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Consultation Seeks Peace, Humanitarian Aid in North Korea

From United Methodist New Service NewsDesk@UMCOM.ORG [via Worldwide Faith News]

Date Thursday, 19 June 2003 14:48:28 -0500

WASHINGTON (UMNS) - Participants in a consultation on the Korean crisis have called for immediate negotiations to find a peaceful solution.

Religious leaders from South Korea and the United States joined with humanitarian workers June 16-18 to seek immediate, international conversation focusing on a nonviolent resolution of the crisis with North Korea - a crisis fueled both by that country's pursuit of nuclear weapons and by the need of its people for humanitarian aid.

"A clear statement from the White House that North Korea will not be attacked will establish a

political climate for progress in negotiations," the group said in the consultation's message.

Hosted by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and Church World Service, a U.S.-based international relief organization related to more than 30 denominations, the event included participation of the Korean National Council of Churches. But the North Korean delegation was prevented from attending when the SARS crisis halted flights to Asian capitals, where the North Koreans had planned to obtain visas to visit the United States.

"We have been concerned that (U.S.) foreign policy has moved from diplomacy to pre-emptive strikes," said the Rev. Bob Edgar, NCC president and a United Methodist, at the conclusion of the consultation.

The people of faith have a vital role to play in concluding a non-aggression pact and speeding humanitarian aid to the people, he asserted, echoing the consultation's statement.

"The military solution is no solution at all!" declared the Rev. Syngman Rhee, a former NCC president and past head of the Presbyterian Church USA. He said this was the collective opinion of the consultation.

Rhee emphasized the consultation was a significant event in 20 years of cooperation on peace and unification issues between the National Council of Churches of Christ USA and the Korean National Council of Churches.

The Rev. Jong-Hwa Park, an officer of the National Council of Churches in Korea, said that South Koreans have been living in an inter-Korean peace that was fragile but much better than an atmosphere of confrontation and hostility. The Koreans' peaceful co-existence is being threatened by the nuclear crisis of North Korea and the pre-emptive attack policy of the United States, he said.

His people desire a nuclear-free Korea, he said. He expressed the hope that a three-way negotiation among North and South Korea and the United States could achieve this goal. The people of both countries do not want a repeat of the Korean War, which devastated the peninsula between 1950 and 1953, he attested.

The Rev. Victor Hsu, a senior adviser with Church World Service and organizer of the consultation, described the "ongoing humanitarian crisis" in North Korea he had seen on a trip there in April.

"I can testify to the deteriorating health (and) malnutrition among the North Korean people," Hsu said.

He noted that Church World Service was among the first to respond in 1995, at the beginning of the current Korean crisis. During this period, the organization with the help of the churches has provided \$4.3 million in assistance. With each shipment, a CWS delegation went to North Korea to see the distribution of the relief supplies, he noted.

"The contribution of Church World Service has helped reverse the trend in stunted growth and in wasting among children," Hsu said, referring to a nutrition report issued by UNICEF and the World Food Programme in March.

With his input and that from other participants, and citing reports from United Nations officials, the consultation strongly encouraged the international community and churches to provide health and agricultural assistance to the people of North Korea, and particularly asked the U.S. government to be generous in its aid.

Edgar said the consultation was part of an NCC emphasis on peacemaking that began last year and initially dealt with trying to avert a war in Iraq.

"What we've discovered over the last nine months is that there are two superpowers: One is the United States and the other is world opinion," he said. "Government needs to do its role, but the people of faith need to stand up and do their role" - to cut across boundaries and work for peace and reconciliation.

Archbishop of Canterbury Delivers Major Inter Faith Lecture

From Anglican Communion News Service acnslst@anglicancommunion.org[via Worldwide Faith News]

Date Thu, 12 Jun 2003 00:34:20 +0100

Dr Rowan Williams has today (Wednesday 11 June) delivered his first major address on inter faith relations since becoming Archbishop of Canterbury.

Speaking at the University of Birmingham, Dr Williams challenged some basic assumptions about relations between faith communities and between religions and secular society.

