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# Keynote Speeches

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Unity and Harmony in Asia  
The 8th General Assembly of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace

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## RELIGION: A WEAPON FOR PEACE, UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT

**Dr. Mir Nawaz Khan Marwat**

*Honorary President, ACRP*

*President, Religions for Peace Pakistan*

**T**he theme chosen for the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of A.C.R.P is very appropriate and is the need of the time. Asia is the cradle of the oldest human civilization and is the birthplace of all the great religions of the world. It is the largest continent and it has more than half of the world's population. Unity and harmony is the need of the entire world. But Asia being the center of strife and victims of terrorism, needs special attention and ceaseless efforts to extinguish the fire of lawlessness and kindle the torch of peace, unity and harmony for the peaceful living and co-existence of people in Asia in particular and the world in general.

To achieve these objectives we have to rise above our territorial, ethnic, religious, sectarian and political affiliations and target unity for common goal. We have to block the way of foreign interference, which is often launched for their political and financial gains.

We have to use religion as weapon of peace, understanding, common living and respect for each other's rights being the basic theme of all faiths. The people are lucky to have taken a lesson from the devastation of religious extremism in 16th and 17th centuries in Europe and World War 1 and 2. They diverted their resources towards development and settled their disputes and forged unity in the shape of European Union, which will prove as a launching pad for prosperity. In Asia there are certain unresolved disputes among the nations, which endanger peace and sometimes result in armed conflicts. Besides, there are foreign troops stationed in certain countries, which may be a cause of menace.

In Second World War Asia faced untold devastation and the hounds of war in shape of poverty, ignorance, disease and skepticism. There seems a tension among certain countries either over territorial water or border demarcation. Among certain countries of South East Asia like China, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam there are claims and counter claims on certain Islands.

And then there is the tension between North & South Korea. The six nations commission could not resolve this issue nor could it lead to the peaceful reunification of Korea. Similarly between India and Pakistan, there are certain issues, which hinder peace in the area and both countries have to allocate major portions of their budget for defense resulting in the alarming increase in the number of people below the poverty line.

During the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Muslim volunteers came from different parts of the World to fight against Soviet Union. U.S.A, Pakistan and certain other countries lent unstinted support against foreign invasion. After Geneva Accord signed in 1988, and exit of Russians, no efforts were made to set the house in order in Afghanistan neither

any government with consensus was formed. The Mujahedeen/volunteers were not sent back to their countries. The result was chaos, which paved the way for Taliban regime.

After 9/11 U.S.A troops supported by other N.A.T.O troops arrived there. The Taliban Regime was toppled but peace could not be restored there. The terrorists turned their guns towards Pakistan who was the most important ally of U.S.A against terror in Afghanistan. The people of the tribal belt of Pakistan, people of Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa and Baluchistan faced great human and fiscal loss. About one hundred thousand people are killed so far including a large number of defense personnel.

Pakistan is still in grip of terrorism and has launched full-fledged operation against terrorists in federally administered territory. The entire population of North Waziristan had to leave their homes and hearths and seek shelter in the Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa province. They are now living in the scorching heat in tents. After the withdrawal of U.S forces from Afghanistan, Pakistan has again to face the wrath from across the border. Pakistan has to take care of large number of Afghan Refugees since 1979 which has put its economy in shambles.

The after effects of the Arab spring were also felt in the Middle East. There were uprisings in some Arab countries. Recent uprising against the regime of President Bashaar Ul Asad in Syria and the armed struggle by a Sunni Muslim organization known as the Islamic state of Iraq and Sham (Syria) (I.S.I.S) against the regime of Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki in Iraq has resulted in the killing of large number of people and rendering large number of people refugees. This fight will engulf other neighboring countries. Let me point out that the U.S has launched its 2003 military invasion of Iraq on the pretext of weapons of mass destruction. The secretary general of Arab League Mr. Amr Moussa, warned persistently, “you will open the gates of hell.”

Referring to the U.S attack on Iraq, Mr. John Kerry, the U.S Secretary of State, recently stated that it was a blunder of United States. General Tony Zinni, former commander in chief of U.S Central Command, has written about the financial and human loss in his book “The Battle for Peace.” He said,

“The Invasion and occupation of Iraq has so far cost our nation something like 300 billion dollars of our non-inexhaustible treasure, and over 2000 Americans and many more Iraqi lives. Could we have put half that amount to better use in the years before September 2001, building stability and order in the region?”

Now when Iraq is in the grip of insurgency, the destruction is obvious and it may lead to the bifurcation of Iraq. The responsibility lies on the shoulders of Prime Minister Mr. Nur Al Maliki who ignored one section of population in power sharing for his ulterior motive. The terrorism in Yemen is also alarming. The Rohingya people, a Muslim minority persecuted in Myanmar, need urgent attention. The government of Myanmar is determined to wipe out these poor people. It needs immediate solution. There are some signs of unrest in Sri Lanka also.

The peace in Africa and Asia has deteriorated steadily over the last seven years, with wars, military attacks and crimes, reversing six decades of gradual improvement. A global security report said, conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan and Central African

Republic in particular helped drag down the annual global peace index particularly in Asia according to the Australia based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).

In particular rising number of people killed in militant attacks across the Middle East, South Asia and Africa while murder rates rose in the emerging world growing urban centers. More people also became refugees by fleeing the fighting. "There seems to be range of causes".

Steve Killelea, founder and executive chairman of I.E.P, said, "You have the repercussion of Arab spring, the rise of terrorism particularly the invasion of Iraq and repercussion of global financial crises."

