

## **ONE THOUSAND RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO GATHER AT THE UNITED NATIONS IN A HISTORIC SUMMIT FOR WORLD PEACE**

New York – July 25, 2000 – For the first time in history, religious and spiritual leaders of the world's diverse faith traditions will come together in New York on August 28th to discuss how to forge a partnership of peace with the United Nations. More than 1,000 leaders are expected. The goal of the Religious Summit is to identify ways that the worldwide religious and spiritual communities can work together as interfaith allies with the United Nations on specific peace, poverty and environmental initiatives.

All regions of the world will be represented, as will the major faith traditions of Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Indigenous, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism.

The Religious Summit convening on August 28th, at the United Nations, will bring together recognized religious and spiritual figures including religious leaders from current zones of conflict such as Sierra Leone, the Balkans, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Philippines, Rwanda and Sudan to discuss the roles they can play in reducing religious tensions. The Summit is being convened by an independent group of interfaith leaders, religious scholars and theologians.

Confirmed participants include:

- His Excellency Francis Cardinal Arinze—President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue at the Vatican
- Venerable Samdech Preah Maha Gosananda—the Buddhist Nobel Prize nominee
- His Excellency Abdullah Salaih Al-Obaid—Secretary General of the MuslimWorld League
- Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau—Chief Rabbi of Israel
- His Excellency Dr. Mustafa Ceric—The Grand Mufti of Bosnia
- Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz—Leading Talmudic Scholar
- Reverend Konrad Raiser—Secretary-General of The World Council of Churches
- His Eminence Sheik Ahmad Kufaro—The Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic
- His Grace Njongonkulu Ndungane—The Archbishop of Cape Town
- His Holiness Abune Paulos—Patriarch of Ethiopia
- Swami Dayanand Saraswati—representing the Shankracharya in India
- Mata Ammritanandamayi—Hindu leader
- Reverend Jesse Jackson—Christian Leader and Special Envoy to President Clinton
- Chief Oren Lyons—Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation
- His Holiness Karekin II—Patriarch of the Armenian Church

The occasion will assemble leaders rarely seen together at religious gatherings, such as the Jingu Daiguji of the Grand Shrine at Ise, the Patriarch of Thailand, and Chief Patriarch Ehsin Watanabe of Mount Hiei from the Tendai School of Buddhism in Japan. Numerous spiritual leaders from the indigenous traditions around the world—such as Andean leaders from the line of the Incas—are also planning to participate.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who will address the gathering on August 29th, has said, "This gathering of the world's preeminent religious and spiritual leaders in a united call for peace will hopefully strengthen the prospect for peace in the new

millennium." H.E. Theo Ben Gurirab, the President of the 54th session of the General Assembly is also expected to address the opening ceremony on August 28th.

At the Summit, the leaders will discuss how to harness the power of religious tolerance and spiritual faith to educate and mobilize their communities to focus on reducing divisions and ancient antipathies. After meeting at U.N. headquarters these leaders will continue to engage in two-day working group sessions at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel to devise special initiatives to address regional conflict, poverty issues, and environmental problems.

Bawa Jain, Secretary-General of the Summit, has been deeply involved in global interfaith work for many years. The Summit is steered by an International Advisory Board of religious leaders, theologians, scholars and its strategic partners, which include the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions; Scholar's Group at Harvard Divinity School; the United Nations University for Peace; the Earth Council; the World Faiths Development Dialogue; the World Resources Institute; the Forum on Religion and Ecology; the World Conference on Religion and Peace; the Parliament of the Worlds Religion and the Interfaith Center of N.Y. Serving as Honorary Chair of the Summit is Ted Turner.

Funding for the World Peace Summit is being provided by the U.N. Foundation/Better World Fund, founded by Ted Turner, Ford Foundation, Ruder Finn, Inc., the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Carnegie Foundation, the Modi Foundation, and the Greenville Foundation among others. A number of religious groups are providing financial support by sponsoring meals and in-kind contributions.

Anticipated outcomes of the Summit are a Declaration for World Peace and plans for the establishment of an ongoing International Advisory Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders that can serve as a resource for the U.N. Secretary-General and the U.N. system in its conflict prevention and resolution efforts.

"There has been a phenomenal response from religious leaders around the world. They see this as a unique opportunity to join efforts with the United Nations in a worldwide interfaith initiative. Our goal is that religious leaders from different traditions will work together to help resolve global problems," said Summit's Secretary-General Bawa Jain, who has been traveling to many regions speaking with religious leaders about the goals of the Summit.

Beliefnet.com is the official web partner of the World Peace Summit and will be doing a live webcast of the event.

All journalists wishing to cover the portions of the Religious Summit taking place at UN Headquarters must obtain UN Press Credentials. Interested journalists must submit a request to the UN Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit (fax: 212-963-4642) accompanied by a letter of assignment on official letterhead of a media organization and signed by a publisher, assignment editor or bureau chief. The letter should specify the name of the journalist seeking accreditation. The status of the request may be checked by calling 212-963-5934 or 7164. Once approved, a UN grounds pass can be obtained by presenting two forms of photo identification at the Pass and Identification Unit, UNITAR Building, 45th Street and First Avenue, New York, Monday to Friday, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. and between 2:00 p.m. 5:00 p.m. For further information regarding UN accreditation only, call 212-963-6934, 6936 or 6937.

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