



# Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation



### *International Symposium on Forgiveness and Reconciliation*

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014

Hosted by GNNSJ in partnership with  
Fetzer Institute & Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace  
at the Nishkam Centre



## Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

### *Statement of Vision and Purpose*

The vision of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the activity of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation is to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek restorative justice and sustainable peace.

**Fostering and practicing forgiveness** has the power to transform deep-seated responses to memories and legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions created by such legacies. Faith and spiritual traditions have long guided us and inspired us to awaken the best of our human potential, to practice love, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to reshape our destinies.

**Forgiveness is understood as an activity** arising directly out of a compassionate consciousness. Compassion is an indispensable spiritual disposition for every faith, religion, dharam, or deen, as well as for our everyday human relations. Forgiveness stems from our ability to see a larger context to our individual and collective existence, and from our impulse to seek and forge genuine and sincere bonds with one another as members of one human family. It is fostered by our experience of unconditional love and an inner calling to live responsibly.

To see forgiveness as a most profound expression and manifestation of our spiritual and human nature, and a catalyst for inward and outward change, will be at the heart of the Charter. To love one's neighbour as oneself means that the efforts to seek forgiveness for oneself are related to endeavours to forgive and receive forgiveness from the other. Our human journey of forgiveness and reconciliation can only be navigated freely and voluntarily. Sharing forgiveness can therefore only be inspired, not demanded.

**Tangible examples of forgiveness** will be identified to highlight and inspire practical and effective actions, leading to reconciliation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Forgiveness and reconciliation are an indispensable part of our journey to peace, in our interdependent world and our quest for restorative justice.

**Throughout history, acts of forgiveness** have helped to de-escalate national and international conflicts, and to restore and sustain harmonious relationships in the daily lives of families, communities and societies. Insights from the lives of outstanding individuals and inspiring grassroots movements will be combined with learning from a shared global heritage of sacred teachings in order to take forward the Charter's work.

**By offering paradigms of forgiveness**, the Charter will direct commitment and activities towards a growing practice of forgiveness and reconciliation, both in public processes and in private settings, in order to foster healing and peace in a wounded and fractured world.



**BHAI SAHIB, MOHINDER SINGH, OBE, KSG**  
**CO-CONVENOR AND CO-CHAIR,**  
**CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION**

Bhai Sahib took early retirement in 1989 after working for 27 years as a civil/structural engineer and housing expert in East and Central Africa, to devote the rest of his life to selflessly serving humanity. Since 1995 he is responsible for the day to day running of probably the biggest Sikh place of worship in Europe where he spends on average some 12 hours a day. He received in 2010 the official religious title of 'Bhai Sahib' from the Sikh fraternity's apex organisation, in recognition of his work in faith propagation through intra and interfaith fields, coupled with his outstanding contribution towards conservation and restoration of Sikh historical shrines. This is the first time in history that a British Sikh has been conferred this award. Bhai Sahib is a visionary in the fields of faith propagation, education, intra and interfaith. A recipient of the Juliet Hollister Award from the Temple of Understanding, he is also a Trustee of Religions for Peace International (RfP)

## Project Development & Coordination

and one of its fifty Co-Presidents, as well as President of Religions for Peace UK. Bhai Sahib is a member of the Elijah Board of World's Religious Leaders (EBWRL), a former member of the Fetzer Institute's Advisory Committee (FAC) on Religions and Spiritualities, a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) and member of the Department for International Development's (DfID's) Faith Working Group. He is Chair and Trustee of the Museum of World's Religions (MWR-UK) Working Group, Patron of United Religions Initiative (URI - UK), member of Birmingham Faith Leaders Group (BFLG). Bhai Sahib is also an ambassador for the Globalisation for Common Good Initiative and received its third annual award in 2014. In 2012 he was made a Papal Knight Commander of the Order of St Gregory the Great in recognition of his dedicated work for Roman-Catholic Sikh relations and for his enthusiastic commitment to working for peace among people of all faiths. In 2015 he was made an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II in recognition of his unstinting and inexorable work over forty years to promote peace and coexistence by bringing people of different faiths together to contribute to the common good of humanity. He has been awarded Honorary Doctorates from Birmingham City University in 2002, the University of Birmingham in 2006 and the University of Aston in 2014 for services to religious faith propagation, community service, education and research.



