



APA Troika-Plus 27th May 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan

Background Paper by H.E. Dr. Nejad Hossienian,
The APA Secretary General on
Recent developments in Asia, and ways and means to curb violence, promote
dialogue and peace in Asian sub-regions

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 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”.

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. 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 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. 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.

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.

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 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, hatred and aggression and turn our egotistic 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 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 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.

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 keys 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.

Upon the endorsement of the Fifth APA Plenary in Damascus, Syria in November 2010, the Center for Inter-religious Dialogue (CID) of the Organization of Culture and Islamic Relations (ICRO) hosted jointly with the Islamic Parliament of Iran the “International Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Culture in Asia” (Tehran on 11-12 September 2011) in which members of parliaments, religious figures and eminent thinkers shared their views and thoughts to promote understanding and integration in Asia. The participants at the Tehran Conference have agreed that a number of common principles, as well as practical measures which emerged in the course of discussions need to be further highlighted and addressed. Main points there is include:

-At this critical juncture, it is imperative to acknowledge and respect the values of all religions, cultures and civilizations and to seek common ground in order to address comprehensively common challenges facing humanity, and to recognize that common concerns and shared values among different cultures are more significant than their differences,

- Dialogue among religions and cultures enhances mutual understanding and knowledge among different social groups, cultures and civilizations in various areas, including education, information, science and technology;

- A culture of dialogue and peace, founded on inclusion, mutual recognition and respect, and embracing diversity as an asset and not a liability, is a key contributing factor to overcome violence and conflict, which are often fueled by humiliation and anger caused by injustice, discrimination and occupation.

- Tolerance is a key factor for promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with human beings respecting one another, in all their diversity of beliefs, cultures and languages, while regarding them as a precious asset of humanity,

- The positive role of faith and religion should be underlined in the process of conflict resolution, reconstruction and community healing, including through encouraging inter and intra religious dialogues, and organizing mutual and constructive interaction between various religious and cultural communities.

The final Declaration of this Conference is hereby forwarded to APA Troika (**Annex -1**) for further consideration and proper action.

In the 6th APA Plenary 8-10 December 2013, Islamabad, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Resolution On “Developing the Inter- Faith Harmony between the Different Religions of the World” was adopted by consensus.

(APA/Res/2013/17, December 2013)

In this Resolution the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, underlined that Inter- Faith Harmony between the different religions of the world in general and Asia in particular is of utmost importance for the survival of mankind and the promotion of the culture of peace and security.

And recognized the need for dialogue among different faiths and religions in enhancing mutual collaboration, harmony and cooperation among nations of the world, and emphasized that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions and beliefs are call for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding. It further encouraged all parliaments to support and spread the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill; as such mutual understanding constitutes important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace. It underscored that a regular dialogue between the parliaments of APA could become an effective supplement for addressing the challenges of international ongoing conflicts based on religious differences and discrepancies;

The text of the Resolution On “Developing the Inter- Faith Harmony between the Different Religions of the World” is hereby forwarded to APA Troika (Annex -2) for further consideration and proper action.

- World against Violence and Extremism

Mindful of the dangerous trend of violence all around the world, the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution based on proposals offered by the Iranian President Rouhani who called for “A World against Violence and Extremism” (18 December 2013 , A/Res/68/127). This resolution condemns all measures that originate from the culture of tyranny, dictatorship and extremism such as use or threat of force against territorial integrity and political independence of nations; and further condemns any agitation to ethnic, racial and religious hatred. The text of the Resolution On “A world against violence and violent extremism” is hereby forwarded to APA Troika (Annex- 3) for further consideration and proper action.

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/127

In conclusion, the path to a world free from violence passes through dialogue, ethics, justice, development and freedom. All nations should enjoy equal opportunities for economic and social development. It is necessary for a peaceful international community that everyone benefits from economic freedom and the right to determine their political destiny. Indeed, any type of economic sanction or military threat will instead of promoting peace and security, merely create humanitarian crisis an aggravate conflict and divergence.

Therefore, to remove suspicion and mistrust and promote mutual respect and constructive dialog on equal basis are necessary for the establishment of peace and tranquility. Spiritual thinkers and religious figures have a sacred duty to invite humankind to dialogue, friendship and peace, as well as justice and freedom and mutual assistance.



