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Statement
on a
Muslim-Jewish-Christian
Conference on
The Changing World Order:
Challenge to Our Faiths
7-11 November 1977, Lisbon

Sponsored by
The Interreligious
Peace Colloquium

The Lisbon Meeting

We met during the week before President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem.

We numbered but thirty. Eight Jews—three from Israel, five from the United States. Seven Muslims — from Cairo and Istanbul, Jordan, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, two among them exiles from Gaza and Jaffa, Palestine. Thirteen Christians — one each from the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, nine from West Europe and North America, and two courageous leaders of the awakening churches of Africa and Brazil. Two came from South and East Asia, Buddhists of Sri Lanka and Japan.

Most participants were from secular fields: seven with direct political experience, six in business and economic affairs, two from the media, seven in academic life. Only eight were pastors or leaders of faith communities. All acknowledged, however, that their faith traditions and religio-ethical values directly influence their daily work and professions. The large majority actively participate within their respective faith communities.

Jews-Muslims-Christians

The "mix" of the Lisbon meeting was singular in another significant way. Purposely we brought together believers in the One Personal Creator of all the human family, the God of Abraham and Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

We did this for three reasons: First, because we Jews, Muslims and Christians share so much in faith from divine revelation; also in our devotional practice and moral imperatives, world vision and hope for the future, in time and eternity. And how that sense of sharing grew and deepened during our week-long live-in together!

Second, because there have been too many periods when we were at enmity with each other, despite our kinship in blood, our spiritual and family roots from Abraham through his sons Isaac and (Ismail)

(Ismail),

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on to Mary and Jesus and Muhammad. Together we seek now reconciliation, friendship and cooperation:

The third reason for our unique mixture appears from our theme: The challenge presented to our three communities of faith by the search for a new world order of justice and peace among our globe's one hundred forty-nine nations. What should faith respond to this mounting call for transforming structures, within and among nations, so as to provide basic human needs and to assure human rights and full development of all our planet's peoples?

Can our three monotheist communities present a uniting witness to our four thousand million sisters and brothers under God? All begin to realize their increasing interdependence as nations, regions and blocs, due to a technology at once wonderful and horrendous. All acquire fresh awareness of their human solidarity, of their universal yearning for justice and peace, of their common danger and hope and destiny.

Human Dignity from God

A new world order, it was agreed at Lisbon, must be fashioned, negotiated and constructed. And Jews, Christians and Muslims of the West and Middle East have, we felt, unique responsibilities in this arduous endeavor.

These responsibilities flow from our long historical relationship and from economic, political and military reasons as current and stark as the morning headlines and evening TV reports. Also, our believing Peoples—through temple and mosque, church and synagogue—continue to play major roles, for conflict and/or cooperation, in the nations and civilizations they have helped generate in our regions.

Too, we "People of the Book" share the same conviction in the root source of human dignity. We Jews-Muslims-Christians worship the same God Who, in the words of Genesis, creates each human to His Own Image; we adore the same God Who, in the words of the Quran, "fashioned him (man) in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His

Qur'an,

32:9
(Sarah ~~32:9~~)

spirit." (Sura 32, 9)

Therefore, today when human dignity, human needs and human rights take first place on the world's agenda, we see this as a providential sign. We feel called then to address these issues of "the humanum" precisely as Muslims, Christians and Jews seeking solutions and working together.

By no means do we wish to ignore other faith communities. Two Buddhists were with us at Lisbon; we regret that two Hindu friends had to cancel out at the last moment. Through other sessions and groups we monotheists hope to carry forward our initial exchanges with the other transcendental religions.

The New Sceptics

We recognize too the pervasive and often beneficent influence exercised in our era by the social sciences and humanist ideologies. We remain open to the precious natural insights they bring to us about society and the human condition, nation and world community, history and the future. We rejoice at the creativity and discipline which engender modern technology and we would cooperate in many of its projects for human betterment.

But as believers ours basically is a critical stance.

We reject the facile credulity accorded exclusivist rationalism and the scientific method during the past century throughout the West, and infecting now most of the globe. Toward this narrow horizontal approach to total reality, we who believe in God declare ourselves "the new sceptics."

Together we hope to bring fresh dimensions of love and justice and life's meaning into current debates and struggles among our interdependent peoples. Provided our sustaining Creator awakens us anew to His transforming Message and to our prophetic role in today's world.

For this at Lisbon we began to pray and search together, to strengthen and animate each other. For we would-be witnesses to the Light, the Good, the Power, are so often myopic, sinful, weak. As individuals, groups, communities; as Jews, Muslims, Christians.

