

Global Peace Convention 2010, Nairobi, Kenya

November 17, 2010
Keynote address



Your Excellency President Mwai Kibaki, Your Excellency President Girma Wolde-Giorgis, honorable participants from around the world, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor and privilege to meet you here in Nairobi, Kenya for this prestigious occasion of the Global Peace Convention 2010. Thank you for your participation and continued commitment to the noble cause of peace.

I especially want to express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency, President Mwai Kibaki, our Patron for this Convention, for his statesmanship as a promoter of peace and prosperity on this continent of Africa. Let us all recognize His Excellency President Kibaki with a hearty round of applause.

And thank you Dr. Manu Chandaria, for your extraordinary leadership as our co-chairman for this Global Peace Convention along with co-chairman Sir James Mancham, founding President of the Republic of Seychelles here today.

I express our gratitude as well to Archbishop Dr. Eliud Wabukala of the Anglican Church of Kenya, Bishop Dr. Joseph Methu, National Chairman, Federation of Evangelical and Indigenous Christian Churches of Kenya, the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, Hindu Council of Kenya and other religious leaders for convening vital interfaith tracks of this convention.

I also want to appreciate the members of GPF's Global Leadership Council, as well as the Global Peace Convention Organizing Committee, and the many volunteers who did so much to welcome us here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is an auspicious moment for Kenya and Africa. The launch of Kenya's new constitution by President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga at Uhuru Park marks a significant milestone in the transformation of this key nation, especially given the discord experienced after the 2008 presidential elections. It suggests that Kenyans are a people of principles and values who are willing to break away from Africa's historic struggle with corruption, conflict and poverty, and create a new precedent for the continent. More importantly, it signals a new birth of hope, reconciliation and self-determination, not only in Kenya but across the vast continent of Africa, as Africans take charge of their own destinies.

The Global Peace Convention 2010 is being convened in Nairobi as the culmination of a significant series of regional Global Peace Festivals held around the world. From the GPF South Asia hosted in Kathmandu, Nepal, to the GPF Asia Pacific held in Jakarta, Indonesia and on to GPF Latin America in Asuncion, Paraguay, these festivals have stimulated the imagination and energy of people in the most dynamic regions around the globe to lead the peace process as well as initiate innovative paths to prosperity and development. I am glad to report that each of these initiatives has generated local and regional ownership in addition to collaborative action motivated by the transformative vision of One Family under God.

The buildup to this Convention also included an important Global Peace Leadership Conference in Korea examining critical issues of peace and sustainable, balanced development. It considered the benefits and challenges of the Saemal Undong model that helped uplift South Korea from the devastation of war and poverty into an economic powerhouse and a member of the G-20 in less than 60 years. This conference was especially meaningful in that it took place prior to the historic G-20 summit in Seoul, Korea, where issues of global development and poverty were discussed; thus, properly framing the issues of development in the developing world.

As this momentum builds from Asia to the Americas and on to the African continent, the Kenya finale – with the three-fold impact of the International Young Leaders Summit, Global Peace Festival Africa, and Global Peace Convention 2010 – can serve as a clarion call, that building a world of lasting peace and prosperity can be achievable through our common commitment to substantiate the vision of One Family under God.

The Convention theme is “One Family under God: Conflict Resolution, Peace and Development.” Our proceedings here are unique in that we deliberate on concrete approaches to critical issues through the

lens of a common spiritual vision rooted in universal principles and values. In essence, we recognize that solutions ultimately must address root causes and, thus, must include the intrinsic spiritual dimension of the human experience. It is, therefore, important to note that this Convention is not looking to find a narrow answer to only one dimension of the peace and development process but to find a holistic solution bringing all sectors and stakeholders to the proverbial “table” to be the owners of peace and coprosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen, all around the globe, nations in the southern hemisphere, like Kenya, are undergoing dramatic change, with pivotal challenges as well as significant opportunities. Unlike their northern neighbors who have been mired in a global recession, they are relatively unscathed. With the unlimited potential of untapped natural and human resources as well as the possibilities of new emerging markets, the southern hemisphere shows the greatest promise of growth and vitality in the global economy. As a result, the established western models of development which, in the past, have been unquestioned are losing their relevance as the world looks to new approaches to development and prosperity.

