

Many to Many

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“Many to Many” under the aegis of Operation Peace Through Unity is a communicating link between “we, the peoples” of all nations, races, creeds and ideologies offering in the spirit of the preamble of the United Nations Charter an instrument for the furthering of better relationships based on deepening mutual understanding and the aspiration to promote unity and cooperation beyond all differences.

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I. *Currency*

As each year brings us further into the new millennium, the new era, ferocious crosscurrents are wreaking havoc and mayhem in all lands, breaking down and destroying all structures that are not standing on firm ground. The brittle bricks and corrupt mortar of the Temples of Mammon, unable to withstand the winds of change, are sending ripples of financial collapse and intense uncertainty throughout the world. Political and financial wizards are struggling to repair their damaged reputation and restore public faith in their capability to make and administer money and power, but the public – overwhelmed by the burden of unpayable debts – are not in the mood to forgive; the ‘dark clouds of retribution’ are building and bursting over the heads of anyone who may have caused or contributed to the miserable state of affairs.

And yet, behind the lashing out in anger and despair, there is an awakening realisation that we may all have participated in the overall de-valuing of the quality of life; that a consuming appetite for material things has caught us like flies on a sticky trap. As members of society and citizens of the world we may have to acknowledge that – perhaps unwittingly – we too have a share in producing the fatty clots in the arteries that should be distributing energy to each and every part of the system to which we all belong, and on which our individual lives ultimately depend for sustenance.

The climate, in every meaning of the word, is indeed changing. Melting icecaps, warming seas, changing weather patterns and increasing volcanic activities seem to coincide with similar comprehensive changes within the human psyche. Watching, and experiencing within ourselves, the seemingly inevitable process of disintegration of all we deemed necessary to our happiness and wellbeing, we are faced with an unprecedented opportunity of choice and change.

We are in the empowering position of holding ourselves accountable for the widespread misappropriation of money; for the careless extortion of the planetary environment as a whole – and for ignoring our voice of conscience. We face the decision whether or not to take ownership of the state of affairs; whether or not to invest in the redemption and the rebuilding, with incorruptible currency and on sound principles. Nature and modern technology will testify to the quality and the extent of our resolve.

The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is repeatedly reminding the global community that “*we no longer have the luxury of indulging in rhetoric and rituals*” and that “*we cannot continue to burn and consume our way to prosperity at the expense of the world’s poor and the environment*”. Procrastination is a choice humanity cannot afford. At this watershed in human and planetary history we have the opportunity to shed the heavy burden of ancient hatreds and poisonous envy and greed, and to embark upon new joint ventures.

Perhaps one could make the suggestion that, among the numerous UN international days, years and decades with focus on issues affecting us all, a ‘*Jubilee Day*’ could be inaugurated in which we forgive each other, including ourselves, for all trespasses; a day for freeing the world of old bondages and ‘debts’ - even the invisible shackles attached to ‘gifts’; a day of jubilant celebration of the treasure of Life in all its many stages of evolution.

“Verily, We reverence the great Feminine Principle. Verily, We reverence the giving Principle which bestows the life of Beauty and of the Heart”
(*Fiery World 1935*)

II. “The Rise of the South”

The 2013 Human Development Report, entitled “The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World” (launched 14 March in Mexico City) is highlighting the ‘profound shift in global dynamics’ engendered by the ‘fast-rising powers of the developing world’. It identifies more than 40 countries which have made achievements in human development far greater than anticipated over the past decade that will have long-term implications for the world at large.

While each of these countries has its own unique history and has chosen different paths of development, they have been, and are, facing many similar challenges. The Report traces and analyses the causes and effects of achievements within the different countries and the possible challenges to be faced on the road ahead. It notes the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence between these developing nations and the growing intensity of the voice of the people of the world, united in their demand to be heard. Through new and numerous means of communication people are offering their ideas and insisting on greater accountability from governments and international institutions.

