



How can we contribute to Global
Peace and **Human**

Rights? 5 February 2012
Perspectives from Spiritual Faith Traditions
A Public Symposium organised by **Canberra Interfaith Forum**
and hosted by the **Australian Centre of Christianity and Culture**



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Welcome and Introduction
Dean Sahu Khan
Chair of Canberra Interfaith Forum

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

—Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[9]
Human dignity knows no borders. The desire for freedom, democracy and security is shared by all.

Human rights and peace are protected best when people listen and learn from each other in a spirit of cooperation and respect.

The criterion for lots of dissension is sadly and unfortunately religion. That arises mainly out of misconceptions and ignorance of each other’s faith. Canberra Interfaith Forum’s objectives are to remove all that. The gathering here today is a manifestation of our attempts to achieve our objective.

Very appropriately the theme is “how can we contribute to Global peace and Human rights”. Peace and the human rights are entitlements of all irrespective of faith, belief or creed.

The Canberra Interfaith Forum (CIF) is a group of people from 12 different spiritual traditions in Canberra: Baha’i; Buddhist; Brahma Kumaris; Christian; Hindu; Indigenous; Muslim, Jewish; Pagan Awareness Network; Sikh; Sathya Sai; and Sukyo Mahikari. CIF meets regularly, usually on the third Sunday of the month at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre from 3.00 – 5.00 pm.

Following the Parliament of World Religions held in Melbourne, December 2009, the ‘Interfaith Forum of the ACT’, which had been active since 1993, became the ‘Canberra Interfaith Forum’. CIF has been operating since March 2010.

The activities of the CIF include hosting interfaith public forums; visiting each others places of worship; discussions and social activities; and the maintenance of an Environment Meditation and Healing Garden, which is located at the eastern end of Grevillea Park just east of Clare Holland House (ACT Hospice). CIF also contributes to the ACT Multicultural festival. Ms Mary Porter MLA, representing the Chief Minister, officially launched the Environment Garden on 20 May 2011. At the official function of the launch, Aunty Agnes Shea (Ngunnawal Elder) and Mr Duncan Smith from local Indigenous community performed Welcome to Country and a traditional Smoking Ceremony respectively.

Our vision, aims and objectives are:

Vision:

To encourage people to live and work in harmony, respecting all cultures, races and spiritual traditions.

Purpose:

To enable and facilitate open exchange, dialogue and cooperation between people of various spiritual tradition within the ACT.

Objectives:

1. To promote open conversation between individuals of various spiritual traditions based on equality and mutual respect.
2. To deepen knowledge, understanding and appreciation of various spiritual traditions.
3. To demonstrate loving and effective relationships between peoples of various spiritual traditions.
4. To share deeper spiritual insights and values in the community.
5. To uphold and respect the right of all human beings to maintain and practise in harmony the spiritual traditions of their choice.
6. To promote cooperative action involving participating spiritual traditions in the ACT.
7. To participate appropriately in community events such as the Multicultural Festival and multifaith worship.
8. To disseminate information on multifaith and relevant activities.
CIF Website : <http://iffact.tripod.com/canberrainterfaithforum/>

As the chairperson I welcome you all to this important symposium on behalf of the Canberra Interfaith Forum, a forum run by many dedicated members.



Welcome to Country
Roslyn Brown
Chair of United Ngunnawal Elders Council

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal People, the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders & non-Indigenous friends here today. Thank you for inviting me to conduct the Welcome to Country this evening.

For those who may not be aware, Welcome to Country is a protocol which is ancient. Before entering another persons country, you would always announce your arrival and not enter until the traditional owners welcome you. The reason for this practice is to protect your spirit and to show respect for the people whose country you are entering.

The Ngunnawal people are the traditional custodians of the ACT and Region. As with all Indigenous communities, our community is made up of several family groups who represent the interest of the Ngunnawal people. In the spirit of Reconciliation,

Elders have acknowledged that we have to work together as a united voice for our community. Therefore, Elders from many family groups have acknowledged that our identity is a collective identity, and have joined together to form the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

Our families are suffering numerous health problems, including drug and alcohol misuse, which is a major problem for our community in the ACT and Region, to the extent that we have been lobbying governments for many years to support us to heal our young people and families by providing a culturally appropriate Residential Healing Place in a bush setting, where Elders can participate and contribute to the healing process.

In 2007 the ACT Government committed the majority of funding to build an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rehabilitation Residential Service now known as the NBHF. The Commonwealth Government has also contributed funding. An advisory board has been established with Indigenous and government representatives. A rural property has been selected, and building begins in October this year. Programs will focus on prevention, education, rehabilitation and outreach support.

The NBHF advisory board can be contacted through the ACT Health Directorate who provides secretariat support.

This has created great momentum within our community for further negotiation with Government and non-government organisations, about issues that affect us and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the region. The vision for a healthy Indigenous society should not be difficult to see because that is where we originally came from – a proud healthy and dignified people. Welcome to Ngunnawal Country!



Opening Remarks
Nic Manikis
Director, The ACT Multicultural Office

Thank you Dean. And thank you Ros for that wonderful welcome.

I too wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on this afternoon and the Ngunnawal people and pay my respect to their elders past and present.

I am grateful to the Canberra Interfaith Forum for inviting me to officially open this Symposium on the question, 'How can we contribute to global peace and human rights?'

I am very much looking forward to listening to the presentations to this question from the different faith perspectives here in this afternoon. It is indeed an impressive line of learned speakers and I congratulate the Canberra Interfaith Forum for this initiative.

The ACT Multicultural Office is delighted once again leading into this year's National Multicultural Festival we have an opportunity to reflect on those important issues of

achieving peace and respect for human rights.

The wide participation in today's Symposium (11 speakers in all) reflects the unity and diversity of various spiritual traditions in the ACT community.

I appreciate the Canberra Interfaith Forum's effort to promote interfaith dialogue, better understanding and harmony between various spiritual traditions, through various community activities.

In May last year you may recall Ms Mary Porter MLA, representing the Chief Minister, launched your Environment Garden located in Barton, adjacent to the ACT Hospice, and I had the pleasure of attending the launch.

For many years there have been well attended interfaith gatherings either before or at the Multicultural Festival.

I believe there should be more than a focus on just 'food and dance' to what seems at the festival to be a 'one year' very public engagement about our community diversity.

At this time of the year, it seems the perfect opportunity to speak up for shared values and common objectives and to highlight and promote examples of interfaith harmony. And I know that the Canberra Interfaith Forum under Dean's leadership is doing just that.

I understand that in addition to the Symposium today, the Canberra Interfaith Forum will also be running an information stall at the festival weekend to enable different faith groups to share information and literature and information on their spiritual traditions with the Canberra community.

I congratulate the Canberra Interfaith Forum for taking these initiatives that reach out into the community to advocate the importance of appreciating diversity, resolving conflicts without violence, and minimising disconnection, marginalisation and helplessness.

The ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs believes that interfaith dialogue is a profoundly important process for harmony and peace – vital to building a community of voices that rejects violence and respects human rights.

All great faiths of the world share a common perspective on respecting human dignity, on what is right and wrong, and what is fair and just. I know we will hear these perspectives thread through all the presentations here today.