We have reached an inflection point in history where the circumstances today are ripe for a paradigm shift of major proportions that could positively or negatively affect this century. As a man of faith, I cannot but feel the hand of divine providence guiding these developments. At the same time, I feel the urgency for a new generation of global leaders to make their mark in history. I submit to you that the deciding factor at such times is always moral and innovative leadership, on every level.

What do I mean by moral and innovative leadership? First, it has to promote a “greater good” that can benefit not only the individual but the larger society, nation and world. This is the needed moral orientation of leadership. It must be guided by a common vision or aspiration and rooted in irrevocable universal principles and values that have the breadth and depth to encompass the diversity of the human family.

Secondly, it has to harness mankind’s natural creative need to advance and develop the human condition. This is the innovative aspect of leadership. In every culture, extraordinary men and women have propelled humanity forward in the fields of philosophy, ethics, science, athletics and the arts, by freely exercising their God-given talents, even to the point of challenging existing paradigms. Surmounting the religious, societal and legal constraints of their time, such innovators brought greater advances and freedoms to the modern world.

Ladies and gentlemen, rapid scientific advances continue to shrink the globe with dramatic improvements in travel, communications, and the exchange of information. In the past, distance and time were the “physical impediments” which isolated and separated the human race. However, they are no longer relevant impediments. Science and technology have removed the physical barriers but have not removed the racial, religious, national, tribal or ethnic pretensions which are still the sources of ongoing conflicts around the world.

The transformative power of the vision to create One Family under God is found in the fundamental truth that all people, regardless of race, religion, nationality, tribe or ethnicity are spiritual beings who share a common heritage in one God or Creator. As Victor Hugo was to have said, “more powerful than an invading army is an idea whose time has come.” Around the world, our Global Peace Festivals have demonstrated that peoples of widely diverse backgrounds are ready to embrace this vision and commit themselves to engaging, working and living as one global family.

GPF has developed multi-sector partnerships with its action-oriented initiatives in three key areas: 1) building interfaith partnerships, 2) strengthening families, and 3) promoting a “culture of heart” through service. In just three years, GPF has engaged millions of people on six continents, drawing on the energy and conviction of civil society partners, the resources of the business community, the shared values of faith-based organizations, as well as the engagement of government agencies.

Our innovative approach to interfaith partnerships has brought leaders from all the great faith traditions, as well as those who do not espouse a faith, to participate together in unprecedented ways. GPF conscientiously avoids advocating any particular religious dogma or tradition, but rather highlights spirituality as a basis of building a common platform of shared aspirations, principles and values. As a result, we are effectively working around the globe: from former communist bloc nations to the primarily pluralistic and capitalist Americas; from the secular, progressive European Union to the deeply religious Middle East; and from traditional and tribal Africa to the diversity and energy of Asia.

Secondly, GPF affirms that the family is not only vital to the spiritual well-being of the individual, but also to building a peaceful society, nation and world. The family is the fundamental unit of society where the most essential life skills are learned. It is the school of love, where the virtues that underlie all positive social relations are practiced and made real. Therefore, it is vital to support the traditional institutions of marriage and family, both in public policy and through practical initiatives. I am proud to report that, with the support of GPF and its partners, the new Kenyan constitution which was recently adopted with

overwhelming support included provisions to protect the sacred institution of marriage as well as the sanctity of life in the womb.

Both these issues are heavily contested in the more developed western democracies, such as the United States and Europe. However, Kenya has taken a lead on these social issues, recognizing that they have national and global consequences. I would like to point out that this era offers such opportunities for other nations, rich or poor, powerful or weak, to chart their own destinies and be leaders in addressing critical issues that affect the global community. But, to truly be a leader, one must be motivated by a clear vision and an altruistic spirit of service as well as be cognizant of the issues and potential outcomes.

That is why our third area of focus is on creating a “culture of heart” through the cultivation of individual character and the transformative power of service. Service in this broader context entails tapping human creativity in collaborative efforts to solve problems, by making “owners” of the solution rather than merely “participants” in the process. Thus, GPF promotes social entrepreneurship and community driven development initiatives, “owned” by local partners, as important tools in addressing the most challenging human problems as well as maintaining sustainability. In addition, serving together in common cause can help to break down barriers that exist between peoples in conflict, and thus can be a powerful instrument for peace, understanding, and personal transformation.

