

Building Bridges: The Third Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue

Waitangi, Bay of Islands
29 – 31 May 2007

WAITANGI DECLARATION THIRD REGIONAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE ACTION PLAN

We, the participants in the Waitangi Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue - from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, gathered in Waitangi, New Zealand to "Build Bridges" on 29-31 May 2007.

This Dialogue builds on the commitments from the Yogyakarta Dialogue in December 2004 and the Cebu Dialogue in March 2006.

We welcome the statement made by New Zealand Prime Minister, Rt Hon Helen Clark, who, acknowledging the rich diversity in our region "where all the world's major religions are represented," called on "responsible nations and people of good will to build bridges across the divides" of our societies.

President of the Philippines, H.E. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, stated that "as co-sponsor of the Waitangi Interfaith Dialogue, the Philippines looked forward to creating deeper interfaith ties within the region as together we work towards building bridges for a culture of peace."

Foreign Minister of Australia, Hon Alexander Downer, noted that although "each faith may walk alternative paths to explore the human and the divine...this is a shared journey that demonstrates the diversity and openness of our societies."

New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rt Hon Winston Peters commented that never before had so many representatives from such a diversity of communities of faith gathered in Waitangi to create "greater mutual understanding and respect for each other."

Director-General for Information and Public Diplomacy of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Andri Hadi, representing Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Hassan Wirajuda, highlighted the role of regional dialogue in connecting religious leaders and faiths across the region and called for

bridges to be built at all levels of society. This Dialogue “has now taken root in history.”

We support their statements on the significance of interfaith activities and cooperation to enhance better understanding in our Asia Pacific region and to collectively address the challenges to peace in our region.

We express deep appreciation to the Government of New Zealand for hosting and co-sponsoring the Third Regional Interfaith Dialogue, which was preceded by the moving powhiri by Ngapuhi on the historic marae at Waitangi. We also express our appreciation to the Governments of Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines as co-sponsors of the Dialogue process.

We welcome the offer by the Government of Cambodia to co-host with Australia the meeting of the fourth Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue next year.

We call for an increased number of women delegates in subsequent Dialogues.

We encourage the participation of youth delegates in subsequent Dialogues.

We note and were encouraged by the national reports on the wide range of interfaith initiatives building on the commitments made during the Cebu Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation.

We acknowledge the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation

- in the building of bridges between faith communities and between them and governments;
- in learning about each other through public education, religious education and media; and
- in the promotion of regional peace and achieving security.

We welcomed the opportunity to learn about the discussion at the Auckland Symposium on 23-24 May 2007 on the Alliance of Civilizations Report and to comment on the Report's recommendations.

We agree to adopt the following Plan of Action:

PLAN OF ACTION

Building Bridges

- We ask that faith groups and civil society develop partnerships with each other and with governments to work for social and economic justice, minority empowerment and reconciliation among conflicting groups within society.

- We recommend that faith leaders and governments establish and facilitate faith and interfaith points of contact at the local and national levels.
- We endorse further exchanges between people (e.g. youth, students, teachers, religious leaders, academics) of different faiths, within and between countries, and at the grassroots communal levels.
- We endorse the strengthening of intra-faith dialogue and call for intra-faith dialogue sessions to become a formal part of the Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue process.
- We encourage dissemination of information about interfaith activities to address concerns about these activities in some religious communities.
- We recommend that a regional database, accessible on the internet, be established identifying the range of local, national and regional religious activities in every region, including faith and interfaith groups, faith-based organisations, charities and NGOs, and best practices of interfaith activities.
- We recommend that faith leaders and governments explore the establishment of an Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue network for the exchange of information about interfaith projects.
- We encourage public and private donors to expand funding for interfaith activities and community development.

Education

- We support education about religions in the public curricula of all schools, including religious schools.
- We encourage governments in the region to ensure through curriculum review that curricula meet guidelines for fairness, accuracy, and balance in discussing religious beliefs and that they do not denigrate any faith or its adherents.
- We recommend that schools should promote non-formal interfaith education such as community service, twinning projects and community immersion.
- We request interested governments to implement pilot projects in religious education to be trialled in more than one country in the region.
- We encourage religious leaders, education policy makers, and interfaith civic organizations to work together to develop consensus guidelines for teaching about religions.
- We support the inclusion of education about religions in the training of faith leaders.
- We call for support for research projects exploring any nexus between religion and conflict; perceptions of security among different faith groups; and religious education in the region.

Media

- We advocate the implementation of media literacy programmes in schools, to help develop a discerning and critical approach to news coverage about religions by media consumers.
- We call for leaders in academia, religion, politics, civil society, and culture to generate media content that help to deepen inter-cultural understanding, and promote community values.
- We call on the media to include the coverage of religion in their voluntary codes of conduct.
- We recommend journalist exchange programmes around the region.

Alliance of Civilisations Report

Delegates welcomed the Alliance of Civilizations Report to the UN Secretary General. A plenary session introduced both the Alliance of Civilisations Report and Recommendations and a report-back on the Auckland Symposium. The workshops were invited to discuss the recommendations and their relevance to the Asia-Pacific region. A number of the recommendations have been incorporated in the Waitangi Declaration above.

Waitangi, New Zealand
31 May 2007