

Religious Leaders Summit

Poverty, the environment and disarmament, for a sustainable peace were cited as main priorities in the final document drawn up by the 100 delegates at the Religious Leaders Summit in Canada. They were appealing not only to politicians, but to the commitment of people of faith.

Report from the Focolare movement (28/06/2010):
<http://www.focolare.org/articolo.php?codart=7340&lingua=EN>

In recent days, June 21-23, the Religious Leaders Summit was held in the state of Manitoba in Winnipeg, in central Canada. This meeting has become a tradition, always held before the G8 or G20 for political leaders. This year the Canadian Council of Churches took the initiative. A hundred delegates came from the Americas (Ecuador to Panama, from Brazil to Canada), Africa (Zambia, Rwanda, Kenya and South Africa), from different countries in Europe and Asia (Saudi Arabia, India and Japan).

Nearly all the world's major religious traditions were represented: Christians from many denominations, Buddhists, Shintoists, Muslims, Hindus and Bahais. But the followers from the traditional religions in America played a particularly important role, giving voice to their spirit and also to the plight of their peoples.

A very valuable innovation was the participation of 13 youth delegates which brought out a very positive and constructive tension between youthful idealism and life experience so typical of adults. New alternatives for the birth of tomorrow's world also lie in our ability to combine these two dimensions. The conscience of the young people emerged, that they have to take the initiative, as was pointed out by Kaur, a young Sikh student: "How can I ask others for a solution to problems if I'm not going to change?"

There was active involvement among the Christians by both the Focolare and the Sant'Egidio Community, who were committed to ensuring that the final message would truly represent the contribution that religions bring into the heart of society.

The final document, which came out from three days of intense debate, once again emphasizes the urgency of addressing three issues of growing priority for the planet and its inhabitants: poverty, the environment and a climate of disarmament for a truly sustainable peace. Leaders continued to insist that in a world that is increasingly interconnected at every level, it is necessary to listen to the voice of all. If the G8, now G20, has undoubtedly significant value, it nevertheless remains inconceivable that 172 other countries do not have a voice and are left unheard.

An important aspect is the presence of the spirit of the Golden Rule which marks the proposals that were presented, because "it is a basic principle common to all cultures and traditions of faith, and it calls for a collective common level of mutual caring for each other" This transversal collective interdependence is not limited to groups and communities, but also involves man's relationship with the planet. It is therefore essential, say the leaders of the faiths of the world, "to make bold decisions which are necessary for the care that the planet requires."

The message is not only a request or a set of expectations presented to policy makers. The protagonists of the Summit wanted to underscore the commitment of the delegates as people of faith to live the teachings of religions. The message, as proposed by Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, from the Armenian Apostolic Church, uses prophetic language, but it combines with this the personal commitment and the expression of desires that unite all men and women regardless of faith: eradicating poverty, caring for the planet and investing in peace.