

VIII

CONGRESS OF THE LEADERS OF WORLD
AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS



«Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future»

ASTANA, 2026

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TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS
“DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS:
SYNERGY FOR THE FUTURE”**

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OPENING OF THE VIII CONGRESS OF THE LEADERS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS



SPEECH BY KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN



Distinguished spiritual leaders, esteemed guests!

First of all, welcome to Kazakhstan!

Today, here in Astana, the most respected spiritual leaders of the world have gathered. This is a great honor and a high privilege for us.

At present, challenges are growing across the globe, and the international situation is becoming increasingly tense. As a result, various conflicts are multiplying. This turbulent period is not easy for anyone. Unfortunately, the nature and character of war are becoming increasingly pronounced. Nevertheless, we must draw the right lessons from the past and strive for constructive and open dialogue. There is no alternative to negotiations. In this regard, today's Congress has exceptional significance. Religious leaders can rightly be called Ambassadors of



Peace, upholding human values. You have come together for the sake of a common purpose and are expressing your readiness to unite the world community around noble goals. I express my sincere gratitude to all of you.

I would like to express my special gratitude to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' for taking part in this forum. In Kazakhstan, Your Holiness, you are sincerely respected for your invaluable contribution to strengthening interfaith harmony and religious tolerance both in our society and in a much broader geographic space. Your participation in the Congress will undoubtedly enrich the forthcoming dialogue of leaders of traditional religions and will become an important factor contributing to the desired success of the Forum.

Today, a special delegation headed by Sheikh Mohamed Abdelrahman Eldweny, Deputy Grand Imam of the ancient Al-Azhar Islamic University, has arrived to join our gathering. Since the very foundation of the Congress, Al-Azhar University has continuously supported us. We express our deep gratitude. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar is recognized worldwide as one of the prominent thinkers of modern Islamic civilization, Kazakhstan considers His Eminence Dr. Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb a friend.

Among our distinguished guests is also the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Sheikh Mohammed Al-Issa. It is well known that the Muslim World League is an important international organization calling all humanity to goodness.

The Congress is being attended by the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel Kalman Ber and the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel David Yossef.

It is no secret that the situation in the Middle East is extremely difficult today. Your participation in this gathering demonstrates a sincere commitment to open dialogue, peace, and reconciliation. We value this highly.

I also wish to express special appreciation to His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Taking this opportunity, I extend deep gratitude to the United Nations leadership, other organizations, politicians, and experts for supporting the work of the Congress.

I would also like to thank Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, the High Representative for the UN Alliance of Civilizations, who is attending the Congress as an honored guest.

Additionally, I express my appreciation to the delegates of the special session on safeguarding religious sites and symbols, as well as to the participants of the Young Religious Leaders Forum and the experts' roundtable. I wish you productive work. Such events undoubtedly contribute to the continuity of spiritual diplomacy.



When speaking about the importance of interfaith dialogue, it is impossible not to mention the late Pope Francis. In 2022, he made a special visit to Astana and participated in the VII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. That historic visit undeniably strengthened the global significance of our forum.

We also express our sincere gratitude to His Holiness Pope Leo XIV for supporting the work of the Congress. We hold high hopes for his initiatives aimed at strengthening interfaith harmony.

Distinguished participants of the Session!

From its inception, the Congress has served as a unique platform for open discussion of the key challenges of our time. In accordance with your recommendations, the Secretariat has developed and begun implementing the Congress Development Concept until 2033.

The document outlines our shared goals: ensuring peace, fostering constructive coexistence, and establishing moral guidelines acceptable to all. These goals are particularly important against the backdrop of unprecedented geopolitical tensions. It is also noteworthy that the final declarations of the Congress are disseminated as official documents at the UN General Assemblies. I hope the 80th anniversary session will be no exception.

Historically, the territory of Kazakhstan has been a crossroads of cultures and a place of mutual enrichment among civilizations. On Kazakh soil, all major world religions and confessions have succeeded one another and coexisted peacefully. In modern Kazakhstan, we make every effort to preserve and develop these traditions.

Our country has accumulated rich experience in strengthening interethnic and interreligious harmony. At the heart of Kazakhstan's model of ethnic and religious tolerance is the universal principle of "Unity in Diversity". This approach is fully embodied in the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, a truly unique institution even by global standards.

Historically established traditions – tolerance, solidarity, and openness – are reflected today in Kazakhstan's peaceful and measured foreign policy, which is based on the principles of trust, dialogue, and cooperation. I am convinced that these universal values and principles are of great importance to all nations and states.

Yesterday, during the Congress, a special session of the UN Alliance of Civilizations took place, dedicated to the protection of religious sites. I wish to express my deep gratitude to the High Representative of the Alliance, Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, for his steadfast commitment to promoting the global humanitarian agenda.



By protecting religious sanctuaries and symbols, we are, in essence, safeguarding the very foundation of human civilization. Kazakhstan hosts nearly 4,000 religious associations representing 18 different confessions. We carefully preserve sacred sites such as the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, ancient and modern mosques, Orthodox and Catholic churches, the Buddhist center in Almaty, as well as synagogues including Beit Rachel Chabad Lubavitch. Our state ensures the protection of all sacred sites significant to believers. I would also like to mention the Beket-Ata underground mosque in Mangystau, the Tamgaly-Tas petroglyphs on the Ili River, the resting place of Rabbi Levi-Yitzhak Schneerson in Almaty, and Lake Maryamkol in northern Kazakhstan, highly revered by Catholics.

Sacred sites unite people of different faiths, preserving generational connections and spiritual continuity. For us, these are not merely architectural or historical monuments, but symbols of peace, mutual respect, and the cultural diversity of our people.

Since the previous Congress, extremely negative trends have intensified globally, which some politicians and experts have already called a civilizational crisis. As Kipling said: “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”. On the surface, considering recent events in some major states, this conclusion might seem plausible. But we must never underestimate the political factor – or, in other words, the governance practices of ruling authorities. Their policies are far from always rational or constructive in terms of developing peaceful dialogue and cultural, religious, and ideological cooperation.

A particularly concerning trend is the growing intertwining of ultranationalism and patriotism, which disorients young people. Additionally, we observe an alarming clash between right-conservative and liberal ideologies, leading to political destabilization in several countries.

In Kazakhstan, all these – essentially global – issues are given high priority and lie at the heart of our domestic policy. I consider it crucial to implement policies of interethnic, interreligious, and multinational tolerance and mutual respect. Any attempts to undermine or discredit such a policy of unity in diversity, including the free use of languages of peoples permanently residing in our country in public service and public spaces, are suppressed and will receive due legal assessment under the Law and Order concept.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has been consistently carrying out large-scale transformations aimed at creating a more resilient, open, and just political system. Human rights protection has been significantly strengthened: the Constitutional Court was established, the Ombudsman institution was reinforced, and a number of special laws and decrees were adopted.



The 2022 constitutional reform, supported by the majority of citizens in a nationwide referendum, became the culmination of political transformations. We prioritized the principle of “Strong President – Influential Parliament – Accountable Government”. The introduction of a single seven-year presidential term, as well as the prohibition of close relatives of the Head of State from holding political office, became both legal and political innovations.

Moreover, in my recent Address to the Nation, I proposed creating a unicameral Parliament, aimed at further modernizing the political system in line with citizens’ aspirations.

The cornerstone of our domestic policy is ensuring social stability and citizens’ security, based on the principle of Law and Order. The main theme of my Address was the comprehensive modernization of the national economy, with a focus on widespread introduction of innovations, particularly artificial intelligence technologies.

The plans presented in the Address further develop structural reforms of Kazakhstan’s economy initiated in recent years, including the creation of a new industrial framework. Gradual modernization of energy and public utilities infrastructure has begun.

Kazakhstan’s territory is essentially a key land corridor between East and West, North and South, and particular attention is paid to strengthening our transport and transit potential. Focus is placed on launching a new investment cycle and supporting citizens’ entrepreneurial initiatives. The state is improving the investment climate and business environment to this end.

In developing the national economy, we combine large-scale public investments with major private investments, while recognizing that the main wealth of the country is its people. Comprehensive measures have been adopted to strengthen human potential. Support for teachers, doctors, scientists, engineers, and youth has reached a new level.

This year in Kazakhstan has been declared the Year of Skilled Workers, emphasizing the importance of instilling diligence as a fundamental principle of life.

Significant resources are invested in building new schools, developing higher education, science, sports, and creative industries, and modernizing healthcare and social protection. Measures are being taken to enhance ecological awareness in society. Last year, the nationwide project “Taza Kazakhstan” was launched, with millions of citizens participating regularly.

Our main guide and vision for the future is the idea of building a just, clean, safe, strong, and digital Kazakhstan – a state of responsible citizens, a country of opportunities and progress.

Distinguished participants of the Congress!



We observe not only growing intercultural contradictions worldwide but also trade and sanction wars, a new arms race replacing universal disarmament. Hybrid wars, taking place in different regions, have no clear front lines, yet cause heavy human losses, provoke mass refugee flows, and severely damage the global economy.

There is concern about the risk of nuclear conflict. Experts assess the likelihood of such an Armageddon as the highest in decades. Unfortunately, instead of constructive initiatives and policies of détente, confrontational thinking is gaining momentum, geopolitical rifts are expanding, and social tension is rising. In such challenging realities, I believe constructive diplomacy should play a key role as the main tool for dialogue, overcoming alienation, and building trust on the international stage.

We also place high expectations on religious leaders, who bear special responsibility for promoting intercivilizational exchange and strengthening trust between people and societies. I am confident that religious leaders will do their utmost to prevent the world from sliding into chaos, reminding many politicians of common sense, goodwill, and moral responsibility.

We already see inspiring examples globally: the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the Document on Human Fraternity, the Makah Declaration, the Bahrain Forum for Dialogue, and the House of Abrahamic Religions in the UAE – all demonstrate that when we act together, religion becomes a powerful unifying force. We must build on this experience and expand it.

Let me present Kazakhstan's vision for the prospective development of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue:

First. It is important to leverage the potential of spiritual diplomacy at international and regional organizations. I propose discussing the previously announced idea of a “Movement for Peace” under the Congress's auspices. Religious hierarchs could serve as the moral core of this movement with a neutral, non-politicized call to end violence and seek peaceful solutions. This initiative, based on universal human values, the sanctity of life, compassion, and mercy, could unite not only broad masses of believers but also politicians, representatives of international organizations, NGOs, experts, and youth. The voice for peace must sound more persistently, and platforms like the Congress are meant to facilitate this.

High expectations remain for the United Nations, which continues to be an indispensable global platform. I would like to thank the UN member states for supporting Kazakhstan's proposal to create a UN Regional Centre for Sustainable Development Goals in Almaty for Central Asia and Afghanistan.



It is also important to strengthen the role of regional structures such as the CICA, OIC, OSCE, SCO, CIS, ASEAN, and the League of Arab States.

Second. Religious confessions have always helped people overcome life's difficulties and hardships. Therefore, when speaking about high spiritual matters, we must also address basic humanitarian needs.

Despite significant progress, humanity continues to face numerous humanitarian challenges. Millions still suffer from hunger, epidemics, environmental degradation, and climate change. Kazakhstan makes serious efforts to reduce poverty, address environmental issues, and provide humanitarian aid. These issues are planned to be discussed at the Regional Summit on Ecology and Sustainable Development in Astana in April next year.

Kazakhstan is the northernmost and largest part of the Islamic world. Thirty years ago, we joined the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Within this esteemed organization, Kazakhstan initiated the creation of the Islamic Organization for Food Security. Religious figures inspire and guide people to good deeds and compassion for those in need. Religious communities contribute greatly to achieving Sustainable Development Goals, launching humanitarian missions and volunteer programs, opening schools and hospitals, supporting youth and vulnerable groups, and promoting climate and migration agendas. This once again proves that religions in the 21st century have enormous constructive potential, which must be fully utilized.

The world faces serious environmental threats, which Central Asia feels acutely. Climate change here is proceeding faster than the global average. Droughts have become more frequent, glaciers are melting, and freshwater resources are decreasing.

Spiritual traditions of all peoples teach the importance of protecting nature and living in harmony with the world, because the Earth is our common home, gifted by the Creator, and caring for it is our shared responsibility. Climate change and its consequences are not merely scientific or economic issues – they are a fundamental moral challenge.

Facing a potential ecological catastrophe, it is critical to strengthen international unity and coordinate efforts globally and regionally. Therefore, I propose discussing within the Congress an initiative to develop a joint document on the role of religious leaders in combating climate change. The document could outline common principles of ecological responsibility, based on spiritual traditions, with particular emphasis on supporting vulnerable regions.



Third. The world is rapidly entering a new technological era. Artificial intelligence, big data, bioengineering, and other revolutionary innovations are transforming all spheres of human life. Yet ethical standards struggle to keep pace, giving rise to new challenges: protecting freedom of choice and privacy, ensuring digital equality and security, using AI responsibly, and many other dilemmas.

I am convinced that religious leaders, as guardians of moral values and ideals, should participate in shaping humanity's digital future. Technology must serve humanity, requiring ongoing dialogue among spiritual leaders, scientists, and technocratic engineers.

In developing AI, we see a great opportunity for the country's dynamic progress, while fully recognizing the importance of ethical norms. We are open to broad cooperation in this area. I propose establishing an Interreligious Commission on AI Ethics, tasked with developing a set of universal principles for responsible use of neural networks and other breakthrough technologies. These would act as moral "commandments" for algorithms, respecting human dignity, prohibiting discrimination, and controlling decisions of critical significance.

Your Holinesses, Excellencies! All major religious traditions affirm common humanist values: compassion, justice, love for one's neighbor, and peace. Today we reaffirm our commitment to these values, rejecting any attempts to use religion to justify violence, extremism, or hatred. Many thinkers now speak of a post-secular era, where religion will once again become a significant factor in social and political life.

Our Congress continues to move forward. We are strengthening interreligious dialogue with academic and expert communities. The synthesis of spiritual wisdom and expert knowledge can become key to finding effective solutions to pressing global and regional problems.

The truth is, the future lies in the hands of the younger generation. Young people must grow up with a deep sense of mutual respect and dignity among representatives of all religions and cultures. Today's youth are facing numerous challenges. Even if their beliefs and worldviews differ, the issues that concern them are common. Therefore, the solutions to these issues must also be sought together. For this reason, the Forum of Young Religious Leaders is being held for the second time within the framework of the Congress. The participants of this forum have demonstrated their readiness for open dialogue and joint work. We all see that a new generation of spiritual leaders is emerging. Supporting them is a shared responsibility for all of us.

There is a Kazakh saying: "When four unite, even what is above will come down". Indeed, if we combine all our efforts, we can withstand global challenges.



We are gathering here in Astana for the eighth time. This shows that religious leaders share common aspirations and are ready to jointly confront the various threats facing humanity.

May the spirit of respect and friendship at this “round table” guide the entire world toward unity! Let us reach noble goals together! I wish successful work to the Congress! May your prayers and wishes be accepted.

Today, I have made the decision to award several religious leaders, who have contributed to strengthening spiritual dialogue and mutual understanding, with one of Kazakhstan’s highest state honors. The award ceremony will take place within the framework of the Congress.

Now I wish well-being to all of you.



SPEECH BY KIRILL, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'



Your Excellency, Dear Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich! Distinguished participants of the Congress!

Today, on the hospitable Kazakh land, prominent religious leaders, representatives of international organizations, diplomats, and people of goodwill have gathered once again. I warmly recall my visit to Kazakhstan in 2012 and my participation in the IV Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the atmosphere of that forum, and the communication with its participants. Today I see how much the level and authority of this international platform have grown. The accompanying events and conferences, the youth forum, cultural initiatives, and conceptual documents – all of this is marked by professionalism, valuable content, and relevance. I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan, which has created permanent mechanisms for interreligious dialogue, exchange of views, and peacemaking activity.

In 2012, in my address to the Congress, I said that attempts to build human existence without God and religion would bring nothing good. I remember how we discussed this topic with Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich some time later, when we met at the Trinity-Sergius Lavra in 2014. It was gratifying for me that at that



time my words were listened to attentively and, what is especially important, were taken into account in the subsequent work of the Congresses of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

Today's international situation once again proves that a world denying God is a world without a future. Bloody conflicts, serious economic and environmental problems, terrorism, violations of fundamental human rights – all these are direct consequences of attempts to expel religion from the life of society, leaving it only in a person's private sphere.

We all know very well that, despite the existing differences between traditional religions, they are united by a common goal – faith in God and moral conduct corresponding to this faith. Only a society of truly believing people is capable of existing and developing in peace and prosperity. World history bears witness to this: how many times did the Lord punish His chosen people for unbelief and moral corruption! How many great empires fell because of a crisis of faith and moral debauchery, atheism, and the lack of a unifying spiritual idea!

Despite the events happening around us, it should be said that the activity of secular ideologists has provoked the opposite reaction among young people. Today we can see an increase in religiosity among the younger generation. We see more and more young people in churches, mosques, synagogues, and datsans. However, the youth must be protected from radicalism and directed toward the constructive path of dialogue and respect. In this sense, the idea of holding interreligious youth forums within the framework of the Congress deserves full support, as they give young believers the opportunity to communicate directly, rather than through biased social networks and channels.

One can pronounce many lofty words about peace, human rights, and the need to protect the oppressed. But words must always be confirmed by deeds – and the theme of today's forum calls on everyone to joint action. In my observations, real efforts to reconcile conflicts today are being made primarily by believing people, including political leaders. Therefore, we, religious leaders, wholeheartedly support peacemaking initiatives of all people of goodwill aimed at overcoming existing crises and establishing and maintaining lasting peace.

One important aspect of today's forum is the close cooperation of the organizers with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. I believe that for all of us this is an opportunity to finally ensure decent representation of religious leaders in the world's main international structure. The idea of creating a consultative council of religions at the UN, which we, together with a number of esteemed religious leaders (some of them are present here today), tried to implement almost 20 years ago, has not lost its relevance. At that time, supporters of secularism prevented us from doing so. The participation of leaders of



traditional communities would undoubtedly strengthen the UN's peacemaking potential. Our joint voice, reflecting belonging to different religions and nations and possessing the fullness of healthy tolerance, could become the voice of conscience and reconciliation for humanity. Today, the presence here of the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations of the UN Secretary-General instills in us a certain hope.

Religious leaders indeed have something to say to the world to make it at least a little better, brighter, and safer in the future. Believers are bearers of centuries-old religious culture that presupposes mutual respect, peace, and constructive cooperation. Thanks to this, representatives of different religions and nationalities live peacefully together and work jointly for the benefit of their countries and peoples.

In conclusion, I would like to quote the words of the Gospel: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27), – said Christ to His disciples in His farewell discourse. True peace is possible only when a person is at peace with God, with his Creator. And this obliges a person to much, makes his path difficult and thorny, but blessed. And we have made a considerable journey to gather here today in a union of peace, to develop friendly relations, to contribute to the testimony of faith. With one voice, we affirm that only faith, supported by good deeds and a moral way of life, can be the foundation of true and unshakable peace. And may our united voice, with the support of the organizers of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, sound as loudly as possible. May the final declaration we adopt be yet another reminder that the key to future peace is the spiritual and moral foundation in human life.

Thank you all for your attention.



**SPEECH BY MOHAMMAD ABDULKARIM ALISSA,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE**



In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful! Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds! May Allah bless and grant peace to our Master and Prophet Muhammad, and to all the Prophets and Messengers of Allah!

Your Excellency, esteemed Mr. President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev!

Your Excellencies, esteemed Chairman of the Senate and Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Maulen Ashimbayev!

Your Honor, Your Eminence, and Honored guests, peace be upon you, as well as Allah's mercy and blessings!

Today we have gathered at the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan – a country of diversity, coexistence, and peace. We meet against the backdrop of concerning international transformations, during which many tragedies and challenges facing our global order have worsened, threatening the stability of international law. There are early signs warning of a



sharp division after nations united under the historic Charter of the United Nations, in which the peoples of the UN, on June 26, 1945, committed to saving future generations from the horrors of wars that twice within one generation brought humanity suffering that is difficult to describe.

Today, we meet within this religious summit, which carries broad perspectives and high aspirations. Its success, with Allah's support, is linked to the determination of religious leaders, who influence the consciousness of believers in their faiths worldwide. These believers make up about 80 percent of the world's population. It is no secret that their spiritual influence is extremely important in instilling universal human values and principles, as well as protecting these ideas from being affected by extremism, violence, and terrorism, particularly in environments where such threats are nurtured.

Our hopes bring us to this forum to affirm that religious institutions are not merely involved in preaching, but are called upon to be an active force in building peace by guiding their followers from a spiritual position toward awareness of the importance of human dignity according to shared principles.

The principles we believe in are not slogans, declarations, or appeals made for temporary occasions, but an eternal promise, a covenant implemented in our discourse and realized in our behavior through words and actions, so that spiritual institutions may develop them through education, engagement, and promotion. This demonstrates a living and tangible example that true religious values are upheld by benefactors in all their dimensions.

Esteemed Mr. President! Distinguished attendees! From the podium of the World Islamic League, representing an incubator of Islamic peoples with its main center in Makkah, we declare that the lessons of history teach us that achieving peace in our world requires consciousness that understands that conflict and confrontation generate nothing but evil, which affects everyone. Therefore, we constantly affirm that human diversity should be a source of cooperation and exchange, rather than – as some portray it – a reason for inevitable confrontation between nations and peoples.

We proudly recognize certain achievements in strengthening coexistence and mutual understanding among the various components of our world. At the same time, we observe with deep concern what is happening on the international stage – wars and conflicts threatening global security and the stability of communities. Currently, in the Gaza Strip, the mass genocide and systemic starvation represent a stain of shame for the international community, the likes of which the world has not faced since the adoption of the UN Charter.

Your Excellency, Mr. President, distinguished attendees! Experience shows that religious leaders have significant influence in the strategic role of religious presence, or what is called constructive spiritual religious diplomacy,



through dialogue, moderation, and reconciliation within the scope provided to them spiritually and religiously. Who is called to take on this responsibility among these leaders? They are not only guardians of texts but witnesses to the truth. They transform the values they cherish into tangible efforts that have real impact. A value that is not implemented or realized has neither price nor weight.

Yes, we differ in faiths and denominations, but we are united by a single human brotherhood – a spiritual, universal brotherhood derived from divine guidance. As Almighty Allah addresses the entire human family, He says, “Oh, sons of Adam”. We are also united by shared security, which is in essence a common destiny. All of this works against what threatens peace in our world and the harmony of its communities.

In conclusion, I express my gratitude to His Excellency, Mr. President, for his hospitality, excellent organization, and for the interest shown in the vital role of religious leaders. May Allah make these efforts and steps fruitful and turn dreams into reality.

Peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you!



MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIV



(Read by George Jacob Koovakad, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue of the Holy See, Vatican)

To the participants of the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, peace, shalom, salam, and beybitshilik!

From the bottom of my heart, I greet all participants of the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana under the motto “Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future”.

In particular, I express my deep gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

You have gathered from all corners of the world to renew friendships and forge new ones, united by a common goal: to heal our fragmented and wounded world. This theme is especially relevant, highlighting the vital role of interreligious dialogue in an era of intense conflicts.

In essence, synergy means working together – not only with each other but also with the divine. Every authentic religious impulse contributes to dialogue and cooperation, grounded in our innate awareness of interdependence, which unites people and nations.



From this perspective, working together in harmony is not merely a pragmatic choice, but a reflection of a deeper order of reality. It aligns with the very essence of our shared existence as members of the one human family. Deep within our consciousness, this awareness gives rise to a profound sense of solidarity and responsibility for one another. Thus, solidarity is synergy in action, a living manifestation of love for one's neighbor as oneself on a global scale.

Such cooperation is not a call to erase differences, but rather an invitation to embrace diversity as a source of mutual enrichment.

The Catholic Church recognizes and values all that is true and sacred in other religions. Moreover, it seeks to develop genuine synergy, bringing together the unique gifts of each tradition, where every faith contributes its distinctive wisdom and compassion for the common good.

