

¹**Proposal for a**
UNITED NATIONS DECADE
OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION
FOR PEACE

**Advancing the Culture of Peace through dialogue and cooperation among
individuals and communities of diverse religions and beliefs**

The UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace 2011-2020 (or DECADE) is aimed at promoting partnership between UN Member States, UN Agencies, Religious and Spiritual Communities and Civil Society Organizations to advance the culture of peace.

The DECADE provides a framework to:

1. Encourage Member States publicly and constructively to engage individuals and communities of diverse religions and beliefs for the common good;
2. Strengthen and deepen the cooperation of individuals and communities of diverse religions and beliefs, locally, nationally, regionally and internationally for building a sustainable world of justice and peace;
3. Encourage individuals and communities of diverse religions and beliefs to cooperate on UN initiatives such as: Enhancement of Human Rights (including the rights of women, children and youth, refugees and migrants as well as gender equity), Millennium Development Goals, decent work for all, dialogue among civilizations, promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence, peacebuilding and shared security.
4. Promote mutual respect and trust between individuals and communities of diverse religions and beliefs through dialogue and shared action.

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

There is a growing recognition of the role played by individuals and communities of diverse religions and beliefs in all societies. Sadly, many situations of injustice and conflict have religious or ideological origins and dimensions. At the same time, there is also a sense of hope that comes from the development of a number of religious and interreligious initiatives committed to peace building.

The proposed DECADE will build on *the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010*. It is being implemented with increasing participation of organizations of civil society, creating at the social level and

¹ *This third draft of the proposal was developed and agreed upon by the representatives of interreligious and faith-based organizations who attended the Consultation hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of NGOs in a consultative relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), and held at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, Geneva, Switzerland, on 8-11 January 2008. The list of participants for this Bossey Consultation is in Appendix II.*

among political actors a strong conviction: sustainable peace needs to be based on the respect for human rights, as well as mutual understanding, trust and solidarity, values which are widely shared by religious communities, spiritual traditions and value-based organizations and movements.

Within the UN the role of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace has been clearly expressed in recent resolutions of its General Assembly which promote “*interreligious dialogue*” as well as “*religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation.*” It is worth noting that these resolutions bring “interfaith dialogue and cooperation” into the wider field of “*mutually inclusive and reinforcing initiatives on inter-religious, inter-cultural 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. In October 2007, the General Assembly complied with Resolution 61/221 by convening a “*high level dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation for the promotion of tolerance, understanding and universal respect on matters of religion or belief and cultural diversity, in coordination with other similar initiatives in this area*”. In December 2007, the General Assembly decided “*to declare 2010 as the International Year for Rapprochement of Cultures*” and recommended that “*during the course of the year appropriate events be organized on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace.*”

The chance to build on these UN decisions, in conjunction with mobilizing the immense spiritual, human and organizational resources of the religious communities, spiritual traditions, interfaith organizations and value-based movements, makes this the opportune time to call for a United Nations Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace.

B. Main features of the proposed DECADE

1. Actors

United Nations The primary political and programmatic responsibility for sponsorship and implementation of the DECADE will lie with UN Member States and pertinent UN agencies.

Coalition Given the unique focus of the DECADE, religious communities, interreligious and values-based organizations will be given key responsibilities in a participatory approach to implementation, interlinked through an appropriate non-governmental arrangement established by a coalition of these supporting entities.

2. Expected Functions

The UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace would have the following key tasks:

- Promote right relations within the human family and with the Earth community;
- Increase dialogue between people and communities of diverse religions and beliefs, and by seeking commonalities and respecting differences, promote mutual understanding and trust;

- Enhance communication and partnership between religious and political leaders at every level around issues dealing with peace;
- Identify the root causes of violence in multireligious societies, in order to promote non-violent conflict resolution, justice, tolerance, gender equality and elimination of all forms of religiously and ideologically related injustice, violence and discrimination, leading towards harmonious coexistence between people and communities of diverse religions and beliefs;
- Identify, deepen and share the application of sacred texts, teachings –for example, the Golden Rule- and practices that promote mutual respect, cooperation, peace, justice, healing and reconciliation.
- Design and develop joint programs, projects and activities with people and communities of diverse religions and value-based organizations, working as partners in the pursuit of pertinent United Nations goals;
- Proactively include women, youth and children in every aspect of the planning and implementation of programs, projects and activities;
- Build partnerships between people and communities of diverse religions and value-based organizations, 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 local levels;
- Establish and strengthen relationships of cooperation with the bodies and specialized agencies within the UN system which are responsible for social, cultural, political, economic and environmental concerns.

