



## Roads of Faith

### The Malta Declaration

(Valletta, Malta, 20 – 22 June 1997)

1. In pursuance of the process begun at Rabat in 1995, putting into effect the intercultural project 'Roads of Faith', practising believers, members of the body of the faithful or simple followers of the three monotheistic religions of the Book - Judaism, Christianity and Islam and of the spiritual traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism met in Malta from 20 to 22 June 1997 at the invitation of UNESCO, the Maltese National Commission and the Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta, with a view to promoting inter-faith dialogue. The meeting was chaired by Mr Salvino Busuttil; its Vice-Chairpersons were Ms Jacqueline Rougé, Mr Emile Moatti, Sheikh Rajäi Abdo and Lama Denys Teundroup; the Chief Rapporteur was Mr Iba Der Thiam and the Deputy Rapporteurs were Ms Suha Farouqi and Mr John Baldock.

2. In response to the challenges arising in today's world, which is marked as much by violence, the fear of others, misunderstanding, mutual distrust and the rise of intolerance and incomprehension as it is by the will to collaboration and comprehension, we, practising believers, members of the body of the faithful or simple followers of the monotheistic religions of the Book and the other spiritual traditions represented in Malta, basing ourselves upon certain areas of convergence in our respective spiritual heritages, consider it more urgent than ever to develop and deepen the inter-faith dialogue so as to consolidate peace, mutual understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation.

3. This dialogue, far from ignoring the differences between our respective spiritual heritages, enables us, on the contrary, to discover those differences, to become better acquainted with one another and to enrich one another. Its effect is not to cause each individual to blend into the others, but rather to reinforce his or her convictions: it is not aimed at a merging of spiritual identities nor at developing some form of syncretism, nor again at providing a platform for proselytism, but it stands for openness, respect and recognition of the possibilities of living together in a pluralistic context.

Following a series of statements in which speakers summed up their personal experiences in the inter-faith dialogue and set out their own vision of future prospects, the meeting allowed a fertile exchange to take place and gave speakers an opportunity to express the specific nature of their own heritage.

4. Inspired during this meeting by the hope of developing the dialogue and promoting co-operation among the followers of all religions, we were mutually enriched and felt ourselves challenged by the diversity of the experiences and approaches presented during the days we spent together. Furthermore, we discovered that very often the way in which others see our own religious tradition helps us to a deeper personal system of belief.

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5. While recognizing and respecting our differences, none of us felt under pressure to renounce our own outlooks or to ignore the specific nature of our own religious traditions.

6. Indeed, this diversity sheds new light on our traditions and practices, which is why we maintain that personal relations constitute a particularly useful starting point for the inter-faith dialogue and the fruitful exchange of experience.

7. Conversely, religions have been and continue to be tragically implicated in conflicts, as we became increasingly aware in the course of our meeting. In reaction therefrom, we reaffirm our commitment to developing the enormous potential for good inherent in the world's religions, which command us to seek and to bring about peace.

Inasmuch as religions thus constitute human realities, expressions such as '**religions are in favour of peace**' fail to take sufficient account of the dissension engendered or encouraged by certain adherents of various religions. This is why we stress the need, on the one hand, to be aware that religious motivations may be misappropriated and, on the other, to warn against the terrible consequences of such misuse.

8. In such circumstances, all those who feel threatened in their religious affiliation by extremism or intolerance have drawn closer to one another. Periods of crisis may sometimes open up new avenues of dialogue. Within multireligious societies, actual attitudes need to be consistent with the sincerity of the commitments given, since the disparity that otherwise arises brings discredit upon the inter-faith dialogue.

9. Considering that we have need one of another, we have decided to base our action on our common faith in the Transcendence that gives life a meaning and the world a purpose. In doing so, we have resolved to turn our backs on everything that may have set us one against another in the past and march together, united by a common desire to live together in peace, justice, solidarity, mutual respect and fraternity.

10. We have become more aware that, to achieve this aim, it is our responsibility, but also the responsibility of the religious communities and of each active believer and follower of our spiritual traditions to foster a just and peaceful environment by endeavouring to mobilize the immense spiritual, moral, social and material potential that religions offer at the personal, local, regional, national and international levels.