The Human Development Report offers fresh analytical insights and outlines proposals for policy reforms, which would promote comprehensive development progress throughout the world. It also *‘helps chart a course for people in all regions to face shared human development challenges together, fairly and effectively’* (<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home.html>)

III. First Global Indigenous Peoples’ Forum

This first ever two-day Forum took place in Rome (February 2013) at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) headquarters and was attended by more than 30 participants from the 27 countries.

Prior to the Forum, IFAD, together with partners within the indigenous communities, had been conducting consultations and regional workshops through which two priority areas emerged:

- increasing full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the design and implementation of IFAD-supported projects; and
- building the capacity of indigenous peoples’ organisations.

Among the issues discussed at the Forum were the indigenous peoples’ rights to own and manage ancestral territories. According to Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Executive Director, Tebtebba Foundation, many indigenous peoples still inhabit their traditional territories, which are among the last remaining ecosystems in the world. But, according to Tauli-Corpuz, *‘since these are areas where biodiversity, mineral, oil and gas are found, indigenous peoples are confronted with daily threats of being displaced from their communities or of inappropriate development agendas’*.

In 2000 the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was created, followed in 2007 by the approval of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, through which the indigenous peoples have gained a greater voice within international institutions and the global community. (<http://social.un.org/index/IndigenousPeoples.aspx>)

A study has recently been undertaken by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues focussing on the extent of violence against indigenous women and girls, in particular in terms of article 22(2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The study together with its recommendations has been forwarded to the Forum's 12th Session, May 2013. (<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/230/59/PDF/N1323059.pdf?OpenElement>)

IV The 36th session of IFAD's Governing Council

On 13 February the Indigenous People's Forum's findings were presented to the 36th session of IFAD's Governing Council meeting, entitled "*The power of partnerships: Forging alliances for sustainable smallholder agriculture*", also taking place in the IFAD headquarters in Rome. This year the Council will aim toward establishing new and improved forms of partnerships with governments and other donors, the private sector and smallholder farmers.

The meeting acknowledged that profound changes have taken place within the 'landscape in which agriculture operates', providing new challenges, alliances and risks. While the world population is rapidly increasing, agriculture today shall have to help restore a '*fragile environment, managing dwindling natural resources, addressing climate change and providing decent livelihoods to the farmers of today and tomorrow*'. And as the agricultural market is changing and attracting new entities and individuals; new '*configurations of power and development opportunities*' emerge, which will need new and improved forms of partnerships, based on a common goal.

Whether formal or informal such partnerships will need to be based on an agreement to cooperate in order to advance the partners' mutual interests, and be built on their combined strengths and resources in a transparent and equitable manner. The Governing Council stressed that such partnerships require the '*letting go of top-down approaches and blueprints, while accepting that no single set of participants – not farmers, other private investors, researchers, governments or donors – has the solution to the challenges now facing agriculture.*'

Although there is general agreement that collaboration is increasingly becoming a necessity, it is also found to be a challenging process of learning. The benefits to the smallholder farmers will depend on an '*equitable sharing of risks, responsibilities, resources and benefits*'. Creating the right conditions for smallholder farmers to connect with dynamic markets will need farmers to be trained and organized; have access to research and technology, an enabling policy environment and a receptive business sector, combined with effective partnership facilitation.

IFAD works with poor rural people and enables them to grow and sell more food, thereby providing them with greater freedom to determine their future direction. Since 1978 IFAD has invested some \$14.8 billion in grants and low-interest loans to developing countries through projects empowering over 400 million people so they in turn can help create vibrant rural communities.

(<http://www.ifad.org/governance/ifad/gc.htm>)

<http://www.ifad.org/events/gc/36/summary.htm>

V. The Commission on the Status of Women

This 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place in the New York UN Headquarters from 4 to 15 March with the theme: ‘Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls’.