A Human World Order

Addressing ourselves initially to the call for a New International Economic Order now debated in the United Nations, we quickly stripped away the modifier "economic." The changes must also be political, social and cultural, we all affirmed.

Our goal then must be a *human world order*, which provides basic human needs and assures the rights of freedom and participation for all.

This goal requires fundamental changes in world structures, we all agreed, through transfers of economic and political power.

Third World participants insisted that the injustice in today's world order derives directly from the colonial and imperialist control of the West over most of the planet's peoples, from 1800 to World War II. During that period the industrialized West organized the globe for their own benefit. The economic, military, political and cultural structures of that global system, the first in history, remain largely intact in our time, despite the formal independence of a hundred nations since 1945. Some Southerners went on to contend that even the United Nations was constituted by the five great powers to shore up that framework.

Underdevelopment, therefore, is not simply national or cultural backwardness of people, according to this Third World view. It comes rather from an exploitative global system and development models imposed by the North. So Southern underdevelopment is the ugly by-product of Northern industrialization for selfish nationalist goals.

The interlacing cobweb of power structures which entangle the South includes the North's technological and financial power, exercised principally through transnational enterprises, together with the North's military might. To this must be added the cultural dominance of Western civilization exerted through education, information and communications systems. This view holds that self-reliant development among nations must be maximized in order to break this inherited stranglehold. Northern participants raised no direct or

absolute challenge to this Third World explanation for the genesis of today's unjust global system. They asked rather, what can be done about it, within and among nations, blocs and regions. Some Northerners tended toward adjustments within the inherited system. They also asked how Southern nations could justify demands for democratic equality and participation in global institutions, when so many denied these rights to their own citizens in their own national institutions. Southerners contended that often these regimes persist because of Northern support.

North-South Consensus

We reached, however, a solid consensus despite these questions, that significant transfers of economic and political power from North to South are required. The sudden start and growing volume of this power shift through the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries received the attention due this historic turnaround. Of unique interest because of Lisbon's interfaith perspective, it became clear that many in the Muslim community have begun grappling with the moral implications for justice and development, human rights and peace, of their sudden responsibility for enormous wealth and power within their own region and for our interdependent world.

We also agreed that transfers of economic capability must give priority to basic needs for the poorest of the poor, the billion humans who have nothing to be "economic" about, nothing to sell, nothing to buy, the five hundred million who are constantly malnourished, often suffering famine. We reacted favorably to the recent tentative formula for measuring human development, namely, the Physical Quality of Life Index, based on rates of infant mortality, literacy and longevity. This represents a substantial improvement over the Gross National Product.

All accepted that basic transformations would hurt, but still must be carried through. Northerners insisted that the cost of changes resulting from more labor-intensive production, medium level technology, adjusted tariff

and trade patterns, etc., must not fall upon the poorest and weakest within their own nations. Even those who could reduce high consumption without really hurting are loathe to forsake their superabundance by simpler lifestyles. The young people in these countries are generally more flexible. We saw the need of personal interior conversion and unselfish motivation for generating the fresh political will to effect changes required among the Northern rich.

Southerners recalled the dramatic suffering inflicted on Third World peoples by the Western world system for many generations. They asserted that the new world order will benefit the North as well as the South, that it is more than a "zero sum game," taking from one exactly what will be given to another. Some, from both North and South, regard it as a "positive sum game," everyone will gain from a more human world order.

This is due to the present interdependence of all nations, unprecedented in history, and the problems shared in consequence. We did admit that North and South must face together problems such as the arms race and nuclear threat, depletion of scarce resources, especially oil, and chronic food shortages, rampant inflation, unemployment and damage to the environment. Continuing arms sales to the Third World by industrialized nations was decried as particularly tragic and immoral.

We perceived at Lisbon that absolute sovereignty of the nation state and unbridled nationalism fly in the face of this new global reality. We saw that political realism today demands openness beyond traditional national interests and territorial security, beyond our inherited brand of narrow internationalism merely for "reasons of state."

A Community Experience

As our week drew to a close, we marvelled that our disparate group had drawn so close together.

Our sense of community was nurtured by the informal setting of our small seaside hotel,

ideal for confidential talk and sharing. Also, by the scheduled "quiet periods," of some forty to sixty minutes, "each day for prayer, meditation and services, alone or in groups."

The week's highlight, all agreed, was the outpouring of personal experience, doubt and hope, which occurred during the opening session. Each in turn looked inside self to answer: Who am I? Why am I here?

