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An Appeal to the Leaders and Followers of All Religions

Moscow Conference

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AN APPEAL TO THE LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS OF ALL RELIGIONS
(from the Moscow conference)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We make this appeal at a decisive hour of history. The potential is ominous. The catastrophe of a nuclear holocaust, capable of destroying humanity and life itself, faces us frighteningly closer than ever before. We who make this appeal have come from 90 countries in all six continents, representatives of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism, gathered together in Moscow from May 10th to 14th, 1982, in the World Conference: Religious Workers for Saving the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe.

We make this appeal to you, our brothers and sisters of all religions in all parts of the world, for together we form the majority of the population of the world, and by accepting our moral responsibility to work together we can change the course of history through appealing to the conscience of humanity and to the decision-makers of the nations, on the basis of our common love for humanity.

Part 1

We hold to different religious convictions. We admit that we have not ourselves always pursued peace. We have quarreled about our convictions and even fought wars in the name of religion. Today we have come together, drawn by the menace of a nuclear catastrophe, which faces all of us alike, whether we profess one religion or another, or none at all. We have gathered here neither to discuss our differences nor to create a common syncretistic new religion. We are here because we sense the common peril that faces all humanity, and even all life. We make this joint appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters of all religions of the world, and in your name to the conscience of humanity. We represent so many different cultural, ideological and political backgrounds. Among us there are men and women from every walk of life, factory workers, leaders of governments, statesmen and politicians, surgeons and physicians, professors and researchers, scientists and social workers and ministers of religion. But we have come together as religious people, united in the common struggle to save the sacred gift of life from nuclear holocaust.

We have not sought to merge our world view. Our perspectives on reality remain different. We hold to our differing religious convictions without compromise. Despite these differences, we can commonly affirm much that is precious to all of us: Life is a sacred gift, to be cherished and fostered; peace is an essential quality of life. War is anti-life. Love, compassion and care for all bring peace and make life worth living. Truth alone is to be pursued and lived out. Falsehood is evil and to be shunned. Hatred, aggression and greed lead to war and destroy life. Injustice and enforced poverty should be fought against and eliminated. The pursuit of self-interest at the cost of our neighbors is against all religion.

Religions should learn to understand and appreciate each other. We have held, as religious people, conflicting views on the justification of war and violence. The new factor in today's world is that, for the first time in history, all life is threatened by a nuclear holocaust, and a nuclear war could only end in total catastrophe. Therefore our religions agree on this clear point ~~that~~ nuclear war can never be justified under any circumstances, and that it is the greatest danger facing mankind today.

In this conference we have listened to many voices. We were touched to tears by the words of our sister from Japan, Michiyo Kurokawa, a surviving victim of Hiroshima, who told us what she experienced as a 16-year-old girl on that fateful morning of August 6,

1945, the fiery storm and the eerie silence that followed, the hundreds of thousands incinerated, the deathly spread of radiation which took the toll of another hundred thousand, the 10,000 scalded and wounded crowding into a 600-bed hospital, the smell of burning bodies, flesh falling off the bodies of the living, little girls with their peeling skin trailing them like rags. We who listened to the account wept in silence, helpless and forlorn. We listened to many voices--people from nations big and small. We felt the insecurity and fear experienced by people in small nations like Cyprus, which remains divided and continues to suffer, or Angola, Namibia or Zambia, living close to a powerful neighbor nation that does not shrink from crossing borders and bombing and strafing defenseless people. We shuddered to think how much greater their insecurity would be if the potential nuclear power of these neighbors who do not respect international law were to become actual.

Our brethren from the Middle East told us that the Middle East has now become a boiling cauldron. Lebanon bleeds; its unity and sovereignty are threatened; arms are rushed in from outside to several groups. This should be stopped immediately. The Palestinian people still suffer, deprived of their homeland and denied the rights to self-determination and statehood. Violation of human rights and repression have become more intense in the occupied territories. The special status of Jerusalem, the Holy City sacred to three religions, is in danger, and the liberation of the occupied part of the city is a necessary condition for peace in the region. We listened to our sisters and brothers in Europe, the cradle of modern civilization and the theater of two world wars in this century. Its soil is saturated with nuclear weapons. More is sought to be added. A little spark in Europe, be it due to inflamed passions or an inadvertent accident, can light a fire that can soon grow into a global holocaust. No wonder that peoples of Europe are expressing their protest in massive demonstrations of unprecedented size and scale. We listened to our brothers and sisters in Central and South America, in Africa and Asia and from all parts of the world--demanding in unison: banish nuclear weapons, establish justice, negotiate, do not interfere in internal affairs, abjure war, pursue peace.