Dr Williams warned policy makers against treating religion as a separate and subordinate sphere of life. He also challenged religious traditions to be clearer about the true nature and extent of their differences.

Dr Williams criticised the secular tendency to view religion as "a subdivision of human activity which belongs among the optional extras, after you have attended to the clear imperatives of non-religious public life."

He also spoke of misconceptions that could arise when faith communities were harnessed for government and other programmes.

He said, "Sometimes there can be an expectation that religious communities will simply follow a broadly liberal social agenda, and a consequent anger and disappointment when this doesn't materialise...What matters is to recognise that the religious person or group starts from a perspective which on some questions will deliver conclusions similar to those of the secular progressive and on some questions definitely will not."

Turning to religious traditions themselves, Dr Williams called for a clearer appreciation and understanding of "the very significant disagreements about the kind of universe we inhabit, what that universe makes possible for human beings and what is the most truthful or adequate or even sane way of behaving in the universe."

He added, "Once we are clearer about the nature and scope of religious disagreement, we are actually more rather than less likely to develop a respectful and collaborative practice in inter-faith relations." Faith schools, he added, could play an important role in that process.

Dr. Williams went on to criticise the religious intolerance of some faith-based states. They betrayed, he said, "a very disturbing lack of confidence in their own religious resourcefulness."

He praised non-theocratic societies for allowing real contention about religious truth. But the secular vision of society also had to strive to make itself credible: "When it refuses this," he said, "we have a mirror image of theocracy - an uncriticised ideology defining the terms of public life."

Interfaith Leaders Call For Tough Stand Against Religious Extremists

By Stephen Kaufman
Washington File Staff Writer

(19 June 2003) Washington—Moderate Muslim, Jewish and Christian representatives called upon their co-religionists and the adherents of all three Abrahamic faiths to stand up to religious extremism and to educate each other, the media and government officials about how those faiths promote teachings of peaceful coexistence.

The representatives, a panel of clergy and laypeople from the Islamic, Jewish, Protestant and Catholic communities, met on June 13 at the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee's (ADC) annual conference in Crystal City, Virginia, to discuss the role of religious faith in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, the 2003 conflict in Iraq, and the ongoing crisis between Israelis and Palestinians.

Imam Yahya Hendi, from the Georgetown University Islamic Center, decried religious extremism that is used to justify violence, saying, "Sadly, in the name of peace, peace is murdered."

He argued that it was very important for believers to confront the extremists in their midst and tell them "no more in my name."

"My challenge to my colleagues on the panel here, my challenge to each and every one of you: Are you willing to say 'no more in my name?'" asked Hendi. "Muslims must not allow Osama bin Laden and like minded people to speak on behalf of Islam because they don't, and they must not be allowed to do so. Jews must not allow the State of Israel to become the representative of the Torah, the Tanach, ... and Christians must not allow this war in Iraq to become a war in the name of Christ as some may see it," he said.

Hendi said that justice "should be the goal of every one of us." If he felt he had to stand up to a fellow Muslim and tell him that his interpretation of faith or faith-based action was wrong, "I have to do it," he said.

Cherie Brown, co-founder of the Jewish Alliance For Justice and Peace, echoed the imam's challenge, saying it "is absolutely essential that we put our voices out, that we need to say what the religions that we love and cherish truly teach ... [and] we need to be willing to have the courage to take on our own communities and to look for what we believe to be the genuine crystals of faith of our communities."

Each representative voiced frustration over the fact that often the most extreme voices are presented in the mass media as representatives of their respective faiths, seeking to give religious justification for such things as suicide bombings by Muslims, Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and conservative Christian support for Israeli hard-line policies.

Reverend Stan Deboe, Justice and Peace Director for the Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men's Institutes, said that during the recent military conflict in Iraq, moderate religious voices, such as the National Council of Churches, were speaking out against military action, and were virtually silenced by the media.