I once again congratulate Dean and your capable and hard working team, on initiating and hosting this event and I look forward to your continuing commitment to promoting community harmony.

I also wish to put on record that I believe that the Canberra Interfaith Forum, through its initiatives so far, is serving the purpose for which it was established.

I now have the pleasure of declaring this Symposium OPEN!



An Indigenous Perspective Wiradjuri Echoes by Duncan Smith

My name is Duncan Smith, I am an Indigenous man from central NSW, I am a Wiradjuri man and I am here to talk about my people, and the effects society has had and still has on them. I will also be talking about 'Equality', a painting I was asked to paint for the Marist Brothers and portray my vision of reconciliation through painting.

Firstly, I wanted to talk about all the indigenous people we do not see, the people who live in third world conditions, do not have access to strong medical care, Medicare, proper housing facilities or education. I strongly believe that these are the people who need our help, need our care and support; to provide education to their children and better Australia's steps toward a real reconciliation and equality. In saying that, the picture I painted for the Marist Brothers which portrays what the school and I believed equality really was. This picture represents that between my aboriginality and their religion, together we can work as a team and create something amazing.

The goanna is sacred to my Wiradjuri People and in this painting it represents the circle of life. The cross in the centre of the picture is sacred to religion and through it I incorporated the foundation of religion and represented their version of the circle of life. The Southern Cross in the painting represents that anywhere in Australia we all live under those stars; it is shown on our flag if we look up, we will see those stars regardless of who we are, where we came from or what we believe in.

The patches of colour represent how the land used to look. It shows how we all walk upon this land and as aboriginal people believe that the world is our mother and we should respect her, keep her clean so that future generations are just as lucky as us. Finally, the hands represent togetherness and working together for a better world of understanding and equality.



Perspectives from Baha'i Faith Dr Natalie Mobini

I would like to begin by thanking the Canberra Interfaith Forum for organising this event, and the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture for hosting it. I join other speakers in acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

The task of achieving global peace and human rights is obviously a vast and complex one. Given the limitations of time, I am going to offer three insights drawn from the teachings of my faith tradition, which I hope will provide a distinctive and useful contribution to our discussion.

I am a Baha'i, which is one of the most recent of the world's religions. For those who are not familiar with it, the Baha'i Faith began in the mid 19th century in Persia and has since spread to all parts of the world. Key teachings of the Baha'i Faith are based around the principle of unity or oneness: the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the fundamental oneness and equality of all humanity.

The first insight I would like to offer is that we should be optimistic about the prospects for peace and human rights. Baha'is believe that civilisation is advancing. Despite all its war and bloodshed, a positive legacy of the 20th century is that it compelled the people of the world to begin seeing themselves as the members of a single human race, and the earth as our common home. This is a huge shift in thinking in a relatively brief period, which has made many things possible. It has made possible the establishment of international agencies, the articulation and codification of international human rights law, and a vast range of international undertakings in the scientific, legal, economic, environmental and humanitarian fields.

Let me give one concrete example. You may have seen it reported last month that India announced 2011 the first full year in its history without a single case of polio being reported. Polio was one of the most dreaded childhood diseases of the twentieth century. Today, thanks to global immunisation programs and the collaboration of millions of people worldwide, we are down to only three countries in the world where it is still endemic. This is a phenomenal achievement of human ingenuity and international cooperation.

We should recognise and celebrate such achievements, because they give hope and optimism that change is possible, and global peace and human rights are slowly taking on the character of a realistic goal.

The second point I would like to make is that, as people of faith, we need to recognise the problems caused by religious prejudice and extremism.

This is not to say we would be better off without religion, or that peace can somehow be achieved in a spiritual vacuum. As a Baha'i I acknowledge the divine origins of all the great religions. I believe religion has been the seminal force in the advancement of civilisation and the cultivation of human nature. All religions are concerned with the ennobling of character, the harmonising of relationships, and the establishment of peace. But we won't achieve peace if we don't seriously address the challenge presented by fanaticism, hatred and violence perpetrated in the name of religion. This is not just a recent phenomenon, nor is it confined to one religion or one part of the world.

I believe the inter-faith movement has progressed to the point that we can and must have a conversation about how we can support one another in addressing this issue. Religious leaders and institutions, in particular, need to encourage exploration of reality and the exercise of intellectual faculties, including learning about religions other than our own, through events such as this one. It is failure in this responsibility that leaves believers exposed and vulnerable to the influences of fanaticism and prejudice.

Thirdly, I would like to suggest that one of the most useful, practical things we can all

do to contribute to peace and human rights is to work to re-build community wherever we are.

Bahá'ís believe we have a two-fold purpose in life: to develop our own spiritual nature, and to help make the world a better place. We have concluded that the most useful way to do this is to consciously try to be an agent that brings people together to re-build community where we live, in neighbourhoods and villages around the world. Community building should not be a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another. The primary purpose is to build capacity, in any community, to read our own reality, see our own possibilities, and make use of our own resources to participate in creating a better world around us.

The Baha'i approach to community building has a number of aspects, but it can start with an act as simple as knocking on your neighbour's door and inviting them into your home.

We have learned that one of the activities that supports community building is meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the community by bringing people of diverse backgrounds together in prayer and reflection.

We have found that young teenagers are a particular group who possess a strong sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe, and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world. So we are working on programs that try to channel these energies into projects that serve the whole community.

Spiritual education for children and adults is also an important part of community building.

The most important thing is that every soul feels welcome to join in, and we have faith in the capacity of every individual who shows a desire to serve. Let's think of this as treading a path of service to humanity.

Sometimes it's a challenging path, sometimes our destination seems impossibly far away. But we are all walking the path together, supporting one another, respectful of the knowledge that each possesses at any given moment, and welcoming the constructive contributions of all.



A Perspective from Brahma Kumaris Robyn Horton

I would like to read to you the New Year Message from the Head of our Organization, which is the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, because I think it is very relevant to today's topic. Dadi Janki is 95 years old, and has devoted her life to promoting peace and living a spiritual life i.e. a value-based life. Her message reads: 'We are reminded constantly of the descending energy and its destabilizing effects on the world, increasing feelings of fear, anxiety and hopelessness.'

Perhaps less visible, but assuredly more powerful, is the ascending energy. Like new growth below the ground in late winter, ascending energy is working quietly in the hearts and minds of people everywhere, shaping a new story. We see it in the surge of those seeking spiritual truth and in the hundreds of thousands of civil society organizations requesting transparency, authenticity, and a return to values.

We have a choice about which energy we affiliate with, about where we put our support. We make this choice at the level of thought. When we allow anger, greed, or fear into our thoughts, we strengthen the descending energy, and we lose our capacity for generosity and mercy.

When we meet situations with peace, love, and persistent happiness, when we are careful not to say or think anything that would hurt another's heart, we amplify the energy of ascent.

We find these qualities inside of ourselves, as they have always been our true nature. But to find them ready in moments of need, we have to nurture them daily. To make the greatest contribution to the world at this time, keep the fire of goodness alive in your heart and mind. Fill yourself with the energies of peace, love and happiness and let them infuse your every action.'