Part II

To save life the mind must move--from false pretensions of national security and narrow national interests to a perception of the threat that now faces all of humanity and life itself. Humanity should identify its common enemies and set itself to struggle against these: wrongly giving priority to narrow national interests and national security above the interests and security of humanity as a whole; wrong perceptions of security as based on the power of weapons--nuclear or conventional--and seeking one's own security through the destruction of others; the false idea that more weapons bring more security; the pursuit of profit by escalating the arms race and by fomenting local conflicts to expand the market for the arms trade; the failure to fight injustice, both within and among nations, to remove exploitation and oppression, ignorance and poverty, hunger and malnutrition, communal hatred and racism; the prevailing male domination in all societies that keeps the female half of humanity from full participation in decision-making and leadership; the pursuit of untruth in international relations, including self-justification, suppression of truth, false perceptions about ourselves and about the presumed enemy; the desire for domination, one nation pursuing superiority over others.

To save life peace should not be separated from justice for all; only a just peace can endure. Both peace and justice should be the concern of all--whether rich or poor, less developed or more developed. We should not remain passive in the situation where many people, under the pressure of social and economic factors, lose faith in the value of their life and become indifferent to death.

To save life science and technology, the most powerful instruments in the hands of humanity, have to be liberated from their present subservience to war and profit, in order to serve the true interests of all humanity--like the eradication of disease and ignorance, of hunger and malnutrition, of poverty and suffering.

To save life humanity must unite. People of all religions and no religion, working together, must put pressure on decision-makers and leaders of government; to move from postures of confrontation, to meeting around the conference table, accepting one another as they are, with their differing ideological and political positions, not insisting on changing the other before talking to him; to devise an effective time-frame, with stipulated deadlines for implementing the various stages, based on the program of action already agreed upon in the First Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament, that new comprehensive program on disarmament which, we hope, would be adopted by the Second Special Session in June-July, 1982; to implement immediately a total freeze on the manufacture, testing and deployment of new or "improved" nuclear weapons; to begin destroying substantial parts of the present arsenals of nuclear weapons, thereby demonstrating the good faith of disarmament agreements and providing humanity with new hope; this can be done unilaterally by all of the nuclear powers, as well as bilaterally or multilaterally on the principle of equal security for all.

To conclude, ratify and implement an enforceable international convention to ban all chemical and climatological weapons; to declare and implement Nuclear Weapons' Free Zones in Southern Africa, in the Middle East, in Europe, in the Indian Ocean, in Asia and wherever else possible and necessary, like that already existing in Latin America; to embark on a well-financed, massive and effective campaign under UN sponsorship, for the education of children and adults everywhere, on the horrible consequences of nuclear war, not only for people now living, but also for future generations, and for all life on our planet as such, using all the mass media, places of worship, trade unions, educational institutions, leadership training programs; disseminating information and films on the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, drawing upon the expertise and research of Peace Institutes, physicians' international organizations and other similar bodies.

To save life the religious organizations and peoples of the world should act together with others to expose the falsehood of many prevailing doctrines which are dangerously misleading, such as: the view that people can buy private shelters which will protect them from a nuclear attack; the view that a nuclear war can be fought and won; that there is such a thing as a limited nuclear war that can be fought with enhanced-radiation weapons, which destroy only people and not property; that security can be granted by a pre-emptive first-strike capability; that more weapons bring more security; that one nation can find its security by exposing other nations to insecurity; the view that a humane and civilized world is possible after a nuclear war.

To save life religious people and organizations should: give active and enthusiastic support to genuine peace movements and anti-war demonstrations; buy time and space in the mass media to programs of education about disarmament issues; put pressure on the media to devote more of their facilities and influences for peace education and the demand for peace; use all the means at their disposal, including pulpits, publications, festivals and worship programs to promote a campaign for peace with justice and for disarmament; to initiate and support negotiation campaigns all over the world.

Above all, the religious people of the world should with one voice condemn as a moral evil, the development, manufacture, testing, deployment and use of any nuclear weapons of any kind whatsoever by anyone. This is not a political issue, but a pre-eminently moral issue. Religions should speak hunbly, with awareness of their own past

complicity in war and violence. But they must speak clearly, audibly and unequivocally, for it is a matter of saving the sacred gift of life.

We appeal to our brothers and sisters of different religions not to say or do anything that hurts the religious feeling, or the legitimate and legal rights of the followers of other religions. Peaceful co-existence and dialogue are as necessary among religions as among nations. So we appeal to you, our religious brothers and sisters all over the world, to begin now, if you have not already done so, to speak and to act, and above all to pray, to pray fervently, to pray with hope and trust. May the prayer of millions rise as a canopy over the earth to protect it from the impending doom of a nuclear catastrophe. The source and ground of all being and of all life will not fail to heed our prayers.