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ASCETICISM, JUSTICE,  
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## PROLOGUE

**Stefano Bonaccini**  
*President of the  
Emilia-Romagna Region*

**D**esidero accogliere tutti i partecipanti al G20 Interfaith Forum, provenienti da ogni parte del mondo, con un caloroso saluto e un grande abbraccio da parte della comunità dell'Emilia-Romagna, l'unica regione al mondo che porta nel proprio nome il nome di una strada, la millenaria via Emilia, che nasce a Rimini in Romagna e che è da sempre abituata a persone che arrivano, che partono, che si incontrano, che dialogano in una terra di viaggio.

Ieri abbiamo celebrato l'anniversario del drammatico attentato alle Torri Gemelle. In queste settimane, in questi giorni, siamo alle prese con la vicenda afghana. In questa terra, insieme al sindaco di Bologna e insieme a tutti i sindaci, grazie all'aiuto delle prefetture e di tutte le istituzioni locali, stiamo accogliendo famiglie con bambini provenienti da quel martoriato paese. In tutto il mondo ancora oggi assistiamo a troppe guerre, violenze, sopraffazioni, negazione del minimo rispetto dei diritti e della dignità umana.

Grazie ad Alberto Melloni e a tutti coloro che hanno lavorato per preparare questo straordinario appuntamento di dialogo interreligioso.

Si parlava poc'anzi dell'importanza di sanare, di curare le ferite, di abbracciarsi e di impostare quel dialogo che è alla base di un mondo che ci auguriamo nei prossimi mesi e nei prossimi anni porti a più pace e a più riconoscimento dei diritti e delle libertà indipendentemente dal luogo in cui si vive, in cui si nasce, e in questo caso dalla religione che si professa.

Ringrazio tutti voi, e in particolar modo il presidente Sassoli, per lo straordinario impegno che sta mettendo alla guida del Parlamento Europeo.

Mi sento convintamente europeista, prima ancora che italiano ed emiliano-romagnolo e credo davvero che l'Europa stia facendo un grande sforzo per cercare di essere di nuovo terra e culla del rispetto delle libertà e dei diritti umani e civili.

In conclusione, permettetemi una riflessione. Stiamo combattendo questa drammatica pandemia che da oltre un anno e mezzo ha colpito il mondo dimostrandoci qualcosa di molto semplice: il ceto sociale o la condizione economica contano niente davanti alla malattia se non c'è qualcun altro che ti aiuti e si prenda cura di te. Vorrei che mandassimo tutti insieme un grande abbraccio e un grande ringraziamento a tutti quei medici, infermieri, operatori sanitari che in ogni parte del mondo da un anno e mezzo stanno cercando di salvare le nostre vite, in troppi casi purtroppo rimettendoci la loro.

**Alberto Sermoneta**  
*Chief Rabbi of Bologna*

**A** nome della Comunità ebraica di Bologna, di cui sono rabbino capo e mio personale, vogliate gradire i saluti più affettuosi.

Si racconta nella Mishnà, la legge orale, che la tenda di Abramo era aperta ai quattro lati, per poter dare maggior ospitalità a tutti i viandanti che avessero avuto la necessità di soffermarsi per rifornirsi dalla strada, senza mai indugiare ad entrare in essa.

*Berukhim ha baim*, benvenuti a tutti voi, nel nome dell'unico Dio, lo stesso di Abramo, che ha avuto il merito di essere chiamato da Dio "Av hammon goiim, Padre di una moltitudine di nazioni" (Genesi 17,5).

Gli ebrei vivono a Bologna fin dai primi secoli dell'E.V. durante i quali hanno fortemente voluto fondare e intrecciare le loro radici nel tessuto cittadino.

Senza nessuna remora possiamo affermare che la religione ebraica ed i suoi appartenenti siano i più vecchi abitanti della città, così come gli ebrei italiani sono gli italiani più vecchi d'Italia.

Essere monoteisti secondo la concezione ebraica non vuole esprimere soltanto la condizione religiosa che si manifesta in sinagoga, in una chiesa o in una moschea, ma significa anche perseguire quegli ideali che sono fondamentali per il comportamento degno degli esseri umani: un comportamento che si fonda sulla libertà e la democrazia e che indica rispetto all'uomo in generale e ai suoi diritti ad una vita libera e democratica.

Nella sua storia plurimillenaria il popolo ebraico, pur avendo origini dalla Terra di Israele, attraverso continue diaspori e persecuzioni, ha sempre cercato di integrare la propria vita e le proprie tradizioni a quelle delle nazioni nelle quali è stato costretto a dimorare, cercando di adoperarsi in ogni modo per il bene di esse.

L'inizio della storia del nostro popolo in Italia è datato all'incirca attorno al 200 a.E.V. quando i primi ebrei provenienti da Gerusalemme si impiantarono a Roma, dove fondarono una comunità che mai più hanno abbandonato.

Essi hanno sempre dato dimostrazione di un affetto particolare e nutrito per questo paese, prendendo parte in ogni modo alle varie lotte per la difesa dei diritti dei suoi cittadini e per l'ottenimento della libertà.

Durante la loro permanenza fino al 1555, anno dell'istituzione dei ghetti, parteciparono alla vita sociale della nostra città, anche e soprattutto dal punto di vista culturale e accademico, dove si è assistito fra le varie cose all'attività in seno all'università più antica d'Europa.

Per ricordarne uno fra i tanti, Servadio Ovadia Sforso vissuto a Bologna agli inizi del Cinquecento; esegeta biblico conosciuto e studiato ancora

oggi nelle accademie rabbiniche di tutto il mondo, ma conosciuto anche per la sua professione di medico e per questo chiamato in ambito universitario Abbir ha rofeim, il Principe dei medici.

Gli ebrei com'è noto hanno subito numerose e terribili persecuzioni, ma hanno tratto da queste l'insegnamento per superare quei dolorosi momenti dedicandosi con il loro nobile comportamento d'essere d'esempio per tutti gli altri.

Alla fine del Cinquecento furono cacciati da Bologna ma mai la dimenticarono.

Con l'emancipazione ottenuta nel 1861, dopo oltre tre secoli, non persero l'occasione per tornare nuovamente a viverci e a lavorarci, nel nome della lotta per il rispetto dei diritti di tutte le minoranze religiose ed etniche.

Numerosi professori ebrei ed allievi pullulavano nell'università cittadina, fintanto che le famigerate leggi razziali vennero promulgate, e a distanza di secoli furono nuovamente discriminati, fino ad essere cacciati dai loro posti di lavoro.

Infine, con la Shoah vennero deportati nei campi di sterminio nazisti, da dove un terzo della popolazione ebraica cittadina non fece mai più ritorno.

Il nostro destino però è quello di essere sempre il buon esempio per gli altri e nella nostra tradizione vi è il sacrosanto dovere di dedicarsi al bene del prossimo, qualsiasi sia il proprio credo religioso.

Abbiamo appena trascorso la solennità religiosa del Rosh ha shanà, il Capo d'anno; siamo nel 5782 (secondo la tradizione rabbinica) dalla comparsa del primo uomo sulla terra. È questa una solennità, insieme a quella prossima dello Yom Kippur (il Giorno dell'espiazione), ad avere un valore non prettamente ebraico, bensì universale. Si celebra, infatti, l'alto valore dell'essere umano in seno alla creazione del mondo.

Nelle nostre sinagoghe si prega l'Eterno per la pace, il benessere, la salute e la vita di ogni essere: non solo degli ebrei, non solo degli uomini ma di tutti gli esseri che vivono su questo pianeta.

Nella nostra storia abbiamo sempre incoraggiato ed esortato al perseguitamento del benessere e alla vita buona per ognuno, combat-

tendo sempre per la libertà, la difesa dei diritti civili e per la possibilità di esprimere le proprie tradizioni.

Questo è stato ciò che gli ebrei, in Italia e in ogni parte della diaspora, dove ormai vivono da millenni hanno voluto trasmettere alla società che li ha ospitati; questo è ciò che tutti coloro che credono nei valori positivi dell'umanità ed hanno fiducia negli uomini hanno il compito di attuare.

Fu chiesto ad un famoso maestro del Talmud quale fosse l'elemento fondamentale per essere ebrei. Egli con estrema semplicità rispose: "Non fare agli altri ciò che non vorresti fosse fatto a te; il resto è commento, va e studia". La nostra speranza è che il mondo futuro, le nuove generazioni, possano vedere nel bene del prossimo la cosa più cara che un uomo possa attuare nella sua vita e prodigarsi per un mondo migliore, dove vi sia amore ma soprattutto rispetto per chi ci circonda.

## Virginio Merola

Mayor of Bologna

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orto il saluto di una città che è orgogliosa di accogliere per tre giorni dialoghi e riflessioni di altissimo profilo. Ringrazio prima di tutto il professor Alberto Melloni che ha lavorato intensamente per questo incontro e ha voluto che fosse qui a Bologna.

