

Universal Peace Federation
Summit 2022 and Leadership Conference
Special Plenary: Universal Rights and Freedom of Religion
August 12, 2022

Declaration on the Universal Value of Religious Freedom

We, participants in the Summit 2022 and Leadership Conference sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation, convened on August 11-15, 2022, in Seoul, Korea, and dedicated to the theme “Toward Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Toward a World Culture of Peace,” submit the following declaration in order to underscore and affirm the essential importance of universal human rights and religious freedom at a time when many believers of the world’s religions, both major religions and minority religions, face persecution, intolerance, discrimination, and violence in many countries around the world.

Acknowledging the “Peace Charter” which was affirmed in our Opening Plenary, calling for building a heavenly unified Korea, a world culture of peace, a world of interdependence, mutual prosperity and universal values, and one universal human family under one God; and,

Understanding that the freedoms of religion, belief, conscience, and speech are fundamental rights that derive necessarily from recognition of the dignity of each human being; and,

Recognizing that violations of religious freedom are carried out at times by governments and at other times by the general public, even in countries where freedom of religion is enshrined in law; and,

Acknowledging the billions of religious believers around the world who identify themselves in diverse ways as Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Sikhs, Jains, Shintoists, and followers of many other traditions, including indigenous traditions and many smaller or newer religions; and,

Noting that believers around the world are national citizens in good standing who are entitled to human security and the protections of the rule of law and the rights enumerated in national constitutions; and,

Recognizing that freedom of religion is recognized in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 18 (1): "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom ... either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching"; and,

Acknowledging that the human right to religious freedom is stated clearly in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirms that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”; and,

Respecting the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted in 1966 by 173 member states of the United Nations General Assembly, which respects freedom of religion; and,

Appreciating that the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has appointed a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to identify violations of religious freedom and to recommend correction of such violations; and,

Knowing that many national constitutions—including the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution—affirm religious freedom as a fundamental right of all citizens, a right that is to be protected as necessary for human dignity, good governance, and rule of law; and,

Noting that violations of religion may come not only from governments but also from the general public and even from other believers who, out of ignorance or malice, seek to suppress or punish members of religions who hold beliefs with which they disagree; and,

Seeking a world where prejudice, bigotry, hate and violence toward believers have no place; and,

Seeking to protect believers who may be vulnerable to victimization by powerful forces,

we hereby resolve:

To encourage all peoples, all multilateral organizations, and all governments to uplift and protect the right to religious freedom of each and every individual;

To educate religious believers in all religions not only to practice tolerance and mutual respect toward the believers of other religious traditions but also to affirm the absolute freedom of religion of all people;

To call upon both persons and governments that may be secular or non-religious to respect and affirm the rights of each individual to follow their conscience in matters of faith and belief;

To reject the persecution of religious believers, including members of minority traditions or new religious movements;

To avoid the use of any language or terminology, by governments, the media and the general public, that demeans, mocks, ridicules, disrespects or slanders either the beliefs or the members of a particular religion;

To educate the youth in our homes, our classrooms and our places of worship to be respectful of people of all faiths;

To appeal to governments to live up to their constitutions and laws in protecting their citizens from prejudice, discrimination, and violence that target others because of their religious beliefs.

In conclusion, we call on all people throughout the world to uphold the right to religious freedom and to stand firm against all forms of religious intolerance, prejudice, slander and hate.

Affirmed this day, August 12, 2022, in Seoul, Korea