



Zanzibar Tanzania / Organizers: United Evangelical Mission, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania Eastern and Coastal Diocese, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania North Western Diocese, ZANZIC, The Catholic Diocese of Zanzibar, Waqf and Trust Commission of Zanzibar, The Mufti's Office of Zanzibar

MESSAGE OF PEACE FOR PEOPLE OF ALL FAITHS

Preamble: Peace Among the People

Message from the Interfaith Conference, hosted by the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC) and the United Evangelical Mission from 20 – 23 September 2019 in Zanzibar.

We, seventy participants from eleven countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe, representing Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist religious communities, have gathered from 20 – 23 September 2019 in Zanzibar. We have experienced the hospitality of the local people. We have encountered the traces of different religious traditions lived over centuries, and we have seen these same traces in the contemporary interfaith activities initiated by our hosts from the Interfaith Centre.

We have been encouraged in our interfaith journey for peace by the Second Vice President Ambassador Seif Ali Iddi, who represented the Government of Zanzibar in the opening session.

From our different contexts, we have shared our experiences with the various threats that extremism and violence pose to our societies, and we have discussed how we can jointly act to build peaceful and inclusive communities in this world. We have also shared the message from this conference with the public in a march for peace.

1. The “Zanzibar spirit” of learning together

We have learned that people of different faiths – Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and local religions – have coexisted peacefully in Zanzibar for at least five hundred years. They support one another in times of joy and sorrow. The government recognizes and grants freedom of worship to people of all religions. The intra- and interfaith dialogues here are a good example of pluralistic cooperation that can be used elsewhere to promote peace among people of different religions. Another good example is the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre, which offers a diploma in interfaith education and conducts interfaith seminars on peaceful coexistence and on entrepreneurship for women and youth. We commit ourselves to promote such interfaith dialogues and joint social actions for the pursuit of peace and development.



Peace among the People –
Interreligious Action for Peace and Inclusive Communities



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2. Our common belief in unity

Though we are people of different faiths, together we believe that God (and *dhamma*, in Buddhism) unites us and transcends all that may separate us from each other. This higher power calls us and empowers us to overcome violence together and to live out the potential for peace in our respective religions, nurturing a society without exclusion.

We have shared, on one hand, stories of religious communities using violence against others, and on the other hand, stories of religious communities protecting each other from the violent attacks of religious extremists. We commit ourselves to make sure that the unity and solidarity among people of different religions is maintained through good relations, dialogues, seminars, consultations, and joint socio-economic actions to promote peace and alleviate poverty.

3. Our common position towards injustice

We realize that injustice is a universal experience in our times. We are aware that the followers of religion often are involved in fomenting injustice. However, as people of different religions, we strongly believe that the Almighty God is a God of justice. God imbues human beings with dignity. The various forms of injustice and violence that cause suffering to human beings and the rest of creation are neither the fate of the people nor the will of God. The injustices still prevalent in our present world include human rights violations such as slavery, human trafficking, forced labour, including child labour, and xenophobic attacks against migrants and refugees. These problems are largely due to poverty and exploitation. The root causes of these problems are systemic injustices fueled by the greed of people in power, who tend to manipulate others and exploit nature and other people for their own benefit. Religion is often used to justify injustice and to legitimize violent actions, making the problems even more complicated. In many instances, the injustice itself triggers the acts of radicalism.

As people of faith, we commit ourselves to work together and in cooperation with all people of goodwill, to overcome the various injustices that destroy communities and have the potential to extinguish life on this planet. One thing that many religions have in common is the teaching that each person is special in the eyes of the Creator. This doctrine needs to be underlined so that we may



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respect our fellow human beings as our brothers and sisters, whatever their ethnicity, culture, or religion. It must be cultivated in families, schools, places of worship, communities, the professional environment, and the public sphere, and should be reflected in the structure of the society. We people of faith commit to care for others and to share our resources with our fellow human beings and all of creation. We understand our special responsibility to children and youth.

4. Our common observation on conflict potential

We experience conflict of different forms in different parts of the world. We therefore believe that there is a need for just power-sharing among all communities, and a need to address the various religious agitations generated by the inequitable distribution of resources and by economic, social, and political marginalization. We commit ourselves to enlighten children and youth via the school system and through various forms of religious education on interfaith relations. We will also use the media to bring the interfaith message against radicalism to young people.

5. Our common call for peace

We have shared our impressive liberating experiences from Sri Lanka, where victims of religiously motivated violence were empowered to react with forgiving love instead of taking revenge. In a very existential way, they were able to relate their inner suffering and pain to their deep religious source of hope in God. This allowed them a healing process that included both professional trauma healing and an insistence on the legal accountability of the government. We have learned that the deepest source of our common call for peace is not only our affirmation of the moral values we have in common, but even more our experience in our respective religions of God's liberating power for healing and forgiveness.

Trusting in the reconciling, transformative, and encouraging power of God, together we commit ourselves:

- To discover and share these deep experiences of the liberating and reconciling power of God in our religions, and through this to strengthen and deepen our common call for peace and its impact on the life of the people.



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- To encourage people of different faiths to cross borders through encounter, dialogue, and bridge-building, and in so doing, to treat the religious convictions of others with respect and speak about each other in a positive and peacebuilding way.

6. Our common call for peaceful collaboration

God calls upon our religions to walk hand in hand and to work together as beacons of hope and peace, to establish networking structures and to continue our common interreligious journey for peace and inclusive communities. We commit ourselves to establish interfaith training centres where youth, clergy, and people of all faith can study each other's religions together. Platforms and activities for young people of different faiths need to be strengthened so that they can work together to establish networks of cooperation promoting peace and justice in the world.

We call upon all people of faith and goodwill to join us in our journey for peace and inclusive communities. May this "spirit of Zanzibar" spread through our communities and encourage us to proceed on our common journey together.