

Central and Eastern European Regional Religious Youth Meeting

April 16-18, 2006 Bakuriani, Georgia

THE MEETING STARTED WITH...

The most important thing in thinking about the meeting idea was the inspiration taken from the Summit of Asian Religious Youth Leaders (June, 2005 in Ambon, Indonesia) where the representative of our organization was invited. Taking into account the common commitment to confront violence and advance shared security at all levels, we realized the need for joining the global initiative of the Religions for Peace for peace, justice and security. Afterwards the proposal of having the Central and Eastern European Regional Religious Youth Meeting in Georgia came up and thanks to the enormous assistance for the Religions for Peace –International and Religions for Peace – Japan, the meeting was held.

Georgia, as part of the region shares the same concerns, needs, challenges and perspectives with other countries from region. On the one hand, we can observe so many commonalities in recent past and on the other hand the present developments in the region differ from country to country in terms of human rights protection which stays a cornerstone for building peaceful and democratic society. Some countries are still facing the obstacles in defending basic rights of their citizens, while others made significant advancement in ensuring civil society building. Many of the challenges facing the countries in the Central and Eastern Europe are not only common to all, but they have cross-border dimensions too (conflict resolution, regional security, terrorism).

But the phenomena of violence more or less concerns to all countries in the region and unfortunately we witness it occurring in our societies and creating favourable conditions for emerging new conflicts and/or exacerbating the old ones having taken place in the region.

Addressing the issues of confronting violence and advancing shared security, we all agree on the vital role of dialogue, cooperation and intercultural understanding as one of the ways towards solving problems and building bridges. In this respect we focus on the role of religion and religious people in advancing dialogue, strengthening cooperation and respecting multiculturalism.

Besides of the above mentioned commonalities, one more similarity can be observed – most of the countries in the region face the problem of inter-confessional dialogue and understanding between the Christian faiths.

The venue of the meeting- Bakuriani, a mountain resort of Georgia, was selected because of its location suitable for the concentration on work and encouraging the spirituality. In the recent past it was used to be as truly intercultural place of the country.

We planned to hold the meeting either on 23rd April when Orthodox people in Georgia celebrates the Easter or on 16th April which is the Easter holiday for Catholic and Protestant believers here. Focusing on these days we guided with the most faithful principles of inter-religious dialogue and understanding.

By inviting young people of different religious backgrounds at the meeting, first of all we call them for understanding and dialogue. The symbol of which would be the celebration of the EASTER together. We believe that a true inter-religious cooperation should be started with the `sharing the table with brother~ which means the sharing of each others' happiness and concerns.

THE MEETING WAS BASED ON....

Sixteen (16) religious young people from thirteen (13) Central and Eastern European countries, representing Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities, who commit themselves to confront violence and advance shared security in their region. The meeting gather religious youth leaders and active participants in interreligious dialogue who declared the establishment of the Central and Eastern European Interreligious Youth Network.

At the opening session, senior religious leaders of Georgia addressed the meeting participants. In their letters of encouragement religious leaders highlighted the importance of the meeting from the global perspectives of peace, dialogue and security.

The meeting used interactive panel discussions and working groups which analyzed country specific cases of conflict, and identified the root causes of violence. Participants paid great attention to the identification of their specific assets (spiritual, moral, and social) to-

wards violence and advancing shared security. The very specific forms of violence, such as Islamophobia, anti-Semitic trends, ethno-territorial conflicts and etc were presented.

At the second day, which was the Palm Sunday, participants visited a local Orthodox church. The visit was vivid expression of religious tolerance towards each others' faiths especially if taking into account the previous experiences when people of different faiths were not allowed to enter the Orthodox churches in Georgia. It was unforgettable feeling listening to the praying in different languages expressing the same content and commitment of participants.

One of the largest TV Channels in Georgia reported about the meeting and in his interview the representative of the government of Georgia highly estimated the work done by the WCRP and the local host organisation.

AND THE MEETING ENDED UP BY....

By the end of the meeting was launched the Central and Eastern European Interreligious Youth Network which



adopted a joint statement entitled as Bakuriani Declaration and established a program sub-committee. The sub-committee, consisting of seven (7) members of the Network, will work to develop the concept paper with action plan in the fields of conflict resolution, peace-building, intercultural education, sustainable development and etc.