In this pursuit, "Synergy for the future" is not an abstract slogan but a living reality that has already borne fruit. The historic prayer meeting of religious leaders in Assisi in 1986, convened by Pope John Paul II, demonstrated that peace among peoples is impossible without peace among religions.

More recently, in 2019, in Abu Dhabi, my esteemed predecessor Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayeb, signed the Document on Human Fraternity for Peace and Coexistence. It outlined a clear plan for how religious synergy can contribute to global peace and coexistence. We carried that same spirit at the last session of this Congress in 2022, where leaders of various faiths, including Pope Francis, gathered to condemn violence and extremism, advocate for refugees, and call on all leaders to work together for peace.

These high-level commitments are reflected in concrete actions when natural disasters strike, when refugees are forced to flee, or when families suffer from extreme poverty and hunger.

Religious communities often come together, working side by side to offer assistance and hope to those who need it most.

The future we envision – a future of peace, fraternity, and solidarity – requires the dedication of all hands and hearts.

When religious leaders collectively protect the most vulnerable members of society, plant trees caring for our common home, or unite in defending human dignity, they bear witness to the truth: "Faith unites, it does not divide".

Thus, synergy becomes a powerful sign of hope for all humanity, showing that religion, by its very nature, is not a source of conflict but a source of healing and reconciliation. With these sentiments, I believe that the work of this Congress will inspire us to unceasingly strive for harmony, creating synergy for peace, which, as I have said, is unarmed yet disarming, humble yet steadfast, always seeking mercy, and close to those in need.



Let us pray side by side, serve shoulder to shoulder, and speak with one voice wherever human dignity is under threat.

May the Almighty bless our efforts and bring abundant fruits for the good of all people.

From the Vatican, September 14, 2025.

Father Leo.



SPEECH BY LI GUANGFU, CHAIRMAN OF THE TAOIST ASSOCIATION OF CHINA



Your Excellency Mr. President!

Distinguished representatives of religious communities!

Honored guests!

Ladies and gentlemen!

Good day to you all!

In this beautiful autumn season, Astana welcomes us with clear skies and refreshing air. Even more heartwarming is the spirit of peace and dialogue brought by the gathering of religious leaders from around the world. Today, we come together under the theme of “interreligious dialogue” to inaugurate the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. This great event is more than a platform for communication – it is a shared commitment by humankind to address the challenges of our times through spiritual strength.

On behalf of the World Taoist Federation and the Chinese Taoist Association, I extend my heartfelt congratulations on the convening of this Congress and express my sincere gratitude to the organizers for their meticulous efforts in preparation. Since the very first Congress in 2003, the Chinese Taoist community has consistently participated with a spirit of “harmony and unity”, hoping to foster



goodwill through cultural exchanges and build consensus through joint discussions. This commitment remains unchanged today.

Founded in 1957, the Chinese Taoist Association unites Taoist believers across China and has long been dedicated to promoting friendly exchanges and cultural cooperation with Taoist communities around the world. In September 2023, we initiated the establishment of the World Taoist Federation, the first international religious organization to be founded in mainland China. Today, it includes 52 founding member organizations from 20 countries and regions across Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania. The founding of the Federation marks a significant milestone in Taoism's development into a global religion with growing international influence.

Here, I sincerely invite all religious leaders and organizations to actively engage with the World Taoist Federation platform for deeper interreligious dialogue and collaboration.

The world today is facing multiple crises: geopolitical tensions escalating into conflict, climate change threatening survival, and technological revolutions creating moral and ethical dilemmas. These challenges also intensify individual anxiety and social alienation: some people are displaced by war, others are trapped in deteriorating environments, and many feel spiritually lost amidst the flood of modern technology.

In the face of this shared predicament, no country or religion can remain unaffected. As Taoism teaches, “All things embrace Yin and hold onto Yang; harmony arises from their balance”. Only by breaking down barriers through dialogue, resolving differences through understanding, and gathering strength through cooperation can humanity discover a sustainable path of coexistence.

We must promote interreligious dialogue and cooperation with the mindset of “harmony in diversity”. In Taoist philosophy, differences are not causes for confrontation but are the foundation for mutual complementarity and coexistence. The goal of dialogue is not to eliminate differences, but to seek consensus and synergy based on mutual respect. By enhancing understanding and collaboration, especially in areas such as poverty alleviation, disaster relief, and spiritual care, we can better contribute to the well-being of all humanity.

We must uphold the wisdom of “following the Dao and aligning with nature” to respect the diversity of civilizations. Taoism advocates for pluralism, cultural awareness, and peaceful coexistence among different religions and cultures. We must oppose all forms of extremism, xenophobia, and civilizational clashes, and work together to safeguard the richness and diversity of human civilization with open and inclusive hearts.



We must practice the Taoist principle of “unity between Heaven and humanity” to foster harmony between people and nature. Today’s global ecological crisis calls for green, low-carbon, and sustainable lifestyles. Taoism emphasizes simplicity, moderation, and contentment-values that offer important insights for addressing the ecological crisis. Let us carry forward the Taoist spirit of “universal compassion”, loving nature as we love ourselves.

We must also cherish the Taoist reverence for “life and regeneration” to uphold peace for all humankind. Taoism honors life and all living beings. As we mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, we must draw lessons from history, stand firmly against destructive forces, and jointly safeguard the dignity of life and global peace.

Dear friends!

The healthy development of any religion requires it to adapt to the realities of its society and country. Taoism is a traditional religion indigenous to China and an important part of China's rich cultural heritage. In the new era, the Chinese Taoist community has upheld correct belief and practice, remained faithful to its roots while embracing innovation, and worked to present Taoism with distinct Chinese characteristics, style, and spirit – keeping pace with the progress of the times.

Dear friends!

Advocating for love and peace and guiding people toward goodness are core tenets of most major religions. In the face of an uncertain future, we must walk together – replacing confrontation with dialogue, conflict with cooperation, and exclusion with inclusiveness. The World Taoist Federation and the Chinese Taoist Association are willing to work with all religious communities to deepen exchange, build mutual trust, and promote cooperation – contributing wisdom and strength to the building of a community with a shared future for humankind.

I wish this Congress great success!

May the world enjoy peace, and may all beings live in well-being!

Thank you!



SPEECH BY KALMAN MEIR BER, ASHKENAZI CHIEF RABBI OF ISRAEL



Honorable President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Tokayev!
Honorable Chairman of the Senate, Mr. Ashimbayev!
Honorable colleague, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel!
Honorable leaders of world religions!
Distinguished participants!

I have come from the Holy Land, the Land of Israel.

As you know, we have been in the midst of a difficult war for nearly two years now – a war in which many have lost their lives, and whose end is still not in sight.

I want to clearly emphasize here, before this important forum:

This war is not a religious war.

Judaism is not opposed to any religion. In Judaism, we respect all religions.

My colleague, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi, and I, since our appointment to our positions, have published several statements – public calls to society – in which we have urged people to respect all people of faith, each person and their religion, each individual and their path.



Maimonides (Rambam), one of the greatest sages in Judaism, writes in his book *Laws of Kings* that the Creator of the world established other religions, such as Islam and Christianity, in order to bring the entire world closer to the recognition of faith in the One God.

All of us here believe in one God.

In six days, the people of Israel will be observing Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year – a time in which we pray and offer supplications not only for the Jewish people.

We pray:

That every being in the world will come to know that the Creator has made them. That every person in the world will understand that the Creator has formed them.

May every person in whose veins blood flows declare:

“The Lord God of Israel reigns”.

Also, during the holiday of Sukkot, which we will celebrate soon – just two weeks after the New Year – in the days of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, we would offer seventy bulls as sacrifices during the festival, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world, for whom we prayed. We prayed that God would establish peace among them, and between them and us.

Furthermore, when King Solomon built the Temple and sanctified it, he prayed that God would hear the prayers of all nations, as prayers pass through the Temple – not only the prayers of the people of Israel, but of all humanity.

King Solomon even established that the Temple is to be a universal house for all peoples.

As it is written:

“For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”.

What happened on October 7 is a completely different story.

Terrorists from Gaza infiltrated the Land of Israel to kill and destroy us – men, women, and children. Not only to kill, but to torture, to rape, and to abuse.

They murdered parents, and placed infants in cages without food or water, leaving them to die of hunger and thirst.

Unspeakable cruelty.

Shortly after October 7, I personally visited the affected communities.

I saw with my own eyes the horrific acts committed by the terrorists, driven by pure sadism – and specifically against those Israeli civilians who had treated them kindly, offered them help, and even brought them to hospitals in Israel. Those very people – they murdered, they tortured.

It is against such evil that we are at war. We are a people who desire peace and seek peace. But anyone who seeks to destroy us – we will rise up against them



with all our strength, to defend ourselves by any means necessary. Dear brothers and esteemed friends, our cooperation is vitally important! Today, the world is moving away from its foundational human values. Sadly, essential concepts like home, family, womanhood – are being eroded. Care for one's fellow human, even if they are different, Compassion for the needy – are becoming things of the past. Instilling moral values, and kind behavior – is almost forgotten.

We have forgotten a great principle:

“Human decency and integrity must come before religiosity”.

We have forgotten the core rule taught to us by Hillel the Elder, the greatest sage of the Mishnaic era:

“Love your neighbor as yourself – this is the great principle of the Torah”.

Before acquiring knowledge, before receiving an education – we must dedicate ourselves to moral education and the transmission of values.

The partnership between religions, all of which share the belief in one God, can bring us closer to the repair of the world –

a world of justice,

a world of law,

a world of mutual aid,

a brighter world.

I want to make a universal call for peace across the world.

But we must not forget:

For nearly two years, we have had 48 hostages – our brothers and sisters – suffering in the tunnels of Gaza under inhumane conditions. Some of them are dead, and their families in Israel want only to bury them – to have a place to mourn them.

I appeal to all of you – esteemed religious leaders –

Please, make a call to the world:

Bring the hostages home!!!

I will conclude with a Jewish prayer that we recite three times a day:

“Oseh Shalom bimromav, Hu ya’aseh shalom aleinu, ve’al kol Yisrael. Ve’imru: Amen.”

May He who makes peace in His heavens grant peace upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

May God, who makes peace in the heavens, establish peace upon us all.

I wish all of you a happy and sweet New Year!

Thank you very much.



**SPEECH BY THEOPHILOS III, PATRIARCH OF THE HOLY CITY OF
JERUSALEM AND ALL PALESTINE, SYRIA, ARABIA, AND BEYOND
THE JORDAN RIVER, KANA OF GALILEE AND HOLY SION**



Mr. Secretary! Respected Fellow Delegates! Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is a great honour to participate in this significant conference. We are gathered here at the gracious invitation of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and our subject in this session is the Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future.

We are given two crucial concepts that I would like briefly to address. Both of them, I am happy to say, happen to be Greek. The first is dialogue. We who live in the Holy City of Jerusalem have come to place a high value on dialogue, whether it is dialogue between different Churches, or between different faith traditions, or between communities in conflict.

We are clear that the only way to deeper understanding, to mutual respect, and to an ability to live together in the same land, is by way of serious and committed dialogue. True dialogue is based, first and foremost, on an interest in, and a curiosity about, the other. Let us not forget that dialogue is the active relationship between two human beings or human groups, both of whom share in the fact that we are made of dust and destined to return to dust (Gen. 3:19).



We partake in an essential equality, which Saint Paul calls *isotis*, which is shared even between masters and slaves (Col. 4:1). And this is so because we are all children of the same heavenly Father. We must be eager to know each other, and discover in each other the seeds of our common humanity.

Only when we are able to find some common ground can we begin to address differences of opinion or conflicting experiences. The goal of dialogue is to establish as clearly as we can a mutual commitment to shared values and shared hopes that lie beneath our superficial or more deeply held differences. In this way we are engaged in the exploration of what one of our early Christian theologians, Saint Justin Martyr, called *spermatikos logos*. This is the universal, seminal reason which dwells in the hearts and minds of very human being, and where it is possible to discover truth together even in the face of our often-contrasting experiences of God and of human community.

In a sense, we are already united in this *spermatikos logos*, and it is our task in our dialogues to uncover both the similarities and the distinctions in our understanding first so that we may appreciate each other more clearly.

This is why Saint John says, In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was in the beginning with God (Jn 1:1-2). Then it is possible to establish the kind of common ground on which a new future together may be built. We can see an image of this *spermatikos logos* in the Bible, where we read the kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle because the harvest has come (Mark 4:26-29). Here we see that the *spermatikos logos* does not remain within us, but comes to fruition beyond us. This process is the same whether the subject is political, social, or theological, whether it is between warring factions or different religious traditions. The second important aspect is synergy.

As we know, synergy is that way of interacting and co-operating that has as its result something that is greater than its parts, but which does not negate the uniqueness of those parts. As Saint Paul says, we know that all things work together – synergy – for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). In other words, synergy is the consequence of recognizing that, when it comes to our life together in the human community, we are more effective and a greater source of hope and encouragement, when we are able to find ways of being and acting together, even when we still disagree or are still in the midst of important dialogue. In this way, as Saint John says, we may become coworkers – synergy – with the truth (3 John 8). True synergy does not need to



wait for dialogue to reach its goals, but together synergy and dialogue may nourish each other in a fruitful relationship that sustains and supports all those who are engaged in it.

There is no doubt that if the human family is to have a future, this combination of dialogue and synergy must become the driving principle of all that we do. We live in a world of increasing and alarming division, violence, prejudice, conflict, and hatred, in which we are too ready to dismiss each other and demonize each other. This is the way of death, as we can see only too clearly in the regions of the world now at war. We have some particular experience of the catastrophic consequences of the lack of dialogue and synergy in our region of the Middle East as a whole and of the Holy Land in particular. We need only mention the conflict in Gaza, which is the cause of unutterable suffering to all our peoples, and which is a monumental testimony to the lack of a willingness to engage in the kind of dialogue that is the only way to transform a situation of violence into a pathway to peace and reconciliation.

We also face increasing assaults on our communities from radical elements who see dialogue and synergy as the enemy of their ideology and goals. We can never cease in our efforts to persuade others that everyone gains from proper dialogue and synergy, as these activities open up often previously unknown or under-appreciated possibilities, while conflict and division diminish all parties. We have seen the repeated senselessness and failure of conflict in all its forms, whether is the armed conflict of war, or the ideological conflict of political or nationalistic ambition, or the theological divisions that become excuses for demonizing those who differ from us.

We know that only dialogue can bring about that reconciliation and peace for which the vast majority long and for which they are willing to work. We who have confidence in our religious traditions to be heralds of peace and beacons of hope have a special obligation to lead and to model the way of dialogue and synergy. We are convinced that there is no other effective or reliable way in which to build a future for the human family that has any chance of working.

When some will not walk this path with us, we must walk it with any and all people of good will who are willing. As we read in the Bible, whoever is not against us is for us (Mk. 9:40), especially when we are engaged in the work of peace-building and reconciliation. And people will be more willing to walk with us when our own traditions live the way of dialogue and synergy that is obvious to others. We cannot tell others to do what we are unwilling or incapable of doing ourselves. It must begin with us, and this Congress is a tangible sign of our collective and individual commitment to effective, and in some cases, sacrificial di-



alogue and synergy. But we know that the fruits of this work have so much potential, and are so much more rewarding, than any narrow isolationism. It is my prayer that we shall all take from this Congress a fresh energy and a renewed vision as we seek to help our respective communities find creative ways, grounded in that universal spermatikos logos in which we all have a share, to build and sustain the human family that shares a common destiny.

Thank you for your attention.



VIDEO MESSAGE FROM ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL



Excellencies! Dear friends!

I am pleased to send my greetings to this VIII Congress of the Leaders World and Traditional Religions.

I thank the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting this important gathering and for your commitment to dialogue across faiths and cultures.

The United Nations was founded on the conviction that dialogue leads to peace. Today that truth is more important than ever – especially as conflicts, inequalities, the climate crisis and geo-political divisions grow. We need to build bridges in our fractured world. That’s exactly what you are doing.

Your theme – “Synergy for the Future” – is a powerful reminder that differences can be a source of strength – and that common ground is always within reach. Religious and spiritual leaders are essential in forging that common ground. Your teachings have guided billions across centuries. And today your voices can counter intolerance and inspire hope.

Thank you for coming together to do just that – and for advancing our shared goals of dignity, mutual understanding and peace.

I wish you every success.



**SPEECH BY MIGUEL ÁNGEL MORATINOS,
UNITED NATIONS UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL AND HIGH
REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE UN ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS,
UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA**



Your Excellency, honorable Maulen Ashimbayev, Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of the World and Traditional Religions and Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan,

Eminencies!

Excellencies!

Distinguished colleagues!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am truly honored to be back to your beautiful capital Astana to join you at this esteemed gathering of Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. I warmly thank you for inviting me.

Allow me, at the outset, to commend His Excellency President Tokayev, and through him, the Government and people of Kazakhstan, for convening and nurturing this unique global platform of interreligious dialogue. The very fact that this Congress has become an enduring tradition is testimony to Kazakhstan's vision of fostering peace through dialogue, rooted in respect for diversity and the conviction that humanity is stronger when united.



We gather today under the main theme “Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future”. This is not a matter of abstract aspiration. It is an imperative of our time.

The world we inhabit is turbulent. Conflicts rage across continents.

Inequalities are widening, and trust between peoples is fraying.

We are living through an age in which the misuse of religion as a tool for division is far too frequent.

In such times, our collective duty is to reclaim the peacemaking power of religions, and to remind humanity of the spiritual and moral foundations that bind us together as human beings.

Religions, at their core teachings, are a valuable source of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Time and again, we have seen religious leaders stand at the forefront of efforts to ease tensions when political negotiations reach an impasse.

Their voices carry a moral authority that can open doors where official diplomacy may struggle.

I can personally attest to that. As a veteran diplomat and politician and more so in my current capacity, I often resorted to the mediating skills of wise religious leaders and faith actors to achieve a breakthrough.

This is what I would call spiritual diplomacy – diplomacy of conscience, grounded in ethical values – one that transcends politics.

Spiritual diplomacy complements the work of states and international organizations by appealing to the deepest aspirations of the human heart: the longing for peace, dignity, and justice.

At a moment when our humanity is at risk, we must harness this peacemaking potential to remind societies that reconciliation is always possible.

Dialogue, however, is not a one-time event or a random act of doing good.

It is not simply convening in grand halls to exchange ideas. True dialogue is a practice – a daily discipline of listening, respecting, and learning from one another. It is lived in neighborhoods, classrooms, and workplaces as much as it is articulated in conferences.

Dialogue is a way of life.

At the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, dialogue across cultures and religions is at the heart of our mandate. We know that dialogue, when sincere and sustained, becomes the foundation for peaceful coexistence.

As we turned 20 this year, our network of religious leaders and faith actors have evolved and expanded. Our role has evolved within the UN system and beyond. We are proud to be the leading UN entity in intercultural and interreligious dialogue.



We have always recognized that dialogue empowers communities to resist the forces of hatred and polarization. It equips societies to embrace diversity not as a threat but as a source of enrichment and unity.

And it ensures that the next generation – particularly young people and women – are empowered to be agents of peace, dialogue and mutual respect. In this respect, UNAOC has long recognized the power of youth as agents of change. We have well established flagship programs that have empowered youth-led organizations across 6 continents. Just recently, we have kicked off the 8th edition of the Young Peacebuilders Programme in the South Caucasus and Central Asia region. The Project is fully funded by the Government of Azerbaijan. Twenty young participants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan engaged in an intensive online training focused on peacebuilding concepts, emphasizing the role of youth in fostering inclusive societies and preventing violent extremism [when conducive to terrorism] through intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution skills.

Eminencies!

Excellencies!

One of the most urgent moral tests of our time is the climate crisis. Climate change is not simply an environmental challenge; it is a profound ethical question. It compels us to ask? Are we capable and willing to safeguard that planet on which we all live? What legacy do we leave for future generations?

Here, too, religions have a crucial role to play. Virtually every faith tradition emphasizes the sacredness of creation and the responsibility of humans to protect it. The principle of stewardship – of caring for the Earth and safeguarding it for those who come after us – is deeply embedded in sacred texts.

I believe the time has come for religious leaders across traditions to unite as a moral coalition for climate action.

The Scientists can warn us.

Policymakers can design frameworks.

But it is faith leaders who can speak to the conscience of billions, mobilizing humanity to act not out of fear, but out of a sense of moral duty and intergenerational justice.

Distinguished participants!

History offers us abundant examples of what is possible when religions engage in genuine dialogue. Medieval Andalusia, the exchanges along the Silk Road, or the flourishing of scholarship in Baghdad's House of Wisdom – all remind us that civilizations advanced when faiths coexisted, when knowledge was shared, and when diversity was embraced.



Sacred texts, across all traditions, converge on the same timeless values: compassion for the vulnerable, justice for the oppressed, care for the stranger, dignity for the human being. These values are not relics of the past. They are living principles that can guide us in addressing the crises of today – from violent conflict to climate change, from polarization to poverty.

If we allow these shared moral foundations to inform our actions, then synergy among religions becomes not only possible but inevitable.

Excellencies! Dear friends!

The Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions has, since its inception, been a beacon of hope – a moral compass for humanity at times when the world seems adrift. Today, more than ever, we need such compasses.

I am very pleased that the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations has been and continues to be a supporter and an active participant of this Congress since its inception. We further consolidated this partnership this year by renewing our collaboration with the International Centre for Interfaith and Interreligious dialogue. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the leadership and government of Kazakhstan for the consistent commitment and support for UNAOC.

Excellencies!

Eminencies!

Concluding, let us move beyond words to action. Let us commit to joint initiatives that demonstrate solidarity across faiths. Let us raise our voices together against war and hatred, and for peace and human dignity. Let us show, through our common witness, that dialogue of religions is not a luxury – it is a necessity for the survival of humanity.

Allow me to conclude with a verse that resonates across traditions: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God”. These words, though rooted in one tradition, echo in the teachings of many. They remind us that the work of peacemaking is sacred work – work that transcends creed and culture.

May this Congress inspire us to renew our commitment to dialogue, deepen our synergy, and build together a future of peace, justice, and hope.

Thank you.



**SPEECH BY OMAR HABTOOR AL DAREI,
CHAIRMAN OF THE GENERAL AUTHORITY OF
ISLAMIC AFFAIRS AND ENDOWMENTS OF UAE**



Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds! Blessings and peace be upon our Prophet Muhammad, sent as a mercy to the worlds, upon all the prophets and messengers, and upon his companions.

Your Excellency Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan!

Your Excellencies!

Your Highnesses!

Your Reverences!

Ladies and gentlemen!

The greatness of nations is determined by their contribution to the development of civilizations, spiritual thought, and peace.

The capital, Astana, where we are gathered today, has taken a special place as a citadel of peace, an intellectual platform, and a vivid symbol of dialogue between religions and cultures.



On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, which shares this mission and actively participates in its implementation, I greet you and express my joy at the continuation of this noble initiative!

Today, the Congress, being held for the eighth time, enters its third decade, continuing to convey messages of peace and mutual understanding to the world. The organizers have shown wisdom in choosing the theme for this Congress: “Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future”. It reflects a profound civilizational approach, encompassing the past, present, and future.

In the past, religions, cultures, and philosophies laid the foundations of dialogue, calling for mutual understanding and tolerance, opening doors to understanding others and respecting them.

In the present, it is necessary to strengthen these values by integrating them into educational, religious, and societal systems, so that culture becomes part of the formation of the modern individual.

The future, with its openness, speed, and rapid development, can only be built on strong bridges of mutual understanding and joint action.

The connection between dialogue and the future is manifested in their ability to create a healthy environment, generate realistic solutions, and open broad horizons for human coexistence, as confirmed by verses from the Quran. The Quran says: “Oh, mankind! Indeed, We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another”. This is a clear reminder that what unites people is deeper and more enduring than what divides them.

