

Speech on the 3rd Plenary Session of the "International Seminar on Interfaith
Exchanges and Shared Future for Mankind" in Beijing, China
(December 11, 2019)

Good afternoon, your eminences, excellences, distinguished religious leaders, guests, brothers and sisters. I want to thank CCRP for inviting me to this significant seminar, focusing on the critical themes. I noticed that some crucial keywords are mentioned in the invitation letter of CCRP for this seminar.

They are idea identity, social cohesion, social progress, world peace, inclusiveness, understanding, respect, ecological civilization, cultural values of religions and Social harmony.

I want to begin my presentation with my thought on social harmony by using the concepts of some keywords mentioned now.

<Idea Identity>

Common identity on ideas such as love, compassion, mercy, friendship, trust, etc. can provide an interesting theme for inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue.

For example, Christianity teaches us to love the neighbor, enemy. Buddhism teaches us to be compassionate to everyone. Islam teaches fraternity love. Other religions teach love in various expressions.

If people of faith, religion, and no faith could exchange respective thoughts in the spirits of inclusiveness, understanding and respect toward each other, their exchange becomes a meaningful dialogue. If they do it without such spirits, it may end up with a mere transaction of monologue.

Once dialogue among religions or cultures is generated, the mutual understanding and trust are nurtured among people, which may eventually lead to their coexistence.

For the social harmony, coexistence among people of different ethnic groups, religions, cultures seems indispensable. Therefore, the dialogue on idea identity could play a vital role in creating social harmony.

As religious identity has a strong influence on people and societies, the inter-religious dialogue could play a critical role in realizing a social harmony.

<Social Cohesion>

The expression of "social cohesion" prevails in our world. It means social unity, social bond, social inclusion, etc. In this context, social cohesion may not be able to take place unless society is not bonded, integrated, to a substantial degree.

If society is divided into various groups without recognition or acceptance based on the reciprocal inclusiveness, social cohesion will never be realized.

Religion can nurture the values which could strengthen the above mentioned social system or entity. Therefore, religion can play a critical role in bringing about cohesion in our societies.

<Social Progress>

It means social development, growth, which encompass economic, political, cultural and spiritual dimensions.

We too much focus upon the economic development in the name of poverty eradication, more prosperous life, etc. Such materialistic prosperity doesn't necessarily guarantee the healthy wellbeing or happiness of both physical and spiritual dimensions.

Of course, basic material or physical needs should be met by all means for everyone. But the excessive pursuit of such needs has a risky trap of dividing societies between have and have-not.

All religions have universal teaching, namely, of controlling greed or self-centered pursuit to richness. Social progress needs to be made in the well-balanced manner of aspiration and satisfaction.

"Knowing satisfaction with a little greed" is one of the typical values most religions treasure. Therefore, religions can play a vital role in nurturing healthy social progress.

<World Peace>

For a more precise understanding of the concept of peace, I want to refer to the famous peace theory of Johan Galtung.

Positive peace is condition without direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. Direct violence is war, conflict, terrorism, etc. Physical violence uses the body, weapons, tools, etc. Verbal and literature violence are such as hate speech, violent words, ill speaking, etc. Structural violence is causes for direct violence, such as discrimination, human-right violation, poverty, hunger, inequity, etc. Cultural violence is cultures that promote and support structural violence such as fanatic religion, etc.

Most religions demote cultural violence and promote positive peace.

<Spirit of Inclusiveness>

Exclusiveness based on the dichotomy philosophy penetrates the many corners of our present world. It creates division, boundary, discrimination, inequity, marginalization, etc. All these contribute to the cultural, structural and direct violence mentioned above.

Most religions teach the importance of inclusiveness. Inclusiveness requires tolerance, patience, compassion, the broadness of mindset, which are the root values of religions. Therefore, religion could play a crucial role in fostering inclusiveness in the hearts and minds of human beings. Without the spirit of inclusiveness, humankind can never achieve the goals mentioned here.

<Spirit of Understanding>

Understand is literally stand under others. Unless we don't stand under others, we cannot truly know and see others.

Regardless of the title or position, many of the genuine leaders can stand under common people.

A true leader knows this truth. Leaders or people who don't understand others cannot make the right or proper decision and may make a fatal mistake in leading and guiding others.

Understanding requires humility and selflessness by steadily endeavoring to overcome

self-centeredness.

Instead of understanding, many are living on above-standing. Therefore, we unconsciously look down on people and worsen human relations, which might eventually lead to risky ties between ethnic groups or countries.

Religion could play a significant role in making social cohesion and harmony by fostering the spirit of understanding.

<Spirit of Respect>

Every religion teaches the importance of respecting others as well as oneself. Without respecting others, there is no way to harmonious coexistence among humanity.

Social harmony cannot be realized without harmonious coexistence among peoples of different ethnic backgrounds, religions, cultures, and languages, etc. In this context, the spirit of respect can be called one of the most vital values of religions.

In Asian history, the harmony based upon mutual respect, understanding and inclusiveness has always been the ideal image of all sorts of relationships among peoples, religions, cultures and countries.

Religion can play an essential role in fostering the spirit of inclusiveness, understanding and respect in the hearts and minds of people. Therefore, religion can eventually contribute to bringing about harmony in societies.

I want to conclude my presentation by reiterating my heartfelt congratulations to CCRP for providing a platform to develop inter-religious dialogues and share experiences on matters related to idea identity, social cohesion and their role in promoting social progress and world peace, in a most timely manner.

Thank you for your patience.