



Contribution of Monsignor John Putzer, First Secretary
Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 8th Annual Interfaith Dialogue on
Faith, Multilateralism and Public Policy
Geneva, 10 February 2023

Dear friends,

At the outset, allow me to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Nikhil Seth, UN Assistant Secretary General and Executive Director of UNITAR; and to His Excellency Walid Khalid Obeidat, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Jordan to the United Nations in Geneva, as well as to Mr. Alex Mejia for organizing this Annual Interfaith Dialogue.

It is an honor and a privilege for me to join you at this 8th gathering of people of diverse faith traditions who share a common interest and conviction: that through sincere dialogue, the richness of our beliefs might have a positive impact on the world in which we live. Each of us knows, from personal experience, the value and importance of religion in our lives. This annual conference allows us to share that which is most important to us, in a spirit of trust and fraternity, so that we might learn from one another, help one another and grow together in mutual respect.

In a particular way, I believe the theme that was chosen for this panel discussion is both timely and important, *“Faith and Multilateralism”*. Indeed, our world is currently facing intersecting crises, including food insecurity, massive migration flows, health emergencies, numerous protracted conflicts, like the ongoing war in Ukraine, as well as climate change and natural disasters. In this last regard, my thoughts and prayers go to the victims of the terrible earthquake that took place this past Monday in Syria and Türkiye. My sincerest condolences to all those affected by this tragedy.

These global crises test the limits of the multilateral system and have *“clearly demonstrated that we cannot be saved alone and by ourselves: the great challenges of our time are all global.”*¹

Unfortunately, while what is needed is a renewal of collaboration and cooperation to address these challenges, all too frequently the discussions within the international organizations and UN system are “hijacked” by political and national

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 10 January 2022.

interests, reciprocal vetoes, accusations, manipulation and a lack of political will. As such, rather than seeking consensus through authentic dialogue, the operations of these institutions are blocked by increasing polarization amongst its members.

This is why Pope Francis has called for a renewal of the multilateral system. Earlier this year in his annual address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, the Pope said: *“The current conflict in Ukraine has made all the more evident the crisis that has long affected the multilateral system, which needs a profound rethinking if it is to respond adequately to the challenges of our time. This demands a reform of the bodies that allow it to function effectively, so that they can be truly representative of the needs and sensitivities of all peoples, and avoid procedures that give greater weight to some, to the detriment of others. It is not a matter of creating coalitions, but of providing opportunities for everyone to be partners in dialogue.”*²

Indeed, it is clear that the response of the multilateral system to the challenges we face today have been incomplete, untimely and insufficient. From inadequate responses to providing vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics during global health emergencies, to the lack of serious commitments regarding the reduction of greenhouse emissions, to the lagging commitment to finding solutions to address ongoing and future arms races, it is always the people in the most vulnerable situations that bear the brunt of these inadequacies.

How can we adequately address this crisis of multilateralism? What would render our efforts more effective in responding to the needs of our day?

Dear friends,

It is here where I believe faith can have a tremendous impact. Religious values are human values, and where faith traditions witness in an authentic fashion to their beliefs and principles, they can play an important and complementary role in addressing the deficiencies of the multilateral system.

As Pope Francis noted at the VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which took place in Kazakhstan this past September, *“Religion is not a problem, but part of the solution for a more harmonious life in society. The pursuit of transcendence and the sacred value of fraternity can inspire and illumine the decisions that need to be made amid the geopolitical, social, economic, ecological, but fundamentally spiritual crises that many modern institutions, including democracies, are presently experiencing, to the detriment of security and concord among peoples.*

² Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2023.

We need religion, in order to respond to the thirst for world peace and the thirst for the infinite that dwells in the heart of each man and woman.”³

An excellent example of how religious traditions can have a positive impact on the work of the multilateral system can be seen in the Document on Human Fraternity, jointly signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019. Amongst other things, the document reiterates, “*The firm conviction that authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, human fraternity and harmonious coexistence; to re-establish wisdom, justice and love; and to reawaken religious awareness among young people so that future generations may be protected from the realm of materialistic thinking and from dangerous policies of unbridled greed and indifference that are based on the law of force and not on the force of law;*”⁴

In this regard, the UN General Assembly, on 21 December 2020, adopted a Resolution which – inspired by the abovementioned Document on Human Fraternity – establishes 4 February as the International Day of Human Fraternity, inviting all Member States and other relevant organizations and stakeholders to observe this day by promoting peace, tolerance, inclusion, understanding and solidarity.

These annual Geneva Interfaith Dialogues are another wonderful example of how, through dialogue, reflection and mutual understanding, the deep riches of the various faith traditions can be promoted for the good of the international community.

Dear friends,

In conclusion, allow me to express the desire of Pope Francis, with which he closed the abovementioned annual address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, “*How wonderful it would be if, just once, we were to gather simply to thank the Lord Almighty for his constant blessings, without having to list all the tragic events plaguing our world. If I may quote once more the words of John XXIII, “we nonetheless remain hopeful that, by establishing contact with one another and by a policy of negotiation, nations will come to a better recognition of the natural ties that bind them together as men and women. We are hopeful, too, that they will come to a fairer realization of one of the cardinal duties deriving from our common nature: namely, that love, not fear, must dominate the relationships between individuals and between nations.”*”⁵

Thank you.

³ Pope Francis, Address at the Opening and Plenary Session of the *VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions*, 14 September 2022.

⁴ Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, 4 February 2019.

⁵ Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2023.