Dear participants! The principle of complementarity, rather than confrontation; mutual understanding, rather than conflict is one of the greatest strategies by which humanity can face contemporary challenges.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, expressed this profound meaning when he began his mission, affirming that it complements previous messages and emphasizing that the purpose of his message is to perfect virtuous morality.

In the modern world, complementarity is no longer merely an intellectual choice but has become an existential necessity. Complementarity in knowledge, complementarity in experience, complementarity in values, cooperation among heavenly messages, their leaders, and their followers – this is what creates a safer and more stable future. Just as the strength of the body does not come from a single organ, civilization is not built from a single source but from many resources, because complementarity gives thoughts depth and diversity, producing broader understanding.



Perfection is achieved not through self-isolation or rejection of others, but through diversity, cooperation, respect, and acceptance. Therefore, on such platforms, we must learn to recognize each other's uniqueness and seek paths of mutual respect and enrichment.

The Quran also states: "On the earth are gardens, crops, and date palms, growing from a single root or from multiple roots. They are watered with the same water, yet some of them We make more delicious than others". From the diversity of colors arises beauty, from harmonious sounds comes melody, and when different experiences complement each other, they give rise to civilization.

Dear brothers and sisters! Only through such a comprehensive dialogue, based on the ability to listen and respect human dignity and the sanctity of life – regardless of religion, race, or skin color – can we confront modern wars and conflicts, climate threats, technological transformations, migration, and other challenges. These issues can only be addressed by combining the efforts of states and relying on universal human values.

Reflecting on the beginning of this project on the blessed Kazakhstani land at the beginning of the century, I would like to note that the global culture of dialogue and rapprochement of religions achieved over the past two decades must move from theory to practice. This requires action on three levels.

First – education. Embed a culture of dialogue in future generations, nurturing youth who reject hatred and exclusion.

Second – society. Bring the project closer to everyday life, making it a part of gatherings, institutions, and social structures.

Third – religious discourse. Purify it from anything that hinders coexistence and moderation, and actively confront extremism and radicalism.

This is the experience of the United Arab Emirates, where, under wise leadership, platforms, centers, programs, and institutions have been established to promote dialogue and mutual understanding. These initiatives have become a source of stability, confidence, and peace for the entire society.

This path can be supported through several fundamental principles.

First, affirming the positive role of religion as a source of moral values in an era of global transformations.

Second, Friedrich Nietzsche called philosophers the physicians of civilization. Scholars and religious leaders must be aware of their responsibilities and fulfill them with honesty and fidelity.

Third, dialogue among cultures requires educating a new generation and involving youth in religious communication. They must be taught to understand its



politics and priorities in order to build a more tolerant, peaceful, and sustainable society.

Fourth, ignoring extremist rhetoric, delayed action to curb its spread, and excessive leniency toward countering any content promoting radicalism and hatred in the name of religions undermines the foundation of such initiatives and dooms these projects to failure. Those who sow enmity cannot be partners in building human civilization, while those who convey faith in the national state and strengthen moral responsibility must set an example.

Finally, I would like to say that just as plants do not grow without soil, peace projects cannot develop without a solid foundation. This foundation consists of faith in the national state, the strengthening of moral responsibility, a correct understanding of dialogue, knowledge of laws and agreements, and investments in education, technology, and artificial intelligence for the sake of peace. The defense of the homeland is the highest goal of dialogue.

I thank Kazakhstan and the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan for such a warm welcome. I pray to Almighty Allah to guide the participants of the Congress to correct conclusions, useful results, and practical recommendations. May Allah protect our nations and bless our leaders! May peace and security reign in our countries and homes!

Peace be upon you, and the mercy and blessings of Allah!



**SPEECH BY GEORGE JACOB KOOVAKAD,
PREFECT OF THE DICASTERY FOR
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE OF THE HOLY SEE**



Dear leaders of the world's religions, honorable representatives of civil society! Dear brothers and sisters!

We have gathered at a decisive moment in the history of humanity and Earth – our common home.

Everywhere we hear negative narratives about conflicts, wars, violence, destruction, trade wars, and natural disasters. At times, it seems that multiculturalism is weakening and global organizations are silent. As a result, we witness disintegration, discord, and new divisions. Such situations easily lead to feelings of hopelessness.

In these dark times, what can we, as leaders, do to bring light? We are here to reflect on our shared responsibility, to change the course of history from violence to peace, to promote human flourishing, to bring hope to a world gripped by despair, and to protect our environment.

How can we do this, and what should our approach be? I speak as a religious leader, and I would like to focus on three factors that are key to building peace and fostering interreligious cooperation.



The first reality is the necessity of development and justice.

The second reality is that there is no hope without God, who is the Absolute Truth.

Finally, the third reality is that we will not be saved alone.

The first factor to consider is the need for the social, economic, cultural, and spiritual development of every person.

Saint Paul VI reminded us in his encyclical *Populorum progressio* that development is the new name for peace; it is a prerequisite that allows people to live with dignity, free from excessive pressures, and with the possibility of happiness. This prosperity cannot be for a chosen few alone; it must be just and all-encompassing, otherwise it will not be sustainable.

As Pope Leo XIII emphasized, authentic human flourishing arises from the integral development of the person – that is, the full development of the individual in all dimensions: physical, social, cultural, moral, and spiritual.

Paul VI also pointed out the causes of the absence of peace, explaining that extreme inequality among nations in economic, social, and educational terms breeds envy and discord, often putting peace at risk. This is why it is so important to work toward building a just society that ensures equality for all. Without this, there can be no peace. True equality in society must be comprehensive – economic, political, cultural, linguistic, and religious.

Freedom of religion is also an inseparable element of peace. This brings us to the second factor: there is no hope without God, who is the Supreme Truth. All our traditions, at their deepest essence, strive toward the Supreme Truth.

Religion is, above all, a relationship – a dialogue with the Divine. This vertical dialogue opens a new vision of hope for humanity and for Earth. Throughout history, founders of religions, sages, reformers, and sacred texts have brought hope in seemingly hopeless situations. Our religious traditions have shaped cultures and civilizations, while also safeguarding rights and respect for human dignity and for the Earth.

Today, we must return to these sources in order to renew ourselves spiritually and work together for the common good. It is for this reason that a global ethic, grounded in our religious traditions, is possible. Its principles are simple, yet profound.

For example, one of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not kill”, places non-violence and the sanctity of life at the forefront.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” expresses the pursuit of truth, justice, and responsible communication.

“You shall not steal” restores rights and combats injustice.



“Honor your father and your mother” reflects respect for identity, culture, and generations.

“You shall not covet” addresses the temptations of greed and the struggle for power.

When the commandments are reinterpreted in a contemporary context, they can inspire concrete paths toward peace and reconciliation.

Pope Leo XIII recently noted that The City of God – the great work of Saint Augustine of Hippo, one of the most important Church Fathers, who lived in the 4th-5th centuries in what is now Algeria – can still inspire our world with hope and give new meaning to life.

Saint Augustine taught that in the history of humanity, two cities are intertwined – the earthly city and the City of God. They represent spiritual realities, two directions of the human heart, and, consequently, of human civilization.

The earthly city, built on pride and self-love, is characterized by the pursuit of power, prestige, and pleasure.

The City of God, built on love of God and selflessness, is manifested through justice, mercy, and humility.

Our duty as religious leaders are to fill earthly society with universal values found in our religious traditions, in order to guide history toward a harmonious peace.

In this regard, Pope Francis, together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, declared in the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together that faith leads believers to see in others brothers and sisters to be supported and loved. This conviction should inspire us, transforming religious wisdom into global solidarity.

Finally, the factor that salvation does not come to one person alone – in unity is our strength, and in disunity is our fall. We are interconnected and dependent on one another. Our religions teach us that we are one human family, brothers and sisters to each other.

As Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, we are a global community, all in the same boat, where the problems of one person are the problems of all. We realize that no one can be saved alone; we can only be saved together. No one is capable of addressing the pressing challenges of our time alone. Cooperation is not a matter of choice, but a necessity.

Dear friends, our gathering today is a sign of hope. In this spirit, allow me to conclude my speech with the words and thoughts of Pope Leo XIII. Indeed, this very moment, which you share today, is a wonderful testimony. It confirms that differences in faith or origin should not divide us. On the contrary, in the act of meeting one another, in the spirit of friendship and dialogue, we stand together



against the forces of division, hatred, and violence that have too often torn humanity apart.

Where others sow distrust, we choose trust.

Where others may foster fear, we seek understanding.

Where others see differences as obstacles, we recognize them as paths to mutual enrichment.

Let us continue to walk this path together, bringing hope to a world gripped by despair. **Thank you.**



**SPEECH BY JO BAILEY WELLS,
DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ANGLICAN
COMMUNION, BISHOP FOR EPISCOPAL MINISTRY**



Your excellences, esteemed colleagues in this sacred circle of world faiths and traditional religions, including my brothers and sisters in Christ!

I am honored to be here. I greet you in the name of Jesus and along with my colleague Bishop Danald Jute from Malaysia we represent the Anglican Communion which is committed to engage in constructive dialogue and work for peace and reconciliation across more than 180 countries of the world.

To inhabit a role of leadership brings great privilege and great responsibility. In regard to the Dialogue of Religions, I want to reflect on the character of religious leadership that is needed in today's world. This is the VIII Congress of its kind, and yet we live in an age that is increasingly marked by division – divisions across religion, politics, culture and ideology. My friends, it seems we are a very long way off the vision to which this Congress has been summoning us for over 30 years. I fear we have not even progress it. As we seek new synergy for the future, let's begin by acknowledging this painful situation together, and lamenting. It is a situation for which we must share some responsibility, and then start to do some reimagining.



Those who founded and developed this Congress are committed to the particular capacity of faith leaders in local, national and international spheres. I continue to be so thankful for that remarkable affirmation. While faith leaders don't usually dominate headlines, their work is often the most urgent and impactful. And so I want to ask: what is the essence of our strength, our capacity, our potential if we are to be bridge-builders and peace-makers?

Such leadership isn't about erasing religious differences – that model only exacerbates tensions. Rather, I would suggest, it is about navigating them with humility, curiosity, and presence. The most powerful interfaith work begins not with agreement, but with building relationships. With listening, before and after speaking, a lesson I learned again last night at the special session on Sacred Sites. This Congress is a gift for developing those friendships – among senior leaders and now also through the Young Leaders' forum – friendships that grow as much through our informal contact after we've spoken as when we sit at this table. And especially when the conversation can become learning, stretching us to realise that unwittingly we are part of the misrepresentations and misunderstandings that occur, inherent to our broken world, our sin.

I want to suggest that the very fragmentation of our world – fragmentation that is not just religious but social and ideological – summons us to embody a particular kind of leadership. One that's not driven by rhetoric but by relationship. Building relationships across difference is about growing our fluency in the spiritual and cultural vocabularies exactly where our people are divided – so that where others see conflict it may become the locus for empowering our attempts to connect.

What does this involve? Friendship is not about agreement, but connection. We don't have to share the same language, spiritual tradition or view of history, but we do need to find a way to be present to each other, to be curious in our listening and then to re-imagine the way forward. This requires shared space, I might dare to call it sacred space; certainly, it is creative space, the kind of space where the encounter stretches us beyond an exchange of words. This might happen through a shared project at grassroots level, a food project or a peace march; I have witnessed it happening through shared exploration of the arts – through music, poetry, performance, painting or sculpture; I've also know it happen through the practice of Scriptural reasoning, where we read and respond together to one another's sacred texts.

Whatever it is, the creative process becomes a kind of spiritual and cultural diplomacy – allowing us to step into each other's stories. To function in an interfaith context, leadership must take me beyond my own religion. Even though I shall not cease to long for you to glimpse the grace and truth of God which I know



to be revealed in my Christian tradition, and you might just as surely seek for me to be persuaded of the ultimate value of your tradition, our leadership to foster interfaith engagement and creativity demands that we become cultural interpreters, relational diplomats, and spiritual listeners. That we create capacity for complexity, honoring difference without demanding conformity, acting as gentle disrupters of prejudice and fear.

Such leaders work not through declaration, but through invitation. Not through dogma, but through dialogue. At moments we will need to stand in the tension to create the space for something deeper to emerge. That demands of us a combination of courage and restraint. Our power lies in our subtlety – not in our systems and structures, nor in our platforms and pulpits. We carry a different kind of authority – earned not through status, but through trust. And that begins wherever we can be present to one another – in the sacred work of showing up, exercising curiosity, creativity, imagination.

I'm not talking about grand gestures but everyday acts: in a shared concern for refugees between a rabbi and an imam; in a collaboration I witnessed recently called 'Caravan' bringing artists from different religious traditions to work on the story of Noah; in the quiet courage of those who choose to engage in relationship despite the risk of being misunderstood or misled.

This model of leadership is about seeking and modelling sacred encounters, grounded in presence, curiosity and creativity. This is the only way I know to overcome the simplistic polarizations of our world – not in search of homogeneity but only of the willingness to stay in the same room and explore the sacred.

Then, together, to reimagine the fabric of peace.



**SPEECH BY MOHAMED ABDELSALAM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE
MUSLIM COUNCIL OF ELDERS**



Dear ladies and gentlemen!

I welcome you back to this fertile land at our meeting, which has become a name for communication and openness, and another step on the path where we are united by a common goal, through which we strive to ensure that dialogue turns from just hope, which comforts those who dream of a better tomorrow, into collective visions, an institutional culture. and a project that is moving forward confidently and powerfully. And power is the result of various experiences, the diversity of cultures of our world, which is transformed into a rich variety of its literatures, languages and identities.

The Republic of Kazakhstan has become a vivid symbol of the rapprochement of civilizations and interreligious dialogue, especially in the light of the undoubted efforts of H.E. President, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and H.E. Maulen Ashimbayev, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan and Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. And the proof of this is the fact that the Kazakh capital Astana is hosting



this Congress with the participation of religious leaders and thinkers for the eighth time in a row for almost a quarter of a century.

Our goal at this important forum is to confirm our vision of dialogue, considering it not only as mere phrases exchanged, but as an institutionalized culture with the courage and perseverance that follow from it. The implied dialogue is a dialogue between religions that embody not just rituals, but a holistic vision of human essence, a vision of another, a vision of moral values transmitted by religions in creating high-level communication and conscious and constructive human relationships.

Ladies and gentlemen!

We in the Council of Muslim Elders are following this path, and today we are proud that it has reached the stage where it strives for synergy for the sake of the future. Having worked in the Council for many years to strengthen the values of dialogue between religions and between the followers of each of them, we can see the prospects for synergy. And this means a greater awareness of the nature of the challenges that arise on the path of interreligious dialogue. It is not aimed only at correcting the opinions exchanged between representatives of religions and not at eliminating misunderstandings about each other, but at achieving a greater level of synergy between their followers for the benefit of their common future on this planet.

We can identify the manifestations of this synergy through 4 main levels.:

1. The primordial synergy between the values in all religions, which affirm the importance of human brotherhood, mutual peace and mercy towards all creatures on this earth.

2. Synergy between religious practices or collective practices called for by religions, whether they are communities with religious diversity, or we can talk about those parts of the world where there are increasing opportunities for communication and meetings between its representatives and the need for them to coexist within the same society and state.

3. The synergy between the enormous potential that fills communities with their differences of religions, and between the creative foundation that the elite and religious leaders represent when they realize that differences are the greatest opportunity to learn, cooperate and complement each other.

4. Synergy for the sake of the future between the youth who belong to these numerous communities. It should be based on education. And youth is the force that can change the world. These young people, with their synergy, must be part of this change.

Ladies and gentlemen!



At the end of my speech, I would like to shake hands with all of you and note that we have passed an important milestone that deserves to be continued, and that the enormous challenges and major crises our world is experiencing confirm for us the need to continue this path, the path of dialogue that opens up the prospects for better opportunities for a synergistic world. with its religious and cultural components, because this synergy is the key to its success in confronting the common challenges faced by all its representatives.

We would also like to once again express our gratitude to the Secretariat of the Congress of Leaders for its consistent work towards achieving this lofty goal.

Thank you all! Peace be upon you, the mercy of Allah and His welfare!



SPEECH BY DAVID YOSSEF, SEPHARDI CHIEF RABBI OF ISRAEL



Honorable Chairman of the Senate of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Ashimbayev! I would like to thank you, as well as thank the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, for this event of exceptional importance, which has brought together representatives of religions from all over the world and spreads the message of unity and peace.

My esteemed colleague, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Kalman Ber, and I represent Judaism. It is a religion with many commandments. One of the important commandments is Shabbat (Saturday). Every week on the seventh day (Shabbat), Jews cannot drive a car or turn on the lights, they must stop and observe the sanctity of Shabbat. But sometimes we are forced to set aside Shabbat and not observe it. This happens when a matter of saving a life is involved. If one must save a life, Shabbat is not observed. This is a special commandment which says: “Saving a life is more important than Shabbat”, and it overrides Shabbat. Human life is the highest value.

The most important thing in Judaism is to preserve life, this is how we act, and we do everything possible to fulfill this. With regard to any person, regardless



of their religion or origin, we try to do everything in our power to preserve their life. Judaism cares about life.

There are many leaders of religious movements here. I appeal to all of you, we have the power to change the course of events in the world, we can stop bloodshed, we have the power to prevent the spread of hatred. And it is in this regard that we must direct all our efforts and concern ourselves with achieving the goal of ending killings in the world, so that no one ever disposes of human life in the name of religion. Everyone must know that life is the most sacred thing for us.

My father was a very well-known rabbi in Israel. He was born in Israel, emigrated from Baghdad, and repatriated to Israel. My mother was born in Halab (Syria), she was also forced to flee Syria and arrived in Israel. At some point, my parents were forced to live in Egypt, where my father was the chief rabbi of Cairo. At that time, there was a very large Jewish community in Cairo. But at some point, they were again forced to flee Egypt and return to Israel.

Israel is the land that God promised and entrusted to the Jewish people. At some point in history, we had to flee Israel, but now we are returning to Israel because it belongs to us. You all saw what Hamas did to Israel, how Hamas murdered children and mothers. Israel is our place, we have nowhere else to go. We are in Israel because we have no other refuge, and we will remain in Israel. We survived before, and we will survive now. The people of Israel live.

Thank you all very much.



SPEECH BY SAMIR SHANTILAL SOMAIYA, PRESIDENT OF “SOMAIYA VIDYAVIHAR”



His Excellency Mr. Kassym-Jomart Kemeluly Tokayev, the President of Kazakhstan! H. E. Maulen Ashimbayev, the Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan and the Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan! Delegates and Dignitaries!

I bring greetings of India with me for the success of the present congress. I feel privileged to attend this meeting as the Leader of Hindu delegation.

We meet here today to engage in dialogue that will help strengthen interfaith harmony in the world, and enhance intercivilizational and intercultural dialogue.

We meet today to reaffirm our shared commitment to work towards building a fair and peaceful world.

We meet here today, to continue our dialogue to promise to ourselves and the world that we are constructively engaging with each other towards securing a future that is better for all of us.

As I speak on the topic of our future synergy, I will quote from the Hindu scriptures – the Vedas and the Upanishads.



We live on the only planet we call home. Quoting from the Hindu Scriptures – the Vedas and the Upanishads:

In the Atharva Veda – the Bhumi Sukta states that we are children of the earth, and that she is our mother:

माता भूमिः पुत्रो अहं पृथिव्याः ।

This is the spirit and love we must have for the earth. As a child who loves his/her mother. As a child who as he/she grows up has a deep sense of responsibility for his/her mother.

We share all that the planet gives us. And we owe the Earth and all its inhabitants a future better than what we inherited.

And as common children who inhabit the earth, we are then, members of the same family.

In the Yoga Vasishtha it is stated that:

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्।

उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्॥

This is mine and that this is not mine are the thoughts of the narrow minded. For the large hearted one, the entire world is a family.

And so we must look at the entire world as a family and we meet here as members of that family, in dialogue to remind, reaffirm, and assure ourselves of our commitment to our shared future.

Further the Bhumi Sukta states that

ये ग्रामा यद् अरण्यं याः सभाः अधिभूम्यां ये संग्रामाः समितियस्त्येषु चारु वदेम ते

In villages, in forests, in meetings, in assemblies, in gatherings let us speak what is good of you.

What is that we wish for our earth and its inhabitants? What is this future synergy of which we speak?

Firstly – also from the Bhumi Sukta:

मा नो द्विषत कश्चन

we must not hate each other:

The synergy is that we have the same aim. The same intention.

समानी व आकृतिः समाना हृदयानि वः । समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति ॥ (Rigveda 10.191.4).

Common, be your intention; common be (the wishes of) your hearts; common be your thoughts, so that there may be thorough union among you.

And so, we have gathered here, of one intention, and one common and shared wish, our shared future. And to live in harmony with one another.

And the future we seek for all of us.

A world that has more happiness and takes care of all its inhabitants.



ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु
मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

- 1: Om, May All be Happy,
 - 2: May All be Free from Illness.
 - 3: May All See what is Auspicious,
 - 4: May no one Suffer.
 - 5: Om Peace, Peace, Peace.
- Shanti is spoken 3 times.

Peace in the cosmos. Peace on earth and peace with oneself.

At Somaiya Vidyavihar where we have about 40,000 students, our students are now encouraged to study different spiritual traditions and also be exposed to wonderful diversity, beauty and abundance of nature, so that in addition to being experts in their chosen field of study, their wider education also helps them to be great citizens of India and the world, and caretakers of mother Earth.

So let us be conscious of our commitment to our common home. To ourselves as one family. And let us work for our shared future for all humanity and all living beings.



**SPEECH BY CHRISTOPHE KAMP,
HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)**



Excellencies!

Religious leaders, distinguished colleagues!

Ladies and gentlemen!

My mandate was established by the OSCE participating States more than three decades ago to identify and de-escalate tensions involving national minorities and ethnic communities – quietly, impartially, and early – so that differences don't get the chance to become divisions, and divisions never become conflict. That preventive spirit is also at the heart of this Congress.

As His Excellency President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has underlined, the potential of religion to act as a bridge between communities and countries is indispensable when the world's stability is tested. We gather today to make that potential a reality.

Sustainable inter-ethnic peace rests on two mutually reinforcing pillars: integration with respect for diversity and security anchored in human rights. Where



different ethnic, linguistic and religious communities are able to learn, work, participate and be heard – in their own languages and together in the State language – societies grow more cohesive and resilient to radicalization and hate.

In 2022, during this Forum, my predecessor, Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, stressed three practical levers of prevention: inclusive education, responsible media and digital spaces, and meaningful participation. This year, I would like to place a special focus on youth exchange and on the participation and leadership of women and girls belonging to different communities. If we dedicate resources and succeed in advancing these two priorities, we will amplify the impact of every other investment in peace.

Young people are our partners in sustainable peace and prevention. When they meet across lines of faith, language and identity – on campus, online and in their own towns – they lower the temperature of public debate, broaden empathy and build sustainable networks. That is why, during my visit to Kazakhstan this week, like during other visits, I am engaging actively with students – I have already given a lecture at KIMEP University and I look forward to my upcoming lecture at Nazarbayev University.

Women belonging to different communities, including minorities, often face intersection of multiple barriers – linguistic, socio-economic, cultural and sometimes legal. When these women are included and participate, the benefits to their families and communities multiply school attendance rises, local economies are strengthened and grievances are resolved earlier and more peacefully.

At the same time, women belonging to minorities should be recognized and supported as leaders and mediators within local and national governance. For this valuable potential to be realized, commitment must be matched by resources: predictable, transparent financing for women-led initiatives in mixed communities should be built into policy frameworks, so that education, mentorship and interfaith community work can strengthen social cohesion in a sustainable way.

Much has already been done by faith-based leaders to strengthen cohesion, yet further steps could bring about a lasting difference.

Religious leaders bring unique convening power and moral authority. Even small steps taken now could make a lasting difference. For example, opening pathways for youth. Building on OSCE region's wider experiences with youth dialogues and intercultural exchanges, religious leaders could intensify efforts to host regular, jointly designed youth dialogues and service projects – creating space, and responsibility, for young people to work together across lines of faith, language and identity.



