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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM'S INFLUENCE ON PEACE AND SECURITY

**CHALLENGES TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, PEACE & SECURITY AND
THE NEED FOR COORDINATION OF THE 'DIALOGUE FIVE' ACTORS**

**BASED ON THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL SUMMIT ON «RELIGION, PEACE
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Association internationale
POUR LA DÉFENSE DE LA LIBERTÉ RELIGIEUSE
International Association
FOR THE DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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Those Who Manipulate Religion, As Well As Morality, Seek to Justify Positions of Power



Dr. Jose Miguel Serrano Ruiz-Calderón Photo ©AIDLR

At a United Nations Summit, in the presence of government representatives, we must insist that threats to security in the name of religion and the violation of freedom to practise religion precisely with real or purported religious pretexts have as their main agents States that are members of the UN and ought to be compelled by the resolutions of the Security Council and other organisations.

That a terrorist attack on a train costing a few thousand euros should be carried out by a 'radical organisation' is credible. On the contrary, maintaining genocidal practices across territories for years of intense combat

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with heavy weaponry is not. Nobody but States can sustain those conflicts. Often they spread because of the disappearance of a State as a result of a second party's manoeuvring, such as in the case of Libya. Although they use sectarian violence, the underlying reasons are strategic — one State against another —, economic — for instance, the passage of oil — or the self-portrayal as the protector — 'Protector of the believers' — of a certain minority or the majority in a State seeking a purely state objective.

In this sense, it would be ironic, if not hypocritical, that those who fail to do their job of keeping peace among States, of protecting the displaced, of imposing sanctions on the armed interference in third countries, should devote themselves, under the excuse of achieving peace or security, to monitoring the contents of sermons or even the dogmatic tenets of religions, or should seek to transfer to religious leaders responsibilities that do not correspond to them.

Indeed, in general, and no doubt with many exceptions, religious leaders use a less hypocritical language than States that, for instance, allow the funding of suiting terrorist groups while condemning terrorism. In this sense, it is no wonder that some should describe terrorism as 'someone else's violence.'

Taking perspective, we must remember, on the other hand, that a large part of attacks against religious liberty was carried out in the name not of religion, but of secularism. All eastern Europe, a large part of Asia and, let it be said, a part of western Europe have seen the enforcement of practices against the free exercise of religion. According to certain secularist positions, it must be remembered, organised religion itself is fanatical and should be prevented. I felt outraged yesterday⁸⁸ when I heard that, for someone, religious freedom excluded the possibility of living religion communally.

In this sense, we must insist that religious liberty cannot consist of a practice adapted to politically correct behaviour, of an external control system that impedes free expression and practice generally imposed by those who do not understand the value of transcendence for a large part of mankind.

Following such a path would lead to an ideological reading of the problem and its solutions. This would increase the gap between party

88 Reference at the first day of the Global Summit on 23 November 2016

lines and what many people feel and live. In addition, it would exacerbate a problem we have not dealt with, but which underlies all violence in the name of religion. Indeed, in our experience, religious leaders' appeals to protest against certain mindsets — and such appeals are most often heeded — stumble over the problem that a large portion of radicalism comes from the fact that denominational leaders have lost authority within their creed, precisely as soon as they are perceived as mere agents of an imaginary or real foe. Only an accurate, realistic analysis by the denominational members themselves can lead to the recovery of moral authority.

My last point concerns a course of action that must be adopted by everyone that, like us, rejects the use of religious convictions as a mean to foster violence, normally in order to achieve situations of power.

Those of us convinced that, most often, those who manipulate religion, as well as morality, seek to justify positions of power, must realize — if I am allowed to use this Nietzschean approach — the 'genealogy' of that manipulation. We must devote our best efforts to show this manipulation in each concrete example, circulating names, presenting processes, denouncing distortions of texts or traditions and exposing the personal advantages that the violent receive. Obviously, this labour can be carried out by any intelligent person, but it is more effective, it succeeds in better capturing nuances, if it is carried out from within each confession. A Christian, a Muslim or a Jew engaged in this work within their own confession can effectively and credibly identify manipulations. Of course, we cannot forget that such a person will face criticism, incomprehension and will even put their own survival at risk. It is a hard, intelligent and risky work. And to bring it to fruition, they must have the prestige of a witness of true religiosity, not the label of 'tamer' of religions.