



INTER ACTION COUNCIL

Established in 1983

InterAction Council
25th Annual Plenary Session

Final Communiqué

21-23 May 2007
Vienna, Austria

In the first InterAction Council Communiqué in 1983, we pronounced: “The world is now threatened by the most dangerous situation it has faced since the end of the Second World War.” Today, this statement would be unjustified. The world is in a better place than twenty-five years ago, when as a consequence of the Cold War the world faced imminent danger of extinction. However, we are still plagued by myriad challenges. On 21-23 May 2007, the InterAction Council returned to its birthplace in Vienna, Austria, to consider the state of the world, engage in dialogue with religious leaders, and discuss the role of the United States as a world leader.

Present State of the World & the Role of the United States as a World Leader

In the decade following the end of the Cold War, important developments have taken place, including increased political cooperation on both global and regional levels. Through voluntary membership in the European Union, Europe today has achieved unprecedented peace. The African Union has taken a lead in the continent, establishing a framework for regional peacekeeping and economic development. In Latin American countries, democracy is strong: military regimes have ended, average growth is up and inflation is down. Likewise, in the last decade, Asian countries have achieved remarkable, and largely peaceful, economic development. Globalisation provides both opportunities and challenges. One particular problem which remains to be solved is the tremendous trade imbalance between the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Some problems that the Council addressed in 1983 remain. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in particular, continues to threaten peace and security in the region. New problems have also emerged. Iraq is degenerating into tri-partite civil war; climate change poses a global threat to mankind; and the threat of pandemics has intensified. Increased burden sharing amongst all countries is important to finding sustainable solutions to these problems.

Adherence to international law and reliance on multilateral institutions must be restored. Unilateral actions have weakened the status of international law. As a defensive measure, some states are building military arsenals rather than relying on the mechanisms of international law; others are modernising existing nuclear arsenals and building antiballistic missile systems. Surprisingly, in this post Cold War era, a new arms race has begun. At the present, the combined nuclear and military arsenal has a destructive power unimaginable during WWII.

The role of the United States as a strong political, economic and military power is without a doubt imperative to the global community. This is even more noticeable due to the multi-faceted challenges the world is facing today. The participation of the United States in the international community in solving these challenges is indispensable.

The active participation of the United States contributed to the foundation of the multilateral world order, which has served both greater and smaller nations alike. It was the initiator of a multilateral community and an active participant in building the institutions and mechanisms of global policy.

In the beginning of this century, we saw a departure from the values that the United States traditionally espoused. The combination of the emergence of the role of the U.S. as the world's only superpower and the profound concern instilled in the U.S. by the 9/11 attacks catalysed a new U.S. policy of unilateralism. At the present, there is hope that the longstanding tradition of multilateralism will re-emerge as the driving force behind U.S. policy.

Today, the basic issue of education is absolutely critical. A dialogue within societies — shaped by politicians, by academics, by media, by all social movements — is vital to positive transformation and change.

Therefore, the InterAction Council recommends:

- Urging nuclear states to abide by their obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to phase out nuclear arsenals and to avoid the development of new systems that would instigate a new arms race;
- Supporting the six-party talks on North Korea in order to achieve the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and prevent further nuclear proliferation in the region;
- Limiting and regulating international production and trade in small arms by supporting negotiations in the UN for the establishment of an International Arms Trade Treaty;
- Urging the prohibition of inhumane weapons, especially the use of anti-personnel landmines and “cluster bombs”;
- Reinforcing the principle of national sovereignty by emphasising the necessity of Security Council approval in any intervention against a sovereign state, and by establishing clear guidelines in the absence of a Security Council mandate in cases of gross violations of human rights;
- Urging the return to a truly multilateral world order in order to effectively address common challenges;
- Reinforcing that a primary issue in the Middle East is the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, and that only a negotiated political settlement based on UN Security Council Resolution 242, and the concept of two states living side by side, will produce a durable peace;
- Recognising the unique opportunity presented by the recent Saudi initiative at the Arab League Summit in Riyadh, and underlining the importance of active U.S. leadership in negotiating a solution;
- Urging Israel and its neighbours to join in cooperative projects such as sharing water resources, developing trade initiatives and engaging in joint tourism;

- Calling for a full diplomatic effort for Iraq and organising a conference of all countries in the region with the recognition that a sustainable solution is contingent on an agreement of all relevant parties;
- Encouraging all states, especially the United States, to share the humanitarian burden of the continued unrest in Iraq — especially the growing refugee problem — in order to relieve the pressure on neighbouring countries;
- Reiterating that a “military solution” in relation to Iran would carry huge risks in the region and in the world;
- Supporting an increase in the membership of the G-8 to fifteen members, by including new emerging economic powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America in order to better reflect the current economic reality;
- Alerting the world to the risks of the enormous trade imbalance between the United States and the rest of the world, which could create financial instability leading to severe recession or even depression;
- Empowering developing countries by calling on all participating parties to conclude the negotiations at the Doha Round for trade liberalisation, especially on agricultural products; and
- Urging world leaders to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol ratified by the world’s major and emerging economic powers.

Dialogue with Religious Leaders

In discussing the role of religion in politics, there are several issues on which we can agree: that we must foster dialogue among religions; that we must promote dialogue within religions; and that increasing religious education will promote mutual respect. We reaffirm the commonalities between religions. These commonalities provide the foundation from which the global citizen can shape a civil society with respect for a common global ethic.

Religion plays a unique role in the identity of the whole individual. While political decisions may dictate what an individual can and cannot do, religious decisions involve all dimensions of the human experience: personal ethics, values, faith and fundamental beliefs. It is therefore extremely important to carefully scrutinise the interaction between politics and religion.

