

## The Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace

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*Rev. Kwak and Dr. Kaufmann visits the Grand Mufti Kufitaro in Syria*

Respected leaders of the great religion of Islam, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today about an extremely important topic: world peace. World peace is something that concerns all of us as people of faith, for we so sincerely want this world to reflect the beauty, harmony and goodness that we know exist in God. We see, however, that our world, drowning in moral chaos, injustice and violent conflict, is very far from the ideal of peace which we all hope to attain. What can be done to eliminate this contradiction between our shared desire for peace and the existing reality of bitter conflict?

Of course, the nations of the world should work together cooperatively to resolve disputes peacefully. We recognize the important role which the United Nations plays in this regard, for the United Nations represents the human hope for international harmony and cooperation. The United Nations has played a significant peacekeeping role on many occasions during its 45 years of history, including in the case of Korea.

While the United Nations symbolizes the human aspiration for international harmony, we also recognize that national identity is often not the community to which an individual commits himself or herself totally. A citizen's loyalty to a nation is conditional upon that nation's embodying the highest ideals which the individual holds dear. In turn, it is most often the case that a person's most profound loyalty will be related to his religious commitment. For most of the world's population, religion is an extremely significant factor in their worldview.

For example, while I am Korean, my ultimate loyalty belongs to God. I am sure that for many of you, religious identity is prior to your national identity. When we consider that there are nearly one billion

Muslims, one and one-half billion Christians, eight hundred million Hindus, and five hundred million Buddhists, we can conclude that the religious factor is extremely relevant to any program aimed at world peace.

Furthermore, many existing international organizations do not adequately account for the primacy of the religious factor in their efforts on behalf of world peace.

To conclude this point I want to state simply that inter-religious peace is the precondition for world peace. I do not wish to denigrate the accomplishments of political, economic and social organizations dedicated to world peace. Without these efforts our world would be a very undesirable place in which to dwell. Nevertheless, if we are unable to come to terms with this religious factor, peace will inevitably evade even our most ambitious and conscientious efforts.

### **IRFWP's Foundations**

As a disciple of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon for over thirty years, I have had the good fortune to benefit from his vision for world peace. At the very core of that vision is the recognition that the religions and the religious leaders of the world must take the lead in the creation of world peace. He has worked tirelessly for this cause, even to the extent of sacrificing his own religious movement, the Unification Church, in order to serve other religions. Even when Rev. Moon began his ministry almost fifty years ago, he always stressed the oneness of God and the importance of working for the unity of humanity.

The ideal of world peace through inter-religious dialogue and harmony has been at the very center of the vision and practice of the International Religious Foundation (IRF). IRF, as many of you know, has been at the very forefront of interfaith activity throughout the world.

IRF includes the work of the Assembly of the World's Religions, the Council for the World's Religions, the New Ecumenical Research Association, and the Religious Youth Service. Each of these projects has an impressive and well-established track record. In a relatively brief period of time the IRF has come to be recognized as a leader in the quest for world peace.

On August 16, 1990, in his Founder's Address at the Assembly of the World's Religions, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon initiated a new organization that extends the significant advances already made by IRF. That is, he called for the development of the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace (IRFWP). I would like to share with you a brief excerpt from that speech:

*Today I propose to you the inauguration of the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace. In the current world situation, externally we are experiencing the termination of the Cold War, and peacemaking between East and West. Overcoming confrontations and divisions, we are heading toward the age of unification by harmony, as one world family of brothers and sisters. The last decade before the year 2000 is a precious period which God has allowed us for returning to the original world, a precious opportunity... The role of religions in realizing world peace is therefore indispensable. Accordingly, all men and women of religion should now tear down the walls of sectarianism to make themselves available with unified religious power to act in accordance with God's desire for the greater goal of the realization of world peace. Now is the time to reflect that religious people have not contributed enough for world peace.*

*Now is the time to develop within each religion true love, which is the origin and basic element of world peace and by practicing it faithfully, to deploy an all-encompassing movement, the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace.*

Before our very eyes we are witnessing the world becoming one global family. This is partly due to the technological developments in communications and transportation, and the gradual dispersal of these developments throughout the world. In effect, the technological conditions are available for world unity. Unity and peace, however, cannot be achieved externally by technology or science. Unity is ultimately grounded internally in spiritual awareness.

Without establishing the internal conditions for world peace, the world will never escape the spiral of conflict and violence that is our historical reality today. In fact, the problem will only get worse.



*Rev. Kwak is invited to address a Muslim audience at Grand Mufti Kuftaros' mosque in Syria*

### **Era of Inter-religious Unity**

Rev. Moon is totally committed to the ideal of world peace, and he recognizes that religion is the key to peace. Of course, he is aware that religion has often been an obstacle to world peace. It is his firm belief that the era of materialism and secularization is quickly coming to an end, and we are at the threshold of a great and global spiritual revolution.

That is, it is time for religion to assert itself in the global arena. How should religion assert itself?

Each religion has its own unique character and content. At the same time religions share many common values and aspirations. Up until this time in history, each religion has survived without emphasizing or even acknowledging the common ideals shared by all religions. This isolation of each religion was in part a result of cultural and geographical divisions that were not easily overcome.

Today, however, no religion can escape the need to communicate and relate constructively with other religions and cultures. Given these circumstances, if religions persist in focusing only on their own purity and uniqueness, excluding others, the possibility of inter-religious conflict and war will always be close at hand. In order to avert disaster, all religions have to think of our common purpose under God, who is our universal foundation. In order to achieve peace and harmony we must center on God; this is the teaching of Godism.

