

**THE MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS ARAM I**  
**ADDRESSED TO THE INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE**  
**ORGANIZED BY THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

3–5 July 2006, Moscow

I would like to express my warm thanks to His Holiness Alexy II, for inviting me to this important gathering of high ranking representatives of the living faiths of the world. Due to my prior commitments, as head of church, it was not possible to me to be in person with you. Therefore, I wanted, through my representatives, His Grace Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian, the Prelate of the Armenian Community in Tehran, Iran, and His Grace Bishop Nareg Alemezian, the Ecumenical Officer of our Catholicosate, to share with you briefly a few perspectives and concerns pertaining to inter-religious dialogue and collaboration.

Relations, collaboration and dialogue among religions have been, on a smaller or larger scale, permanent features in the history of religions. Today, aggressive globalization and its implications, the increasing pace of religious fundamentalism and its destructive repercussions, and intensifying secularism and its dominant forces and values have created a global situation marked by ambiguities and uncertainties, anxieties and polarization, progress and fear, violence and insecurity. Vis-a-vis this alarming situation, I firmly believe that dialogue between religions is a necessity. Further, it is my deep conviction that religions should move beyond dialogue by establishing close collaboration in respect to a multitude of issues and areas touching the daily life of communities and societies.

It is with this perception and conviction that I would like to highlight a few challenges that need to be addressed by all religions together.

1.- Living together as a community. Human beings cannot live in isolation. Community is a human and social necessity; it is also a theological and spiritual necessity. Living as community is, according to Christian theology, both a gift of God and a call. Hence, it has clear implications and it requires firm commitments. Mutuality, in all spheres and at all levels of community life, is a precondition for community building. Mutual responsibility and accountability are essential aspects of a healthy community. Equality and coherence are characteristic marks of a peaceful community. The decay of such values would cause community to become disintegrate. More than at any other time, at this point in the history of humanity when forces of globalization are destroying community, religions must work together for community-building.

2.- Community building implies mutual trust. Indeed, mutual trust is the strong foundation of a family, of an organization and of the community. Where there is no mutual trust, tension, confrontation and violence will prevail. Where there is no mutual trust, the evil forces will establish their dominance. Where is no mutual trust, progress will be overwhelmed by stagnation. Together, religions must take the sorts of initiatives, embark on the kinds of processes, and engage together in common actions by which we can deepen mutual trust among the followers of religions.

3.- Integration is another critical matter that religions are called to grapple with seriously. I do not believe that cultures, religions, nations or civilizations will endorse any policy, program or process aimed at assimilation. We are all deeply attached to our identities. Identity is a source of enrichment, continuity and creativity. But it is vitally important that our identities interact creatively. When identities live in isolation and in a self-contained existence, they generate intolerance and violence. Integration is not loss of identity; on the contrary, it enriches one's identity in dialogical interplay with the other identities. In this globalized world, where identities are in constant danger of being dominated by mono-identity, the religions are challenged to work together for the kind of community in which identities are not marginalized, but are in creative interaction based on common values.

4.- Building community together means accepting each other the way we are and respecting our differences, our respective values, traditions and belief systems. In fact, for centuries, the differences became the tangible and visible expression of identity and, at the same time, a source of conflicts. We must transcend this ambiguous perception of

differences and make them a source of progress and creativity for community-building. We are created by God the way we are; our differences are not human made; what comes from God is for the good of humanity. Therefore, we must preserve and enhance our diversities, respecting at the same time the otherness of our fellow human beings.

5.- And finally, community-building must take place on the basis of common moral values. Indeed, the marginalization of moral values is one of the acute concerns that we face today in all parts of the world. Economically, politically, socially and ecologically sustainable communities can be build only on the firm basis of moral values. We cannot, as religions, remain silent and indifference in view of the decay of moral values in our families, in our public institutions, and in our political systems. Human rights and democratic values, systems and processes must be undergirded by moral values. Religions have a pivotal role to play in this area.

In order to achieve such a colossal objective, we must cooperate with all players of civil society. Religion cannot be politicized; religion should not identify itself with any political structure or ideology. On the other hand, religion cannot be apolitical; religion has a tremendous responsibility in human societies. Therefore, in my judgment, there should be a close partnership between religion and politics; a partnership where the specificity of the religion's role, which we call in our Christian theological vocabulary prophetic role, must be preserved; a partnership which should aim at combating the evil forces in all their forms and expressions; a partnership which compels all partners to strive for a human community underpinned by peace with justice and reconciliation.

May God bless you in your deliberations and actions.

**ARAM I  
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA**

*July 3, 2006  
Antelias, Lebanon*