



FORO INTERNACIONAL ACCIÓN CATÓLICA
INTERNATIONAL FORUM CATHOLIC ACTION

10 of March 2021

11.30 (India) - 15.00 (Philippines)

ASIA
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MEETING

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Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together

A Historic Document Co-signed by H. H. Pope Francis

and

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb

+ **Felix MACHADO** *Archbishop of Vasai – Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (C.B.C.I.)*

A Public Declaration by World's Two Religious Traditions: A Sign of Hope in Our Fragmented World.

- The two leaders of two religions publicly DECLARE THE ADOPTION OF A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE AS THE PATH; MUTUAL COOPERATION AS THE CODE OF CONDUCT; RECIPROCAL UNDERSTANDING AS THE METHOD AND STANDARD.
- Starting Point: “Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on accounting of mercy), all believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need.”

Context of the Document

- Poverty, conflict and suffering of so many brothers and sisters in different parts of the world as a consequence of the arms race, social injustice, corruption, inequality, moral decline, terrorism, discrimination, extremism and many other causes.
- Human Fraternity, which embraces all human beings, is torn apart by policies of extremism and division, by systems of unrestrained profit or by hateful ideological tendencies that manipulate the actions and the future of men and women; the culture of intolerance and danger of living together in peace.
- Values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence need to be rediscovered in order to confirm the importance of these values as anchors of salvation for all, and to promote them everywhere.

Crises of the modern world

- Desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles.
- There exists both a moral deterioration that influences international action and a weakening of spiritual values and responsibility. All this contributes to a general feeling of frustration, isolation and desperation leading many to fall either into a vortex of atheistic, agnostic or religious extremism, or into blind and fanatic extremism, which ultimately encourage forms of dependency and individual or collective self-destruction.

Signs of a “third world war being fought piecemeal”.

- These signs are painfully apparent, as in those situations where the precise number of victims, widows and orphans is unknown.
- We see other regions preparing to become theatres of a new conflicts, with outbreaks of tension and a build-up of arms and ammunition, and all this in a global context overshadowed by uncertainty, disillusionment, fear of the future, and controlled by narrow-minded economic interests.
- Attack on the institution of the family: it is regarded with contempt or doubt in its important role; this is one of the most threatening evils of our era.

Believers must resolve never to become a cause of conflict

- The first and most important aim of religions is to believe in God who is the Creator, who has formed us with His divine wisdom and has granted us the gift of life to protect it. Life is a gift of God and no one has the right to take it away, threaten or manipulate to suit oneself. Everyone must safeguard this gift of life from its beginning up to its natural end.
- Religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings.

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- Believers must be aware of the danger of political manipulation of religions and interpretations made by religious groups who take advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women in order to make them act in a way that has nothing to do with the truth of religion.
- Religious conflicts are often results of manipulation with the purpose of achieving objectives that are political, economic, worldly and short-sighted.
- Believers must unite and stop (ab)using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression.

Believers are invited to uphold the following:

- The firm conviction that authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, human fraternity and harmonious coexistence; to re-establish wisdom, justice and love; and to reawaken religious awareness among young people so that future generations may be protected from the realm of materialistic thinking and from dangerous policies of unbridled greed and indifference that are based on the law of force and not on the force of law.
- Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. The divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives. It must be rejected that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture.

Contd.

- If we believe in the existence of the human family, it follows that it must, as such, be looked after. This presupposes having one's own identity, not to be foregone to please the other person. But at the same time it demands the courage of otherness, which involves the full recognition of the other and his or her freedom, and the consequent commitment to exert myself so that the other person's fundamental rights are always affirmed, everywhere and by everyone. Without freedom we are no longer children of the human family, but slaves.
- Religious freedom is not limited only to freedom of worship but sees in the other truly a brother or sister, a child of my own humanity whom God leaves free and whom, therefore, no human institution can coerce, not even in God's name.