Let me point out that America's hawks are pressing the administration to launch air strikes against I.S.I.S, if need, in tandem with Iran. But president Obama has been wise to deflect their pressure, hold back air strikes and keep his option open in view of the U.S past mistakes or remorse for massive suffering inflicted on Iraqi people.

Europe learnt lesson from the devastation of wars and turned towards unity and economic wellbeing of the people. Formation of European Union is the glaring example of their wise decision. Once worst enemies like Germany, Italy, France, Russia and United Kingdom and others are working under the same umbrella. It is a good omen for peace. Europe has replaced religious extremism of 16th and 17th centuries with liberalism and tolerance. The Asian nations should follow their precedent and must forge unity for the welfare of the future generations.

Life, says a fine Greek adage, "is the gift of nature, but beautiful living is the gift of wisdom." In order to achieve unity and harmony certain norms are to be observed like tolerance, mutual respect, patience, non-interference, social justice and helping each other.

Now let me explain tolerance. The United Nations through its agency UNESCO approved the famous declaration of Principles of Tolerance in 1995 which has defined tolerance as:

"Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human."

It is forested by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference and to be practiced, it requires, just and impartial legislation, law enforcement and judicial and administrative process."

Tolerance is a positive trait denoting humane interaction among humans. As aptly remarked by Professor William Re, at Harvard, "tolerance is not just agreeing with one another or remaining indifferent in the face of injustice but rather showing respect for the essential humanity in every citizen." The intolerance can be tamed through education, counseling and appropriate laws and effective enforcement. The policy of non-interference in others' affairs and desisting from desecration of other faiths can lead us to unity and harmony resulting in peaceful co-existence. Peaceful co-existence is the basic theme of all faiths.

No religion allows persecution, hatred, extremism and terrorism. Extremists do exist in all faiths who misinterpret the golden principles of religions. We have to join hands to

frustrate their evil intentions. No religion compels people of other faiths to convert. It has given them complete freedom to follow their own faith.

As a Muslim let me state in an unequivocal terms that Islam does not allow forced conversion and extremism. The freedom of religion is documented in both the Holy Quran and the prophetic teachings known as Sunnah. Almighty God addresses the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the Quran.

“If it had been your Lord’s will, they would all have believed all of who are on earth. Will you then compel human kind, against their will, to believe?” It is clearly revealed in The Holy Quran that there is no compulsion in religion. Observing the moral principles it can also lead to unity and peaceful co-existence. Let me quote Martin Luther King jr, “Morality cannot be legislated but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless.” Thus, by observing the moral values we can inculcate the spirit of mutual love and peaceful co-existence.

It is heartening to note that the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen a big change. Religionists have moved away from defending their beliefs or reinforcing their religious conviction with revivalist movements. Instead, they have followed modern medical practices. They have inserted stents to improve the flow of corpuscles of thought and the platelets of ideas within their own system. The result of this reinvigoration has been a quickening of interest in interfaith communications as realists began to acknowledge a truth since the interfaith communication has found a number of voluntary flag bearers.

One of the best-known persons in this field is Ms. Karen Armstrong, a former nun who since turning her back on her convent, has achieved fame publishing books on comparative religions. She has created a niche market for her well-researched and readable summaries of the world major religions and their founders. Through her works she has created an environment of mutual understanding leading towards unity and harmony.

The other person in this field treading on the same path in Islam would have to be Dr. Akbar Ahmed who now serves as an ambassador of Islam in the U.S. As an author he is as prolific, and he is equally articulate and persuasive as a speaker and has a vast experience as a civil servant and diplomat. His commitment to the promotion of interfaith understanding is as deep as hers. She shares and pursues the same mission as Dr. Akbar Ahmed who is teaching in United States. His latest book “The Thistle and the Drone is interesting provocative application of the tools of the academic anthropology to modern politics.

Going through the books of Ms. Karen Armstrong and Dr. Akbar Ahmed, it becomes crystal clear that the need for interfaith understanding today remains unarguably acute. For it to succeed, though, it needs desperately to move beyond the singularity of interfaith monologues.

Now let us examine our own religion which we follow. The basic theme of all is peace, love for human kind, helping the poor and the needy, and stand with the oppressed and not the oppressor.

It is also revealed in all the Heavenly revealed Books that all human beings are the offspring of Adam and Eve. Hence having common origin, they have common values.

Thus they must live in peace, unity and harmony and struggle against all odds and injustices together. Now let us think whether we have played our role in this context and tried to change the volatile situations prevailing in some areas.

In the Holy Quran it is said, “And there is not for man except that (good) for which he strives.” It further says, “God does not change the condition of (a) people until they change what is in themselves.”

Hence we have to wage struggle for change, to bring people close and solve the confronting issues. The two august organizations, World Conference of Religions for Peace and Asian Conference of Religions for Peace are the largest interfaith organizations. The people have attached great hopes with them. We must take their activities to all the affected areas and mark our presence by sharing their sorrow and grief during terrorist attacks, natural calamities like earthquake, flood and famine etc. Our activities should not remain confined to the holding of our general assemblies every after five years or holding meetings of executive committee once a year.

My suggestion should be taken as proposal and not criticism.

In 2005, an earthquake had resulted in great devastation in Pakistan causing enormous human and property loss. Delegations of A.C.R.P. Japan and South Korea Chapters visited Pakistan and extended their financial assistance to the affected people and personally visited those areas. I also accompanied them. It was highly appreciated by the government and people of Pakistan.