Maybe the many words spoken during the two-week long deliberations at the Commission on the Status of Women can be summed up in the statement by UN Women Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet, that *“our goal is to create a participatory process that takes into account the experiences of Member States, UN agencies and civil society and builds on existing initiatives specific to the situation in each country”*

In her message for the International Women’s Day, Michelle Bachelet said that change is happening: *“Change is happening when people worldwide declare solidarity with a Pakistani girl who was shot for championing education for all.... when protests erupt across the globe with women and men, young and old, rising up and saying no to violence against women”*. Discrimination and violence against women and girls has no place in the 21st century, she declared and announced that during the two weeks government representatives and activists will negotiate a global roadmap of actions to prevent the worldwide human rights violations.

In conclusion she urged: *‘let us work together for strong laws and policies and for effective implementation. Let us work together for prevention and education and for programmes that provide essential services for the victims and survivors of violence’*

‘Engaging Men and Boys in Preventing Violence against Women and Girls’

As a side event, organised by Canada, John Hendra, Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Executive Director Policy and Programme, spoke to the theme: *‘Engaging Men and Boys in Preventing Violence against Women and Girls’*.

John Hendra firmly believes that men and boys have a central role to play in ‘shaping respectful, gender equitable attitudes and behaviors among other men and boys’, and that they are important partners, essential to the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Although emphasizing that this potential has yet to be fully realized he saw many encouraging signs that an old mindset was giving way to a new and more enlightened one.

He stressed that ‘early childhood experiences, and education, are the basic foundation for raising awareness and engaging men and boys proactively to end violence against women’, but also believes that awareness-raising alone is not sufficient. We must, he said, actively engage men and boys; we must *‘bring their voices and views to the table, and ensure they are an integral part of our strategy to end violence against women and girls’*. We need to *‘enlist men and boys in questioning dominant ideas of masculinity that condone and perpetuate violence against women in all societies’*.

John Hendra mentioned numerous examples of initiatives throughout the world engaged in ending violence against women and girls and encouraged the meeting to visit the UN Women’s Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women at <http://www.endvawnow.org/en> and the following link to a fact sheet by Ban Ki-moon <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf>

John Hendra ended his statement with a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which says: *“I call on men and boys everywhere to take a stand against the mistreatment of girls and women. It is by standing up for the rights of girls and women that we truly measure up as men”*. (Desmond Tutu is a member of The Elders, a group of independent

global leaders working together for peace and human right, founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007. <http://www.theElders.org>.)

According to the World Bank more than one hundred countries impose legal differences between women and men with regard to the ability to sign contracts, manage property and interact with public authorities and the private sector. Women are making around 70-90 per cent less than men for the same kind of work and are still under-represented in senior roles, while continuing to do most of all the unpaid and un-valued work of caretaking within house-holding and family.

Equality at the heart of our common future:

At the twenty-second session of the Human Rights Council (March 2013) Mr. Michel Forst, speaking on behalf of the Special Procedures mandate holders, urged the international community to: *'place human rights, equality and non-discrimination, and sustainability at the heart of the post-2015 development agenda'*. We must, he said, *'champion universal and fair development in all countries, where the protection and fulfillment of all human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social – for all are the overarching aims'*. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story>

VI. Violence against Women is Integral to War and Armed Conflict - The Urgent Necessity of the Universal Implementation of The UN Security Council Resolution 1325

This Statement, addressed to the 57th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (4-15 March 2013) stresses that violence against women under the present system of militarised state security *'is not an aberration that can be stemmed by specific denunciations and prohibitions'*. To reduce violence against women (VAW) and to stop accepting it as a regrettable consequence of armed conflicts, or a 'constant of the real world', will require a profound change in our mindset; the abolition of war and armed conflict, together with the *'full and equal political empowerment of women as called for by the UN Charter'*.

In the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) on Women, Peace and Security women stated their belief that a stable peace requires gender equality; that gender equality and the end to the present system of militarized state security are *'inextricably linked one to the other'*. The Statement outlines the different aspects and types of military violence against women and encourages universal support for disarmament and international law together with the full implementation of the UNSCR1325, with special emphasis on the political participation of women in all matters of peace and security. It concludes with 6 recommendations which – together with the full text of the Statement – can be read at <http://www.i-i-p-e.org/csw/>

“Time has run out to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the potentially disruptive impact that growing inequalities present to people, communities, our societies, our planet, and a peaceful and sustainable future.”