Gradually the probing went far beyond banal embroidery upon curriculum vitae. Self-revelation took over each in turn. "Why am I doing this?" several asked. "I've never exposed my deepest motives and religious quest to anyone. Why now, to total strangers?" The two hours allotted for introductions stretched into six, and remained still the shortest session of all.

Our Joint Mission

And what do we do next? How continue what has begun?

We have reached an initial consensus on the role of religion for promoting a more just and human world order. We see our role as constant appraisal of this arduous secular effort in terms of the value of human beings, their origin and transcendental character and ultimate destiny. We who believe must bring a more comprehensive vision into this long-term endeavor—dimensions which are anthropological and cosmological, theological and eschatological.

While not rejecting the strategy of "positive sum games" and bargaining packages, we are convinced that personal transformation and deep inner motivation are imperative. Our unique message as Jews, Muslims, Christians, is the love and justice of God for all His human creatures, and that we bear true witness to Him through our own love and justice toward all. Our joint mission, we now see, is to move this love and justice into the Monday morning world of economic and political power, into the regular processes of policy and decision-making.

For that reason we have come to regard ourselves as a faith-inspired movement, a community of friends who offer solidarity and

courage to those among us who are exposed to danger on "the frontlines" as defenders of the weakest and poorest and most oppressed.

An Interfaith International

The Interreligious Peace Colloquium (IRPC) sponsored the Lisbon conference to carry forward an embryonic peace and justice movement born out of a similar experience two years ago in Bellagio, Italy. The subject of that first session was "The Food-Energy Crisis: Challenge to the World Faiths." The undersigned are officers and directors of IRPC, which was legally constituted a year ago to provide the minimum of structure needed to keep our movement afloat.

Our present group is basically North American in its composition and concerns. At Lisbon all participants agreed that they will begin forming groups in other regions, e.g., in West Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, Latin America, and Black Africa. As these advance we hope to federate as equal partners. Interfaith groups will also be formed in metropolitan centers; these will provide local networks for the regional groups.

We perceived that our movement has a major role to play within our three faith communities. We will communicate the content, motive and meaning of our Lisbon experience to our religious leaders and official bodies, at local, national and world levels. Their understanding and the cooperation of temple and mosque, church and synagogue are necessary for realizing our Lisbon aims. We shared information about the networks of our faith communities, some of which are recently organized, especially among Islamic bodies.

Where appropriate we shall assist interfaith coalitions, and if lacking stimulate their formation, within our respective nations. These interfaith coalitions must bring our Lisbon consensus on a human world order to government officials, scholars and members of the foreign policy community, to business, labor and farm leaders, into educational systems and the media.

At Lisbon we discovered marked convergence on religious principles and practices which can undergird our joint efforts, at local,

national and global levels. We agreed that "social ministry" of this sort is needed in the normal teaching mission and prayer life of our faith communities. We shared examples of such ministry and of the religious literature now being prepared to nourish it.

To assist this process, we will encourage research and studies on the relation of faith and justice in our interdependent world, and will publish books, pamphlets and articles which present and enrich the "social teaching" of each community. The papers of our Lisbon conference and a more detailed report of its findings will be published in book form in spring 1978. At that time an interpretative account of the Interreligious Peace Colloquium, 1975-77, and of the Bellagio session which launched it, will also be published; this book's title will be *Food-Energy and the Major Faiths* (Orbis Books, New York).

We now feel called into a sort of "Interfaith International," growing out of this Lisbon experience of our rooted dependence upon our one personal God.

We rejoice at the deep sense of brother-sisterhood we His followers have discovered in each other, and toward all the human family, awakened anew by the interdependence of our one hundred-forty-nine nations on this "Only One Earth" provided us by Him.

By this Statement we the undersigned officers and directors of the Interreligious Peace Colloquium, who participated in the Lisbon conference, make known to all who would hear our findings and commitments.

Officers:

Matthew Rosenhaus, President
(Ismail) Faruqi, Vice-President *Isma'ili a)*
Henry Siegman, Treasurer
Joseph Gremillion, Secretary and Coordinator
William Ryan, Executive Secretary

Members, Board of Directors:

Cynthia Wedel
Theodore Hesburgh
Irwin Blank
(Other members of the Board, not present at Lisbon, are Maurice Strong, Henry Schultz, Muhammad Abdul Rauf, Sol M. Linowitz, Philip Klutznick, and Simeon Adebo.)

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