

Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)



Statement by

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Understanding among Cultures and Religions in

Asia

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Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)



Honorable members of parliaments

Distinguished religious and academic figures

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to express my deepest appreciations to you all for participating in this timely and significant Conference which reflects your attachment to dialogue and understanding in Asia.

Asian Parliamentary Assembly, as the most inclusive institution representing Asian people, has always underlined the importance of dialogue among cultures and religions for promoting peace and friendship both within Asian countries as well as between Asia and the rest of the world. In line with this great goal, the Fifth APA Plenary in Damascus in November 2010 welcomed the initiative of the Center for Inter-religious Dialogue (CID) of the Organization of Culture and Islamic Relations to host jointly with the Islamic Parliament of Iran the “International Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Cultures in Asia”. I express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Center for Inter-religious Dialogue and the Islamic Parliament of Iran for working so hard in the last six months to organize this important gathering for promoting understanding and friendship in Asia.

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As the cradle of civilizations and great religions, Asia is an inspiring source of cultural and religious diversity and plays a major role in fostering integration among different nations and cultures. Integration in Asia mainly relies on respecting cultural diversity and promoting dialogue and understanding. Both the common heritage of Asian civilizations and Cultural diversity necessitate inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue among Asian nations that fosters Asian common values and enhances cooperation and integration, peace and friendship while diminishing the risk of discrimination, violence and war.

I cherish this opportunity to exchange views with you all regarding the current critical state of the world, the role of religion in society and grounds for peace and understanding.

At the age of globalization, we all are living in an interconnected, but divided world. Globalization has brought in a new era of interdependent human relations and culture. These interconnected processes have transformed human interactions at all local, national, regional and global levels. The digital and information revolution has transformed the way the world learns, communicates, interacts, does business and treats illnesses. In social and cultural fields it has changed the shape of human society from individual life style to massive popular art industry. Global culture strongly undermines the

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social and cultural identity of different communities and weakens the traditional social institutions such as family and education.

It is ironic that our world, so interconnected globally, is divided so dangerously regarding power, wealth and belief, even though, war, violence and conflict mostly have an underlying economic or political source. However, unfortunately different cultural identities and various religious beliefs and belongings are blamed so often.

History shows that religion has had an indisputable role in creating and enhancing civilizations and causing them to flourish. Religion and faith play a significant role in the public sphere. Many human morals and values have stemmed from religion. However, we cannot ignore the fact that at times religion has been a source of conflicts.

One of the factors that leads to the outbreak of violence is the existence of different identities, each of which are trying to establish themselves through the negation of the others. I should emphasize that all major religions create a sense of identity for their believers essentially bringing them together in a circle of faith. However, this circle is not opposing with other circles, but rather can be inclusive of them by basing its relationship with other “identities” on compassion, kindness and friendship.

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Religious figures have underlined that at the core of every single one of the religion is the virtue of compassion which means to feel with the others. This is crucial to the ethical and spiritual vision of all religious traditions that: “Do not treat others as you would not like to be treated yourself.” Compassion is not only essential for religious communities, but also for a healthy economy and good governance. Unless we implement this significant rule, treating all nations as we would wish to be treated ourselves, we will be unable to live together in peace and friendship in our interdependent world. It is important for all of us in the current chaotic world to understand that it is war and aggression that result in misunderstandings on the one hand, and become a source of hatred and insecurity on the other. This is while major world religions have strongly called on their followers to live in peace and harmony with humanity. This love can liberate us from fear, greed, hatred and aggression and turn our egotistic will and tendencies into one that is ready for friendship and compassion. Accordingly, to promote understanding and peace to negate destructive atmosphere of war and aggression, the United Nations, with a global consensus, named the year 2001 as the year of “Dialogue among Civilizations.”

And now, with respect to Asian religions, I should emphasize that not only dialogue is possible, but coexistence, cooperation and collaboration to achieve global peace is a must at this crucial time. A culture of dialogue and peace, founded on inclusion, mutual respect, and embracing diversity as an

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asset and not a liability, is a key contributing factor to overcome extremism and violence, which are often fueled by humiliation and anger caused by injustice and domination. Sustained dialogue among and within religions and cultures, and between religious leaders and political leaders, is a pressing requirement of our time, empowering societies and nations to recognize their common humanity and destiny. There will be no conflict between state and religion, when the state is democratic and religion is committed to human dignity and rights.

It is imperative to engage in dialogue about matters that are essential for materializing peace and justice in the world. Political and religious leaders should recognize that their common concerns and shared values are more significant than their differences, hence working together to give moral leadership at local, national and international levels. Justice and equality, revered by all religious and cultural traditions, are key to peaceful interaction among individuals, communities and nations. Religious leaders, mindful of their moral authority and responsibility to take a stand, and complementing the constructive efforts of political leaders, can and should significantly heal divisions, and contribute to advancing social justice and human rights, and preventing war and violence.

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At the end, as the APA Secretary General, I would like to register my sincere thanks for your active participation and fruitful deliberation regarding the role of religions and cultures in Asia for promoting peace and friendship. The Secretariat welcomes the opportunity to include the input of this important meeting into its agenda at the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural affairs to be held in the next two days.

Thank you Mr. Chairman,