Siete in una città che è un luogo d'incontro e un crocevia di intelligenze grazie anche alla presenza della sua università. Una città dove è nata prima l'università del libero comune e dove, nel 1257, vennero affrancate quasi 6000 persone dalla loro condizione di schiavi. È la grande lezione del *Liber Paradisus*, il memoriale ufficiale dell'atto con cui il comune stabilì di procedere all'abolizione della servitù sul proprio territorio. Un'azione lungimirante, lungimirante come questa grande città, dove si cerca sempre di coniugare le idee con la real-

tà, le aspirazioni con le possibilità, e tutto questo in un criterio di giustizia e solidarietà. Il nostro è il pragmatismo sano di chi sa che non ci si salva mai da soli; questa pandemia ha messo questa evidenza ancora più in luce.

Siamo molto sensibili al dialogo tra le religioni. L'abbiamo voluto e praticato in questi anni con gesti concreti e un percorso fattivo assieme al rettore, al nostro arcivescovo, al rabbino Alberto Sermoneta e la comunità ebraica, con il presidente della comunità islamica Yasine Lafram. E mi piace ricordare, come piccolo seme di questo percorso, l'accordo che abbiamo condiviso per far nascere qui a Bologna una casa delle religioni e del dialogo tra le culture, un luogo di scambio e di conoscenza che sarà presto realtà. Per un sindaco che si sta preparando a lasciare dopo dieci intensi anni è una bella eredità da consegnare a chi arriverà.

Il tempo della guarigione evocato dal titolo di questo appuntamento è un tempo concreto e allo stesso tempo può sembrarci una chimera: la guarigione dalla pandemia, grazie allo straordinario impegno della scienza e alla competenza dei nostri sanitari.

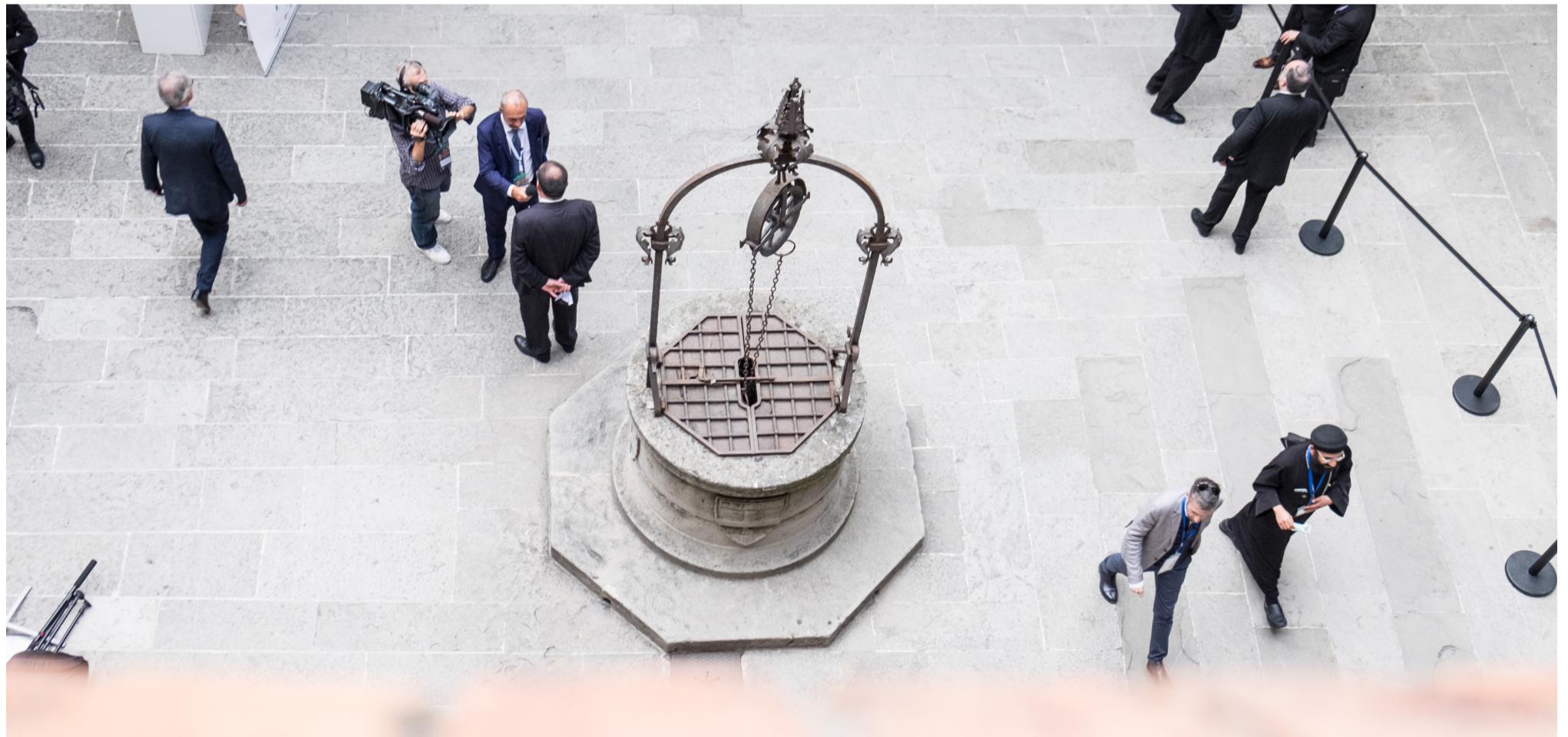
Voglio ringraziare la nostra azienda sanitaria per il grande sforzo che sta facendo in queste settimane: proprio qui sotto è presente il camper dove tanti cittadini vanno a vaccinarsi, soprattutto giovani, e che in questi giorni permette anche di effettuare i tamponi a garanzia della salute di tutti.

Ma questa guarigione è ancora troppo ineguale: troppi paesi non hanno un accesso equo alle dosi per vaccinare la popolazione. Non ce lo possiamo permettere: questa pandemia ha dimostrato quanto il nostro mondo sia interconnesso e legato.

Un'altra guarigione sarebbe importante raggiungere: quella dalla guerra, a vent'anni dall'11 settembre, mentre in Afghanistan è in atto una nemica che chiama in causa in modo profondo ciò che intendiamo per democrazia.

Ognuno di noi può fare la propria parte. Il dialogo tra le religioni, in un contesto così lacerato a livello globale, ha una profonda valenza etica e politica e va fortemente perseguito perché le religioni possono dare un grande contributo alla convivenza e al dibattito pubblico.

The courtyard of Palazzo Re Enzo, Bologna.  
Stefano Bonaccini, President of the Emilia-Romagna Region.  
Alberto Sermoneta, Chief Rabbi of Bologna.  
Virginio Merola, Mayor of Bologna.



# OPENING CEREMONY

**Francesco Ubertini**  
Rector of the University of Bologna

Alma Mater Studiorum vi dà il benvenuto a nome di tutta la comunità delle università e delle istituzioni di ricerca qui presenti e vi ringrazia della vostra presenza. La vostra è una presenza preziosa, e siamo tutti grati al Forum, al governo italiano, alla Fondazione per le scienze religiose e al professor Alberto Melloni per averla provocata e ai donatori per averla permessa.

La storia dell'Alma Mater Studiorum, sin dai suoi tempi più antichi, è caratterizzata dalla pluralità dei saperi, dal loro reciproco rapporto, dalla visione laica con la quale vengono affrontati tutti gli insegnamenti, anche quelli che riguardano le culture religiose. Per questo, anche all'inizio della nostra storia, troviamo discipline che vengono a contatto con esperienze religiose pur non avendone una definizione specifica. Una delle figure leggendarie della storia dello *Studium* è Bettisia Gozzadini, che ottenne una laurea in giurisprudenza nel 1236 pur avendo compiuto profondi studi teologici.

Questa tradizione è continuata in una sequenza di maestri e di scolari, fino alla scelta di Giuseppe Dossetti di fissare qui nel 1953 la sede dell'istituzione che oggi ha ottenuto lo status di *hub* dell'infrastruttura europea di ricerca delle scienze religiose: un'istituzione che ha portato recentemente alla proposta accolta dagli organi accademici di far ritornare gli studi teologici negli atenei italiani con una laurea magistrale che il rettore Fabrizio Micari ha riaperto a Palermo oggi e che noi a Bologna apriremo nel prossimo anno, nella convinzione, condivisa con il cardinale Zuppi e con monsignor Lorefice, che ogni teologia possa essere insegnata se e solo se ha accanto le altre.