The electronic and print media gave it prominent coverage. This good gesture raised the image of our esteemed organization. As you know that Pakistan is gripped with terrorism; the people and armed forces are combating and confronting the terrorists. I have visited areas stricken by terror along with my delegation and repeatedly extended to the victims assistance and providing relief goods under the banner of WCRP & ACRP Pakistan Chapter.

Let us pledge during our Assembly that we will give all our efforts in bringing peace, unity and harmony in Asia in particular and the world in general. We will rise above our religious, ethnic and territorial entities and play our role individually and collectively continuously to achieve our noble aim of human homogeneity and survival. It may prove as source of salvation on the Day of Judgment when we all appear before our Creator.

Long live our unity, harmony and peace.



# DIVERSITY AS AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN PEACEMAKING

**Rev. Nichiko Niwano**

*President, Risshō Kōsei Kai, WCRP/Japan*

**A**llow me to express my deep gratitude for being given the opportunity to deliver this keynote address at the Eighth General Assembly of Religions for Peace Asia (ACRP).

Today I see gathered here many distinguished guests who attended WCRP IX last November in Vienna, Austria. I also see many old friends with whom I have enjoyed close friendships over the years. I am very happy to be reunited with all of you here in Incheon, Korea.

Many people have devoted their time and energy to organizing this General Assembly: ACRP's President and Moderator Dr. Din Syamsuddin, its Secretary General Dr. Sunggon Kim, and its General Assembly office staff; as well as KCRP's President, Most Ven. Ja Seung, its Executive Secretary Dr. Jinheung Byun, its officers, and its staff. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of them for their great efforts.

The theme of this General Assembly is "Unity and Harmony in Asia." Specifically, we are treating diversity not as a negative factor, but as an essential ingredient in peacemaking. One important point for discussion will be finding the ways to do so.

The people living in this world come from diverse national, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In the Asian region in particular, this trend is quite remarkable.

I think that this diversity is completely natural. Indeed, we can readily accept diversity as enriching human society.

By accepting and respecting those we are different from, we have the opportunity to reflect upon, to learn about and to improve upon ourselves. Through such encounters, we can dispel our misunderstandings and prejudices about others, and deepen our correct understanding of them. Fresh ideas, values and activities are created through these encounters. In order to reap these benefits, we need to make a mutual effort to restrain self-assertiveness. The Eastern spirit of broadmindedness is extremely valuable wisdom that has emerged from our diversity.

Personally, I also feel it is vital that, while we accept and respect diversity, we also keep our eyes on the fundamentals, those basic points that human beings have in common.

All human beings rejoice when their children are born, and grieve when they lose their loved ones. We tremble before violence, and we fear death. We all have strengths and weaknesses.

By nature, we human beings harbor, deep in our innermost hearts, the common desire to get along with everyone and to live in harmony with them.

In Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra teaches "the wish to be born," which means that we have been born into this world due to our wish that all living beings be liberated and become happy. This teaches us, in a religious sense, the truth about human nature.

From an individual perspective, someone once explained this concept by saying, “The soul has a program.”

This “program” is living while maintaining harmony with all existence in the universe. For example, on the one hand, there is no food, nothing to eat, in one part of the world. On the other hand, there is enough food stored up for oneself and there is enough in reserve for one’s own country. This is “disharmony.” The soul, which only borrows things existing on earth, goes on practicing its program of harmony. Putting aside the ego of “me first” and harmonizing with all existence in the universe—that is the theme of each and every human soul.

As all of you remember, the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami occurred in March 2011. That news crossed the globe in an instant, and within days of the disaster, many nations, including China and Korea, dispatched rescue teams that performed dedicated relief work in the disaster zone.

In the two months following the disaster, Japan received offers of assistance from 197 countries, regional communities and international organizations. Twenty-three countries and communities dispatched emergency response teams, and 108 countries, communities, and international organizations sent emergency supplies and relief funds. And it would be impossible to enumerate the amount of assistance and support given by ordinary citizens.

Transcending differences of nationality, race, culture and language, the emergency responders did their utmost to lend a helping hand to their fellow human beings, and shared the burden of suffering and grief. There were many members of the rescue teams who, even though they did not have language in common, gave hugs to victims of the disaster and cried together with them. This tragic event made me strongly feel that unity and harmony—the theme of this General Assembly—are the very essence of human nature and the true character of humanity.

Speaking of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, we received generous support from many Asian religious leaders. As one Japanese religious leader, please allow me to take this opportunity to once again express my gratitude.

My speech last year at the Ninth General Assembly of WCRP included an episode about Voyager, the spacecraft put into orbit by NASA 37 years ago. As it seems very appropriate to this General Assembly’s theme of “Unity and Harmony in Asia,” I would like to mention it again.

When Voyager had finished collecting data on Jupiter, Saturn and Uranus, it sent back 64 photographs before exiting our solar system. In them, the earth is seen from a distance of 6.5 billion kilometers.

Having seen these photographs, NASA’s director of research spoke in a pensive tone. “Ladies and gentlemen, please take a good look at this photograph. This spot as tiny as the head of a pin is where you now are. Your families and the pets that you love are all here. The enemies you are fighting with, they are here, too. I want you to remember that everything and everyone are here on this tiny speck. Please take a close look, for around that tiny speck is nothing but black space and if that small speck, our Earth, ever has an emergency, there is no indication whatsoever that help will be coming from anywhere!”

The words of this scientist convey, in powerful terms, that all living beings on this planet are fellow passengers on spaceship Earth, sharing a common fate. In other words, we have always been family; we are all brothers and sisters.