One such example of ongoing success is the Nairobi River cleanup initiative that was launched in the aftermath of Kenya’s post-election violence in 2008. This effort continues to this day as Kenyans and young volunteers from around the world plant trees along its banks, working to make Nairobi once again the illustrious “green city under the sun.” I am pleased to report that the success of this initiative has been noted by the United Nations Environment Program as well as the Kenyan Government. Due to the success of this project, I am proud to announce today that it has grown to become a global “Rivers of Peace Initiative.”

Inspired by that successful model here in Kenya, GPF in Nepal launched a similar project to clean the badly polluted Bagmati River in Kathmandu, traditionally considered a national symbol and, more importantly, a holy river. Thousands of volunteers recently gathered for the enthusiastic kickoff of the Bagmati River cleanup campaign as part of the global “Rivers of Peace Initiative,” prior to the regional festival in Katmandu. During that relatively short period, this campaign has gained significant momentum with the support and ownership of local youth leaders, community-based organizations, and businesses.

Here in Kenya, the Ministries of Education and Higher Education, as well as Brand Kenya, have partnered with GPF to build upon our successful character education programs by launching a nationwide character competency initiative. This broad campaign has inspired thousands of youths with a transformative message that focuses on building good character and establishing positive lifestyle choices. Our joint Character Competencies Program is also initiating indepth pilot projects with schools in Nairobi and beyond, equipping students with the character tools to succeed as future heads of households, employees, owners, leaders and, most importantly, as good patriotic citizens.

Furthermore, partnerships are critical to advancing the objectives of conflict resolution, peace and development that this Convention is addressing. Here in Kenya, the Office of the President has coordinated an inter-ministry working group to support this Convention as well as GPF’s ongoing programs that will benefit the youth of this nation long after this event concludes. In the USA, GPF partnered with the US Department of Health and Human Services as well as the Office of the Mayor of Atlanta on a character competency program for inner city youth with significant positive impacts documented by a leading American university. In Nepal, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry was a central organizing partner for the Global Peace Festival South Asia 2010 as well as “owners” of on-going civic and social programs initiated during the festival. And the list goes on.

This level of “ownership” highlighted in these examples has become the norm rather than the exception after our Global Peace Festivals and Convention. Due to GPF’s professed goal to raise “owners” of the solution rather than “participants” in the process, as well as our ability to build broad multi-sector partnerships, we have been able to sustain programs through local partners committed to the vision, principles and values of GPF. More importantly, the success of these ongoing programs allows GPF to leverage its base even further, building even more partnerships both in depth as well as breadth; thus, becoming a grassroots movement in promoting peace and prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen, economic prosperity is an essential goal for all nations, but it is also important to note that it should not be the sole goal of development. We should seek a balance where both the social and political implications are deeply considered as well. South Korea, for example, developed rapidly from poverty to prosperity, yet it is currently facing the erosion of its traditional family values and its spiritual heritage. Unlike the Korea of my youth, it now is experiencing one of the highest divorce rates and lowest birthrates of any developed nation. This will have untold political and social-economic consequences down the road. Here in Africa, the path to prosperity should honor and preserve the rich

spiritual heritage of Africa's traditional families and cultures as a necessary foundation for its "balanced" social, political and economic development.

That is why I believe that moral and innovative leadership is so important today, not only in developing nations but also the developed world. Moral leadership provides the roadmap for nation building by outlining a vision rooted in universal aspirations, principles and values, while innovative leadership provides the methods in which that vision can be realized. Both are like two sides of a coin.

I believe most will agree that the true cause of the global recession can be directly attributed to the erosion of principles and values. If those in power do not regulate themselves based upon some transcendent ethical norms, then any system or institution will experience corruption and eventual collapse, whether on Wall Street or in the halls of government. In the end, the legitimacy and sustainability of any free society relies on its ability to raise ethical or moral citizens, guided by a shared vision, principles and values. Due to the fluidity of leadership in a democratic society, it is paramount to raise citizens who can become leaders with integrity. Ultimately, it is leadership, or lack thereof, that will determine outcomes, whether positive or negative.

Clearly, the problem of corruption, so prevalent today, will only be solved when our citizens regulate themselves according to spiritual principles and values that are reinforced within the culture. That reinforcement requires a consensus on values, which is why interfaith partnerships are so vital in coalescing faith leaders to work together as the conscience of society.

