

Asia-Africa Summit

Awakening of Global Compassionate Leadership

October 26-29, 2007

Dharma Drum Mountain, Taiwan

“If you are compassionate, you will have no enemies”

– Ven. Master Sheng Yen

As political and economic ties between Africa and Asia grow, it is important that the spiritual and religious communities from these two regions come to know each other. Both regions are experiencing a growing role in the world community and are facing important development issues that will help shape the future of their communities. The relationship formed between these two regions could determine in a significant way the character and quality of the development that takes place, and this will affect the stability of the regions and the whole world community.

This Asia-Africa Summit will bring together religious leaders and experts from various fields for a reflection on ways to generate greater global compassion, and on the role of compassion in transforming suffering and establishing human dignity. One aim will be to build greater collaboration among the religions by sharing understanding of the ways the practice of compassion can help shape our social, economic and political realities – and the role of spiritual leaders in guiding this process. It will explore how the cultivation of compassion can help guide the form and nature of development to ensure that it is in keeping with the cultural and spiritual values of local communities, and empowering people through sustainable development.

Peace and development go hand-in-hand. Without the basic necessities of life, and without a reasonably equitable distribution of resources, peace remains elusive. And as long as there is conflict, one cannot have development – adequate food and housing, access to healthcare and education, or a healthy environment. What can spiritual leaders offer on these two fronts? They have the vision and capacity to bring compassion to the discussion and efforts for peace and development. They have the ability to bring together communities and to help generate greater understanding of human unity and the values that bind us together as a human community. The role of the spiritual in peacebuilding and in guiding us toward an equitable, caring, environmental sound and sustainable form of development for the future is key. Religious leaders can help create the vision for this and work with their communities in the implementation of this goal.

For peace and an environmentally sound development to become a reality, compassion is needed. Can religious leaders from all traditions join together in the effort to generate greater compassion among leaders in government, business and religion so that the conflicts and deprivations of people can be addressed and real healing take place for those who are suffering. While religious communities throughout the years have provided great service to their followers, there is a pressing need to move beyond merely caring for one's own community and those around us to a more inclusive world vision – to the realization of our shared human values and our complete interdependence, and the appreciation of the cultural and spiritual integrity of others.

As Africa and Asia become stronger forces in the global community, there is concern over what will happen to long-held traditional values that have shaped their societies for millennia. How will globalization impact the traditional structures and mechanisms in these societies, including:

- the role of the elders
- traditional methods of peacemaking and healing
- ways of living in harmony with the environment
- the self sufficiency of rural communities
- village life centered around family farming
- the weakening of the links that pass down traditional knowledge and wisdom from one generation to the next

To explore how to maintain these key values within the context of globalization, the Summit will bring together some of the elders and traditional leaders from these two regions. Most importantly, the Summit will provide an opportunity for religious leaders from these two regions to hear the concerns of their counterparts from the other region, and to discuss what types of future exchanges and partnerships would be most useful.

The Eastern religious traditions – in particular Buddhism and Hinduism – have not thus far been key drivers of interfaith dialogue and activity. They have remained on the sidelines. With the rise of Asia, they will now become central to shaping the dialogue as it evolves to deeper levels of interchange. Hopefully, this will lead to a more inclusive worldview and greater appreciation of the diverse traditions that compose the world community. This call for an Asia-Africa Summit is the first such call from the Eastern faiths with the aim of expanding the interreligious arena and building understanding and partnership between Africa and Asia. There is much that

is shared between the cultures of Asia and Africa, and a common voice can be found.

Compassion can lead to new ways of being, where self-interest is not the primary factor. The underlying goal of this Summit is to help foster a new global awareness of the deeper ways in which compassion can guide human activity and provide the strength and wisdom needed in the face of many global challenges.