"They were there, but the media wouldn't publish it, and in fact when the media would do something, they would say that American church leaders are out of step with the people in their pew and they should shut up," said DeBoe.

He accused the Bush administration of listening to the views of more extremist Christians, while marginalizing and neglecting faith communities that spoke out against the war and ignoring their repeated requests to meet personally with the president.

But alongside their frustration with government officials and the media, the panelists strongly urged their co-religionists to empathize with each other through their own faith traditions and to learn how to see different faiths through the eyes of those who practice them.

Imam Hendi said teachers and educators "can change the world more than tanks can." He said he wanted to learn about Judaism, "not as portrayed or spoken about or preached by Muslims, but as spoken in synagogues," and called upon Christians and Jews to learn "not the Islam of Fox News, CNN, NBC, or CBS, but the Islam that is preached in the Holy Qur'an."

This understanding of Islam, said Hendi, "teaches me that when a bomb goes off in a synagogue in Tunisia, I consider that a bomb is going off in a mosque in Mecca. And when a man carries a bomb and bombs a church in Islamabad, he is bombing, for me, the Kaaba," and he called upon others to feel the same empathy when Muslims are targeted.

At the same time, he said his answer to extremist Christian leaders who had publicly denounced the Islamic faith is, "you continue to hate, we will continue to love. You continue to throw stones upon us; we will continue to throw roses upon you. That is my faith and that is what it teaches me to do."

Cherie Brown, who described herself as a Jewish peace activist, founded her organization, the Jewish Alliance For Justice and Peace, specifically to fight racism and prejudice. Reminiscing about her early years, she related that she confronted a rabbi at her religious school who told her class that Arabs were the enemies of the Jewish people.

"I was sent home with a note that my parents should teach me to not talk back to the rabbi," she said. "I don't think I learned that lesson because I've been talking back ever since!"

She advised activists to organize events where victims of discrimination can speak out about their experiences and bring home the message of how destructive racism and hatred can be.

"You change people's minds, you change their hearts," she said, "and what changes hearts is

when they can hear a personal story, particularly when that story is emotional."

Brown said many U.S. Jews were outraged by media, criminal and legal assaults against Arabs since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and wanted to find ways not only to stand in solidarity, but also to confront the anti-Palestinian rhetoric emanating from parts of the Jewish community, which she said is a "violation of our faith and our Judaism."

Brown said her organization was inviting Muslims who had experienced discrimination to speak publicly on college campuses. "When hundreds of students and faculty administrators hear those stories, it opens up something that all of the learning and reading can't open up," said Brown.

Reverend DeBoe said that, for his part, the September 11 attacks had created "a new world of understanding" for him, as he suddenly felt vulnerable and could empathize with others such as refugees and the homeless. He said that people were now living in "the world of September 12," in which barriers of misunderstanding had been removed and replaced by "new solidarity that all of us could experience."

"I believe that peace really involves crossing the divide of September 11 to step into the world of September 12, to take the risk of creating a world that is different, ... to be able to look and say, they're not against us, they're with us. And they're not just with us, we're here together."

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

Religious Leaders Call for Solution to Liberian Crisis

Press Release

Contact: Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General, WCRP Phone: (212) 687-2163; E-mail: wwendley@wcrp.org

Abuja, Nigeria -- (11 June 2003) - Religious leaders meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, today called for a solution to the rapidly escalating conflict in Liberia and its impact on all of the West African region. A group led by senior clerics from across Africa formally presented an appeal to a committee of the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) this morning. The Committee on Foreign Affairs accepted and endorsed the appeal and urged its adoption by the full Parliament this afternoon.

Speaking before the inaugural meeting of the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL), Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of the World Conference on Religion and Peace

(WCRP), stated, "Religious leaders in Africa and beyond are fully seized by the worsening situation in Liberia and the entire sub-region."

The situation inside the country continues to deteriorate with the international relief agency Medecins Sans Frontieres estimating the number of displaced as up to one million people. At least 100,000 have sought shelter in ramshackle camps without food, water, or adequate medical supplies.

