

## United Religions Initiative

The United Religions Initiative (URI) is a growing global community dedicated to promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, ending religiously motivated violence and creating cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

Working on all continents and across continents, people from different religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions are creating unprecedented levels of enduring global cooperation. Today, at its birth, people's hopes are rising with visions of a better world. It is a world where the values and teachings of the great wisdom traditions guide people's service, where people respect one another's beliefs, and where the resourcefulness and passion of people working together bring healing and a more hopeful future to the Earth community. The URI, in time, aspires to have the visibility and stature of the United Nations.

Since June 1996 thousands of people have shared their visions and worked together to create the URI. It is an organization for global good rooted in shared spiritual values. People from many different cultures and perspectives have worked to create an organization that is inclusive, non-hierarchical and de-centralized; one that enhances cooperation, autonomy and individual opportunity. This co-creative work offered by people of many cultures has produced a unique organization composed of self-organizing groups which operate locally and are connected globally.

### URI Charter

The URI's Charter has been spoken into being by a myriad of voices from around the world. Its essential spirit, values and vision are expressed in the Preamble, Purpose and Principles. Taken together, they inspire, ground and guide all URI activity. The Charter includes:

**Preamble** - the call that inspires us to create the URI now and continue to create it everyday;

**Purpose** - the statement that draws us together in common cause;

**Principles** - the fundamental beliefs that guide our structure, decisions and content;

**Organization design** - the way we organize to enhance cooperation and magnify spirit;

**Guidelines for Action** - an action agenda to inspire and guide our worldwide URI community.

The global URI organization will be born in June 2000. You are warmly invited to participate in the birth and the growth of the URI and become part of this extraordinary force for good in the world. This Charter is your invitation to participate in its on-going creation. Welcome!

### THE PREAMBLE, PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

#### Preamble

We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

We respect the uniqueness of each tradition, and differences of practice or belief.

We value voices that respect others, and believe that sharing our values and wisdom can lead us to act for the good of all.

We believe that our religious, spiritual lives, rather than dividing us, guide us to build community and respect for one another.

Therefore, as interdependent people rooted in our traditions, we now unite for the benefit of our Earth community.

We unite to build cultures of peace and justice.

We unite to heal and protect the Earth.

We unite to build safe places for conflict resolution, healing and reconciliation.

We unite to support freedom of religion and spiritual expression, and the rights of all individuals and peoples as set forth in international law.

We unite in responsible cooperative action to bring the wisdom and values of our religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions to bear on the economic, environmental, political and social challenges facing our Earth community.

We unite to provide a global opportunity for participation by all people, especially by those whose voices are not often heard.

We unite to celebrate the joy of blessings and the light of wisdom in both movement and stillness.

We unite to use our combined resources only for nonviolent, compassionate action, to awaken to our deepest truths, and to manifest love and justice among all life in our Earth community.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

## **Principles**

1. The URI is a bridge-building organization, not a religion.
2. We respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression and indigenous tradition.
3. We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.
4. We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their own tradition.
5. We listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust.
6. We give and receive hospitality.
7. We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate.
8. We practice equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI.
9. We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.
10. We act from sound ecological practices to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations.
11. We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts.
12. We welcome as members all individuals, organizations and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
13. We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all the relevant and affected parties.

14. We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
15. Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any.
16. We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
17. We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part, and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts.
18. We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information.
19. We are committed to organizational learning and adaptation.
20. We honor the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Articles, Bylaws and related documents in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles, and the spirit of the United Religions Initiative.
21. Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytized.

## **ORGANIZATION DESIGN**

The URI is an organization where people act from their deepest values and claim their right and responsibility to do extraordinary things to serve interfaith cooperation on a local and a global level. The URI is made up of groups of people all over the world who take many different kinds of actions to serve a common purpose.

Individuals, associations or organizations seeking membership in the URI shall create a Cooperation Circle (CC) or join an existing Cooperation Circle. Groups are called Cooperation Circles because they are created by people who come together to initiate acts of interfaith cooperation. Every URI Circle determines its own unique purpose, membership, and ways of making decisions that are relevant and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles. If a Cooperation Circle chooses to coordinate its efforts with other Cooperation Circles, it may decide to form a Multiple Cooperation Circle (MCC). If two or more Multiple Cooperation Circles wish to coordinate efforts they may form a Multi-Multiple Cooperation Circle (MMCC). See diagram on page 8.

To provide initial stability and interfaith diversity, Cooperation Circles must have at least seven (7) members who represent at least three (3) different religions, spiritual expressions or indigenous traditions.

### **Rights of Members**

Each **URI Cooperation Circle** has the right:

to organize in any manner and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles; to determine its own process of governance and decision-making that is in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles; to choose to combine with or join any other URI Circles; to participate in the selection of Trustees to serve on the Global Council; to use the name "United Religions Initiative" and its related names, abbreviations, logos, and images so long as they are used in furtherance of and in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose

and Principles of the URI; to review and accept, on behalf of the URI, applications for membership from individuals, organizations and associations seeking to join in pursuit of the Purpose.

