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## ***Religions for Peace World Assembly Unites Religious Leaders***

***-- Religious Communities Must Confront Violence  
in All its Forms --***

(KYOTO, JAPAN, 29 August 2006) – The Eighth World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* – which began with masterful swipes from a Japanese calligrapher’s brush across the convocation’s massive banner -- concluded today with 800 delegates from more than 100 countries and all major religious traditions endorsing the Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security.

“At a time when religion is being hijacked by extremists, the religious leaders gathered in Kyoto demonstrate for all the world the power of religious communities to illuminate the path to peace when they work together,” said Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*. “The Kyoto Declaration offers a new vision of shared security that properly places religious communities at the center of efforts to confront violence in all its forms.”

The Declaration issues a multi-religious call to action, urging participants to continue the work of the World Assembly:

“As people of religious conviction, we hold the responsibility to confront violence within our own communities whenever religion is misused as a justification or excuse for violence. Religious

communities need to express their opposition whenever religion and its sacred principles are distorted in the service of violence.”

Assembly delegates adopted the Declaration’s twenty recommendations for religious leaders, governments, international organizations and businesses to address violence and advance shared security through advocacy, education and partnerships with, and among, religious communities.

Religious leaders from Iraq, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Sudan illustrated the Assembly’s unique capacity to bring together delegates from zones of conflict. Today, religious leaders from those nations presented statements to the Assembly, invoking the positive and necessary role religious communities must play in transforming conflicts and building peace.

Shi’ite, Sunni and Kurdish religious leaders from Iraq chose to meet during the Assembly after having bypassed UN-sponsored and other established forums for negotiation. Speaking in a single voice through its chosen representative, Sheikh Seyed Saleh Mohammed Saleh Al-Haidari, Imam of the Al-Khelani Mosque in Baghdad and the Iraqi Government’s Minister of Shi’ite Religious Affairs, the thirteen members of the Iraqi delegation stated: “We have talked not behind curtains and not behind walls but we have talked like normal people. We have talked with boldness and with courage and with confidence. We are going on this path, God willing, and will reach a green line of good for all of Iraq.”

The World Assembly’s sessions also highlighted the multi-religious efforts of youth and women of faith. More than 400 participants from 65 countries concluded the *Religions for Peace Women’s Assembly* on August 25 with a Declaration affirming, “women of faith make available strength and hope when all seems hopeless.” The *Religions for Peace Youth Assembly* from August 21 to 25 produced its own Declaration, proclaiming: “We choose hope because that is the only way forward.”

World Assembly delegates included Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Shinto, Zoroastrian and Indigenous leaders. Kyoto was the site of the first World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* in 1970.

***Religions for Peace, a global network of inter-religious councils and affiliated groups, harnesses the power of cooperation among the world’s religious communities to transform conflict, build peace, and advance sustainable development. Founded in 1970 as an international, non-sectarian organization, Religions for Peace is now the largest coalition of the world’s religious communities.***

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