



*His Holiness Aram I Catholicos
of the Great House of Cilicia*

BEING OBEDIENT TO OUR COMMON CALLING

Message of

His Holiness Aram I

On the occasion of the Asia/Middle East Dialogue between Religions

12 - 14 November 2006

Armenian Catholicosate

Antelias, Lebanon

I greet you from Lebanon, a country that has once again risen from the ashes of wars. I greet you from a country that has provided hospitality to many religious communities, traditions and cultures. As part of the Middle East, Lebanon is the cradle of rich languages, cultures, and religions, and we have lived together through existential dialogue. Today, the Middle East, which represents a microcosm of the world's conflicts, is affected by the consequences of globalization, and we want to meet as religious leaders to reflect on these consequences and to affirm, and to place spirituality and moral values at the heart of dialogue.

The Middle East, which is the bridge between Asia, Europe and Africa, has, for centuries, facilitated passage and contact between these regions. At the same time, our religious traditions have been in conversation with Asia and Europe. Today, as religions are becoming more strongly involved in public life, we must dialogue with our neighbours on both continents. Talking to one's neighbours leads us through a process of first, listening to them, then, understanding them and, eventually, accepting them as they are. All of our religions call us to love our neighbour, and they speak of love and compassion as the highest moral value. Love grows through active dialogue based on justice; it leads us to respect the other, acknowledge the dignity of our neighbour and recognize the right to life in its fullness for all people. Justice, peace and reconciliation are the fruit of love. The ability to love and be compassionate is a spiritual act, and it is our common responsibility to reclaim our moral, ethical and spiritual values in order to build peace with justice.

Despite our long history and contact with the people in Asia, we in the Middle East have not sufficiently related to the religions born in Asia – Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and Taoism. We have not made an effort to understand their vision of this fundamental principle of "love your neighbour". Now that religions are becoming global because of population movements and migration, it is their responsibility to speak together and announce their common commitment to life-giving values through love and spirituality. Religious leaders should demonstrate to the world credible ways of meeting, staying together and responding together to their common calling.

It is with this deep spiritual conviction that we decided to organize this Middle East-Asia Dialogue in our spiritual centre, the Holy See of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon from 12-14 November 2004.

I pray to the Almighty that this first encounter will help us to start building communities of loving neighbours.

Aram I

Catholicos of Cilicia

3 October 2006