Unfortunately, even now, in this very moment, conflict is raging in every part of the world, and the flames of war are inextinguishable.

Buddhism teaches us that the root causes of all sufferings are greed, anger and ignorance—in other words, the delusions that are represented by greed, anger and ignorance.

Greed, in modern parlance, is the self-centered mind that is possessive and craves control. Anger means getting angry at people. It is the stubborn emotional state that does not forgive. And ignorance is born of not knowing the truth. It is the state of being imprudent as a human being.

In particular, anger and an angry mind not only affect the human relationships nearest them, but also increase the conflict and divisiveness among peoples and nations. When anger escalates, it may lead to violence. If one group attacks another, they are on the defensive and ready to retaliate. Responding to hatred with hatred and countering violence with violence will, as history shows us, produce a chain reaction of new violence and unending distrust and fighting.

Buddhism's *Dhammapada* contains the phrase, "Responding to hatred with hatred, the cycle will never end. By non-hatred alone is hatred eliminated." The following story illustrates this principle.

One day, there was a certain monk who behaved in such a way that he broke a precept. One group of his fellow monks insisted that he was without blame, while an opposing group asserted that he was guilty of precept-breaking. Violence was about to erupt when *Shakyamuni* intervened as an intermediary.

Shakyamuni had all of them gathered and told them this story.

"Long ago, in the Kingdom of Kosala, there was a wise king named Dighiti, who was very prosperous. However, the king of the neighboring country had designs to invade Kosala. Dighiti thought that by making himself disappear, the idea of war would die down, so he hid himself in the mountains. Thanks to this, there was no large war, but Kosala was reduced to a tributary state, and Dighiti himself was captured and sentenced to death.

"Dighiti had a son, Prince Dighavu. When Dighiti was about to be put to death, he caught sight of his son, and yelled out: 'If there is anyone here who intends to take vengeance on my enemy, then my enemy will only produce more enemies, and for eternity there will be no end to it. For my sake, do not kill another person.'

"However, Prince Dighavu's hatred did not vanish. Concealing his true identity, he got close to the enemy king, and served as his companion on a hunting trip. Along the way, when the tired king laid down to sleep, Dighavu drew his sword to kill him, but his father's final words weighed heavily on his mind, and he could not go through with it.

Later, when the king opened his eyes, he said, "I had a strange dream. Dighiti's son was going to stab me, but for some reason he put down his sword and went away."

“When Dighavu heard this, he revealed his true identity and honestly told the king what he had intended to do. The king then apologized to him, saying, “Prince Dighavu, I deserved to be killed by you, because I killed such a splendid king as Dighiti. Your strong sense of filial piety and your broadmindedness have given my body and mind a new life.” The two men then shook hands.

Later, the king returned the kingdom of Kosala to Prince Dighavu, and afterward, the two countries were on friendly terms, just like brothers.”

When Shakyamuni had finished telling this story, he persuaded the monks, by saying, “Hatred is not ended by further hatred. The cycle of vengeance is brought to an end by non-vengeance.” Then both camps are said to have resolved their argument.

Ending the cycle of hatred is never easy for human beings. Even planning some basic resolutions, by forgiving adversaries and finding a way to coexist with them, require tremendous patience and persistence.

However, ending the cycle of hatred can also be called the deepest desire of humanity. No matter how difficult the situation and no matter how much time is required to resolve it, unless we find some means to advance on that way, step by step, our wish to realize true unity and harmony in this world will never be granted.

As I have often said before, I believe that the essential spirit transmitted to us by Shakyamuni is to always reconfirm the path, while continuing to advance on it and, as one Buddhist practitioner, this is my intention.

All of the representatives of different religions in attendance here today are living examples of their own esteemed faiths, which are also leading the human spirit toward salvation. All of their countries and peoples have their own treasured traditions and cultures. Each and every human being is living a precious life that cannot be compared to any other.

When people put their hands together in prayer as a sign of respect for all existence—which is, without exception, entirely worthy of respect and irreplaceable—then all become united as one, accept one another, work together, and realize a world of great harmony. This vision, etched in my heart, is what I hope to achieve, together with all of you.

Just like you, I am living in Asia, with its hallowed history and its rich cultural heritage. As I mentioned earlier, the religious traditions of the East are rooted in accepting diversity and the living spirit of being broadminded. In Asia, we accept that human beings are a part of nature, and value lifestyles that aim to coexist with nature. In Asia, there is an ethos of reining in desire before it becomes large and unbounded.

These are all examples of our invaluable wisdom that has much to contribute to solving global issues.

One meaning of the word “Asia” is “the land of sunrise.” As religious leaders living in this Asia, we must shine forth the light that will lead the world to peace and make the world as one—that is the extremely important mission with which ACRP has been entrusted.

I would like to conclude my Keynote Address with my unceasing prayers that this assembly starting today, which will extend across the next three days, will bear many good results as it achieves “Unity and Harmony in Asia.” Thank you very much.

# STRENGTHENING UNITY AND HARMONY THROUGH INCLUSIVENESS, MUTUAL LEARNING AND EQUAL COOPERATION

**Imam Chen Guangyuan**

*Vice Chairman, China Conference of Religions for Peace*

**D**ear delegates,

At the outset, please allow me to extend cordial greetings to all friends present here on behalf of Living Buddha Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai, President of the China Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP). On behalf of the CCRP delegation, I would also like to greet our colleagues at the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) Secretariat and the Korean Conference of Religions and Peace (KCRP) for your excellent organization of the meeting and the gracious hospitalities accorded to us.

