

¹**Proposal 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

1. Our Shared Responsibility

There is a new sense of urgency in the world *of our shared responsibility* for a more just, peaceful and sustainable future. In the face escalating violence, financial turmoil, and unprecedented climate change, the global community increasingly recognizes that we must address these challenges together. No one sector of society or single institution can do it alone. We must find collaborative ways to

¹ *This proposal was originally 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. It has been updated by the Steering Committee (see annex II) and endorsed by the Coalition for the DECADE Initiative (see annex I) on May 2009.*

uphold human rights, to promote the honor, dignity and self-determination of communities and peoples, to seek equitable distribution of goods and services, and to care for the earth.

Coupled with this sense of urgency 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, the emergence of a myriad of religious, interreligious, multi-cultural and value-based initiatives committed to peace building has created renewed hope for the future. This proposed Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace seeks to enhance these initiatives through an active partnership with the United Nations.

2. Building on Recent Work of the United Nations

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*.

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 interreligious, intercultural and intercivilization 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

² See resolutions [61/221 of 20 December 2006](#) and [62/90 of 17 December 2007](#).

³ See Resolution [A/RES/63/22 of 13 November 2008](#).

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 value-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 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 has been constituted, which will design and put in place an appropriate non-governmental arrangement to insure the effective mobilizing of individuals and communities of diverse religions and value-based organizations for their participation in the DECADE.

Annex I

Organizations joining the Coalition for the UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace

Interfaith organizations

Children of the Earth; Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations; CONGO’s Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns –CSVGC-Geneva; CONGO’s Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns CSVGC–New

York; The Council for the Parliament of World's Religions – CPWR; Interfaith International; Interfaith Encounter Association – IEA; Interfaith Peace Building Initiative; Interfaith Youth Core; International Association for Religious Freedom - IARF; Minorities of Europe; Religions for Peace – WCRP; Religions for Peace, European Women of Faith Network EWFN; The Temple of Understanding; The Inter-confessional Religious Forum for the Great Lake region (Africa); The World Faiths Development Dialogue; United Religions Initiative – URI; World Congress of Faiths.

Faith based communities and organizations

Baha'i International Community; Canadian Council of Muslim Women CCMW; Caritas International; Chief Rabbinate of Israel; Federation of Islamic Associations of Senegal; Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (Sikh); FEZANA Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America; Indigenous People's Spiritual Ancestral Council; International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations IJCIC; Lama Gangchen World Peace Foundation - LGWPF; Lutheran World Federation; Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers; Muhammadiyah (Indonesia); Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony in the United Kingdom; Network of Engaged Buddhists; Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Ethics; Rissho Kosei-kai (Buddhist); Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (Jordan); Shinto - Konko Church of Izu; Sikh Dharma International; Soka Gakkai International; The Salvation Army; The World Islamic League; Union of Superiors General of Men (USG) and Woman (UISG) Religious of the Roman Catholic Church; Union of Muslim Councils for east central and southern Africa; Union of Reform Judaism; Union Theological Seminary; Won Buddhist International; World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC); World Council of Arya Samaj; World Fellowship of Buddhists; World Spiritual University Brahma Kumaris; Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF), World Council of Churches (WCC); World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation; 3HO Foundation.

Value-based organizations

Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO); Global Family for Love and Peace – GFLP; Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN); World Alliance of YMCAs; World Organization of the Scout Movement; World Young Women Christian Association – World YWCA

Annex II

Steering Committee for the Coalition in support of the DECADE

In its constitution meeting (2-4 March 2009) the Coalition supporting the DECADE initiative nominated a Steering Committee formed by 15 of its organizations, which will continue the promotional work done by the Provisional Steering Committee during the previous 14 months and oversee the process aimed at having the proposed DECADE eventually proclaimed by the UN General Assembly. The SC is chaired by Mr. Stein Villumstad, Deputy Secretary General of WCRP, having for the time being two Vice-Chairs: Dr. John Taylor (IARF), based in Geneva, and Sister Joan Kirby (The Temple of Understanding), based in New York.

For more information on this initiative or for expressing your support, please visit

www.faithdecadeforpeace.net or contact the Executive Secretary, Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, e-mail: decade@vtr.net

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