Mercy is the Path to Follow

- Dialogue, understanding and the widespread promotion of a culture of tolerance, acceptance of others and of living together peacefully would contribute significantly to reducing many economic, social, political and environmental problems that weigh so heavily on a large part of humanity.
- Dialogue among believers means coming together in the vast space of spiritual, human and shared social values and, from here, transmitting the highest moral virtues that religions aim for. It also means avoiding unproductive discussions;

Peace, in order to fly, Needs wings that upholds it: the wings of Education and Justice

- Education – means to bring to light the precious resources of the soul. Education also happens in a relationship, in reciprocity. Alongside the famous ancient maxim “*know yourself*”, we must uphold “*know your brother or sister*”: their history, their culture and their faith, because there is no genuine self-knowledge without the other. As human beings, and even more so as brothers and sisters, let us remind that nothing of what is human can remain foreign to us. Education on behalf of peace and reciprocal knowledge in order to prevent violence.

Contd.

- Justice is the second wing of peace.
- No one can believe in God and not seek to live in justice with everyone (Mt 7:12).
- Peace and justice are inseparable! Peace dies when it is divorced from justice, but justice is false if it is not universal. A justice addressed only to family members, compatriots, believers of the same faith is a limping justice; it is a disguised injustice!
- Greed for profit renders the heart lifeless; laws of the current market do not benefit encounter, dialogue, family – essential dimensions of life. Religions should be the voice of the least, who are not statistics but brothers and sisters.

Terrorism is deplorable and threatens the security of people all over the world

- Terrorism disseminates panic, terror and pessimism. It is due, rather, to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts and to policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression and pride.
- It is necessary to stop supporting terrorist movements fueled by financing, the provision of weapons and strategy, and by attempts to justify these movements even using the media. All these must be regarded as international crimes that threaten security and world peace. Such terrorism must be condemned in all its forms and expressions.

Equality of Rights and Duties Under which All Enjoy Justice.

- The concept of citizenship is based on the equality of rights and duties under which all enjoy justice.
- It is therefore crucial to establish in our societies the concept of *full citizenship* and reject the discriminatory use of the term *minorities* which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority. Its misuse paves the way for hostility and discord; it undoes any successes and takes away the religious and civil rights of some citizens who are thus discriminated against.

Mutual Respect for Cultures brings Enrichment

- Through fruitful exchange and dialogue mutual cultural enrichment can take place; we must eradicate a prevailing obsession for materialism which gives rise to spiritual and religious maladies.
- It is important to pay attention to religious, cultural and historical differences that are vital component in shaping the character, culture and civilization of various religions.
- It is also important to reinforce the bond of fundamental human rights in order to ensure a dignified life for all the men and women.

The Rights of Women, Children and elders

- Today women need to be supported so that they are freed from historical and social conditioning. The women also need to be protected from sexual exploitation and from being treated as merchandise or objects of pleasure or financial gain. Efforts must be made to modify those laws that prevent women from fully enjoying their rights.
- So also, the fundamental rights of children to grow up in a family environment, to receive nutrition, education and support, are duties of the family and society.
- Practices that violate the dignity and rights of children must be denounced; it is equally important to be vigilant against the dangers that they are exposed to, particularly in the digital world, and to consider a crime the trafficking of their innocence and all violations of their youth.
- The protection of the rights of the elderly, the weak, the disabled, and the oppressed is a religious and social obligation that must be guaranteed and defended through strict legislation and the implementation of the relevant international agreements.

Wider Diffusion of the Document

- This Declaration may be an appeal to every upright conscience that rejects deplorable violence and blind extremism...
- ...a witness to the greatness of faith in God that unites divided hearts and elevates the human soul...
- ...a sign of the closeness between believers who believe that God has created us to understand one another, cooperate with one another and live as brothers and sisters who love one another.
- All this is to achieve with the aim of finding a universal peace that all can enjoy in this life.

Seeking Wider Diffusion of the Document

- Al-Azhar and the Catholic Church ask that this document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of formation, thus helping to educate new generations to bring goodness and peace to others, and to be defenders everywhere of the rights of the oppressed and of the least of our brothers and sisters.
- This document may constitute an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, indeed among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will.