**DR. WILLIAM F. VENDLEY**  
**CO-CONVENOR AND CO-CHAIR,**  
**CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND**  
**RECONCILIATION**

Dr William Vendley is the Secretary General of Religions for Peace, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition advancing common action for peace by working to advance multi-religious consensus on positive aspects of peace as well as concrete actions to stop war, help eliminate extreme poverty and protect the earth. He is a member of its World Council which consists of 60 senior religious leaders from all continents. He coordinates the activities and projects of Religions for Peace's 92 national and 5 regional councils. Dr. Vendley is a pioneer in advancing multi-religious cooperation to help resolve conflict and has been engaged in multi-religious peacemaking efforts in Syria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and other countries. Dr. Vendley is an advisor to a number of governments on matters related to religion and peace. He advised US President Barack Obama through his service on the Multi-religious Cooperation and International Affairs Task Force of the White House Faith-Based Council. He was appointed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and re-appointed by Secretary Kerry as one of ten members of the US State Department's Advisory Committee on Strategic Partnership with Civil Society and he is a Co-chair of the State Department's Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group. Dr. Vendley is a recipient of the UNICEF Lifetime Achievement Award.



**DR JOSEF BOEHLE**  
**DIRECTOR, CHARTER**  
**FOR FORGIVENESS AND**  
**RECONCILIATION**

Dr Josef Boehle is a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham, UK. He received a postgraduate degree in Theology from the University of Tuebingen, Germany and received his PhD from the University of Birmingham in 2001 for his thesis on *Inter-religious Co-operation in a Global Age*. He has worked for international interreligious organisations and helped to organise major conferences and summits addressing interreligious, intercultural and intercivlisational issues. From 2005-2010 he was a member of a UK Government (DFID) sponsored Research Consortium on 'Religions and Development'. Dr Boehle previously participated in a 4 year process of developing the United Religions Initiative Charter (1996-2000). He was the European Coordinator of the URI from 1997-2000. The URI Charter has been distributed and is actively consulted in many countries around the world. Dr Boehle was also a coordinator of the development of the Concept Note of the Interactive Hearing with Civil Society of the *2007 High-level Dialogue of the UN General Assembly on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace*. His work and teaching focuses now on Religion, Politics and Peacebuilding.



**RABBI DAVID ROSEN CBE**

**CO-CHAIR,  
CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND  
RECONCILIATION**

Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, is the International Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and Director of its Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding. He is a past chairman of IJCIC, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, the broad-based coalition of Jewish organizations representing World Jewry to other religions. Rabbi Rosen is Honorary Advisor on Interfaith Relations to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel; serves on its Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, and represents the Chief Rabbinate on the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land.

He is an International Co-President of Religions for Peace and serves on its Executive Committee; a Honorary President of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ); and is a member of the Elijah Institute's World Board of Religious Leaders. He is a founder of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel that embraces some seventy organizations in Israel involved in interfaith relations (ICCI).

In November 2005 he was made a papal Knight Commander of the Order of St Gregory the Great for his contribution to promoting Catholic-Jewish reconciliation and in 2010 was made a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II for his contribution to interfaith relations.



**REV KOSHO NIWANO**

**CO-CHAIR,  
CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND  
RECONCILIATION**

Rev Koshi Niwano is President-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai and Co-Moderator of

Religions for Peace. She serves on the Executive Committee of Religions for Peace.

President-designate Koshi Niwano was born in Tokyo as the first daughter of President Nichiko Niwano. After receiving a law degree from Gakushuin University, she studied at Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin seminary.

She is currently devoted to studying the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and shares the teachings with members who visit the Great Sacred Hall for worship services and special events.

She also actively promotes interreligious cooperation domestically and internationally in her capacity as president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai attends interfaith congresses.

She is a councilor of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan), a board of director of Religions for Peace Japan, co-moderator of Religions for Peace International and a member of the board of directors of KAICIID (The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue).



**SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH**

**CO-CHAIR,  
CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND  
RECONCILIATION**

Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah is President, Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu

Dhabi, and Co-Moderator of Religions for Peace. He serves on the Executive Committee of Religions for Peace. As a life-long advocate for peace, Shaykh Bin Bayyah is the President of the Forum of Peace in Muslim Societies and one of today's most well respected Islamic scholars.

He was born on 1935 in eastern Mauritania. He studied sacred sciences in the Mauritanian centers of learning known as Mahadhir. He then studied law at the Faculty of Law in Tunisia and was trained in Tunisian courts in 1961. Bin Bayyah has served in many distinguished positions over the years, including but not limited to Judge at the High Court of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the first Minister for Islamic Affairs and Education, Minister of Justice and Official Holder of the Seals. He is currently the Chairman of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, Member of the European Research & Fatwa Council, Member of the Muslim League's International High Council of Mosques and lecturer at the King Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia. Shaykh Bin Bayyah has published numerous writings and has been distinguished in a variety of ways for his work in Islam, interreligious dialogue and peace building. He was named one of the most Influential Muslims from 2009-2013. Shaykh Bin Bayyah has received numerous awards for his work as an Islamic scholar and advocate for peace.

## Editorial Panel

We have established an Editorial Panel to oversee the drafting and writing of the Charter text. Religious leaders, academics and leaders of International NGOs have agreed to join the Editorial Panel to ensure:

- that the Charter text will have the envisioned high quality and global appeal
- that the Charter text will be an authentic expression of the values inherent in the sacred teachings of the major World Religions.

### EDITORIAL PANEL MEMBERS:

**BHAI SAHIB MOHINDER SINGH,**  
**CO-CONVENOR, CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND  
RECONCILIATION** - *Biography is on page 4 of the brochure.*

**DR WILLIAM F. VENDLEY,**  
**CO-CONVENOR, CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND  
RECONCILIATION** - *Biography is on page 5 of the brochure.*

**DR JOSEF BOEHLE, DIRECTOR,**  
**CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION AND  
EDITORIAL PANEL DIRECTOR** - *Biography is on page 5 of the brochure.*

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**PROFESSOR PAL AHLUWALIA,  
PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH, UK**

In October 2014 Professor Ahluwalia joined the University of Portsmouth as Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

Professor Ahluwalia holds a Bachelor and

Master of Arts from the University of Saskatchewan, and completed his PhD at Flinders University. He was subsequently at the University of Adelaide for 14 years, finishing as Professor of the Politics Department. Professor Ahluwalia has previously been a Visiting Professor at the University of California, and Professor with the Goldsmiths College at the University of London, where he was also Director of the Centre for Postcolonial Studies. His main research interests lie in the areas of African studies, social and cultural theory, in particular, post-colonial theory and the processes of diaspora, exile, migration, and the complexities of identity formation. His work is internationally renowned for breaking down disciplinary boundaries and challenging orthodoxy. Professor Ahluwalia is a prolific publisher, both in terms of volume and prestige. He is the sole author of four books: Politics and Post-colonial Theory: African Inflections; Post-colonialism and the Politics of Kenya; Plantations and the Politics of Sugar in Uganda; and Of Africa: Post-structuralism's Colonial Roots. He is also the editor of three Routledge journals: Social Identities; African Identities; and Sikh Formations. In October 2008, Professor Ahluwalia was appointed a UNESCO Chair in Transnational Diasporas and Reconciliation Studies.



**THE RT REV DR BISHOP  
CHRISTOPHER COCKSWORTH,  
BISHOP OF COVENTRY, UK**

The Right Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth was consecrated as the 9th Bishop of Coventry on 3 July 2008. Prior to becoming Bishop he was the Principal of Ridley Hall,

Cambridge. The Bishop of Coventry is the senior leader of the Church of England in Coventry and Warwickshire. He read Theology at the University of Manchester and received his PhD in 1989. Bishop Christopher has served in parochial and chaplaincy ministry and in theological education, latterly as Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge. In 2010 he was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity by the University of London for his services to education. He has written a number of books and articles in the area of Christian theology and worship with his last book, Holding Together: Gospel, Church and Spirit being shortlisted for the 2011 Michael Ramsey Prize. Bishop Christopher is Co-Chair of the Joint Implementation Commission of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, and is Chair of the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England. He entered the House of Lords in January 2013.