Annex -1

Tehran Declaration on Dialogue among Religions and Cultures in Asia

September 12, 2011
Tehran-Islamic Republic of Iran

In the name of God

As the cradle of civilizations and great religions, Asia is an inspiring source of cultural and religious diversity and can play a major role in enhancing social bonds among different nations, societies and ethnic groups. Dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions will foster Asian common values and enhance cooperation and integration, peace and friendship while diminishing the risk of violence and war.

Upon the endorsement of the Fifth APA Plenary in Damascus, Syria in November 2010, the Center for Inter-religious Dialogue (CID) of the Organization of Culture and Islamic Relations (ICRO) hosted jointly with the Islamic Parliament of Iran the “International Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Culture in Asia” (Tehran on 11-12 September 2011) in which members of parliaments, religious figures and eminent thinkers shared their views and thoughts to promote understanding and integration in Asia. The final Declaration of this Conference is hereby forwarded to Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) for further consideration and proper action.

The participants at the Tehran Conference have agreed that a number of common principles, as well as practical measures which emerged in the course of discussions need to be further highlighted and addressed:

Common Principles

1-At this critical juncture, it is imperative to acknowledge and respect the values of all religions, cultures and civilizations and to seek common ground in order to address comprehensively common challenges facing humanity, and to recognize that common concerns and shared values among different cultures are more significant than their differences,

2- Dialogue among religions and cultures enhances mutual understanding and knowledge among different social groups, cultures and civilizations in various areas, including education, information, science and technology;

3- A culture of dialogue and peace, founded on inclusion, mutual recognition and respect, and embracing diversity as an asset and not a liability, is a key contributing factor to overcome violence and conflict, which are often fueled by humiliation and anger caused by injustice, discrimination and occupation.

4- Tolerance is a key factor for promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with human beings respecting one another, in all their diversity of beliefs, cultures and languages, while regarding them as a precious asset of humanity,

5- The positive role of faith and religion should be underlined in the process of conflict resolution, reconstruction and community healing, including through encouraging inter and intra religious dialogues, and organizing mutual and constructive interaction between various religious and cultural communities.

6- A reassertion of ethical values is needed to deal with the problems of inequality and poverty, denial of human dignity, rights and freedoms, and increasing suspicions, fear, polarization and violence.

7- Justice, equality and compassion revered by all religious and cultural traditions, are key to preserve the rights to communities, especially religious minorities, in living in their homeland securely and with full respect to their human dignity and rights,

8- Globalization brings greater interrelatedness in communication and economy and increased interaction among cultures and civilizations, but it also presents the challenge of preserving and celebrating the rich intellectual and cultural diversity of humankind and civilization,

9- Educational institutions and civil society organizations should strive to promote the values of diversity and tolerance, enhance constructive understanding between religious and cultural groups, and prevent extremists from exploiting these means towards violent ends;

10- The essential contribution of women in the public sphere should be recognized, and the culture of rivalry and exclusion should be replaced by cooperation, friendship and understanding;

11 - The media has an instrumental role in promoting communication and dialogue among religions and cultures and in fostering greater understanding among various groups and civilizations;

Practical Measures

The participants welcomed the suggestion made for establishing a permanent secretariat in Tehran at Center for Interreligious Dialogue for the follow up of this Conference as well as promotion of dialogue and understanding, and agreed to take the following practical measures individually and collectively:

1-To promote and encourage interaction and exchange among all individuals, intellectuals, religious figures, thinkers and different stakeholders of various societies and cultures;

2- To continue to maintain contact and to meet periodically to assess progress and to plan ahead;

- 3- To facilitate mutual visits and meetings of experts from different religious and cultural background which provide an opportunity for discovering common grounds among various civilizations and cultures;
- 4- To sponsor conferences, symposiums and workshops to enhance mutual understanding, tolerance and dialogue among religions and cultures;
- 5- To encourage translation and dissemination of basic manuscripts and books and studies representing different religions, cultures and civilizations;
- 6- To compile examples of best policies and practices on dialogue and co-existence among religions and cultures;
- 7- To promote historical and cultural tourism and facilitate easy access to religious and historical sites;
- 8- To support programs to study various religions, cultures and civilizations in educational curriculums, including the teaching of languages and history as well as the exchange of knowledge, information and scholarship among academia;
- 9 - To sponsor research and scholarship to achieve an objective of understanding of each religions and cultures and to enhance constructive interaction and understanding among them;

The participants at the Tehran Conference expressed their thanks and appreciation to the host for holding such a successful meeting for promotion of dialogue and understanding among religions and cultures in Asia.

