

**An Appeal to The Religious Peoples
of The World and to All Men of Good Will**

*By Dr. Ralph David Abernathy**

My brothers and sisters united in faith and humanity:

It is almost three years now since representatives of major religions of the world gathered in New Delhi, and shortly thereafter in Kyoto, to plan this unprecedented World Conference on Religion and Peace.

As a member of an inter-faith, world-wide peace mission at that time, I was privileged to attend the meetings in New Delhi and Kyoto; and I am honored to be with you today in Kyoto.

Religious people, and people who believe in the value and dignity of every man and woman and child, together represent the overwhelming majority of the people of the world. But we are confused, and divided, and silent majority.

Religious people, and men of goodwill, share in common a belief that there is a system of values greater than man's selfish ambitions, and that love ought to be the rule of human relations. Religious people, and men of goodwill in the world today, are sickened of a cruel, and senseless and immoral war in Viet Nam, and the suffering and threat of war in the Middle East, we do not know how to cope with these tragedies.

Religious people, and men of goodwill all over the world today, recognize that poverty blights the minds and bodies of untold

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millions of men, women, babies and children.

Religious people, and men of goodwill, know that racism still lurks deep in most of the world, poisoning the very wells of goodwill and mutual trust from which the world must drink, and drink deeply if it is to survive.

Religious people, and men of goodwill, know that fear is destructive, and that fear leads to hate, and hate to violence, and violence to repression, and persecution.

Religious people, and men of goodwill, know that war is not the road to reconciliation among brothers, and that the selfish pursuit of national interest destroys the chance of a world community of brotherhood and sisterhood.

Why is it that the religious people, and the men of goodwill who are the large majority, have so little influence in the world today?

Because we are timid, and afraid of each other. Because we have let ancient and outworn divisions keep us from working together. Because we have not joined together to let the flame of our religious faith outshine the works of evil and selfishness.

Our division, our timidity, and our silence have left the mighty forces of racism, poverty and war unchallenged. Our silence has been paid for by the suffering of millions, for whom we should have been the advocate, the friend and the spokesman.

The religious people of the world have been too long divided, too timid about their faith, too unsure of their mission of peace and reconciliation among all men. The religious people of the world, and the non-religious people of good will, have been silent too long, and their silence has worked against the welfare of every man, woman, child and baby-even every person yet

unborn--and I say that the time for silence is past!

For many hundreds of years the poor and exploited peoples of the world have endured their misery nearly in silence. Only rarely have voices been raised on their behalf by spokesmen who dared the risk of standing against the self-satisfaction, smugness and self-indulgence of those whose comfort was guaranteed by the *status quo*.

Always the poor and oppressed have been repressed by police and military violence, by hunger and sickness, by illiteracy and ignorance, by artificially imposed barriers of racial prejudice and nationalism.

The poor and oppressed have for centuries been the victims of police and military violence, and of illegal terror and torture to intimidate the people and destroy their leaders.

For centuries the worldly-wise have mocked the foolishness of those who opposed all war and who saw violence as the father of injustice, hate, fear and more violence. But today mankind must free itself by a mighty act of soul-force from the burdens of the past.

Why have the religious peoples of the world been silent? Partly, no doubt, because we have been apart. Now we are together. But also perhaps partly because we have lost hope. Silence with hope is one thing, but silence without hope destroys the spirit of men and women. It is our task today to re-establish hope in the heart of mankind.

Silence is a luxury that we cannot afford. Millions of babies die of hunger, while vast amounts of food are wasted. We must not be silent! People starve while big industry spends billions on goods that are built for the privileged. We must not be silent!

Millions of poor and doomed to short lives of struggle without hope while the major nations of the world spend billions on horrible new chemical, biological and atomic weapons of destruction. We must not be silent!

Traditionally, war has been man's cruelty to man. Modern war is man's unspeakable, highly organized and technically developed bestiality visited upon women and children and other innocent people. Tomorrow's war may be man's ugly act of convulsive and compulsive suicide. We must not be silent!

Racism keeps people fearful of each other, nurtures hate rather than love, competition rather than cooperation. Today the white millions of the world, who are generally the relatively rich in the world, nurture fear of the poor—who are generally yellow, or brown, or black. And the poor people and people of color in the world harbor resentment against the insensitivity--and the arrogance--and the selfishness of the white peoples. Only religion can overcome this deep division, and heal the community of mankind! Only the power of religion can cast out the devil of racism from the hearts of people and societies, and bring in the day of brotherhood! We must not be silent!