To counter religious extremism and the politicians who encourage it, the goal should be to strengthen religious moderates and to isolate extremists. In achieving these goals, it is important to identify three distinct issues: the roots, the causes, and the politicisation of religious extremism. A fear of modernity, the plague of poverty, disrespect for religious differences and dissatisfaction with the impacts of globalisation are each roots of

religious extremism. Religious fundamentalism then provides a tempting solution because of its ability to provide clear, straightforward answers to address people's innermost fears.

In moving forward, we must identify and address the roots, causes and politicisation of religious extremism in order to limit the ability of extremists and opportunistic leaders to exploit religious doctrine. Political leaders must never misuse religion for political purposes and religious leaders must never let religion be misused for political purposes.

Religious leaders must assume the role of “public intellectuals” and protect and defend the integrity of their religion's core values. Religious leaders have a significant role to play in harnessing the power of people to face global challenges, and by lending moral weight to nurturing ecological sensitivity toward efforts to sustain the planet. One of the greatest obstructions to peace is hatred; no peace can prevail if we respond to hatred with hatred.

We must identify ways to promote peace and solidarity while preserving cultural diversity and the plurality of faith communities.

Therefore, the InterAction Council recommends:

- Promoting the understanding that all religions have common core ethical norms, and recognising that this core is the foundation of global citizenship and common humanity;
- Reaffirming and strengthening the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities and underscoring that the core values acceptable to all religions — justice, compassion, civility and harmony — mentioned prominently in the Declaration, are even more relevant today;
- Rejecting the misuse of religion by political leaders and calling on religious leaders not to let their faiths be misused for political purposes;
- Encouraging every state to establish a permanent interfaith institute that includes both politicians and religious leaders;
- Supporting the establishment of an Interfaith Council in the United Nations in order to address these issues on a global level;
- Fostering dialogue among and within religions and developing an action plan for inter-faith education for increasing tolerance and mutual respect; and,
- Harnessing the power of religious movements to meet environmental challenges of respecting life and protecting the Earth for the benefit of future generations.

List of Participants

IAC Members

1. H. E. Mr. Helmut **Schmidt**, Honorary Chairman (Former Chancellor of Germany)
2. H. E. Mr. Malcolm **Fraser**, Honorary Chairman (Former Prime Minister of Australia)
3. H. E. Mr. Ingvar **Carlsson**, Co-chairman (Former Prime Minister of Sweden)
4. H. E. Mr. Franz **Vranitzky**, Organising Chairman (Former Chancellor of Austria)
5. H. E. Mr. Valdis **Birkavs** (Former Prime Minister of Latvia)
6. H. E. Mr. James **Bolger** (Former Prime Minister of New Zealand)
7. H. E. Mr. Jean **Chrétien** (Former Prime Minister of Canada)
8. H. E. Mr. Gyula **Horn** (Former Prime Minister of Hungary)
9. H. E. Mr. AbdelSalam **Majali** (Former Prime Minister of Jordan)
10. H. E. Mr. Andrés **Pastrana** (Former President of Colombia)
11. H. E. Mr. Yevgeny M. **Primakov** (Former Prime Minister of Russia)
12. H. E. Mr. George **Vassiliou** (Former President of Cyprus)
13. H. E. Mr. Richard von **Weizsäcker** (Former President of Germany)
14. H. E. President Olusegun **Obasanjo** (Nigeria)

Associate Members

15. Prof. Thomas **Axworthy**, Professor, Centre for the Study of Democracy, Queen's University (Canada)
16. H. E. Mr. Jean André **François-Poncet**, President of the Senatorial Committee on Regional Planning (France)
17. Prof. Hans **Küng**, Professor Emeritus, Tübingen University (Switzerland)
18. H. E. Mr. **Lee Seung-Yun**, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Korea (Korea)

Religious Leaders

19. Dr. Jawad Ahmad **Al Anani**, Former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (Sunni, Islam, Jordan)
20. Dr. Ahangamage Tudor **Ariyaratne**, President, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Theravada Buddhism, Sri Lanka)
21. Rev. Dr. Mettanando **Bhikkhu**, Special Advisor on the Buddhist Affairs to the World Conference of Religions for Peace (Theravada Buddhism, Thailand)
22. Archbishop **Damianos** of Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery (Greek Orthodox, Greece)
23. Chief Rabbi Paul Chaim **Eisenberg** (Judaism, Austria)
24. Acharya Shrivatsa **Goswami** (Hinduism, India)
25. His Eminence Monshu Koshin **Ohtani**, Past President of Japan Buddhist Federation, Monshu of Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha (Mahayana Buddhism, Japan)
26. Dr. Abdolkarim **Soroush** (Shia, Islam, Iran)
27. H. E. Bishop Herwig **Sturm**, Chairman of the National Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria (Protestant, Austria)
28. Dr. **Tu Weiming**, Harvard University (Confucianism, China)

Special Guests

29. Sheikh Abdul-Aziz **Al-Quraishi**, Chairman, Saudi-U.S. Businessmen's Association (Saudi Arabia)
30. Ambassador **Li Dayou**, Former Ambassador to the U.S. and UN (China)

31. Prof. Richard **Norton**, Professor, Boston University (U.S.A.)
32. Mr. **Qian** Qichen, Former Deputy Prime Minister, Former Foreign Minister (China)
33. Mr. Masajuro **Shiokawa**, Former Minister of Finance (Japan)
34. Mr. Seiken **Sugiura**, Former Minister of Justice (Japan)
35. Mr. Walter **Mondale**, Former Vice President (U.S.A.)

Deputy Secretary-General

36. Prof. Nagao **Hyodo**, Former Ambassador to Belgium (Japan)

The InterAction Council acknowledges with gratitude the support given to the 25th Annual Meeting by the Government of Austria, the Government of Japan, the Government of Korea, Mr. William Laughlin and Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue.