

**Concept for Peace Initiative of Middle East Religious Leaders,
In collaboration with the World Economic Forum and the
Millennium World Peace Summit
January 20-30, 2001**

What is clear from recent events in the Middle East is that hatred has sprung up again among the two parties and has led to continuing, or even increasing hostilities, and what we are seeking is for religious leaders to find some way to tell the adherents of their faith, as well as to others, how we can overcome this hatred and begin to see what we have in common.

This initiative would be a significant follow up of The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders that took place at the United Nations in August 2000. The achievement of that Summit was the commitment of religious leaders to work together in peacemaking and peacekeeping activities in regions of tension around the world. Over 1,200 religious leaders and their delegations, for a total of around 2200 people from over 100 countries participated in the World Peace Summit. One of the outcomes was the signing of a *Commitment to Global Peace* that condemns all violence, especially when perpetrated in the name of religion, and endorses respect for religious diversity. A long-term plan is now being developed by a Steering Committee for the establishment of a Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders for the United Nations. The function of this Council will be to work with the United Nations as well as with, political and business leaders to support and strengthen efforts to support and end conflicts.

The outbreak of violence in the Middle East just weeks after religious leaders had come together at the United Nations demonstrates the need to engage religious leaders in the peace process. The purpose of Jewish and Muslim religious leaders from the region will be to strengthen the political efforts and help in long-term healing of tensions between the two communities. Senior Muslim and Jewish leaders from the region had attended the World Peace Summit and have recently indicated their support of and willingness to attend such a meeting in Davos. Among these leaders are Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, the Grand Mufti of Syria and Secretary General of the World Muslim League Abdullah Bin Abdullmussen Al-Turki. David Finn, Chairman of the Executive Council of the Millennium World Peace Summit, has kept UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan apprised of all ongoing developments and post-Summit initiatives, and as with the Summit itself, he has expressed his appreciation of support by the religious leaders for the UN.

This peace initiative would involve a series of ongoing meetings involving between 15 and 20 prominent religious leaders from the Middle East and possibly a few religious leaders from outside the region and from other religious traditions, who would help provide a neutral platform for the discussions. The discussions would focus on long-term healing. The goal is to foster an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidentiality, so that a foundation can be established for building relationships between the religious leadership of the two communities. It is also hoped that specific initiatives would come out of the meeting, including the development of joint projects for the region that the leading Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious figures from the region can back. The group would decide whether the proceeding will be kept totally private or whether an appeal could be issued - such as one asking for respect for all sacred places. The first meeting is scheduled to take place in closed sessions during the World Economic Forum in Davos, January 27-30, 2001.

The concluding plenary session of the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 30, will be on the subject: *World's Religions: Where Are The Peacemakers?* This session will include some of the participants from the two-day closed sessions. They will address the role of religious leaders as peacemakers in different areas of conflict and tension, not only in the Middle East but also Ireland, Asia and Africa, and the role of religious and spiritual leaders in the global community.