This message reflects the essence of the teachings of Raja Yoga which are imparted by the Brahma Kumaris. The teachings provide an understanding of yourself as a spiritual being, separate from this physical costume, and enable us to contribute to this ascending energy. Raja Yoga meditation teaches us how to become the creator of your own thoughts and feelings.

Through the practice of turning your mind inwards and being able to direct your thoughts, you become able to be your own creator and to discover the knowledge within you.

The more you do this, the more you will find that your life is filled with light and peace. You, a spiritual being, are innately peaceful.

This is the true nature of human beings. But, instead of acting from these innate inner spiritual qualities of peace, love and happiness, we have, instead, been distracted by external or material things (people, possessions and position), and this connection has meant that our thoughts and therefore our actions have been based on anger, greed or fear.

It has made us become spiritually weak, and strengthened the descending energy.

When I know who I am, I experience peace.

I, as a spiritual being, a soul, am a child of the Supreme Soul, God.

When I connect in meditation to the Supreme, I experience power.

When I experience God's love and power, I will be filled with inner peace and the power to serve.

It is now time to show the practical proof of the power of spirituality as a living reality in this world. We believe that when we human beings change, the world will change, and hence the ascending energy will become even more powerful.

As well as teaching Raja Yoga through our centres in 108 countries, we also work with the United Nations, aligning ourselves in particular with the tenet contained in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations: '...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person'.

Our formal relationship with the UN is as an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and in consultative status with UNICEF.

In our work with the UN, we offer perspectives that affirm the dignity and worth of the human person, and we cultivate attitudes of tolerance and brotherhood in relation to all topics of concern to the UN. Over the years, we have undertaken world wide programmes promoting peace. In 1986, we undertook a programme called 'A Million Minutes of Peace' in support of the UN International Year of Peace. It emphasised that peace begins with each individual. The UN awarded 7 Peace Messenger Awards to the Brahma Kumaris for this programme.

While the teachings of Raja Yoga emphasise developing the person through enabling them to live better, more spiritual lives, in our work with the UN, we are also looking at ways in which to integrate human rights at all levels - political, social and spiritual.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you a gift of peace from our Head, Dadi Jan-ki: 'Ignorance makes you believe that life functions haphazardly. Wisdom teaches you that everything that happens in this theatre of life has profound significance. What you see today is not the fruit of chance but a fruit from seeds planted in the past. Plant seeds of peace now and you will create a life of peace for the future.' I leave you with the expression, *Om Shanti – I, the soul, am peace.*



A Buddhist Perspective Venerable Thich Quang Ba

The concept of peace is central to Buddhism, it is a religion that promotes peace, non-violence and reconciliation. Non-violence is at the heart of Buddhist thinking and behaviour.

The teachings of the Buddha require us to extend peace, love and compassion to all fellow human beings. Buddhist teachings maintain that under any circumstance (whether political, religious, cultural or ethnic), violence should not be advocated to solve disputes and conflicts between individuals and nations. The Buddha has said:

“He who is friendly amongst the hostile, who is peaceful amongst the violent, who is unattached amongst the attached, - him I call a a holy man.” (Dhammapada: 406)

According to Buddhist teachings, a viable solution to conflict is less likely through the use of violent means. This is because of the belief in Buddhist doctrine that violence breeds hatred. Thus victory achieved through violence is not a permanent solution to any conflict.

“Hate is not overcome by hate. By love alone is hate appeased. This is an eternal law”. (Dhammapada: 5)

All human beings, according to Buddhism, are equal, and each has the potential to realize the truth by his or her own will and endeavour, and can help others to realize it. Buddhist concepts recognize the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings.

Although Buddhism is widely regarded as one of the most tolerant religious traditions, it is sad to note countries like Burma, Tibet and Viet Nam have seen a higher level of religious and ethnic intolerance. In these countries, for instance, thousands of Buddhists, including monks and nuns, have been persecuted. There is an urgent need for spiritual faith traditions to urge governments, which persecute their citizens for their religious beliefs, to stop immediately religious persecutions and human rights violations to ensure that human rights become a reality in their countries.

At present, we live in an extremely difficult and uncertain time, witnessing hostilities and conflicts, social turbulence, and threat of widespread terrorist networks worldwide. To effectively deal with these problems, there is an urgent need to forge cooperation and tolerance among different ethnic, national and religious communities. Moderate and constructive dialogue can be an effective tool for building trust, tolerance and harmony among diverse religious groups to work towards a culture and global implementation of Non-violence and Human Rights.

Irrespective of the differences and interpretations, almost all spiritual traditions would invariably agree that peace is an absolute necessity. Religion can play a vital role in the peaceful development of individuals and society and the world.

Buddhism promotes a better understanding of religion and religious tolerance. Teachings of the Buddha place an importance of being respectful and courteous towards other religions. Mutual understanding, mutual co-operation and tolerance among all religions are vital to achieving religious harmony.

Because Buddhism encourages compassion towards all human beings, it has a strong ethical foundation for supporting peace and global human rights.



A Christian perspective
Rev. Gregor Henderson

Two foundational theological principles underlie the question of how Christians can and do contribute to global peace and human rights:

1. Christians believe that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, came to reconcile human beings

with God and with each other, and therefore the followers of Christ are committed to global peace and reconciliation;

Christians believe that God is the Creator of all, and loves all of creation, including love for every human being; therefore every human being is to be treated with dignity, love and compassion and accorded human rights.

2. As individuals Christians are called to pray for and work for global peace and human rights. Our worship almost always includes prayers for the conflict places in the world, seeking God's help for peaceful resolutions of the conflicts. As well as through their personal prayers, Christians are called to work for peace and justice - through their local action in the community, through their support of church action for peace and justice and through their individual advocacy with government/s.

3. Australian churches are very active in working for global peace and human rights: There are many Australian church-based international aid agencies (such as Act for Peace, the National Council of Churches aid agency; World Vision; Caritas, the Roman Catholic aid agency; Tear Fund; Anglicord, one of several Anglican aid agencies; Baptist World Aid; to name just a few).

These agencies support development and emergency relief projects across the world, especially in Africa and Asia, and also educate their supporters about global conflicts and global poverty, and advocate for changes in government policies. Their combined budgets amount to hundreds of millions of dollars each year, the bulk of that money coming from direct donations from Christians in Australia. These agencies also spend some Australian Government money on development and relief projects, through AusAID funding which is carefully overseen by AusAID officers.

Many national, state-based and regional church leaders are advised by staffed agencies in international relationships and social justice. They frequently meet with government ministers, issue media releases, and seek to educate their own church memberships about working for global peace and human rights. For instance, in my own church, the Uniting Church, we have a national staff of around 30 people working in international relationships and social justice.

We work particularly closely with churches overseas, supporting their action for peace in countries and regions like Fiji, the Philippines, Sudan, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, the Middle East. Other large churches such as the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches have similar staffed agencies and similar relationships with their overseas counterparts.

Occasionally churches arrange for overseas visits to expose church leaders to conflict situations and lack of human rights overseas. I've been involved in such visits in recent years to places like North and South Korea, Palestine-Israel, Fiji, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines. Next month, 8 national church leaders will visit Israel and Palestine to learn more of the situation there and to equip themselves to advocate and work more effectively in Australia for justice and peace for the peoples of Israel and Palestine – the visit is arranged by the National Council of Churches in Australia.