A **second way** is modelling responsible remembrance. At a time when debates over history are intensifying, leaders can help shape inclusive commemorations that acknowledge all communities' losses and contributions. Because when memory is handled with care, it can heal.

And third, helping to de-escalate negative rhetoric. Religious leaders can set the tone by discouraging divisive language, speaking out against hate speech and promoting respectful dialogue. By leading through example – using nuanced and inclusive rhetoric themselves—they can lower the temperature of public debate, prevent tensions from escalating, and foster a climate in which all communities feel secure and valued.

What can the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE (HCNM) offer?

Drawing on the OSCE HCNM's thematic Recommendations and Guidelines – on education (The Hague), on integration of diverse societies (Ljubljana), on media in the digital age (Tallinn), on minority language rights (Oslo), as well as socio-economic inclusion – I propose a concrete step that States, religious leaders and local authorities can take together: interfaith and inter-ethnic youth exchanges. Move beyond symbolic meetings to problem-solving exchanges where mixed teams of students work jointly on shared challenges. Because when young people build something together, they also build trust among themselves.

My office is ready to share expertise on conflict prevention and fostering integration, including bilingual and mother-tongue plus State-language education models, that strengthen both learning outcomes and social cohesion. We can support the design of youth exchanges and initiatives that foster the leadership of minority women, drawing on tools and lessons learned from across the OSCE area. And where sensitive issues of language, education or participation risk escalation, I can help facilitate quiet dialogue to keep channels open and trust intact.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

Every act of inclusion is an early investment in peace. Youth exchange and the participation of women belonging to minorities are not side projects; they are core infrastructure for security.

I am grateful to the President of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, for convening this Congress and for his consistent support to interreligious dialogue. I look forward to working with many of you in translating our shared principles into daily practice – so that the next generation inherits habits of co-operation that keep our diverse societies peaceful, resilient and whole.

Thank you.



**SPEECH BY MOHAMMAD MEHDI IMANIPOUR,
PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC CULTURE AND
RELATIONS ORGANIZATION UNDER THE PRESIDENT
OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN**



First of all, I would like to express my joy at being among the most important religious leaders of the world gathered here in friendly Kazakhstan, and I wish success for this meeting. I would also like to sincerely thank the wise and culture-loving people and government of Kazakhstan, in particular the leadership of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which for many years has been serving the cause of justice and peace throughout the world. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, as well as to the Chairman of the Senate and the Head of the Secretariat of the Congress, Mr. Maulen Ashimbayev, for their hospitality.

It should be noted here that since the very foundation of this Congress, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a supporter and partner, has wholeheartedly backed this noble initiative aimed at systematizing joint actions for just peace, and will continue to do so.

The theme of this stage of dialogue is synergy for the future, or in other words, the challenges and opportunities ahead of us. Without doubt, we are living in one



of the most complex periods of human life. It is impossible to solve all the issues, yet for my brief address I have chosen as the main theme: “Digital slavery as one of the main challenges, and ways to overcome it within the framework of religious synergy”.

Our daily lives are becoming increasingly dependent on the Internet, social networks, and digital services. This dependence directs users toward “packaged services” and ecosystems that influence key decision-making. Such dependence may restrict freedom of choice and action, resembling economic or cultural enslavement. Advanced algorithms can predict and steer user behavior, and in some cases, individuals may not even be aware of such control.

On the one hand, there is the issue of human rights. Digital space can give rise to new forms of domination and exploitation of people. Specialists who provide online services, create content, or manage data often work without job security or fair wages. This resembles a new form of digital slavery, as human labor is exploited under technological conditions. The historical experience of combating traditional slavery can serve as a reference in overcoming this digital phenomenon.

On the other hand, there is the issue of the rights of nations and states. Principles such as equal rights, balanced distribution of power, and freedom of speech can provide a practical basis for reducing exploitation in the digital sphere. For example, ensuring equal access to information and technology can reduce digital inequality between societies and prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a few companies or institutions. Supporting transparency in algorithms and platform policies, as well as establishing independent oversight bodies, can prevent algorithmic discrimination and misuse of personal data. Ultimately, strengthening freedom of speech and enabling users to actively participate in the design and management of technologies will create a sense of ownership and social responsibility, preventing digital tools from turning into instruments of exploitation. Yet, the social harms of the digital sphere go beyond these issues.

Here, I find it necessary to briefly refer to the owners of Big Data, who control data and use it as a tool in modern hybrid warfare. Today, the rulers of cyberspace make enormous efforts to distort and conceal the truth. Some user posts and comments are easily deleted under the pretext of inciting violence or hatred, and this practice is considered permissible – unlike in traditional media. For instance, events in Islamic countries, especially in resisting Gaza, are being distorted and concealed. The media is not allowed to present the truth as it is, and unfortunately, they often reverse the places of angels and demons. We live in an era where governments do not respond to the demands of the people, international mechanisms and human rights institutions are practically ineffective and failing.



Can we then expect the owners of Big Data to fulfill their obligations to show the truth? If great powers continue to control content and Big Data while promoting fabricated narratives, how can we hope for the dissemination of accurate information in the future? Contemporary research shows that, due to the inefficiency of international institutions and the dominance of great powers over Big Data, serious challenges have arisen in ensuring truth and justice in the digital sphere. Under such circumstances, the creation of metadata and shared data banks by independent, value-oriented states can be considered a key solution to resisting new forms of “digital slavery” and the harm it causes.

On the other hand, the purposeful use of shared data and artificial intelligence, grounded in the natural foundations of human existence and religious teachings, can serve as an effective tool for peaceful coexistence, constructive dialogue, and reducing misunderstandings. However, proper use of this technology is only possible if it is based on ethical principles, universal values, and cultural particularities, and if it is protected from misuse and domination.

Digital slavery has become a reality of the global arena, and therefore the need to formulate and implement international rules based on moral and religious values is felt more strongly than ever before. At this point, collective awareness and cooperation among religious leaders and the followers of divine religions can pave the way to a new order, where truth and human dignity – not the absolute dominance of data-form the foundation of human life.

Our duty is not only to critique the current situation but also to strive to build a future founded on greater justice and humanity. This should be a future where data is not a tool of domination, but rather an instrument for advancing mutual understanding, justice, and coexistence. Believing that the role of religions in the future will be even more important than it is today, my concrete proposal for religious synergy for the future is this: instead of reinforcing monopolies in the sphere of digital data or supporting dominant narratives in the media, let us jointly work toward “building Big Data” that leads to free thinking and sustainable peace.

With shared vigilance and cooperation, there is hope that we can build a world where human dignity stands above all digital structures.

Thank you for your attention.



**SPEECH BY RAVIL GAYNUTDIN,
CHAIRMAN OF THE SPIRITUAL ADMINISTRATION OF
MUSLIMS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, CHAIRMAN
OF THE COUNCIL OF MUFTIS OF RUSSIA**



Your Excellency Kassym-Jomart Tokayev!

Venerable brothers and sisters!

Here, within the walls of the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, I am heartily glad to welcome you on behalf of the 25 million Muslim Ummah of the Russian Federation and the Muslim International Forum. Allow me to greet you with peace, mercy and blessings of the Almighty. For such a large-scale Congress to convene and work successfully, it is not enough to build a building.

I congratulate you, Your Excellency Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, on the fact that the political leadership and the people of Kazakhstan have, over the 30 years since the adoption of the Constitution, built not just a palace in their state, but a society of peace and accord, and are strengthening it in every way. As a participant in all Congresses since 2003, I am a witness to Kazakhstan's development based on the values of dialogue and the coexistence of peoples, religions, civilizations, and cultures. Seeing this, I sincerely rejoice for our neighboring brotherly state, Kazakhstan. Taking this opportunity, I congratulate



the people of Kazakhstan and all humanity on the 80th anniversary of our Victory over Nazism in World War II, which is known to us, the citizens of CIS countries, as the Great Patriotic War.

Humanity has repeatedly experienced the denial and diminishment of the role of religion and faith, and the destruction of religious institutions. History has also known attempts at falsification: using quasi-religious rhetoric to achieve political, mercantile goals. Modern times are an era of replacing traditional religious institutions and practices with their secular analogues.

Epochs follow one another, but in moments of the most difficult trials people all over the world continue to turn their eyes and prayers to God, calling for His help and salvation. In moments of confusion, in search of consolation and spiritual support, people continue to go to temples. That is why temples become the object of aggression against them during military conflicts and civil strife.

In this regard, the holding of a Special Session on the Protection of Religious Sites on the margins of our Congress, jointly with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, is highly commendable. On behalf of Russian Muslims, I congratulate the High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, on his appointment as the UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia. We are grateful to the Alliance of Civilizations and to you personally for your attention to the protection of God's temples – mosques and churches – in Palestine, especially against the backdrop of the man-made humanitarian catastrophe that has unfolded before the eyes of the entire world. I know that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) provides significant support to you in this mission. Thanks to the strategic vision of our national leader, Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation has the honor of being an observer state in the OIC for 20 years and consistently speaks out against the inadmissibility of Islamophobia.

Against the backdrop of numerous military conflicts everywhere in the world, the voice of religious leaders is called to be a voice in defense of peace, dialogue, justice, and humanity. In this connection, I extend heartfelt greetings to the newly elected Pope Leo XIV, who, continuing the mission of his predecessor Pope Francis, advocates from peacemaking positions regarding the Russian – Ukrainian conflict, as well as on the issue of the destruction and suffering in Palestine.

The Holy Quran states: “O mankind! We created You from a single (pair) Of a male and a female, And made you into Nations and tribes, that Ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise Each other). Verily The most honoured of you In the sight of God Is (he who is) the most Righteous of you. And God has full knowledge And is well acquainted (With all things)” (49:13). Thus, the Noble



Quran declares that different religious communities should be in balance with each other and that the Almighty Himself preserves this Divine order. Abai Kunanbaev – the glorious son of the Kazakh land through the ages, who deeply comprehended the essence of Quranic humanism –wrote lines echoing the Quranic verses:

“Biz jaratushy emes, jaratqan köleñkesine qaray biletuğyn pändemiz. Sol mahabbat pen ğadeletke qaray tartpaqpyz. Sol Allanyñ hikmetin bireden bireu anyğyraq sezbekpen artylady”.

“We are not creators, but mortals, cognizing the world through created things. We are drawn towards that love and justice. And we differ in how much better one of us understands the wisdom of Allah than another”.

I am convinced that the peacekeeping, consolidating role of religion will not fade until the end of time. On the contrary, in the 21st century, faith can truly be a source of creative inspiration and synergy of healthy forces throughout the world, provide spiritual support in the whirlpool of technological transformations of our reality, and be a source of immutable values and moral guidelines.

Allow me to conclude my speech with the words of the Russian Muslim theologian Musa Bigiev, whose 150th anniversary is being marked this year by the global scholarly community. In my opinion, they reflect the mission of religion today and for all time: “Faith is the approach of a man to the abode of Divinity. The gates of God's mercy are always open. There is no gatekeeper posted at these gates. Whether in an hour of voluntary choice or in moments of inevitability, everyone – both the free person and the wretch oppressed by misfortune – will certainly be accepted by this abode of mercy”. (From the work “Some Current Problems of Our Society”).

To make these words come true, leaders of religious traditions must, first of all, ensure dialogue, brotherhood and mutual respect among themselves, and on this path I prayerfully wish success to our Congress.

Thank you for your attention.



SPEECH BY PHALLOP THAIARRY, PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD FELLOWSHIP OF BUDDHISTS



Excellencies! Distinguished Guests! Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is my honor to thank the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting this VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. This gathering proves that dialogue among faiths is possible and necessary for global peace.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), which I represent, was founded in 1950 in Sri Lanka and now unites Buddhists in more than 40 countries. Our mission is to promote understanding, compassion, and cooperation – not only among Buddhists, but with people of all faiths. We believe that peace for the world begins with peace in the mind, and we seek cooperation with every tradition represented here today to make that vision real.

Buddhism teaches that peace begins within. As the Buddha said:

“All things are preceded by the mind, led by the mind, and made by the mind”.

Our conflicts, like our peace, are created in the mind. Meditation trains the mind to be calm, clear, and compassionate. A concentrated mind dissolves hatred, greed, and fear. It creates kindness, forgiveness, and harmony.



Meditation is simple and universal. It requires no wealth or position – only mindfulness and breathing. Today, it is practiced in schools, institutions, and workplaces worldwide. Its benefits are clear:

- Less stress and anxiety,
- More clarity in decisions,
- Greater compassion and kindness.

This is why the WFB actively promotes meditation as a practical tool for everyday life. We see it as a way for people everywhere to contribute to peace in their families, communities, and nations.

Yet peace cannot be achieved by one religion or one community alone. It requires all leaders, all faiths, and all nations working hand in hand. The WFB stands ready to cooperate with every tradition represented here – to build understanding, reduce conflict, and ensure that the next generations inherit a more peaceful and compassionate world.

Meditation is more than a religious practice – it is a universal principle. By cultivating peace within, we create peace without. Together, as leaders gathered at this Congress, we carry a shared responsibility: to build a future of peace for humankind and for the world.



**SPEECH BY SHEIKH-UL-ISLAM
ALLAHSHUKUR PASHAZADE,
CHAIRMAN OF THE CAUCASUS MUSLIMS BOARD**



In the Name of the One and Almighty Creator!

Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev!

Your Excellency, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Maulen Ashimbayev!

Your Holiness, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' Kirill!

Your Eminence, Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad!

Your Excellency, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos!

Secretary General of the Council of Muslim Elders, Mr. Muhammad Abdelsalam!

Distinguished participants of the Congress, religious, political, and public figures!

It is an honor for me to sincerely greet all the participants of our esteemed forum and to convey, on behalf of the Azerbaijani people and the leader of our state, His Excellency Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the warmest greetings and blessings to the



participants of the Congress and to the brotherly Kazakh people. I pray to the Almighty that He grants success to all our efforts and activities for the sake of the unity of the human family.

The Congresses in Kazakhstan, serving as a traditional summit of the world's respected religious leaders for more than two decades, have reaffirmed their importance on the international stage. The special significance of the Congresses in Astana lies in the fact that they serve as a permanent platform for the interaction of religious leaders with political and public figures. I wish to express deep gratitude to the state of Kazakhstan and its wise political leadership for bringing to life this initiative of great importance to all humanity and ensuring its sustainable continuation. Under the leadership of His Excellency President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the Republic of Kazakhstan is confidently advancing on the path of progress and spiritual development. We are convinced that Kazakhstan will continue to play an active role in promoting dialogue among religions and civilizations.

Distinguished participants! It is certainly an important step that the agenda of the VIII Congress in Astana includes the theme: "Dialogue of Religions – Synergy for the Future". Recently, we all witnessed how the world stood on the brink of a real nuclear threat. We must realize that the nature of wars has changed, that we live in an era of hybrid wars that know no boundaries. Each of us, as representatives of different segments of society, bears our share of responsibility, and we must fully comprehend this and intensify our efforts to raise peace-loving and peace-making individuals. We must act in accordance with our moral duty and use the powers and opportunities of international law to put an end to the killings and tragedies of innocent people in various parts of the world.

Another issue of concern is the introduction of artificial intelligence into everyday life. The rapid development of digital technologies and their widespread penetration into all areas of life open up new opportunities, but they also bring new threats. In this matter, observance of spiritual and moral boundaries and prevention of possible destructive consequences are of fundamental importance. This issue has gone beyond the technical level and has begun to affect socio-ethical aspects, which must prompt reflection in every individual. It is necessary to strictly observe legal frameworks and religious principles to avoid major catastrophes in the future. Today, we have gathered in Astana to discuss these extremely important issues that will allow us to achieve real results.

Dialogue and cooperation between religions is of paramount importance for the protection of human life – the sacred value created by the Almighty on earth. This cooperation must continue and develop in the spirit of the Document on Human Fraternity, signed in Abu Dhabi in 2019. The duty of every political and re-



religious leader is to curb statements and actions that incite hatred and conflict under the guise of freedom of speech and democracy, to prevent the misuse of religion for political purposes, and to counter manifestations of xenophobia.

The Almighty Allah says in the Holy Quran:

“Do not spread corruption and wickedness on the earth after it has been set in order” (Surah Al-A‘raf, 56).

As a religious leader, I appeal to all political figures to support a ceasefire and diplomatic efforts aimed at establishing peace.

Praise be to the Almighty, Azerbaijan, having restored its territorial integrity, is carrying out large-scale reconstruction work in the liberated territories, eliminating the consequences of ecocide and vandalism against our cultural and spiritual heritage. We are grateful to all states that support Azerbaijan in reconstruction and demining efforts, as well as in new construction projects. In this regard, we express special gratitude to brotherly Kazakhstan for the construction, as a gift, of the Kurmangazy Children’s Creativity Development Center in the city of Fuzuli.

I sincerely express my appreciation to the leadership of Kazakhstan, the responsible officials, and the entire state for the traditionally high level of organization of the Congress and the warm hospitality.

May the Almighty grant peace and security to our countries and protect our entire world!



**SPEECH BY SALIM BIN MOHAMMED AL-MALIK,
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD
EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
ORGANIZATION (ICESCO)**



In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate, All praise is due to Allah, the One to be worshiped, for there is no deity but Him.

Peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, and upon the faithful procession of prophets and messengers.

Your Excellency Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan! Distinguished ministers! Excellencies! Esteemed guests!

Peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you.

Here we meet again, esteemed participants of this distinguished conference, in its eighth session, after three years since we last gathered in the seventh session, also under the patronage of His Excellency President Tokayev, and with the generosity of the people of Kazakhstan, who have always been known throughout history for their warm welcome and noble hospitality.

We meet after these years to review what we had resolved then, and to assess the efforts we have made, with varying contributions shaped by diverse circumstances.



We meet while the world has witnessed, and continues to witness, dire developments in the human context. Developments which indicate that man's estrangement from his fellow man has become an accepted reality. More dangerously, it has become a normalized matter that arouses no concern and hardly receives attention.

Distances have widened, exchanges have diminished, numbers of migrants crossing on boats of death have increased, while stability has declined in many regions. We have possessed all means of comfort, yet weariness has possessed us. We have conquered space with our knowledge, yet wronged the earth with our greed. We have shortened time with our achievements, yet our relationships have slowed.

Material production has doubled, while spiritual giving has withered. Scenes of live-streamed killings now feed our moments of entertainment produced by screens, and instill in our youth illusions of heroism in the environments of killing and destruction offered by electronic games.

What madness besieges our world! What dark future pursues our optimism for a bright tomorrow! Truly, the earth has adorned itself, but are we now promised that our joy in believing we possess everything and can control anything will be stolen from us?

Esteemed participants, this is a moment of responsibility more graver than many realize. The paradox is that the issue is evident, and the roots of the crisis are hardly hidden from the discerning or the observant. It is spiritual emptiness – plainly and simply.

This spiritual emptiness has increased the rate of conflicts in the past two years by 23 percent, according to reports of the International Peace Institute. Last year recorded the highest rate of violent conflicts since 1946. It is this emptiness that raises the rates of killing to eight cases per 100,000 people. It is this emptiness that leads the world to witness famine disasters, due to aggressions, unprecedented in history – as is happening today in Gaza, Sudan, Yemen, and elsewhere.

It is this emptiness that fuels sex trafficking and the sex industry to frightening levels, exposing the nakedness of the world we live in. Reports state that \$83 billion was the volume of the sex trade in a single year! Added to this is the drug trade, whose annual economy amounts to about \$186 billion, involving 292 million users, according to the 2024 World Drug Report.

As for the arms trade, the trade of deliberate killing, its global volume amounts to \$5.3 trillion! All these are alarming bells of danger. And no response is more fitting than that of religious leaders, with their hearts, minds, and tongues, whom the world needs today more than ever.



“Religious diplomacy”, which ICESCO has included in its new concept of “civilizational diplomacy”, is indeed the optimal path to enable a world governed by security, peace, values, and noble morals. It is true that the assault on values is greater than our capacity to resist. But in the solidarity of spiritual leaders, in the unity of their wills, and in their known devotion, perseverance, and steadfastness, I say: there lies what assures us of the wisdom of their visions and the effectiveness of their initiatives.

In this context, ICESCO recommends the following, to continue this path:

First: To make full use of the Astana initiative in establishing a reference observatory that provides information, conducts analyses, and proposes orientations and policies that religious leaders can fulfill to the best of their ability.

Second: To rely on the principle of modernization, adapting the tools of the age, the language of the age, and the resources of the age, by mobilizing the efforts of specialized experts aware of the role of civilizational diplomacy in its spiritual and religious dimensions.

Third: To create an accredited scientific index in the study of cases, in order to anticipate outcomes connected to the capacity of religious leaders to fulfill their intended roles.

All this, esteemed leaders, can create a network of scientific and practical trust, capable of carrying out the duties of resistance and confrontation.

How can we achieve this ambition and realize this dream? Undoubtedly, the deliberations of this forum provide answers to this and to other questions that will arise during the course of our great work. And I affirm to you from this platform that the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) pledges to remain in regular communication with the leadership and officials of the Republic of Kazakhstan, to ensure clarity of vision and implementation with its esteemed member states.

So, thank you to Kazakhstan – its leadership, government, and people. And thank you, faithful participants of this conference. Much is expected from you, and it is a great responsibility. But it remains a legitimate dream and a hope to be pursued.

And finally, may peace from Allah be upon you.



**SPEECH BY SARDAR MUHAMMAD YOUSAF,
FEDERAL MINISTER FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AND
INTERFAITH HARMONY OF PAKISTAN**



In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Distinguished leaders of world and traditional religions! Esteemed colleagues! Respected scholars and honorable participants of this august gathering!

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.

It is indeed an honor and privilege to address the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions here in Astana, the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan. I wish to express my deep gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan, and in particular to the Chairman of the Senate and the Head of the Secretariat of this Congress, for convening us under the most timely and profound theme: “Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future.” This Congress has established itself as a beacon of hope, a forum of wisdom, and a unique symbol of our collective aspiration to cultivate peace, understanding, and harmony among the diverse peoples of the world.

At this moment in history, when humanity is confronted with multifaceted crises, rising conflicts, widening inequalities, moral disorientation, and



environmental degradation – the need for dialogue among religions is greater than ever. Dialogue is not merely a diplomatic exercise; it is a sacred duty entrusted to us by our traditions. In Islam, the Quran declares: “And do not argue with the People of the Book except in a way that is best, unless it be with those of them who act unjustly, and say, We believe in what has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit” (Surah al-‘Ankabut 29:46).

This verse provides a divine framework for dialogue: with wisdom, respect, and the acknowledgment of shared spiritual roots. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is reported to have said: “The most beloved to Allah are those who are most beneficial to His creation”.

This Hadith places service to humanity at the very heart of faith, reminding us that the outcome of dialogue must be cooperation for the common good.

Dialogue of religions, in its truest sense, is an engagement of hearts and minds. It is about building bridges of trust, recognizing our common humanity, and cultivating empathy across traditions. The diversity of our faiths is not a weakness but a divine blessing. As the Quran tells us: “For every one of you We have appointed a law and a way. If Allah had willed, He could have made you one community, but He willed otherwise in order to test you in what He has given you. So compete with one another in doing good deeds” (Surah al-Maidah 5:48).

Here the Quran does not erase difference but elevates it into an opportunity – an opportunity to excel in goodness, to learn from one another, and to cooperate in what benefits humanity at large.

Dear Colleagues!

The life of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) offers a timeless model for interfaith harmony. The Charter of Madinah, drafted under his leadership, stands as one of the earliest constitutional frameworks ensuring peaceful coexistence between Muslims, Jews, and other communities of the city. It granted them rights, duties, and mutual protections, establishing a civic order based on justice and equality. Similarly, when a Christian delegation from Najran visited the Prophet’s mosque in Madinah, he received them with respect, allowed them to pray in the mosque according to their own rites, and engaged them in dialogue with patience and courtesy. These examples demonstrate that Islam’s vision of dialogue is not theoretical; it is deeply practical and historically grounded.