**DR MARIUS FELDERHOF,  
MUSEUM OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS (UK),  
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM, UK**

Dr Marius Felderhof was born in Holland and emigrated with his parents, brothers and sisters to Nova Scotia, Canada aged 9. He studied

Philosophy and Theology in Canada and Scotland, and received a Ph.D. in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Wales, Swansea. He is a licentiate of the Church of Scotland and served in the parish of Burntisland for one year before returning to teach Systematic and Philosophical Theology at St. Mary's College, The University of St. Andrews. He then went to Westhill College, Selly Oak, Birmingham and served for a number of years as Head of Religious and Theological Studies at Westhill College. The College and his department were integrated into the University of Birmingham and its department of Theology and Religion in 2001. In 2005 he was seconded by the University to the City of Birmingham to act as the drafting secretary to the Agreed Syllabus Conference which devised the groundbreaking 2007 Syllabus for Religious Education. This syllabus committed all the major faiths found in the City to supporting teachers in developing 24 dispositions in young people on the basis of their scriptures, traditions and practices. He has published many articles relating to Theology and to Religious Education and is responsible for authoring and editing four books. He continues to advise the City of Birmingham on its RE provision as a member of its Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. Currently, Dr Felderhof is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Theology and Religion and the Executive Director of the Museum of World Religions project in Birmingham.



**DR OMNIA MARZOUK  
PRESIDENT, INITIATIVES OF CHANGE  
INTERNATIONAL, UK**

Originally from Egypt and having lived most of her life in Australia and Britain, Dr Omnia Marzouk has been working as Consultant in Paediatric Emergency

Medicine for 15 years at the UK's busiest Children's Emergency Department – Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool. She served as Clinical Director of the Emergency Department for seven years during which time it was twice recognized as hospital 'Team of the Year' for innovation. Omnia is currently Associate Medical Director with a lead role in medical appraisals, job planning and long-term medical workforce strategy. Omnia was introduced to Initiatives of Change (IoFC) while at school in Australia and has been actively involved since. For many years, she has been particularly engaged in intercultural and interfaith dialogue within the UK as well as taking part in similar initiatives in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. In 2011, Dr Marzouk was unanimously elected as President by the 31 members of Initiatives of Change International. She brings to the role her perspectives as an Arab-Muslim professional woman living in the West, who is used to dealing with a diversity of people and opinions. She also brings her experience of management and leadership, strategic and innovative thinking, and the ability to learn from mistakes as well as successes. Initiatives of Change International (IoFC International) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working for peace, reconciliation and human security worldwide. It has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and Participatory Status at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. It stresses the importance of personal responsibility, ethical leadership and building trust across the world's divides. Dr Marzouk succeeds Professor Rajmohan Gandhi as President.

**REV. KOSHO NIWANO, PRESIDENT DESIGNATE OF RISSHO KOSEI-KAI, JAPAN**

*- Biography is on page 6 of the brochure.*



**PROFESSOR ANANTANAND RAMBACHAN, PROFESSOR OF RELIGION, ST OLAF COLLEGE, USA**

Professor Anantanand Rambachan is Professor of Religion, Philosophy and Asian Studies at Saint Olaf College, Minnesota, USA, where he

has been teaching since 1985. Prof Rambachan has been involved in the field of interreligious relations and dialogue for over twenty-five years, as a Hindu participant and analyst. He has contributed to numerous consultations and discussions convened by national and international organizations concerned with interreligious issues. He is very active in the dialogue programs of the World Council of Churches, and was a Hindu guest and participant in the last four General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, Canada, Canberra, Australia, Harare, Zimbabwe and Puerto Alegre, Brazil. He is also a regular participant in the consultations of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican and an educator on interfaith issues in Minnesota. Prof Rambachan has served on the Advisory Board of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society, Victoria University, Canada, and as a member of the Consultation on Population and Ethics. He is currently an advisor to the Pluralism Project (Harvard University), a member of the International Advisory Council for the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, and a