The rich in the world harden their hearts against the poor, and tend to grasp their goods and their wealth to them, while the poor suffer. Only by sharing can men be set free from poverty, and if some men must become less rich so all men can eat, well, the greatest compensation for selfish materialism that I know is the love that the poor can give to those who care and who are willing to suffer a little to help.

We all know this, that our task is to see that the struggle against war must also be part of a united struggle against poverty and

racism, in all the world.

The question is, what can we, religious leaders assembled from all over the world, do about it? How can we become effective agents of building brotherhood, how can we be peace-makers, how can we struggle against poverty, how can we combine to remove the demon of racism from the heart of every person and from the culture and institutions of every society?

The task is great, and cannot be done in one step, or achieved by one decision. But we must begin where we are, and take the first step, conscious of the tremendous task and burdens and the sacrifice and suffering that may be ours, if we undertake this task.

The first step for us, I believe, is to declare to the world --to the whole world--by every means at our disposal--that there is hope! That racism, poverty and war *can* be overcome, and a new and better tomorrow can be ours.

I say this because I believe that despair and disillusionment are major impediments to social, economic and political change today. Hopelessness has stopped up the springs of creativity, and doubt has dammed up the river of loving brotherhood.

It is religion that can overcome our barriers, that can cause our timid tongues to speak, that can give new hope to our fainting hearts, and fresh ideas to our tired and confused minds.

There is a power that sets men free from age-old prejudices, and we have met here and discovered that the love of God, which is the source of all true religion, also transcends and brings together all who are truly human. We have loved each other here, and in our love we have found nurture for our souls and hope for our hearts.

As I said earlier, it is time, my brothers and sisters, for a mighty act of soul-force, to raise up before all men the ancient dreams of brotherhood and justice. We must produce brave words, but more than brave words, we must produce mighty acts.

I respectfully submit to you today that we, as representatives of the major religions of the world, begin taking the following steps toward a world of genuine peace:

1) That, within one year, we assemble at the seat of the United Nations, and there, before the eyes of the world, we call upon political leaders to work with us for peace with justice. For there can be no peace without justice. And justice means the absence of war, poverty, and racism.

2) That we constantly speak out against genocide wherever it exists, and take vigorous and legitimate protest actions against genocide and racism. And when I speak of genocide, I refer not only to the open, brutal slaughter of people of color. I speak also of subtle, day-by-day, racist starvation and exploitation--the kind of genocide described by the United Nations Charter itself: the calculated destruction or oppression of a race of people, in whole or in part.

3) That we counsel the peoples of color in the world not to engage in racist warfare against each other; and that we firmly insist to the white peoples of the world that they must reject the ungodly notion of skin privilege.

4) That we strengthen and expand our international ties among the religions of the world, making it clear to political and military leaders that religious people and those of goodwill can no longer tolerate destruction, oppression and racism.

5) That we warn our own religious organizations that, in

order to survive as religions, they must commit themselves in words and deeds--including financial resources and activist positions against racism, poverty and war.

6) That we teach the world's peoples and their leaders to share among all peoples not only the richness of our various faiths, but also the richness of material resources.

What I am really trying to say is that, if existing governments the world over abdicate their responsibilities for building peace with justice, then it is our sacred duty to lead the religions of the world toward the establishment of peace with justice.

And what I am really calling for today is no less than the beginning of a nonviolent world revolution . . . a revolution that crosses national boundaries . . . a revolution that unites all religious peoples and men of goodwill . . . a revolution to renounce war, to end poverty, to abolish racism . . . a revolution which will permit men to live up to all the great religions in a world of sharing, of brotherhood, of peace.

So I say to you today, that in this nonviolent world-wide revolution, let a newly aroused peace movement join with the poor and oppressed in every country Let a Poor People's Campaign emerge in every land Let a Resurrection City, where the poor take land belonging to the people in order to build a community of equality and sharing, arise up everywhere just as two Resurrection Cities recently appeared in Chile Let nonviolent resistance and struggle grow, following the traditions of a Gandhi in India, a Martin Luther King, Jr. in America, a Dom Helder Camara in Brazil Yes, let the civil rights movement, the human rights movement, the peace movement spread to every continent and nation.

As leaders of religions, we must work together in this revolution, putting aside the comparatively minor differences over doctrine. We can have unity without unanimity. We can have diversity without division. And eventually, we can have a world community without the scourge of racial hate and oppression, the suffering of poverty, the madness of war.