In today’s context, the “Synergy for the Future” must mean harnessing the moral capital of our religious traditions to confront global challenges. Poverty, injustice, extremism, and climate change are not problems of one nation or one religion; they are shared crises that demand shared solutions. Our religions, when interpreted in their true spirit, emphasize stewardship of the earth, care for



the vulnerable, and the pursuit of justice. The Quran commands: “Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives, and forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and oppression” (Surah al-Nahl 16:90).

This principle of justice and benevolence must underpin our interreligious cooperation, ensuring that faith becomes a source of healing rather than division.

Esteemed Members!

It is equally important to disown the misuse of religion for political or violent ends. Extremism, hatred, and coercion in the name of faith contradict the very essence of all religious teachings. Islam, in particular, rejects compulsion in matters of belief, as the Quran states unequivocally: “There shall be no compulsion in religion. Truth has become distinct from falsehood” (Surah al-Baqarah 2:256).

We must unite our voices to condemn all forms of intolerance, discrimination, and violence, reaffirming that religion is a force for peace, not for conflict. Our shared moral voice has the power to counter ideologies of division and to inspire societies toward reconciliation and cooperation.

The youth of today look to us, as religious and moral leaders, for guidance. They live in an interconnected yet often polarized world, exposed to conflicting messages of division and unity. It is our responsibility to provide them with hope, wisdom, and direction. Education rooted in ethics, compassion, and a spirit of coexistence must be promoted across the globe. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said: “The best of you are those who learn knowledge and teach it”.

Knowledge is the antidote to prejudice, and dialogue is the antidote to ignorance. By combining the two, we can nurture a generation that values diversity as strength and embraces dialogue as a pathway to peace.

This Congress, by bringing together leaders of world and traditional religions, is uniquely positioned to set a moral compass for humanity. From these deliberations must emerge a universal message: that religions, far from being barriers, are bridges; far from being instruments of conflict, are fountains of reconciliation; far from fueling despair, are reservoirs of hope. Our synergy for the future lies in realizing this truth collectively and applying it sincerely in our societies, institutions, and policies.

Pakistan, with its deep spiritual heritage and its experience of diverse religious traditions, remains firmly committed to interfaith harmony and dialogue among civilizations. Our Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and belief, while our cultural history reflects centuries of peaceful coexistence among various communities. We stand ready to contribute to the global efforts for interreligious understanding and to work with all partners in building a future that is inclusive, just, and peaceful.

**Dear Audience!**

In conclusion, let me emphasize that the road toward synergy is long, but it is paved with divine guidance and human goodwill. If we remain sincere, patient, and committed to the higher values of our traditions – justice, compassion, mercy, and wisdom – we can transform our diversity into unity and our dialogue into tangible cooperation. Let this Congress send forth a clear message to the world that when leaders of religions come together in dialogue, humanity gains a vision of hope, peace, and prosperity for generations to come.

I thank you all for your attention, and I pray for the success of this Congress and for a future of harmony, peace, and wellbeing for all humankind.

Wa Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.



SPEECH BY ARAM I, CATHOLICOS OF THE GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA



I warmly welcome and highly appreciate the continuous efforts of the government of Kazakhstan to deepen and broaden interreligious dialogue and collaboration in support of initiatives and processes aimed at a peaceful world sustained by human rights and ethical values.

Interreligious dialogue is no more a theological matter or on academic project; it is a reality of existential nature in a globalized world marked by growing religious, cultural and ethnic pluralism.

A serious and relevant interreligious dialogue should not be self-centered; it must be responsive to the concrete issues and challenges facing a given society. It must not be also self-sufficient; its agenda must keep pace with changing realities.

Indeed, a credible interreligious dialogue enhances greater understanding and mutual respect; it builds mutual trust and acceptance; it questions all forms and expressions of exclusiveness and absoluteness and helps to enlarge the scope of our views, opens us to wider horizons, and leads us to uncharted territories.



A serious interreligious dialogue implies intrareligious dialogue, to avoid the emergence of contradictory trends within the same religion, as well as to ensure the integrity of its teachings.

Religions have both commonalities and specificities pertaining to their beliefs and teachings. They are called to respect their differences and accept each other the way they are. Religions are also called to affirm their common ethical values which ensure their identity, strengthen their moral authority and emphasize their specific role in society.

In the last few decades, significant steps have been taken in the area of inter-religious dialogue. Through common statements, joint declarations and mutual visits, religious leaders have affirmed their commitment to continue their dialogue and collaboration. I believe that a renewed emphasis needs to be given to interreligious dialogue as a solid platform and a reliable context for religions of addressing together issues of common concern, of grappling with critical challenges, and dealing with complex situations, impacting the life of societies.

In my view, the interreligious dialogue and collaboration should consider as a top priority the following four areas of engagement.

First, religions are challenged to translate their reflection into action aimed at harmonious and peaceful co-existence. Living together as integral part of one broader community of coherent diversities is of vital importance in the world today. In fact, intolerance, fundamentalism and extremism, in multiple forms and expressions, often assert their presence in modern societies. Religions must combat such trends and tendencies by promoting values of tolerance and peaceful co-habitation.

Second, in a world marked by increasing tensions and conflicts, I consider the role of religion as one of bridge building. Humanity is at a dangerous crossroads: global and regional agendas clash, strategies oppose, exclusive claims persist, consensus gives way to military victory, might imposes itself on right, clouds of uncertainty, insecurity and fear gather on the horizon of humanity. Religions cannot remain silent and on standby. In the face of growing polarizations, building bridges of mutual understanding as a core ethical value is at the heart of all religions' teachings and vocation.

Third, religions can make significant contribution to prevention of crises rather than to conflict resolution. In prevention, values are employed, while in negotiation interests count. Without associating themselves with a given political agenda or ideological orientation, religions are urged to stand firm against all dangers that threaten the human life and dignity, and cause injustice and violence.



Fourth, religions can play an important role in the sphere of ecological crisis, particularly in addressing issues related to climate change. Religion's approach to ecological issues should be ethical, namely within the framework of human stewardship and responsibility towards the planet, the only household of humanity.

In conclusion, how can we take interreligious dialogue from the stage of intellectual inter-action to issue-oriented action? How can interreligious dialogue promote a culture of peaceful co-existence in societies in which living together has become shaky? How can religions develop a global ethic based on shared values and binding principles? These challenges need to be taken seriously and responsibly by interreligious dialogue.



**SPEECH BY OSANO MASASHI,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SUPREME RELIGIOUS LEADER
OF THE SHINTO SHRINE “FUJISAN KOMITAKE”**



Allow me to start by to express my respect for President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who is hosting this meeting today, and my deepest gratitude for his invitation to participate.

Further, it is a great honor to be able to address the leaders of religions from across the world and representatives of international organizations who have gathered here today.

I am here as the representative of Shinto, the native religious tradition of Japan. In Shinto, we honor many diverse entities called “kami”, and our tradition is said to date back to the first inhabitants of the Japanese islands. The kami are honored at sacred sites called “jinja”, and even now there are said to be about 100,000 across Japan, many of them centuries old. I serve as chief priest of one of them, a jinja on Mount Fuji with over a thousand years of history.

Since ancient times, we Japanese have suffered from the impact of typhoons and torrential rain. From this was born a fearful reverence for nature, and Shinto’s veneration of the kami of wind, rain, and lightning.



At the same time, we made our livings based on forestry, fishing, and agriculture, especially rice, and gave thanks to the kami of nature and our ancestors for these blessings. As cooperation between community members was essential, we deeply valued harmony. Shinto was formed from the accumulation of this awe, gratitude, and respect for harmony.

Thus, Shinto is deeply connected to the history, culture, and traditional spirit of the Japanese. Jinja Honcho brings together jinja from across Japan, and works across many fields to preserve Japan's cultural and spiritual traditions and pass them on to the next generation.

In today's world, extreme heat, flooding, and wildfires are frequent occurrences, and extraordinary weather is becoming normal. Mount Fuji, where I spend my days, is no exception.

The permafrost is melting, and the tree line is climbing. As I see the beauty of this mountain, honored by the Japanese as a kami, changing under the influence of global climate change, I am gripped by a profound sense of crisis.

Further, as technology advances at a breathtaking pace, artificial intelligence is starting to have a great effect on our traditional values. People are looking for easy answers, forgetting the traditions of listening to the voices of the unseen and feeling their presence, and we seem to be on the verge of people treating AI as a higher power.

But more than this, in a world where problems of inequality, discrimination and poverty are crying out for us to join hands to find solutions, instead we see intensifying division and opposition. At this moment, this gathering, united in our aim to find synergy for the future through dialogue of religions, is of deep significance for the world.

In particular, it is now 80 years since the end of the last world war. In Japan, this was marked on August 15th, when almost everyone remembered the war dead and prayed for peace. Since then, Japan has successfully enjoyed more than 80 years of peaceful life, and this is my personal experience.

But if I look at the rest of the world, not everywhere has been blessed with peace and development. There is no end to armed conflicts, and people's lives are being taken even at this moment. Despite these tragic experiences, people do not stop fighting. As their suffering deepens, their vision narrows to their own situation, and they try to distract themselves by taking it out on others. And so, conflicts continue without relief. As religious leaders, is it not our mission to confront this situation in a spirit of harmony?

In the legends of Shinto, there are many tales of the kami gathering to decide matters in council. None of them impose their will in the belief that they alone are right. They value dialogue, and seek a solution that is best for everyone.



I believe that people today are called on to follow their example. In a spirit of harmony, we should not just put forward our own positions, but also listen to those of others, try to understand them, and, through continued dialogue, together seek out the best way forward. And this attitude of seeking mutual understanding through dialogue is in no way unique to Shinto. We share it with all religions throughout the world. It is precisely because religions seek to live in peace that we can respect one another. It is our duty as religious leaders to work for the recognition of this.

Religion is the foundation of humanity. We can appeal to the hearts of all people, across political and economic borders. To whom we pray might differ, but as we pray alongside each other, it is our calling to demonstrate hope for the future.

All of us gathered here bear the wisdom of our own traditions, through which the people of the world can live in peace and prosperity.

Through dialogue, we can learn from one another, and create synergy for the future. Individually, our effort is a single drop of water, and cannot quench even one person's thirst. But however small the drops, if they gather, they become streams, and then rivers, and then the wide ocean. If everyone acts with firm faith, we will in the end become a great wave opening a bright future for the world.

Here today, we, all of us, offered prayers for peace with a united heart. I believe that was a first step towards this future.

Let me conclude by once again expressing my gratitude to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev for his strong commitment to continuing to host this Congress and guiding its development. With prayers for the health and success of all of those present today, I would like to conclude my speech on behalf of Shinto.



**SPEECH BY ELDER PATRICK KEARON,
MEMBER OF THE QUORUM OF THE TWELVE
APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF
LATTER-DAY SAINTS**



Dear friends! Distinguished leaders and honored clergy, it is a privilege to address you today. I come representing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and celebrate this gathering and what it stands for. It is a great pleasure to meet once again with friends made in many corners of the earth.

I have the deepest respect and admiration for the contributions you each make around the world, and for the remarkable diversity of faith and tradition assembled here in this beautiful setting. I join you less to speak but more to listen.

As a child, I moved from my native England to a faraway country with a very different culture, climate, and religious landscape. For a small boy, this was at first shocking but very quickly became a source of marvel and wonder. Children adapt swiftly and observe without prejudice. In no time, I came to love my new home, the people, the land, the food, and the culture. I was fortunate, in my youth, to arrive without preconceived ideas.

I later realised that I had become sensitive to what was sacred to friends in our host nation. The way families we knew treated their religious rites and practices



with quiet reverence became a beautiful example to me. Their holy places had sacred status for them, and this was passed on to me through their example of devotion. It became a tender privilege to enter their holy sites.

I came to understand that a sacred space didn't need to be "My sacred space" to foster a sense of the sacred in me.

Our Shared Experience with Sacred Spaces

I applaud the Congress's decision to hold, yesterday, the special session on safeguarding religious sites, and I look forward to the official opening of the Park of Peace and Reconciliation tomorrow morning. That park will serve as a beautiful space we can all share, a fitting emblem of this gathering, and a beacon to all who will follow.

Across faith traditions, sacred spaces – whether soaring cathedrals, quiet temples, majestic mosques, serene synagogues, or humble meeting places – hold deep meaning. These houses of worship stand in nearly every land, offering refuge and inspiration for the faithful.

These sacred spaces rise like sturdy beacons of faith and hope. They offer sanctuaries where we pray, sing, meditate, and find strength in the presence of God and one another.

For my faith, temples are the most sacred place on earth – referred to as "the house of the Lord." In the temple, we seek to learn more about God and draw closer to Him. Our most recognizable temple, located in Salt Lake City, originally built in the mid-1800s, is now undergoing a major renovation. This complex work includes strengthening the temple's foundation to be seismically secure. It is both a preservation of the past and a commitment to the future. As I watch this work unfold, I am inspired by the craftsmanship, skill, and dedication of the hundreds of individuals involved. They each contribute their unique skills to something greater than themselves.

When it is completed, we will welcome our friends to come and celebrate this restoration and renewal with us. This morning, I invite each of you to come as my personal guest to experience this monument to our love of God between April and October of 2027. We would be honored to have you join us in this special season of celebration for our faith.

Building Sacred Space Between Us

We know what a difference it makes when we approach our own personal interactions with the same kind of care we are taking with our historic temple.



I'm grateful for our shared striving – beyond the walls of temples, churches, synagogues, and mosques – to treat the space between us with the same sense of reverence and purpose. We can give as much sacred regard to one another as we do to the beauty of our sanctuaries. As we do, we build sacred spaces within our relationships – places of mutual respect, compassion, and trust.

The spaces between us become sacred when we take the time to listen, when we replace judgment with compassion, and when we remember that what unites us is far greater than what might divide us. Just as holy edifices rise one stone at a time, so too are peace and understanding built, moment by moment, encounter by encounter.

As leaders of faiths, we strive to work across borders. I am deeply grateful for the spirit of consecrated effort that brings us together with enduring respect, wherever we are from. This allows us to build connections that are both deep and strong, grounded in genuine understanding and sincere awareness of one another's backgrounds, experiences, and needs. In this work, we honor the divine call to foster peace, mutual respect, and lasting fellowship for the whole human family.

Building Our Shared Future of Peace

Creating sacred connections together opens extraordinary potential. In fact, it seems essential to the theme of this year's Congress: finding synergy for the future through religiously grounded dialogue and action. We have all witnessed working together, and hand in hand with local communities, to create safe havens for women and children, and places of refuge from war. We have seen former adversaries setting aside differences to deliver food, medicine, and shelter in disaster-struck regions. Often leading these efforts are faith-based groups – trusted allies with deep roots in the communities they serve, helping ensure that relief reaches those who need it most.

This is what is happening as we move from conversation to action and build trusting connections by serving together. Our shared opportunity is to turn strangers into neighbors and neighbors into friends.

As Winston Churchill once observed, "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us". Though he spoke of physical structures, the same is true of building peace and human connection. The world we hope to live in depends on the world we are willing to build together.

Dear friends, thank you for your efforts. As we continue to build and protect more than temples, synagogues, mosques, and churches, we can build and protect human trust and friendship. We will lay the foundation stones of



compassionate dialogue, listening, and understanding. We can repair what is broken, strengthen what is fragile, and frame a future where peace can replace fear. We can draw closer and forge connections as thoughtfully and hopefully as we build and preserve physical sanctuaries. In doing so, we will best realize the kind of world those buildings represent – a place of heaven on earth.

Thank you for being such builders.



**SPEECH BY FRANCIS KURIA KAGEMA,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF “RELIGIONS FOR PEACE”,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE AFRICAN COUNCIL
OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS**



**Your Excellency, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of Kazakhstan!
Esteemed religious and faith leaders!
And members of Congress!**

It is my truest pleasure to join you here today.

I bring you warm greetings of peace on behalf of the global Religions for Peace movement.

It is a profound honour to address this Congress, and I wish to begin by offering my heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan and the International Center for Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue for their gracious hospitality and for convening us once again in the beautiful city of Astana.

For more than two decades, this World Congress has stood as a beacon of dialogue and cooperation, reminding our world that peace is possible when we choose to work together.



Since its inaugural gathering in 2003, the Congress has grown into a truly global platform for interfaith dialogue, engaging leaders of diverse traditions in common reflection on the pressing challenges of our age.

Religions for Peace has long been honoured to walk alongside you in this journey. My predecessors, Dr. William Vendley and Dr. Azza Karam, each participated in this Congress, bearing witness to its unique contribution to the architecture of global peace.

Today, I stand humbly in their footsteps, carrying forward our movement's enduring commitment to collaboration among religions in service of humanity and the Earth.

The theme of this VIII Congress – “Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future” – is both timely and visionary. The word synergy comes from the Greek *sunergos*, meaning “to work together”.

At its heart, it reminds us that none of us – no religion, no nation, no community – can meet the immense challenges of our time alone.

The crises of war and displacement, ecological destruction, inequality, and polarisation demand not only dialogue but a new depth of cooperation, what we might call a spiritual synergy.

History teaches us that such synergy is possible. We recall the courage of St. Francis of Assisi, who crossed enemy lines in 1219 to meet Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil with respect and fraternity.

We remember the first Religions for Peace World Assembly in 1970, where leaders of every major faith came together in Kyoto to lay a foundation for multireligious cooperation. And we look to this very Congress, where for two decades leaders have modelled the possibility of dialogue that transcends difference and nurtures peace.

These examples remind us that when religious leaders unite, they can bend the arc of history toward reconciliation and hope.

Today, we are called to deepen this legacy with a new paradigm: Shared Sacred Flourishing. Launched by Religions for Peace in Istanbul earlier this year, and already embraced in Africa and Latin America, this initiative seeks to recover and renew a shared sacred worldview – one that affirms the intrinsic interconnectedness of all life.

It tells us that our flourishing as individuals is inseparably linked to the flourishing of our neighbors, of our societies, and of the Earth itself. This is not an abstract idea. It is rooted in the lived experience of our faith traditions, which teach us, each in our own way, that to love the Sacred is to love the community of being that the Sacred sustains.



Shared Sacred Flourishing is, in many ways, the inner dimension of synergy. It grounds our dialogue in the recognition that we are not isolated beings pursuing individual gain, but relational beings whose dignity and well-being are bound to one another.

It challenges the reductionist worldview that sees the universe as meaningless and life as disposable, and instead invites us to embrace love, compassion, and solidarity as the very basis of human and ecological survival.

Kazakhstan, with its rich history as a crossroads of cultures and faiths, offers us a powerful example of such synergy. Just as the Silk Road once connected East and West, so this land continues to connect the spiritual traditions of the world.

The commemoration of both Oraza Ait and Orthodox Easter, celebrated here with equal reverence, stands as a living testament to the harmony that is possible among diverse communities.

We at Religions for Peace are honoured to have recently deepened our partnership with the International Center for Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue, a collaboration that underscores our shared commitment to nurturing dialogue, education, and cooperation in this pivotal region.

Excellencies, friends – dialogue is not an end in itself. Dialogue must give birth to action. Synergy is realised when our words become deeds, when our prayers for peace become movements for justice, when our reverence for the Earth becomes ecological responsibility.

This is why we must continue to forge partnerships across traditions, across sectors, and across generations. The presence of the Youth Forum alongside this Congress is a hopeful sign, reminding us that young people are not only the future but already the living messengers of peace and unity.

Let me conclude with the words of one of my colleagues, His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo, Co-President of Religions for Peace: “Let us learn from creation’s timeless symphony, that harmony is not found in sameness but in unity”.

May this Congress be such a symphony – where the diverse notes of our traditions converge in a harmony that strengthens human dignity, heals our wounded Earth, and charts a path of flourishing for generations to come.

On behalf of Religions for Peace, I thank you for your leadership, your courage, and your unwavering commitment to dialogue. May our work together in this Congress ignite the synergy that our world so desperately needs.



**SPEECH BY DAVID RUTSTEIN,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE
INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY**



Esteemed and beloved Religious Leaders! All the Kazakhstan government representatives, and all the distinguished speakers, guests, brothers and sisters! I am delighted to have the opportunity to address you here today, in this truly unique forum.

Before I begin, I want to formally thank the Kazakhstan government for both its enduring commitment to interreligious dialogue and its far-reaching vision of the role religion can play in creating a truly unified world. This Congress is a tangible manifestation of Kazakhstan's commitment and vision. I hope other countries will be similarly inspired to act in this regard.

Today I offer a few questions and thoughts from the Bahá'í International Community on a theme that resonates deeply with the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith: Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future.

But what does "Dialogue of Religions" mean? And, in a world increasingly interconnected yet often divided by misunderstanding, how can this be put into practice for maximum effect? The Bahá'í perspective offers a hopeful and practical approach to religious dialogue – one rooted in the principle of consultation.



Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, proclaimed that “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established”. This unity is not uniformity – it is a rich tapestry woven from diverse beliefs, cultures, and perspectives. And it is through consultation, a sacred and structured form of dialogue, that this unity can be achieved. He further stated: “For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation”.

Let us explore five characteristics of Bahá'í consultation, which can serve as a model for interfaith dialogue:

First, is earnestly ascertaining the facts.

Consultation begins with a sincere search for truth. It is not a debate, nor a contest of ideas, but a collective investigation. Participants strive to understand the reality of a situation, setting aside personal biases and assumptions. In religious dialogue, this means approaching each tradition with humility and a genuine desire to learn – not to convince, but to comprehend.

Second, is respect for all participants and their views.

Every soul has a unique perspective shaped by experience and insight. Consultation requires that we honor each voice, recognizing that truth often emerges from the interplay of diverse ideas. But respect is not passive, it is active listening, thoughtful engagement, and the affirmation of each person's dignity. The Bahá'í Writings state that “The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions”. The result is often an insight that is new to all of those engaged.

Third, is listening carefully to all Ideas.

Listening is a spiritual act. It demands patience, openness, and empathy. In religious dialogue, careful listening allows us to hear not only the words but the spirit behind them. It builds bridges of understanding and reveals common values – justice, compassion, and love-values that unite all faiths.

Fourth, is detachment from one's own ideas.

Bahá'í consultation teaches that once an idea is offered, it no longer belongs to the individual – it belongs to the group. This requires that the individual be detached from the contribution. This detachment fosters collaboration rather than competition. In interfaith dialogue, it means being willing to let go of pre-conceived notions and allowing collective wisdom to guide the conversation as it emerges.

And fifth, is speaking without offense and listening without taking offense.



This principle is vital. Consultation must be conducted in a spirit of love and courtesy. Words should be chosen with care, avoiding harshness or superiority. Likewise, listeners must cultivate resilience and grace, understanding that disagreement is not disrespect. This creates a safe space where truth can flourish.

In delving into the subject at hand, I asked myself, despite how unique and important this Congress is, can meaningful progress toward unity be achieved, and a productive future be assured, through our gathering here for two days every three years? I think the answer is yes if we adopt a hopeful and practical approach to religious dialogue – one rooted in the principle of consultation.

Imagine a world where religious communities at local, national, regional and international levels engage in ongoing, respectful dialogue – where facts are objectively determined, where differences are not feared but explored with curiosity and reverence. In such a future, religious synergy would not be a mere ideal, it would be a living reality. Faith traditions would work together to uplift humanity, guided by shared spiritual principles and a unified vision. The walls of religious, ethnic and racial prejudices would crumble, replaced by networks of cooperation and mutual support.

As a result of the unity such engagement will foster, these communities will collaborate and make meaningful progress in addressing global challenges of immense importance: poverty, climate change, education, and peacebuilding.

