„We are a world in pieces. We need to be a world at peace.”[1]

Today the world is in a catastrophic state: Between 2007 and 2016, there was a 408 per cent increase in war dead, an 247 per cent increase in people killed by terrorism and a doubling of the number of refugees.[2] Conflicts continue to rage in many places such as the Ukraine, Syria, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, in the Holy Land, Myanmar, on the Korean Peninsula as well as between Sunni and Shiite groups. 70 per cent of the world population perceives their religious freedom to be severely restricted[3], more than 10 per cent of the global population has less than 1.90 US Dollars per day[4] and virtually all states are lagging behind their commitments to the Paris Agreement.[5]

Today’s challenges of conflict and extremism, violations of human rights, poverty and environmental threats, go hand in hand with a crisis of confidence in political and economic institutions. Even the concept of “trust” is being challenged and communication is increasingly manipulated and distorted for commercial or political reasons.

The Potential: Effective Action

Against this background, shared values are not the only reason why world religions unite to work together. Rather, their positive visions of peace and range of potential resources, including their enormous number of believers and followers, their spirituality, their ethical heritage and their extensive infrastructures, make them far more qualified than most other actors to effectively advocate for peace and the common good. Thus, interfaith action lies at the heart of the World Assembly: Action to resolve violent conflicts, promote inclusion and solidarity, support sustainable development and protect the environment. Interfaith action forms the basis for the Assembly and is its most important outcome at the same time.

Another achievement of the 10th World Assembly will be to bring together and enter into dialog with actors in Lindau across dividing lines: This entails listening to one another and

[1] UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres’ Tweet before the 2017 UN General Assembly
trying to understand others, even if you do not share their position. “We agree to disagree”, in other words “We agree that we have different opinions”, is a message and a cultural achievement in itself. In light of political, economic, cultural and developmental conflicts, the objective of the World Assembly of Religions for Peace is to support religious communities in fulfilling their responsibility. This dialog acts as a kind of “soft power”, which is based on the shared sense of responsibility, the joint development of trust, credibility and coordinated commitment.

The outstanding strength of Religions for Peace is that the organization adopts a “top down” approach. Both the local communities and religious leaders are championing the creation of peace across boundaries. Initiatives are being launched in order to establish coalitions that can address specific problems on the ground. By harnessing new and social media, they also act as catalysts particularly in multi-confessional contexts.

Together Against Radicalization and Escalation

The transformation of perceived life-worlds leads to fears and erodes social ties. The potential of inter-confessional dialog lies in its fundamental affinity with virtually all religious orientations. They work by transcending the present and imparting meaning. They provide stability in our changing world: Stability in faith and stability in the religious community. In our digital age, this stability, the necessity for imparting meaning and community building, is increasingly important but also more challenging, too.

This function of imparting meaning and building a community, is both inclusive and exclusive. In awareness of this, the Lindau dialog symbolizes an invitation for understanding beyond borders and differences. Speaking to one another means recognizing and respecting how other people are different from ourselves. It is an “antidote” against radicalization and escalation. By entering into this dialog, the world religions are proving their sense of responsibility both internally and externally.

Climate Change: An Existential Matter

Furthermore, the World Assembly invites its participants to reflect upon how our attitudes towards economic systems, political institutions and societies are to be assessed – and ultimately be improved – based on the question of what contribution they make to shared well-being and in the service of humanity, and to what extent they duly value and protect the environment above all. “Shared well-being” essentially lends expression to a “positive” understanding of peace, a recognition that peace is more than a mere absence of war and conflicts. A view voiced by each and every religious tradition in their own way.

Care for creation means giving meaning to the existence of each individual in its environment. A global discourse on sustainability must not only be pursued by elites, it also needs to include those at the local level. Initiatives emanating from inter-confessional dialog on sustainability
make it possible to activate the meaningful and community-forming functions of religions. The focus on transcendence lends religions strength when it comes to dealing with worldly matters. They thus set a counterpoint to the dominance of the present. Climate change illustrates how humanity’s basis of existence is at stake, and hence sustainable thinking and acting are called for. In this context, the World Assembly of RfP makes itself, but also the world, aware of this and calls for new ways of assuming responsibility.

**Religions As “Trustees of Knowledge” Against “Fake News”**

Imparting meaning and community building in times of “fake news” is more important than ever. Even though we may interpret facts differently, part of the responsibility of religions is to perform a trustee function for «knowledge about the world» and represent facts to the best of their knowledge and belief. That not only acts as protection against demagogy, as a “remedy” against an instrumentalisation of faith, but also contributes to a healthy social discourse, which can override ethnic, religious or ideological differences and establish “common sense”. This supports social coexistence. As a World Assembly, RfP highlights the necessity of understanding the task to not be the national well-being, but rather the shared well-being of the entire world. In this respect, religions boldly introduce their spiritual strength and ability, their trust and confidence.

**Women as Peacemakers**

The Women’s Assembly represents an important platform for reflection, discussion and mobilization in relation to the role of religious women in interfaith cooperation. It provides the ideal opportunity to establish and strengthen national, regional and global networks of religious women so as to transform conflicts, promote peace and advance sustainable development. Approx. 250 women in leading positions in their respective religious communities, female high-ranking representatives of the United Nations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as experts and scientists in the area of women and religion will come together at the Women’s Assembly. The aim is to promote partnerships between religious communities and representatives of international organizations and civil society.

**In Focus: Women in the Middle East and North Africa**

RfP sees an enormous potential for religious women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to build confidence and to bring about peace in the entire region. In order to further strengthen the role of women as peacemakers, the RfP is bringing together a group of eminent religious representatives from various traditions from the region and supporting them in their joint efforts to develop solidarity and assist refugees worldwide. In the run-up to the 10th World Assembly of RfP, this selected group will meet in Jordan to address the core concerns of the region and the special role adopted by women in this process. The meeting provides
the framework for an open and honest dialog, whose purpose is not only to identify challenges and the strategies to overcome them, but also to promote a sense of community between the women. Their experiences and successes will be presented on the second day of the 10th World Assembly in a special session entitled “MENA Women of Faith as Peacemakers”, so as to create understanding and a basis for future joint action.

Giving Strength to Young People

At the Youth Assembly, 100 youth representatives from the most important global religions will unite to illustrate the special role played by young people in the prevention of violence and to plan youth-led, interfaith advocacy groups and activism for peace in their respective regions and beyond. The youth representatives will be empowered to develop global, regional and national networks with the aim of transforming conflicts, promoting peace and advancing sustainable development and environmental protection.

Understanding the Past - Looking to the Future

The World Assembly serves the aim of examining the activities of RfP since the last World Assembly and deciding on future long-term plans and agendas of RfP. The General Assembly will also elect a new global council of 60 religious representatives from all continents and major religions as well as the new General Secretary of RfP.

The Role of Germany

The focus of the World Assembly in Lindau opens up a unique opportunity to perceive and harness interfaith dialog as a new foreign policy that is guided by a balance of “soft power” and other diplomatic forms of action. Germany is currently one of the most globally renowned advocates of multilateral approaches and has therefore adopted important, strategically relevant initiatives. The peace dialog of religions is a lever to forge coalitions. The combination of global coordination and local action can be harnessed to act sustainably. The new interface between domestic and foreign policy is a mirror image of the upheaval of the orders. Providing impetus and having an impact in this field of tension represents one of the challenges of our time. This challenge is to be addressed in Lindau.

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