

Global Peace Convention 2013, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

December 5, 2013

Address



Your excellencies, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is both an honor and a great pleasure for me to welcome you from the four corners of the earth here, to Malaysia, for the Fifth Annual Global Peace Convention.

On behalf of the international participants, I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all those “owners,” here in Malaysia, who have worked tirelessly to make this Convention possible.

In particular, I want to recognize the Department of National Unity and Integration of the Prime Minister’s Department, who are co-hosts of this Convention and whose support has been invaluable.

We are particularly grateful to Co-Chairs Honorable Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, the JPNIN Cabinet Minister, and Honorable Tan Sri Zaleha Ismail, my grandmother, and Chairwoman of GPF Malaysia.

May we give them a round of applause? As well as all of our Malaysian leaders, once again, could we also give them all a round of applause?

I also want to commend the work of two of our many strategic partners here today:

The University of Malaya for its support in developing the convention program; and the Character Education Partnership for their engagement with the pre-convention Summit on Character and Creativity.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of the Global Peace Foundation’s Global Leadership Council, and to all the other dignitaries, partners, and supporters who are with us here today. Give them all a round of applause.

May I say, thank you for your visionary leadership, and your ownership over this mission for peace.

I believe it has been mentioned several times today in this plenary, but I would like to mention once again.

You know, there are few men and women in history that (who) have such a profound affect that their legacy continues to live on even though their lives have passed. I believe that Nelson Mandela is one such figure who carried on the message of true love, even loving thy enemy, to build the bridges of peace that could heal the wounds of the experience of segregation that had separated two races in South Africa, setting a precedent of leadership rooted on principles and values and as someone who has a kindred spirit at heart who shares that humanity is truly one family under God; and that humanity needs precedents like the life that he has lived. Once again, I would like to extend my condolences to his family, but more importantly, to make the commitment with all of us here that we shall carry on that legacy through our work by being owners of that vision of one family under God; being peace builders of in our communities, our nations, our regions, our continent and eventually the world. So once again, could we give Nelson Mandela a round of applause?

We also need to remember the tragedy that humanity has faced, especially in this region of Malaya with the tragedy in the Philippines, then even the recent floods here. So could we take a moment to give remembrance to those who have suffered, and who are no longer with us, and the families that continue to persist under those very difficulties. Could we just give a moment of silence in remembrance of them?

Thank you.

The first Global Peace Convention was held just four short years ago, in 2009, in Manila, in the Philippines.

It then moved to Africa in 2010, to Nairobi, Kenya, where then-President Mwai Kibaki was the patron. That convention accomplished significant work in addressing the causes of the 2008 post-election violence, and in advancing what has now become the Character and Creativity Initiative.

2011 saw the convention held in South Korea, the land of my birth, and the launch of an important initiative to engage ordinary Korean citizens in a grassroots movement for the unification of the Korean peninsula.

Last year the convention was held in Atlanta, the birthplace of the civil rights movement in America. There, a call for a new “great awakening” on a hemispheric level was made, to inspire the Americas to take on the mantle of true moral and innovative leadership on the global stage.

The theme of this year’s Convention is, “Unity in Diversity: Building Social Cohesion for Sustainable Peace through Universal Aspirations, Principles, and Values.” Malaysia is the right place to discuss such a theme and to craft initiatives based upon it. Malaysian society is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural and democratic. As such, you are uniquely positioned to offer the world a successful example of unity in diversity, where all the parts, while retaining their own unique religious and cultural identity, cooperate together for the greater good of the whole society.

Malaysia is a country on the rise.

In recent years you have experienced impressive economic growth.

Malaysia is also taking on a greater leadership role both in the region, hosting and mediating peace talks between the Philippines government and parties in Mindanao, for example, -- and globally, through the Prime Minister’s launch of the Global Movement of Moderates.

For Malaysia as for many emerging countries, this is a moment of historic transition. The prospects for the future are bright but there are serious challenges to be faced, most importantly from identity-based conflicts, based on ethnic and religious differences.

The threat of interreligious conflict is most serious and extends beyond individual nations. It has the chilling potential to become global in scale.

