



Charter

World Council of Religious Leaders

An Outcome of The Millennium World Peace Summit

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Chapter 1 PREAMBLE

As religious and spiritual leaders of the world forming the World Council of Religious Leaders, we believe that religion can serve as a positive force for achieving world peace, that conflicts among religious and spiritual groups are avoidable, and that harmony amongst them is to be consistently promoted through active discussions and dialogues. We acknowledge that the history of humanity is replete with conflicts – even violent ones – that might have been avoided had there been a body to promote mutual understanding and equal respect among all religions. Therefore, we believe that it is our responsibility to work together to remove all causes of tension among our communities. We believe we have the will and courage to lead their followers to accept differences, to maintain self-respect, and to live in harmony with diverse communities in the world and with humankind in general.

WITH THESE ENDS IN VIEW, the World Council of Religious Leaders is formed as an independent body to be available as a resource, to work in collaboration and cooperation with, and to strengthen the United Nations and other international and national organizations that are dedicated to promoting world peace, harmony, tolerance, mutual respect among humans, and social and economic justice.

The first act of the World Council is to:

- a) Affirm the charter of the United Nations
- b) Reaffirm the commitment to Global Peace that was signed by the religious and spiritual leaders attending the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious at the United Nations in August 2000.
- c) Affirm that we will collectively work to promote spiritual values and practices throughout the world.

Chapter 2 MISSION

The World Council of Religious Leaders aims to serve as a model and guide for the creation of a community of world religions. In the spirit of service and humility, it seeks to inspire women and men of all faiths in the pursuit of peace, justice and mutual understanding. It will undertake initiatives to provide the spiritual resources of the world's religious traditions to assist the United Nations and its agencies in the prevention, resolution and healing of conflicts and in the eradication of their causes and in addressing social and environmental problems. By promoting the practice of the spiritual values shared by all religious traditions, and by uniting the human community for times of world prayer and meditation, the World Council seeks to aid in developing the inner qualities and external conditions needed for the creation of a more peaceful, just and sustainable world society.

Chapter 3

STRUCTURE

Article 3.1

With a view to implementing the objectives in the Preamble, the World Council will establish a three-tier structure as described below:

1. World Council of Religious Leaders will be headquartered in New York City, USA
2. Regional Councils of Religious Leaders will be located alongside the regional offices of the UN. They will work with the pre-eminent religious leaders and established networks and religious bodies of their areas.
3. National Council of Religious Leaders will be situated in each member country of the United Nations. Each of these councils will be autonomous but will be linked with the World Council.

Recognizing that much progress has already been made in the inter-religious field, the World Council will work with established organizations and networks in setting up this structure.

Article 3.2

The World Council will be composed of eminent religious and spiritual leaders from the member states of the United Nations. It will guide the composition and the activities of the Regional and the National Councils. The World Council will appoint co-chairs from traditional religions as well as the indigenous traditions. The appointment of co-chairs shall take into account both religious representation and geographical distribution as well as gender equity. The World Council of Religious Leaders evolved out of the Millennium World Peace Summit, which is registered in New York City as a 501c3 nonprofit organization. The World Council developed through extensive consultations with Summit participants. Thus the World Council will maintain the Secretariat of the Millennium World Peace Summit, administered by a Secretary General and charged with the organizational tasks of The World Council. The World Council will appoint two co-chairs from each of the major five religions as well as the indigenous traditions, for a total of 12 co-chairs. The co-chairs will maintain this position for a term of two years. This group will appoint a Chairperson, by rotation through the religions, also for a term of two years. The Chairperson and co-chairs, along with the Secretary General, will constitute the Executive Committee and will help establish the overall policy and direction of the Council. The Executive Committee will guide the strategy and actions of the Council. In times of world or regional crisis, the members of the Executive Committee can be spokespersons. The interim co-chairs of the Steering Committee will become the board of the World Council to oversee the running and administration of the World Council. The current board of the Millennium World Peace Summit will fold into this new board. This board will seek to expand with the induction of business, political and religious leaders.

The World Council of Religious Leaders will develop its own bylaws and constitution, incorporating the existing bylaws for the Millennium World Peace Summit.

Article 3.3

The Regional Councils will be composed of eminent leaders nominated by the National Councils. They will each have co-presidents and a secretary, who will work closely with the Secretariat in New York. The co-presidents will be nominated for a term of two years on a rotational basis.

Article 3.4

The National Councils will consist of religious and spiritual leaders within the nation. The National Councils will each have a president and a secretary, who will have a two-year tenure on a rotational basis.

