

PRESS RELEASE (PR192-06R)

Cebu Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity

14 – 16 March 2006, Shangri-La Mactan Island Resort, Cebu



DECLARATION OF THE CEBU DIALOGUE ON REGIONAL INTERFAITH COOPERATION FOR PEACE, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN DIGNITY

We, the participants in the Cebu Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, gathered in Cebu, Philippines on 14-16 March 2006.

We acknowledge

- the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the promotion of regional peace and security
- the contribution of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the promotion of regional social and economic development and in upholding the principle of the inviolability of human dignity
- the crucial role of education in promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation
- the influence of the media on interfaith and intercultural understanding,

We welcome the statement made by Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo on the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation for regional peace and development and supporting the President's view that faith is a primordial need in the human condition offering hope, confidence, courage, and the commitment to lead a good life on which the family, society, and civilization are based,

We welcome the commitment to the regional interfaith dialogue process expressed by the Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, Prime Minister of New Zealand, Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto G. Romulo, Philippine Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus G. Dureza, Hon. Andrew Robb, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Australia, and Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr. N. Hassan Wirajuda, represented by Director General for Information and Public Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Mangasi Sihombing,

We support their statements reflecting the great potential and power of faith to bring together peoples of different races, **cultures and creeds** in our shared pursuit of lasting peace in the region,

We express our appreciation to the Governments of Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand and the Philippines as the co-sponsors of the dialogue process, and particularly to the Philippines as the host of this Cebu Dialogue,

We welcome the offer by the Government of New Zealand to host the third regional dialogue on interfaith cooperation,

We were encouraged by the national reports on interfaith initiatives undertaken following the commitments made during the Yogyakarta Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation on 6-7, December 2004, and building upon them, including the report on the progress of the Jogja Centre,

We believe that interfaith dialogue builds understanding, goodwill, and relationships across religions and among peoples,

We acknowledge that interfaith cooperation plays a central role in the fostering of peace and security in our region and that interfaith dialogue and cooperation are now an integral part of the national and international political landscape,

We recognize that believers, communities, and institutions exercise a distinct and vital role in the promotion of peace, development, and human dignity in this region,

We appreciate that interfaith dialogue and cooperation are essential in de-linking religions from all forms of terror,

We affirm that the key societal values that underpin successful interfaith understanding and cooperation include shared values of peace, harmony, tolerance, ethical standards and human rights,

We recognize the impact of the media on public opinion and their critical relationship to peace and harmony, interfaith and intercultural understanding, nation building, social cohesion and social responsibility,

We affirm that faith communities need to engage with the media, build relationships, provide them with news and information and enter into dialogue with them,

We believe that human beings have moral, spiritual and intellectual capacities which could be best developed towards the attainment of human dignity,

We believe that education at all levels and in various contexts can play a significant role in promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation,

We recognize the shared contribution of women and men towards interfaith education and the promotion of human dignity,

We recognize that to make interfaith education effective, the driving forces behind interfaith conflict need to be addressed.

We hereby declare that:

- We will hold local, national, and regional forums to build knowledge, respect, and understanding and to provide opportunities for dialogue, thereby deepening relationships and friendships among faith communities and enhancing capacity for interfaith cooperation.

- We call on governments to uphold freedom of religion and belief in ways that will encourage interfaith dialogue.

- We call for increased interaction and partnership between governments and religious communities in addressing violence and all forms of terror and in working for peace, development, and human dignity.

- We call on religious groups to recognize pluralism, multiculturalism, and peace education and develop openness, and respect for other faiths, traditions, and cultures; to develop internal mechanisms and resources for responding to violence and intolerance against other ethnic and religious communities; and to be sensitive to the complexities of proselytization, respect all belief systems, and discourage proselytization through inducements.

- We will undertake cooperative efforts to assist one another in times of natural disasters.

- We encourage future interfaith dialogues to focus on programs of practical action, with due respect to those previous interfaith dialogues which focused more on the philosophical aspects of religions, and which have been able to minimize the stereotypical misunderstanding among various groups.

-We will promote interfaith dialogue at the grassroots level to serve as an instrument to promote sustainable livelihoods and community cohesiveness or unity, thus, becoming the basis of civil society to promote the democratization process.

-We encourage governments involved in interfaith dialogues to establish a mechanism for institutional policies and all relevant enabling guidelines to promote and protect human life, dignity, social justice, and the integrity of all creation and call on participants to acknowledge and support the goals and objectives of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

-We call on participants of the Yogyakarta Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation held on 6-7 December 2004 and the Cebu Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development, and Human Dignity held on 14-16 March 2006 to support the development of the Yogyakarta International Center for Religious and Cultural Cooperation and the other initiatives included in the Cebu Declaration.

-We will work for the inclusion of values-based interfaith education in the curriculum at all levels, including post-graduate studies, the appropriate training and preparation of teaching professionals, the use of experiential and holistic teaching-learning methods, and the provision of quality resources, towards the goal of interfaith understanding and cooperation.

-We will undertake non-formal educational activities that will bring together youth and adults from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds.

-We support practical initiatives at the regional and national levels by governments, faith communities, and the media to enable and encourage the media to increase their contribution in the achievement of interfaith and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace, development and human dignity.

-We call for the development and provision of training for media managers, journalists and journalism students on religious and cultural diversity, in partnership with interfaith experts and national and international media organizations; and encourage the development and review of codes of conduct and standards for the exercise of media freedom with responsibility; and support the establishment and strengthening of processes of dialogue among media executives, journalism trainers and religious and interfaith leaders.

The participants and sponsors in the Cebu Dialogue, characterized by many languages, cultures and religions, share a conviction that Interfaith Cooperation plays an essential role in the promotion of peace, development, and human dignity and that the Cebu Dialogue, exemplified by the spirit of cooperation, understanding and friendship provided a robust platform for our collective future.

Cebu, Philippines
16 March 2006