4. Internationally, there are two major Christian bodies which work separately but

frequently together for peace and human rights – the Vatican based in Rome (the Roman Catholic Church) and the World Council of Churches based in Geneva (with 347 member churches from across the world). Both these bodies have status with the United Nations and can make direct representations to the UN and to national governments. They do so every week of the year, one way or another.

5. And a growing area of contribution to global peace and human rights is through inter-faith relationships. The more we of different faiths understand each other and work with each other, the greater our contribution to global peace and human rights. Christians are increasingly committed to working together with people of other faiths.

6. So, how do we contribute to global peace and human rights? By our individual actions, by our prayers, and by participating in the actions undertaken by churches and by faiths as outlined above. Thank you.



A Perspective from Hinduism **Jayanti Gupta**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution in December 1948. This declaration puts at one place what has been considered by the peoples of the world as being of the essence of human dignity and of the possession by human beings of certain inalienable rights that accrue to them by virtue of their being human beings. As the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, they are the “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”.

Today, let us look at the role faith plays in the recognition and furtherance of these principles, values and rights. I have said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts in black and white what has always been regarded as essential by peoples of the world. So it is with the Hindu faith and people professing that faith.

The great master and teacher of the Vedanta philosophy, Swami Vivekananda, brought the message of values and world peace to the entire world in his famous addresses at the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago in 1893. His very first address to that ‘August Assembly’ opened with a message of universal acceptance. He said, ‘I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true.’

Swami Vivekananda quoted from a hymn he learnt in his boyhood:

As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which people take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.

He went on to say, ‘Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole

nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.'

The Hindu faith teaches universal acceptance and not just tolerance. The latter has limitations. One can only tolerate up to a point and then the peace breaks down. However, acceptance has no issues left to tolerate. It is complete and leaves no room for disharmony.

The Hindu faith believes that all peoples of the world take different paths that lead to a common goal. The world has shrunk over time thanks to science, technology, transport, etc. While globalization has allowed developments in one part of the world to become available to others in distant lands, it has also allowed problems of the countries to spill over and impact other lands.

Why then are there disturbances in world peace? The eternal quest for power, wealth, dominance, religious intolerance, etc. continue to plague human societies around the globe. There exist huge differences in the manner governments treat each other; differences in the manner in which they treat their own people; differences in the manner in which women, children, the aged and infirm are treated by them; differences in their approach to distribution of the natural wealth and resources of the earth; etc.

One of the integral principles of Hindu philosophy is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', or 'the whole world is but one family'.

Let me quote from the Rig Veda Ayam Bandhurayam neti Gannana Laghuchetasaam Udaracharitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam Meaning: Only base minds reckon whether one be kin or stranger; Those of noble conduct take the whole world as their own family.

Hinduism accepts that all paths are valid and lead to the truth. Hindus believe in the all-pervasiveness of the divine. By seeing the divine in all beings, we see that there is no other, no opponent.

In my native language, Thamizh, this has been simply put as 'Yaadum Oore, Yaavarum Kellir', which means 'every country is my own and all the people are my kinsmen'. (Sangam (300 - 100 B.C) Thamizh Purananuru poem Yaadum Oore, Yaavarum Kellir).

'Ahimsa' is a fundamental principle of Hinduism – it means abstaining from causing hurt or harm, and to prohibit subtle abuse and even simple hurt.

More than two thousand years ago, a weaver saint of South India, Thiruvalluvar said, 'Noyellaam noyseydhaar maelavaam noyseyyaar Noyinmai vendu bavar', meaning: 'All suffering recoils on the wrong-doer himself. Therefore those who desire not to suffer, refrain from causing others pain.' (Thirukkural was composed by Thiruvalluvar during the Sangam period of literary development in Thamizh i.e. 500 – 200 BC).

This wisdom is the cumulative knowledge of Karma (the law of cause and effect), dharma (right living or righteousness) and the all pervasiveness of the divine in all things.

While spiritual notions of Hinduism have a lot to contribute to the cause of peace in the world, this religion has also laid the foundations for the respect of human rights.

When we, today, talk of the fundamental human right to life, the Hindu has all along advocated that it was wrong to take another human being's life. When we today speak of respect for the family, the Hindu has all along given the family a sanctity upon which our societies are built.

When we speak of the rights to speech, fair access to justice, equality before the law, and equal rights for men and women, the Hindus have practised and preached these values since time immemorial.

Slavery and servitude have been considered by the Hindus to be abhorrent to human dignity. The Hindus respect the individual and his family and will not let a person be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation.

Thus, looked at from a historical, religious and philosophical perspective, the Hindu faith has lived lofty ideals and principles that are clearly essential to the enjoyment by all peoples of the world of their human rights.

In a world where human rights are respected, and individuals live their lives in values, ethics and morality, peace is bound to reign supreme. Hinduism teaches those values and provides the world with a solid foundation for peace.

As the Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore prayed to the almighty:

'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high,
Where the world is not broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls,
Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.'

The great poet would certainly agree with us today if the last line of his prayer said, 'Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let the world awake.'

I sincerely thank the Canberra Interfaith Forum for organising today's forum and for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

Let me conclude by reciting the Shanti prayer from the Upanishads:

*"om saha nāvavatu; saha nau bhunaktu;
saha vīryam karavāvahai; tejasvināvadhītāmastu mā vidvisāvahai
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ"*

'Let us all enjoy together; May all of us work together,
And let our study become radiant; Let there be no hatred between us.
Peace, Peace, Peace.'



A Perspective from Islam **Ahmed Youssef**

The fundamentals of Islam which inculcate an ethos of accountability to an omnipotent God can be and in most cases is a powerful moderating force on the actions of individuals who believe in such framework. This accountability is tied to the notion of promoting what is 'good' and avoiding or disallowing what is 'bad'.

As a broad consensus of the people on what is good and proper forms a key legal basis on what is 'good', it is a check on ensuring that small group vested interests will not prevail at the cost of the overwhelming majority.

Sincere performance therefore of 'good', or described in Islamic terms, acts which benefits humanity, can therefore lead us towards a global peace.

The first declaration of the Muslim is that she or he accepts the One Almighty God and the apostleship of Mohamed. In this declaration is the acceptance of a Covenant, the acceptance of the notion of other faiths and their validity in the eyes of God and the notion of a single brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity that follows from the Islamic notion that we are all descended from the one pair of parents, Adam and Eve.

Everyone who accepts the Covenant is bound by its terms which mandates right conduct, honourable behaviour, a charitable ethos and a friendly and helpful demeanour towards other living beings. The Qur'an states, 'O people, we have created you out of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you come to know one another [...]; that is interactions with others must be based on equity, knowledge and a spirit of co-operation.

The five canonical prayers that forms part of a Muslim's covenant has a range of purposes including the remembrance and worship of God, which carry a range of meanings, but also importantly includes the element of reminding an individual not to behave badly to avoid crime, sin oppression, unkindness and alternatively including to behave ethically, honourably, charitably, kindly and justly.