On this basis, the participants in the Malta meeting submit to all the religious communities, associations and persons concerned, and to UNESCO, the following proposals:

- (i) Adoption and implementation of guidelines and a methodology for dialogue between religions: with this in mind, consideration should be given to the drafting of a Charter containing the major objectives of the monotheistic religions and the other spiritual traditions, in order to elucidate possible lines of action and to develop an approach leading to dialogue and co-operation among the followers of various religions, in both clergy and laity;
- (ii) Collection and evaluation of examples of dialogue and co-operation between the religious communities of the whole world, with a view to publicizing successful initiatives that could serve as models and to promoting dialogue outside of academia:

Collaboration should be promoted among academics and individuals involved in the inter-faith dialogue on the ground, with a view to combining reflection and action in order to broaden the dialogue by extending it beyond universities and institutions as such and out to families, communities and all levels of society, thus giving the dialogue a wider impact;

- (iii) Examination and analysis by each religious community of those features of its own textual tradition and sacred history that have been used to justify conflicts and violence, and also of the commandments, practices and teachings of those traditions that incite to tolerance and mutual respect, in order to make them better known: popular brochures presenting the chief religions and, as far as possible, any relevant publications along the same lines should be drafted and distributed;
- (iv) Organization of visits, with a message of peace based on their own religious traditions, to believers living where conflicts are taking place at present: these visits should not imply recognition upon an existing state of affairs, much less acceptance of it, but should be aimed at bringing a non-political, spiritual message, a message of peace inclining hearts towards the coexistence that springs from the divine injunction, shared by all, to love one's neighbour, in the same spirit, joint pilgrimages to places charged with spiritual significance for the various communities should be encouraged;
- (v) In the field of **education**, the participants recommend to the religious communities that, with the help of UNESCO they:
  - (a) promote studies on the image and perception of 'others' in religious texts: on this basis, guidelines should be established for the presentation of other beliefs within the education systems of each of the religious communities or associations working to bring people closer together;
  - (b) promote research on the ways in which communities have used religious texts to justify conflicts, and in parallel thereto, publish other sacred references urging tolerance and mutual respect;
  - (c) disseminate publications of common interest published in UNESCO's Member States;
- (vi) Implementation of proposals 3(a) and 3(e) of the Rabat Proposals: **the establishment of institutes for reciprocal learning about the three Scriptures and UNESCO Chairs in the three Scriptures and their distinctive cultures** and, in that connection, the award of prizes to individuals, organizations, universities, etc., for successes in inter-faith projects that look to be of interest for the future in various fields;
- (vii) In the fields of **information, communication and documentation**, it is recommended that, with the help of UNESCO, the religious communities:
  - (a) establish an inter-faith directory and a bulletin covering all the institutions working in the inter-faith field and all the initiatives undertaken;
  - (b) facilitate communication among the communities and individuals involved in the dialogue and co-operation, for instance using new technologies such as e-mail, data banks and databases, with a view to identifying the inter-faith activities under way world-wide and making them better known;
  - (c) establish a UNESCO Internet site entitled '**Inter-faith dialogue**';

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- (viii) that, in partnership with other sources of funding, it provide substantial financial and human resources for the promotion of the dialogue as a component part of a culture of peace, justice, mutual understanding and fraternity;
- (ix) that it continue the **'Roads of Faith'** project, and that the next meeting should take place in the Middle East, possibly in Jordan, during the autumn of 1998;
- (x) that it include in its cultural programme inter-faith activities laying stress on creativity and on artistic, literary, theatrical, cinematographic and musical forms of expression, and also the study of sites and monuments, given that stones speak to us across the gulfs that divide us; to this end, an appeal should be made for voluntary contributions;
- (xi) that in partnership with religious communities and associations, it organize:
  - (a) *forums* for dialogue specifically intended for young people and women, seeking appropriate means to nourish the inter-faith relationship they experience;
  - (b) local inter-faith meetings, since the context in which inter-faith conflicts arise should not be forgotten or neglected if the inter-faith dialogue is to be more than mere intellectual speculation;
  - (c) a symposium on forgiveness and reconciliation, a contribution to peace among all the religious traditions;
  - (d) a symposium on the promotion of the rule of law on the basis of equality, justice, aid for education and solidarity with all individuals, within a vision of hope;
- (xii) lastly, that it take account of the conclusions of the Barcelona meetings of 1994 and take an interest in those to be held by the UNESCO Centre for Catalonia, namely 'The future of cultures and of religions in the Mediterranean areas' (Catania, April 1998), 'Religious education in the context of pluralism and tolerance' (Granada, May 1998) and the 'Universal Forum of Cultures' scheduled for the year 2004.

In conclusion, while we know of admirable cases of alliances being formed to combat misappreciation or ignorance of others and misunderstandings, we are likewise the heirs to divisions created by false interpretations of sacred texts.

It is therefore our duty, as members of religious communities, to transmit to future generations a common heritage of mutual respect, fraternal solidarity, confident and fruitful co-operation, tolerance, peace and justice.

Religions have the task of bringing a message of spiritual well-being and a vision of a world of peace and just relations among individuals: we believe that we, all of us together, should spread this message abroad.