Annex- 2



Resolution on “Developing the Inter- Faith Harmony between the Different Religions of the World”

**APA/Res/2013/17
9 December 2013**

We the members of Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Mindful of the fact that, Inter- Faith Harmony between the different religions of the world in general and Asia in particular is of utmost importance for the survival of mankind and the promotion of the culture of peace and security,

Recalling with appreciation various global, regional and sub regional initiatives on mutual understanding and interfaith harmony including the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/65/PV.34, the International Conference on Environment, Peace and the Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures, held in Tehran on 9 and 10 May 2005, the Asia-Europe Meeting Interfaith Dialogue on the theme "Building Interfaith Harmony within the International Community", held in Bali, Indonesia, on 21 and 22 July 2005, and United Nations General Assembly resolution 57/6 of 4 November 2002 concerning the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence,

Recognizing the need for dialogue among different faiths and religions in enhancing mutual collaboration, harmony and cooperation among nations of the world,

Admitting that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions and beliefs call for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding,

- **Encourage** all parliaments to support and spread the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill, as such mutual understanding constitutes important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace;

- **Expressing** the need to explore ways and means to intensify Inter- Faith Harmony and resultant cooperation to strengthen the international peace and security to make the world a better place to live;
- **Believe** that a regular dialogue between the parliaments of APA could become an effective supplement for addressing the challenges of international ongoing conflicts based on religious differences and discrepancies;
- **Denouncing** stereotyping of any religious, national or ethnic group and condemn any intentional and unintentional activity that leads towards the division between the followers of different faiths;
- **Urge** all Member Parliaments to harmonize their efforts in promulgating laws and legislations in Asia for improved standards of cooperation between the nations to enhance the patience for contradictory religious beliefs;
- **Believe** that terrorism, extremism and violence have no religion nor any borders, as these are common enemy of all humanity,
- **Encouraging** the international community to be cognizant of the grave humanitarian situation in Myanmar which involves violations of human rights against the Muslim community in Arakan region.
- **Condemns** Islamophobia in all its forms and considers it a manifestation of racism, bigotry and prejudice, which has no place in the comity of civilized nations.
- **Encourage** all Member Parliaments to intensify their efforts in utilizing parliamentary diplomacy for the development of international and regional frameworks to promote best practices which leads towards the inter faith harmony and collaboration.
- **Requests** the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member Parliaments on measures taken to implement this resolution and to report the efforts of Member Parliaments for their contribution in this regard.



General Assembly

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Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2013

[without reference to a Main Committee (A/68/L.31 and Add.1)]

68/127. A world against violence and violent extremism

The General Assembly,

Guided by the purposes and principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹

Recalling its resolutions 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970, [36/103](#) of 9 December 1981, [39/11](#) of 12 November 1984, [49/60](#) of 9 December 1994, [53/243](#) of 13 September 1999, [55/282](#) of 7 September 2001, [56/6](#) of 9 November 2001, [60/288](#) of 8 September 2006, [64/14](#) of 10 November 2009, [66/171](#) of 19 December 2011, [67/99](#) of 14 December 2012 and [67/173](#), [67/178](#) and [67/179](#) of 20 December 2012 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,²

Reaffirming that the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter include, inter alia, to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace, and to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of any kind such as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Underlining that all Member States have undertaken to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations,

Alarmed by the acts of intolerance, violent extremism, violence, including sectarian violence, and terrorism in various parts of the world, which claim innocent

¹ Resolution 217 A (III).

² Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.



lives, cause destruction and displace people, and rejecting the use of violence, regardless of any motivation,

Reaffirming the commitment made by all States under the Charter to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction, and reaffirming also that States are under the obligation to protect and respect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons,

Convinced that wars and armed conflicts can lead to radicalization and the spread of violent extremism and disrupt development of human societies and thwart the well-being of humankind,

Recognizing that a primary responsibility of each State is to ensure a peaceful and violence-free life for its people, while fully respecting their human rights without distinction of any kind, to live together in peace with its neighbours, in full respect for political independence and the principle of sovereign equality of others, and to help maintain international peace and security,