The remembrance of God acts as a disincentive to act badly as one is constantly reminded that the next prayer is not very far away in time and that once again the individual will be standing before the Almighty who is all knowing and is aware of what wrongs the individual worshipper has committed.

The tithe or the Muslim mandatory charity is also an element that promotes peace and reduces strife by providing and redistributing wealth, thereby reducing economic disparity and the competition for resources. Charitable activity therefore also promotes and contributes to peace and well-being of the community. On an international scale it helps reduce the disparities between the wealthy and the poor; economic factors that can sometimes underlie the war and strife in the quest for the planet's limited resources.

Fasting or the abstinence from otherwise permitted activity such as eating and drinking is primarily provided in the Covenant so that the individual learns self-restraint.

Self-restraint is a key component in reducing anger and strife and is a key component of peaceful interaction between individuals and also between groups of people, nations and states. The fasting person is also reminded of the pain of deprivation and this creates empathy with the poor and the downtrodden and softens the heart towards the dispossessed, promotes charity, and engenders empathy with the other. The final pillar of the Covenant is the pilgrimage. Here one meets with members of the 'family of Adam, the mass of humanity of varying colours, races, tongues, ethnicities and economic and social classes. The Qur'an states, 'And among the wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours [...]'

The belief in the Unity of God the Almighty, includes belief in God's Divine and all-encompassing absolute justice. Islam speaks of a basic sense of a notion of reward and punishment for good and evil, but the ethic of Islam is to promote a more altruistic notion of what constitutes deep faith and good behaviour. It elevates the notion of eliminating injustice and inequity and thus sets a practical basis for equity and freedom for all humanity.

The adherence to these simple acts based on faith, practised in sincerity will bring humanity closer to world peace by reducing the causes of enmity, animosity and aggression all over the world.



A Perspective from Judaism **Harry Oppermann**

Two plaintiffs appeared before a Rabbi.

The Rabbi listens to one plead his case and says, "You are right."

The Rabbi listens to the second plead his case and says, "You are right too"

The Rabbi's spouse, who has been listening in , calls out , "Rabbi? They have conflicting stories! How can they be both right?"

....and instantly receives the reply: "Yes of course! You are right, too."

You see in Judaism, you don't have to be wrong, for me to be right ! Now is that not a recipe for peace and the avoidance of conflict?

My presentation touches on the concepts in Judaism of truth, justice and the sanctity of life; all prerequisites for human rights; and love for humanity, justice and the sanctity of life; all prerequisites for peace. Intrinsic to all these teachings is the symbolism of one of the teachings from the account of Adam and Eve; 'that we are all from the one human family' and all the implications which flow from that.

Justice and Truth: Even in ancient times Hebrew Judges were appointed for every 10, for every 100, for every 1000, and for 10,000 population. It is a religion in which Love, Justice Mercy and forgiveness are key (and in Hebrew one of the words for Justice: 'Tzedakah' is a cognate of charity and saintliness)

Peace: The Greeting Shalom (Aleichem) Peace (be unto you) comes from the three consonantal stem of the word Perfection – the implication is.... that peace is perfection.

The Sanctity of Life: The ethical stance of Judaism is that to wage war is unethical. The ultimate master for the Rabbis is G-d; the ultimate value is the sanctity of life; hence, the teaching, that "To save one life is to save the world". Peace is synonymous with perfection; Justice and Truth are an expression of community; Love for one another, the expression of humaneness and our common humanity.

According to Jewish tradition, the Messianic Era will be one of global peace and harmony, an era free of strife and hardship, and one conducive to the wide acceptance of the knowledge of the Creator. The theme of the Jewish Messiah ushering in an era of global peace is encapsulated in two of the most famous scriptural passages from the Book of Isaiah:

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift sword against nation and they will no longer study warfare."... "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"

Rabban Shimon the son of Gamliel taught:

"By three things is the world preserved: by Justice by Truth and by Peace "Al hadin v'al ha'emet v'al hashalom."

It was King Solomon who made a judgement when the two women came before him each claiming that the baby was theirs. King Solomon understood that the real mother was the one who was prepared to give the child away, rather than let it be killed. Love is more than possession – it is also in part the ability to let go.

Forgiveness is the ability to let go. Every act of forgiveness mends something broken in this fractured world. Forgiveness is a step in the long difficult road to redemption At the heart of the concept of forgiveness is the idea of Love - the real attachment of one being for another.

Justice and forgiveness go hand in hand. Each is the answer to the problem of revenge and neither is sufficient on its own. To forgive without the dialectic of accusation and apology, as an unconditional act of grace, is a sign of moral greatness. It expresses Love.

The spiritual message of the Jewish Bible is an expression of Love for humanity, and the Bible is referred to as " a Service of the Heart":

The Jewish Bible teaches:

Love your neighbour as yourself !

Love the stranger !

Love the Lord your G-d with all your might and all your soul !

From where does the expression 'ruthless' come? It is from the story of a Moabite woman and Naomi the Hebrew woman.

The Moabite woman says to Naomi: ""Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from

following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy G-d my G-d: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

This is Ruth's expression of Love and Devotion. The absence of Love and devotion is a Ruthless world.

Forgiveness only exists in a culture in which repentance exists. Forgiveness transformed the human situation. For the first time it established the possibility that we are not condemned endlessly to repeat the past. When I repent, I show I can change. Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of the past.

It does not mean to forget the past. It means not to live in the past !This is an answer to the problem of peace.

The Hebrew Mishnah powerfully articulates both the value of the individual person and the equality of all people. Precisely that sacred right to life resultant from being created in the image of G-d, is that which serves to make demands on us to respect and protect the life of the other. There can be no greater human right. Only by understanding and enacting those values will we come to an understanding of what it can mean to be human.

In Judaism it is the year 5772 . The enduring civilisation of Judaism, a tiny civilisation, has outlived the empires intent on its destruction. I as a Jew, carry within me the tears and suffering of my parents and theirs, through all the generations. The story of my people is a narrative of centuries, if not millennia, of exiles, expulsions, persecutions and pogroms and massacres. My parents' families were all murdered: babies; children; and adults. All of them! I understand within my consciousness and through my family history, the meaning of the absence of human rights and the absence of peace!

Rabbi Sacks writes :

“Each year I dedicate a day - which is a day (Holocaust Memorial Day) - a day of universal reflection, on what it is to be human.

To which the answer is: “to be human is to recognise the humanity of others, of those who are not like me, who do not live as I live or believe as I believe - but who carry within them the mark of their Creator. Those who are not in my image are none the less in G-d's image. That is the vast proposition with which the Bible begins, and without it there cannot be a world of justice to the human condition.”

Judaism urges each human to see compassionately with the heart and as we journey through life - and with our daily acts of kindness ...we can help bring the peace of the Divine - the ultimate redemption ----- to a suffering world.

