

**FINAL DRAFT FOR A**  
**DECLARATION OF MONTSERRAT**  
**ON**  
**RELIGIONS AND THE BUILDING OF PEACE**



Misleading information on the origin of conflicts require a clear cut analysis of the relation between religious feelings and violence, in order to advance towards the building of peace through its prevention and pacific

resolution. Unless we carefully analyse and communicate this relationship, some media and many people in the world will continue to wrongly think and perceive that religion is often fuel for violence. Conflicts are mostly originated at the levels of power, resources and ideologies, but religion is often misused to stir them up.

In the year 1994, in the city of Barcelona, an important meeting of representatives of different faiths and religious organisations took place<sup>(1)</sup> and the participants unanimously concluded that, based on our common humanity, common vision and the shared values of fraternity, human solidarity and love, religions should never more be the origin of confrontation but of conciliation.

The dramatic and endless conflicts in the Middle East, as well as recent tragic developments in other parts of the world, require solutions prompted by the awareness, commitment and involvement of religious leaders and civil society, which must urge political will and action to the decision-makers. In this framework the imposition of a double standards policy by some countries is a threat to peace and stability and makes much more difficult the role of religions that are working for justice.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The 1994 Barcelona Declaration: Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace, UNESCO. [www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/declarations/religion.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/declarations/religion.pdf)

We are witnessing a growing deterioration of global governance, which is visible on the various global issues, from climate to finance, from law to social justice, from human rights to decent work. . Those threats to the individual have created a sense of lack of security at human level.



Religions, in moment of crisis, must provide hope and trust to human kind and keep values particularly relevant in an increasingly valueless economic and social world system.

Civil society based on universal human values has become a central player in addressing global issues, for another kind of governance.

It is therefore on an alliance of values that religions and civil society can act on political institutions, at local, national and international level, to provide hope, justice and progress.

As stated in the Alliance of Civilizations Report and others <sup>(2)</sup> we must enhance efforts to bridge the divides between religions and cultures through dialogue and concrete action, because religions and cultures are intertwined. We must overcome the misperceptions, stereotypes, biased language and concepts reproduced by the media and frequently echoed by irresponsible leadership. Religions must stay together to build a future where religions co-exist harmonically and work together for a common future. We must challenge attitudes that spread the appearance of links between religion and violence, extremism and even terrorism.

In this context, it is most urgent the need to promote action which can counteract the present situation and trends, based on force and imposition. We must encourage action–

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<sup>(2)</sup> Report of the UN High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations: [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org); Dialogue Among Civilizations Process, [www.unesco.org/dialogue](http://www.unesco.org/dialogue), Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace. Resolution by the UN General Assembly A/RES/61/221, [www.un.org/ga/61/](http://www.un.org/ga/61/) ; **Rio Declaration on Alliance of Civilizations, Interculturalism and Human Rights. Rio, December 2007. (Mendes)**

oriented behaviours and attitudes, and widely spread knowledge on the real root causes of the conflicts –including, when appropriate, the wrong use of religions and ideologies-. We must provide possible solutions to building peace in the minds of people, particularly in the minds of social and political actors as well as the mass media.



Therefore, assembled in the inspiring mountain and abbey of Montserrat, and within the framework of the year of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reconfirm our full endorsement of the principles enshrined in the Declaration, as well as in other international documents and agreements, that guarantee the right and full respect of freedom of religion and other beliefs, and encourage dialogue and interaction with people of other belongings and identities, being believers or not. In this respect, rapid and efficient encounter and sharing between representatives of religions, among them, and with national and international policy-makers, appears to be essential, specially to identify common values and standards to learn to live with our differences.

We underline the significance, nowadays, of identities which, leaving aside extremisms, become the strongest ground for an effective model of international coexistence.

We are convinced that a culture of dialogue, alliance, non-violence and peace must be built with full respect to the human rights, the UN Charter and the rule of law. Such a shared culture of peace needs to give creative expressions to the teaching of the world's religious traditions: we are all responsible for one another with a sense of otherness and brotherhood. In political terms, the only security that is practically possible and morally sound is “shared security”. We voice loudly our convinced support for all those committed to such a shared project.

We call on religious leaders, at all levels, from the highest hierarchies to the grassroots level, to enhance and exercise their crucial role as actors of peace and mutual understanding.

We call on the civil society the institutional actors and the media to work, hand in hand, to diligently and tirelessly, with resolve and imagination, to achieve and go beyond the Objectives of the Millennium and, in this way, accelerate the transition from the use of force to word and dialogue, from violence to intercultural and interfaith harmony, from clash to alliance, from an economy of war to an economy of global development, from a culture of war to a culture of peace, based on justice and freedom.

We appeal especially to the religious, educational, academic, scientific and artistic community as well as to the intellectual associations, and *think tanks*. Because of their very nature, they should become champions in the teaching and learning of human rights, tolerance, values and better gender balance.

We invite all cultural expressions, to participate in the building of an international architecture through intercultural dialogue which shall reinforce a shared culture of peace.

We call upon media to contribute to avoid wide spreading of stereotypes and biased images, and to promote better understanding between different cultures and religions.

We call on the political leadership, governments and international organizations – and particularly through an in-depth reformed United Nations system – to unite their efforts, guided by the “democratic principles”<sup>(3)</sup>, to face the challenges threatening human kind. We are convinced that if humans want, they can transform the world. As it is acknowledged by all religions, nothing is beyond the human creative distinctive capacity.

Montserrat, Barcelona, 10<sup>th</sup> of April of 2008.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Constitution of UNESCO, 1945