Recalling that, as affirmed in the Preamble to the Charter, the practice of tolerance is one of the principles to be applied to attain the ends pursued by the United Nations of preventing war and maintaining peace, and convinced that the respect for and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons, as well as tolerance, the recognition and appreciation of others and the ability to live together with and to listen to others, form a sound foundation of any society and of peace,

Welcoming the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations to promote greater understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures and religions,

Reaffirming that violent extremism constitutes a serious common concern for all Member States, threatening the security and well-being of human societies, and convinced that there is no justification for violent extremism, whatever the motivation,

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach to countering violent extremism and addressing the conditions conducive to its spread,

Stressing that States must ensure that any measure taken to combat violent extremism complies with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, and underscoring that counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are not conflicting goals, but complementary and mutually reinforcing, and are an essential part of a successful effort to counter violent extremism,

Recognizing the commitment of all religions to peace, and determined to condemn violent extremism, which spreads hate and threatens lives?

Reaffirming that violent extremism, in all its forms and manifestations, cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group,

1. *Stresses* the international obligations of all States under the Charter of the United Nations and international law, in particular refraining in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of

the United Nations and settling their international disputes by peaceful means on the basis of the Charter;

2. *Condemns* the targeting of civilian populations, including women and children, in violation of international law, in particular human rights and humanitarian law, including by violent extremists, as well as the attempts to disrupt and divert the popular quest for political reform, moderation and inclusive development in different societies and drive it away from the hard work of development towards violence;

3. *Deplores* attacks on religious places and shrines and cultural sites in violation of international law, in particular human rights and humanitarian law, including any deliberate destruction of relics and monuments;

4. *Urges* all Member States to unite against violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations as well as sectarian violence, encourages the efforts of leaders to discuss within their communities the causes of violent extremism and discrimination and to evolve strategies to address these causes, and underlines that States, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and the media have an important role to play in promoting tolerance and respect for religious and cultural diversity;

5. *Stresses* that it is important that States strongly condemn all forms of violence against women and refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination, as set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women;³

6. *Encourages* all States and international organizations to generate public awareness, to enlighten the public about the dangers of intolerance and sectarian violence and to react with renewed commitment and action in support of the promotion of tolerance and human rights, and invites them to continue to pay attention to the importance of mutual cooperation, understanding and dialogue in ensuring the promotion of moderation and tolerance and respect for human rights;

7. *Calls upon* all States to respect and protect, in their fight against violent extremism, all human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law and to support all actions at the local, national, regional and international levels, in cooperation with civil society, to foster understanding, tolerance and non-violence, inter alia, through programmes and institutions in the fields of education, science, culture, communication and information, strengthen democratic institutions, ensure the all-inclusiveness of the development process, eliminate all forms of intolerance and violence, eradicate poverty and illiteracy and reduce inequalities within and among nations in order to leave no one behind;

8. *Underlines* the vital importance of education, including human rights education, as the most effective means of promoting tolerance, in preventing the spread of extremism by instilling respect for life and promoting the practice of non-violence, moderation, dialogue and cooperation, and encourages all States, the specialized agencies of the United Nations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to contribute actively to this endeavour by, inter alia, placing emphasis on civic education and life skills as well as democratic principles and practices at all levels of formal, informal and non-formal education;

9. *Recommends* promoting community engagement in countering violent extremism, including by strengthening ties between communities and emphasizing their common bonds and interests;

10. *Calls upon* Member States to advocate for and disseminate information on tolerance and mutual respect, and underlines the potential contribution of the media and new communications technologies, including the Internet, to promoting respect for all human rights, to developing a better understanding among all religions, beliefs, cultures and peoples, to enhancing tolerance and mutual respect and thus to strengthening the rejection of violent extremism;

11. *Recognizes* the positive contribution that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, particularly by the media and new technologies, including the Internet, and full respect for the freedom to seek, receive and impart information can make to the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and reiterates the need to respect the editorial independence and autonomy of the media in this regard;

12. *Strongly condemns* any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence;

13. *Invites* all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, regional and non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders to Endeavour to fulfill, in an appropriate manner, the objectives set out in the present resolution;

14. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its seventieth session on the implementation of the present resolution and to recommend ways and means by which the United Nations system and the Secretariat could assist Member States, upon their request and within existing resources, in generating public awareness about the dangers of intolerance, as well as in fostering understanding and non-violence.

69th plenary meeting 18 December 2013