This meeting served as a regional preparatory meeting for the Religions for Peace World Youth Assembly to be held in Hiroshima and Kyoto, Japan in August 2006. The World Youth Assembly will be followed by the Religions for Peace VIIIth World Assembly, which will bring together approximately 500 senior religious leaders from six continents to advance multi-religious collaboration for peace and sustainable development.

BAKURIANI DECLARATION

Being representatives of Jewish, Muslim and Christian youth organisations and active participants in interreligious dialogue, having discussed issues of violence and shared security, we would like to conclude the Central and Eastern European Interreligious Youth Meeting hosted by the Religions for Peace and the Union 'Century 21' in Bakuriani, Georgia, in April 2006, by declaring the following:

We reiterate and underline our belief that every human being, regardless of faith, gender or ethnicity, has the ultimate vocation and right to live in peace and harmony with her or his sisters and brothers as beloved and unique people of God.

With deep concern we witness the everyday reality of our societies plagued with old and new forms of violence, starting with verbal attacks, hate speeches and acts, and ending with serious violations of human rights. It is with deep regret that we observe the continuous conflicts in our region stemming from territorial, political, power or other claims.

We see a serious lack of moral responsibility resulting in violent acts of hatred in our communities, often committed by young people like ourselves. We are deeply concerned by the rise of phobias of the 'Other,' such as anti-Semitism or Islamophobia.

Some of the most disturbing and challenging forms of violence that we identified during our panel discussions and working group sessions are the ongoing ethnic conflicts and territorial disputes; violence as a result of intolerance, ignorance, prejudice and misinformation; and violence against women and children, including domestic violence and human trafficking.

Behind all these forms and types of violence and conflicts, we managed to identify some of the root causes omnipresent. At the basis of violence and lack of dialogue we find first of all questions of identity: the various and parallel claims for uniqueness or even superiority.

Apart from identities too exclusively and hardheartedly defined, different psychological motives come into play, such as aggressivity, pride, envy, jealousy, or guilt, inferiority and fear.

These inner reasons are reinforced by causes emerging from history and society: politics, economics, demography, power and poverty are all playing their parts in these conflicts and violence.

Finally, non-dialogical ideologies are fuelled by biased media representations, demonizing propaganda, and lack of proper mutual education within faith-based communities, many times leading even to a corruption of our teachings and spiritualities.

We as representatives of religious youth and active participants of interreligious dialogue understand and value the enormous potential that lies in us facing together the mentioned concerns. We have living ideals and dreams that we are determined to seek, and we also have energy and enthusiasm to live up to them.

We are willing to build friendships and to use them for making the world a better place. We also understand and acknowledge that religion can serve as a powerful tool for reaching out to people in need and for building peace and dialogue.

Therefore we are determined to use our institutional, intellectual and spiritual potentials and enthusiasm by establishing a Central and Eastern European Interreligious Youth Network.

Members of the network shall be national, regional and international faith-based youth movements, or secular ones if they pursue compatible aims. We are committed to work together with other interreligious regional youth networks.

Among the main issues of our network, we enlist the following: conflict prevention, solution and transformation; peace and non-violence, spiritual enrichment, cultural diversity, solidarity and charity, human rights, health and well-being, gender issues, and ecology.

We would like to address these topics through the following means: seminars, workshops, conferences, exchange programmes, sharing creative tools and methods, trainings, working camps, pilgrimages and common celebrations; publications, books, and an internet portal in order to more effectively preserve and disseminate our common findings.

Furthermore, we will work by facilitating interreligious and interconfessional dialogue, promoting tolerance and mutual understanding, conducting research and increasing knowledge about each other's traditions and religions, networking, monitoring challenges and activities concerning interreligious dialogue, and providing advisory and legal proposals for governmental and religious bodies.

We deeply appreciate the excellent work done by our local hosts and the Union 'Century 21', and seek the continuous support of Religions for Peace in facilitating the development of our network. We call upon other individuals, movements and institutions who share our concerns to join in these endeavours and to integrate these issues into their agendas.

May the blessings of God Almighty dwell upon our dialogue, solidarity and common action.