

**Donors and Faith-Based Peace-Building Actors Conference
Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

The Hague, the Netherlands

16 November 2005

**Faith Based Peace Building:
A Vision for the 21 Century**

Dr. Hashim El-Tinay

Founder/President

Salam Sudan Foundation (SSF)

&

The International Peace Quest Institute (IPQI)

Editor,

The Peace Quest Messenger

Your excellencies Ms. Agnes Van Ardenne, Netherland Minister for Development Cooperation; Aart Jacobi, Director, Human and Peace-Building Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Tsjeard Bouta, Research fellow, Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”; the Representative of the Netherlands Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Policies, Mohamed Abunimer and S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana of the Salam Peace and Justice Institute; donors, faith-based peace-building actors, ladies and gentlemen: Alsalam Alaikum (peace be with you), good afternoon and bon appetite.

Dear friends:

Thank you for this timely, thoughtful and historic initiative that has the potential to move faith from being part of the problem of our troubled World today, to becoming part of the solution. Thank you also for including Salam Sudan Foundation (SSF) and myself in your program today. I am greatly humbled and honored.

Toward a common human identity:

As you all know very well, faith, religion and spirituality are an essential component of the identity of the vast majority of humanity who recognize the importance of framing the radical finiteness of the human and thus, humility. A basis for human meaning is then provided by belief in radically inclusive and ultimate context-God in the Abrahamic faith traditions and most religious and spiritual traditions that emphasize the oneness of God and the oneness of the human family. Although the Abrahamic tradition teaches us about the Divine purpose of testing the human species by choosing

between doing good or evil, while here on earth, as the Abel and Cain story tells us, the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an all teach a deeper meaning that stresses humility, wisdom and a common humanity.

Limits of the Nation State:

The universally dominant Nation State secular paradigm, rooted in the French Revolution and the European experience, is perceived by many, rightly or wrongly, as having divided people on the basis of race, language, territory, and ethnicity etc and de-emphasizing the spiritual dimension. It teaches a more compartmentalized sense of functional identity that stresses our differences. Because of this, many argue that a zero-sum logic became unleashed, in the 20th Century, wherein racial, ethnic, linguistic, territorial divisions, rivalries and competitions were, oftentimes, the root causes of injustice, conflict, wanton violence, war and untold suffering.

The powers that be in this nation state framework are seen by many as self-righteous, materialistic and arrogant. Whether in the name of secularism, religiosity, civilization or freedom, their actions are often perceived as unethical and a reflection of their military might alone. For them might equals right. Nonetheless, these powers, oftentimes, do use religion selectively and opportunistically to justify unethical and even illegal policies (colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, state terrorism, etc). Our world today seems to be hostage to exclusivist, ghettoized, rigidly compartmentalized systems of thought and action that cause us to be self-indulgent and oblivious to our neighbors. This leads to myopia, mutual ignorance,

misunderstanding, fear, poor governance, unending wars and the wasteful squandering of human and natural resources as well as environmental destruction.

All this goes on despite the fact that, in the deeper world of the human heart, we all are intuitively uncomfortable with injustice. This was truthfully captured by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he said “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” The challenge before us is to help people in power to resist the sins of self-righteousness, arrogance and war by bringing both religious and secular extremists to the negotiating table of dialogue, understanding, greater awareness, cooperation and unity.

Faithful of the World Unite for Peace:

In that way we can finally address the root causes of the crisis facing all our faith traditions, political systems, families, communities, societies, nations and international order.

Too many people are unnecessarily perishing in our world today. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” says the Bible. Like many other voices, I have been advocating since 1985 that humanity needs a new vision for the 21 Century to address a lingering crisis. Our global village – or global ship – is fragile and is at the mercy of unending natural and human-induced “hurricanes”. We need to practice humility and critically revisit the very foundations of the conventional wisdom on which stand our political, economic and social orders. Urgent reforms are needed from within religious traditions, from within states, and from within regional as well as international institutions. All are facing a deep crisis of legitimacy.

For this reform to be meaningful, it has to be from the bottom up, from the grassroots in our communities all the way up our governments, to the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Justice, peace, love, solidarity, compassion and selflessness are the essence and the common denominator of all religious and spiritual traditions. Although the usage of violence and warfare are permitted in certain instances for self-defense, these traditions tell us that conflicts can be resolved peacefully and through dialogue. War must be the exception rather than the rule. It should be the option of last resort. Since most of humanity adheres more naturally, and oftentimes passionately, to faith rather than to political parties, temporal power or government, faith-based peace-building can be a very effective way for policymakers to help pre-empt and/or resolve conflict, violence and war. Hence my call and advocacy work since 1985 in the direction of making the 21st Century a century of spiritual and civilizational renewal.