Article 3.5

The World Council will establish various task forces and commissions to address specific issues, with scholars and experts in the field. Thus these commissions can:

- a) Act as a forum to discuss events and areas of potential religious tension and conflict in the world;
- b) Consider and hear disputes and matters of concern to any religion;
- c) Hear disputes regarding violations of the Charter; and
- d) Propose recommendations to the World Council regarding any action taken up by the United Nations or the International or National Bodies.

Chapter 4

MEMBERSHIP

Article 4.1

The World Council seeks to include distinguished representatives of the major faith traditions, as well as outstanding individuals of recognized spiritual stature. It will seek to develop balanced representation among the religions as its essential goal is to form a strong body of eminent religious leaders who can work together to address critical world problems in concert with the United Nations, skill in inter-religious dialogue is necessary.

Thus membership is by invitation. Recommendations can be submitted to the co-chairs and the board. The Council will seek to develop balanced representation among the religions. To help achieve this aim, it will also seek to develop councils of each major faith tradition.

Article 4.2

The admission of members will be effected by a decision of the World Council upon the joint recommendation of the Regional Councils and the National Councils.

Article 4.3

The World Council of Religious Leaders will meet at least once a year. The chairperson or persons for each meeting will be elected by the Executive Committee of the World Council. Specific task forces or commissions of the Council may meet more regularly. Every ten years, the Council will convene a World Summit, similar to the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations in New York in 2000. This Summit would include a ten-year review of its activities.

There will be Regional Council and National Council Assemblies once every five years. During these meetings, the National Councils in each region will assemble to review policy issues regarding religious harmony and peace in each region, evaluate goals of the past five years and set goals for next five years. The Regional and National Councils will meet at least once a year or more as they deem fit.

Chapter 5

FUNCTIONS

Article 5.1

The World Council will be vested with the following functions and powers to:

- a) Promote religious and spiritual harmony.
- b) Prevent and resolve tensions and potential conflicts connected with religion and culture.
- c) Promote respect for women and children and care for the vulnerable in society.
- d) Work for the active promotion of mutual respect and the preservation of religious diversity.
- e) Take constructive measures to resolve conflict, promote reconciliation and foster healing in areas of conflict.
- f) Seek methods to reduce poverty and promote the values of sharing and compassion in the effort to help the UN achieve poverty reduction goals.
- g) Promote an Environmental Ethics to help reverse environmental degradation, to mobilize the faith communities around sustainability, conservation and respect for all life.

Article 5.2

To achieve these ends, the World Council will:

- a) Assist policy formation at regional, national, and global levels.

- b) Establish subcommittees on subjects such as conflict resolution, environmental issues of local and global importance, prevention of crime, prevention of terrorism, and gender equity.
- c) Create a forum for the debate and dialogue on matters of concern to any religion.

Article 5.3

The World Council will work towards forging active linkages with:

- a) International bodies such as the United Nations and World Bank.
- b) International humanitarian organizations working towards social justice and peace.
- c) Governments and Governmental bodies of international repute working towards harmony.
- d) Non-governmental organizations of international repute working in specific regions for peace and social justice.
- e) Business and professional associations of international repute who are working towards peace.
- f) Labor leaders and labor unions.

Chapter 6 VOTING PROCEDURES AND AMENDMENTS

Article 6.1

All decisions of the World Council will come into force when they have been adopted by a two-thirds majority vote. Within the terms of reference set by the World Council, the executive committee of the Council will be able to act in response to regional or global crises without having to wait for a vote.

Article 6.2

This Charter is intended to provide a broad framework for the establishment and functioning of the World Council. As the functioning and the role of the World Council evolve over time, this Charter may be suitably altered or amended. Any alteration to the present Charter must be recommended by a two-thirds and similarly ratified.

During each meeting of the Council, a decision will be made on the timing and location of the next meeting. The Secretariat will be responsible for organizing the logistics of each meeting, working with local co-hosts.

Chapter 7 COMMUNICATIONS

Quarterly contact will be made with all Council members by the Secretariat to update them on requests for initiatives and activities of Council members. An annual report will be produced describing all outcomes of the Council for that year.

In times of increased world tension or conflict, the Secretariat will consult with the Council co-chairs to issue statements on behalf of the Council for the purpose of alleviating a crisis situation. These statements, which would then be issued to the public, would be purely for humanitarian, rather than political, ends.

Chapter 8 FINANCING

Council members will provide for some financial contribution to the Council, either through their organization or through the support of business leaders. A business board will be established, composed of business leaders committed to the Council and/or individual religious leaders on the Council.

The Secretariat will establish a five-year budget and plan for the Council, which will include seeking financial support from religious organizations, foundations, corporations, and individuals.