The General Assembly of the ACRP is a grand meeting where people from the religious communities of the Asia Pacific gather. I am very delighted to meet friends, old and new. Hereby I want to share with you some of my views concerning the theme of “unity and harmony in Asia.”

Asia has nearly a third of total global land area and three-fifth of world’s population. It is a continent where multiple ethnic groups and religions coexist. In the long course of history, together, Asian countries have created splendid oriental civilizations and have suffered from hardships. Today, Asia has become one of the most dynamic and promising regions in the world. However, we should be aware that most Asian countries are developing countries, with over 700 million people still living under the international poverty line. We, thus, face daunting tasks in boosting economic growth and improving people’s livelihood as well as multiple traditional and non-traditional security challenges. It is the shared aspirations and responsibilities of the entire people of the Asia Pacific to diffuse challenges, grab opportunities, safeguard peace, accelerate development and improve people’s well being. To solve problems in Asia, first is to rely on development. Secondly, it is closely related to unity and harmony of people of different countries in the region.

To strengthen unity and promote harmony calls for the spirit of inclusiveness, mutual learning and equal cooperation. Countries in the Asia Pacific vary from one another in terms of social systems, cultures and development stages, which should be our advantage and distinction rather than hindrance to solidarity. Only by respecting and understanding each other, learning and cooperating, and accommodating each other’s concerns on the basis of equality, can we promote harmonious development of the Asia Pacific region in its richness and diversity.

To strengthen unity and promote harmony calls for a long-term vision. The development of Asia faces many difficulties and risks, but peace, development, and win-win cooperation

have always been the mainstream of Asia. Globalization has increasingly made the Asia Pacific a community of shared destinies. It is more imperative than ever for us to keep in mind the large picture, build consensus, increase confidence, and contribute positive energy to unity and development in Asia.

To strengthen unity and promote harmony calls for people-to-people exchanges as its core. There is an old Chinese saying that “a far-away relative is not as helpful as a nearby neighbor.” We are neighbors in the Asia Pacific region as close as lips and teeth. We are blessed with a fine and long tradition of friendly interactions and mutual help. To strengthen unity in Asia, we must enhance exchanges between the people to build the bonds of affinity so as to lay a solid foundation of public opinion for friendship and cooperation between states. In history, China used to communicate with the world via the Silk Road both on land and at sea. Oriental and Occidental civilizations emerged. Religious and cultural exchanges served as important content and carriers, for instance, Muslims brought “zero” to China and used it in geometry. Currently, China is proposing to build the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century.” The religious community in China is also contemplating on how to engage in this process, advocate the humanistic spirit of religions and contribute to dialogue between different civilizations and increased friendship among the people.

China is a unified multi-ethnic country with the co-existence of five big religions. The Chinese culture adores harmony and the Chinese people love peace. Ideas like “all hearts are towards peace,” “unity in diversity” and “universal peace” are ideas that have been passed down from generation to generation. The Chinese people’s suffering of internal strife and external invasion in modern times has given us a keener understanding and a deeper conviction of peace and harmony.

Among the five big religions in China, only Taoism was original, while Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Christianity were all brought to China from abroad at different times. The foreign religions adapted to the Chinese culture including Confucianism and Taoism and achieved joint development through mutual learning. Religious harmony is not confined to one religion. Rather, it exists between different religions, between people with or without faith, among people with different religious beliefs, and between religious and secular communities.

The CCRP is composed of representatives of the five religions. To safeguard religious harmony in China and to facilitate foreign friendly exchanges is the main task for us. We have shared experience of our work with friends of religious communities in other countries to increase mutual understanding and consolidate friendship. The exchanges, based on respect and equality, have had good impact on promoting unity and harmony.

Dear delegates, religion has served as an important bond in people-to-people exchanges in the Asia Pacific region, as reflected in the Gold Bond of Buddhist Conferences between China, Japan and ROK, the Islamic cultural exhibitions between China, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and seminars on Christianity held by China and ROK. The ACRP has also provided a helpful platform for member organizations to share wisdom and experience. Thanks to joint efforts of all of you, the pattern of friendly cooperation in the ACRP is taking shape. Here, on behalf of the CCRP, I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to the Conference President and Secretary-General of the ACRP and friends in member

organizations. We hope and believe that the new leadership of the ACRP will work strenuously with its member organizations to promote unity and harmony, peace and development as well as friendship and cooperation in Asia with great success.

Dear friends, to make the ACRP a success, we have to rely on its member organizations. To make Asia a continued success, we have to rely on the people of Asia. Unity is strength. Harmony is the prerequisite for coexistence. Dear friends, despite our different faiths, we have come here for the unity and harmony, and for the peace and development in Asia. Let's demonstrate wisdom, build consensus and work in concert. With a bigger heart, we can respect and tolerate each other, and promote the dialogue of civilizations. With a wider vision, we can put the issue of security in a new light and maintain lasting peace. With a more balanced view, we can seek development to eradicate poverty. With a more open attitude, we can cooperate and promote common progress. Let us join hands to contribute to the cause of the ACRP, to strengthening unity and harmony in Asia, and to promoting lasting peace and common development in Asia.

Thank you all!