The IRFWP is being created at this time in order to serve the process of spiritual awakening throughout the world, and in order to allow this awakening to contribute to world peace. Through the IRFWP, religion can shed itself of the image of being the source of the world's problems. In the IRFWP representatives from all the world's religions will work together in a cooperative manner. The IRFWP will be an example of inter-religious peace.

The IRFWP is absolutely committed to respecting the unique integrity of each of the world's religions. The IRFWP does not seek any syncretism of religions, nor does it in any way promote or ask of its members a lessening of their personal faith commitments. The IRFWP is not itself a religion, nor will it presume to judge any religion.

The IRFWP, as a federation of religions, is concerned to diagnose the world's problems and to recommend and contribute to solutions.

The IRFWP will have an extensive worldwide membership, representing all religions, cultures and nationalities.

Likewise, its Presiding Council, Executive Committee and its Advisory Board will represent the diversity of its worldwide, inter-religious membership. The Presiding Council will initiate, review and supervise all areas of the IRFWP's activities. At present the Presiding Council will be made to consist of at least five people, each sitting for a term of three years, with a Chairman. As a second tier of IRFWP, under the Presiding Council, there will be an IRFWP Executive Committee of at least five members, each appointed for a three year term. The Executive Committee will coordinate the work of the various IRFWP project areas. Both the Presiding Council and the Executive Committee will be representative of the world's diverse religions, and no one religion will be given privileged status or power. The same will hold true for the Advisory Board, which will function to offer recommendations and counsel on policies and project proposals.

The IRFWP Secretariat is headquartered in New York at the offices of the International Religious Foundation. For the immediate future IRF will provide the base for launching the IRFWP. The IRF has been generously funded by Rev. Moon through the resources of the Unification Church. The IRFWP, however, will cultivate a broad inter-religious base of spiritual and financial support for its activities. The IRF is completely committed to nurturing the birth of this great new inter-religious venture, even to the extent of tailoring its own projects to suit the agenda of the IRFWP. In addition to the New York offices we are drawing plans to open regional IRFWP offices in Frankfurt, London, Geneva, Rome, Istanbul, Bangkok, Delhi, Nairobi, Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing and Moscow.

The membership of the IRFWP will be drawn from all religions and from all parts of the world without discrimination. While we seek official representatives of the various religions, we also seek the involvement of believers who do not officially represent their religious institutions. We also seek the support and cooperation of any number of institutions and organizations dedicated to peace. Institutional members may also be brought on as co-sponsors. The IRFWP will seek to organize its members on a regional, national and local level in order to more effectively work on a grassroots level.

It should be emphasized that the IRFWP does not seek to duplicate or compete with the important work of other organizations, inter-religious or otherwise, dedicated to world peace. The IRFWP is fundamentally committed to cooperation and service on every level. Whenever possible, the IRFWP will support and contribute to the work of existing institutions, including the United Nations.

## **Project areas**

Finally, I will mention the project areas of the IRFWP. These include: peace initiatives, service, education, research and publications, and inter-religious dialogue.

### **Peace initiatives:**

IRFWP will seek to mobilize its inter-religious forces to provide peaceful solutions to situations where tension and conflict prevail.

The IRFWP may offer policy suggestions, briefings, and it may even send IRFWP emissaries to meet directly with key figures in the dispute or with United Nations representatives.

### **Service:**

Service includes both relief efforts in parts of the world suffering from great deprivation and the mobilization of inter-religious volunteers to serve as a kind of inter-religious peace corps in areas where the need is great.

### **Education:**

Inter-religious education is essential to world peace. People of the world, both religious and secular, need to be well informed about the integrity and value of the world's religions. Fear and distrust are often the result of ignorance.

The IRFWP is planning to establish an Institute for Inter-religious Education which will train religious leaders from all religious backgrounds.

### **Research and Publications:**

In order to effectively educate or promote peace initiatives the IRFWP must itself be educated. For this purpose the IRFWP is committed to research. The IRFWP will develop a full range of publications that promote its principles and goals. For example, later this year a World Scripture, with an inter-religious advisory board and with texts respectfully representing all the religions of the world, will be published. We also have plans, based on a suggestion by Dr. Ahmad Kuftaro; the Grand Mufti of Syria, to create a volume on Religion and World Peace. Finally, the IRFWP will publish monographs that focus on current issues of importance relating to religion and world peace.

### **Inter-religious dialogue:**

As has been the tradition of IRF, the IRFWP will continue to promote all forms of inter-religious dialogue through conferences, seminars and an assembly which will meet periodically. The IRFWP will also devote itself to internationally networking.

Over the next several months the IRFWP will be taking shape. I hope that all of you will become actively involved in this important and exciting new venture. The present world situation, including the tensions that exist in the Middle East, are very serious and potentially disastrous for everyone. To avert disaster the worldwide religious community must do something. This is exactly why the IRFWP is being established.

IRFWP can begin to deal with the internal dimension of disputes such as we see in the Middle East, just as the United Nations deals with the political dimension.

Please take a moment to review this draft of the IRFWP Founding Statement and if you agree to its

general thrust please lend your signature and take an active role in shaping the IRFWP and the future of our world. I want to thank you for your kind attention. May God bless you and your families.