I conclude with a true story from 11th century Spain:

“Who is great – the one who turns an enemy into a friend!” from Ethics of the Fathers Pirkei Avot d'Rabbi Nathan

Samuel ibn Nagrela, known in Hebrew as Sh'muel HaLevi ben Yosef HaNagid and in Arabic as: Abu Işhāq Ismā'īl bin an-Naghrīlah was a Talmudic scholar, grammarian, philologist, poet, warrior, and statesman, in 11th century Spain and the Vizier to the Berber King Badis al Muzafar of Granada. He was once cursed in the presence

of the King. The King commanded Samuel to punish the offender by cutting out the offender's tongue. The Jewish Vizier however treated his enemy kindly, whereupon the curses became blessings. When the King next noticed the offender he was astonished that Samuel had not carried out his command, and asked him why.

Samuel replied:

"Sire, I have torn out his angry tongue
... and given him instead a kind one!"

This presentation is based on the writings of many Rabbis: Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Rabbi David Rosen, the late Rabbi Dr Hertz (obm), the writings of many Chabad Rabbis and of other Chassidic dynasties. My appreciation to Rabbi Avital of Chabad ACT for checking my script.



Perspectives from the Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba Dr Pal Dhall

Sathya Sai Organisation is a multi-faith Organisation. The point of view that I will make, I hope, will embrace all the faiths. All faiths have the same aspirations, the same calling and that is to build an equitable society, a peaceful world, a sustainable future for the generations to come irrespective of the race, religion, cast or creed.

Multi-faith vision is one of a world in which universal human rights are enshrined in law and ensured through proper legal channels of enforcement. At present the Declaration of Human Rights is not universally enforceable through a system of courts. It is an aspirational statement, no more. Powerful countries flagrantly ignore violations of human rights as do countries which uphold legal systems based on religion or political ideology. In most countries the state laws override human rights in the interests of national security.

Sathya Sai Baba's teachings are more directly focussed on individual and global peace than on human rights. He addresses the question of human rights at the level of human heart and mind. It is here that injustice, war, terrorism are born and it is here that we have to tackle these. Human rights and peace both are ensured if his philosophy of love and right conduct is followed.

He regards every individual as a living temple of God. Peace, love and justice are inherent in the divine human nature. Each one of us has the means to dive deep into the ocean of peace within and draw the invaluable pearl of bliss, love, right conduct, non-violence and truth. He gives equal status to every human being, rich or poor, child or adult, black or white, male or female – all are potentially divine, all have the same rights and all can access Divinity through personal spiritual practices. Since we can confirm the truth of this statement by our own spiritual experience it is more than merely aspirational; it is the spiritual truth. He regards society as an expression of Divinity and our personal spiritual practices have not so much to do with rituals of the various religions as developing a universal outlook based on an understanding that Divinity is immanent in everything, that all is divine.

In building a more equitable and peaceful society Sai Baba has a triple approach: first an educational reform, second a social reform and third an institutional reform. The system of education that he established combines normal education with spirituality. This is to build a human infrastructure of spiritually awakened individuals who practise his teachings and who are change agents for their communities. Human Values Education fosters personal transformation and peace and this is the way to societal peace. Personal peace overcomes prejudice, injustice and intolerance. It establishes a universal outlook, an elevated universal consciousness that promote unity, brotherhood and affirmative actions for the welfare of our own society as much as for entire humanity. His system of education tackles war, injustice and violations of human rights where war, injustice and violations of human rights are born i.e. in the human heart and human mind. This system of education is now being introduced in more than a hundred countries

We cannot have global peace when there is hunger, poverty and disenfranchised communities. Moved by the degradation of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, Sai Baba started initiatives of uplift for the communities that are less privileged. In this the focus is on provision of clean water, nourishing food, establishing homes and other essentials for a life of dignity. Again this is being implemented wherever there is Sai Organisation and that is in more than a hundred countries.

Under institutional reform his first focus was on meeting with needs of health and medicine in many countries. He strongly advocated the three principles: first, of high quality free education that combines the secular and the spiritual, second a social reform to ensure equality and justice and third an institutional reform of all systems of governance, especially access to free high quality medicine and health care.

We are far from solving the current problems of peace and human rights. We are living in a global village where poverty, violation of human rights and war affect all of us. But we are also living at the dawn of a new civilisation in which spirituality will once again claim its rightful place, this time not in a tribal and limited sense, but in a universal sense. We need to come together as faith communities develop and strongly advocate a vision of peace, equity and love to ensure peace and dignity for ever into the future. Let us, the faith communities evolve a globalised culture of spirituality, of human dignity and human rights. This will be a good counter to injustices, violations of human rights and wars perpetuated by poverty, exploitation and vested economic interest of powerful countries and multinationals. If our advocacy harnesses the hearts and minds of our constituents then we can create a climate of opinion to get Governments, multinationals, economic systems, politicians and others to get behind a new social contract, a new legal system.

We need to develop an International Bill of Rights, a new understanding of social contract strongly advocated by all faiths and based on universal philosophy of love and peace to ensure decent human future. The accent is on a new legal system not on managing the problems caused by the current system.



A Perspective from the Sikh Faith **Manjit Singh Gilhotra**

It is well known that many wars have been fought in the past in the name of religion. Even today religion continues to be exploited by self-seeking individuals and self-righteous groups to disseminate hatred and ill will against others. This is really unfortunate because religion is meant to spread peace and goodwill through universal love. Countless efforts have been made by individuals and organisations all over the world to promote peace but somehow it still eludes us. So can we do something to advance the cause of global peace? The answer has to be “Yes, we can” as we can’t afford to give up in sheer frustration.

A simple approach that may prove to be effective is by beginning with our own self. Let us ask ourselves: Am I at peace with myself? It’s a big question. In order to answer it, we have to break it into smaller bits of introspection: Do any of my words or actions hurt others or cause conflict? Do I have a desire to dominate others? Do I want to convert others to my faith by coercion or temptation? Do I hate people because of their skin colour or race? Do I dislike somebody because he or she doesn’t agree with me on some issue? Are my actions motivated by lust, anger, greed, undue attachment or arrogance? If the answer to any of these questions is ‘yes’, then I am not at peace with myself.

The importance of being “at peace with ourselves” and “cultivating a spirituality which manifests itself in action” was rightly emphasized by UNESCO’s ‘Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace’ (Barcelona, December 1994).

To be at peace with myself, I must, first of all, engage in battle with my own mind. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, affirms that by conquering our own mind we can win over the whole world (SGGS, 6). Those who fight with their mind are the greatest warriors, says the third Guru (SGGS, 1099) and the fifth Guru reiterates that one who removes evil from one’s mind sees the whole world as friendly (SGGS, 266). As long as we keep thinking in terms of friends and foes, our mind cannot be at peace (SGGS, 278). Self-righteous egoism is the greatest enemy of peace. He who eliminates egoism attains salvation while alive, says Guru Nanak (SGGS, 1009).

Once we eliminate self-conceit from our minds, we find it easy to treat others as equals. “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”, proclaims the first article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 10th of December, 1948. Human Rights is a relatively modern concept which has arisen as a result of the spread of education along with socio-economic changes in the world during the last century. From a secular point of view, violation of human rights is a social evil and a crime against humanity. From a theological point of view, violation of human rights is disobedience of the Divine Commands. As Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Master, says, “Now the Benevolent Lord’s command has been issued. None shall cause pain to others. All shall live in peace as this is the Kingdom of Compassion” (SGGS, 74). According to Sikh Faith, it is God’s Will that all human beings enjoy equal rights and live in peace. The Sikh prayer always ends with words seeking God’s Grace for the welfare of all: ‘tayray bhanay sarbat da bhala’.

