

## **Cheek Against Delivery**

**Address by  
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President, Appeal of Conscience Foundation  
Member, UN Alliance of Civilizations High Level Group  
Senior Rabbi, Park East Synagogue, New York  
International Conference for Dialogue  
Under The Patronage of  
His Majesty King Abdulla bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud  
Madrid, Spain  
July 16, 2008-07-16**

**Dialogue In Judaism :  
Dialogue-An Instrument for inter-religious, Inter-cultural  
And International Cooperation**

**Rabbi Arthur Schneier**  
**International Conference for Dialogue**  
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**Shalom, Salaam, Peace**

**Your Majesties, Eminences, Excellencies, distinguished spiritual leaders, fellow participants of this conference,**

**I want to thank H.M. King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia for his initiative in convening with the Muslim World League this International Conference for Dialogue. Your Majesty, your personal presence gives new impetus to broaden the dimensions of existing inter-religious dialogue and reinforces the premise that religious communities and leaders can and must play a role in easing world tension. I also extend my deep gratitude to H.M. Juan Carlos, King of all Spaniards, for hosting this significant gathering. Inter-religious dialogue has become a vital tool for inter-religious, inter-cultural, and international cooperation.**

**What brings us here today, both veterans and newcomers to the field of inter-religious cooperation, is God's mission statement to the Patriarch Abraham "V'heye Brachah" (Genesis 12:3) to be a blessing, for our family, community, world, and humanity.**

**The Jewish tradition stresses the need to love all of God's children. Students in our schools learn from the early childhood years "v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho" love thy neighbor as thyself (Leviticus 19:18). We are instructed to pursue peace out of a love for our fellow human beings (ahavat ha'beriyot). The Bible makes very clear that this love is not exclusive to one's own ethnic or national group. Thirty-six times it is repeated in the Torah that one must love the stranger, treat him well, support him in his hour of need, and make him feel welcome.**

**In my own life I experienced defiance of these principles. I am a survivor of the Holocaust who experienced ethnic cleansing, racism, the burning of my synagogue, deportation, and the murder of my family in the death camps of Auschwitz and Terezin. How does one transform from being a victim to an advocate for dialogue? This has been my path in life since founding, over 40 years ago, the inter-faith Appeal of Conscience Foundation, which has united religious and business leaders committed to the furtherance of human rights, religious freedom and tolerance. The key is not to be paralyzed by the horrors of the past. One must remember with resolve to ensure that similar tragedies do not befall your people or any people. This requires mutual understanding of one another, being able to feel the pain of the Other and ultimately mutual acceptance.**

**In the days of Noah, God destroyed the world with a massive flood. But he made a covenant never again to destroy civilization, with the rainbow serving as a sign of this covenant. The rainbow retains the individuality of each of its seven colors while simultaneously preserving the harmony**

**of the blended whole. Similarly, we must respect the traditions of other faith groups while working in unity and harmony to repair a fractured world. The Bible commands us to choose life "u'vacharta ba'chaim (Deuteronomy 30:19)." God won't destroy the world again, but we have to consciously choose to live and preserve life, something possible only when there is harmony and unity amongst men.**

**To achieve the peace and security which we so desperately desire and deserve we must be cognizant of the need for reconciliation. While we find in the annals of history page after page of bloody conflict fought in then name of religion, the contemporary era is quite different. War persists but the underlying premises are no longer exclusively theological differences. It is true that we still have vestiges of violent extremism, but the recent trend is toward mutual acceptance amongst mainstream religious leaders. There are still 30 active conflicts in the world, many of which have a religious dimension. Given that reality, we need to take firm action to douse the flames of war with the healing waters of peace.**

**We can prevent a clash of civilizations. It was my honor and privilege to have served as a member of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations High Level Group, which was established to refute the premise of a clash of civilization and help bridge the gap between Islam and the West. The conflict today is not as portrayed between Islam and the West, but between those who believe in coexistence and those who reject mutual acceptance and live and let live, between those who believe in tolerance and those who want to destroy life. It is my firm**