This is not a utopian dream. It is a future within reach if the manner in which we interact mirrors forth the principles that lie at the heart of all the world's religions – principles of respect, harmony and love. Let us not be swayed by the obsolete practices of the past or the political machinations of the present. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh and a champion of interfaith harmony: "If religion becomes a cause of disunity, it is better to be without it". Let us as religious leaders implement a higher standard. Let us not be dissuaded by the din and chaos sweeping the planet, nor the ever – increasing material distractions that consume societies. Let us ensure that religion becomes an enduring source of unity – through consultation, respect, and genuine love. If so, it can and will transform the world.



**SPEECH BY KADIR DİNÇ,
DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OF TURKEY**



Honorable Chairman, Ministers, religious leaders, ladies and gentlemen, representatives of the media!

It is a pleasure to be present at the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana. I greet all of you with my sincerest and warmest feelings and express my appreciation.

Before proceeding to my remarks, I would like to convey to you the greetings of the President of Religious Affairs, Dr. Ali Erbaş, along with his good wishes for this significant event, one that concerns all humanity, to yield the most favorable outcomes.

I would like to share my views. Religious sites consist not only of stone, earth, and concrete, they are sacred places where souls find faith, prayers ascend to the heavens, and people encounter spirituality. Wherever there are mosques, churches, synagogues, and other places of worship, it is not only about faith – it is also human dignity, history, culture, and the reflection of civilization. In this regard, all religious sites are inviolable and worthy of respect.



All forms of violence and assault against sacred places, regardless of the religion they belong to, can mobilize vast masses of people, and their consequences can deeply harm the feelings of those who belong to different faiths. Such monstrous acts sever people's connection to their past, damage their relationship with holy sites, erase collective memory, and lead to the disappearance of cultural and historical heritage.

Today, in many parts of the world, sacred places are being attacked, destroyed, or even disregarded for political and ideological purposes. Unfortunately, these attacks target not only buildings but also the faith, identity, and communities that live around them.

Furthermore, we regret to note that such attacks are carried out not only against sacred sites, but also against sacred symbols, books, and holy people.

Distinguished participants, in this context, the protection of religious sites is not merely a matter of public security, it is a matter of conscience, justice, and civility. We must act together and uphold our convictions, beliefs, and religious centers, remaining far removed from all forms of violence, hatred, and politicization.

An analysis of the above points of view clearly shows the need for stronger guarantees of the inviolability of places of worship both in international and national law.

Distinguished participants, there is another very important point I would like to emphasize. It is also unacceptable to allow another act of violence, placing responsibility on all members of a particular religion for the religious affiliation of the attacker, or to blame representatives of other religious communities.

The culture of religious tolerance must be instilled throughout society through the education system, and adopting the principle of zero tolerance toward hate speech and religiously motivated acts must become our common goal.

When we look at the issue from the perspective of Islam, we see that the temples of other faiths, apart from Muslim ones, are also recognized as inviolable. Islam protects religion, life, the mind, property, and the lineage of a person. Regardless of faith or ethnicity, harming these five essential principles is considered a sin (haram) in Islam.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye regards the protection of freedom of religion and the inviolability of religious sites worldwide as one of the fundamental human rights. Just as we oppose attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque, we equally and resolutely condemn the attack on a church in Sri Lanka or acts of hatred toward a synagogue in France.



Türkiye has been a land where various religions and cultures have coexisted peacefully for centuries. Today, our state continues to support the places of worship of minority communities and implements projects for the restoration, renovation, and preservation of monuments. The presence in Istanbul of mosques, churches, and synagogues side by side reflects the deeply rooted tradition of tolerance in our country. We are determined to protect and uphold this heritage.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to draw your attention to what is happening in Gaza today. With thousands of innocent people, women, children, and the elderly, more than 60,000 victims, being massacred, the world is being damaged and humanity is being severely tested. Such aggressive behavior, destroying temples and people who have lived side by side for centuries, damages religious freedom and the peace of mind of believers. It destroys relationships and constitutes genocide by the Zionist regime. In addition to hundreds of mosques, other works belonging not only to Muslims but also to Christians have suffered from this destructive mentality.

In this regard, on behalf of myself and my institution, I unequivocally condemn the attack on Gaza and wish that the conscience of humanity will act as soon as possible so that this tragic atrocity may finally come to an end.

Let us not forget that the destruction of places of worship is the destruction of the heart and lifeblood of a community. And when that heart is shattered, humanity itself is broken.

I hope that this meeting strengthens international cooperation. I would like to thank everyone who contributed, first and foremost the organizers and all those who supported the realization of this Congress.

Thank you all.



**SPEECH BY ANWAR ABBAS,
DEPUTY GENERAL CHAIRMAN
OF THE INDONESIAN COUNCIL OF ULEMA**



Dear brothers and sisters!

First of all, I would like to say that our main enemy is neither terrorism nor radicalism, but poverty, extreme destitution, and socio-economic inequality. This injustice and the economic gap have led to social conflict among middle-class communities. We see that certain groups are trying to take advantage of this disparity in economic development by exploiting religious sentiments to attack their opponents and their enemies. In other words, they use religion as fuel to mobilize and incite certain groups against others. This results in religious conflicts that are extremely difficult to prevent or stop, because they tend toward religious fanaticism. If we cannot manage this, it poses a tremendous threat to the very existence of humanity. The question is whether we want to continue this conflict. Of course not. Therefore, we need to identify the root, the source of the problem and find a practical solution to it.

Consequently, religious leaders must recognize that economic inequality is the dominant factor and the root cause of religious, ethnic, and international conflicts across the world.



To address this issue, religious leaders at regional and international levels must unite their efforts to tackle economic inequality. Religious leaders must appeal to governments to develop appropriate policies aimed at equitable distribution and prioritization of income.

In addition, religious leaders should engage in dialogue and cooperation with the business community. I hope they will pay attention to poor populations and the issue of combating poverty and destitution.

From a religious point of view, especially in Islam, fighting poverty is considered a very good and virtuous act. It is not only humanitarian it is also a form of worship. By helping others, we not only save poor people from their hardships and difficulties, the business community could also help the poor, which over time would contribute to the growth of their own businesses. By helping the poor, both the business community and the people, as well as the Government, could benefit.

If we want to achieve peace throughout the world or within each of our countries, religious leaders must work together with governments and business communities to discuss the problems faced by ordinary people in their daily lives, especially those relate to injustice and poverty.

Thank you for your attention.



**SPEECH BY FARHAN AHMAD NIZAMI,
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE
OXFORD CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES**



Ladies and gentlemen! Allow me to also thank you and Mr. President for organizing today's forum and for your continued support of this important initiative.

The need for such a forum is obvious. Many issues can be raised at such forums, but I would like to draw your attention to some fundamental principles. Some of them may seem very specific.

It is important to emphasize that interfaith relations are very important, as such dialogue is an alternative to conflict. However, interfaith dialogue cannot remain merely symbolic; we must discuss various issues and problems faced by all participants, namely respect, content, and religious education. Those who work in schools and hospitals are also culturally aware.

It is necessary to think about how to improve the daily life of society, with a focus on including pluralism and excluding discrimination, including racial discrimination, excluding injustice, inequality and any inaccuracies, whether in media articles or reports. This will create a sense of confidence in communication between different societies. Tolerance is also extremely important.



We are all aware of what is happening. We need to be aware and understand what resources we can gain from tolerance, what we can give in terms of tolerance, what is required and what comes from tolerance.

The metaphor we all accept is “building bridges”. A bridge goes both ways. Tolerance is also an offer of mutual peace and fruitful coexistence. Tolerance is what we all strive for, if we can build it. We need to ensure that there is an appropriate foundation in each of our religions.

Interfaith relations cannot be effective unless they are maintained at the proper level. And they cannot remain at the proper level unless the texts and traditions of the respective religions are respected by all parties. There are certain differences. Accepting our differences, tolerance is imperative, not war.

The Quran states that you have your way of life, and I have mine. This phrase should not be used as an excuse to turn away from each other; on the contrary, it should be used to treat each other with peaceful coexistence.

What does the Quran mean? That your God and my God are one and the same God. We accept our differences and understand that they must be accepted.

The Quran also states that God is one and that He has many prophets. No one is guaranteed salvation, and no person or people has a monopoly on any virtue.

There is a certain concept of the People of the Book in the Holy Scriptures. Here and now, we must strive to do good deeds, and this applies not only to Muslims but also to non-Muslims. It is necessary to remain tolerant.

I hope that we can work towards achieving greater tolerance and not limit ourselves to our religious traditions. Tolerance is not based on human rights doctrine or international decisions; it is not limited to political neutrality or indifference; it is a very specific religious quality.

God is the Creator, whether for Christians or Muslims, for those who believe and those who do not. Faith is God's gift to humanity. As stated in the Quran, every soul bears its own burden, so tolerance is the affirmation that every soul has its own light under God's protection and in His favour.

We must take certain practical measures to strengthen the life, freedom and dignity of every human being, regardless of their religion.

A lot depends on the local context and conditions. We must protect ourselves and each other. I would call the principle of non-interference a lesser form of tolerance. Given what we believe in, the highest form of tolerance is when we can work with each other through dialogue and cooperation that benefits us all.

We must take into account the fact that other people do not believe what we believe. We must understand this and accept their cultural traditions and customs.



There are many interrelated causes that activists must consider – the struggle between rich and poor, the struggle in the sphere of economics and investment that are important for the environment, as well as tyranny and injustice. All types of this struggle are not a struggle against, but a struggle for the salvation of humanity, justice and individual discipline.

Interfaith dialogue should be at the forefront and strive to improve healthcare, education, environmental protection, and so on. Religious dialogue can also play an effective role in the field of education.

There must be mutual respect in interfaith dialogue. This is what stops people who are not believers. The essence of this problem lies in practices that prevent people from working in the right way. Of course, this is not an easy discipline. If practiced correctly, consistently and with the right tolerance and coexistence, then, of course, great results will be achieved.

If this discipline is implemented correctly, there will be no differences, no concerns about our future. Of course, aggressive conflicts will also be eliminated.

Thank you very much.



**SPEECH BY JEONG BEOM,
MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
COMMITTEE OF THE JOGYE ORDER, DEPUTY HEAD OF
THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SPECIAL BUREAU**



On behalf of the Korean religious community, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which is being held in Kazakhstan.

For the past two decades, the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions has established itself as a forum that promotes interfaith dialogue, serving as a channel for religious leaders to express their views on diverse issues that go beyond national borders.

This year, the dialogue continues under the theme of “Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future”.

Today, wars, humanitarian crises, environmental destruction, and the climate crisis are not only causing global suffering but also threatening the very survival of future generations. Concerns about hatred, violence, and the destruction of human dignity in the digital environment, fueled by AI advancements, continue to grow.



The Buddha taught that “This exists because that exists” (此有故彼有), meaning all phenomena arise interdependently through causes and conditions. When greed is excessive, suffering deepens; when attachment is strong, anguish grows. No matter how advanced scientific and material civilization becomes, it cannot eliminate the suffering from the human heart. When the mind awakens to peace, one naturally knows what must be done. Seon meditation, which awakens each individual’s mind and allows them to create their own peace, is the direct path to resolving these problems of modern society.

This is also why the United Nations officially declared December 21 as World Meditation Day, raising awareness about meditation and its benefits and affirming everyone’s right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Embracing the UN's intent in establishing World Meditation Day, Korean Buddhism hosted the International Seon Meditation Summit in 2024, which took place at Seoul's Gwanghwamun Square. This year, it held a Seon Meditation Festival in April, which will be followed by an international conference in October. Through Seon meditation, Korean Buddhism continues its efforts to help each person cultivate the power to govern their own mind and aims to extend the reach of humanity's spiritual civilization, striving to achieve not only inner peace but also global peace.

With one breath in, I contemplate the connections that bind us together.

With one breath held, I reflect on the causes and effects of my actions.

With one breath out, I dwell in the stillness that transcends the duality of suffering and joy.

Deeply recognizing the interconnectedness of all life and nature, I pray for a world where violence, war, discrimination, and hatred vanish and are replaced by understanding, respect, compassion, and wisdom.

Once again, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the religious leaders who have taken time out of their busy schedules to gather here for peace and happiness of people worldwide. Kazakhstan's demonstration of inclusivity and dedication set an example for interfaith dialogue. As we see Astana establishing itself as a symbol of peace and harmony, we all discover new hope. I applaud the government of Kazakhstan and the conference organizers for their efforts in making this gathering possible.

May the light of freedom, peace, harmony, order, wisdom, and compassion shine upon all people suffering in the world.



**SPEECH BY TAPIO JUHANI LUOMA,
HEAD OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF FINLAND**



Distinguished participants! Dear friends! I am pleased to join all the words of gratitude expressed today to the organizers of this Congress. It is a privilege for me to be part of this event.

There is one thing I would like to understand as we conclude our forum. We have often spoken about how peacemaking is a very difficult task within the framework of our interreligious efforts. When we look at the situation in Israel and Gaza, as well as in Ukraine and other regions around the world, we see that achieving peace is extremely challenging.

I recall the words of one bishop (I do not remember his name, he was involved in bringing peace to a particular conflict situation): if someone wants to work in the field of peacemaking, he must be ready to get his hands dirty. That is, there is a great deal that must be done. As leaders, we can look in the same direction. It seems to me that it is fairly easy to find common ground, but the question is how to connect all of this, how to involve other religious communities in the process of building peace.



My question is, what particular challenges do we face within our own religious communities when we try to achieve peace? I would like to highlight three points.

The first is the issue of religion and nationalism. There is a certain national context, and we must take responsibility for those people in our communities who hold such views. From this perspective, we are also national actors. At the same time, we must remember that ultimately the issue is global, not local.

My question is: how can we learn to look more broadly? We must take into account the situation of religious minorities. I believe that establishing proper relations with religious minorities is a major responsibility, otherwise, achieving a common peace will not be possible.

My final question: what kind of language should we use when speaking with people who do not belong to our own group?

Allow me to give an example from my own community. We understand that it is necessary to use respectful language when communicating with people whose faith differs from ours.

I thank all those who have been part of today's process.



CLOSING OF THE VIII CONGRESS OF THE LEADERS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

SPEECH BY KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN



Distinguished ladies and gentlemen!

Over the past several days, representatives of various cultures and civilizations have gathered in our capital. Although our guests differ in faith and background, their aspirations and intentions are unquestionably united. The Final Declaration of the Congress is clear proof of this. The document reflects shared ideas and proposals.

In essence, this is the true meaning of the forum. We have witnessed a constructive dialogue based on respect and mutual understanding.

Most importantly, religious leaders have demonstrated their readiness to unite efforts in pursuit of common goals.

Indeed, profound and constructive dialogue is a true manifestation of wisdom. You have presented to the entire world an inspiring example of foresight and moral clarity. In a period of mounting geopolitical instability, this carries exceptional significance.



The forum has shown how important it is today to strengthen interaction between religions and cultures, and to enhance cooperation for the sake of a better future for all humanity.

During the plenary and sectional sessions, the Special Session on the Protection of Religious Sites and Symbols, the Expert Roundtable, and the Forum of Young Religious Leaders, many valuable ideas and proposals were put forward. You firmly condemned destructive ideologies and violence, considered the possibilities for addressing modern crises, discussed ways to overcome social inequality, and examined the building of inclusive societies. Special attention was devoted to environmental issues, sustainable development, and the impact of new technologies and artificial intelligence on people's lives.

At the opening of the Congress, I emphasized the vital role of spiritual diplomacy in strengthening dialogue and trust on the international stage. I am glad that this is a shared vision. In this era of profound global transformation, it is religious leaders that must carry the light of moral guidance and the values of humanism to all humanity.

Over these two days, you have reached a common understanding of the Congress's future agenda and its key areas of work, which is reflected in the Joint Final Declaration.

I call on all participants of the forum, including Goodwill Ambassadors, to actively promote the ideas of this Declaration.

I fully support your recommendations to the Secretariat of the Congress to prepare a document on the role of religious leaders in addressing climate change and to formulate universal principles for the responsible use of artificial intelligence, guided by spirituality and humanism.

I would also like to highlight the session held in partnership with the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

The protection of religious sites is critically important for preserving historical memory, cultural diversity, and the spiritual heritage of humanity. Holding such an event in Kazakhstan underscores the significant role of Central Asia in this matter.

The Forum of Young Religious Leaders demonstrated that the new generation seeks to preserve continuity and continue the path of dialogue and mutual understanding. This means that peace has a future.

The Expert Roundtable demonstrated the importance of synergy between scientific and religious knowledge for a deeper understanding of the potential of spiritual diplomacy. I believe it is essential to strengthen this area as an important component of broad international cooperation.



The Congress proposed the idea of ensuring a unified, neutral, and depoliticized voice of religious leaders in support of peaceful coexistence. This initiative could become a significant contribution to shaping a new, more stable, and just world order.

Kazakhstan fully supports interfaith and intercultural harmony at all levels and will continue to actively promote the strengthening of the Congress's role as a global platform for dialogue.

We remain committed to expanding the Secretariat's cooperation network with UN institutions and other organizations. Together with international partners, youth, experts, and volunteer organizations, all activities aimed at promoting the ideas of the Congress will be carried out.

Distinguished participants! Peace is our greatest treasure. It is an exceptionally important value shared by all countries, peoples, and religions. Indeed, harmony and stability are the firm guarantee of a prosperous future. You are working tirelessly on this path. And today's gathering is a vivid testament to that.

In short, the Congress has been a success. I extend my deepest gratitude to all of you. I believe that our unity in pursuit of noble goals will continue to grow stronger.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to the spiritual and political leaders, representatives of the United Nations and other organizations, and diplomats for supporting the work of the Congress.

I am confident that the Congress will continue to work systematically with the United Nations on interfaith harmony.

I also express my gratitude to the volunteers, interpreters, and organizers who contributed to holding this event at such a high level.

I wish all of you prosperity and well-being. Until we meet again in Astana, the cherished home of peace and harmony, may you remain in safety and good health.

Thank you for your attention.



SPEECH BY KIRILL, PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUS'



Dear participants of the Congress!

I would like to express my satisfaction both with the very fact of holding such a significant gathering and with the results that have been achieved, as well as with the wonderful atmosphere created through the efforts of the country's authorities and the activists who assisted in organizing this work.

Indeed, we have acquired a global interreligious platform – a group of people interested in working together for the sake of peace and prosperity. I believe that, together with other significant and important platforms, we can actively participate in resolving or preparing solutions and studying the problems that are currently on the agenda for all of humanity.

It is very important that religious leaders and heads belonging to different religions and confessions have worked side by side today as one family, demonstrating the closeness of our positions despite the theological differences that have always existed and will hardly disappear from our discourse anytime soon. Nevertheless, the common goals that stand before us today (primarily in connection with the emerging threats to the very existence of humankind) serve as a powerful incentive for further developing our joint efforts.



I would like to sincerely thank, on my own behalf and, I hope, on behalf of all of you, President Tokayev, who devoted his personal time and, of course, made great efforts to ensure the excellent preparation of this event.

I would also like to thank the religious leaders of Kazakhstan who took part in this work and extended hospitality to all of us.

May God's blessing remain with all of us, strengthening us on our shared path toward building global peace and justice. All the best!

Thank you for your attention.



**SPEECH BY SHEIKH
MOHAMED ABDELRAHMAN MOHAMED ELDWENY,
DEPUTY GRAND IMAM OF AL-AZHAR**



In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful!

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds!

May Allah's blessings and peace be upon the Seal of the Prophets and the mercy to the worlds, upon all the prophets and messengers, and upon those who follow them in goodness until the Day of Judgment!

Your Excellency, esteemed President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev! Honorable Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Maulen Ashimbayev! Your Eminences, esteemed religious leaders! Honored guests!

May peace, Allah's mercy, and His blessings be upon you!

Allow me first to convey to you the greetings of Al-Azhar al-Sharif, its scholars and esteemed figures, led by the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Professor Dr. Ahmed al-Tayeb, may the Almighty Allah preserve him and grant him good health. I also convey to you the deep gratitude of His Eminence the Grand Imam, his appreciation to the Republic of Kazakhstan, its President, Government, and people, for inviting Al-Azhar al-Sharif to participate in this highly important



Congress. I convey to you his prayers and best wishes. I wish us all success! May this forum become a genuine step toward achieving the happiness of humanity, establishing peace, and advancing coexistence, all of which our world urgently needs today.

At the beginning of my remarks, I would like to highly commend the sincere efforts of the Republic of Kazakhstan in promoting the values of peace and harmony among people. These are values that humanity needs more than ever in today's world, a world torn apart by crises in security, economy, politics, and society, crises whose flames are repeatedly rekindled by satanic minds whenever they begin to subside.

Distinguished participants! The participation of Al-Azhar al-Sharif in the work of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions stems from its deep conviction in the importance of dialogue, and from its continual affirmation that dialogue is the most sound path to securing every person's right to a dignified life, a life in which he may enjoy all the blessings that Allah has created for him. Throughout its history, extending for more than a thousand years, Al-Azhar has called for unifying brotherhood. Among its early initiatives was the Message on Human Partnership, authored in 1936 by His Eminence Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi, the Sheikh of Al-Azhar at that time, which he presented at the Religious Forum in London. Also among them is the Document on Human Fraternity, signed in 2019 by His Eminence the Grand Imam, Professor Dr. Ahmed al-Tayeb, together with his brother, His Holiness Pope Francis, the late Pope of the Vatican, in Abu Dhabi.

Likewise, this is the very initiative advanced by the Grand Imam in Bahrain to strengthen brotherhood and unity among different confessions and religions.

Distinguished participants! This VIII Congress is being held under the title "Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future", and it continues this noble mission. It carries great importance, for it serves as a clarion call to the ears of every believer. I believe that we all bear responsibility, regardless of our religions and convictions. I do not think that any rational person (especially someone devoted to religion) would believe that the peace and happiness of human beings are not among his priorities.

Allow me to begin with this important theme, "Synergy for the Future", a theme through which every rational person dreams of a safer and calmer future, one with fewer destructions and threats, and in which all people without exception enjoy a life that is a gift from the Almighty Allah.

Based on everything we have heard as the outcome of this forum, it is clear that we are in dire need of a safer future for all of humanity. But this cherished



future requires courage, courage capable of transcending this dark history and bitter present. Yes, we need courage to rise above this dark history and bitter present! However, I ask that we not demand courage only from the oppressed. What is important is not to embolden the oppressor toward such courage, or even worse, toward extremism, discrimination, killing, and displacement.

As we stand here calling for courage to overcome crises, I ask that we not forget the institutions and structures that continue to exist in environments seeking to revive past mistakes, environments that still operate within spaces of extremism and discrimination, enabling the shedding of people's blood, the plundering of their resources, and the destruction of their homes. Political challenges, too, are becoming increasingly evident and increasingly dangerous.

I believe there is no need for me to recount here the tragedies associated with political actions that obey neither reason nor logic. For what mind could accept that states use the livelihood of their people as a tool to destroy other nations? What mind could accept that countless billions, beyond measure, are spent on killing and destruction rather than construction and prosperity? What mind could agree that such colossal sums are used to inflict hunger and blockade instead of development and growth? These are the declared instruments of wars and conflicts, instruments driven by political agendas.

If we look more deeply into this matter, we will find horrific instruments that cannot be restrained by morality and cannot be limited by values. No ethical principle can prevent them. All of these tools are used to weaken nations and destroy them. Among them are drugs, the promotion of sexual immorality, and the encouragement of deviant groups. All of this and more is deployed in this so-called civilized era to bring about the collapse of states. What rational mind could accept this?!

It is enough to look carefully at the map of the world to see what kinds of manipulations and games are taking place regarding the relations of communities and the aspirations of their peoples, without any consideration of the accusations of a living conscience that suffers at the sight of the killed and wounded, of women who have lost loved ones, and of those forced to flee and be displaced. In reality, this evil could have been avoided had the resolutions of international organizations truly reached the oppressed and persecuted states and nations.