With the end of the Cold War, the two competing ideological blocs fragmented, spurring the rise of identity-based conflicts first in the Balkans, and central Asia, while fueling on-going conflicts in the Middle East, South Asia, and parts of Africa.

It is clear that with the rise of such sectarian conflicts, the geopolitical dynamic has been reconfigured through politicized forms of religion, operating on a regional scale, and claiming a spurious legitimacy from the great faith traditions.

As history has shown, the ferocity and ruthlessness of such interreligious conflicts is something that humanity cannot afford especially in this age where weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical, and biological – have proliferated throughout the world.

Unlike the Cold War era where two rational protagonists played the game of nuclear deterrence, a religious conflict or a clash of civilizations will not be constrained by reason but, fired by passion, could lead humanity to commit the greatest sins against itself, in the name of religion.

As a man of faith, I believe that these developments should sound a clarion call for all true men and women of faith to become the true peacemakers of this age. A true interfaith movement should emerge at this time, that can bring the different faith traditions to work together in harmony, not to further their own particular agendas, but upon a common platform of universal aspirations, principles and values. As people of faith, we should recognize that what we share in common is greater than our differences.

We all aspire to establish peace on earth, to recognize the value of human life, to recognize the importance of individual responsibility in living according to the laws of nature and heaven and of the individual conscience in guiding us to do so, and to realize that we are truly One Family under God.

The threat of sectarian extremism will never be resolved by political or economic means alone. A true and lasting resolution must be rooted in faith, expressed through practical spirituality. In fact, the universal principles and shared values of the world’s faith traditions provide the essential basis for rising above conflict and building social cohesion in diverse and multi-religious societies.

They offer the antidote to the threat of global religious wars. That is why cooperation among faith leaders is essential for securing peace at this critical inflection point of modern history. Such a movement of cooperation calls for a vision that can transcend the many differences and divisions that feed conflicts worldwide today.

I believe that vision is the simple yet profound idea that all people, regardless of race, nationality, religion, or culture, are members of One Family under God.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we strip ourselves of our pretensions, and we stand honest and naked before God and all of humanity, we are all the same. If we strip ourselves of our national pretensions, our racial pretensions, religious pretensions, we will recognize our common humanity and our common destiny to live a life of co-prosperity and peace.

On the basis of this vision, that so powerfully expresses our fundamental human aspirations, the great faith traditions can unite and work together. Then they will not only counter religious radicalism, but uphold fundamental human rights and freedoms through the universal principles and moral values that they share in common. From this foundation a global ethic can then be developed that will provide the moral and cultural framework of a peaceful and harmonious world.

The GPF approach here is both timely and relevant.

It addresses one of the most pressing contemporary threats to peace, namely the possibility of global religious conflict. Our approach is different from past interreligious initiatives which focused on dialogue and mutual understanding among different faiths. GPF initiatives are multi-sectoral, engaging partners not just from the faith community, but political leaders, educators, business people and social entrepreneurs as well.

Our projects are practical, bringing faith communities to work together to change attitudes and thus behaviors in order to solve social problems and resolve conflict. The new and very different geopolitical dynamic of today calls for fresh thinking and new initiatives.

With that in mind, I propose the establishment of a faith-based Peace Council at the United Nations to meet the global challenge of identity-based conflict.

Through such a council the collective wisdom and resources of the world's great faith traditions can be mobilized to counter the radical elements that are distorting the original spirit of those traditions. We need to recognize the power of religious authority in amplifying the message of peace to local constituents in the most troubled hot spots of the world.

They represent a largely untapped resource for peace, yet, because they are deeply rooted in their communities, are far more effective peace builders than the UN's 'blue helmets' who can only contain the level of violence.

When local faith leaders become true 'owners' of the vision of peace, they will inspire their constituents to act in ways that build lasting peace. This process is already happening in a very real way in Nigeria where Christian and Muslim leaders are partnering with GPF to take the One Family under God message into every single local community in that nation.

Their example of religious cooperation and unity is a powerful statement against the religious violence of the Boko Haram extremists. Several of those Christian pastors and Muslim imams are here with us at this Convention.

Let's recognize them with a round of applause. Please stand so we can recognize your leadership.

