



THE KATHMANDU DECLARATION ON DISARMAMENT FOR SHARED SECURITY

Kathmandu, Nepal | 11 July 2009

We young people came here to Kathmandu as leaders and activists from the world's religious traditions. We came not just to learn and to listen and to talk, but also to act. We gathered here for an International Summit of Religious Youth Leaders on Disarmament for Shared Security. We leave with the commitment to start a global disarmament campaign. Our campaign will have two pillars. The first is to ask governments to reduce military and weapons spending and refocus on development. The second is to advocate for the eradication of nuclear weapons.

The Summit was organized by the World Conference of *Religions for Peace*, the world's largest multi-religious organization accredited with the United Nations and headquartered in New York in partnership with the Religion and Peace Academy of Nepal. It was opened by His Excellency President Ram Baran Yadav. It brought together approximately 100 Nepali and 50 international religious and civil society leaders from 24 countries.*

It is significant that we met in Nepal. As His Excellency President Yadav reminded us at the opening of this summit, Nepal is the birth place of the Buddha, known to so many as the Prince of Peace. It is a country with a rich history of multi-religious harmony. Yet, in stark contrast to that heritage, armed violence is on the rise in Nepal. This violence threatens lives and deprives communities of the safety and stability needed to move forward in peace. Out of this context we have been inspired further in our commitment to address disarmament as an immediate priority.

As Youth we know that our peers are disproportionately the victims and combatants in armed violence. We came of age at the turn of a new millennium hearing promises of a new era of peace, of a global village in which we could all participate freely and without fear. Instead, in these first years of the millennium we have seen new wars, increased military budgets, continuous gun violence and growing fear and mistrust. We know that peace and development come only when we build trust and confront violence. The Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty was signed before we were born. Yet, as we reach adulthood, nuclear weapons are a continued and growing threat.

We identify the common link between all issues of disarmament as that of government expenditure on arms instead of development and peacebuilding. A key element of this peacebuilding must be regulation of the production and trade of armaments. Military spending in 2008 reached a new high, \$1.464 trillion, which is 10 times the amount estimated to be needed annually to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This occurs even as the global economy falters and the majority of the world's population continues to live in poverty.

The choice for military expenditure is usually explained as a choice *for* security. However, we want to communicate to world leaders that a choice to spend resources on weapons is a choice *against* true shared security. When our governments spend money on weapons development and not education they are taking away the potential for future security. When they spend money on buying new guns instead of clearing mine fields, they contribute to more unnecessary deaths. When they spend money to maintain large military industries instead of clearing national debts the world moves further from stability and security. We must change these out-of-balance priorities and shift the focus of our leaders from military spending on all types of arms to development that brings lasting peace.

The world's religious communities can be vital voices in advocating for this shift. Each possesses their spiritual traditions, moral heritages and the oldest and largest social networks. As active voices in our

* Afghanistan, Argentina, Cambodia, Canada, People's Republic of China, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Georgia, Greece, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and the United States.

individual religious communities, we can mobilize these networks and draw on the shared values of life and human dignity in our traditions to work for disarmament.

Our world is confronted with proliferation of nuclear weapons, continued use of cluster munitions, landmines and other conventional weapons. In the face of all of these threats we commit ourselves to challenging the continuous rise in military expenditures, the related neglect of development, and the misuse of religion in support of violence and war. We call on government leaders at all levels to reduce military spending, address the threat of nuclear and conventional weapons, and redirect resources to building secure and thriving communities. Leaders must develop methods of addressing perceived threats to security that do not rely on obtaining and developing more weapons. We also call on young people in Nepal and around the world to join us as we work towards peace.

Our actions will focus on education and advocacy. At the local level we will raise community awareness about military expenditure and the impact of weapons of all types. Bringing the voices of these communities to the global arena, we will join with the Religions for Peace network and partners such as Mayors for Peace and the International Peace Bureau to advocate with national and international decision makers. As milestones for our efforts we look to the March 2010 Global Nuclear Summit announced recently by President Obama of the United States review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in May of 2010 at the UN as well as the culmination of the MDGs in 2015.

Each of us will leave Nepal inspired by our time here to take concrete action from the local to the global level. Already with this summit the momentum has begun here in Nepal for work with Youth to reclaim their culture of peace from one of increasing violence. We commit ourselves to supporting the work of our Nepali sisters and brothers. Together we will shift the world's priorities away from weapons and to real sources of development, security and peace.