Have we really become accustomed to witnessing all this suffering in Gaza and Palestine?! Have we truly grown accustomed to seeing all this bloodshed?! Al-Azhar al-Sharif offers its full support to the Palestinian people and affirms its solidarity with their steadfastness.



Today we all strive to strengthen peace, because peaceful civilians continue to be under threat. There are so many wounded. Al-Azhar al-Sharif confirms that the Palestinian issue will remain the central cause of the Islamic and Arab worlds. These nations will never forget that precious part of the Earth which contains the first qibla of the Muslims.

The policy pursued today by the Zionist establishment to alter the Arab-Islamic identity of Jerusalem through the imposition of foreign policies and the distortion of historical truths taking place today is a failed attempt, because Muslims are fully aware of all these schemes.

All these Zionist claims are false. And all the actions committed by the occupying forces, the explicit occupation, the criminal acts, the open terrorism. They are rejected by divine laws, international laws, and human morality. None of this will change the true nature of the issue. We all bear a great responsibility to take a serious stance regarding these violations and inhumane practices.

The position of the Arab Republic of Egypt in supporting the Palestinian cause and rejecting attempts to evict its inhabitants, as well as all the atrocities taking place against the people of Gaza, remains unwavering.

By the will of the Almighty Allah, Al-Azhar al-Sharif plans to hold an international conference at the beginning of next month aimed at providing support to Gaza.

Distinguished participants! Economic realities arise from economic theories devoid of ethical standards. Those who promote and establish the foundations of these theories see no problem in a small number of people living happily at the expense of the vast majority, where some become richer and more advanced, while others become ever poorer, more ignorant, and more burdened by illness.

A quick glance at the world economy, at the bewildering changes within it, and at the enormous disparity in resources, is enough to confirm that market rules and the principles of supply and demand must be accompanied by a restraining moral philosophy.

I believe, distinguished gentlemen, that you will agree with me that social challenges are no less dangerous and no less destructive than economic ones. We can clearly see how the international community is suffering from fragmentation and instability at the very core that is meant to be its foundation, the family, which should have been the dream of every dreamer.

Under the banner of rights and freedoms, we hear “voices” denying laws and reason, calling for relationships rejected by sound human nature, contradicting the laws of existence in which the Almighty Allah created everything in pairs, male and female, and declaring as “normal” that which should never be proclaimed. These voices threaten the stability of the family. And the



consequences are before us: the negative phenomena facing our societies – divorce, separation, conflict, and declining morality.

As a result of these misguided ideas, the environment has been exposed to corrupting forces that have brought ruin to it. Despite the fact that the Almighty Allah prepared the environment so that human beings could enjoy His blessings and so that every generation could take its share.

But how can there be environmental security when materialistic thinking prevails? Greedy minds believe that the environment exists to serve them, not understanding that they bear responsibility toward it and all its components.

Honorable Mr. President! Distinguished participants! Attempting to resolve modern crises through isolated efforts, detached from others, and removed from religion and the values and ethics it provides, is nothing more than a fragmented solution, like an amputation.

His Eminence the Grand Imam has directed the opening of a representation of the Council of Muslim Elders in the Republic of Kazakhstan, in recognition of this country's important efforts to advance peace and to establish the principles of love and coexistence among peoples by elevating human fraternity and all that follows from it.

Distinguished participants! I am not addressing you now in the language of politicians. I am not a politician, I am a man of religion who believes that the Almighty Allah has granted life and dignity to all human beings.

And here I must ask a question aloud. When did the Almighty Allah grant to one of His creations the right to judge over His other creations and deprive them of life? The right to a dignified life is guaranteed to all people, regardless of skin color, origin, or religion. And unless we return to religion and to what religion provides in its essence and truth, peace and serenity of the heart and soul, this dignity will not be realized.

Elevating the role of values and morality has become an unavoidable necessity, especially given that our contemporary world has been profoundly harmed by social experiments and philosophical movements presented to humanity as alternatives to religion and faith, yet they have neither healed people's wounds nor preserved for them their right to belief. I believe that now a real opportunity stands before intelligent minds and wise leaders to play their role and fulfill their duty to humanity.

I hope that our meeting today will become a new seed planted to instill heavenly values in the people of Earth.

Honorable Mr. President! Distinguished participants! I would once again like to emphasize the call made by the Grand Imam, Professor Dr. Ahmed al-



Tayeb, Sheikh of Al-Azhar – the call for convening an international conference that will bring together religious leaders, political leaders, and economists of the world, so that each of them bears responsibility for what our world is experiencing today.

Thank you for your attention.

Peace be upon you, and may Allah's mercy and His blessings be with you.



SPEECH BY DAVID YOSSEF, SEPHARDI CHIEF RABBI OF ISRAEL



Honorable President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Tokayev!

First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to you for this Congress. It is very important for all nations of the world to see leaders and representatives of every religion coming together to speak about peace, about ending terrorism and killings. We say very loudly that terrorism must be stopped. We suffer from it. We suffer from it everywhere. We say it loudly and clearly, this must end!

According to our religion, Judaism, when we meet each other daily, we say “Shalom!”, meaning “peace”, “salam”, “greetings”. Judaism, that is, we as Jews – want peace. We believe that the most important thing in the world is peace!

According to our religion, we are forbidden to call upon, pressure, or force a person of another faith to convert to our religion. Whoever is Christian or Muslim should remain in their religion. We believe that everyone may keep their own convictions. We believe in one God. Now, as all of us have gathered in this beautiful country of Kazakhstan, we are speaking about peace, and about peace alone. And we must continue these efforts for the sake of peace. When religious leaders speak about peace, this must be put into action.

I want to repeat once more, stop terrorism, stop the killings! We want peace!

Thank you.



EXPERT OPINIONS ON THE OUTCOMES OF THE VIII CONGRESS OF THE LEADERS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS



**Vice-Rector of the Rotterdam
Islamic University of Applied
Sciences
Emrulla Akgündüz**

I participated in the Congress in my capacity as a representative from the Netherlands. The event offered a well-organised and welcoming setting for exchange, bringing together religious leaders and scholars from many parts of the world. From an academic perspective, the Congress contributed to sustained interreligious dialogue by creating space for meaningful engagement, the exchange of experiences, and the development of professional and scholarly connections across religious and cultural traditions in a respectful atmosphere.



**President of the
Interreligious
Organization of Singapore
K Elango**

I attended the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions as a representative of Singapore's interfaith community and as President of the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO). My participation was intended to contribute to international interreligious dialogue, strengthen relationships with global faith leaders, and engage in discussions addressing contemporary challenges confronting humanity.



The VIII Congress brought together leaders of world and traditional religions, representatives of governments, international organisations, scholars, and civil society actors. The programme included plenary sessions, breakout sessions, a special session on safeguarding religious sites, the Forum of Young Religious Leaders, and expert roundtables.

The overarching theme, “Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future”, reflected the Congress’s commitment to addressing global instability, conflict, extremism, and ethical challenges through dialogue and spiritual diplomacy.

From my attendance across the Congress programme, **several key observations emerged:**

- *Growing relevance of spiritual diplomacy: The Congress demonstrated that religious leaders play an increasingly important role in easing tensions, fostering reconciliation, and supporting peacebuilding initiatives at both national and international levels.*
- *Shift toward contemporary global challenges: Discussions moved beyond traditional interfaith concerns to include climate change, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, extremism, and social cohesion.*
- *Emphasis on youth and future leadership: The Forum of Young Religious Leaders highlighted the importance of intergenerational continuity and the need to prepare younger leaders for emerging global realities.*
- *Recognition of ethical responsibility: There was strong consensus that technological and social progress must be accompanied by moral clarity and ethical guidance.*

The VIII Congress reaffirmed its importance as a credible and forward-looking platform for interreligious engagement. It demonstrated that dialogue among religious leaders is not merely symbolic, but an essential component of global efforts to promote peace, dignity, and social harmony. My attendance at the VIII Congress reinforced the conviction that sustained interreligious dialogue, ethical leadership, and cooperation across cultures are indispensable in addressing the complex challenges of the contemporary world. The Congress continues to play a vital role in nurturing these shared responsibilities.



**President and Secretary-General of the “Mediterranean Perspectives” Organization and the Italian Network for Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue
Dr. Enrico Molinaro**

1. The Special Session on Safeguarding Religious Sites at the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana

The VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held on September 16/18, 2025 in Astana, has been the best opportunity to share with the participants and to discuss my list of principles, which Amb. Miguel Angel Moratinos, UNAOC High Representative and UN Deputy Secretary General, distributed as “Recommendations from the Chair on Safeguarding the Religious Sites” at the Congress’ Special Session’s on “Safeguarding Religious Sites: Reflections and a Call for Action by the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and State Actors”, organized in partnership with UNAOC, and co-chaired by Mr. Maulen Ashimbayev, the Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Head of the Secretariat.

2. Saint Francis, Giorgio La Pira, and the potential role of Italy and Kazakhstan

Italy, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), could play a propulsive and innovative role in such a sensitive field. In this context in June 2023 the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani has promoted through the Italian Institutes of culture the immense value of Saint Francis of Assisi’s life, journeys, meetings, and work as an example of Christian humility and willingness to open dialogue with the Muslim world. In this respect, Mr. Edoardo Crisafulli, the Director of the Italian Institute of culture in Kazakhstan, published for the first time in Khazaki language Saint Francis’ famous masterpiece, the Canticle of the Creatures (Cantico delle Creature).

On the inspiration of both this extraordinary Saint and of the late Florence’s Mayor Giorgio La Pira, who in the middle of last century succeeded to organize his peace Mediterranean Colloquia behind closed doors with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim representatives, Italy could play a leading role, together with Kazakhstan – both countries without mass terror attacks from religious radical extremists in the last decades – in developing concrete steps and suggesting practical



solutions to facilitate interfaith dialogue as a crucial tool for fostering peace and harmony among peoples and nations.

3. A new epistemological framework: the dichotomy between Glocalist and Westphalian identity models

Two diametrically opposed conceptions of international relations and the corresponding international socio-legal environment produced the current dichotomy between two opposite Westphalian and the Glocalist models of collective identity: following the former model the community's limits are the States' frontiers, while for the latter model those limits lie within or outside the States, such as the concepts of Civilizations or Race.

This innovative scientific methodology considers the aforementioned two alternating historical cycles, providing a new critical key to understanding geopolitical dynamics shaping today's world, in fact anyone may apply such analysis to any field of social science, or any cultural field related to collective identity.

By understanding the profound political interests at stake, geopolitical analysts may use these revolutionary epistemological Magical Glasses to avoid polarized and preconstructed dichotomies (such as German/Italian, right/left, or West/Islam). Artificial polarization provides organized elites with intellectual weapons to manipulate scholarly interpretations and popular perceptions, thus distracting them from the real power play on the ground.

4. Conclusions: a new educational approach towards collective identities

Any identity discourse nowadays might trigger intolerance, discrimination, extremism, terrorism, hatred, and social violence, especially based on religion or belief, bordering even into xenophobia or racism. In fact, reciprocally enhancing collective identities could on the contrary facilitate interfaith dialogue and social openness, preserving each community's cultural, historical, and spiritual heritage based on mutual respect.

The aforementioned Special Session on Safeguarding Religious Sites: Reflections and a Call for Action held in Astana on September 16 discussed acts of intolerance, especially attacks on religious sites, seeking to strike at the very core of communities' sense of identity, sowing division, hatred and fear.

In light of the above, the Astana VIII Congress was the opportunity to launch an appeal towards Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, State Actors, and civil society organizations: a new educational approach, especially towards the youth, enhancing the mutual knowledge and the encouragement towards the understanding of the respective collective identity, is needed.

Such a cultural enterprise to turn upside-down the described negative situation is a daring challenge in a world filled with identity intolerance, but as an outcome of the VIII Congress, building on the long-term partnership between the



Republic of Kazakhstan and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, it is a realistic ethical mission, which I would suggest to launch on the occasion of an event to be held in Astana by the end of 2026, in cooperation with the Italian Embassy in Kazakhstan, with a special focus on the Status Quo at the Jerusalem's Holy Places, suggesting the institution of the first Jerusalem Holy Places Center (JHPC), as I had the opportunity to propose and discuss at the VIII Congress in Astana.



President of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Argentina Imam Marwan Sarwar Gill

Kazakhstan brings faith leaders together: a beacon of hope

Astana turned into a shining beacon when it hosted in September 2025 faith leaders from around the world under the banner of peace, fraternity and hope. At a time where humanity is dragged into unending confrontations, conflicts and divisions merely the fact that more than 60 religious delegations came together was a healing remedy for the bleeding souls.

Whilst the world is rapidly heading towards another World War the motto “Synergy between religions as a driving force for hope and reconciliation” expressed the urgent need for this type of gatherings and initiatives. The emblematic image of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists sitting around the round table undermines that “faith unites rather than divides”. It was a beautiful reminder for our wider societies that interfaith collaboration does not seek to eliminate differences, but rather to turn diversity into a source of mutual enrichment.

In fact, at an era when there are increasingly more voices on international platforms advocating a return to a period of ‘medieval crusades’ or a division between ‘West vs. East,’ the Astana Congress suggests that the solution is not more division, but more unity. And the method is not to build more walls, but more bridges. Hence, the engagements during the congress provided valuable opportunities to listen to “the other” and foster our relations.

It is important to clarify that dialogue with “the other” does not mean renouncing your own identity or denying your principles but rather listening and seeking similarities with “the other”. In fact, the Holy Quran, in chapter 3, verse



65, emphasises that it is essential for religions to be in harmony and stresses that, as Muslims, it is our responsibility to build bridges in order to seek the common values that unite us all, whether we are Jews, Christians, Muslims or followers of any other religion. With this Islamic premise in mind, in representation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community I thank the President of Kazakhstan and the ICIID Center for their commitment towards interfaith harmony and fraternity.

In conclusion, the Astana congress reaffirmed my conviction that interfaith dialogue is a fundamental pillar for creating more just and harmonious societies. Peace, which we all desire and which is the essence of all religions, requires a joint effort. The next vital step will be to convert dialogue and words into concrete deeds and actions. I am fully aware that the encounter and dialogue between religious representatives is the first step on this long road towards a more humane and peaceful humanity. The primary challenge now lies for us in transforming those words and speeches into real initiatives that contribute to reconciliation and can transform fear into hope, uncertainty into conviction, frustration into comfort.



**Chairman of the Abrahamic Forum for Interfaith Dialogue in Spain
Dr. Saif El Islam Benabdennour**

The VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana in September 2025, constitutes a platform for reflecting on the importance of religion in international relations, as well as on the role of religious actors in global governance. From an International Relations perspective, the Congress can be interpreted as a platform of non-state multilateral diplomacy, in which religion operates as a symbolic resource and as an instrument of soft power within an international context marked by fragmentation and conflict.

From an organizational standpoint, the Congress stood out for its high degree of institutionalization and for the ability of the Kazakhstani state to articulate a dialogue space with international outreach. The participation of delegations from more than sixty countries and representatives of multiple religious traditions reinforces Kazakhstan's image as a mediating actor and promoter of intercultural dialogue in Central Asia and globally. From this perspective, the event should be understood not only as a religious forum, but also as a foreign policy tool aimed at addressing the conflicts affecting the world.



The debates took place in a climate of consensus and cooperation, prioritizing discourses centered on peace, tolerance, and coexistence. Among the main outcomes of the Congress is the reaffirmation of interreligious dialogue as a complementary mechanism to traditional diplomacy. The adoption of the Astana Final Declaration strengthens the normative dimension of the event, aligning it with other international frameworks for the promotion of peace and cooperation. Likewise, the presence of high-level religious leaders and representatives of international organizations underscores the growing centrality of religious actors as indirect participants in the management of international crises and in the production of global ethical norms.

Nevertheless, from an International Relations perspective, the adopted declarations lack binding mechanisms or institutionalized follow-up, which limits their impact in terms of public policy or effective conflict resolution. In this sense, the Congress is situated more within the realm of network-building among interested actors than within that of operational governance.

Looking ahead, strengthening the Congress as a relevant platform within the international system would require greater articulation with multilateral institutions, regional organizations, and civil society actors. It would also be pertinent to further develop issues such as the relationship between religion and international security, the prevention of violent radicalization, the role of religions in mediation and reconciliation processes, and the ethical dilemmas arising from emerging technologies. These areas would allow interreligious dialogue to be more directly connected to the central debates of the contemporary international agenda.

In terms of recommendations, it is crucial to move toward the creation of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that make it possible to assess the impact of the Congress beyond its symbolic dimension. The institutionalization of permanent thematic committees, the incorporation of impact indicators, and the systematic inclusion of young leaders and International Relations experts could enhance the effectiveness of the forum. In this way, the Congress could evolve from a predominantly declarative space into a platform with greater capacity to influence global governance.

In conclusion, the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions represents a significant initiative in the field of religious diplomacy and international soft power. However, its future relevance will depend on the participants' ability to move beyond rhetorical consensus and contribute in a more direct and measurable way to the management of the structural challenges of the international system.



**Head of the Department
of Philosophy, Institute
of Scientific Information
on Social Sciences, Russian
Academy of Sciences
Sergey Melnik**

Improving the effectiveness of interfaith summits: the symbolic aspect and the “Spiritual Leaders' Message” project

During the international expert round table “Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Today,” held as part of the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, I presented a report on the contribution that scholars and experts can make to improving the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue. In this publication, I would like to share the main conclusions and offer specific practical recommendations that could be taken into account in the further work of the Congress, which is currently the most significant international interfaith summit in the post-Soviet space.

Four types of interfaith dialogue and three levels of participants.

When discussing ways to optimize and increase the productivity of interfaith dialogue, it is necessary to take into account the diversity of possible forms that it can take. That is, we cannot talk about interreligious dialogue in general, but must first clarify what specific type we are considering in this case. I have developed an original classification of types of interreligious dialogue that takes into account all existing approaches in this area and complements them. I propose distinguishing between four main types of interreligious dialogue: (1) “polemical dialogue”, (2) “cognitive dialogue”, (3) “peacemaking dialogue”, and (4) “partnership dialogue”. Each of these types of dialogue can be matched with a question that reflects the main motivation for a believer to enter into a relationship with followers of other religions.

Polemical dialogue corresponds to the question “who is right?” This type of interaction is characterized by the desire to spread one's faith and demonstrate its advantages, which leads to polemics. This type of interaction still takes place among believers today, as evidenced by numerous theological debates between believers on the internet, which often attract hundreds of thousands of views.

Cognitive interreligious dialogue is built around the question “Who are you?” Such dialogue involves getting to know and studying another religion, which can



be expressed in comparative studies (for example, the research area of “comparative theology”) or in “mutual enrichment” as the goal of contact (this is referred to as “spiritual dialogue” or “dialogue of religious experience”).

Peace-building dialogue defines the question “how can we live together peacefully?” and focuses on maintaining a friendly social climate and harmonizing ethnic and religious relations.

Partnership dialogue is expressed in the joint practical activities of believers of different religions in the social or environmental spheres, and the central question here is “what can we do together to improve the world”?

Within the classification of the four types of interreligious dialogue listed above, different types can be identified and described in terms of the criteria of “purpose” (what goals the participants set), “principles” (what principles determine the interaction), and “form” (in what form the dialogue is expressed), and give specific examples of their implementation. Without going into detail, I would just like to draw attention to the fact that within the framework of polemical and cognitive dialogue, the views of different religions are studied, analyzed, compared, and discussed, including ideas about God, His revelation, sin, religious experience, virtues, spiritual practices, etc. (in a polemical key or simply to learn about the Other and compare with one's own views, as in cognitive dialogue). Whereas in peacemaking and partnership types of dialogue, religion is viewed more as a social institution, and the task is to ensure that relations between believers are constructive. It is important to take this difference into account: interreligious dialogue can be understood as an examination of the relationship between ideas and views (polemical and cognitive dialogue) or as a means of ensuring positive relations between believers who hold these different views (peace-building and partnership dialogue). Religious leaders and religious organizations are mainly involved in peacemaking dialogue and, to a lesser extent, partnership dialogue, i.e., their attention is focused on strengthening peace or joint activities in order to make a positive contribution to society. Theological topics may also be encountered in peacemaking and partnership dialogue, but they are more instrumental in nature, i.e., they are used as a means to justify agreement and creative cooperation.

It is also useful to distinguish between three “levels” of participants who may engage in interreligious dialogue.

Firstly, there is the “high” level of religious leaders. The dialogue involves the heads and official representatives of high-level religious communities.

Second, there is the “middle” level, which can also be referred to as the ‘expert’ or “conceptual” level. Here, scholars and theologians reflect on the ideological foundations of interreligious dialogue. This may be a comparative analysis of the beliefs of different religions, in the case of cognitive dialogue, or the development of conceptual foundations explaining why believers of different religions should live in peace and respect each other, in the case of peace-building dialogue. The



results of such research can be expressed in the form of documents of religious communities that formulate their attitude towards other religions. Examples here include the Roman Catholic Church's declaration on its attitude towards non-Christian religions, "Nostra aetate", which was adopted in 1965, the open letter from Muslim scholars to Christians, "A Common Word Between Us and You" in 2007, and Hans Küng's project of global ethics. Within the framework of the presented classification, these documents can be characterized as the "conceptual level" of peacemaking interreligious dialogue.

Finally, the third level is the grassroots level. Here, interaction takes place between ordinary believers and young people. This also includes projects by individual activists in the field of interreligious dialogue or education in the spirit of peace.

The Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan can be classified as a "high-level" peace dialogue or so-called "diplomatic interfaith dialogue." Each type of dialogue has its own ways of increasing effectiveness. For example, one thing is a subtype of cognitive dialogue, aimed at "mutual enrichment" through deep immersion in the study of another religion ("spiritual dialogue"), and quite another is dialogue between young people, aimed at developing mutual respect and preventing extremism ("grassroots" peace dialogue), etc. Each subtype of dialogue and its optimization needs to be discussed separately; further analysis will focus only on the format of interaction known as international interfaith summits.

International interfaith summits.

What unique role do interfaith summits play in strengthening peace and harmony? It is important that such events provide a platform for religious leaders to communicate and maintain direct contact with each other "face to face". At the same time, it should not be forgotten that such communication is limited and sometimes formal in nature; most of the time is spent in meetings and listening to speeches. Religious leaders do not set themselves the task of conducting discussions on purely theological topics in a comparative context (cognitive dialogue), neither should it be expected that the issues raised in the speeches (e.g., ecology, artificial intelligence, pandemics, terrorism, etc.) will be examined with academic diligence and fundamentalism (which should be the task of scholars who specialize in a particular topic). Religious leaders also often talk about global issues, but most interfaith summits do not assume that joint practical activities will be carried out after them (partnership dialogue). In other words, when leaders express concern about, for example, income inequality between the rich and the poor, this does not mean that after the meeting the participants will return to their countries, meet with their ministers of economy, and take concrete steps to solve the problem identified at the summit. It can be argued that diplomatic interfaith dialogue occupies its own niche in the system of interfaith relations, that it is very



necessary, useful, and essential, that it fulfills its functions within the framework of maintaining social stability, and that this can be substantiated and illustrated with a number of specific examples. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that diplomatic dialogue between religious leaders and interfaith summits should not be assessed incorrectly from the point of view of other types of dialogue, which pursue different goals and are based on different principles.

One aspect of interfaith summits deserves special attention, as it largely determines their unique contribution to peacemaking, which can be described as “symbolic significance”. The very fact that religious leaders meet in a spirit of goodwill and publicly express similar views and assessments has symbolic significance. The peace appeals of the heads of religious communities, their demonstration of positive, friendly relations, and their expression of a consolidated position on current issues are important. Dialogue between religious leaders is important as a living example, a clear demonstration that a shared desire for peace, mutual respect, good neighborly relations between believers, and their creative cooperation for the common good are not only possible but are the norm in the modern world. In this context, interfaith summits can in some respects be viewed as a kind of social ritual and examined through the prism of symbolic politics.

The symbolic significance and the “Spiritual Leaders' Message” project.