(Michelle Bachelet, commenting on the final 'Synthesis Report on the Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities', Copenhagen, Denmark, 19 February,).

<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/299198>

VII. International Conference On the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons

This conference, which took place in Norway 4 – 5 March, was attended by delegates from 127 countries, several UN organizations, the International Red Cross/Red Crescent as well as representatives of civil society, numerous other groups and experts. Hosting the conference was the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Espen Barth Eide, who believed that the meeting had succeeded in reframing the issue of nuclear weapons by putting humanitarian impacts and concerns *‘at the very centre of the discourse’*. We have, he said, been reminded in very sharp terms that these weapons exist, hence they can be used, and we cannot continue to approach them *‘through a strategy of denial’*.

In his summary of the conference Mr. Barth Eide remarked that the broad participation had clearly reflected that this is *‘an issue of fundamental concern to us all’*, and shared three key points which he believed could be discerned from the presentations and discussions:

- It is unlikely that any state or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation in an adequate manner and provide sufficient assistance to those affected. Moreover, it might not be possible to establish such capacities, even if it were attempted.
- The historical experience from the use and testing of nuclear weapons has demonstrated their devastating immediate and long-term effects. While political circumstances have changed, the destructive potential of nuclear weapons remains.
- The effects of a nuclear weapons detonation, irrespective of cause, will not be constrained by national borders, and will affect states and people in significant ways, regionally as well as globally.

During the final session of the Conference, the Government of Mexico announced that it would offer to host a follow-up conference. http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/whats-new/Speeches-and-articles/e_speeches/2013/weapons_final.html?id=716983

***“No nation should own nuclear arms –
not Iran, not North Korea, and not their critics who take the moral high ground.”***
Desmond Tutu, Guardian UK, 4 March 2013

VIII. International Women’s Day – South Sudan

Hilde F. Johnson, the special representative of the UN Secretary-General in South Sudan, tells how this, the nation’s second celebration of the International Women’s Day, is indeed a testimony to the International Women’s Day’s statement that *‘this is about the story of ordinary women as makers of history; it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men’*.

Hilde Johnson speaks about the daily struggle and challenges that the South Sudan women and girls are confronted with, which is deeply rooted in custom and tradition. Up to 40 per cent of girls are forced to become child brides, traditionally in exchange for a ‘bride price’ or dowry, which may be the only source of income for a family, especially in rural communities. South Sudan is one of the most dangerous places for any girl or woman to give birth and has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Gender based violence is experienced by at least four out of ten women, while eight out

of ten women, as well as men, are tolerating violence against women, and many cases are not reported.

The UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), is the first UN peacekeeping mission which, in partnership with UN agencies and other stakeholders, are deploying Women's Protection Advisors across the country '*solely dedicated to this critical function and to strengthen prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence*', and mandated to monitor, investigate, and report incidents of conflict-related gender based violence to the UN Security Council. Through a variety of approaches and initiatives communities, NGOs as well as the Government are working together to reverse the practice of child marriage and prevent gender based violence, and together becoming effective agents for change. Through joint efforts women have come together through community peacebuilding forums to address the prevailing indifference, inequality, and impunity within the country. The UN is also focusing on the empowerment of the South Sudanese girls and women, encouraging their active participation in civil society and government, and reports on the 'noticeable progress' being made. Currently more than 25 per cent are holding ministerial position.

Although being submerged in this struggle South Sudan is making remarkable forward strides. Recently a '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' was organized on the overall theme: '*Promote Peace at Home, Stop Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage*'. Events were carried out throughout the country with the aim of developing and sharing new strategies, and demonstrating solidarity between women in South Sudan and throughout the world. Education is seen as an indispensable tool for ending any form of violence, in particular against women.