member of the Theological Education Committee of the American Academy of Religion. In April 2008, Professor Rambachan, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered the distinguished Lambeth Lecture at Lambeth Palace, London. He has contributed as a Hindu scholar to the joint United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) – Global Network of Religions for Children project (GNRC) "Children in World Religions." He was awarded the Chaconia Gold Medal (1989) by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for his public service. Prof Rambachan is the author of several books, book-chapters and articles in scholarly journals.

**RABBI DAVID ROSEN, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR OF INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, AJC, ISRAEL**

*- Biography is on page 6 of the brochure.*



**H.E. DR DIN SYAMSUDDIN, LEADER, MUHAMMADIYAH; MODERATOR OF ASIAN CONFERENCE OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE; CHAIRMAN, CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION AMONG CIVILISATIONS, INDONESIA**

Professor Dr Din Syamsuddin is a prominent Muslim leader from Indonesia. He is a professor of Islamic Political Thought at National Islamic University, Jakarta. He served as President of Muhammadiyah, the largest modernist Islamic organization in Indonesia from 2005 to 2015, as well as President of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) during 2014–2015, and now (2015–2020) acting as Chairman of its Advisory Council. He has been active in interfaith dialogues and cooperations, as he initiated the creation of and becoming Presidium of Inter Religious Council – Indonesia,

He is currently acting as President-Moderator of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP), Co-President of Religions for Peace International, as well as Chairman of Center for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC), and Chairman of World Peace Forum based in Jakarta. He is also member of Group for Strategic Vision Russia – Islamic World, and member of Leadership Council of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solution Network (UNSDSN). He recently initiated the creation of Indonesia's Movement to Save the Earth (Indonesia Bergerak Selamatkan Bumi) and acts as Chairman of the Movement's Steering Committee. He obtained both Master and Doctoral degrees from the Interdepartmental Program in Islamic Studies, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), USA, in 1998 and 1991 consecutively.



**PROFESSOR GARRETT THOMSON, CEO, GUERRAND-HERMES FOUNDATION FOR PEACE, UK AND USA**

Professor Garrett Thomson is the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace CEO as well as Director of Research. He received his DPhil from Oxford University. Currently he is

Compton Professor of Philosophy at the College of Wooster, USA. He was formerly the CEO of the World Subud Association in 2005–2010. Garrett is the author of numerous books including Needs; Kant; Introduction to Modern Philosophy; and a series of introductory texts on Descartes, Locke, Aristotle, Kant, and Leibniz. He co-edited the six-volume The Longman Standard History of Philosophy. His other recent works include Una Introduccion a la Practica de la Filosofia, On Philosophy and On the Meaning of Life. Most recently, Garrett has co-authored books as part of the GHFP's research team.



**MARIA VOCE, PRESIDENT, FOCOLARE MOVEMENT, ITALY**

Maria Voce was elected president of the Focolare Movement on 7 July 2008 by the General Assembly of the Focolare. She is the first focolarina to succeed the founder, Chiara Lubich, who died on the 14th of March of the same year. She was born in Ajello

Calabro, Cosenza, Italy, on 16 July 1937, the first of seven children. Her father was a doctor; her mother a housewife. During her last year of law school in Rome (1959) she met a group of focolarini at the university and was fascinated by their Gospel witness. Upon completion of her studies, she became the first woman lawyer in her city's court system. Later she studied Theology and Canon Law. In 1963, she felt the unexpected and "overwhelming" call of God to follow in the way of Chiara Lubich and she immediately responded. From 1964 to 1972 she was in Sicily, in the Focolare Centres of Syracuse and Catania. From 1972 to 1978 she belonged to Chiara Lubich's personal secretariat and for the following ten years she lived in the Focolare Centre of Istanbul where she established ecumenical and interreligious relationships, especially with the then Patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrius I, and with numerous metropolitans including the now Patriarch Bartholomew I, as well as with representatives of various Churches. As a law expert, from 1995 she was a member of the Abba School, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies chaired by Chiara Lubich. From 2000 she was also co-responsible for the international commission, "Communion and Law," a network of academics and professionals involved in law. From 2002 until their approval, which came in 2007, she worked directly with Chiara Lubich in updating the General Statutes of the Movement. On 24 November 2009 Benedict XVI appointed her as a Consultor for the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Maria Voce was re-elected as President of the Focolare Movement for a second consecutive term in September 2014.

