



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Laurel Hart, *Religions for Peace*

Tel: +080-3479-2292 (Japan, through 8/29)

Tel: +212-687-2163

lhart@wcrp.org

Kim Assalone, *Brodeur for Religions for Peace*

Tel: +212-771-3632

kassalone@brodeur.com

**WORLD RELIGIOUS LEADERS
REJECT VIOLENCE AND “HIJACKING OF RELIGION”
AT *RELIGIONS FOR PEACE* WORLD ASSEMBLY**

– Assembly Convenes 800 Religious Leaders from all Major Faith Traditions –

– Assembly Brings Together Religious Leaders from Zones of Conflict –

(KYOTO, JAPAN, August 26, 2006) – More than 800 senior religious leaders from every region of the world and all major faith traditions are convening today to reject violence and the “hijacking of religion” at the *Religions for Peace* World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will welcome the religious leaders at the Assembly opening ceremony today.

“The *Religions for Peace* World Assembly is a unique opportunity for religious leaders of all faith traditions to come together to reject the hijacking of religion,” said Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*. “Whenever extremists attempt to hijack religion for violent ends, whenever politicians seek to exploit sectarian differences, and whenever the press mischaracterizes our faith traditions, people of faith, religious communities and religious leaders must stand up, speak out and take action. Religious communities are gathering at a critical time because religion has been hijacked by extremists, politicians and the media.”

In his message to the *Religions for Peace* Assembly, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote, “By standing together in multi-religious alliances, you are well-placed to be effective agents for peace. By cooperating within the *Religions for Peace* networks, your effort is multiplied, and your impact in your communities magnified.”

-more-

The *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly (August 26-29, 2006, Kyoto, Japan) is the world's largest and most diverse multi-religious assembly. Delegates come from the *Religions for Peace* network of more than 70 national and regional affiliated inter-religious councils and groups, and include Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Shinto, Zoroastrian and Indigenous leaders. Guests include representatives of governments, development agencies and civil society. Assembly participants include:

- HE Mohammad Khatami, Former President of Iran;
- Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF;
- HE Kjell Magne Bondevik, Former Prime Minister of Norway;
- HE Cardinal Julio Terrazas, Archbishop of Santa Cruz, Bolivia;
- HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, Moderator, *Religions for Peace*; and
- Chief Rabbi David Rosen, President, International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultations, Israel.

The Assembly brings together religious leaders from zones of conflict -- among them Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon, the Congo and Sudan -- to begin the process of healing by finding common moral ground to end the violence that is taking place in religion's name. The Assembly, for example, provides an opportunity for meaningful discussion of common concerns among Iraqi Shia, Sunni and Christian religious leaders.

The Assembly will articulate a new vision of "shared security" in which religious communities play a central role. Assembly participants will also build partnerships among religious communities and between religious communities and other groups to combat chronic poverty, hunger and disease.

Assembly participants will share the concrete experiences of religious communities transforming conflict, building peace and advancing sustainable development. For example, 690 faith-based organizations in six African countries collectively have assisted over 150,000 orphans and vulnerable children impacted by HIV/AIDS.

The *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly returns to Kyoto, site of the historic first World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* in 1970. Since then, *Religions for Peace* World Assemblies in Louvain, Belgium (1974), Princeton, New Jersey, USA (1979), Nairobi, Kenya (1984), Melbourne, Australia (1989), Rome, Italy (1994) and Amman, Jordan (1999), have brought the world's religious communities together to address the critical global challenges of our time from a faith perspective.

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.