
Appeal of religious leaders to the world, “If you see wars around you, do not be resigned! Peoples long for peace.”

“If you see wars around you, do not be resigned! Peoples long for peace”. The request is contained in the Appeal for Peace signed by high-level representatives of the major world religions : Jews, Christians, Sunni and Shia Muslims, members of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. The document was delivered by children to ambassadors representing countries worldwide. “We thank all the friends of dialogue in the world and we say to them: courage! The future of the world depends on this: that we recognise ourselves as brothers and sisters. Peoples have a destiny as brothers and sisters on this earth.” The Appeal was read by an Afghan woman dressed in her country's traditional and colourful garments in the evocative setting of the Colosseum in Rome, a place steeped in history and memory, during the final ceremony of the international meeting “Peoples as Brothers, future Earth”, promoted in the “Spirit of Assisi” by the Community of Sant'Egidio. Images of destruction and poverty caused by conflicts in several areas of the world were screened during the speeches. Joining Pope Francis in imploring the gift of peace were, among others, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, political leaders including Angela Merkel, and government representatives. They paused for a minute's silence in remembrance of the victims of all wars. **“We have lived through a painful time of pandemic, not yet over: we have seen the fragility of a world”**, said **Andrea Riccardi**, founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio, *“we are at the threshold of a new world, determined to learn from the painful lessons of the history of women and men, determined to build it with everyone, especially the poor and the young”*, he remarked. **Angela Merkel**, Chancellor of the German Federal Republic, spoke words of encouragement. “The work of peace is an arduous and long journey, not always crowned with success.” “Despair is never an option,” she said, “we must never be resigned, nor become passive spectators before people suffering as a result of conflicts. Only those who seek peace shall find peace, no matter how slow and difficult the quest may be.” The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, **Ahmad Al-Tayyeb**, called on the international community to change pace to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines in the framework of the ongoing pandemic, and urged everyone to work towards “a collaborative approach and exchange of resources, and to prioritise the public interest over private interests.” **At the end of the final ceremony, all religious leaders present exchanged a fraternal embrace of peace.** The Pope with the Rabbi, representatives of Sunni Islam with Shia clerics, Christians from different Churches, all came together in a sincere embrace. This is the time for peace! “In the world there are many open wars – the religious leaders write in the Appeal - there are terrorist threats, there is serious violence.” “The use of force as an instrument of international politics is being rehabilitated.” *And while the path of conflict is pursued, oblivious to the horrors of past wars, “peoples suffer. The refugees of war and of the environmental crisis are suffering, the discarded, the weak, the defenceless. They are often offended and humiliated women, children without a childhood, abandoned old people.” Especially “the poor, so often invisible”, are “the first to invoke peace. Listening to them makes us better understand the folly of all conflicts and violence.”* The religious leaders call for disarmament (for “the proliferation of nuclear weapons is an incredible threat”) and for the respect of planet Earth. “The future –reads the Appeal - belongs to women and men who are in solidarity and to peoples who are brothers. May God help us to rebuild the common human family and to respect mother earth. In front of the Colosseum, symbol of greatness but also of suffering, let us reaffirm with the strength of faith that the name of God is peace.”