Hilde Johnson pays tribute to the role of the South Sudan women and girls for 'their immense contribution to the birth of the world's newest nation, for being architects of it history, and for paving the way for the future generations to live in a more equitable society'. Find out more at www.unmiss.unmissions.org/ and www.un.org/peacekeeping.

IX. Proposal for a UN Global Conference on Women in 2015

On the 2012 International Women's Day, the UN General Assembly President, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon jointly proposed the convening of a Global Conference on Women by the United Nations in 2015. This fifth Conference on Women would be taking place twenty years after the Fourth such conference, held in Beijing 1995 on the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace".

http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/pdf/BEIJIN_E.PDF)

Feeling confident that their suggestion would be seen by the world community as a welcome opportunity to advance gender equality and the betterment of all human relations, the UN Secretary-General and UNGA President also expressed the hope that UN Member States would show their support by taking '*the necessary steps during the 66th session of the General Assembly*'. They viewed the 2015 Women's Conference as an opportunity for reviewing the implementation of the Beijing "Platform for Action" and for further realisation of the many opportunities for advancement contained in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (31 October 2000)

http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf)

In the 1995 Beijing Declaration Governments confirmed their determination ‘to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity’. Acknowledging that the progress made has been ‘uneven’; that inequalities persist and other obstacles ‘remain’, which have ‘serious consequences for the well-being of all people’, and that increasing poverty has affected ‘the majority of the world’s people, in particular women and children’, the Governments ‘unreservedly’ dedicated themselves to ‘addressing these constraints and obstacles and thus enhancing further the advancement and empowerment of women all over the world, and agree that this requires urgent action in the spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity, now and to carry us forward into the next century’

The Declaration’s Platform for Action outlines specific goals that both Governments and the international community are determined to resolve through joint efforts; among these are, to

- ensure the full enjoyment by women and the girl child of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and take effective action against violations of these rights and freedoms (23);
- encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality (24);
- prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (29);
- promote and protect all human rights of women and girls (31); and
- develop the fullest potential of girls and women of all ages, ensure their full and equal participation in building a better world for all and enhance their role in the development process (34).

“5WCW”:

Despite no action having been taken by the UN member nations during the 66th session of the UN General Assembly there is an increasingly determined support for the 2015 World Conference on Women (5WCW) proposal from people and groups throughout the global community. A deepening resolve is gathering momentum, and women as well as men are working towards a meeting of the world’s women taking place in 2015, one way or another; a meeting in which a new generation of women, and maybe also of men, will actively participate in the planning of our common future and building together the culture of unity and peace.

For further information on current initiatives, as well as suggestions on how to support and/or participate in the preparations for a 2015 world conference on women go to <http://5wcw.org/> or <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/5wcw.html>

X. Green Economy - ‘a sound insurance policy for the future we want’

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon emphasised the importance of a *green economy* in his message to the 27th UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum, Nairobi, 18 February 2013, urging all UN Member States gathered at the Forum to make the most of this opportunity. We all understand that the environment underpins all social and economic development, and “when the environment is neglected, poverty and instability follow. When it is nurtured, well-being and prosperity flourish’

The UN Secretary-General urged the UN Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum to shoulder their responsibility as a policymaking forum “*to articulate these truths and to help craft the policies and programmes that will benefit all people – and especially those most at risk from environmental degradation and climate change*”.

During this First Universal Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, held in Nairobi between 18 and 22 February it was decided that the Governing Council should be transformed into the UN Environment Assembly of UNEP, and to build stronger links between UNEP’s science-based Global Environment Outlook process and its ministerial meetings. The governments also decided to give support for an increased, more predictable and stable, funding for UNEP in the future.