His Grace Dr. John Onaiyekan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and host of the ACRL meeting, commended ECOWAS and the International Contact Group for their efforts to resolve the crises, but urged additional steps be taken immediately.

In a joint statement signed by WCRP Co-Presidents, Archbishop Onaiyekan, H.E. Dr. Adamou N'dam Njoya, Minister Plenipotentiary Cameroon, and Dr. Vendley, the religious leaders issued an urgent appeal for a:

Ceasefire in Liberia between all belligerents;

Resumption of humanitarian assistance and emergency relief to the refugees and internally displaced persons in Liberia and all other peoples in the sub-region adversely affected by the crises;

Deployment of an international stabilization force in Liberia to monitor demobilization and re-integration of all military and security personnel and the electoral process;

"As senior religious leaders, we are committed to collaborating with ECOWAS to resolve this crisis and establish just and peaceful societies in the sub-region," noted Dr. Njoya.

Leaders of the delegation to the ECOWAS Parliament included Dr. Njoya, Bishop Albert Gomez, President of the Interreligious Council-Guinea, Most Rev. Peter Kodwo Turkson, Archbishop of Cape Coast and Chair of the Interreligious Council-Ghana, Mr. David Kiazolu, Secretary General of Interreligious Council-Liberia, Rev. Prof. Yusufu Obaje, Co-ordinator of the Nigerian Interreligious Council, Rev. William Tolbert III, West African Regional Director for WCRP and Ms. Angela Oliver, WCRP Director of the Program on Conflict Transformation.

WCRP and its affiliated regionally based Interreligious Councils have long been at work mediating conflict in the Mano River region of West Africa. Since 1996, WCRP has brought together religious leaders in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia to assist them in stemming conflict and building peace in their home countries and the region.

The World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) mobilizes religious communities to work together to prevent and mediate violent conflicts, to strengthen civil society and to protect children. WCRP is a non-sectarian, non-political coalition of the leaders and representatives of

the major religions of the world. The Executive Committee of WCRP includes Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Indigenous, Jewish and Muslim leaders. Information on WCRP and its programs is available at www.wcrp.org.

Finding the Locus Between Faith and Ecology

Review of *A Sacred Trust: Ecology & Spiritual Vision*, based on a series of lectures organized by the Prince's Foundation and the Temenos Academy.

Edited by David Cadman and John Carey The Temenos Academy & The Prince's Foundation, London

Thoughtful people have always understood the connection between nature and spirituality. But in terms of an explicit connection between organized religion and the conservation movement, an important milestone came in 1987, when the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) invited global religions to participate in an interfaith event at Assisi, Italy, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Fund.

The idea of involving the religions in conservation work stemmed from the realization that the great majority of the world's peoples, especially at the grassroots level, can perhaps best be motivated to embrace environmentalism if they see it as connected to their religious belief, which is for many the most important thing in their lives.

Since Assisi, there has been an ever enlarging body of thought on the intersection between faith and ecology. At first, the focus was on showing what the scriptures of each religion had to say about protecting the environment; later, there came more complex explorations of the locus between the two realms.

Into this latter realm of increasingly deep exploration falls the new book, *A Sacred Trust: Ecology & Spiritual Vision*, which was recently published by The Prince's Foundation - an organization established by Prince Charles, HRH the Prince of Wales, and the Temenos Academy, of which Prince Charles is patron.

Based on a series of lectures organized by the Foundation and the Academy, and introduced with a preface from Prince Charles himself, *A Sacred Trust* features essays by more than a dozen leading thinkers whose work has touched on the junction between faith and ecology.

Edited by David Cadman and John Carey, the book includes contributions by Wendell Berry,

Suheil Bushrui, Edward Goldsmith, Brian Goodwin, Satish Kumar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Jeremy Nadler, Kathleen Raine, Philip Sherrard, and Vandana Shiva. Among them, they cover religious traditions or backgrounds that include the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Jainism.

