

A Proposal from People of Religion

To leaders of the Group of Eight

Kyoto/ Osaka, Japan

June 2008

This is the third communiqué from religious to political leadership since the G8 meetings began a decade ago.

Preamble: Living with the Earth: Messages from World Religions

As leaders and members of different religions, we met in Osaka and Kyoto for several days prior to the G8 leaders meeting. We addressed our shared concerns and commitments to face up to environmental dangers and disasters, to economic and social failures, and to political and moral crises. These disfigure our shared planet and too often divide what should be our interdependent human communities. We contemplated these issues in centuries-old shrines and temples, some of which are set within complexes of industrial achievement. But we also walked through a shelter where social workers and volunteers try to care of hundreds of jobless and homeless people who sleep on cardboard sheets or makeshift bunks. We described to each other situations of such prosperity and destitution around the world. Together we sought to commit ourselves to adopting more sustainable lifestyles, to share our riches more equitably, and to put into action our compassion for the victims of disasters natural and man-made, and injustices world-wide.

Our Commitment

There is a powerful symbolism in the venue of the G8 summit this year being Japan, at a moment when the degree of concern for our global environment has finally reached critical mass in global popular consciousness. This is because, notwithstanding recent industrializations in Asia, the dharmic, pantheistic and ancestor traditions of Eastern societies remain a practical tool for mobilization in defence of the environment in spite of recent histories of rupture and loss.

But common to all our religious traditions is the belief that justice and the preservation of human rights, including gender parity, must be given primacy. In the interests of mutual prosperity and co-existence, every possible measure should be taken to avert wars.

1 Living with Nature

The current global environmental crisis has so heightened fears around the world that many are considering sincerely whether we can survive on the Earth. Species diversity is being lost at a rate one thousand times faster than that in the era of dinosaur extinction. The note of emergency around climate change is heard from the joint science academies of the G8, who have said “A step-change in our response is needed, with action at global, national and local level. Local actors must be engaged in impact assessment and in identifying solutions”.¹

¹ (G8+5 joint Academies of Science statement *Climate Change Adaptation and the Transition to a Low Carbon Society*, 2008).

We therefore now commit our resources and mobilizing power to the transition to a low-carbon society, and the innovations which the just-held G8 Environment Ministers' Meeting in Kobe has declared will be necessary for all countries in their *lifestyle, production and consumption patterns, and social infrastructure* (Chair's Summary). These innovations will undergird the *technological* innovations which must be brought to bear. We shall seek to qualify materialism and consumerism, control the overloading of desire to the point of the destruction of nature, and reflect life's brilliance by moving the hearts of our followings to prayer for the happiness and flourishing of others, and the showing of mercy by the powerful.

2 **Ethnic and Religious Diversity: A Commitment**

The cosmos, as the divine creation, is decorated with the enormous beauty named "diversity". Diversity is most spectacularly expressed in ethnic and religious cultures. Therefore no authority, either religious or secular, is given any right to negate this sacred endowment. Throughout our history, humankind has repeated the same mistake, of annihilating diversity under the pattern of the strong oppressing the weak. Fortunately our modern sensibility now recognises this as inhumane, and contrary to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (celebrating its 60th anniversary this year). Yet we witness today in many instances, on every continent, situations of social and political oppression that totally violate the principle of due admiration for divine diversity — Tibet and Myanmar most recently. There are also cross-cutting issues such as promoting gender equity and closing the wealth gap. Rather than blaming others, however, we should feel profound pain at our own implication in these tragedies. To ignore tragic incidents in our global community is irresponsible, and ultimately denial of the divine. It then becomes clear what we have to do. In the spirit of optimism and countering any mood of despair, religious people commit themselves to be part of the solution, to pray and to act with compassion for all victims. We seek to be considered equal partners in the solution of these entangled problems.

3 **Africa: Reckoning with Poverty**

Africa continues to be plagued by neo-colonialism, reproducing various forms of poverty that in turn both create and compound the environmental and political problems. Africa's future can take either direction; its resource potential means it holds the key as the 'experimental' continent that could sway the future of the human race in the twenty-first century.

African poverty has been on the G8 agenda since 2005. Recently prime minister Fukuda of Japan received proposals stating that without education there can no economic development in Africa. And the Japanese Science Academy has submitted proposals to this G8 Summit concerning the importance of higher education to lifestyle changes for transitioning to a low-carbon society. Accordingly we religious leaders advocate the establishment of a Scholarship Foundation for wide-ranging mutual exchange of students between African and G8 nations, so as to contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives discussed in this G8 Summit.

This particular recommendation reflects the critical necessity of education in the development of global community. It is in complete accord with both the substance and

spirit of *Just Participation: A Call from Cologne*, the statement of our 2007 summit, with its emphasis on the Millennium Development Goals as an ongoing basis for conversation between global religious and political leaders.

Conclusion:

This proposal attaches a timeframe of a year, within which this forum will monitor progress under areas 1, 2 and 3 above. It will also scrutinize its own constituent bodies' progress in engaging and educating their followings, and produce a balance sheet by the time of the 2009 G8 Religious Leaders Summit in Canada.

In common with many today, we are concerned about "short-termism". The kinds of long-term responsibility and accountability by which we shall save our children's future are not yet devised anywhere. This is a matter for the urgent attention of all in authority, and all thinking citizens, in the mere year we have until the next round of these meetings, when we must appraise ruthlessly what we have achieved for our ailing world, in these times of planetary emergency.

All religions hold life to be sacred and interconnected. Human beings, at the highest level of consciousness in the chain of the life process, have a responsibility to look after and care for the weak, the vulnerable, the less fortunate. This compels us to ask of you that you reformulate our governments' policies to be fair to all life on Earth.