3. Time Frame

The DECADE would cover the period 2011-2020, launched on the 21st of September, 2010, which corresponds with the International Day of Peace (an occasion celebrated by communities and their members with prayers, meditation, vigils and other practices, such as the International Day of Prayer for Peace of the World Council of Churches, and the International Day of Peace Vigils). The International Day of Peace would then be an annual occasion each year to promote the Decade's objectives, assess the progress made, and strengthen interreligious partnership and commitment. The launch date of the Decade would also correspond with the UN International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures.

Given this proposed launch date, there will be sufficient time to prepare and promote a final proposal and to get political support from member states to present the corresponding project of resolution on the Decade to the General Assembly in its 63rd session (September 2008), in order to be adopted by the General Assembly in its 64th session (autumn 2009).

4. UN Lead Agency

The UN General Assembly will designate an appropriate entity of its system to serve as Lead Agency for the Decade, as well as other agencies and entities that could

cooperate in its implementation.

A “Plan of Action” proposed by the UN Secretary General at the launching of the DECADE will be prepared by the Lead Agency, 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, Human Rights, climate change, peacebuilding and shared security 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 programs 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.

5. Non-Governmental Arrangement to Facilitate the Implementation of the Decade

To insure the effective mobilizing of individuals and communities of diverse religions and value-based organizations for their participation in the Decade, an appropriate non-governmental arrangement will be **developed** with the following characteristics:

- a “movement” rather than an institution
- be functional rather than institutional
- effectively liaise with the UN and its agencies
- have the capacity to link with constituencies and networks
- be participatory and inclusive of interested constituencies
- be transparent and accountable to its supporting constituencies and networks
- allow each organization to operate on its own according to its mandate and mode of operation or in cooperation with other organizations of the Coalition
- secure resources from a wide range of sources
- perform administrative tasks
- make best use of new technologies for operations and communications

The overall goal of this arrangement would be to find new and effective ways of relating the communities of diverse religions and the interfaith and value-based organizations among themselves as well as with the pertinent United Nations agencies and programs.

The initial process for establishing such an arrangement would include:

- a working group to explore possible models;
- consultation with constituencies about possible models;
- selection of an arrangement by the Coalition, in consultation with supporting Member States and partner UN agencies.

C. Proposed Schedule for the Preparatory Phase

January 2008

- Establish a Provisional Steering Committee to oversee the preparatory process for submission and approval of the DECADE resolution (See Appendix III).

January 2008 – September 2008

- Complete draft proposal and consult with organizations (January - March 2008)
- Secure budget and resources for preparatory process
- Expand network of organizations to reach “critical mass” of support (February-May 2008) (see Appendix IV)
- Secure Member States to sponsor Decade resolution (March-June 2008)
- A member state (or a group of them) registers the theme in the agenda for the 63rd session of the General Assembly (July 2008)

September 2008

- Member States propose Decade resolution to UN General Assembly

September 2008 – September 2009

- Explore and adopt an organizational model for the non-governmental arrangement (November-December 2008)
- Liaise with Member States and pertinent UN agencies to outline the UN mandated Plan of Action for the Decade
- Liaise with Member States to build support for the Decade resolution
- Draft action plan for the non-governmental arrangement
- Secure budget and resources for the Decade

September – December 2009

- UN General Assembly approves Decade resolution
- Hold convening meeting of the non-government arrangement and supporting constituencies (December 2009)

September 21, 2010

- Launch of the Decade
- Formal establishment of non-governmental arrangement.

January 2011

- Decade begins

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Appendix I

Historical Background of the DECADE

The idea of a “UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace” was proposed for the first time on March 2006 in the framework of the Project “*Towards the creation of a spiritual forum for world peace at the United Nations*”, which had been launched two years earlier (May 2004) at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, near Geneva, by an international group of volunteers belonging to different religious/spiritual traditions and linked to several interfaith organizations. That group - labeled as the “Partnership Committee”- prepared and circulated a draft proposal, starting a process of consensus building.

After a long process of consultations, which included Mr. Kofi Anann when he was still the UN Secretary General, the idea of creating a permanent forum was replaced by a more realistic goal:

to have the United Nations declaring 2010-2020 as 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 fixed term, which would facilitate internal dialogue and cooperation within the religious/spiritual constituencies as well as concerted actions for peace with relevant partners (UN agencies, governments, other organizations of the civil society) along that decade.