### **Responsibilities of Members**

Each **URI Cooperation Circle** accepts responsibility:

to act in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles; to determine its own process of governance and decision-making that is in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles; to take actions to encourage and ensure that its own members act in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles; to actively use its best efforts to achieve the Purpose in accordance with the Principles; to adhere to the by-laws and operating procedures as they evolve in the life of the URI; to communicate best practices and stories and highlights of activities with other parts of the URI; to develop financial resources to meet its own needs; to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other Circles; to pay any dues and/or offer such appropriate contribution as the Global Council may establish; to keep accurate and current records of its members, financial transactions and activities; to indemnify and hold the Trustees, the United Religions Initiative, its employees and representatives, harmless from any liabilities arising out of or in any way caused by a URI Circle's breach of any provision of the Articles, by-laws or operating procedures.

### **Application for Membership**

Individuals, associations, and organizations may form their own Cooperation Circle and may apply for membership directly to the Global Council or to an existing MCC or MMCC.

### **Affiliates**

Individuals, associations and organizations who value and support the URI Preamble, Purpose and Principles may become Affiliates. Affiliates desire to be informed of and to participate in the work of the URI but do not desire to have the rights and responsibilities of membership. Affiliates may be asked to pay a fee and/or offer such appropriate contribution as the Global Council may establish in order to participate in URI activities and the communication network. Affiliates may apply to the Global Council or to URI Cooperation Circles.

### **The Global Council**

The purpose of the Global Council (GC) is to support the Membership in making real the vision and values of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles. The Global Council's central spirit is not one of control, but rather one of service informed by deep listening to the hopes and aspirations of the whole URI community. The Global Council will inspire and support the URI worldwide community in cooperative global action. It is envisioned that their deliberations will be tempered with tenderness for one another and for the Earth community. It is envisioned that their actions will reflect a yearning to help people of the URI fulfill their aspirations to be a positive force for peace, justice, and healing in the world.

The Global Council is responsible to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of the URI, Inc. The Global Council will accept eligible applicants for membership to the URI and manage the affairs of the URI, Inc.

### **Global Council Trustees**

The term Trustee signifies that trustees carry the trust for the URI world membership. The Trustees of the URI will be exemplars who manifest the vision and values of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles, and who will model leadership and service by their actions. They will have a deep commitment to serve the whole of the URI community.

### **Composition of the Global Council**

A maximum of twenty four (24) trustees elected by the world membership through elections in eight (8) regions. A maximum of twelve (12) trustees selected at-large by the GC to meet the need for greater diversity or a particular expertise. A maximum of three (3) trustees designated from among the members of a Transition Advisory Committee composed of members of the current URI Board of Directors. The Transition Advisory Committee will remain in place until June 2005. One (1) Trustee shall be the Founding Trustee to honor the unique role of the URI founder. One (1) Trustee shall be the Executive Trustee to ensure that the URI staff is represented.

### **Selection Process for Trustees**

To ensure that there are people from diverse geographic perspectives on the Global Council, 24 seats will be filled through an election process. URI Circles within a geographic region can select up to three (3) trustees from among the eight (8) regions listed below. The regions are: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, North America, and the Pacific. The eighth (8) region is a non-geographic region that includes URI Circles that are multi-regional in composition.

To ensure optimum diversity and to meet the need for particular expertise at the GC, twelve (12) seats will be filled by appointment by the GC.

Trustees are chosen every two years to serve on the GC.

Models of reflection, meditation and prayer which deepen understanding of the qualities of leadership which embody service and spiritual wisdom are encouraged as part of every governance selection process.

### **Global Assembly**

A Global Assembly of all the Members of the URI is planned to take place every two years at a place designated by the Global Council. The Global Assembly will be a vibrant gathering where people deepen their experience of living into the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles as a global community. The Global Assembly will magnify everyone's capacity to carry forward their dreams and initiatives, address visions of collective actions for service in the world, and give voice to collective hopes and aspirations. The Global Assembly will align strengths and call forth unprecedented cooperation. The Global Assembly will celebrate the totality of the URI and offer opportunities to give and receive hospitality, to share work, and to offer help to each other.

### **GUIDELINES FOR ACTION**

In light of the essentially self-organizing nature of the URI which gives members freedom to choose what they want to do, the following Agenda for Action is offered as guidance for URI activities. Inspired by a Javanese phrase, *Memayu Hayuning Bawano*, which when translated

means "to work for the safety, happiness and welfare of all life," the URI seeks to serve as a moral voice and a source of action grounded in contemplation in each of the following areas:

*Sharing the Wisdom and Cultures of Faith Traditions* - actions to promote dialogue, education and kinship among the diverse religions and spiritual traditions of the world.

*Nurturing Cultures of Healing and Peace* - actions to develop cultures in which all people can live without fear of violence.

*Rights and Responsibilities* - actions to uphold human rights.

*Ecological Imperatives* - actions to uphold the welfare and healing of the entire Earth community.

*Sustainable Just Economics* - actions to bring a spiritual perspective to the tremendous gap between rich and poor.

*Supporting the Overall URI* - local, regional and global actions to support all URI activities.