## SOLIDARITY AND COOPERATION: STEPPINGSTONES TO WORLD PEACE

**Most Rev. Boniface Choi Ki-San, D.D.**

*Bishop, Diocese of Incheon, Korea*

**A**s a bishop serving in Incheon areas on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea, I welcome and greet all of the representatives from Asia who have graced this special occasion with your presence. I also would like to express my sincere gratitude to ACRP's Moderator/President Prof. Dr. M. Din Syamsuddin and the ACRP's leadership for allowing me this honor of giving a keynote speech before esteemed colleagues and members of religious communities in Asia. As all of you may well know, His Holiness Pope Francis had visited Korea only a week ago. It may be a coincidence, but the papal visit lasted five days, just as ACRP's General Assembly will go on for five days. Five days may be short or long, depending on how one looks at it. Even though His Holiness Pope Francis is no longer with us here, much of Korea is still echoing the heartfelt impressions that the papal visit had left behind. Such impression is alive in me as well, and it is with this trembling and joyful heart that I welcome you to this beautiful city, Song-do, Incheon.

The ACRP's 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly's theme brings us two challenges. The first challenge is to answer how Asia, represented by all the participants and attendants of this General Assembly, may stand in solidarity with one another and in unity (not uniformity). And the second challenge is about finding the way of overcoming whatever differences and conflicts that may arise in our attempts to achieve the former goal and attaining true coexistence and harmony. Of course, these challenges are not exclusive to religious leaders; political and socioeconomic leaders must address them as well. However, we are to face and answer these two dilemmas as religious and spiritual leaders.

Today the East and the West have lost their way in a whirlpool of violent conflicts and political standoffs, costing many innocent lives along the way. The casualties always have been the socially marginalized such as the youth, the elderly and the women. If these conflicts were to continue, then it would not just be an end for them, but an end for us all.

Let us be reminded of how at the birth of ACRP and WCRP, the religious leaders around the globe rallied together to warn about the dangers of man-made catastrophes and ways to prevent them. They warned about the nuclear tests and nuclear arms race that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, urging the governments to stop building the weapons capable of total destruction. By now, we have also learned about the dangers of nuclear plants as evidenced by painful and not-yet-healed memories of Chernobyl and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disasters. And if international energy race will to escalate into the military conflicts, it will result in an unimaginable and insurmountable loss to everyone, even without the use of nuclear weapons.

What if current tension between the U.S. and Russia over the Ukraine crisis becomes worst and turns into an armed conflict? How about China and Japan's dispute over the

Senkaku/Diaoyu islands? What will happen to the territorial disputes in the South China Sea between China and the Philippines? The Liancourt Rocks (Dokdo/Takeshima) dispute between South Korea and Japan? Or the current stalemate situation between North and South Korea? If any of these disputes is set on fire, the whole of Asia and the world will be affected; the violence, like a wildfire, will spread out uncontrollably; it would mean the end for us all. Just like the dinosaurs before us, we will be gone in an instant. And yet, we have kept our calm and ignorance, choosing to remain in the dark than to face the problems in the light of day. We cannot overcome these tides of power struggles and money games in a single attempt. But we can choose to stand in solidarity with one another and tell the world about the dangers that are coming our way. As the plane flew over China on his way to Korea, Pope Francis conveyed the Roman Catholic Church's blessings to the land and people of China. Meanwhile, Russia, protesting against economic sanctions of the U.S. and the E.U. in response to the Ukraine crisis, threatened the U.S. and E.U. of blocking the Russian air space. As I looked at these two incidents, I found hope because I saw how this world's problems - which cannot be solved by political, economic or military maneuvering - could be answered through interreligious dialogue.

If we are convinced that non-violence is the incomparable value of true peace, then we have made our first step towards redeeming the earth. His Holiness Pope Francis, on the fourth day of the papal visit to Korea, spoke about the importance of having an authentic dialogue that bears justice, goodness and peace as its fruit. He said, "We must open our hearts and minds to understand different peoples and different cultures. Otherwise, our dialogues will forever remain a soliloquy." I believe His words also apply to our situation. We the religious leaders must pave a way into dialogue that would allow other leaders to open their hearts. This may not be easy, but we must create a space for authentic dialogue rather than a place for soliloquy and self-pity, enabling the opening and transforming of hearts to bear the fruits of justice, goodness and peace.

Even though the road to authentic dialogue may be long and hazardous, we must not be discouraged, let ourselves down, and stop what we are doing. Once again, I want to share with you the words of His Holiness Pope Francis. In speaking to the thousands of youth on the 6th Asian Youth Day, His Holiness Pope Francis urged the youth to refuse violence and prejudice, to fight against 'the culture of death' which blasphemes the sacredness of human dignity. When our messages such as this are clearly heard and taken seriously by the political and socioeconomic leaders, only then shall true peace arrive and dwell in our midst.

Our task is to find the way to true peace. In order to produce the fruits of justice, goodness and peace which all of Asia can share, we during this general assembly must inquire and investigate "Asian Answers" which contextualize our regional and cultural characters. We must also work together pragmatically and creatively, testing possible methods and approaches to make our "answers" come alive. That, perhaps, will be the face of true religion shown throughout ACRP's 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly; that, perhaps, will be the transformative and life-giving power to Asia and to the world.

Once again, I welcome all of you participants of the General Assembly for visiting Incheon and Korea. And I humbly entreat you to lay down a steppingstone to world peace through solidarity and cooperation throughout these meetings.

Thank you.

# HINDUISM: ITS ALL-ENCOMPASSING UNIVERSALITY AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

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**H**induism is a very ancient religion believed to be thousands of years old. Its very antiquity has endowed it such richness and variety that it is vast and complex at first sight while being profound and simple on careful study. Hinduism has no particular founder nor is it dependent upon any specific book. Although appearing mysteriously complex at first sight, it is yet as simple as the rays of the sun when we delve deeply into its oceanic thought. Tracing its origin is as impossible as tracing the origin of God Himself! It is 'vast as the skies and deep as the ocean' with an amazingly rich variety of traditions that have grown over millennia upon millennia. These appear bewildering at first sight, but on reverential investigation reveal their fascinating multifarious hues, rich patterns and wonderful generalizations based on certain universal principles. Hindu religion is therefore called in Sanskrit *Sanatana* Dharma, the Eternal Religion.

## Two Kinds of Dharma

Dharma, although translated often as 'religion', is much more than that—it is that Principle that 'holds' us all together—the living and the non-living, men, women, animals, plants, sun, moons, stars, galaxies, in fact the entire universe of micro and macro worlds. In modern parlance, it could be called the 'Principle of Sustainability.' Two kinds of dharma are spoken of as the Vedic Dharma (literally, delineated in the Vedas, the fundamental scriptures of the Hindu religion). First, *pravritti* dharma which means all-round welfare while living on the earth). Second, *nivritti* dharma which is means emancipation, liberation or freedom that is considered the ultimate goal of human life. The first one is again classified into three components: *dharma, artha, kama*, meaning respectively, universal goodness, wealth, enjoyment of desires. These three are collectively called *abhyudaya*, worldly prosperity. The second one, *nirvritti* dharma is the single thrust of moksha, also called *nishchreyasa*, that is, emancipation, liberation or freedom from all bondage, all limitations and all forms of egocentricity, in short from ignorance that has deluded us to falsely imagine that we are bound and limited.

## Rishis and Vedas

The ancient Hindu sages and seers were called *rishis*, who were spiritual scientists who investigated relentlessly and one-pointedly into the inner world of the Spirit as contradistinguished with the material scientists who investigate into the outer world of matter. The documentary evidence they produced of their discoveries, which is an open-ended document as it were, is called the Vedas. Swami Vivekananda, the Prophet

of Hinduism and its scientific exponent in modern times, pointed out in his famous paper presented at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 that by Vedas no books were meant, but they were the treasury of spiritual laws discovered by the *rishis*. Elaborating on this, Sister *Nivedita*, one of the outstanding exponents of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and his chief most woman disciple, wrote:

“To him, all that is true is Veda. ‘By the Vedas,’ he says, ‘no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times.’ Incidentally, he discloses his conception of the *Sanatana* Dharma. ‘From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the lowest ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.’ To his mind, there could be no sect, no school, no sincere religious experience of the Indian people--however like an aberration it might seem to the individual--that might rightly be excluded from the embrace of Hinduism. And of this Indian Mother-Church, according to him, the distinctive doctrine is that of the *Ishta Devata*, the right of each soul to choose its own path, and to seek God in its own way. No army, then, carries the banner of so wide an Empire as that of Hinduism, thus defined. For as her spiritual goal is the finding of God, even so is her spiritual rule the perfect freedom of every soul to be itself.”

### **Writing about Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda said on another occasion:**

“Truth is of two kinds: (1) that which is cognizable by the five ordinary senses of man, and by reasoning based thereon; (2) that which is cognizable by the subtle, super sensuous power of Yoga. Knowledge acquired by the first means is called science; and knowledge acquired by the second is called the Vedas. ...The person in whom this super sensuous power is manifested is called a *Rishi*, and the super sensuous truths, which he realizes by this power are called the Vedas. This *Rishihood*, this power of super sensuous perception of the Vedas, is real religion. And so long as this does not develop in the life of an initiate, so long is religion a mere empty word to him, and it is to be understood that he has not taken yet the first step in religion.”

The Hindu spiritual tradition is an authentic record of the realizations of rishis constantly engaged in Consciousness research. The truths that they actually ‘saw’, not through the eyes or the senses but through super sensuous perception, form a dynamic and vibrant body of knowledge created through their exploration and insight into the mystery of Consciousness. This river of rich spiritual tradition, set in motion by the *rishis* ages ago, is flowing unhindered in a thousand streams over the millennia through a perennial chain of teacher-disciple succession down to the present age. The challenge of the *rishis*, which is the saving challenge in the present day agnosticism and crisis of faith, is that the great spiritual truths they discovered could be realized by anybody, anywhere, anytime, provided the same process of investigation and research (called in Sanskrit *sadhana* or spiritual effort) is gone through. This is what makes these truths ‘scientific’, for science is characterized by two important principles: universality and replicability. If it were not for this scientific character built into the Hindu mystic and spiritual truths, Hinduism

would have been reduced to a set of esoteric doctrines meant for a small group of fanatic adherents. Swami Vivekananda used the following powerful language in condemning secrecy and esotericism in matters spiritual: “No shilly-shally, no esoteric blackguardism, no secret humbug, nothing should be done in a corner.” He wanted religion to be based like a solid rock “always on Truth as broad as the light of day.” This is what makes Hinduism, particularly its Vedanta philosophy, stands up to the challenges of modern times, the modern age of science and reason.

