

## **RELIGIOUS LEADERS ARE BEING CALLED UPON TO HELP RESTORE PEACE TO THE MIDDLE EAST**

*The Millennium World Peace Summit calls upon Middle East religious leaders to take strong stand for peace*

New York—[October 16, 2000]—With the recent eruption of violence in the Middle East, religious leaders are being called upon to assert their moral authority to help quell passions and restore peace to the region. Just six weeks ago, religious leaders from around the world gathered at the United Nations for the World Peace Summit to commit themselves to working with the UN to resolve conflicts. The current crisis in the Middle East is a test as to whether the commitments made can indeed be implemented. Thus far, religious leaders have not played a public role in helping to halt the violence. They are now being called upon to urge their constituents to practice the tolerance and understanding which are central to the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

Bawa Jain, Secretary-General of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, is calling for a meeting between religious leaders in the Middle East and UN Secretary-General, Kofi A. Annan, to see how the religious leaders can be effective in ending the violence. During the World Peace Summit, Annan expressed his support for increased involvement of the religious leadership in peacemaking and his hope that he could call upon the religious leaders in times of crisis. This is such a time.

"We are asking religious leaders in the region to put into action The Commitment to Global Peace made at the World Peace Summit and take a bold stand against violence in any form," says Bawa Jain, the Summit's Secretary-General. "This crisis in the Middle East is an opportunity for religious leaders to help their communities overcome hatred and religious divides. Political and religious leaders must sit together to work out their differences."

The Commitment to Global Peace condemns all violence in the name of religion and makes a strong appeal to all religious, ethnic and national groups to seek a cessation of all hostilities. The signing of the Commitment signifies an unprecedented collaboration among religious and spiritual leaders to commit to cooperate in building peaceful societies.

The World Peace Summit took place August 28-31, 2000 in New York City. The Summit opened at the UN with Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressing the leaders. The Summit continued at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where religious leaders engaged in working group sessions to devise ongoing initiatives to address regional conflict, poverty and environmental problems. In addition to the signing of The Commitment to Global Peace, another outcome of the World Peace Summit is the formation of an "Advisory Council" of religious leaders who would be available as a resource to the United Nations in its conflict prevention and resolution efforts.

The Summit represented the first time in history that religious and spiritual leaders of the world's diverse faith traditions came together to discuss forging a partnership of peace with the United Nations and to identify ways that the worldwide religious communities can work together on specific peace, poverty and environmental initiatives.

The Commitment to Global Peace was developed with the contribution of the Summit's International Advisory Council and with input from the Scholars Group at Harvard Divinity School and other Summit strategic partners in the months preceding the Religious Summit. It was then circulated among religious leaders for their input and changes. The Commitment includes input from all the major religious faiths.