

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

The UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace 2011-2020 (or DECADE) is aimed at promoting partnership between UN member states, UN agencies as well as religious communities, spiritual movements, organizations representing indigenous traditions and other pertinent value-based civil society organizations to advance sustainable peace.

The DECADE provides a framework to:

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

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

There is a growing recognition of the role played by individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures 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, interfaith and multi-cultural 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*.

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 entities represented in the Bossey Consultation is in Annex I. This document is an updated and revised version of the "short version" prepared in June 2008, and revised in for the first time in October 2008.*

Within the UN the role of Interreligious and intercultural 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.*”² 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*”.

In this framework a High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace was held by the General Assembly on 4 and 5 October 2007, with participation of organizations of the Civil Society. Two months later, 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.*”

More recently, in November 2008, the UN General Assembly approved by unanimity a resolution sponsored by 78 Member States³ which in its paragraph 8: “*Requests the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, which plays the focal point role on interreligious, intercultural and intercivilizational matters, to coordinate with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in facilitating consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for 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 and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding 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, interfaith 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. The Coalition partners must 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.

2. Expected Functions

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

- Design and develop joint programs, projects and activities with people and communities of diverse religions and cultures and other relevant value-based organizations of the civil society, working as

² See resolutions 61/221 of 20 December 2006 and 62/90 of 17 December 2007.

³ See Resolution A/63/L.24/Rev.2 of 13 November 2008.

partners with pertinent UN agencies and government agencies in the pursuit of relevant United Nations goals, such as: Millennium Development Goals, Enhancement of Human Rights (including the rights of women, children and youth, refugees and migrants as well as gender equity), decent work for all, dialogue among civilizations, promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence, peace-building and shared security;

- Build partnerships between people and communities of diverse religions and cultures and other relevant value-based organizations of the civil society, government agencies and social actors from the private sector, in the pursuit of the above mentioned United Nations goals at global, national and local levels;
- Proactively include women, youth and children in every aspect of the planning and implementation of programs, projects and activities;
- 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.
- Enhance communication and partnership between religious and political leaders at every level around issues dealing with peace;
- Promote dialogue between people and communities of diverse religions and cultures, and by seeking commonalities and respecting differences, increase mutual understanding and trust;
- Identify the root causes of violence in multireligious and multicultural 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 cultures;
- 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.
- Promote right relations within the human family and with the Earth community.

3. **Implementation**

The UN Secretary General will identify an appropriate entity of the UN system to serve as Lead Agency for the Decade, as well as invite other pertinent UN agencies and entities to cooperate in its implementation according to their specific mandates. Given the wide spectrum of fields and issues within the UN agenda which might be addressed by the DECADE, a decentralized multi-agency arrangement would be the most appropriate for 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 other cooperating agencies, supporting Member States and pertinent civil society partners organized themselves in the Coalition. The Millennium Development Goals, Human Rights, Culture of Peace, Dialogue among Civilizations, climate change, peace-building 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 and intercultural 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.

4. Time Frame

The DECADE would cover the period 2011-2020, launched on the 21st of September 2010, the International Day of Peace, which would then be an annual occasion to promote the Decade's objectives, assess the progress made, and strengthen Interreligious and intercultural 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 would 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 and to have it adopted by the General Assembly in its 64th session (autumn 2009). During this preparatory phase the Coalition of supporting organizations will be constituted and an appropriate non-governmental arrangement will be designed and put in place to insure the effective mobilizing of individuals and communities of diverse religions and value-based organizations for their participation in the DECADE.

Annex I Participants at the Bossey Consultation

The following entities 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 (WCC) and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO)

Interfaith organizations

Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations; CONGO's Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns (Geneva) – CSVGC; The Council for the Parliament of World's Religions – CPWR; Interfaith International; Interfaith Encounter Association – IEA; International Association for Religious Freedom - IARF; Minorities of Europe; The Temple of Understanding; United Religions Initiative – URI; World Conference on Religions for Peace – WCRP.

Faith based communities and organizations

Armenian Orthodox Church; Baha'i International Community; FOCOLARI Movement (Roman Catholic); Rissho Koseikai (Buddhist); Lama Gangchen World Peace Foundation; Lutheran World Federation; Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (Jordan); Saint Egidio Community (Roman Catholic); Sikh Dharma International; Spiritual Appeal Group of Geneva; Spiritual University Brama Kumaris; Union of Superiors General of Men (USG) and Woman (UISG) Religious of the Roman Catholic Church; World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC); World Council of Arya Samaj; The World Islamic League; World Vision International; Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF)

UN Member States and observers

Chile, Italy, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Romania and Russian Federation. The Holy See.

United Nations agencies and departments

DESA – Department for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat; ILO – International Labor Office; OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; UNDP – United Nations Development Fund, and UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Annex II
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.

As soon as the Coalition will be formally established (March 2009), their partner organizations will be requested to either ratify the Provisional Steering Committee (which would cease to be “provisional”) or designate a new one.

For more information on this initiative or for expressing your support, please visit www.faithdecadeforpeace.net or contact the Coordinator, Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, e-mail: decade@vtr.net