

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS RESULTS IN THOUSANDS OF COMMITMENTS TO ADDRESS RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND OTHER URGENT ISSUES FACING THE WORLD

The Barcelona meeting of 8,000 religious leaders and lay people deemed a success

(Barcelona, 14 July 2004) - As the Parliament of the World's Religions came to a close after a week of debates by nearly 8,000 members of diverse religious communities centered around commitments on the issues of religious violence, access to safe water, the fate of refugees worldwide, and the elimination of developing countries' debts, religious leaders who convened the gathering deemed the event a success.

The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religion's Executive Director Dirk Ficca said that one fundamental difference between this gathering and others discussing the same subjects was that, "when people of faith commit to address religious violence and other pressing issues facing the global community they follow through. We make a commitment not only to the world, but out of a deeply rooted religious or spiritual conviction. That is what makes the Barcelona Parliament commitments so special, and why this year's Parliament in Barcelona is going to make an impact."

Andre Porto, a 34-year old social activist from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil who pledged at the previous Parliament in Cape Town, South Africa in 1999 to organize an interfaith coalition to address the illegal gun trade in the Favelas of Brazil reported that the Rio religious community's lobbying and social activism campaign resulted in a strong law halting illegal gun sales. "Our progress and success in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas is an example of the feasibility and effectiveness of commitments made at the Parliament of World Religions."

Rev. Dr. William Leshner, Chair of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions' board pointed out the immeasurable outcomes of the Parliament. "Along with the strong commitments made this week, the mere presence of 8,000 people from so many different religious and spiritual traditions and places in the world is a meaningful outcome in and of itself. The impact of this is perhaps not as measurable, but equally remarkable in today's world."

The Parliament's priorities over the next five years are to assist the world's religions in meeting their commitments. "Our organization's work does not start or end here", said Ficca.

"The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions has established a network of interreligious movements in partner cities around the world", said Diane Goldin, founder of the Annual Goldin Institute for International Partnership and Peace. "These strong grassroots partnerships are a powerful vehicle for implementing these commitments."

Ficca continued: "The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions has also developed a process to monitor and support the implementation of the Barcelona Parliament commitments, including best-practice manuals and a web-based communications network in order to support and assess the impact on the world's pressing problems. We are also exploring partnerships with other sectors of society such as organizations within the UN system, the World Bank and organizations that promote corporate social responsibility."

The Barcelona Parliament Commitments include what Ficca called "simple and profound acts", often developed in concert with civil society organizations. Some examples include:

Religious violence

- "Organize the interreligious community in Sarajevo to bring Palestinians and Israelis to Bosnia, to the House of Peace in Ratna Monastery and develop approaches to building communities and relationships in order to provide peace and prevent future conflicts." - Vjekoslav Saje, Center for Religious Dialogue, Catholic, Bosnia Herzegovina.
- "Include religions and peacemaking in my program policies related to preventing deadly conflict and engage our congregations across the country and policymakers in Washington DC." - Bridget

Moix, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Christian, USA.

- "Work with the Israeli Jewish community in Jerusalem to publicize the TV series "Search for Common Ground", especially a one-hour special on Palestinian refugees. Organize screenings and turn out Israeli Jewish people to see it." - Sharon Rosen, Jewish, Israel.
- "Continue to organize an interfaith community in Rwanda to help genocide survivors, prisoners' families and released prisoners." - Saleh Habimana, Rwanda.
- "I will create a guidebook for youth about the role of the world's religions in bringing about peace in order to enhance their awareness about religions, but mostly to get rid of their prejudice against other religions." - Yasutomo Sawahata, Switzerland.

International Debt

- "Raise \$10,000 to support Jubilee USA advocacy effort and establish a Center for Global Awareness to link local and global issues and provide international people to people contact on the debt issue and interfaith dialogue." - Pastor Bill Harman, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, USA.
- "Coordinate with the Jubilee Foundation to strengthen the internal voice within India for debt forgiveness. I have already begun working with micro-credit creating Pilot Model Village in West Bengal." - Sliami Shuddhanaunda Brahma Chari, India.
- "I will join an organization campaigning for debt cancellation from Spain." - Anna Balaguer, Spain.
- "Work with my synagogue to introduce this issue to the congregation and speak to the reform group and the St. Francis Catholic Church Women's Group about the Parliament and my commitments." - Emily M. Axelrod, Jewish, USA.

Water

- "Work with the women in my community to develop a strategy on how to increase access to clean water by building wells and covering bore-holes. Organize young women to form small groups and develop trainings for them on how to accomplish their goals." - Carmeline Achieng, Kenya.
- "Engage the Unity Community and interfaith group to plan and implement a project to make clean water accessible to a community in Haiti and West Africa." - Rev. James Trapp, Unity, USA.
- "Engage Mediterranean people involved with mountain conservation to promote a network for protection of Mediterranean mountains as a source of water, natural resources and spiritual values." - Puri Canals, the World Conservation Union, Catholic, Spain.
- "Reduce water pollution by promoting care and concerns from the public to the government of Taiwan and create trust and commitments between all religions in Taiwan." - Dharma Master Hsin Tao, Taiwan.
- "In drought prone areas create a demonstration plot and an extension of services." -Saran Singh, Sikh, India.

Refugees

- "Engage the spiritual leaders of the Hindu and Sikh communities of my country in making people aware of the refugees and telling their stories of suffering so that hearts are touched and people have an irresistible urge to help them. We will mobilize the community to volunteer in the medical

facilities of refugee camps with the help of other doctors." - Dr. Inderjit Kaur, All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, Sikh, India.

- "Engage my church community to research what is happening to arriving refugees at the international airport and begin working with agencies to ensure that they are treated fairly." - Rev. Johanna Boeke, Christian, UK.
- "Engage the Office for Ethnic Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago to lobby the legislature to grant drivers licenses for those who do not have legal papers and to refugees." - Bishop Francis Kane, Vicariate II/Archdiocese of Chicago, Catholic, USA.
- "To help new migrant community members who do not have enough food and no shelter. I will educate other young people to open their mind and hearts to accept people from other communities who need help because of their suffering." Meas Sokeo, Muslim, Cambodia.
- "Organize interreligious prayers and humanitarian help for people in areas of earthquake, drought, flooding and war." - His Holiness Mahamandaleshar Paramhans Shami Maheshwarananda, Austria.

General

- "To speak more about issues of this Assembly in my own community and in my own job. My first step is to educate my church community about the impact of debt in developing countries, the need for clean water in many parts of the world, legislation regarding refugees and immigration and the networks available to impact these issues." - Archbishop Jukka Paarma, Evangelical Lutheran church of Finland, Christian, Finland.
- "Organize a forestation program among the school children in one of the villages in India to help the ecology and give them an opportunity to know and interact with youth from other religions in their community." - Dr. Homi Dhalla, World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation, Zoroastrian, India.