A first draft proposal for such a DECADE was presented by some members of the Partnership Committee at the Hearings organized by the High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations on 17 July 2006 at the United Nations in Geneva. This new approach raised a lot of interest and support, particularly from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), which offered to be the hosts of a three-day Consultation aimed at developing a consensual proposal for the DECADE. Consequently, on April 2007 representatives from the WCC, CONGO and the PC had a planning meeting in Geneva aimed at organizing the Consultation, to be held on 8-11 January 2008 at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute. In that planning meeting the second draft proposal for the DECADE was prepared, which was later on used for inviting the participants and as basic document for their deliberations during the Consultation.

The above mentioned Consultation took place on the foreseen place and dates, gathering representatives of international interreligious organizations; representatives from diverse religious traditions, able to bring the views and sensitivities of their own faith communities; representatives of some Member States committed to the cause of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace; and advisers from pertinent UN agencies and programs.

The primary purposes of this Consultation were to jointly develop a consensual collective proposal for the DECADE – which is contained in this document - and to consolidate a wide alliance or partnership in support of this initiative, which is being formed.

Appendix II

Participants at the Bossey Consultation

The following persons attended the Bossey Consultation - held at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, Geneva, Switzerland, on 8-11 January 2008 - to consider a proposal in support of a UN Decade for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. This draft proposal is endorsed only by those representing interfaith and faith-based organizations:

Host Organizations

- + The World Council of Churches: Reverend Doctor Samuel Kobia, General Secretary. Geneva.
- + The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO): Ms. Renate Bloem, former president. Geneva.

Representatives of Member States

- + CHILE. Minister Alejandro Rogers, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations Office at Geneva.
- + ITALY. Dott. Roberto Vellano, First Councillor, Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva.

- + KAZAKHSTAN. Mr. Berik Aryn and Mr. Gabit Syzdykbekov, Senate of the Parliament of the Republic. Astana.
- + PHILIPPINES. Her Excellency Ambassador Erlinda F. Basilio, Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other International Organizations, Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines.
- + ROMANIA. His Excellency Ambassador Doru Costea, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Romania in Geneva.
- + RUSSIAN FEDERATION. Mr. Nikolai Lozinskiy, Senior Counselor, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations and other international Organizations in Geneva.

Participants representing the UN Secretariat and United Nations agencies

DESA – Department for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat. Mr Sergei Kambalov, Chief, ECOSOC and Inter-organizational Cooperation Branch. New York.

ILO – International Labour Office Father Dominic Peccoud s.j., Special Counselor, Office of Foreign Relations and Partnership. Geneva.

OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Michael Wiener, Associate Human Rights Officer, Special Procedures Branch. Geneva.

UNDP – United Nations Development Fund. Cecile Molinier, Director UNDP Office in Geneva.

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Bernard Doyle, Head NGO Liaison Unit.

Participants representing interfaith and faith-based organizations of the civil society

Interfaith organizations

- + Trevor Davies, President, CONGO’s Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns (Geneva) – CSVGC. Geneva.
- + Reverend Dirk Ficca, Executive Director, The Council for the Parliament of World’s Religions. Chicago, USA.
- + Reverend Charles Gibbs, Executive Director, United Religions Initiative (URI). San Francisco, USA.
- + Dr. Charles Graves, Secretary General, Interfaith International, Geneva.
- + Sister Joan Kirby, Representative of the Temple of Understanding to the UN and President, Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations. New York.
- + Deepak Naik, Secretary General, Minorities of Europe, Coventry, U.K.
- + Dr. John Taylor, Representative in Geneva, International Association for Religious Freedom - IARF. Geneva.
- + Stein Villumstad, Deputy Secretary-General, World Conference on Religions for Peace – WCRP, New York.
- + Monica Willard (adviser), representative of URI at the United Nations. New York.

Bahá’í Faith

- + Susan Hansen, Special Representative of the Baha’i International Community. Geneva.

Buddhism

+ Yasutomo Sawahata, Representative of Rissho Kosei-kai in Geneva.