Although the contributors are quite diverse in their backgrounds, styles and approaches (Ms. Raine's offering is a poem), a unifying theme nevertheless emerges. As summarized by Mr. Cadman, the common theme is that "we must come to see the world as related, connected, and whole; that all that is is part of an intricate web of causation and dependency; and, indeed, that we should see ourselves as 'a part of' and not 'apart from.'"

This theme of interconnectedness goes beyond traditional ecological holism that stresses the interdependence of earthly life; rather, the essays in *A Sacred Trust* explore the deep connection between the "material world" and the spiritual one - and the implications that necessarily has for ecology.

The opening essay by the late Philip Sherrard, a founder of the review *Temenos* and a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, sets the stage by criticizing the dominant "techno-scientific" culture that would have modern man believe that only the day-to-day material world matters.

On the contrary, Mr. Sherrard writes, "[a]ll that is in the natural world, then, from its minutest particle to the constellations, the whole and each particular of the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms, is nothing but a kind of representational theatre of the spiritual world, where each thing exists in its true beauty and reality," writes Mr. Sherrard.

"The spiritual world is not another world set apart from the natural world," he adds. "It intermingles and co-exists with, and constitutes the invisible dimension of, the natural world."

Without this understanding, he writes, true knowledge of reality will always elude us and the environmental crisis will be impossible to solve.

Satish Kumar builds on this theme. He offers a Jain perspective on reverence for life and suggests that part of our current environmental crisis stems from an arrogance that fails to see that "the material and the spiritual" are "parts of a continuum." If, however, we look at the earth as a "sacred trust" that entails responsibility for all living beings and for future generations, we will be less likely to take the earth for granted.

Vandana Shiva draws on Hindu scriptural references and rituals that uphold the sacred and spiritual nature of food. Her essay advocates the rejection of global industrialized agriculture in favor of organic methods of food production. Industrial agriculture, she writes, with its

emphasis on petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides, not only poisons the soil but also the life forms - such as earth worms - upon which sustainable agriculture is dependent.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's essay makes perhaps the most bold assertion of the importance of religion and spirituality in resolving the environmental crisis, writing that "without the resuscitation" of the "religious and metaphysical view of nature, everything else we say about the environmental crisis is just cosmetics and politics."

He argues that the materialistic/scientific/modernist world-view has severed not only the relationship between God and man, but also between man and nature - and in this way has helped precipitate the environmental crisis.

"...the environmental crisis cannot be solved by good engineering (or better engineering), cannot be solved by economic planning, cannot even be solved by cosmetic changes in our conception of development and change," he writes. "It requires a very radical transformation in our consciousness, and this means not discovering a completely new state of consciousness, but returning to the state of consciousness which traditional humanity always had. It means to rediscover the traditional way of looking at the world of nature as sacred presence."

The essay by Suheil Bushrui, holder of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, in many ways ties together some of the common themes of the others, and, in essence, offers a plan of implementation. For it goes on to assert that that ultimate spiritual ideal for humanity today - and something that is equally necessary for the protection of the environment and a balancing of human needs - is the creation of a unified world commonwealth.

"A consciousness of the oneness of creation and of the mutuality of the material and spiritual elements of society, and the counterpart of such consciousness in action - its beneficent expression in our wise use and care of the environment - are dependent on humanity's unity," he writes.

And to create and reap the benefits of such unity, writes Dr. Bushrui, "[o]nly a 'world federal system' animated by concern for all the people of the world will enable mankind to arrange its economic, material and social life in a manner concomitant with justice for all peoples and the duty of reverence towards the earth..."

Such a system, he writes, tempered by spiritual principles and ethical ideals such as "the sense of belonging to one earth," would "generate new thinking about the mutuality of the physical and spiritual activities of which the planet is the joyous and holy site..."

A Sacred Trust is, then, a significant contribution to the growing literature that connects religion and ecology. Indeed, the range and depth of exploration found in the volume's essays offer a persuasive brief on the degree to which any successful approach to sustainable development in today's world must encompass the realms of spirituality and religious belief.

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