In this era of globalization, regional and continental cooperation is critical to solving problems, in addition to promoting peace and development. Here in East Africa, a new level of engagement has been achieved through the launch this year of the East African Community that includes nations like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. Such initiatives are a needed and positive step to collaboratively address the unique regional challenges of northern, western, southern and, in this case, eastern Africa. Reconciliation, peace and prosperity in these four corners of the African continent could mark a new age for Africa and Africans from the Sahara to Cape of Good Hope and from the Ivory Coast to coasts of Zanzibar.

This is an age when Africans can lead in ways unimagined before. I know that many in the 1st world are trying to make their mark on this continent, either through economic incentives, humanitarian aid, or through historic and cultural precedents harkening back to the age of colonialism. These forces have definitely shaped the current state of affairs on this continent but it has no bearing as to what could happen in the future. 2010 should signal a new decade of African leadership from local communities to the national halls of government to the four key regional corners of Africa where a new breed of leaders, motivated by a common vision rooted in universal principles and values, rise to shape the future of this continent and, possibly, the world.

As a student of history, I have observed that true leadership is manifested in a moral authority which beckons disparate people to naturally align, without force or coercion, to a common vision or cause. As I have already mentioned the leadership paradigm of this decade and this century should be moral and innovative leadership. What could be more natural than to encourage mankind to strip itself of its pretensions and recognize our common humanity as "One Family under God."

Kenya, on the eastern coast of Africa, has already taken the lead by birthing a new Constitution which recognizes the sovereignty of God as the source of all fundamental human rights as well as, unabashedly, recognizing the spiritual roots of its national principles and values. Unlike the previous Constitution which was rushed to establish a basic governmental framework after liberation from its colonial yoke, this effort reflects the collective wisdom of a uniquely African experience which recognizes the importance of root causes in creating a better Kenya and a better Africa. This precedent can continue to sweep the continent of Africa from Egypt in the north to South Africa in the south as well as Nigeria to the west.

These regional movements to harness and shape the aspirations of a renewed Africa can give significant meaning and inject new life to the current African Union. As we all know, the African continent has vast amounts of largely untouched human and natural resources. To harness those resources for the benefit of all people of Africa, it is vitally important that a shared vision rooted in principles and values strengthens the alliances within the African Union. Hopefully, this can lead to greater political and economic integration which is absolutely needed to compete more effectively in today's global marketplace. By the same token, I believe that movements of regional and continental consolidation will take place in Latin America and Oceania as well, thereby setting the stage for Africa's increasing influence on the global stage as a precedent-setting leader within the Southern Hemisphere.

Given the unique position of Africa, straddling the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, it holds a historic and natural role in brokering the human and natural resource needs of the West and the rising powers in Asia as well as arbitrating the religious and cultural divide between Europe and the Middle East. In other words, whatever transpires here - whether positive or negative, good or bad - will have global

consequences. That is why the eyes of the world have converged upon Africa, seeking to find a new dawn of hope and leadership that can rise out of its troubled past and lead the world to peace and co-prosperity. In short, the future of this continent and the world rests in the hands of Africans and the fate of Africa.

Before I conclude, I wish to commend the Global Leadership Council and the esteemed Host Committee members for presenting the Nairobi Declaration to this Convention. It will announce a number of action measures that will be advanced as a result of this Convention and regional initiatives from Kathmandu to Jakarta, from Seoul to Asuncion, and across the Continent of Africa in places like Nigeria. Each of us will have the opportunity to demonstrate our true ownership as we carry the vision and lessons learned from this historic convention back to our communities and nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I stand here in the company of such dignitaries and leaders from the disparate corners of this continent and the world, I am struck with the significance of this moment- a moment when a dream could be planted that sparks the imagination of a nation, region, continent and the world.

If I may be so bold, I would like to challenge each of you to dream big and take on the mantle of global moral and innovative leadership. The future is yours to mold. Together we can pave the path to reconciliation, peace and prosperity.

Will you seize this moment? Will you rise with me to dream the greatest dream of all, to build a world of peace and co-prosperity through the vision of One Family under God? The choice is yours and the moment is yours.

May God bless you and your families. Thank you very much.