Emphasizing the fundamental human right to equality, Guru Nanak denounced the caste system based on birth: Nobility of caste and honour is determined by one's deeds, he said (SGGS, 1330). Similarly he condemned the unequal treatment of women in society: Why consider her inferior when she gives birth to the greatest? (SGGS, 473). He raised his voice against Babar's invasion of India (SGGS, 360, 722) and even protested to God saying: there has been so much bloodshed and suffering; did it not evoke your compassion? (SGGS, 360).

The succeeding Gurus continued to spread his message of universal love and equality as well as his protest against injustice and oppression. The whole human race is made of the same clay; God, the Potter, has moulded it into numerous forms, said the third Guru (SGGS, 1127-28). Recognise all humankind as one race, proclaimed Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Master.

The fifth and the ninth Gurus sacrificed their lives to protest against religious persecution and defend the human right to freedom of faith, a right which is now enshrined in Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The tenth Guru created the Order of Khalsa, an army of saint soldiers, to fight against tyranny and protect the oppressed. He lost two of his sons in battle while the two younger sons were bricked alive for refusing to give up their faith under coercion. Thus the Sikh Gurus taught their followers not only by precept but also by personal example how to fight for peace and human rights.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that we can make a meaningful contribution towards promoting global peace and human rights only if we give up our egoism, recognise the whole human race as one, and work unitedly towards achieving our common goals.



Perspectives from Sukyo Mahikari Spiritual Faith Paul Taylor

The following teaching from the founder of Sukyo Mahikari, Sukuinushi Sama, is entitled: "The Foundation For a World Peace Movement - How A Loving Innermost Attitude Can Help Establish World Peace".

We learn that the realm of spirit is a realm of innermost attitude and thought. One of the secrets of the structure of the universe is that everything communicates through vibrations. Even though these vibrations are invisible to us, they are transmitted directly to the realm of divine spirits.

The vibrations of our innermost attitude influence the spiritual realm at every moment. They accumulate and become either spiritual impurities or a cause for us to receive blessings from God. Negative vibrations from the heart, such as judgmental thoughts, hatred and jealousy reach negative deities and develop into negative desires. On the contrary, when we love God and others, we develop an innermost attitude of altruistic love that enables us to harmonise with the Will of the Creator God.

If the number of people who are in harmony with God's great love increases, then

spiritual waves of hatred and jealousy will cease to exist. This, in turn, will help to bring about world peace. No matter how polite we may be on the surface, we will never be able to establish world peace as long as our innermost attitude is one of enmity.

When people have an innermost attitude of love, they are in harmony with the loving Will of God, and this helps to bring about an increase in the number of people who have loving compassion for others. Furthermore, the vibrations generated by their love travel far and wide and help to promote peace in the world.

Although invisible, people's innermost thoughts travel all over the world just like radio waves from a broadcast station. Unfortunately, today many people are generating vibrations of hatred and jealousy that could easily lead to conflict. They think of their fellow human beings as enemies. They say things that sound good, but behind the scenes they are building up ammunition. The vibrations of these innermost attitudes are travelling around the world, keeping real peace forever out of reach. We may succeed in setting up all the outward trappings of peace, but it won't be the real thing. That is what is so horrifying.

We need to change the focus of our love from ourselves to others. Once we awaken to the need to love others altruistically, we should do all that we can to manifest love toward those around us. In fact, loving others should become second nature for us. This means that loving our neighbour's children should become just as natural for us as loving our own children. To rework a well-known saying of Jesus, "Love your neighbour's children as your own."

Once we achieve this, we will find that our neighbour will come to love our children as much as we do. The selfless love of others can serve as the foundation of a world peace movement.



**“ How can we contribute to Global Peace and Human Rights?
Perspectives from Spiritual Faith Traditions”
Summation and Conclusion
Rev. Professor James Haire AM**

I wish to make six points.

1. It is very clear that all the religions, as we have seen demonstrated today, have very strong aspirations to produce peace and support human rights. This is an aspiration.

2. For some of them the individual is central, particularly in Western societies. Human rights for these societies are based on individual human rights. For other societies, particularly in Asia and Africa, human rights must be seen in communal terms, where the rights of the community take precedence over the rights of the individual. This has produced a constant debate in the United Nations as to whether individual human rights or communal human rights should take precedence. Indeed, societies which promote individual human rights as primary accuse societies which promote communal rights as primary as simply creating a camouflage for dictatorships.

3. Often the ideals of creating peace and promoting human rights do not translate into reality. All religious groups have failed at times in these areas. In the Christian tradition for example at the time of the Reformation all of the various denominations engaged in oppressing other Christians. The only group who did not were the Baptists, and that was simply because they never got a chance. In the face of these realities it is very important for all religions to have the ability to recognise their shortcomings (confession) and to seek forgiveness. This concept of forgiveness has at times been lacking.

4. Governments have very limited abilities in the relationship between human rights and religion. Particularly insecure governments (that is, governments with small or no majorities in democracies or governments which feel insecure in other situations) often have great difficulty in championing human rights, although societies with a strong legal history are able to control existing human rights. This means that it is the responsibility of citizens to promote human rights in developing areas, while the law takes care of established human rights.

5. A major difficulty for religions is the little word “and”. Religion is often mixed up with other factors, so that we get religion and ethnic identity or religion and political power or religion and class privilege. Where two factors come together as above then human rights tend to be denied. Here religion has to be prepared to discard the “and” in order to be faithful to itself.

6. Religion must of its nature be optimistic about future peace and human rights. It best expresses this optimism through confession, seeking forgiveness and constantly renewing itself. It is in this optimism that it makes its biggest contribution to peace and international human rights.

Vote of Thanks **Harry Oppermann**

On behalf of the Canberra Interfaith Forum, it is my pleasant duty to offer our sincere thanks to Roslyn Brown, Chair of United Ngunnawal Elders Council for her ‘Welcome to Country’ address, Mr Nick Manikis, Director of the ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs for the Opening Remarks as well as his interest in the entire symposium, Reverend Professor James Haire for the Summation and Concluding Remarks and Ms Margaret Roberts and the staff of the ACCC for all their administrative support. I would also like to thank Dean SahuKhan, Chair of the CIF, his team of dedicated representatives of various faiths and all the volunteers who assisted in organising this Symposium. Thanks are also due to Theodora Volti, Irene Costetsou, Tikis Kipouros, Faramarz Shakibaei and Alexei Gorbatov, for providing music, kindly organised by the Baha’i community.

During question time we heard an exhortation from a participant, to act upon the information in a flyer on each seat outlining the incarceration of the Ayatollah Boroujerdi for claiming the right under the UN Declaration of Human Rights: “to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”.

In conclusion I would like to recall the selflessness and compassion of the citizens of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a town of French Protestants during World War 11, who hid 5000 Jews and saved them from death. One of those hidden was one of the greatest French writers and philosophers of the 20th century Albert Camus. In 1997 the previous French President Chirac visited this town of Chambon after a gap of more than 50 years to honour these churchgoers and gave an important address; the first Presidential act recognising this feat of bravery and act of human compassion for which the pastor and each family of his church could have paid with their lives.