L'Alma Mater continua così a fornire il suo servizio attraverso la sua ricerca, attraverso la Cattedra UNESCO per il pluralismo religioso e la pace che festeggia i suoi 15 anni e che ha avuto come titolari, oltre ad Alberto Melloni, Giuseppe Alberigo, Pier Cesare Bori, e come contitolari figure autorevolissime, da Raimon Panikkar a Timothy Radcliffe, alla vicedirettrice dell'UNESCO Stefania Giannini, il gran imam di Al-Azhar Al Tayyeb, il nostro rabbino capo Alberto Sermone e altri che accoglieremo l'anno prossimo, e la vicedirettrice generale delle Nazioni Unite Amina Mohammed.

Questa cerimonia non si svolge in un momento semplice. Anzi, ci troviamo in una congiuntura storica tragica, e questo Forum si svolge nei giorni che toccano la situazione afghana. Noi, come Alma Mater, abbiamo deciso di attuare una serie di misure per offrire accoglienza e sostegno a studenti e ricercatori afghani, e due studiosi archeologi di Bamyan sono qui presenti.

Alla luce di questo contesto storico passato e anche così vicino, l'Alma Mater vi accoglie e accoglie con particolare affetto lei, signor presidente Pahor, nel semestre di presidenza slovena del Consiglio dell'Unione Europea. A lei abbiamo deciso di conferire il Sigillum Magnum dell'ateneo che sarà un onore per me e per la comunità accademica consegnarle domani nella sala dell'VIII Centenario del Rettorato.

Auguro a tutte e a tutti voi il miglior svolgimento di queste giornate, che possano dare un contributo importante al "Time to heal: peace among cultures, understanding between religions".

**Vincenzo Amendola**  
Undersecretary of State  
for European Affairs

Ringrazio la Fondazione per le scienze religiose e il G20 Interfaith Forum per questo invito. Ringrazio il professor Alberto Melloni, guida sicura per tanti di noi, e saluto ovviamente tutte le numerose autorità civili e religiose presenti e tutti i partecipanti. Benvenuti a Bologna, come ha detto il sindaco, da grandi e piccole distanze superando quelle che sono ovviamente le sofferenze del tempo.

Permettetemi un saluto forte e affettuoso al presidente Pahor; un saluto alla Slovenia, presidente di turno dell'Unione Europea, con cui lavoriamo in stretto accordo per rendere questo passaggio storico sempre più determinato per cambiare anche il nostro continente, l'Unione Europea, di fronte a quelle che sono le nuove sfide del tempo che viviamo: il tempo della guarigione, inteso come armonia tra culture e importanza del dialogo interreligioso per promuovere la pace.

Il richiamo al tempo della guarigione rappresenta oggi sempre di più una questione globale, come ha sottolineato il presidente del Parlamento Europeo David Sassoli, prioritaria e condivisa soprattutto alla luce delle conseguenze devastanti che sono derivate dalla diffusione della pandemia da SARS-CoV-2.

Dona a noi forza il messaggio del Santo Padre diffuso ieri. L'impegno al centro del Forum di quest'anno – cito: "Noi non ci uccidiamo, noi ci soccorriremo, noi ci perdoneremo" – richiede condizioni non facili perché non c'è disarmo senza coraggio, non c'è soccorso senza gratuità, non c'è perdono senza verità.

L'obiettivo finale è quello di aggiungere una quarta "P", la Pace, al centro degli obiettivi della Presidenza italiana, di cui parlerà il sottosegretario Benedetto Della Vedova, che sono People, Planet, Prosperity. È un tema da sempre attuale ma di cui si discute ancora di più in questi giorni, come hanno già detto tanti, alla luce della tragedia umanitaria che stiamo vivendo e veniamo affrontando in Afghanistan, dove la vera sofferenza, al di là dell'impostazione militare o diplomatica della vicenda storica del triste paese, è il rischio di un disastro morale dell'opinione pubblica che guarda alle tragedie e poi non agisce.

La globalizzazione degli ultimi decenni ci ha obbligato a riaprire il cantiere del rapporto tra le religioni, le riflessioni più profonde e le sfide contemporanee, perché abbiamo bisogno, anche come Unione Europea, di politiche che alimentino il dialogo, la ricerca, il confronto fra la tradizione e il presente, attraverso un focus su temi universali quali la ricerca della pace, il rispetto dell'ambiente e la tutela dei più deboli, con diseguaglianze sempre più acute che hanno aumentato ragioni di rabbia sociale.

Il ruolo delle donne è fondamentale nella costruzione di società in cui l'inclusione non è uno slogan. Nel racconto mediatico, però, c'è una tendenza a ridurre il confronto tra le religioni e la riflessione più profonda quasi a un elemento decorativo, spesso stereotipato dal dibattito sull'immigrazione, che sappiamo essere un fenomeno storico e che dobbiamo affrontare con quel grado di civiltà e solidarietà che contraddistingue il genere umano nella sua più alta espressione.

In realtà, occasioni come questi forum ci danno il senso dell'importanza del dialogo e in questo senso l'Europa allargata al Mediterraneo è un laboratorio di diversità, che va coltivato iniziando dalle differenze confessionali.

L'Unione Europea ha fatto delle proprie differenze linguistiche, nazionali e culturali un vantaggio che oggi la rende un attore globale ma che non può farla chiudere nei suoi confini. La stessa attenzione all'unità e al confronto deve portare insieme culture, religioni, popoli del Mediterraneo rappresentati qui a Bologna.

Nel 1992 Jacques Delors, allora presidente della Commissione Europea, espresse la necessità di creare, disse, una dimensione etica e spirituale per l'unità europea, che andasse oltre le questioni economiche, i negoziati e i processi giuridici. La sua visione fu chiamata "Un'anima per l'Europa" e ha preso la forma di un dialogo strutturato con i rappresentanti delle religioni e delle organizzazioni umanistiche. Oggi questa visione si è trasformata nell'articolo 17 del *Trattato sul funzionamento dell'Unione Europea* e negli articoli 10 e 20 della *Carta dei Diritti Fondamentali dell'Unione Europea*, che prevedono la libertà religiosa e il rispetto della diversità; ma sappiamo, nel mondo di oggi, che questa conquista non può essere solo vissuta all'interno dei confini europei.

È la matrice per spingerci oltre il disarmo morale e intervenire lì dove c'è bisogno, utilizzando il dialogo come chiave e struttura per un nuovo paradigma; perché il dialogo è sostanza e sostegno etico e spirituale a un nuovo umanesimo, che non guardi solo agli obiettivi economici ma promuova il rispetto di tutti gli esseri viventi, lo sfruttamento responsabile delle risorse naturali, il consolidamento di relazioni sociali improntate a solidarietà inclusione e promozione delle persone. Proprio per questo motivo l'auspicio è che il tema sarà trattato anche nel corso, insieme a voi, della conferenza appena inaugurata sul futuro dell'Unione Europea.

Adesso che le sfide si innalzano anche a livelli mai conosciuti prima, in cui la rivoluzione tecnologica e digitale cambierà in tutto il mondo anche i connotati della cittadinanza nei paesi a livello multilaterale, il successo del G20, qui in Italia con la Presidenza italiana e con forum come questi, arriverà sicuramente quando tratteremo in questo lasso di tempo scelte che non abbiamo mai compiuto prima.

Il Santo Padre ha detto "noi non ci uccideremo, noi ci soccorriremo, noi ci perdoneremo". È questo il tempo delle scelte anche più complicate, è questo è il tempo per l'Europa e per tutti noi per riprendere il cammino.

**Benedetto Della Vedova**  
Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs  
and International Cooperation

I feel honored and privileged to be here. Finding the right words to describe the importance of the international Interfaith Forum is not an easy task. First, let me express my gratitude to the Fondazione per le scienze religiose, with its president, Alessandro Pajno; its secretary, Alberto Melloni; their team; and the presidency of the G20 Interfaith Forum. They have made relentless efforts to organize this event in person despite all the COVID-related difficulty. They have also laid the groundwork for the discussion that will take place at this Forum by coordinating a number of working groups in the past few months and drafting the recommendations to the G20 leaders.

I also wish to thank the speakers who have preceded me: Professor Francesco Ubertini, Rector of the Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, and my friend and colleague Vincenzo Amendola, Undersecretary of State for European Affairs. I would like to warmly welcome their Excellencies Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia; Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prime Minister of the Democratic

Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gamini Laxman Peiris; and Ronald Steven Lauder, President of the World Jewish Congress. Thank you all for taking part in this important event and bringing your insightful contributions.

As the host country, your presence means a lot to us. It proves the growing role of the Interfaith Forum as a leading platform for dialogue and cooperation between civil and religious actors since its inception in 2014. I will take this opportunity to briefly explain why Italy considers the Interfaith Forum a vital component of its G20 presidency.

As you are by now probably aware, the priorities outlined by the Italian presidency are epitomized by the three "P's": People, Planet, and Prosperity. Humanism and religion have placed human dignity and human development at the heart of their vision since the dawn of time. Given this commonality, we believe there is much space for cooperation between civil and religious players in the areas of priority highlighted by the Interfaith Forum. So-called religious engagement can prove decisive in achieving meaningful results.

