



Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good

The Washington Declaration

February 7, 2018

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation. (Isaiah 52:7)

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called into one body. And be thankful (Colossians 3:15)

Good and evil cannot be equal: repel evil with that which is better, and your enemy will become as a close and warm friend, but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness.) Qur'an 41:34-35)

On January 27, 2016, in Marrakesh, Muslim scholars and leaders from ten dozen countries affirmed in a landmark statement that the oppression of religious minorities is contrary to Islamic values and called for equality of citizenship, regardless of faith tradition, in Muslim majority societies. The Marrakesh Declaration was inspired by the famed Charter of Medina which had, 1400 years earlier, recognized the equal rights and responsibilities of the residents of that holy city.

This week, in Washington, more than 400 representatives from the three Abrahamic faiths assembled in the spirit of another initiative that came to fruition on the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century of the Common Era. The Alliance of Virtue was formed in Mecca and included in its embrace the Prophet Muhammad, prior to his mission, and leaders from a variety of ethnicities and religions. The Alliance was conceived and implemented to support the rule of law and to ensure fair treatment for the vulnerable and disadvantaged throughout the Meccan community.

The vision we propose now is of a revived Alliance of Virtue, global in nature, open to men and women of every faith, race, and nationality, and dedicated -- like its earlier namesake -- to joint action in the service of sustainable peace, justice, compassion, and mutual respect. We take this step because we believe

that individuals and communities need to move beyond mere tolerance and to dedicate themselves to a future in which all can flourish and in which all – empowered by faith -- can build reconciliation and seek to heal the wounds of conflict and violence.

The leaders who formed the original Alliance were prompted to do so by unsettled conditions in historic Mecca; similarly, the impetus for our Declaration can be found in today's troubled world.

With heartfelt sorrow, we observe that armed struggle, terrorism, and other manifestations of conflict are the principal causes of civilian deaths, the displacement of populations, the suffering of innocent people, and the desecration of sacred places and shrines. Sectarian rivalries and religious prejudice contribute significantly and tragically to violence that -- due to the relentless advance in weapons technology -- poses an imminent and dire threat to the well-being of all people.

Despite some gains, there remain gross inequalities in the human condition: vast wealth contrasted with deepest poverty, chronic malnutrition, lack of access to education, deadly shortcomings in health care, and callous indifference -- even among the outwardly pious -- to human pain.

The pervasiveness of conflict, injustice, and hardship constitutes a direct affront to the aspirations of the three great faith traditions to which we -- who have gathered this week in Washington -- adhere. The gap between our shared hopes and a wounded world constitutes a warning to which we must respond.

Though mindful of our differences, we are called by the ethical values we hold in common to embark on a new course informed by old wisdom, a journey that begins with the knowledge that all humans come from a single origin, that each is endowed by our Creator with intrinsic human dignity and related inalienable rights, and that we cannot love and serve God if we fail also to love our neighbors -- including the strangers in our midst.

Recognizing that our shared values are more important than our differences, and that we are strongest when we act together, we pledge to combine our best efforts to foster unity where there is discord, aid the impoverished, tend the vulnerable, heal the poor in spirit, and support measures that will ensure respect for the dignity of every human being. We will be guided in this endeavor by convictions that flow from our deepest theological understandings:

- All people, regardless of faith, are entitled to religious liberty. There is no room for compulsion in religion, just as there are no legitimate grounds

for excluding the followers of any religion from full and fair participation in society. This principle is prominent in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and is intimately associated with the United States, where the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom preceded even the adoption of the federal constitution.

- All people, men and women alike, are entitled to equality and due process under the law. All are entitled to freedom of movement within their states, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom from political persecution, freedom from torture, the right to seek political asylum, the right to nationality, and all other internationally recognized human rights.
- Each government has an obligation to respect the dignity and related rights of all who dwell within its jurisdiction. Each should employ its resources to address the root causes of inequality and to create opportunities for people to make full use of their energy and talents to provide for their families and contribute productively to society. Each should be a faithful steward of the natural environment, which we hold in trust for future generations. Each state has a duty, per the United Nations Charter, to refrain from aggression or attempting to subjugate others and to cooperate in resolving disputes peacefully, lawfully, and justly. Each government has an obligation to enact and enforce laws against violence stemming from bigotry and hate.
- People from all sectors – including public service, religion, business, academia, civil society, and the arts – share a responsibility to encourage international and inter-cultural understanding and to oppose any effort to convey information that is false or defamatory toward the members of any ethnic, racial, or religious group.

We believe that religious leaders have a special responsibility to ensure that the tenets and teachings of our faiths are not distorted for wrongful purposes and that, on the contrary, they provide a living example of God's love at work in the world. In light of that responsibility, we reject the polarization that leads to conflict and war. We are determined to deepen our solidarity and thereby ensure that religion is a force for reconciliation and harmony. We pledge to work across confessional divides in support of values that are central to each of our faith traditions, including peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, justice, and truth. Together, we can help the world to understand that differences of doctrine are no bar to cooperative deeds; on the contrary, these differences enable us to address shared challenges from diverse vantage points and through a variety of strategies. In that spirit, we promise to exchange ideas,

train and encourage our congregants to engage in joint projects and advocacy, form partnerships with relevant national and international actors, reach out to the leaders of other faith and ethical traditions, and create a model of collaboration that people of all religions can pursue in support of the common good.

In reviving the Alliance of Virtue, we proceed in the belief that, for all the ignorance, enmity, and perplexity that plagues our world, love remains a more powerful force in shaping human behavior than hate, hope is more resilient than fear, and the desire to build will ultimately prevail over any impulse to destroy. We go forward seeking God's help to liberate us from the snares of prejudice and narrow-mindedness -- to give us ears that we might listen across differences, hands that we might reach beyond boundaries, and minds that are open to the thoughts and needs of our fellow human beings.

May God's blessings enlighten and inspire us all.