

CONFERENCE ON INTERFAITH COOPERATION FOR PEACE

22 June 2005, United Nations Headquarters

INFORMATION NOTE

Background

The *United Nations Millennium Declaration* highlighted the importance of shared values and principles such as freedom, equality, solidarity and tolerance, as essential to international relations in the twenty first century. The active promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with people respecting one another in all their diversity of beliefs, cultures, and languages, is vital for the achievement of sustainable peace. Governments, international organizations, faith communities and other civil society groups can work together to make a major contribution to enhance intercultural understanding towards a just and peaceful world community.

The effective engagement of leaders of faith-based organizations provides an opportunity for greater understanding of religions, civilizations and cultures. Such a better understanding can inform and facilitate the work of governments, civil society and religious leaders, to foster harmonious inter-cultural relationships and to reduce the potential for animosities and even violence. More deliberate and strategic efforts can foster and advance understanding of the relationships and interdependencies between diverse cultures and religions.

Recent efforts to promote interfaith cooperation have been conducted at international, regional and national levels. The 59th Session of the UN General Assembly adopted two relevant resolutions: *Promotion of interreligious dialogue* (A/RES/59/23) and *Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation* (A/RES/59/142). Furthermore, there is also the report of the Director-General of UNESCO (A/59/201), responding to General Assembly resolution (A/RES/58/128) *Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation*, which was submitted to the General Assembly.

Objective

The Conference aims to enhance interfaith cooperation among governments, civil society and the United Nations system, including the promotion of the culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, and the translation of shared values into action, to achieve sustainable peace in the twenty-first century.

Expected Output

The outcome on strategies to enhance interfaith cooperation towards peace will be transmitted to the President of the 59th Session of the General Assembly as input to the High Level Plenary Meeting in September 2005.

Preparatory Process

A tripartite group composed of a core group of countries, civil society, UNESCO and UN-DESA are organizing the conference.

Organizational Aspects

Representatives of Member States, civil society organizations accredited to the United Nations agencies and offices will be invited to participate in the Conference.

The Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace will be held on 22 June 2005 at Conference Room 4 of the United Nations Headquarters. It will carry the theme: *Enhancing Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation Toward Peace in the 21st Century*. The conference will be divided in two sessions of 3-hour duration each. The morning session will focus on the sub-theme “*The role of religions in promoting intercultural understanding towards sustainable peace*” and the afternoon session will run on the sub-theme “*Exploring strategies to enhance interfaith cooperation for sustainable peace*”.

Each session will feature three panelists from a Member State, civil society and the UN system, followed by reactions from six discussants on lessons learned/best practices. All speakers will be asked to submit to the Conference Secretariat by 10 June 2005 their papers, presentations and/or reactions. Other Member States, UN system organizations and relevant civil society organizations will likewise be invited to submit a short (one-page) paper on lessons learned/best practices dealing on the theme and sub-themes of the Conference.

The Interfaith Conference Secretariat, handling pre-registration and other activities, can be reached at UNESCO Office in New York, Room 900, 2 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, tel. no. (212) 963-5981, fax no. (212) 963-8014, and its email address is unescony@un.org. The website is www.interfaithconference.com.