We must act to heal our societies from all their wounds without further delay or hesitation, by joining hands. We must start with people and embrace a comprehensive notion of human development. The Forum has indicated healing the many fractures stemming from the COVID-19 emergency is a priority.

We must face the reality of the situation. While the pandemic has affected us, measures have not impacted everyone in the same way. In Europe, for instance, vulnerable people have been especially hit with asymmetric effects on those at risk of poverty and exclusion. These include people who are not self-sufficient, particularly house-bound elderly people, persons with disabilities, Roma populations, asylum seekers left in limbo because of suspended procedures, prison inmates, and people deprived of their freedom confined in overcrowded detention centers, to name but a few.

A fundamental rights approach to the pandemic can ensure that rights remain at the forefront of our attention so that government measures respond to the needs of our population in all their diversity. With these inequalities in mind, Italy is sparing no effort in promoting health and economic solutions at the G20 level for relieving the worst effects of the pandemic. At the same time, we are also working for a far-reaching approach, capable of shaping a more just, inclusive and sustainable recovery worldwide. In this framework, we acknowledge the priceless contribution of religious institutions to health care.

The advocacy of religious leaders for fair and uninhibited access to immunization against COVID-19 is playing a key role in raising awareness about ensuring that the highest number of people worldwide are vaccinated and that public health always remains at the top of national and international agendas. It has also complimented the efforts of many countries, including Italy, within the COVAX initiative. Besides playing a key role in providing health services, especially to those most in need, religious institutions are well-equipped to fight back disinformation and vaccine hesitancy, thanks to their outreach potential within their constituency and beyond.

Planet is the second element of our three-word formula. It reminds us how much of our future depends on the health condition of our planet. The one health principle enshrined in the Rome Declaration embodies the inextricable link between human, animal, and environmental safety. In other words, we cannot deliver health and wealth to our societies if we do not care about our planet.

Religious leaders have long recognized the necessity of preserving the fragile balance between man and nature. Here again, the efforts of civil and religious actors perfectly complement one another and magnify the impact of our common action to fight climate change.

As a tangible example of such commitment, Italy, along with the United Kingdom and the Holy See, is organizing an event entitled "Faith and Science towards COP26", to be hosted in Rome on 4 October as part of our partnership with the UK on COP26. It will bring together faith leaders and scientists who will join their voices in a common call to action. We believe that the combination of our obligation to protect the environment while upholding scientific evidence will further raise believers' and lay citizens' awareness on the need to behave responsibly and protect the environment from further degradation.

Finally, safeguarding human and environmental safety is a prerequisite for achieving prosperity. The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, wiping out the income and savings of many people and entire families. The Italian G20 presidency is strongly committed to taking on such challenges by advancing sustainable development goals and the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations.

I believe that forgiveness should be considered so as to not overburden recipients and countries in their fight against the pandemic. To be sustainable and fair, recovery needs to be inclusive, both domestically and internationally. Religious institutions often provide the most vulnerable people with a social safety net. They passionately bring relief and much needed social services in many of the most remote and far-flung areas of the world. They often step in and silently fill the gap left by many states that cannot respond to all the humanitarian needs of suffering populations.

Therefore, it is in the utmost interest of civil actors, both governments and international organizations, to expand their cooperation with religious counterparts and find new synergies. Today, we reiterate our call for civil and religious actors to join their efforts and engage in common action to respond to such global challenges together.

At the same time, such cooperation will be the best antidote against the political use of religion and the spreading of hate, racism, violence, terrorism and other social plagues, thus helping our societies to fully recover and embark on a new path of shared prosperity and peaceful coexistence.

### Amina J. Mohammed

*Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group*

t is a pleasure to address the 2021 G20 Interfaith Forum. My sincerest thanks to the organizers for inviting me to join your deliberations.

Our world today is in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to upend societies across the world. Unequal access to life-saving vaccines is exacerbating this impact. Our planet is on fire. The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group, produced just a few weeks ago, has reaffirmed the shocking devastation of climate change in our environment and underscored the urgent action needed to avert climate catastrophe. Around the world, inequalities continue to grow, and hatred and division are spreading online and in the streets. Violence is putting vulnerable groups such as women, indigenous people and minorities at higher risk. These trends are all made worse by COVID-19. That is why your discussions today are so vital.

As a global community, we need to heal. We need to address the root causes and risks of these polarizing issues. We need to come together as a human family. Religious leaders and faith actors must be at the center of these efforts. You play a crucial role in promoting the values of inclusion, peace, human rights, and dignity. These values are at the heart of our work at the United Nations and enshrined in the 2030 Agenda. Early in the pandemic, the Secretary-General called on religious leaders and actors to speak out against the hate and stigma that has accompanied the pandemic. I am glad to see so many of you have responded to this call, and I encourage you to continue this important work to bring communities together. For humanity to come together as one, we need to work together as one; we

need to heal as one. We at the United Nations are proud to work with our faith-based partners to bring people together, to begin healing our world and to shape societies in which every person is valued and every person can thrive.

Let us walk this journey together.

Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.



## CLOSING CEREMONY

### Riccardo Di Segni

*Chief Rabbi of Rome*

a scorsa settimana abbiamo festeggiato l'inizio dell'anno nuovo ebraico, scambiandoci un augurio tradizionale: "che quest'anno sia un anno buono e dolce". Potrebbe bastare che sia un anno buono e non dolce, oppure che sia solo dolce e non buono; ma è sempre meglio che vi siano entrambe le cose. Insieme a questo semplice augurio, ne abbiamo fatti altri, e, tra questi, uno molto particolare: la richiesta di essere "di testa e non di coda".

Che significa questa richiesta? La cosa può essere letta in varie prospettive. Può avere una dimensione personale, nel senso che una persona deve riuscire a dominare se stessa e le sue passioni, oppure avere successo nella società, libero da dipendenze degradanti; oppure, se l'augurio si riferisce a gruppi, a collettività, nazioni e religioni, può significare il desiderio di avere un ruolo di leadership e di guida. Però, come è noto, la leadership, il ruolo di protagonista, spesso è un lavoro ingrato, difficile, del quale si può non essere all'altezza. È per questo che alcuni maestri, ironicamente, dicono che va prima detta la preghiera per l'anno buono e dolce, perché se l'anno non è né buono, né dolce, non è una bella cosa fare i leader.

Trasportandola alla nostra realtà immediata, questa preghiera per un anno buono e dolce nasce nel momento in cui l'anno che è passato non è stato affatto né buono né dolce, per questo paese e per tutto il mondo. Conosciamo i tanti problemi aperti. In questo scenario drammatico, qual è la preghiera giusta per un ruolo onorevole delle religioni? Perché le religioni spesso sono state leader, ma per farlo hanno dovuto accettare pesanti compromessi. Vi sono state religioni che hanno perseguitato; a volte sono state perseguitate; molto spesso non sono state all'altezza della missione che avrebbero dovuto svolgere; quindi, prima di imporre il proprio ruolo, bisogna fare un esame di coscienza e di autocritica, tanto più in questo secolo che nasce sotto l'ombra inquietante di fenomeni gravi di intolleranza religiosa di cui abbiamo appena ricordato il ventennale.

In tutti gli stati moderni la società è divisa tradizionalmente in potere legislativo, esecutivo e giudiziario. Prima di questa divisione

politica moderna, se ci si rifa al modello biblico, anche la società antica era divisa in poteri: c'era il potere del re che rappresentava lo Stato, la legge e la giustizia; c'era il gran sacerdote, il sacerdozio, che rappresentava la religione costituita, organizzata, ceremoniale. Poi c'era un terzo polo, il profeta, la persona che quando le cose non andavano bene alzava la voce e criticava il gran sacerdote e il re e tutto il popolo, senza remore e con chiarezza.

Interrogandoci in questo momento su quale debba essere il ruolo per le religioni, risponderei che le religioni devono avere prima di tutto un ruolo critico: partecipare al dibattito culturale e politico generale e dire che certe cose non vanno bene; che i doveri vanno adempiuti; che i diritti vanno difesi; che è necessaria la cultura della vita in opposizione alla cultura della morte; che non tutto ciò che nasce dal pensiero di qualche gruppo influente può andare bene, ma che va misurato e verificato.

Ma oltre a questa fondamentale funzione critica è necessaria la funzione profetica che dobbiamo riscoprire: dire qualcosa al mondo per renderlo migliore, essere portatori di visioni.

L'anno ebraico che è cominciato, secondo il calcolo tradizionale che si basa sul racconto della Genesi è l'anno 5782. Questa cifra è divisibile per 7, il che vuol dire che questo è un anno sabbatico. Non l'anno sabbatico dei professori universitari; l'anno sabbatico della Bibbia nel quale la terra deve riposare.

