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DECLARATION OF CHRISTIAN INSPIRED ORGANISATIONS FOR THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

We international Christian inspired NGOs¹, working to defend and promote Human Rights, wish to recall our deep commitment to the fundamental values underlying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (UDHR).

The Declaration is the universal reference for men and women around the world who, being aware of their equal dignity as part of the human family, fight for the respect and dignity of their fellow brothers and sisters in order to live in peace and concord.

The Declaration is the universal reference for those who are vulnerable and whose rights are violated: it requires our commitment to create conditions that will make human rights better known, recognised, protected, respected and enforced worldwide.

Because the UDHR states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”, it calls upon each believer. The Declaration invites everyone to reflect upon his/her way to implement these fundamental principles in their spiritual and social dimension. As Christian organisations, we recognise that the UDHR is a reminder of our own responsibility as the Gospel teaches us to see in any other human being a person with his/her full dignity whatever his/her beliefs, his/her origin or his/her social status are.

We, the signatories of this declaration recognise that the enforcement of the UDHR, 60 years after its adoption, faces new challenges (the food and financial crises, climate change...) which require a new global governance based on the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.

Geneva, 10 December 2008.

¹ List of the signatories : ACISJF, Action de Carême/Fastenopfer, AIC, AMI, l'Arche, BICE, CIJOC-ICYCW, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, CRESCENDO, Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers), Franciscans International, FIAMC, FIDACA (Fédération Internationale des Associations Catholiques d'Aveugles), Institut de Politique Familiale (IFP), IIMA (Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice), MIAMSI, MIDADE, MIJARC, New Humanity, OIDEL, Pax Christi International, Pax Romana ICMICA, Points Coeur, SIGNIS, SSVP (Société de Saint-Vincent de Paul), UNIAPAC, VIDES (International Volunteerism Association for Women, Education, Development), Guillaume Fuchs, (FIHC Unum Omnes), Ernest König (ancien président de la COIC), Dominique Lemau de Talancé (ancien président de la COIC), Bertrand Loze

OPEN LETTER BY INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN NGOs TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- 1. On the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) the NGOs signing this letter wish to draw the attention of the international community in Geneva to the importance of reaffirming forcefully the universal character of all human rights.**
2. More than ever before it is essential to respect, “that grammar of dialogue which is the universal moral law written on human hearts”² which is a yearning for peace. Thus the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms in its Article 1 that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience ...”. Rationality, morality and freedom are the foundations of human dignity. This anthropology is similar to the Christian vision of humankind as John XXIII wrote: “Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature that is, endowed with intelligence and free will.”³
3. Yet Christianity does not claim any exclusiveness in this field; far from it, as it considers that the *Universal Declaration*, in line with natural law, codifies common cultural values and traditions, which are engraved in the hearts of any human being.
4. Cicero affirmed already that “nature has instilled in us the feeling for justice... and if following nature, as claimed the poet, nothing human is foreign to the person”, all would have equal respect for the law. For, it is through reason that nature has given the human being the law, which is nothing but reason seen through its rules and prohibitions.
5. We are motivated by the urgency facing the suffering of so many men, women and children whose rights are denied; our motivation is humanistic for depriving people of their rights “is an offence against dignity of the human being”⁴ and ultimately an offence to truth and thus to justice itself. Our intention is to contribute to the peace within and among peoples.

6. At this crucial moment in the history of humanity, we wish to reinforce the principles of universality of human rights. We herewith reaffirm the recent *Joint Declaration of the First Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum* held in Rome in November 2008.

1. Human life is a most precious gift of God to each person. It should therefore be preserved and honoured in all its stages.
2. Human dignity is derived from the fact that every human person is created by a loving God and has been endowed with the gifts of reason and free will, and therefore enabled to love God and others. On the firm basis of these principles, the person requires the respect of his or her original dignity and his or her human vocation. Therefore, he or she is entitled to full

² Benedictus PP. XVI : Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace – 1 January 2006

³ John XXIII “*Pacem in Terris*”, 1963

⁴ Benedictus PP.XVI : idem

recognition of his or her identity and freedom by individuals, communities and governments, supported by civil legislation that assures equal rights and full citizenship.

3. We affirm that God's creation of humanity has two aspects: the male and the female human person, and we commit ourselves jointly to ensuring that human dignity and respect are extended on an equal basis to both men and women.
4. Genuine love of neighbour implies respect of the person and her or his choices in matters of conscience and religion. It includes the right of individuals and communities to practice their religion in private and public.

Geneva 10 December 2008.

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