Drawing as it would on such local faith resources, the council should be given serious weight in peace deliberations. Its establishment would help the United Nations adapt to the current global realities. The UN is often limited in its effectiveness in addressing broader issues by the self-interest of its member states.

Today religious identities are regional in scope and appeal, spreading far beyond national boundaries. That is something the existing UN is not well equipped to deal with and that a religious peace council could remedy.

The council would also provide a stronger voice for fundamental human rights and freedoms, than currently exists in the United Nations. Unlike the American Declaration of Independence, which recognized those rights and freedoms as endowed by the Creator, the United Nations at its founding, due to the circumstances of the Cold War, failed to acknowledge God or the Creator as the source of human rights.

That is why the UN has been ineffective in protecting those ideals in a world where authoritarian regimes make human rights dependent on their own power.

A faith-based council would strongly uphold the principle that all human beings, having the same Origin, are created equal and endowed with equal rights by our Creator, rights that no government or any other human institution can deny or infringe upon. The international movement of cooperation among faiths that I am calling for would find a powerful public voice in the council, working within the institution of the UN.

To establish the council it will be crucial for several nations, with the support of international religious leaders, to take the lead in advocating it. I hope that Malaysia will be a champion for this endeavor.

Malaysia can play a unique role here, as a Muslim nation. Malaysia can also become a global leader through demonstrating that Islam is a force for peace in the world.

Through pioneering a model of social cohesion and unity with Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism – the other great faith traditions present here – this country can powerfully dispel many of the violent and negative stereotypes that color the perception of Islam in the West and other parts of the world.

I believe we stand at a moment of historic transition, not just for Malaysia, but for the world.

Humanity is being challenged to take responsibility for the future and answer this fundamental question. In the words of my father, who devoted his entire life to the pursuit of peace, “Will everlasting peace ever take root? Or is humanity doomed to repeat the tragedy of the 20th century?” a century fraught with unprecedented levels of human violence, with two World Wars, the Cold War, genocide, and numerous regional conflicts.

The time for discussion is over.

The time for leadership is here.

True leaders have a vision and pursue it single-mindedly.

Their strength comes from moral authority, like our beloved statesman, Nelson Mandela. That moral authority is rooted in spiritual principles that are then mobilized to engage social change.

True leaders are also innovative.

They clear away the logjams of the past through fresh thinking, changing the framework of the debate, and establishing new precedents.

These precedents replace old, corrupt habits, establishing new ethical standards, that are the basis of a new culture.

You have all gathered here because you share the hope of a peaceful world rooted in the vision of One Family under God.

You share the principles and the values that bring us together in this common cause.

Now is the time to take up our responsibility to give substance to our hopes, and shape to our vision.

I call upon all of you here to join me in the mission of creating the institutions and the structures that will advance the cause of peace.

Let us create a global movement of faith communities, working together as a powerful social and cultural force for peace, as they are doing in Nigeria, but on a global scale. Can you do this, yes or no? [Yes!]

Let us establish the faith-based Peace Council as part of the UN. Can we do this, yes or no? [Yes!]

We can be sure that the extremists are not sleeping.

Let us determine that it is not they who will determine the future, but it is us that share this common vision to build one family under God, to put our mark in this very crucial moment in human history, and shape the future of humanity.

If we rise to this challenge we can move beyond the threat of a global Clash of Civilizations, beyond the stage of a Dialogue among Civilizations, toward a world of peace and harmony.

I pray that you will join me today and unite for this common cause.

This is a solemn moment. But I cannot leave without giving a challenge. This is a big, big challenge that I am proposing here today: Will you become owners of the dream of One Family under God and make it a living reality for future generations? If you do, please stand up.

I want to share with you a Korean word: “Aju”. My father explained that this word has tremendous meaning to it, because it means that “I will take ownership over it,” not somebody else. “Peace will start with me. I will be the peacemaker.” So could we say together, “Aju!”? [Aju!] Louder, could we say, together, “Aju!”? [Aju!]

Will you be owners of the dream of One Family under God and carry this message and the large mantle that is present before us to the world as the true peacemakers of this century? Will you do that? Yes or no? [Aju!]

Thank you, thank you very much. May God bless you and your families in all your endeavors.