Noi abbiamo un messaggio fondamentale, tra i tanti, da lanciare: quello che noi non siamo i padroni della terra. Tutti i beni di cui godiamo ci sono stati dati a disposizione, ma non perché noi si debba distruggerli o abusarne. Nel momento in cui noi ci chiediamo che cosa deve dire una religione al mondo, ecco un semplice messaggio, di origine remota, ma estremamente attuale.

Questo nostro convegno è intitolato "A Time to Heal". Tra le cose che chiediamo nelle nostre preghiere quotidiane c'è anche una richiesta di guarigione, con una formula che deriva dalla Bibbia, e si ispira alle parole del profeta Geremia (17,14) che dice: "O Signore,

guardiscimi, e io sarò guarito; salvami, e io sarò salvato, perché Tu sei la mia lode". Quando questa frase è stata trasportata nel testo liturgico è stata messa al plurale: "Guariscici, o Signore, e noi saremo guariti; salvaci, e saremo salvati, perché Tu sei la nostra lode".

È stato notato che fra tutte le richieste che noi facciamo nelle nostre preghiere quotidiane questa è l'unica nella quale aggiungiamo la frase "perché Tu sei la nostra lode". Una delle spiegazioni possibili di questa particolarità è che noi abbiamo il diritto e il dovere di curare: la guarigione, che si tratti di guarigione da una malattia, o da mali di altro tipo – e ce ne sono tanti – è qualche cosa che spetta prima di tutto a noi operare per ottenerla. Diritto ma soprattutto dovere (il linguaggio biblico parla poco dei diritti; parla molto dei doveri). Ma noi sappiamo anche che se è nostra responsabilità curare e cercare di guarire, l'unico vero guaritore è Dio e senza di lui non c'è guarigione. Questa guarigione Dio la elargisce anche a chi non se la merita; per questo noi diciamo "Tu sei l'oggetto della nostra lode". Di qui un richiamo alla nostra responsabilità, ma senza montarci la testa, perché il vero guaritore, che chiede che vi siano nostre azioni come noi non possiamo fare a meno delle sue opere, è il Signore: "Guariscici, o Signore, e saremo guariti, salvaci, e saremo salvati perché Tu sei la nostra lode".

**Najla Kassab Abousawan**  
*President of the World Communion for Reformed Churches*

A farmer asked a carpenter to build a fence to separate him from the neighbor. The farmer left and came back after several days. When he got closer to the farm, he could not see the fence. He called

the carpenter and asked him why he did not do any work, and the carpenter said, "I did. I discovered while working that you were building a fence because you have problems with your neighbor, so instead of building a fence, I built a bridge. You do not need a fence but a bridge".

Today, the world struggles with walls of separation among communities, families, nations, and religions. In the last year and a half, the Coronavirus opened our eyes to the need for healing, not merely physically, but in facing the new reality that we are captured with. The word healing became central to our daily life and expression. COVID urged us to see life with a different lens, to strive to work towards healing, to work towards peace and understanding among religions where religions could play an essential role in leading the world towards healing.

The question remains: how can we join efforts towards healing? How do we recognize that it is a time of healing?

It is a time of healing when we focus on human dignity, the dignity of all human beings aside from religion, race, gender, or nationality. I believe the pain of the coronavirus touched all humanity, and all experienced common suffering. We became united in pain, and it is time to unite in healing. We are gathered today to focus our eyes on how to lessen the pain of every human being and how religion can be a tool for preserving the dignity of all suffering, marginalized people whether in respect of gender, class, race, or other forms of discrimination and prejudice.

It is a time of healing when we work together for justice. Perhaps a good place to begin would be to look at the question of what implications our gathering today has for justice. We gather today as G20 nations hoping for a model that ensures justice and is equitable and ethical for all people and the planet. What do we hope for? The goal is not the gathering, but rather the hope that it brings to the world. We come together, not for the sake of power, but rather for the sake of a powerlessness that hungers for healing – from vaccine justice to feeding the poor and showing the love of God to all.

As an interfaith coalition, we are called here and now for the sake of the oppressed and the marginalized of the world. As the World Communion of Reformed Churches, we focus on our engagement with the issues of the world from the perspective of justice. Justice has been at the heart of our reformed vision. We, as a communion, are faithful in order to understand that justice is a matter of faith; it is a matter of confession. It is the very heart of God, as the Accra confession puts it – a foundational document for us as the World Com-

munion of Reformed Churches. Today we are called, as faith bodies, to see the questions of justice central to our faith. No healing without justice. No impactful religion without justice for all. In light of our Reformed tradition, and having read the signs of the times, global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and any fruitful effort towards healing. Today we come as religious and secular leaders to deal with the causes, not the outcomes, and economic injustice is one important cause of pain and divisions.

It is time to heal when we encourage our citizens to enjoy dialogues concerning life with other religions, when our youth from different religions come to know about the other religions through shared life and daily experience and questions, and explore the beauty of the other faith as firsthand experience, not through media that infuses prejudices and fear. I believe one of the blessings of living in the Middle East is that we grow with other religions, with whom we share common values, jokes, and traditions. We grow together in the same school and know that the other person is my brother and sister in humanity. War and divisions in the Middle East are not due to religions. Religions do not divide, but rather the abuse of religion is what distorts the beauty of other religions, triggered by political agendas or pragmatic aspirations. As faith bodies, we are called to dismantle any abuse for religions and speak openly against such perceptions because, in our silence, we contribute to stereotyping religion.

It is a time to heal when we have a firm stand against any exclusive attitude or interpretation of any religion that discriminates against others. We are called to rescue religion from any interpretation or understanding when people have extremist interpretations for the sake of specific agendas. We are called to join efforts to speak against exclusive attitudes and violent extremism that encourages building walls instead of bridges. I believe that every religion is called to scrutinize those practices or statements that could distort the beauty of God in the way we live.

It is a time to heal when religion impacts the lives of our younger generation. Youth challenge religions with questions of relevance to their life. How can we be an impactful religion that meets the struggles of today for our young people? We are called to heal the gap growing between the youth and their involvement in religion. It is time to hear them, include them, and strive towards healing their values, which were affected by COVID-19. The youth do not trust that religion could give them answers on earth, especially with their struggles towards justice. It is time to encourage our youth to be activists for human dignity, walking side by side with their religious leaders.

It is time to heal when women are involved in all levels in religious circles. Healing will not happen away from the full involvement of women, in allowing them to use their talents in building a better tomorrow and become involved in leadership. This is not an act of sympathy towards women, but rather an act of integrity in how we perceive God, who loved men and women alike. I believe striving towards healing is at the heart of women's work. It should not be the case that the human rights movement shows more inclusivity towards women than religion does. In this meeting, I was touched by the clear voice in several sessions of women and youth on the process of healing; I hope that practical steps will encourage us on our road to healing, starting from just participation of the voices of the most affected by the pandemic and beyond.

Finally, I want to say that working toward healing calls for urgency, and this is why moving towards practical steps in healing has become inevitable and necessary. I think every morning of the women of Afghanistan who pay the highest price in the change that happened. Every delay in action means that more lives will be lost, more dreams will be assassinated. I say that we need an accountability barometer to measure our progress on issues and where we have created change. As religious leaders, we are called to learn how to measure the progress of our struggle and encourage the young to journey with us and to appreciate their enthusiasm and call for progress.

Today is a time of crisis, but it is a time of *kairos*; civil and religious players should cooperate, such that we are open to hearing each other, to the point where it hurts, to shift from generalizations to specifics and to move together with new imagination – religions are essential contributors for healing and dignified life for all, not only in heaven but on earth.

As we meet here, let us have the courage to build a bridge where we work towards a better tomorrow for all, where justice is justice for all, and particularly the oppressed.

Today we have a great opportunity to have a sincere dialogue, working towards peace and reconciliation, building bridges, not walls.

## OPEN LETTER TO COP26: ASCETICISM, JUSTICE, AND ENERGY

**Elizabeta Kitanović**

*Executive Secretary for Human Rights  
and Communication, Church and Society  
Commission at the CEC*

Today the Archbishop of Constantinople New Rome, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I will lecture on the climate emergency and the novel ascetic needed to jointly take sustained care of God's creation, truly loving the whole of it, in order that we may all live healthy, vibrant lives on the healed planet in peace and justice as the conditions that uphold our God-given dignity.

I am privileged and honored with the opportunity to announce His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, renowned as "The Patriarch of Solidarity", who has deservedly earned the title of "Green Patriarch", and been named in *Time* magazine in 2008 as one of 100 Most Influential People in the World for "defining environmentalism as spiritual responsibility".

