

Christian, Muslim leaders issue call to action for global peace

By Matthew Davies

Christian and Muslim leaders, gathering for a historic summit at Washington National Cathedral, have committed themselves to “appeal to government and community leaders to promote peace and reconciliation efforts worldwide.”

The March 1-3 summit culminated in a call to action and a two-hour public dialogue featuring 24 leaders from the Anglican, Shi’a, Sunni and Roman Catholic faith traditions.

They included Washington Bishop John Bryson Chane; Ayatollah Dr. Ahmad Iravani, president of the Center for the Study of Islam and the Middle East and research scholar at the Columbus School of Law in Washington, D.C.; Professor Dr. Ahmad Mohamed El Tayeb, president of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt; and Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome.

The leaders, who had spent the three-day summit meeting strategizing on how to use their influence to promote peace, acknowledged in their call to action that it comes at a time when the world is “threatened by the global economic crisis and inequitable distribution of resources, by humanitarian crises caused by natural disasters, food, water, and energy shortages, and climate change” and when “new and enduring political and religious conflicts are increasing violence at every level.”

In particular, the leaders highlighted the unresolved conflict in the Holy Land as being “the cause of permanent instability and dramatic violence imposed on persons and peoples of an entire region of the world.”

The Anglican Communion delegation included Clare Amos, director of theological studies in the Anglican Communion Office, London; Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem Suheil Dawani; Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon of Kaduna, Nigeria; and Bishop Pierre Whalon of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe. Two members of the American Jewish community attended the summit as observers. The Honorable Kjell Magne Bondevik, founder and president of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights and the former prime minister of Norway, also joined the Anglican delegation. Bondevik is an ordained priest in the Lutheran Church of Norway.



John Bryson Chane
(Anglican)



Ahmad Iravani
(Shi'a Muslim)



Ahmad Mohamed El Tayeb
(Sunni Muslim)



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Expressing “a firm conviction that believers must become active agents of concrete change, making the world a better place for all,” the leaders committed themselves and appealed to fellow believers to develop deeper understandings of their respective religious heritages and engage in practical interfaith programs at all levels.

They also committed to promoting religious freedom as an integral part of human rights; fostering education for peace-building in churches and mosques; confronting issues of unjust treatment, violence, and oppression of women and children in many sectors of society; joining with government and community leaders to examine and refine public attitudes, policies, media coverage, and practices based on discrimination against others; and rejecting and condemning attacks on sacred places or using them for armed conflict.

“The worship of God who demands serious moral purpose is at the very core of Christianity and Islam; therefore, religious leaders must cooperatively work with each other and the political leaders in their respective countries in response to these crises,” the leaders said, vowing to continue the process of dialogue initiated at the summit.

The Rev. Canon John L. Peterson, canon for global justice and reconciliation at the cathedral, had been instrumental in organizing the summit. “Now, more than ever, the global community continues to divide along lines of religion and culture,” he told those gathered at the cathedral. “Religious leaders of all faiths, especially within the Abrahamic traditions, must intentionally and aggressively work in collaboration to seek reconciliation within religious communities and nations that are in disharmony or in violent conflict with one another.”

Chane said he will leave the summit continuing to be “clear with those who have been given the authority to lead this country that as we engage in the challenges of the 21st century, we need extraordinary 21st century diplomacy, and that diplomacy can no longer be devoid of the voice of religious leaders since religion is the fault line in so many of the conflicts that really challenge the global community.”

Details of a follow-up summit, to which the leaders agreed, have yet to be announced. Further information may be found at www.nationalcathedral.org/learn/summit2010

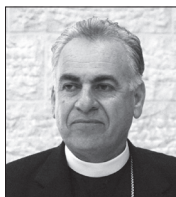
—Matthew Davies is editor and international correspondent of *Episcopal News Service*.



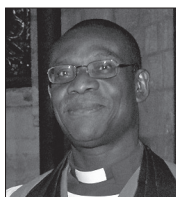
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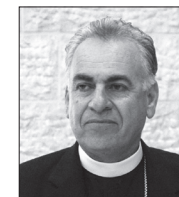
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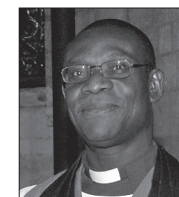
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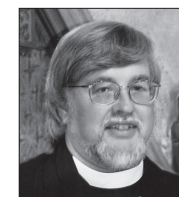
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