Partnership for Action on Green Economy:

In response to the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want”, UNEP presented the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE); a joint initiative by UNEP, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), which will provide a comprehensive series of green economy services to 30 countries over the next 7 years. PAGE will in particular focus on building ‘*enabling conditions within participating countries by shifting investment and policies towards the creation of a new generation of assets, such as clean technologies, resource efficient infrastructure, well-functioning ecosystems, green skilled labour and good governance*’.
(<http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/>)

As Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, expressed in his closing remarks: “*The theme at this historic, universal membership Governing Council was Rio+20: From Outcome to Implementation – and that was precisely what happened over the past five days*”:

Environmental Law:

Among the decisions made by governments throughout this remarkable meeting was their request to UNEP to lead the United Nations system and support national Governments ‘*in the development and implementation of environmental rule of law including boosting information disclosure, environmental auditing and independent dispute resolution*’.

A ‘Climate Technology Centre and Network’ (CTCN):

This Centre/Network will be hosted and coordinated by UNEP, which will function as ‘the implementing arm’ of the Technology Mechanism of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) www.unfccc.int.

In advance and throughout the Governing Council meeting numerous reports and awareness-raising events by many different stakeholders took place with the aim of highlighting specific issues and providing complementary information.

Among these was the United Nations ‘**Think.Eat.Save.Reduce Your Foodprint**’ campaign, which hosted a reception dinner for hundreds of policy makers. The reception highlighted the scale of waste worldwide, including Kenya, by preparing the meal from almost 2000 kgs of fruit and vegetables that had been rejected by UK supermarkets for cosmetic reasons. This campaign supports the UN Secretary-General’s Zero Hunger Challenge (www.thinkeatsave.org)

The young people, representing over one hundred countries at the **UNEP Tunza International Youth Conference** in Nairobi a week prior to the Governing Council meeting, presented a statement in which they call on governments, business, cities and civil society to support the UNEP campaign and called for *‘reduced food waste and loss to be a post-2015 development target as a Sustainable Development Goal’*.

The **UNEP Year Book 2013: Emerging Issues in Our Global Environment**, can be read at www.unep.org/yearbook/2013

XI. World Interfaith Harmony

Having been invited to share a bit about the World Interfaith Harmony event that most recently took place at the United Nations on 14 February 2013, I have taken the privilege of presenting my thoughts, simply, as they came to me. Bits and pieces surfaced, a bit of what has come before blended with what is and what always shall be, portending that the Coming One is on the way.

So, as I begin to write about the United Nations’ Week of World Interfaith Harmony, the first thought that comes to mind is of the Four Freedoms, the Freedom of Speech, Worship, from Want and Fear. It’s as if I can hear the United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt articulating his goal as he did on January 6, 1941, of placing our “destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of millions of free men and women; and faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose.”

And then, my thoughts shift to the Declaration of Human Rights that passed 7 years later, in 1948, wherein Article 18 states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion of belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

And then to think of how one year later, in 1949, The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Trygve Halve Lie, introduced the proposal of having a moment of silence immediately after the opening of the first plenary meeting and immediately preceding the closing of the final plenary meeting of each session of the General Assembly and explained to the Special Committee that many hundreds of letters from private individuals and organizations urged that the General Assembly devote a few moments of its time to prayer. At the time, the Special Committee identified with an awareness of the fact that the Members of the United Nations represent people belonging to nearly every religion, creed and philosophical outlook in the world, and concluded that it would not be possible to introduce a public prayer which would “satisfy all tenets and give offense to none”. In effect, the need for a world prayer was being recognized. It’s interesting to note that the Great Invocation, a World Prayer, was given to humanity a few years earlier, in 1945.

And then, thoughts spring forward in time to 13 September 1999, recalling how the UN resolution on the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, which many believe to be second only to the Declaration of Human Rights, was passed unanimously within the General Assembly, with Article 8 of the Resolution addressing how religious bodies and groups “play a key role in the promotion of a culture of peace.” And in the Programme of Action, it states the intention to “Involve children in activities

designed to instill in them the values and goals of a culture of peace,” with one of the major actors being civil society, in all of its many varied aspects of endeavor, “Civil society should be involved at the local, regional, and national levels to widen the scope of activities on a culture of peace.”