His All-Holiness will address us on "Ascetism, Justice, and Energy". He will present the open letter to the 26th Conference of Parties to be held from 31 October to 12 November this year in Glasgow. This will certainly inspire, encourage and activate all in the human community to selfless, genuine, and earnest encounters and dialogue that will jointly search for the paths to reconcile us humans with nature and each other, leaving no one behind.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome, was elected to the First Throne of the Orthodox Church in 1991.

Born in 1940 on the island of Imvros (today Gökçeada, Turkey) and being a citizen of Turkey, His All-Holiness possesses a unique

perspective on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, especially among the Christian, Jewish and Islamic faiths. As Ecumenical Patriarch, he has journeyed throughout the Orthodox and non-Orthodox world alike, promoting a universal message of love, hope, peace, and profound humanity. His endeavors to raise awareness and action for the green regeneration of the environment together with his inspiring efforts on behalf of religious freedom and human rights rank Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew among the world's foremost apostles in the pursuit of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and a culture of solidarity.

**Bartholomew I**  
*Archbishop of Constantinople New Rome  
and Ecumenical Patriarch*

We are honored to be with you and to participate in the G20 Interfaith Forum to urge G20 members to step up and respond effectively to the most pressing challenges of our time. We are grateful to the organizers for their kind invitation to address this Forum here today. It is the minute before midnight for humanity to go forward together towards a sustainable and resilient future that promises to heal people and our planet. For that, we need to enhance the abundance of our best ideas and, through faith, to succeed in the decisive race to global net-zero and to a culture of solidarity.

Do we all have the capacity to hold the global rise in temperature below 1.5 degrees centigrade by the middle of this century? Will we all be able to mitigate the risks of climate change? Will we all be able to preserve the wealth of nature that nurtures current and future generations? Will we all be able to prevent the ongoing extinction of

species and abate the loss of precious biodiversity? Will we all be able to stop violence amongst ourselves and against God's creation? Will we succeed in ending wars and in eliminating social injustice and the marginalization of our fellow human beings?

The answers to these questions are multifaceted.

We are gathered here today, in community, to stand firmly united in the faith that we are capable of succeeding in this essential global task. If we apply pious moderation and utilize respect and humility as spiritual guides to responsible and sustainable production and consumption, we will succeed. Only through such self-restraint, simplicity and *μετάνοια* – which in Greek literally means a change of mind, not only internally within ourselves, but also in praxis and concrete application in the form of a modern asceticism, *ἄσκησις*, that is practice, the act of exercising – can we hope to heal ourselves and our world.

The climate emergency, with all its disruption of our lives and livelihoods on this beautiful but damaged planet, is caused by the conspicuous increase of consumption in various parts of the world. We must free our lifestyles from temptations and the deadening forgetfulness of the conditions for living together justly and well in God's given solidarity and harmony. Practicing selflessness toward others and caring for the well-being of the community restores peace of mind and soul.

This is the way to heal our societies. This is the way to heal this beautiful planet which is God's creation entrusted to us for faithful preservation. When God first created men and women, he honored them as prudent stewards of our natural environment. Such an important responsibility, to care for God's earthly creation, demands that every single and collective deed is deeply contemplated and considered.

An important part of this journey is already underway. It lies in the direction of commitment to green recovery and twin green and digital transformations. It started at COP21 in 2015, when prudence

prevailed. There we assumed the obligation to work together on limiting global warming to 2 degrees and keeping it as close as possible to 1.5 degrees, as promised in the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Hopefully, the upcoming COP26 in Glasgow, led by the UK/Italy partnership-presidency and joined by all the participating states, will result in nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and climate and energy adaptation plans that can move the global environment to the level necessary for the world to reach net zero. In less than 30 years, it is possible to achieve the regeneration of our planet. Imagine living free from fossil fuels. Imagine a world in which we take care of one another. If realized, the attainment of intra- and inter-generational justice and the elimination of abhorrent poverty become possibilities.

We must realize this today because, paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic leaves us with a historic opportunity to “build back better”. As we stated just a few days ago in our encyclical message on the occasion of the beginning of the new ecclesiastical year for the Eastern Orthodox Church, on 1 September, a day that is also dedicated to prayers for the protection of the natural environment: “We pray for the swift overcoming of the consequences of the ongoing health crisis and for the illumination from above of governments throughout the world so that they do not return to or persist upon economism, to those principles of organization of economic life, production and consumption, of exhaustive exploitation of natural resources, principles that prevailed prior to the pandemic. Further, it is our genuine desire that the dissemination of pseudoscientific opinions concerning the purported dangers of the COVID-19 vaccines, the slander aimed toward specialists of the medical field, and the unfounded degradation of the seriousness of the disease be terminated. Unfortunately, similar opinions are propagated in regard to climate change as well, its cause, and its disastrous effects. The reality is entirely different, and must be faced with responsibility, collaboration, joint actions, and common vision”.

To seize this momentum and take real action, we must realize the seriousness of the problem: unsustainable production and consumption damages the planet and all living species. Our generation has not, until today, sufficiently contemplated the consequences of its euclidean drives to experience the sensations of progress and the pleasures of life – for some and not for all. As a consequence, the heaviest burden was placed on the lives and livelihoods of people on the frontlines of climate change, who not only are increasingly being forced to leave their homes, but also, especially women and children, become the main targets and victims of human trafficking and exploitation.

Najla Kassab Abousawan, President of the World Communion for Reformed Churches.



The enormous sufferings of climate refugees to save themselves and their progeny from the perils of climate change must be immediately addressed. As our Lord Jesus Christ says in the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). Displaced victims of the climate emergency endure these tribulations alone and unjustly.

And yet, in recent months, many nations have experienced, for the first time, the devastating effects of climate degradation. Floods in France, Belgium, Germany, and Luxembourg; burning forests in Greece, Turkey, Serbia, Australia, and California; disastrous storms and prolonged droughts throughout Africa – each of these are undeniable results of harms we have inflicted upon our Earth. These extreme weather events are our foreseeable destiny if we insist upon our enmity toward the natural environment.

In this regard, it is crucial for COP26, which is taking place from 31 October to 12 November in Glasgow, to unify and bind us together in our dedication to heal the climate and protect our planet. Success in this matter requires freeing the future from slavery to wastefulness and unfortunate habits that kill the very prerequisites for the good life for all of us on Earth.

In every Orthodox liturgy we ceaselessly pray: “For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times”. Every time we pray, we are reminding ourselves what needs to be done. We are longing for the moment in which governments globally will shape policies and create plans to safeguard the lives of people and communities threatened and affected by the consequences of the great ecological crisis. New policies must venture beyond the usual by producing only what is needed in sustainable and non-wasteful ways. In the Orthodox Christian tradition, monastics have modeled sustainable living for generations. Now we are faced with the opportunity to follow their example, to live in the dignity and joy of a newly found common cause. It is not coincidental that a recently published book, entitled *The Monk who became CEO: 1000 Years Athonian Management* (Thessaloniki, 2017) became a best-seller by “revealing” the secret of success of the ascetic management implemented by the monastic community of Mount Athos and how it can present a prototype for a new strategy and different value orientation in the philosophy of a modern company.

#### 1. New Technologies

In this spirit of modern asceticism, we call the major economies of the world to provide leadership in all these transitions to a green economy. The green economy refers to the well-being resulting from non-wasteful production and from responsible consumption. Green is the color symbolizing the life that God has given to all. Thus, innovative technologies for green transformations can, should, and must be technologies for life.

These technologies must drive the healing of our planet. By enhancing waste elimination, the de-pollution of water, air, and soil, and nurturing our forests and oceans, we are making a major turn towards an ecological economy for the well contemplated communal and global thriving prosperity of all.

Through our contemplations, we can see a world in which coal, oil, and gas are left in the bosom of our planet while we are powering our mobility, production of electricity, heating, cooling, construction, and all our activities on green and clean energy. Such contemplations are not mere daydreaming. There are already well-devised, technology solutions for the pressing energy problem. These need to be supported not only by pioneering governments, business enterprises and investments, but they should also be powered by everyone engaged in the movement for de-investing from fossil fuels and the modes of production/consumption that waste our future. We must now share these new technologies justly and equally throughout the world and invest in them from the South to the North in order to be responsible, accountable global citizens.

#### 2. Education and Youth

To foster human talents, cultivate the faith of inventiveness, and encourage spirited engagement, it is vital to promote quality education for all, male and female, without discrimination.

Throughout the whole of our lifetimes, we must learn anew and acquire the skills needed to achieve all transformational agendas, from the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development to the UN Agenda for Humanity. Education for such new realities is essential to transform our world to the one world of well-being, sustainability, resilience, responsibility, and justice for all.

