

MEDIA RELEASE

Faith, Shared Wisdom and International Law

Kuala Lumpur, 3-7 October 2010

An International Consultation of some sixty religious scholars, legal experts, leading thinkers and policy makers from different parts of the world was held on the theme "Faith, Shared Wisdom and International Law" in Kuala Lumpur from 3rd to 7th October 2010. It was jointly convened by the International Movement for a Just World (Kuala Lumpur), the Weeramantry International Centre for Peace Education and Research (Colombo), the Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University (Melbourne), and the Sri Ramanuja Mission Trust (Chennai).

The Consultation agreed on a Global Action Plan which draws its inspiration from the moral wisdom shared by the world's religious and ethical traditions, including indigenous spiritualities. The endeavour to find common ethical ground holds the key to constructing a more peaceful and ecologically sustainable world order – a task that must be approached with new thinking and great urgency.

Central to this task, is the conceptual and practical integration of this shared wisdom into international law.

The Consultation, convened with the support of the Malaysian Government, believes that finding common ethical ground can help overcome mistrust and suspicion, weaken religious and political extremism, and pave the way for collaboration in a dangerously divided world.

THE CONSULTATION NOTED THAT HUMANITY IS FACED WITH MONUMENTAL CHALLENGES, AMONG THEM THE POSSESSION AND PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND MASSIVE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION.

TO BUILD A PEACEFUL WORLD, IT IS IMPORTANT NOT ONLY TO ELIMINATE NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND ALL OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION BUT ALSO TO PREVENT THE OCCURRENCE OF WAR. THIS WOULD REQUIRE STRENGTHENING MECHANISMS FOR THE NON-VIOLENT RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS. IN THIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST WAR AND VIOLENCE AND THEIR UNDERLYING CAUSES, RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE AT THE FOREFRONT.

AT THE SAME TIME, TO OVERCOME THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, THE CONSULTATION RECOGNISED THAT THERE WILL HAVE TO BE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS WHICH ACKNOWLEDGES HUMANITY'S TRUSTEESHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ALL LIFE. SUCH A PERSPECTIVE WILL BE LESS OBSESSED WITH GDP CENTRED ECONOMIC GROWTH AND MORE INCLINED TOWARDS ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THAT PRIVILEGES THE NEEDS OF THE POORER THIRD OF HUMANITY. IT IS A PERSPECTIVE THAT EMBODIES THE ESSENCE OF OUR RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL PHILOSOPHIES.

FOR WORLD PEACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRUSTEESHIP TO EMERGE AS REIGNING PRINCIPLES, A NUMBER OF CONCRETE PROPOSALS WERE MADE. IT WAS SUGGESTED FOR INSTANCE THAT A WORLD FORUM OF EMINENT PERSONS BE ESTABLISHED COMPRISING RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS,

LEGAL EXPERTS AND FORMER POLITICAL LEADERS THAT WOULD CONSIDER WAYS BY WHICH OUR SHARED WISDOM COULD BE INCORPORATED INTO INTERNATIONAL LAW. THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FORUM COULD BE SUBMITTED TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL AS WELL AS TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS.

THE CONSULTATION WAS ALSO OF THE VIEW THAT THE DRAFT UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES PROPOSED BY THE INTERACTION COUNCIL (MADE UP OF FORMER HEADS OF GOVERNMENT AND HEADS OF STATE) WHICH ESPOUSES CORE VALUES COMMON TO ALL RELIGIONS SHOULD BE INTRODUCED TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR DEBATE AND ADOPTION. IT SHOULD STAND BESIDE THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF 1948 AS A STATEMENT OF HIGH PRINCIPLE. CONVENTIONS EMANATING FROM THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES WOULD BE OPEN FOR RATIFICATION BY UN MEMBER STATES AND WOULD HAVE THE FORCE OF LAW.

These and other proposals which are part of the Consultation's Global Action Plan (GAP) will be executed by a Secretariat under the oversight of an Implementation Committee. Apart from the UN, the Implementation Committee will focus upon regional organizations, including ASEAN, the African Union and the European Union; governments sympathetic to the aims and objectives of the GAP; religious and cultural institutions and personalities; educational institutions in various countries; youth movements operating at national, regional and international levels ; indigenous movements and other marginalized communities ; women's organizations espousing the cause of justice and equality ; civil society groups committed to peace, justice and environmental protection ; professional associations of lawyers, doctors, and academics ; and businesses and corporations at national and international levels.

To set into motion the GAP, the Implementation Committee will, as a matter of priority, identify a university that has intellectual affinity with the GAP and which is prepared to cooperate with the Implementation Committee. The Implementation Committee will seek the support of the country in which the university is located, and other countries, to reinforce this effort. The funds required will be mobilized from both public and private sector institutions.

One of the first tasks of the Implementation Committee will be to establish a comprehensive directory of institutions, organizations and individuals that we can work with in furtherance of our goals.

Professor Chandra Muzaffar, International Movement for a Just World(JUST).

Judge Christopher Weeramantry, the Weeramantry International Centre for Peace Education and Research (WICPER).

Professor Joseph Camilleri, the Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University.

Swami Chaturvedi, the Sri Ramanuja Mission Trust.

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