A flurry of activity within the General Assembly followed with the promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation, and the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace as well as eliminating all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

Until on September 23, 2010, King Abdullah II of Jordan proposed a World Interfaith Harmony Week at the Plenary Session of the 65th UN General Assembly. In the speech, King Abdullah said:

“The fact is, humanity everywhere is bound together, not only by mutual interests, but by shared commandments to love God and neighbour; to love the good and neighbour. This week, my delegation, with the support of our friends on every continent, will introduce a draft resolution for an annual World Interfaith Harmony Week..”

On 20 October 2010, World Interfaith Harmony Week was proclaimed by the General Assembly in resolution A/RES/65/5

A co-worker and I, both NGO representatives at the UN for Operation Peace Through Unity, happened to be sitting in the balcony of the General Assembly when H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad delivered H.M. King Abdullah II’s speech and we felt the energy of the words filling the General Assembly. The words took us totally by surprise. We could not believe our ears. We were looking at each other in disbelief as we heard the Prince explain the text of the resolution:

“the word “harmony” is used in the Chinese sense of the term Only the Confucian concept of “harmony” can rescue us here because it suggests not merely 'peace', but also 'beautiful and dynamic interaction between different elements within a whole'.”

“there is mention of 'Love of God and Love of the Neighbor, or Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbor'. Why is this religious reference necessary in a UN resolution? because whilst we all agree that it is clearly not the business of the UN to engage in theology, it is nevertheless the primary goal of the UN to make and safeguard peace, and without the specific mention of God and of the Two Commandments of Love [see: Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-31] many if not most devout Muslims, Christians and Jews will consider a secular call for an interfaith harmony week a feckless platitude that they cannot fully or sincerely support.”

“it will be noted that this language excludes no one, of any religion or of no faith at all: every person of good will, with or without faith can and should commit to Love of the Neighbour and Love of God or Love of the Neighbour and Love of the Good. Loving the neighbour and the good is after all the essence of good will.”

“ it sets an invaluable practical standard based upon which people can ask themselves and each other if their actions stem from caritas (love) towards the neighbour or not.”

The webcast and copy of the speech (not to be missed) can be found at:

<http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/newspost/h-r-h-prince-ghazi-bin-muhammad-delivers-kings-world-interfaith-harmony-week-proposal-at-un/>

In February of 2011, the first theme for the Week was “The World Interfaith Harmony Breakfasts” and a small breakfast gathering was held in honor of World Interfaith Harmony Week. The Ambassador of Jordan, Prince Zeid bin Ra’ad Zeid Al-Hussein,

gave a few brief comments and the group shared breakfast muffins and bagels and coffee while mingling. And now, recalling one of the comments the Ambassador made was that there was not a specific reason for World Interfaith Harmony Week to be held during the first week of February even though many people ask him for a reason. As we mingled, there was opportunity to speak directly with the Ambassador about how the Sun is in Aquarius during the first week of February. He bowed, "It was willed." And then he smiled, "I was born in Aquarius." It was a breakfast. It was a beginning.

In February of 2012, the theme for the Week was, "Common Ground for the Common Good." The tone of the celebration was set by Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, the Qatari diplomat who was serving as President of the General Assembly, "We recognize and celebrate the values that are shared across religious traditions," Mr. Al-Nasser told General Assembly delegates. "The common principles form a common ground that unites us in our rich diversity."

A WEBCAST of World Interfaith Harmony Week Observance at the UN, February 7, 2012 (within the energies of the Aquarius Solar/ Full Moon Festival) can be watched at <http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/02/common-ground-for-the-common-good-on-the-occasion-of-the-world-interfaith-harmony-week.html>

All those in attendance could give testimony to how a feeling of Love filled the General Assembly Hall as we celebrated in recognition of how the resolution for World Interfaith Harmony was the first UN resolution that addressed Love.