We need to assure that intergenerational gaps do not widen and that the green and digital transformations leave no one behind. Our youth took to the streets, the public squares, and every corner of the Earth to ignite collective action aiming for the highest of climate-neutral targets. Bonded and linked by inspiration passed to us from our engaged youth, we are obliged to raise this demand of young men and women to reach global net zero. Our faith and ingenuity, our common devotion and inventiveness, must be brought forth for us all to achieve in community these high objectives. We need to join in the efforts of young people to accelerate our progress along transformational paths with full involvement of all those left furthest behind. We urge G20 nations to first recognize and then pursue the demands of our young men and women for a sustainable and resilient future.

Thus we must open our hearts and minds to the ambitions voiced by young generations. They are driving present efforts from the expedited achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to reversing harmful climate change and enhancing general conditions of life. Our younger generation, the largest ever in the history of humankind, will certainly make valuable recommendations at the Youth for Climate Summit to be held from 28 to 30 September in Milan. With truthfulness and sincerity, we plead that the ministers in Milan at the preparatory meeting for COP26 embrace the visions and proposals of the youth as envoys of the future.

#### 3. Conclusion

Unprecedented determination and human energy are required to free us all from enslavement to wasteful living. By devoting the power of our faith and the ingenuity of our minds to the contemplation of solutions, we can escape this bondage. As we are able to heal in community, so we are able as well to mend bad actions in community by accepting the goal of the protection of dignity and human rights of all people.

Therefore, we urge the leaders of the world’s largest economies to be the first to work together and coordinate their actions in support of a sustainable environment and of the common effort for healing of the global climate and for founding a just global society.

Here and now, individual and communal actions, brave and wise steps taken by women and men, by young and old, will empower us to make significant common decisions. We are inspired by a vision of a world united in well-being, sustainability, resilience, responsibility, justice, and peace for all. Truly, our shared commitments can heal humanity and its home, its oikos, our planet Earth.

### Azza Karam

Secretary-General of Religions for Peace

#### 1. Why Multi-Religious Engagement is the Tipping Point to Save Our Collective Heritage

My sincere gratitude to the G20 Interfaith Forum organizers, most especially to the three wise professors who are great knowledge-holders in this field: Professors Katherine Marshall, Cole Durham, and Alberto Melloni, who have stewarded such an impressive gathering. It is an honor for me to be here.

Your All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew: you can see from the applause that has followed your presentation the profound impact of your words on those gathered here today. Because you spoke from your faith, from your experiences, and from a legacy you built, of urging leaders to care for our environment, and doing so long before it became as popular a theme as it is today. You were the first faith leader who urged for this responsibility, and you are thus referred to as the “Green Pope”. Because you speak as a faith leader, your words are power, and powerful.

Distinguished audiences: I ask you to imagine a world where every faith leader was to come together and speak the truth you heard from His All Holiness the Patriarch. If this happens, I am confident there would be no impediment to the transformation our world so desperately needs.

The CEO Marco Alverà shared his dream, which also resonated with so many, and he also shared the steps he deems needed to help realize this. Imagine if every CEO were to share this dream and be committed to realizing the steps together, not just as business CEOs, but with all faith leaders. Imagine the power of positive transformation this would entail.

The combined power of all faith leaders is what Religions for Peace stands for and what it continues to serve. Founded in 1970, Religions for Peace is the largest worldwide alliance of religious institutions and faith communities devoted to advancing common actions for heritages of peace.

Today Religions for Peace has interreligious councils in over 90 countries and 4 regions. Together with our Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Networks. They enable us to span the world and engage religious communities at all levels, from the local to the international, from the most senior leadership to the grassroots.

Religions for Peace is led by a World Council Governing Board composed of senior religious leaders from all corners of our world. They represent the following religious communities (in alphabetical order): Bahá’í, Buddhism, Christianity (including all its streams from the Catholic cardinals in each region, to His All Holiness representing the Orthodox communities, to the World Council of Churches, the Anglican Communion, and more). In addition, Hinduism, varied Indigenous traditions, Islam/Muslims, Jains, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrians all sit and serve as equals in the work of advocacy and service which Religions for Peace has undertaken for over 50 years.

#### 2. Religions for Peace: An Ethos and a Model of Multi-Religious Collaboration for All Time

First of all, it behooves us to realize that this is not merely an organization. Religions for Peace is, above all, a mission of joint service rooted in distinct belief systems and structures. The mission is for religious institutions, through their elected and/or appointed leaders, and faith communities (also through their elected and/or appointed

leaders), to come together in service of the common needs of people in their country, region, and around the world.

In 1970, when Religions for Peace was founded by a group of religious leaders from diverse Christian denominations, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Muslims, they were motivated by many strong convictions. Principal among these are two worthy of sharing here. One conviction is that multi-religious collaboration is necessary for the multi-lateral systems to successfully realize human rights, peace and security, and human development. Another complementary belief is that multi-religious actions are essential for a “positive peace” – this means not just the absence of war or conflicts, but the presence of an inclusive human dignity, which, in turn, requires a healthful planetary resilience. These convictions, although often belittled by secular institutions – including the very same ones which this movement was created to serve alongside – have only grown in relevance and need.

The Interreligious Councils (IRCs), which bear the Religions for Peace affiliation, are locally engendered – i.e., they are founded by local religious actors responding to locally perceived needs. The IRCs are composed of both clergy and lay leaders from the diverse religious communities in a particular area. They function as sustainable, legally registered civil society cooperatives that can work together in times of peace, conflict, natural disaster, or public health emergency. Religions for Peace has sought to expand the meaning of “faith leadership” – particularly where many faith traditions lack institutionalized forms of representation and organization – to include those who serve their communities and are acknowledged by them. This has also enabled the presence of the voices of, and myriad engagements with and by, women and diverse youth from across all faith traditions in many corners of the world.

Religions for Peace provides the principles for the *modus operandi*. Principles which are at once simple and profound: respectful appreciation for the distinctiveness of each faith tradition; subsidiarity; and the necessity to ensure that those who speak in the name of the faith in these structures are representative leaders of their institutions and/or their communities, rather than assume that the numbers, or length of existence, or theologies, or positions, or influence – or the affluence of adherents, traditions, or institutions – distinguish between faith representatives. The principles of Religions for Peace are respect for the notion inherent in all belief systems: that all are equal in the eyes of the greater power, and that each belief system has its own beliefs, structures, and methods of being. Therefore, the task of Religions for Peace is to join together in voice, and actions, designed and destined for the needs of all, without distinctions or discrimination.

Religions for Peace shares its standard bylaws with each emerging IRC, as well as a rich repository of comparative structures, experiences, and lessons learned from decades of multi-religious work for the common good – all for the local faith leaders to choose from and/or adjust to their specific needs and exigencies. Thus, the IRCs share the principles of the mission of religions working together for peace, while – as with each faith tradition therein – they are independent entities from the moment of inception.

Throughout Religions for Peace’s 50 years of convening faith leaders and serving common needs in different countries, a sense of trust is built among communities of diverse faiths, together with a “habit” of collaboration. These are priceless and incomparable gems of human existence. At the same time, the endurance of this habit of collaboration is challenged, sometimes on a daily basis, not only because of the inherent divisiveness of political interests, but also because religious institutions, as they are the original bridge builders, can also continue to be competing actors. But the fact that the IRCs persist, and some are being newly formed in different continents, is a testament to the common will of faith leaders and the enormous needs of populations.

Religions for Peace’s method of work responds to immediate crises, as it helps build the groundwork and facilitate mechanisms for collaborative responses to both short-term emergencies as well as a long-term habitus of social cohesion. In doing so, Religions for Peace IRCs challenge distrust and factionalism (root causes of multiple forms of crisis and conflict), as they serve as alternative and functional spaces of dialogue and service.

This happens not only among religious institutions and faith communities, however. Another principle of Religions for Peace is the imperative of working in partnership with multiple governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental stakeholders. We have observed in over 20 countries – albeit on a small scale compared to the global proportions of this pandemic – that Religions for Peace IRCs are able to continue to bring faith communities together to serve common needs, including in countries where political differences are rife and growing. This work is done with governmental entities operating the public health spaces, as it is being done with UN agencies and secular NGOs serving those same spaces and needs. Multi-religious IRC collaboration is not only for and among institutions of faith: it is an art honed by some faith leaders and by institutions, prevailed upon, over many years, by the growing needs and crises confronting all.

As Religions for Peace facilitates convening and joint service, this effectively “pays it forward” to enhance the impact of what each indi-

vidual religious institution (or community thereof) does. Far from attempting to replace or act as an alternative to existing institutional or community efforts, Religions for Peace and its IRCs aim to magnify the spaces, the means, and the impacts of service to the common good, by ensuring a coming together of actors and resources.

### 3. So, What Are We Learning?

We are living in the age of the decline of all forms of institutions, from political parties to unions, from governments to civil society, from large corporations to community centers and families. Institutions, as we know them, are struggling for legitimacy. As social media and artificial intelligence slowly take over our ways of communicating and organizing, it is not only our markets and our industries that are being affected and impacted; rather, it would seem as if every seam of social fabric is tearing.