**belief, and history will support this assertion, that all conflicts eventually come to an end. Whether you look back to the One Hundred Years War, the Thirty Years War, the Franco-Prussian Wars World War I and II, the Cold War, or even the racial conflict in South Africa, eventually the conflict subsides and people learn to live in harmony with the other. Therefore, we have just cause for optimism that even seemingly intractable conflicts such as those in the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will eventually reach a peaceful resolution.**

**It is our challenge as religious leaders to hasten, and not delay, the end of conflict, so as to avoid needless human pain and suffering. Reconciliation is only possible if we religious leaders, who believe in coexistence, together strengthen the bridge-builders between civilizations. We must isolate and marginalize the peace wreckers in our midst. We must be vigilant against those who would wreck our accomplishments by misusing and abusing religion for nefarious purposes. In the face of injustice and the trampling of human dignity and human rights we cannot indulge in the luxury of indifference. Together let us resolve to speak out forcefully against those who incite violence and prejudice and demonize other faiths and ethnic backgrounds who give voice to the vile expressions of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. They have used the latest form of communication, the internet, to spew forth their message to divide and not to unite.**

**Visiting the destroyed churches and mosques in the former Yugoslavia and learning about the destruction of the sacred Buddhist statues**

reminded me of the destruction of my own synagogue on Kristalnacht November 9, 1938. I am proud that the Appeal of Conscience Foundation was responsible for the passage of the United Nations Resolution for the Protection of Religious Sights in 2001 which was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly.

In this age of symbolism and of immediate mass media, solidarity of religious leaders is an important statement. Earlier this year H.M. King Abdullah made an historic and unprecedented visit to the Vatican for meetings with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. It was my privilege to receive His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI during his recent trip to the United States, as he made the first ever papal visit to an American synagogue, my congregation Park East Synagogue in New York. This visit was hailed by people of all faiths as a sign of hope and Shalom.

No Child is born with hatred ,children learn and are taught how to hate the "Other" A culture of tolerance must be fostered by role model teachers equiped with textbooks that stress mutual respect and acceptance of the "Others"

The next generation must receive an education devoid of intolerance. All should be taught a sense of pride in their faith and identity. However, they must also be taught a responsibility to behave with respect and tolerance for those who don't share their beliefs and national origins . Our greatest hopes for the future are our children. The greatest injustice to future generations is to bequeath our conflicts, while the greatest legacies we can leave are the blessings of freedom and opportunity that come with peace.

**Our meeting follows the leaders of 40 states for the Mediterranean Initiative in Paris. We have seen the victors and the vanquished uniting in the EU of 27 nations. We as religious leaders have the unique advantage of backing up these political initiatives with broadening the people to people contacts of trust.**

**Despite the upsurge of extremism, faith has tremendous potential to become a force for good in the world. This is a time of spiritual awakening around the globe, and so organized religion has an unprecedented opportunity to deal with the great issues of day including poverty, hunger, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, spread of AIDS, and the destruction of the environment. In this effort we must also partner with faith communities of Asia and Africa .**

**The Appeal of Conscience Foundation has helped energize religious leaders to support victims of natural disasters. Religious and inter-faith groups led by example when catastrophe struck Romania Armenia, Turkey, Iran, and China, sending humanitarian aid and relief supplies to those hardest hit.. Based on our sacred teachings, which stress the importance of *tzedakah*, *zakat*, or charity, we have exhibited our ability to work together. Beyond mere dialogue, we have shown the ability of religious leaders and faith groups to put our rhetoric to practical use in cooperative efforts.**

**In 1967 I led an Appeal of Conceal Foundation mission to Spain at a time when Spain did not have full religious freedom as Jews, Muslims**

**and Protestants were merely tolerated. Thanks to the efforts of our host, H.M. King Juan Carlos we are assembled here at an inter-religious gathering in a country which today guarantees full religious freedom. This historic development gives us the confidence that religious freedom will yet in our own days reach the far corners of the world and everywhere in between.**

**The High Priest Aaron earned the title Ohev Shalom vRodef Shalom, a lover and pursuer of peace. He was therefore given the responsibility of blessing the people utilizing the Priestly benediction, the choicest 15 words of the Torah. "May the LORD bless thee, and keep thee; May the LORD make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; May the LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace (Number 6:24-26)."**

**God has given us the blessing of life. Let us try to preserve it in our habitat on Earth. Amen**