



Religious leaders at Davos face up to globalization challenge

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ICCJ Heppenheim - 31 January 2001. World religious and spiritual leaders, including senior representatives of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths, meeting here at the invitation of the World Economic Forum, have agreed to seek the creation of a framework integrating leaders of religion, business, politics and civil society to help tackle "both opportunities and perils" offered by globalisation.

Four senior rabbis, including Chief Rabbi I.M.Lau of Israel, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks from the UK, and the former Chief Rabbi of France, Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat, were among the participants in the meeting that was also attended by the President and Vice-President of the Permanent Committee for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Religions at Cairo's Al Azhar University, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia and the Director of the Muslim College in the UK, Sheikh Dr. M.A. Zaki Badawi.

Christian leaders attending included the Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The role of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, in establishing the council of religious leaders was praised by Professor Klaus Schwab, President and Founder of the World Economic Forum.

In a statement at the end of their two-day session, the religious leaders said that, on the one hand, globalisation could help millions of people around the world overcome poverty, improve health and education, participate in economic and political decisions and improve their lives.

On the other hand, "partly because spiritual values have not been given due consideration, globalisation has produced environmental degradation, sharpened disparities between "haves" and "have nots" and thereby diverted national priorities away from basic services and threatened to homogenise local traditions into a global consumerist culture."

The assembled leaders expressed their firm belief that "religious traditions have a unique contribution to offer in meeting these challenges, particularly in emphasising human values and the spiritual and moral dimension of economic and political life."

Urging that critics be welcomed and listened to, the signatories said they also believed that they had a role to play in helping overcome the division and hostility that the subject of globalisation generated. "Both friends and foes of globalisation are members of our communities and we have a responsibility to heed their different voices. Our goal is to inspire a spirit of universalism while respecting the integrity of particular traditions."

Before ending their sessions, the religious leaders agreed to a series of ongoing meetings "to explore the possibility of creating a council of religious leaders that offers religious, spiritual and ethical guidance to international organisations such as the World Economic Forum, the UN and others. We are committed to work in collaboration with the World Economic Forum in this undertaking."

Rabbi David Rosen, the President of the International Council of Christians and Jews, warmly welcomed "this unique opportunity to establish a mechanism by which leaders of the major world religions may interact with captains of industry, technology and science, as well as with heads of state, for the spiritual and ethical betterment of society at large."

Subsequent to the meeting in Davos, Bawa Jain, Secretary General of the Millennium World Peace Summit, met with Cardinal Arinze, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, who expressed his full support for the formation of an advisory council.

In an address to the gathering in which he reviewed current challenges to religious communities around the world, Sir Sigmund Sternberg, the Patron of the International Council of Christians and Jews and co-founder of the British Three Faiths Forum, welcomed the fact that, despite "the dreadful strains and stresses of the moment, people of goodwill on both sides of the divide have agreed to tackle the sense of inequality on the part of Israeli Arabs."

Leading Jewish and Arab businessmen had agreed to create a \$10 million Arab-Jewish venture capital fund to lobby for the use of Arabic as an official language in the State of Israel, work toward reducing the level of inequality regarding land allocations and to integrate hundreds of Arab citizens into the technology field and corporate boards over the next year.

Sir Sigmund told the assembly: "It is a moderate start – in line with a project I have been working on for several years – and one that I hope will find support from the international business community, with its benefits extended to the Palestinian community outside Israel's borders."

Sir Sigmund, who in his speech accepting the Templeton Prize three years ago had urged the summoning of a "Davos conference of the soul" to unite the religious contribution to the betterment of the world, expressed satisfaction that his vision was at last becoming a reality.

The meeting, which was also attended by Indian and Vietnamese spiritual leaders, paid tribute to Mr Bawa Jain for organising the Davos event. There was also a tribute by Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric to the German theologian Professor Hans Küng for his contribution to the worldwide search for a global ethic.