a global level or on an international scale, and that subscribe 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, would be responsible for further developing the plan of action for the DECADE, as well as for promoting and monitoring through its member organizations its implementation at all levels. More specifically, such a forum/network seems to be a suitable mechanism to fulfil the functions envisaged above for the DECADE, such as facilitating dialogue; building partnership, and developing join programs and activities which might involved also member states and UN agencies.
- c. Modus operandi: The Forum would be expected to be active all along the DECADE working mainly as a network. Its Assembly could meet three times, at the launching of the DECADE, five years latter 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 Agency Leader. 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.
- d. From a financial point of view the 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.
- e. 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 meeting place, 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.

ⁱ This draft proposal is endorsed by the World Council of Churches (WCC); the Conference of NGOs in consultative relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) through its Committee on Spirituality, Values, and Global Concerns (CSVGC-Geneva), and the Partnership Committee (steering body) of the Project “Towards the creation of a spiritual forum for world peace at the United Nations”, given below.

Current members of the Partnership Committee

(Name, faith, organization) (alphabetical order)

Swami Agnivesh, Hindu, President of Arya Samaj; Peace Council, Councilor; Former 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.

Dr. 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, Christian, 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, 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.

Dr. 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)

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