President Chirac put this act down to the motto of the French Republic: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

Pierre Sauvage who made a film about this town where he was hidden as a four year old, disagreed strongly. Under the motto of the French republic 'Liberty Equality and Fraternity' 27,000 Jewish children were sent off by train to be murdered..

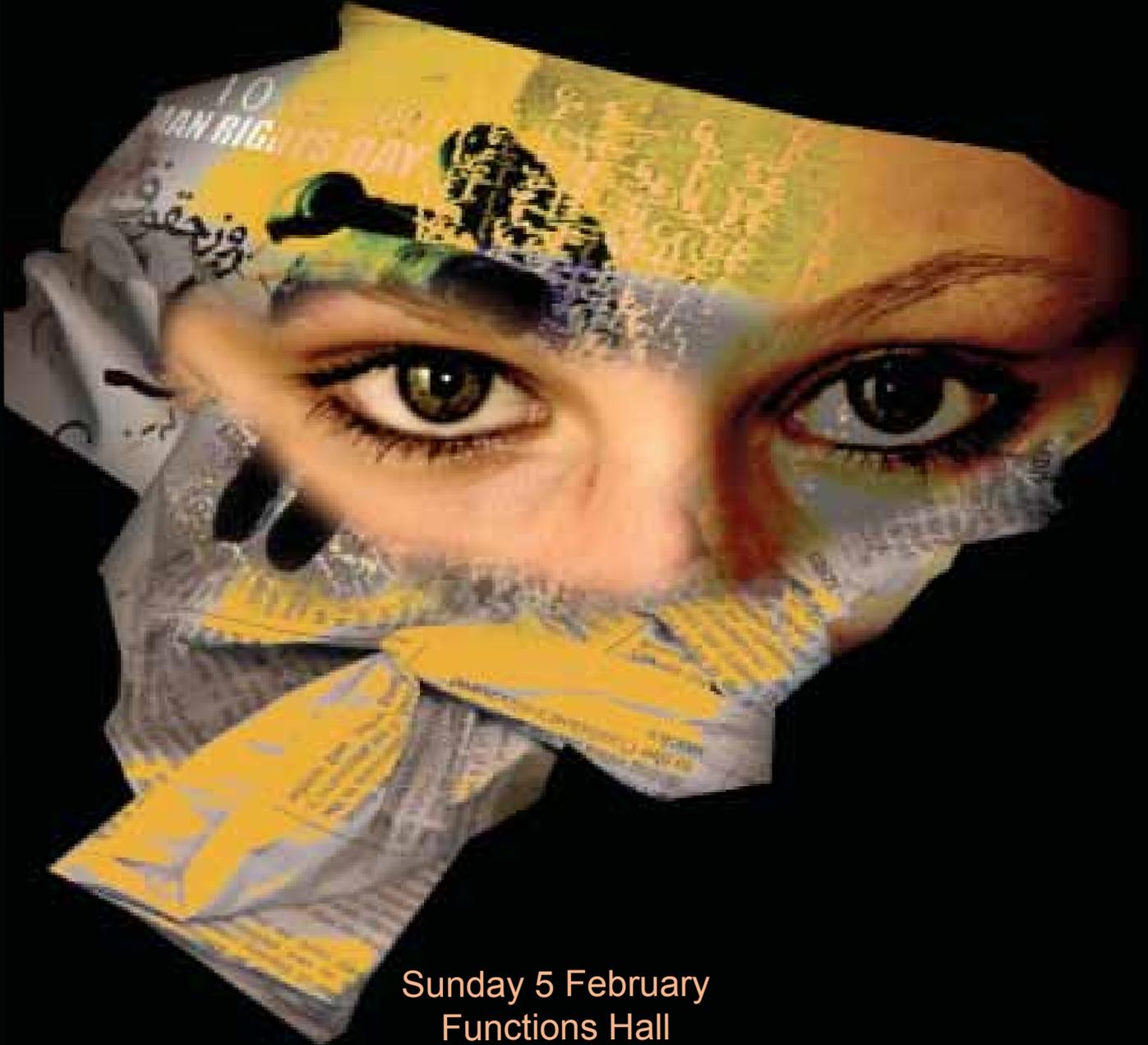
Being a secular state the President it seemed, was reluctant to recognise that what motivated these French Protestants was a phrase from the Jewish Biblical texts, adopted by Christians and enacted by this community in their hearts and with their deeds.

It was writ large at the entrance to their house of worship:

LOVE ONE ANOTHER !

Canberra Interfaith Forum invites you to a Symposium

How Can We Contribute to Global Peace & Human Rights? Perspectives from Spiritual Faith Traditions



Sunday 5 February
Functions Hall

Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
15 Blackall Street, Barton, 2.00pm - 5.00pm

Refreshments will be provided (RSVP by 31 January for catering purposes)
Further Information: Harry (Tel: 0425 224 445 Email: harryo46@hotmail.com)
Dean (Tel: 0411031324 Email: dean.sahukhan@act.gov.au)

Canberra Interfaith Forum (CIF) Application for Admission to / Renewal of Membership

Individual

Organisation

Individual Membership Information:

Full Name
Address Postcode
Phone Email

Organisational Membership Information:

Organisation Name
Community
Address Postcode
Phone Email

Standard Joining fee: \$5

Annual subscription: Individual Membership \$10 Organisational Membership \$100

Signature of applicant Date

Please complete and submit to the Treasurer, Canberra Interfaith Forum, by hand or post to
Canberra Interfaith Forum, PO Box 3900, Weston Creek ACT 2611.

For CIF Use Only:

Received Joining Fee:

Received Application / Renewal Fee:

Signature of Treasurer

Date

Introducing the ENVIRONMENT MEDITATION AND HEALING GARDEN



The site

**Benefits to the
Community**

The Main purposes

- Promote environmental protection and sustainable living in Canberra;
- Encourage meditation on our environmental heritage, and caring for it;
- Enable Hospice visitors to experience calm and harmony in nature;
- Promote mental/spiritual healing and multicultural reconciliation;
- Strengthen interfaith and multicultural links among all spiritual traditions.

The site is about one hectare at the eastern end of Grevillea Park just east of Clare Holland House (ACT Hospice) and the cycle track as it loops above the Hospice.

The Garden was established in March 2011 with planting of around 250 native trees and shrubs by a working party of volunteers from the Canberra Interfaith Forum (CIF) and some co-operating organisations/ individuals e.g. Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, ACT Palliative Care Inc., Little Company of Mary, the ACT Mental Health Foundation and the Mental Health Community Coalition. The shrubs were specially selected to provide habitat and attraction for natural birds.

The Garden was formally launched by Ms Mary Porter MLA, representing the ACT Chief Minister, on 20 May 2011.

Some large public meetings have been held in the garden site. CIF would like to invite other organisations to use the site, possibly jointly with CIF, as a meeting place particularly on environmental or multicultural issues.

The Environment Meditation and Healing Garden

More details available from

Vernon Bailey (CIF): baileykv@pcug.org.au

COLLECTIVE WORKING PARTY OF VOLUNTEERS