“Make Friends Across Religions”

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Wednesday, 14 June 2017 * The most prominent leaders of the world’s major religions released a joint appeal today calling on the people of the world to unify and make friends across religions.

The statement is intended to reduce social tension around the world by stimulating interpersonal contact between people of different faiths. It was made by Pope Francis, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, H.H. the Dalai Lama, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and many others.

Personal contact is believed to counter misperceptions, prejudices and distrust. The appeal was released as a 3-minute video on Twitter (#MakeFriends) in 16 languages during a press conference in London. Here is the full video statement:

<iframe src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/CGMQsJ0VzAk?rel=0" allowfullscreen="" frameborder="0" height="315" width="560"></iframe>

Each of the leaders contributed a personal statement for the exclusive purpose of creating this joint appeal. Ayatollah Al-Milani advises people to make friends with followers of all religions. Patriarch Bartholomew calls on the world to “recognize the beauty of God in every living human being”. Pope Francis and Rabbi Abraham Skorka demonstrate how their religious experiences have been enriched by their interfaith friendship. Grand Mufti of Egypt Shawki Allam stresses not to focus on differences between religious groups. The Dalai Lama calls for a deepening of spiritual friendship. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says “One of the wonderful things about spending time with people completely unlike you is that you discover how much you have in common. The same fears, hopes and concerns.” Archbishop of the Church of Sweden Antje Jackelén stresses the importance for society: “This should start a process that will take prejudices away and where new insights and hope is born.” The Archbishop of Canterbury adds that “It’s not complicated, start with sharing what we all share, which is the pleasure of conversation.”

The joint statement intends to counter a hazardous and widespread misperception that followers of religions other than our own view us with distrust and disdain. While, in reality, a new global study (n=56,000) led by the global research institute Motivaction has found that people of all faiths are generally open to people with other beliefs. Head researcher at Motivaction Martijn Lampert said, during the press conference today, that a message promoting friendship across religions is likely to resonate with the majority of religious people around the world, which according to a study by the American Pew Research Center comprises 84% of the world population.

Prof. Gregory M. Reichberg of the Norwegian Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) explained at the press conference that the misunderstanding that people of other faiths harbor animosity toward us “sets us up for a bad dynamic and tends to produce what we fear.” That misunderstanding stems from the lack of contact between religious people of different faiths, fueling prejudices and social tension.

Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute and the chief organizer of this joint statement, said during the press conference that this appeal is also a significant novelty

from a theological perspective. “We cannot deny that in the books of many religions you can find texts that are not very open, even hostile, to people of other faiths. Therefore, when the world’s most important leaders call for friendship, they are in fact affirming a particular way of practicing religion and rejecting another.” Rabbi Goshen-Gottstein presented two downloadable toolkits—one for religious individuals and the second for local religious leaders interested in advancing and deepening interfaith friendships in their communities.

Rabbi Goshen-Gottstein expressed his gratitude toward the religious leaders for making this bold statement and toward Mark Woerde and his team from Havas Lemz & Letsheal.org who conceived the idea for this project and spent years making it happen.

For much more information such as toolkits for friendship and study, FAQs, overview and biographies of religious leaders, research report, videos, visuals and more visit:

http://www.elijah-interfaith.org/

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