Christian churches

- + Reverend Chris Ferguson, Director, World Council of Churches Office in New York.
- + Christina Lee, Director, Interreligious Dialogue, FOCOLARI Movement. Rome.
- + Alberto Quattrucci, Director, Interreligious Dialogue, Saint Egidio Community, Rome.
- + Father Gearóid Francisco Ó Conaire OFM, Executive Secretary, Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) of the Union of Superiors General of Men (USG) and Woman (UISG) Religious of the Roman Catholic Church. Rome.
- + Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). Geneva.
- + Teny A. Pirri-Simonian, Armenian Orthodox Church, Geneva.
- + Reverend Shanta Premawardhana, Director Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation Programme, World Council of Churches, Geneva.
- + Peter N. Prove, Office for International Affaires and Human Rights, Lutheran World Federation. Geneva.
- + Matthew J.O. Scott, World Vision International's Peacebuilding and Reconciliation group. Former World Vision's representative to the United Nations in New York. Alexandria, VA, U.S.A.
- + Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi O.S., Permanent Observer of the Holy See upon the International Organizations in Geneva.
- + Gary Vachicouras, Th.D., Institute of Postgraduate Studies in Orthodox Theology at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He represents His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel de France, Director of the Office of Interreligious and Intercultural Relations of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Geneva

Hinduism

+ Swami Agnivesh, President of World Council of Arya Samaj. India.

Islam

- + Baker Al-Hiyari, Deputy Director, Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies. Amman, Jordan.
- + H.E. Sayyed Mohammed Musawi, President, The World Islamic League; President, Interfaith International. London. U.K.

Judaism

+ Dr. Yehuda Stolov, Executive Director, Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA). Interfaith organization in Jerusalem.

Sikhism

+ Deva Kaur, Representative of Sikh Dharma International and 3HO Foundation in Geneva.

Spiritual University Brama Kumaris

+ Valeriane Bernard, Representative in Geneva.

Secretariat of the Consultation

- + Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, Coordinator of the Consultation, Director of Project “*Towards the creation of a spiritual forum for world peace at the United Nations*”. Santiago, Chile.
- + Isthara Adler, Representative to the UN of the Lama Gangchen World Peace Foundation, Albagnano, Italy.

- + Elly Pradervand, Executive Director, Women's World Summit (WWSF). Geneva.
- + Astrid Stükelberger, Secretary, Geneva Spiritual Appeal Group. Geneva.

Appendix III

Provisional Steering Committee

Provisional Steering Committee for the DECADE

The representatives from interfaith and faith-based organizations and communities present at the Bossey Consultation designated some of them as “Provisional Steering Committee” which will oversee the process aimed at having the proposed DECADE eventually adopted by the UN General Assembly. This committee is being chaired by Stein Villumstad (WCRP), based in New York, having Trevor Davies, Chair of the CONGO’s Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns (CSVGC-Geneva), based in Geneva, as Deputy-Chairperson.

This Steering Committee will no longer be “provisional” once full status has been granted to it by the Coalition of supporting organizations.

Appendix IV

Coalition for Promoting the DECADE

The Coalition for Promoting the DECADE will be comprised of communities and organizations who have committed to support the adoption of the DECADE by the UN General Assembly and to participate in its activities.

Process

January 2008

- Representatives of interfaith and faith based organizations who attended the Bossey Consultation agree on a consensual draft proposal for the DECADE;
- Representatives at the Bossey Consultation designate a “Provisional Steering Committee” which will oversee the process aimed at having the proposed DECADE eventually adopted by the UN General Assembly.

February – March 2008

- Representatives of the Bossey Consultation consult their respective organizations on the content of the draft proposal and about their disposition to join the Coalition.
- Representatives of the Bossey Consultation share the draft proposal for the DECADE with spiritual/religious leaders belonging to or related to their organizations, asking for their comment and moral support to the initiative.
- Interreligious, faith-based and civil society organizations represented at the Bossey Consultation self-constitute as the Coalition for the Promotion of the DECADE

April – May 2008

- New organizations are contacted by the partner organizations to join the Coalition;

- With a “critical mass” of supportive organizations and religious/spiritual leaders the ***“COALITION for Promoting the Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace”*** is formally established and their partner organizations are requested to either ratify the Provisional Steering Committee (which would cease to be “provisional”) or designate a new one.

Partnership

The Coalition partners would be primarily interreligious, faith-based, and 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, and pursuit of a culture of peace.

Appendix V

Honorary Committee for Promoting the DECADE

The Honorary Committee for Promoting the DECADE will be comprised of influential leaders in support of the adoption of the DECADE by the UN General Assembly. The Honorary Committee will be established by May 2008.

9 February 2008.