



INTER-FAITH ACTION FOR PEACE IN AFRICA

Inter-Faith Peace Summit in Africa
14-19 October 2002, Johannesburg, South Africa

“EMBRACING THE GIFT OF PEACE”

The Johannesburg Inter-Faith Peace Declaration

Adopted by consensus, this day, 17 October 2002,
at Benoni, near Johannesburg, South Africa

A. Preamble

We, representatives from the African Traditional Religion, the Baha’i Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, from different parts of Africa, and gathered in Benoni, near Johannesburg from 14-19 October 2002, hereby commit ourselves to embracing the gift of peace and to genuine inter-faith dialogue and cooperation for peace in Africa. We make this commitment inspired by the teachings and/or the norms of our respective religions, and by the United Nations International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), but especially because our religious traditions urge us to do so. We believe that peace is possible in Africa.

Africa is a continent of faith. Religious beliefs and values are a central feature of the daily lives of African people, families and communities. African traditional beliefs, values and practices have a powerful impact upon our patterns of life and social interaction, as do the beliefs, values and practices of the many religions that have flourished on African soil.

Africa is also a continent of hope, courage and determination. The struggle of the African people for liberation and independence, for example, in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, shows that Africans can turn their continent round for the better.

We commend the efforts of the Lutheran World Federation in convening this Summit, and the efforts of those who contributed in different ways to make the Summit a success. We pray that the fruit of this effort will be lasting peace and understanding in Africa.

B. Acknowledgment

We acknowledge that Africa has for long been a continent of conflict and violence. The violence of slavery and colonialism compounded the violence of our pre-colonial past. Indeed the cycle of violence makes Africa a continent with many unhealed memories and feelings, including those inflicted by conflicts between the many nations and even the religious communities that we represent. In the last decade, conflict has continued to cause intolerable human suffering and to undermine prospects of a better future in many countries and the continent as a whole.

We acknowledge the work of inter-faith groups in different parts of the continent which are engaged in dialogue and peace making at the grassroots as well as national level. Some of these groups and some religious leaders have taken great risks in order to bring understanding and peace in their localities and countries. The obstacles they have encountered and the success they have achieved cannot go unrecognized. We pray that these efforts to make peace in Africa may be blessed and continue to flourish, and that others may join, so that together we can move Africa on the path of peace and development.

But we also acknowledge that religious leaders and communities have at times failed to promote peace. Some of us have sometimes been intolerant of each other's beliefs and allowed ourselves and our religious traditions to be manipulated for purposes that do not reflect our true beliefs. We have sometimes been arrogant in our behaviour towards each other. We have sometimes failed to speak and act against division, injustice, degradation of human dignity, corruption, poverty, disregard for rule of law, and dictatorial leadership which are causes of violence and untold suffering in our continent. Consequently we have not fulfilled the aspiration to peace that our different traditions share.

We further acknowledge that despite our common aspiration to peace, we often seem to ignore, or not to understand, what peaceful co-existence entails. Religious diversity and differences have sometimes been a point of conflict and violence, and at times manipulated to give a deeper motivation to political and ethnic conflicts, and to pursue personal and selfish ambitions.

C. Commitments

We have listened to one another at this Summit, and to the painful stories of people who have suffered violence, their terrible and moving experiences and their fresh wounds, and who despite their suffering, are willing to forgive. We have heard the stories of people of faith engaged in fostering repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace at the grassroots; we have heard the deep yearning for peace and recognized the need for peaceful co-existence in Africa, without which our children and future generations will continue to suffer; and, impelled by our faith principles, and seeking to draw on the best of our cultural traditions:

We declare that we commit ourselves to:

- I. Working for the protection of human life and the environment in Africa. We will work to bring about peace, and to forestall violent conflict, through genuine inter-faith dialogue and intervention in different segments of the African continent.
- II. Embracing the vision of an “African renaissance,” a new spirit for unity and development in Africa.
- III. Working for Inter-Religious Understanding, through:
 - a) A continuous process of genuine inter-faith encounter, discussion, and consultation, in order to promote respect for each other's religious traditions, and refrain from denigrating them;
 - b) Teaching our fellow believers to respect, and to be tolerant, of the beliefs and traditions of others, in order to build mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence in our communities;

- c) Taking a stand against the exploitation of religious diversity that promotes violence;
- d) Fostering a culture of peace and care of the vulnerable, and supporting and strengthening existing inter-faith initiatives, as well as encouraging new ones, for peace in Africa;
- e) Inculcating the spirit of tolerance in our children and youth, including positive information about other religions in educational programmes, formal or informal, for which we are responsible, and to revising our existing educational textbooks and materials, to ensure that they do not contribute to religious intolerance and division; and
- f) Promoting the adoption and implementation of these commitments by other leaders of our respective faith traditions, and by others in our communities.

IV. Working Towards Peace and Conflict Resolution in Africa, through:

- a) Embracing the gift of peace that comes from all of our religious traditions and values, to working for peace as well as speaking of peace, to moving beyond common declarations to common actions, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and to seeking to heal the terrible memories of violence and conflict that haunt our people;
- b) Supporting and strengthening the involvement of all people – men, women, youth and children – in peace building;
- c) Respecting, learning about, and utilizing the unique cultural practices that promote justice and healing in community disputes in Africa; and
- d) Equipping ourselves with the practical mediation skills necessary to resolve conflicts within and between our communities, and seeking to instill a spirituality that is needed for economic and social transformation and emancipation.

V. Promoting Human Rights and Development of the African Continent, through:

- a) Promoting religious freedom in accordance with the teachings and/or the norms of our respective religions, and in accordance with the principles of international human rights law;
- b) Advocating for human rights, human dignity, and human responsibility, for all people and communities without distinction, and to promoting respect for the principles of international humanitarian law, as moral and ethical imperatives; and
- c) Utilizing our religious authority to insist that our political leaders take the path of peace rather than the path of war, and to hold them accountable for their promises and their actions by actively engaging all political leaders in dialogue with regard to positive initiatives and efforts towards conflict resolution, the promotion of peace and justice, and sustaining democratic institutions such as those envisioned in the creation of the African Union.

These commitments are based upon the religious traditions from which we come. They are solemn commitments to help us implement the Johannesburg Plan of Action. We intend to fulfill them. We pray that our hearts, our minds, and our bodies will be strengthened for this task, and that our work will be blessed with success. We pray that those who follow us, our children and our communities, will learn and benefit from these humble efforts of ours to eliminate the culture of violence, hatred and prejudice from our societies and to embrace the gift of peace for all in our continent.

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