Focusing on the symbolic significance of summits involving religious leaders highlights the need for special approaches to enhance the effectiveness of such interaction. Of course, the level and number of participants are important here – the higher the status and authority of the representatives of religious communities and the more of them there are, the better. But no less important than the composition of the participants are the ideological content of the reports and the final declaration of such events, as well as how this content will be presented and communicated to outside observers. Such a “visual image” of positive relations (a joint photo or video of leaders sitting at the same table, communicating respectfully and caring for the common good), broadcast to the outside world, sets an example for ordinary believers and has a beneficial social effect. This symbolic aspect seems to be of particular importance for interfaith meetings involving religious leaders, and taking it into account and optimizing it could be useful for the development of the Congress.

I suppose that summits involving religious leaders would benefit greatly from the participation of PR specialists, those who are engaged in shaping the image of the event and communicating its ideas to the outside world, that is, creative people who could make a meeting or some kind of joint action by religious leaders something that attracts attention, is memorable, makes a vivid impression, and receives wide resonance. This function is performed by a joint photo or some kind of symbolic gestures, such as planting “trees of peace”, etc. It is precisely the development of this symbolic aspect that could become one of the priority elements



of the Congress. In other words, it is advisable to pay special attention to the means and methods by which the main message of the event – the ideas of peace, goodness, and cooperation – will be conveyed to the outside world and embodied. The implementation of this aspect depends on the creativity of the organizers.

One idea could be a project called “Spiritual Leaders’ Message”. The “message” would be a short text, about five minutes long, delivered by religious leaders and accompanied by specially prepared visuals. It is as if the leaders are reading some key, fundamental ideas from a joint statement expressing the essence, the core of what they would like to convey to the whole world. Of course, it is important that this text is not formal, but evokes a lively emotional response in people and corresponds to current aspirations, demands, and problems. In the context of the global socio-political transformations currently taking place, there is a growing need for spiritual leaders to jointly and publicly testify to the most important moral values and principles that we can find in each of the major religions: the belief in the fundamental unity of the human family and the dignity of every human being; the realization that power is not equivalent to right; the necessary condition for the prosperity of modern civilization is adherence to the “golden rule” of morality: “do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.” It is important that the voice of religious leaders, so necessary today, be heard, reminding us that love, compassion, selflessness, and the power of inner truth and spirit are ultimately more powerful than hatred, enmity, and greed, and that good is more blissful than evil.

A short video clip in which authoritative spiritual leaders representing different religions, nations, continents, and civilizations, could make a big impression on both religious and secular people, as well as help popularize and boost the authority of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

Peace can be compared to air. As long as everything is fine and there is enough air, we don't even notice it out of habit; everything seems to be as it should be. But when there is a shortage of air, we realize that we cannot live without it. When conflicts arise, we realize that the opportunity to live in peace and good neighborliness is a great blessing. Peace must be valued, cherished, and multiplied. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all the organizers of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions for their work, as well as for their professionalism, kindness, and the warm and bright memories that remain after visiting the capital of Kazakhstan in September 2025.



**Adjunct Professor at Somaiya
Vidyavihar University,
Dr. Rudraksha Sakrikar**

My participation in the 2025 Congress in Kazakhstan was a deeply enriching and meaningful experience. The Congress provided a rare space where religious leaders, scholars, policymakers, and young voices from across the world could engage in sincere and respectful dialogue. While the formal sessions offered valuable insights into contemporary global challenges, I found that the informal conversations during breaks and side interactions were equally significant in building genuine connections and mutual trust among participants.

Two aspects of the Congress were particularly impactful for me. The special session on Safeguarding Religious Sites highlighted the urgent need for collective responsibility in protecting sacred places and cultural heritage in times of conflict and social unrest.

Equally inspiring was the Forum of Young Religious Leaders, which demonstrated the importance of engaging youth as active stakeholders in peacebuilding. The enthusiasm and clarity of young participants reinforced my belief that inter-faith harmony must be nurtured across generations through education, dialogue, and grassroots initiatives.

Overall, the experience reaffirmed my conviction that sustained and inclusive dialogue is essential for strengthening peace and trust in an increasingly fragmented world. It also reinforced a personal sense of responsibility to carry forward the spirit of the Congress through concrete academic and community-oriented initiatives, ensuring that dialogue continues well beyond the forum itself.



**Executive Director
of the Baku
International Center
for Multiculturalism
Ravan Hasanov**

VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions reaffirmed the strategic importance of interfaith dialogue in international relations. Amid growing armed conflicts, geopolitical tensions, radicalism, hate speech, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, this Congress positioned religion not as a factor of confrontation, but as an essential resource for peace, cooperation, and mutual understanding. It took the voice of religious leaders beyond the confines of inter-confessional discourse, raising it to the level of a political and moral appeal addressed to governments, international organizations, and the global media.

Modern global processes show that phenomena such as wars, occupations, ethnic cleansing, the threat of genocide, mass forced displacement of populations, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism cannot be effectively resolved by political or military means alone. These problems have deep ideological, cultural, and spiritual-moral roots. In this regard, relying solely on diplomatic mechanisms does not ensure sustainable results. That is why VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions added a religious-humanitarian dimension to the global security agenda. By consolidating the calls of religious leaders for peace, reconciliation, and justice on a single platform, the Congress formed a coordinated position on the inadmissibility of violence, hate speech, and discrimination on religious grounds.

The key message of the Congress was that religion, provided it is presented responsibly, interpreted correctly, and protected from political and ideological manipulation, can be an effective tool for strengthening global peace, dialogue, and mutual understanding. A joint platform for religious leaders is particularly important in the context of forming a collective response to ideologies of hatred, radicalism, and discrimination.

In this context, VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions should be seen not only as an initiative of the Republic of Kazakhstan, but also as a significant international platform aimed at mobilizing the potential of religion in the name of peace, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence.



**Chairman of the Executive Board of the International Center Alliance of Civilizations, Associate Professor of the International Balkan University
Ivan Ivanov**

The Congress as a Living Laboratory of Peace

Participating in the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was, for me, both an academic privilege and a deeply formative personal experience. As a political scientist from the Balkans, an associate professor, and a practitioner engaged in intercivilizational dialogue through the International Center Alliance of Civilizations in Skopje, this forum represented a rare convergence of theory and practice.

Beyond being a conference, it functioned as a living laboratory of ideas, encounters, and ethical reflection on the common good. It offered an inclusive intellectual space where emerging voices could meaningfully interact with senior religious leaders, policymakers, and thinkers, confirming that peacebuilding is a shared and evolving responsibility. Having that said, the event can be evaluated as a clear success, both in its conceptual design and in its lived reality. Its greatest strength lay in its ability to function as a genuine meeting point of thoughts and moral traditions. Too often, gatherings of this kind risk becoming carefully staged arenas of parallel monologues, where institutions speak alongside one another without genuine engagement. This Forum distinguished itself by cultivating a shared intellectual space in which listening carried real weight. I am increasingly concerned that in today's world we speak more than we listen, and respond more than we understand. Yet the future can only be built if we recover the capacity to learn from one another, and if listening once again becomes a central condition of dialogue.

In a world increasingly marked by fragmentation, the Forum embodied what Hannah Arendt might call a space of appearance, a space in which diversity is transformed into meaningful and productive plurality. Philosophically, the Forum reaffirmed an essential insight: peace is not the possession of any single tradition, nation, or ideology. As emphasized in my speech, if peace belongs to only one community, it remains fragile; if it belongs to only one worldview, it remains narrow. The Congress successfully challenged this logic of exclusivity by framing peace as a shared moral horizon, something that must be held in common, nego-



tiated, and constantly renewed. The intergenerational dimension was particularly valuable. The dialogue between experienced leaders, what Sir Isaac Newton would call the “giants”, and younger participants, created a dynamic exchange of memory and imagination. Experience contributed historical awareness, while courage enabled the capacity to imagine new directions in times of uncertainty. Together, they form a necessary equilibrium for sustainable peacebuilding. Only through such an equilibrium, I believe, can societies move forward in a meaningful way.

Reflections from the Balkan Perspective

Coming from the Balkans, a region often described as a microcosm of global diversity, the Forum resonated strongly with our historical experience. The Balkans have known both coexistence and conflict, “honey and blood”, yet precisely because of this dual legacy, the region offers valuable lessons for the world. The Balkan and Macedonian experience of integration without assimilation provides a practical model for intercultural and interreligious coexistence. The symbolic image of the “komshi-kapicik” – the small door between neighbors that remains open even when main gates are closed, captures an ethical principle that the Congress itself embodied: dialogue does not require uniformity, only openness. The Congress reflected this spirit by creating conditions for trust, symbolic listening, and moral hospitality. In this sense, it did not just discuss coexistence; it performed it.

One of the Forum’s most significant contributions was its attention to youth and spirituality in an age of uncertainty. As highlighted in my intervention, young people represent more than half of the global population, yet remain dramatically underrepresented in political and decision-making structures. The Youth Forum offered an important corrective by treating young participants not as guests, but as stakeholders. At the same time, the discussions addressed a deeper crisis of meaning in modern societies. The Forum engaged critically with the structural and ethical challenges of modern societies, including intensified individualism, instrumental rationality, and weakened notions of responsibility. It positioned religion and spirituality as constructive moral frameworks capable of reorienting social life toward solidarity and purpose. In doing so, the Congress affirmed a broader understanding of peace as a moral and spiritual project, rather than a purely technical or security-driven one.

Proposals and Practical Recommendations

Building on the success of Congress, several constructive recommendations can be offered, particularly from a Balkan and youth-oriented perspective:



1. Institutionalize Youth Participation

Future Congresses should establish permanent youth advisory councils or intergenerational working groups, ensuring that young scholars and practitioners contribute continuously, not episodically.

2. Strengthen Regional Knowledge Exchange

Regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East possess lived experience of coexistence after conflict. Structured platforms for sharing these regional models could enrich the Congress's practical impact.

3. Move from Dialogue to Policy-Relevant Outputs

Alongside declarations, the Congress could support policy briefs, educational toolkits, and pilot projects translating dialogue into concrete social and educational practices.

4. Invest in Education from an Early Age

Inspired by Balkan experience, intercultural and interreligious education "from a young age" should be promoted as a long-term peace strategy, not an optional add-on.

5. Preserve the Ethical and Philosophical Depth of the Congress

As the Congress grows, it is crucial to protect its reflective, philosophical character, resisting the temptation to become merely ceremonial or declarative. Both, the Congress and the Young Leaders Forum demonstrated that dialogue among civilizations is a practical necessity for humanity's future. It succeeded as a space where ideas, experiences, and moral traditions converged toward a shared purpose. As Eric Hobsbawm warned, the alternative to change is darkness. The Congress, however, stands as evidence that humanity still possesses the intellectual humility and ethical imagination to choose light over division.

For a young scholar from the Balkans, this Forum was not only a professional milestone, but a reaffirmation that peace is possible when doors, large and small, remain open.



**Research Fellow of Freedom of Religion or Belief of the Regent's Park College, University of Oxford
Dr. Mátyás Bódi**

I was grateful for the opportunity to participate in the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana on 17-18 September 2025. The Congress was exceptionally well organised and marked by outstanding hospitality.

One of the most impressive aspects of the Congress was the breadth of participation. Convening leaders and representatives from such a wide range of religious traditions is a significant achievement. The structure of the programme enabled meaningful dialogue, both in the formal sessions and in the informal conversations during breaks and meals. As is often the case with gatherings of this kind, these informal exchanges were especially valuable, and I appreciated that the programme provided ample space for them.

In a world marked by increasing polarisation and mistrust, sustained interfaith and interreligious dialogue is essential. Forums such as the Congress can play an important role in building mutual understanding, reducing tensions, and strengthening the foundations of peaceful coexistence. I therefore see the Congress as a significant contribution to international efforts to foster interfaith understanding.

I would be very pleased to participate in future initiatives organised by your Centre, as I believe our aims in this area are closely aligned. This was my first visit to Kazakhstan, and I would be delighted to return.



ASTANA PEACE DECLARATION 2025



We, the participants of the **VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions**, held in Astana on 17-18 September 2025,

united by our aspiration to contribute to strengthening dialogue among religions, diverse cultures and civilizations in order to ensure mutual understanding and respect, promote a culture of peace, and enhance relations among people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds,

recognizing that dialogue among religious leaders can foster a deeper awareness of and promotion of universal human values, including the encouragement and protection of fundamental human rights and freedom,

supporting the efforts of the United Nations and other international, regional, public, and non-governmental organizations in fostering dialogue between religions and cultures to reinforce peace and stability in the world,

acknowledging the special role of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in promoting deeper understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures, religions, and peoples,



reaffirming our commitment to the values and objectives enshrined in the “The Concept of Development of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions 2023-2033”,

emphasizing the importance of respecting cultural and religious diversity,

expressing deep regret over the ongoing conflicts in various parts of the world, accompanied by humanitarian crises and the suffering of peaceful populations,

welcoming, in this context, the call by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, to unite efforts of all people of good will toward forming a new global movement for peace,

expressing concern over the rise of religious and related ideological intolerance, including its manifestations in the digital environment, which contribute to the incitement of hatred and violence,

noting that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization, or ethnic group,

reaffirming the importance of protecting religious sites and symbols, which are unique historical heritage reflecting the spirituality, culture, and traditions of peoples worldwide,

expressing particular concern about environmental degradation and climate change, and noting the role of religious leaders in educating, inspiring, and mobilizing their communities toward positive action to protect the environment,

emphasizing that new technologies, including artificial intelligence, must serve humanity, respect human dignity, and do no harm,

recognizing the significance of involving youth and women in interreligious and intercultural dialogue to overcome prejudice, deepen mutual understanding, and strengthen cooperation,

highlighting the importance of education in promoting peace, tolerance, mutual understanding, interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and eradicating discrimination based on religion or beliefs,

reaffirming the significance of the Congress as an effective platform for global dialogue and acknowledging its notable role in strengthening intercultural and interreligious engagement,



WE HAVE REACHED THE FOLLOWING COMMON POSITION:

1. **We express** our commitment to deepening interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an important instrument in achieving peace, social stability, and global cooperation. Amid rising conflict and geopolitical confrontation, it is dialogue that opens the path to peace and development – the foundation for humanity’s survival.

2. **We call on** national governments, international organizations, religious leaders, policymakers, experts, NGOs, media, and all people of goodwill to actively promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue as the groundwork for human unity, encouraging tolerance, respect for human rights, inclusivity, and peaceful coexistence, and rejecting hate speech and violence in order to reinforce peace and mutual understanding among peoples and states.

3. **We believe** that it is part of the mission of religious leaders to serve as moral guides in contemporary societies, pointing out problem areas and fostering trust and fair solutions, as well as supporting peacemaking and constructive dialogue at regional and global levels.

4. **We note** that the “Special Session on Safeguarding Religious Sites” under the auspices of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, held during the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, makes a significant contribution to preserving cultural diversity and humanity’s spiritual heritage, while recognizing the damage and destruction that have occurred in many parts of the world in recent years. Its convening aids the UN’s goal of uniting global efforts in promoting and protecting religious freedom.

5. **We reaffirm** the value of the Document “On Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” initiated by the Holy See and Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the “Meccan Declaration,” the “Declaration on Building Bridges Between Islamic Schools of Thought,” as well as initiatives from the Holy See, Bahrain, Jordan, the Alliance of Civilizations, the Muslim World League, Religions for Peace, the G20 Interfaith Forum, the Muslim Council of Elders, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and other organizations aimed at strengthening interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding among followers of various religions and confessions worldwide.

6. **We express our gratitude and respect** for the contribution of Pope Francis – an outstanding spiritual leader of our time, who devoted his life to serving peace, dialogue among people and religions, and the protection of human dignity, and justice. His legacy remains a luminous guide for all who aspire to harmony, mercy, and mutual understanding.



7. **We resolutely endorse** the UN's thesis of "Unity in Diversity" and UN General Assembly resolutions directed toward developing interfaith and intercultural dialogue and countering incitement to hatred, while taking note of initiatives such as the "UN Plan of Action for the Protection of Religious Sites," which may serve as a useful reference point in this field.

8. **We express** deep concern over the continuation of conflicts in various regions of the world. These conflicts inflict devastating damage on countries and civilian populations, cause mass human rights violations, and endanger the foundations of humanity and global security. We call on all parties to cease violence, establish dialogue, and seek peaceful solutions based on the UN Charter and international law.

9. **We strongly urge** the preservation of peace and the prevention of any use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, which pose threats to all humanity. Political leaders and officials must exercise sound judgment, follow moral principles, and undertake all possible efforts to prevent the escalation of armed conflicts, prioritizing the preservation of peace and security on Earth.

10. **We draw** attention to the international community's need to intensify efforts to support women and children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, refugees, and internally displaced persons from crisis and conflict zones, ensuring their rights and social integration.

11. **We acknowledge** that social inequality fosters the growth of radical views and call on political leaders to reduce wealth disparities and ensure decent living conditions for all. We express concern over the loss of spiritual and moral direction in consumerist societies and advocate for cultivating spiritual values and moral responsibility in modern societies. Followers of religious traditions must not be deprived of their rights to freedom of religion in accordance with spiritual values.

12. **We are convinced** that economic and political contradictions and conflicts between countries should not lead to increased intercultural and interethnic animosity and intolerance, nor to hatred, discrimination, or violence among people. Civil society and policymakers must remember this, encouraging the preservation of mutual respect and dialogue that fosters a culture of tolerance and respect among people, societies, and nations.

13. **We denounce** extremism, radicalism, and terrorism in all forms and manifestations and affirm the inadmissibility of using religion for political purposes. We call for cooperation between religious and political leaders in this regard.



14. We condemn any propaganda of religious hatred, incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence based on religion, the desecration of religious sites and symbols, and other acts of religious intolerance.

15. We support education and religious instruction as tools to combat radicalism and extremism. Education should cultivate a culture of respect for other faiths and worldviews, laying the foundation for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect in the world.

16. We call for the protection of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, preventing discrimination and persecution based on race, religion, culture, and other differences. Recognizing that human diversity reflects the divine plan and affirms the equality of all people, we emphasize the inadmissibility of coercion into religion and the need to respect differences as the basis for peaceful coexistence.

17. We endorse equality and inclusivity as the foundation for sustainable development. We call for the protection of the rights of all religious, ethnic, and social groups, and their active participation in public life and political dialogue.

18. We note the potential of women in political and public life and seek to promote the conditions that enable their full participation, acknowledging how this benefits society as a whole.

19. We underscore the role of youth in building bridges of understanding and respect between different cultures and religions. We support the Forum of Young Religious Leaders, held under the aegis of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, as an important platform for consolidating efforts of new generations and ensuring continuity in interreligious dialogue.

20. We express concern over the slowdown in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda and call on developed countries to enhance financial and technological support for developing states to achieve Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, while calling on developing countries to exert all possible efforts toward sustainable development.

21. We reaffirm the importance of environmental protection and combating climate change. We call for global efforts to preserve ecosystems, prevent climate disasters, mitigate consequences, and adapt to climate change. Caring for nature is our moral duty to the Creator and future generations.

22. We instruct the Secretariat of the Congress to prepare a document titled "The Role of Faith in Combating Climate Change" with the aim of presenting it at international climate forums.



23. We call for responsible use of new technologies, including digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and bioengineering. The use of AI for discrimination, hostility, or undermining human dignity is unacceptable. We emphasize the need to develop international norms for AI usage based on human rights and ethical principles. We affirm that despite the progress in the development of AI, the capacity for genuine compassion and love remains exclusively human, and cultivating these qualities should become the foundation of humankind's humanistic and spiritual-moral development.

24. We recommend exploring the possibility of developing a set of universal principles for the responsible use of artificial intelligence from the perspective of spiritual and moral values.

25. We call on the international community to uphold the aims and principles of the UN Charter, international law, and international security guarantees amid the contentious global agenda and geopolitical realities, which serve as the basis for international security and justice.

26. We support the call of the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, to establish a new global movement for peace to unite the efforts of those striving to overcome disagreement and conflict, build trust among peoples, and uphold ideals of peace and justice.

27. We intend to intensify the international dialogue on promoting the objectives of the global movement for peace and to conduct a series of international events – round tables, conferences, and side events – in partnership with other global and regional platforms, with a view to identifying effective ways to promote a culture of peace and harmony.

28. We propose actively promoting and implementing the ideas and objectives of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions within UN platforms and other international forums to strengthen global efforts in forming an inclusive and harmonious international community.

29. We call on the international community and the UN General Assembly to recognize the important role of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which for more than 20 years has actively promoted dialogue and accord among religions, contributing to strengthening peace and harmony. The Congress has made a significant contribution to shaping global interreligious dialogue and spiritual diplomacy based on mutual respect and cooperation.

30. We instruct the Secretariat of the Congress to develop a Roadmap for advancing and implementing the Declaration of the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, ensuring the practical realization of the outlined proposals and ideas at the international level together with forum partners.



31. We recommend that the Secretariat of the Congress establish an International Online Center of Spiritual Knowledge with an electronic library of texts and materials from the Congresses, speeches by participants and experts, as well as media projects reflecting the forum's ideas and objectives.

32. We reaffirm our shared commitment to continuing the work of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and express our intention to hold the next, IX Congress in 2028 in the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana.

33. We once again recognize the Republic of Kazakhstan as an authoritative and global center for intercultural, interreligious, and interfaith dialogue.

34. We express our sincere gratitude to the Republic of Kazakhstan, to the President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, and the people of Kazakhstan for convening the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, and for the high quality organization of the event, as well as for their warmth and hospitality, which contributed to strengthening peace and harmony.

* * *

This Declaration has been adopted by the majority of delegates of the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and is being forwarded to governments, political and religious leaders worldwide, international and regional organizations, civil society institutions, as well as religious associations and leading experts. It will also be disseminated as an official document during the 80th session of the UN General Assembly.

The principles contained in the Declaration may be applied at regional and international levels to be considered in all policy decisions, legislation, educational programs, and mass media in all interested countries.

**MAY OUR PATH TOWARD UNITY, PEACE, AND PROSPERITY
BE BLESSED!**

**PARTICIPANTS OF THE VIII CONGRESS OF THE LEADERS
OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS**

**REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN
ASTANA
17-18 SEPTEMBER 2025**



“DIALOGUE THROUGH IMAGES: THE VIII CONGRESS IN PHOTOGRAPHS”

















































































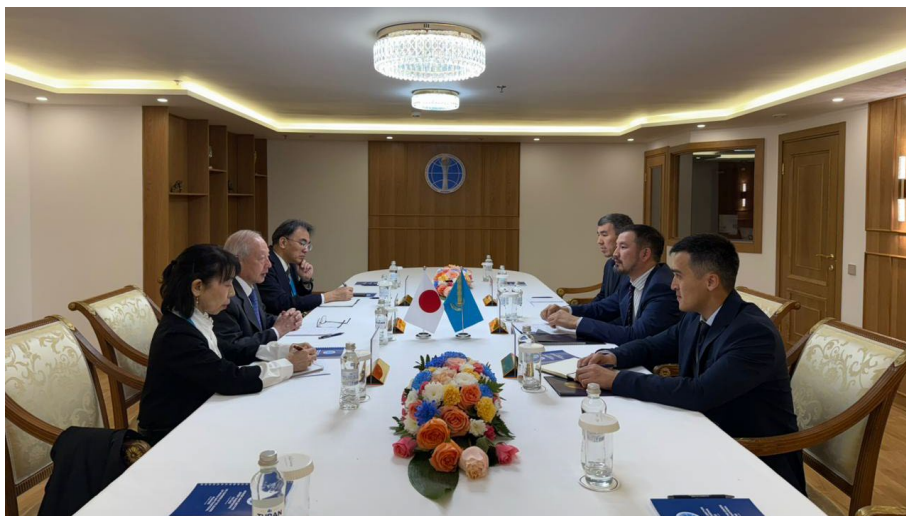




































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