At the same time, it is clear that we do not lack religious leaders who seek to serve our spiritual worlds and needs. Nor do we lack multiple forms of institutions, scientific knowledge, and indeed access to all types of information, alongside myriad forms of activism. Instead, we do lack a sense of, and means for, the accountability of existing leaders, beyond the increasingly limited circle of belonging and affiliation. Rather than receding into a hard shell of impenetrable or exclusive access to privileges (or resentments), we need leaders – of all types – who are determined to work together to serve all and are prepared to be accountable to that way of serving.

So, as we hold our governments, political and business institutions accountable in the global environment in which air, land, and water are all threatened species, and where the human rights of all, barring none, is fast consolidating into a myth, we must hold our religious leaders accountable for the will and means to work together to serve all, without distinctions of race, class, religion, gender, or any other basis.

### 4. Our Sacred Environment

In Religions for Peace, this form of service, and the accountability being built around it, can be seen particularly through the work with and for the environment. Allow me to do a quick tour of a breakthrough initiative conceived by faith leaders inclusively, within the framework of governmental and intergovernmental support, and which is, quite literally, about our ability as a human species and a planet to breathe.

But first, some background: in December 2019, Religions for Peace hosted the first multi-religious, collective strategic planning exercise in interfaith history. This brought together almost 200 faith

Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch.



Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, Papal Legate to the United Kingdom.



leaders from around the world, including members of the movement, and 50 partners from civil society and private sectors. This historic effort resulted in the 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, which identified six priorities for the organization. In another tactical achievement, all six priorities resulted from a deliberately undertaken intention to consolidate decades of multi-religious collaboration to align with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) of 193 governments. The rationale for this alignment is simple: governments should not avoid responsibility for what the multi-religious efforts in their own countries and globally already do to serve the sustainable development goals. One of the six strategic priorities developed by these religious and faith leaders, with a commitment to hold themselves accountable for working together is “nurturing a sustainable environment”.

Religions for Peace thus committed to leveraging its added-value, i.e., supporting multi-religious collaboration to protect our natural environment and doing so with diverse stakeholders from across the political and civic polities. The reasons for this priority are ecological, but also theological. Creation, and by extension the natural environment, is a gift to humanity from the Divine. Without it, we cannot live, enjoy its blessings, and evolve as human and spiritual beings. Hence, the destruction of nature, most egregiously at the pace we see today, is a profound spiritual, moral, and practical concern. That is why it demands joint actions.

At the Religions for Peace 10th World Assembly in August 2019, over 900 faith leaders from 125 countries (together on average representing a constituency of more than 1 billion people) had already joined together to affirm their commitment to work through the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) to end tropical deforestation and stand in solidarity with the indigenous peoples who serve as the guardians of these forests, sacred to them, by endorsing the Faiths for Forests Declaration. The declaration states that “the protection of tropical forests and indigenous peoples’ rights is a moral responsibility, is essential to global efforts to combat climate change and is an issue that demands the mobilizing power, influence and reaches of the world’s religious leaders and faith communities”.

Therefore, in collaboration with Religions for Peace IRCS, IRI is today active in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, working with the most prominent and established faith-based organizations, religious leaders, and indigenous peoples to launch IRI country programs in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Indonesia, and Peru – five countries containing nearly 70% of the world’s remaining rainforests. These national programs are led by high-level advisory councils that define strategic priority actions on national, state, and local levels to influence the private sector, advocate for public policies that protect forests and the human rights of their indigenous protectors, mobilize faith communities for advocacy, and facilitate learning about the science which underpins a common spiritual, ethical, and moral commitment to end deforestation.

Given one of the Religions for Peace’s key methods of knowledge management, a wide range of educational materials have been developed that address the topics of climate change, deforestation, and indigenous peoples’ rights from a scientific and religious perspective, including specific faith toolkits for eight different religious traditions. Each country’s program has brought together a coalition of religious leaders in provinces and local areas where the threat to deforestation is at its highest and where they are actively involved in local development planning. Thus, 36 local chapters have been established in Colombia, with 12 in Peru and 3 in provinces of each of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Indonesia.

Recent achievements in Colombia include influencing the country’s national development plan – specifically through negotiating the inclusion of two articles on forest protection and climate change. Not only that, but an extensive advocacy campaign conducted by IRI-Colombia played a critical role in the recent adoption of landmark legislation criminalizing deforestation in the country. The Bill is particularly important because it updates and adapts the Colombian penal code to better address serious environmental challenges and combat criminal forms of deforestation.

In Peru, the Ministry of Justice was convened for a national discussion on the grave threats against indigenous peoples. In response, the Minister of Justice presented a supreme decree to create an “Intersectoral Mechanism for protecting human rights defenders”. This first-of-its-kind supreme decree commits to work across eight different ministries to strengthen protections for indigenous peoples and environmental defenders. Furthermore, the meeting produced a commitment to initiate an emergency roundtable discussion on environmental defenders in the Amazonian city of Pucallpa, Ucayali, which was held on 14 May 2021, with the presence of 12 government officials (including the Minister of Justice, Minister of Interior, Minister of Environment, and Minister of Women and Vulnerable Populations), indigenous leaders and organizations, together with IRI representatives, including the Bishop of Pucallpa, Monsignor Martin Quijano (who presented the Minister of Justice with an IRI-Peru statement titled, *Declaration for Amazonian Indigenous Security*, which calls for six security measures to be adopted by the Peruvian government), as well as Cardinal Pedro Barreto, S.J., Archbishop of Huancayo and President of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), who added his powerful voice to advocate (in an opinion column in the national newspaper *El Comercio* entitled “Peace and dignity for the Amazon”) for the rights and protections for Indigenous Peoples, and who endorsed the *Declaration for Amazonian Indigenous Security*.

In the DRC, IRI actors engaged in a months-long campaign advocating for adopting a new (historic) law recognizing the rights of indigenous Pygmy people in the country, which was successfully passed in Parliament. Advocacy efforts included video spots of senior religious leaders calling for the adoption of the law, as well as a joint policy paper and statement on behalf of IRI-DRC together with a large swath of religious leaders in the country arguing for why securing the rights of Pygmy people is a shared moral responsibility.

The eight religious councils in Indonesia developed resource guides and religious teaching books on the protection of rainforests. Together with the Ministry of Environment, an official launch of these, intended to be included in school curricula, will be undertaken in 2022.

But IRI is not the only space where Religions for Peace leverages its IRCS and its multi-religious collaborative power. Faith for Nature is another important site of service. Thus, in October 2020, Religions for Peace partnered with the government of Iceland and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to co-host and launch the historic “Faith for Nature: Multi-Faith Action”. The discourse from the get-go focused on the role of values, ethics, and moral responsibility towards nature-based solutions. Despite the largely virtual nature of this conference which took place at the height of the COVID crisis, 6500 people joined through livestreaming. The declaration *Our Sacred Commitment* was adopted as part of the launch of what is known as the Faith for Earth Coalition.

Religions for Peace’s regional interreligious councils in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America hosted “regional hubs” raising awareness and providing reports that directly informed the Faith for Earth Conference and the declaration outcomes. Religions for Peace interreligious councils are now working with UNEP and the global Faith for Earth Coalition to mobilize religious institutions and local populations around the behavioral, political, legislative, and economic implications required to serve the safety of our earth.

## 5. In Conclusion

Earlier, we spoke of the “pay it forward” ethos as part of what Religions for Peace can and does do to build on, magnify and amplify the impact of what each religious institution and community does. From more than 50 years of evidence of multi-religious collaborations for the heritage of peace, the movement of Religions for Peace can legitimately claim that the multi-religious, collaborative joint approach of advocacy and services towards multiple common needs can be:

- more powerful than the efforts of individual religious actors or institutions alone;
- more inclusive of the diversity of faiths, and therefore more conducive to social cohesion efforts;
- more sustainable to serve the interdependence of issues and needs in the long term than ad hoc or one-issue centric interfaith initiatives.

The fact is that multi-religious collaboration for the common good is the tipping point our planet needs. Just as we say that the range and intensity of human and planetary needs demand collaboration across all sectors, we must acknowledge that no one religious institution or actor can serve all on their own. This applies regardless of the breadth and depth of their individual reach. This also applies regardless of the power of individual, religious, institutional presence, of legacy, of internal diversity, and of powerful leadership. No religious actor or religious institution represents the diversity of faiths or serves all of humanity alone. But they do tilt the arc of justice towards planetary well-being when they work together as many religious, civic, and human rights actors.

In concluding, we leave you by insisting that it is the will to be held accountable for working together as faith leaders and institution, and as multi-faith actors alongside others, which is needed to help us save our planet.

## FORTHCOMING

In the forthcoming supplements, the following speeches will be published:

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Ahmed Abbadi  
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