Toward a Global Ethic
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Introduction: A primary goal of the Parliament of the World's Religions' spiritual leaders was to craft a "global ethic," a standard of expectations and behavior to which all religions and individuals could be held accountable. The "Global Ethic" document, prepared by Catholic theologian Hans Kung of Switzerland, was not accepted "as is" by the assembled leaders of the world's religions. They deemed it needed more work to reflect divergent views, and they expressed a desire to participate in its creation, not merely sign their names to it. The document here is an initial statement, a starting point for a continuing dialogue. The first one-fourth appears below; the balance can be requested at the bottom of this page.

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestation so that the depth of this pain may be made clear. Peace eludes us, the planet is being destroyed, neighbors live in fear, women and men are estranged from each other, children die!

This is abhorrent! We condemn the abuses of the Earth's ecosystems. We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin. We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion.

But this agony need not be. It need not be because the basis for an ethic already exists. This ethic offers the possibility of a better individual and global order, and leads individuals away from despair and societies away from chaos. We are women and men who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions: We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the

religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic. We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action. We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order.

Declaration

We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil. We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences. We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by the memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immortality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.

We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and

hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life. We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.

The Principles of a Global Ethic

Our world is experiencing a fundamental crisis: A crisis in global economy, global ecology, and global politics. The lack of a grand vision, the tangle of unresolved problems, political paralysis, mediocre political leadership with little insight or foresight, and in general too little sense for the commonweal are seen everywhere: Too many old answers to new challenges.

Hundreds of millions of human beings on our planet increasingly suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger, and the destruction of their families. Hope for a lasting peace among nations slips away from us. There are tensions between the sexes and generations. Children die, kill, and are killed. More and more countries are shaken by corruption in politics and business. It is increasingly difficult to live together peacefully in our cities because of social, racial and ethnic conflicts, the abuse of drugs, organized crime, and even anarchy. Even neighbors often live in fear of one another. Our planet continues to be ruthlessly plundered. A collapse of the ecosystem threatens us.

Time and time again we see leaders and members of religions incite aggression, fanaticism, hate, and xenophobia-even inspire and legitimize violent and bloody conflicts. Religion often is misused for purely power-political goals, including war. We are filled with disgust.

We condemn these blights and declare that they need not be. An ethic already exists within the religious teachings of the world which can counter the global distress. Of course this ethic provides no direct solution for all the immense problems of the world, but it does supply the moral foundation for a better individual and global order: A vision which can lead women and men away from despair, and society away from chaos.

We are persons who have committed ourselves to the precepts and practices of the world's religions. We confirm that there is already a consensus among the religions which can be the basis for a global ethic, a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes. No new global order without a new global ethic!

We women and men of various religions and regions of the Earth therefore address all people, religious and non-religious. We wish to express the following convictions which we hold in common:

* We all have responsibility for a better global order.

* Our involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the preservation of Earth is absolutely necessary.

* Our different religious and cultural traditions must not prevent our common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and working for greater humanness.

* The principles expressed in this Global Ethic can be affirmed by all persons with ethical convictions, whether religiously grounded or not.

* As religious and spiritual persons we base our lives on an Ultimate Reality, and draw spiritual power and hope therefrom, in trust, in prayer or meditation, in word or silence. We have a special responsibility for the welfare of all humanity and care

for the planet Earth. We do not consider ourselves better than other women and men, but we trust that the ancient wisdom of our religions can point the way for the future. We invite all men and women, whether religious or not, to do the same.

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