Toward a faith-based peace building agenda for the 21st Century:

My dear friends:

Allow me now to briefly outline some actions that support these ideas:

For this desired renewal to happen, humanity needs to embrace this new vision of spiritual, societal and civilizational renewal and work diligently to liberate itself from being hostage to both religious and secular extremisms that feed on each other, and which are now clearly part of the problem. We all need to do this by daring to

question the very basis of our strongly held views. We must do this by humbly seeking knowledge, with all our minds and all our hearts, and using it in new discourses and actions that facilitate the emergence of a **creative synthesis of the middle**-- one that is inclusive of both secular and religious, respectful of religious traditions, cultures and civilizations other than our own, and animated by a necessary search for a deeper meaning to our lives. That is the motivation for me and my friends who are walking the path of working for justice and peace, democracy and human rights through interfaith research, education, dialogue and cooperation – to reach an understanding that helps us to better serve the common good of our communities and of mankind. As a Muslim, I am inspired by what Allah told Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in Sourate Al-Anbiya 22/107, in the Holy Qur'an: " We sent you not, but as a mercy for all the Worlds".

For this desired renewal to happen we need to keep in mind the following four points:

First, we need to recognize that the perceived secular neglect of the religious factor in society contributes to the marginalization and hence misuse of religion to incite violent conflicts. We need to convene scholars, diplomats, government officials, clergy and other leaders, and train people at the grassroots on the use of religion as a resource to prevent or resolve conflict. Quality research, education, dialogue and cooperation are vital.

The growing cynicism perceived in the dominant political culture and its objective limitations, and the growing gap between rich and

poor, is causing a shift in most of humanity's identity to becoming more faith-based rather than nationality-based. As more and more people tend to respond more to a framework of faith rather than mere political discourse, the dominant elites in power can no longer ignore the importance of the religious factor in conflict resolution. This is an emerging reality in the 21st Century that must be embraced and acted upon by policymakers.

At the same time, religious leaders and educators bear a heavy responsibility to uphold the noblest vision of their religious traditions, and to combat narrow, exclusivist and violent interpretations of those traditions, to which marginalized, oppressed and frustrated people can be so easily drawn.

Second, more resources and efforts need to be made in the identification, research, study and financial support of faith-based Peace actors – both religious leaders and lay believers who risk and sacrifice their lives working for justice and peace. We need to empower them and help them learn new techniques and transferable practices and conflict resolution skills. We can greatly benefit from training professionals to work with ethnically and religiously diverse populations. The Tanenbaum Center, based in New York City, is doing good work and leading the way in this area.

Third, our World today is at a crossroad and desperately needs healing. Forgiveness and healing can be greatly enhanced if we all re-examine our dark side and honestly address the root causes of the injustices perpetrated by man's inhumanity to man through the ages. For their own long term best interest and the common good, humans

who have collectively and intentionally committed crimes against other humans need to publicly and courageously admit and assume their sins and seek forgiveness from those they victimized. That will open the way for much-needed healing; a pre-requisite for genuine renewal as demonstrated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission experiment in South Africa.

Fourth, for all the above to happen we need to build on this knowledge and engage religious and believing lay leaders as well as secular leaders at the grassroots level by giving them peace-building, reconciliation and conflict resolution training and skills, which then creates a tremendous opportunity to contribute to inter-communal understanding, peace and harmony, at the national, regional and international levels. This is the mission of my organizations, Salam Sudan Foundation (SSF) and the International Peace Quest Institute (IPQI) and our newsletter the Peace Quest Messenger. We, the Salam Peace and Justice Institute and others are well positioned to facilitate this development.

In conclusion, I know I am expressing the sentiment of all who are here today in thanking the Netherland ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Netherlands Institute of International Relations for making this conference possible. Our thanks also go to the efforts of our colleagues from Bosnia, Nigeria and the Sudan who are sharing with us their faith-based peace-building experiences today. We salute your efforts and know that as leaders in your communities you are making a difference every day. Your good work is an inspiration for all of us. We need you to stay the course.

In so doing, however, let us never forget that God is one and humanity is one. Let us practice humility, forgiveness, and respect and share the truths, common to our traditions, and that we hold dear; in the **best manner**. Rather than always looking for what divides us, let us embrace, celebrate and build on what unites us. Let us all accept the challenge of renewing ourselves and our faith traditions through ijihad (intellectual effort). Let us renew ourselves as individuals, communities and nations living in the 21st Century. Let us resist anger, self-righteousness and arrogance. As believers, let us continue to uphold the prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power. Because as the Bible teaches us in John 8: 24 “And ye shall know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

Let us learn to speak with one another, not at one another. Let us start learning to know one another rather than despising one another. Let us work together and help bring the dawn of a more generous, enlightened, just, peaceful, prosperous and a safer world, centered on the dignity of the human person. And let us, as Gandhi said, start with ourselves to be the change we want to see in the World.

May the Almighty bless us all with humility, wisdom, foresight, courage, perseverance and unshakable commitment to advance the cause of justice, understanding, peace and human decency and dignity? Thank you and God bless you.