



Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good

The Washington Declaration

February 7, 2018

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation. (Isaiah 52:7)

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called into one body. And be thankful. (Colossians 3:15)

Good and evil cannot be equal: repel evil with that which is better, and your enemy will become as a close and warm friend, but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness. (Qur'an 41:34-35)

Introduction

On January 27, 2016, more than 250 Muslim scholars from 120 countries gathered in Marrakesh, Morocco, and affirmed in a landmark statement that the oppression of religious minorities contradicts Islamic values, and they called for equality of citizenship, regardless of faith tradition, in Muslim-majority societies. The Marrakesh Declaration was inspired by the famed Charter of Medina, which had, 1,400 years earlier, recognized that all residents of that holy city, no matter their religious beliefs, had equal rights and responsibilities.

This week, more than 400 representatives from the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, assembled in Washington, D.C., in the spirit of another historic initiative that came to fruition on

the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century of the Common Era. The Alliance of Virtue was first formed in Mecca, and was conceived and implemented to support the rule of law and to ensure fair treatment for the vulnerable and disadvantaged throughout the Meccan community. Key adherents of the Alliance included Muhammad, prior to his prophetic mission, and leaders from a variety of ethnicities and religions. Similarly, the troubled times we live in today compel us to proffer a vision of a revived Alliance of Virtue, global in nature, inclusive of men and women of every faith, race, and nationality, and dedicated – like its earlier namesake – to joint action in the service of sustainable peace, justice, equality, compassion, and mutual respect. We believe that individuals and communities need to move beyond mere tolerance and dedicate themselves to work towards a future in which everyone can flourish and in which all – empowered by faith – can foster reconciliation and seek to heal the wounds of violence and war and bring closer a world of justice and peace for all.

Preamble

With heartfelt sorrow, we observe that armed struggle, terrorism, and other manifestations of conflict are causing civilian deaths, the displacement of populations, the suffering of innocent people, and the desecration of sacred places and shrines. Sectarian rivalries, religious prejudice, and unchecked nationalism contribute significantly and tragically to violence that – due to the relentless advances in weapons technology – poses a dire and imminent threat to the wellbeing of all people.

Despite some gains, there remain gross inequalities in the human condition: vast wealth and affluence amidst deep poverty, chronic malnutrition, lack of access to education, deadly shortcomings in health care, and callous indifference – even among the outwardly pious – to human suffering.

The pervasiveness of conflict, injustice, oppression, and hardship

constitutes a direct affront to the aspirations of the Abrahamic faith traditions to which we – who have gathered this week in Washington – adhere. The gap between our shared hopes and a wounded world is but a warning that we must heed.

The Washington Declaration

Though mindful of our differences, the ethical values we hold in common obligate us to chart a new course guided by old wisdom, a journey that must begin with the knowledge that all humans have a single origin, that each is endowed by our Creator with intrinsic human dignity and inalienable rights, and that we cannot love and serve God if we fail to love our neighbors – including the strangers in our midst.

We recognize that our shared values are more important than our differences and that we are strongest when we act together. We pledge to work together to foster unity, aid the impoverished, protect the vulnerable, heal the poor in spirit, and champion all measures that affirm the dignity of every human being. We will be guided in these endeavors by convictions that flow from our deepest theological understandings:

- ❖ All people, irrespective of faith, are entitled to religious liberty. There is no room for compulsion in religion, nor are there any legitimate grounds for barring the followers of any religion from full and fair participation in society. This cardinal principle in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is deeply rooted in the United States, where the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom preceded the adoption of the nation's Constitution and was a precursor to its First Amendment; and is a central principle of rights guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- ❖ All people, men and women alike, are entitled to equality and due process under the law. All are entitled to freedom of movement within their states, freedom of speech, freedom of

conscience, freedom from political persecution, freedom from torture, the right to seek political asylum, the right to a nationality, and to all other internationally recognized human rights.

- ❖ Each government is obligated to respect the rights and the dignity of all who dwell within its jurisdiction. Each should use its resources to mitigate the root causes of inequality and to create opportunities for people, so they may use their energy and talents to provide for their families and contribute to society. Each government should also be a faithful steward of the natural environment, which we hold in trust, for future generations. Each state has a duty, as delineated in the United Nations Charter, to refrain from aggression or attempt to subjugate others and to cooperate in resolving disputes peacefully, lawfully, and justly. Governments should respect, promote, and implement international human rights standards.
- ❖ People from all sectors – including public service, religion, business, academia, civil society, and the arts – share a responsibility to foster international and inter-cultural understanding and to oppose any effort to convey information that is false or defamatory about any ethnic, racial, or religious group.

We believe that religious leaders have a special responsibility to ensure that the tenets and teachings of our faiths are not deployed for wrongful purposes and to recognize that they are the embodiment of God's love at work in the world. In light of that responsibility, we must reject the polarization that leads to conflict and war. We are determined to deepen our solidarity and to ensure that religion, once again, becomes a force for reconciliation and harmony. We pledge to work across confessional divides to promote virtues central to each of our faith traditions, including peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, justice, and truth.

Together, we can establish, by example, that doctrinal differences are no bar to cooperative deeds; on the contrary, these differences enable us to address common challenges from varied vantage points and through different strategies. In that spirit, we promise to exchange ideas, encourage and train our congregants to engage in joint projects and advocacy, form partnerships with relevant national and international actors, build bridges with leaders of other faith and ethical traditions, and create a successful model of collaboration that people of all religions can emulate in support of the common good.

In reviving the historic Alliance of Virtue, we forge ahead certain in our belief that, for all the ignorance, enmity, and perplexity that plagues our world, love remains a more potent force than hate in shaping human behavior; hope is more resilient than fear; and the desire to build will always trump the impulse to destroy. We go forward seeking God's help to liberate us from the snares of prejudice and narrow-mindedness – to give us ears that we might listen across the distance of our differences, hands that we might reach beyond the boundaries that separate us, and minds that we might remain open to the thoughts and needs of our fellow human beings.

May God's blessings enlighten and inspire us all.

Call to Action

- We call for the establishment of an Alliance of Virtue to implement and advance the Washington Declaration.
- We call for the provision of one billion meals to feed and strengthen the communities made vulnerable by the violence and conflicts that challenge us on the path forward.
- We call for the creation of a multi-religious body of prominent religious leaders to support mediation and reconciliation that will act in accordance with our shared values to promote peace in the world.

- We will establish a committee to adopt these recommendations that reflects the vibrant and dynamic diversity of our communities and of our world.