The Vienna Declaration Appeal of Conscience Conflict Resolution Conference

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THE VIENNA DECLARATION

APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE CONFLICT RESOLUTION CONFERENCE

The Appeal of Conscience Conflict Resolution Conference has met in Vienna to declare that among people of faith there can be no place or tolerance for the conflicts visited on so many people in the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Moreover, the religious leaders present have borne witness to a maturing unity of purpose among them to act on behalf of the innocent victims of war in quest for peaceful resolution of conflicts. For we believe, war is not a solution. We emphatically state that the ethnic conflicts plaguing these regions are not religious wars. Religion should not be misused to further inflame the passion of enmity.

We, the participants of the Appeal of Conscience Conflict Resolution Conference, wish to extend our thanks to H.E. Dr. Thomas Klestil, President of Austria, H.E. Dr. Franz Vranitzky, Chancellor, H.E. Dr. Alois Mock, Minister for Foreign Affairs, who have provided us with the support and hospitality of their country. We also wish to thank the Mayor of Vienna for extending to us the hospitality of this historic city.

We take note of the many messages of support from religious and political leaders. We are especially encouraged by letters received from Presidents Izetbegović of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Tudjman of the Republic of Croatia, and Milošević of the Republic of Serbia. The fact that these Presidents all wrote to encourage the Appeal of Conscience Conflict Resolution Conference in its quest for peace is an unprecedented act of support for a non-governmental and religious initiative for peace.

We wish to thank the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, UN-Secretary-General, Boutros-Boutros Ghali, H.E. President Aliyev of Azerbaijan, the Chairman-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic States for their messages of support and the High Commissioner of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

We also wish to thank His Holiness Pope John Paul II, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II, His Holiness Patriarch Pavle, His Eminence Rais ul Ulema Dr. Mustafa Cerić, His Eminence Cardinal Franjo Kuharić and the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace George Carey for their inspiring messages in the pursuit of peace. This year, 1995, has been designated the “Year of Tolerance” by the United Nations. Our work here in Vienna, at the Appeal of Conscience Conflict Resolution Conference, sees this tolerance as the result of the God given dignity of every human being. It has the goal to encourage actions
which will bring about the end of bloody conflicts now raging in Europe and Central Asia. We refer to and re-affirm the Appeal of Conscience Berne Declaration which condemned the killing and brutality as well as the destruction of all places of worship in the afflicted regions. We also refer and re-affirm the Appeal of Conscience Bosphorus Declaration which stated again the condemnation of the Bosnian conflict and also denounced the bloody fighting then raging in certain regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

This statement, issued in Vienna, draws on both the Berne and Bosphorus Declaration in order to emphasize our deep concern for the fate of all peoples in the areas where conflicts continue. We once again condemn the brutal and bloody fighting in Bosnia, in Central Asia and other countries in that region, and the more recently begun fighting in Chechnya. We view with alarm the spread of xenophobia and the oppression of minorities. We believe that hard earned freedom can only be guaranteed by the building of Democracy--respect for the God given dignity of each human being.

This Conference wishes to bring attention to recent peace initiatives that merit most urgent support:

- It is with great concern that we note the renewed fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina and we fear that the conflict could spread and inflame the entire region. Therefore, we fully endorse the call for a Summit meeting of Presidents Tudjman, Milosevic and Izetbegovic, conveyed to them by the President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, Rabbi Arthur Schneier and the Very Reverend Leonid Kishkovsky.

- In the Republic of Croatia, we welcome the extension of the United Nations peace keeping mandate.

- Confronted by the unremitting violence upon Chechnya, we applaud the just stand taken by His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II and the Mufti of Chechnya, H.E. Muhammed Husein Alsabakov in condemning the violence that leads to loss of life. We, the participants in the Appeal of Conscience Conflict Resolution Conference, stand by them and support their wise decision to work in unison with one another and applaud their stand against the continuation of the killing in Chechnya. We encourage both religious leaders to work to bring about an end to the human suffering caused by the conflict in Chechnya and which threatens to spread to neighboring areas.

- We applaud the action taken by the Armenian Catholics, the late Vasken I, and Sheik-ul Islam Allahshukar Pashazade in their common cause to stop the bloodshed in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We pledge our solidarity in promoting the continuation of this task so that the suffering in Nagorno-Karabakh will end. Inspired by these examples we encourage other spiritual leaders to take similar steps in the quest for peace and to demonstrate the unity of all men and women of goodwill.

The Talmud says, "He who saves one life, saves the world." All of us must begin with that one life to save. That is the reason we continue to demand that hostilities cease immediately in order to alleviate the suffering in the war zones; that humanitarian aid flow freely to all who are suffering and in need, regardless of faith; and that all religious communities cooperate in the vital and life-saving humanitarian work in the conflict zones.

In the Koran it says, "Who did harm on earth without justice, did harm to all people on earth." We are reminded by this that every single act of violence is a universal assault on human dignity.

In 2. Corinthians it is written that, "God is Spirit. Wherever there is God's Spirit, there is freedom." It is
our goal to help manifest that Spirit to all who are now suffering the agonies of war, to make them free and to enable them to enjoy the freedom that is rightfully theirs.

May this united stand of the representatives of major faiths be heard in the councils of government as well as in churches, mosques and synagogues. Let us stand for life and not for death. Let us stand for the conscience, justice and compassion without which there can be no peaceful resolution of conflict.

Vienna, March 30th, 1995

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, President
Appeal of Conscience Foundation

His Eminence Metropolitan Spyridon of Italy
Representative of His All Holiness
The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I

His Eminence
Sheik-ul Islam Allahshukar Pashazade
Supreme Religious Council of Caucasian Peoples of Azerbaijan

His Excellency
Archbishop Francesco Monterisi
Apostolic Nuncio in Bosnia
Representative of His Holiness John Paul II

In the presence of:

His Excellency Dr. Thomas Klestil
President of Austria

His Excellency Dr. Alois Mock
The Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria

The undersigned have also endorsed the Vienna Declaration of the Appeal of Conscience Conflict Resolution Conference.

His Eminence Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Slutsk
Patriarchal Exarch of Belarus
Representative of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia

His Eminence Dzevad Hodžić
Grand Imam, Zagreb Mosque
Representative of H.E. Rais ul Ulema
Dr. Mustafa Ceric of Bosnia-Herzegovina

His Grace Bishop Irinej
Bishop of Bačka
Representative of His Holiness Patriarch Pavle

His Excellency Bishop Djuro Kokša
Representative of the Archbishop of Zagreb
His Eminence Cardinal Franjo Kuharčić