## The Two Fundamental Universal Principles of Hinduism

What are the fundamental principles or truths on which the whole structure of Hinduism rests? They could be summarized in two simple statements as follows:

Principle 1: The Divinity of all beings

Principle 2: The Oneness of all Existence (or Solidarity of the Universe)

These Principles, when seen in the light of the well-known and proven scientific principle, namely, the oneness of the microcosm and the macrocosm, form the basis of the Hindu Vedantic tradition of oneness or unity of all existence. Unity is the very bedrock or foundation of Hindu thought. This leads naturally to harmony, peace and joy—qualities that flow naturally from Hindu religious and philosophical thought. Now, the Principle 1 above speaks of the divinity of the microcosmic existence while the Principle 2 is about the oneness of the microcosm and macrocosm, leading to the inevitable thesis that the macrocosmic existence is also divine. Thus is derived the grand unified Principle of the Divinity of the whole of existence including the micro and macro-worlds. Based on this unified Principle, all interpersonal relationships, international relations and in fact all relationships at the individual or collective level get transformed into divine forms, ensuring peace and harmony.

## Ordering of Life in Society in Hinduism—the Four Ashramas

The whole life of an individual human being has been perfectly ordered in Hinduism into four stages called *ashramas*: the student stage (*brahmacharya ashrama*), the householder stage (*grihastha ashrama*), the retired mendicant stage (*vanaprastha ashrama*) and all-renouncing monk stage (*sannyasa ashrama*). These four stages came to be reduced later into just the first and the last two stages: the householder stage and the monk stage. Each of these is equally glorious; what is important is to aspire to become an ideal householder if a person is in that stage, or an ideal monk, if one belongs to that stage.

Of the two prominent stages of life, called *ashrama* in Hinduism, that of a householder (*grihastha ashrama*) is considered the oldest and the most important (*gyestha* and *shreshtha*), inasmuch as all the other *ashramas* depend upon it. Hence, the householder, with his family set up, is largely responsible for maintaining peace in society. The harmony and peace of his household reflects upon and profoundly influences the well being, joy and peace of the society as a whole.

## Three Fundamental Principles for Peace and Harmony in Society—the Cosmic Rhythm of Life

There are three fundamental principles on which peace and harmony in society rest:

- The Principle of Sacrifice (*yajna*)
- The Principle of Service (*dana or seva*)
- The Principle of Penance or Austerity (*tapas*)

The Hindu sacred texts, the fundamental scriptures, Upanishads and the Bhagavat-Gita, speak of *yajna*, *dana* and *tapas* (sacrifice, service and penance) as the triad of core virtues or values that must be adhered to at any cost. Among these three Principles above mentioned, *yajna* occupies a prominent place in the daily life of a family. In fact, Hinduism looks upon the whole of creation as a Cosmic Sacrifice (*virat yajna*) through which the Infinite Supreme Being sacrificed Himself to become the entire manifested universe of beings, living and non-living. The individual life of a Hindu, therefore, is a joyous participation in the Cosmic Sacrifice, which enables the Hindu to live his/her life in perfect harmony and in tune with the Infinite. This resonance, the individual life vibrating in unison with the Cosmic Life, is the secret of harmony and peace at the individual as well as the collective level, at the family level as well as the societal life in the universe. This Universal Resonance is called in the Hindu scriptures, particularly the Upanishads, as *Ritam Brihat*, the Cosmic Rhythm of Existence.

## The Five Great Yajna-s or Sacrifices (Pancha-maha-yajna)

Living in tune with the Cosmic Life or Universal Existence is translated in actual daily practice as five-fold great sacrifices called in Sanskrit as *pancha-maha-yajna*. These five-fold sacrifices directly and tangibly keep the individual life connected and vibrating in tune with the Cosmic Life. These five-fold sacrifices are:

- *Deva yajna* (sacrifice in the name of and for the sake of the gods)
- *Pitri yajna* (sacrifice in the name of and for the sake of the ancestors)
- *Brahma yajna* or *rishi yajna* (sacrifice in the name of and for the sake of the sages and teachers)
- *Nri yajna* or *manushya yajna* (sacrifice in the name of and for the sake of human beings)
- *Bhuta yajna* (sacrifice in the name of and for the sake of all beings, living and non-living)

These five-fold sacrifices are mandatory for any householder in family life and these establish unbroken connection between his/her individual life and the Cosmic Life and Universal Existence.

## Shanti Mantras or Peace Chants

Shanti mantras or Peace Chants, compulsorily to be recited at the beginning and end of a Vedic or Upanishadic passage, are a constant reminder that Peace and Harmony prevail always and unbroken in the Universe. It is the sacred duty of a Hindu, a person of God-Consciousness, living a cosmo-centric life rather than an ego-centric existence, to constantly aspire to keep this current of harmony, peace, joy and love flowing unbroken and perennially.

Such a life, lived in tune with the infinite, lived in an unbroken communion with the cosmic life, lived in constant 'dynamic equilibrium' with the Universal Consciousness, is the only life worth living. And this is the ideal Hindu way of life. As Swami Vivekananda said, the only remedy to miseries of the world is the transformation of man's character, which means living a cosmo-centric life, in tune with the Infinite, Universal Reality, by renouncing his ego-centric, self-centered life. We end by quoting his famous words:

“The only solution of this problem [of misery] is to make mankind pure. Ignorance is the mother of all the evil and all the misery we see. Let men have light, let them be pure and spiritually strong and educated, then alone will misery cease in the world, not before. We may convert every house in the country into a charity asylum, we may fill the land with hospitals, but the misery of man will still continue to exist until man's character changes.”

“Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.”

And the voice of Hinduism calls upon humankind to awaken to this task of transformation of man's character, to awaken in man's heart this 'burning love, selfless', to make him vibrate in unison with the Cosmic Rhythm. Now that man is panic-stricken, strife-torn, conflict-ridden, he would do well to listen to this call arising spontaneously in the macrocosm as the Music of the Spheres and welling up in the microcosm within the human heart as a perennial current of universal love and harmony!