## Road Map

### 1. Formation of editorial panel

An international editorial panel will be established to oversee and direct the writing of the Charter text.

### 2. Setting up of advisory council

As soon as feasible, an advisory council will be established and convened to include different sectors: religious leaders, scholars and NGO leaders, amongst others.

### 3. Research component of the project

Research into similar charters, initiatives and best practices will inform the development of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation text and the activities associated with the Charter.

### 4. Project development phase

- to establish an editorial panel to direct the Charter drafting process
- to consult and develop a draft of the Charter text
- to seek collaboration with like-minded organisations and communities
- we held a Symposium in April 2014 and are developing a network of partner organisations for launching the Charter and for supporting associated activities.

### 5. Project implementation phase

The project implementation phase will include collecting feedback from the consultation process, holding a second Symposium/Consultation, finalising the Charter text, developing joint activities, advancing research projects with partner organisations and launching the Charter internationally.

### 6. Engagement with governments and global institutions

We will seek engagement with governments and global institutions during the final part of the Charter drafting process (once the Charter text is being finalised and a sufficient network of partner organisations has been established), to inform public policies and strategies, nationally and internationally, in order to make a significant contribution to overcoming and healing the legacies of conflicts and wars. We propose the establishment of a World Day of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, to be held annually during World Interfaith Harmony Week.



## Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation Executive Summary

[October 2016]

- In 2011, the question of developing a Charter for Forgiveness was first raised by Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Chairman, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha. In a series of conversations between Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh and Dr Josef Boehle (University of Birmingham) the initial idea, vision, concept and project proposal for a Charter for Forgiveness were developed.

- After gaining the support of the Fetzer Institute (USA) for the initial project development phase in 2012, additional organisations were approached to seek their support, most prominently the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace (UK) and Religions for Peace International.

In the early Charter development phase, Forgiveness and Reconciliation were identified as being closely related values and both being necessary to achieve sustainable peace between individuals and communities.

Dr William Vendley, Secretary-General of Religions for Peace International, enthusiastically embraced the Charter idea, vision and project, and joined Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh as co-convenor of the Charter project.

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh and Dr William Vendley as Co-convenors, and Dr Josef Boehle as Director, have since formed the core leadership team.

- A very successful International Symposium on Forgiveness and Reconciliation was held in Birmingham in April 2014, bringing together 30 international experts, leaders and practitioners.

- A Statement of Vision and Purpose was developed by a working team and aided by contributions from the participants in the 2014 Symposium. This Statement summarises succinctly the core aims, principles, values and objectives of the proposed Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

This Statement of Vision and Purpose can form the basis for a Preamble of the Charter.

The two opening paragraphs of the Statement of Vision and Purpose:

*“The vision of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the activity of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation is to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek restorative justice and sustainable peace.*

*Fostering and practicing forgiveness has the power to transform deep-seated responses to memories and legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions created by such legacies. Faith and spiritual traditions have long guided us and inspired us to awaken the best of our human potential, to practice love, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to reshape our destinies.”*

- An Editorial Panel with currently 13 members has been formed to jointly develop the Charter text and to safeguard co-ownership, inclusiveness and high-quality of the Charter from the beginning. After the development of a basic architecture and blueprint for the Charter text, each chapter of the Charter will then be developed subsequently. Each chapter will address specific subject areas, for example diverse constituencies (religious, secular, political, humanitarian) and specific issues (peacebuilding, restorative justice, mercy).

- A Plan of Action and Development Stages have been outlined in the Charter brochure, which include the Charter drafting process, the outreach to like-minded organisations and the wider public, the development of Charter related activities, and the engagement with public bodies and institutions.