In February of 2013, the theme for the Week was, "United For A Culture Of Peace Through Interfaith Harmony". The General Assembly was filled to its maximum capacity of over 1,500 occupants registered as UN diplomats and employees and NGO representatives and civil society at large. "We the peoples" were in the house.

The webcast for the 2013 event is available at <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/other-meetingevents/watch/united-for-a-culture-of-peace-through-interfaith-harmony/2165451739001>

The note raised in opening remarks and in presentations made was one of unity, and seemed to be hinting at synthesis. For example, H.E. Ambassador T. Hamid Al Bayati, the Permanent Representative of the Mission of Iraq to the United Nations, shared with us that he has read all the holy books, inviting all of us to do the same, and he found that all the books convey the same message, "to love one another." Dr. Patrick Ho, the Secretary General of the China Energy Fund Committee, spoke of "ren" which can be translated as benevolence or to be one with heaven or to bridge heaven and earth. "Ren" would be achieved, we were told, if/when we are able to "love one another's country as our own."

The tone of the celebration was vibrantly and colorfully textured, in rich and varied tones, within a "symphony of peace prayers" led by the World Peace Prayer Society and Byakko Shinko Kai. Prayers, readings, invocation were presented by representatives of diverse religious, indigenous or faith traditions. It was the first time that many faith based religions were invited to offer prayers in the General Assembly. A Sikh American offered, "In the company of Saints, all enemies become friends. In the company of Saints, man becomes very pure..." and he closed the prayer by offering, "I truly hope one day, all the countries can get together at the United Nations and just pray for world peace. Sat Sri Akaal." The "symphony of peace prayers" harmonized and united in the name of peace.

The Goi Peace Foundation and The World Peace Prayer Society led a "World Peace Flag Ceremony" where the flags of each of the 193 UN Member States and the 2 Observer Missions (the Holy See, and Palestine) were presented as everyone was invited to join in

saying as each flag was raised, “May peace be in ____.” In effect, each country, standing together with all countries, was praying for each and every other country. “May peace prevail.” The spirit of forgiveness seemed to be invoked wherein each is for all and all is for each, “united for a culture of peace.” Peace through unity.

In closing, my thoughts are of how far we’ve come in the last 65 years. Progress is being made and marked. The field is being prepared, aligned with the Will to Good, flowering forth as understanding, and understanding blossoming as goodwill within the Love of Spiritual and Cosmic Lives that look over and guide our planetary evolution. The Coming One is on the way.

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XII. The Unity Pavilion Auroville– South India

The Unity Pavilion is situated within Auroville, which is described as a universal township in the making with the aspiration to realise human unity. Auroville came into being on 28 February 1968 with some 5000 people gathering beside the banyan tree at the centre of the future township. Auroville has the support of UNESCO, the Government of India and other governments, organisations and individuals and ‘Divine Magic behind all of Life’. Currently about 2,100 people of many nationalities and cultures are living there and are working together to realise the vision it holds.

The Peace Pavilion forms part of the building of an International Zone, where pavilions representing the various nations of the world will be built. The Unity Pavilion is presently the centre for this project. Here people from all countries and cultures are welcome to share their unique cultural, spiritual and national identities, while contributing towards their own future pavilions.

“All people of Goodwill are welcome to participate in this big project, which seeks to embrace humanity in all its diversity and find new ways to transform the consciousness of people around the world to establish peace and unity in all areas of life.”

For more information contact: peaceandunity@auroville.org.in.
www.unitypavilionauroville.wordpress.com

XIII.

Journeying god,
pitch your tent with mine
so that I may not become deterred
by hardship, strangeness, doubt.
Show me the movement I must make

toward a wealth not dependent on possessions,
toward a wisdom not based on books,
toward a strength not bolstered by might,
toward a god not confined to heaven.
Help me to find myself as I walk in other's shoes.

(Prayer song from Ghana, traditional, translator unknown)

XV. The Great Invocation

From the point of Light within the Mind of God
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men
May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known
Let purpose guide the little wills of men –
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the plan on Earth.