At present, the further development of the governance and organisational structure of the Charter, of a business plan and the associated fundraising are crucial for enabling the Charter project to succeed and for the Charter to become the founding document of a collaborative global movement for forgiveness, reconciliation and sustainable peacebuilding.

#### Current priorities in 2016:

- the drafting of the Charter text together with the Editorial Panel
- the development of a Charter working team to move the organisational development, the business plan and the fundraising forward.

*October 2016, Dr Josef Boehle, Director,  
Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation*

## Communication and Outreach

*Among the planned activities for outreach and communication:*

- Consulting with participating organisations and individuals concerning a draft text of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Sharing and publicising the Charter text
- Highlighting the unique focus and tangible outcomes of adopting the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Encouraging seminars and conferences
- Inviting religious communities to engage with the Charter
- Collaborating with similar initiatives/organisations
- Encouraging acts of commitments to the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation by individuals and organisations
- Establishing an annual award for outstanding examples of Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Publicising and distributing the Charter text through a variety of web based media

## Outcomes and Intended Audiences of the Charter Project

The initial targets and outcomes to be achieved have been described above under the Project Development Phase. The Project Implementation Phase will finalise the draft Charter text, develop joint activities (including further research projects) with partner organisations and launch the Charter internationally. We propose the establishment of a World Day of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, to be held annually during World Interfaith Harmony Week.

The advisory council, as well as the international consultation process devised to draft the Charter text, will bring a wide range of expertise together. This collaborative effort will help to increase understanding amongst the participating organisations and beyond, about the awareness, motivations and conditions for a 'Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation'.

The research and consultation process will identify many individuals and communities for whom the act

of forgiving and being forgiven has had a healing and restorative effect, as well as those who are currently in, or are emerging from, conflict situations. The lack or absence of forgiveness and reconciliation affects people at all levels, from personal, marital and domestic realms to local, national and international arenas. Thus the primary audiences will span:

- Ordinary individuals in the context of home, family, neighbourhood and workplace and associated organisations which support, guide and govern life in these domains.
- Schools/universities/education institutions and religious/spiritual communities, which help to shape the values by which people live.
- Local, national and international guiding institutions.
- Media institutions which influence mindsets, habits, opinions and inclinations.

There are many ways to communicate the work on, and the results of, the Charter. During the chartering process a wide range of individuals and organisations will be consulted and asked to distribute through their

networks the draft charter text. A website and a range of multimedia resources will be developed. It is intended to work closely with partner organisations to reach out through media networks to a global audience.

Once the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation has been successfully launched there will be the further need to communicate with participating organisations, and to organise joint activities. It will also create the possibility for further research projects (case studies) around aspects of forgiveness (e.g. forgiveness and political reconciliation processes, peacebuilding and conflict resolution; forgiveness and community relations, human well-being; forgiveness and education; forgiveness and economics).

The proposed Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation also has a link to the proposed Museum of the World Religions (UK) project in Birmingham and the value-centred Religious Education work of Dr Marius Felderhof (the Director of the Museum project) at the University of Birmingham.



## Religions for Peace

*Different Faiths, Common Action.*

### Vision

The world's religious communities cooperate effectively for peace.

Since its founding in 1970, Religions for Peace has been guided by the vision of a world in which religious communities cooperate effectively for peace, by taking concrete common action.

Religions for Peace is committed to leading efforts to advance effective multi-religious cooperation for peace on global, regional, national and local levels while ensuring that the religious communities organized on these same levels assume and exercise appropriate leadership and ownership of these efforts.

### Mission

Religions for Peace advances common action among the world's religious communities for peace.

Multi-religious cooperation for peace is the hallmark of Religions for Peace. This cooperation includes but also goes beyond dialogue and bears fruit in common concrete action. Through Religions for Peace, diverse religious communities discern "deeply held and widely shared" moral concerns, such as transforming violent conflict, promoting just and harmonious societies, advancing human development and protecting the earth. Religions for Peace translates these shared moral concerns into concrete multi-religious action

## GNNSJ

The Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation project has been initiated by Bhai Sahib, Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, OBE, KSG, the Spiritual Leader of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ), and the Chairman of the Nishkam Group of Charitable Organisations, based in Birmingham, UK.

Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) Birmingham UK, is a multifaceted faith-led, not for profit, benevolent organisation. Its Vision is to humbly and selflessly serve the one Almighty God & all His creation. Its mission is to practice and propagate the Sikh Dharam (religion), seeking wellbeing and flourishing of all humanity, 'Sarbat da Phla'.



### Our Mission

To foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community.

People across the globe, from all cultures and traditions, embrace love and forgiveness in daily life. These values are universally viewed as central to the fabric of humanity. Yet, the emerging global community has few institutions dedicated to deepening the understanding and fostering deeper awareness of these values. In this context, the Fetzer Institute pursues a unique role-working to investigate, activate, and celebrate the power of love and forgiveness as a practical force for good in today's world. We are interested in how people truly experience and understand love and forgiveness from their diverse points of view, especially from the perspective of their daily work in the world.



### Mission & Objectives

Our mission is to promote and support peace, and a sustainable human future. We seek to contribute strategically to the resolution of human problems, in a spirit of optimism and realism. Our objective is to facilitate processes that help true human qualities to develop in the world, and for our work to be inspired by these qualities.

### The GHFP actively

- Conducts research and seeks knowledge which can help to change perceptions and promote transformation.
- Initiates, supports and facilitates projects and processes that help bring people towards understanding, compassion and growth.
- Creates quiet, safe and open meeting and dialogic spaces where relevant questions can be posed in an environment which can be conducive to understanding.

Addressing Dhritarashtra, Vidura said: ‘There is one only defect in forgiving persons, and not another; that defect is that people take a forgiving person to be weak. That defect, however, should not be taken into consideration, for forgiveness is a great power. Forgiveness is a virtue of the weak, and an ornament of the strong. Forgiveness subdues (all) in this world; what is there that forgiveness cannot achieve? What can a wicked person do unto him who carries the sabre of forgiveness in his hand? Fire falling on the grassless ground is extinguished of itself. And unforgiving individual defiles himself with many enormities. Righteousness is the one highest good; and forgiveness is the one supreme peace; knowledge is one supreme contentment; and benevolence, one sole happiness.’

[From the Mahabharata, Udyoga Parva Section XXXIII - Hindu Dharam]



It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and not grant pardon. One should rather easily forgive and not easily grow angry, and when the offender requests forgiveness he should forgive with a full heart and generous spirit. Even if he caused him distress and committed many offenses against him, he shall not exact revenge or bear a grudge. This is the way of the Israelite people and their principled heart. [Hilkhot Teshuva 2:10, Maimonides]



‘God, You are always forgiving, and always merciful’

Fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji

[Sacred Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Eternal Guru of the Sikhs, ang.713]



‘But if you pardon and exonerate and forgive, Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful’

[Qur’an, 64: 14]



‘Where there are lies and deceit - there is sin; Where there is greed - there is famine, death and destruction; Where there is forgiveness - there is God himself’

Bhagat Kabir Ji

[Sacred Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Eternal Guru of the Sikhs, ang.1372]



‘And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.’

[Mark, 11:25, New Testament]



‘The positive proof that the aspirant is centred in God is that he ceases to hate any person or object, and that good qualities such as love, forgiveness, patience, forbearance go on increasing in him.’

Sri Anandamayi Ma (1896 - 1982)



‘Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong’

Mahatma Gandhi (1869 - 1948)



‘As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison’

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013)



‘There is no Future without Forgiveness’

Desmond Tutu (born 1931)

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# Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

## Statement of Vision and Purpose

**The vision of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation** is that the activity of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation is to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek restorative justice and sustainable peace.

**Fostering and practicing forgiveness** has the power to transform deep-seated responses to memories and legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions created by such legacies. Faith and spiritual traditions have long guided us and inspired us to awaken the best of our human potential, to practice love, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to reshape our destinies.

*(From the Statement of Vision and Purpose, first two paragraphs)*

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