

The Al-Azhar Global Declaration on Peace

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

Dear brother, Your Holiness Pope Francis, Pope of the Vatican.

Esteemed guests, I greet you with the greeting of Islam: Peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you.

A heartfelt greeting from both Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the Muslim Council of Elders to you, blended with thanks for your gracious response and your historic visit to Egypt and to Al-Azhar. This timely visit answers Al-Azhar's call and marks your participation in our global peace conference—a quest for the elusive peace sought by peoples, nations, the destitute, the ailing, those wandering aimlessly in deserts, and refugees fleeing their homelands for distant shores. These individuals face uncertainty about reaching their destinations, fearing they may die, face destruction, drown, or worse, be washed up as dismembered bodies on some distant shore, far from home. With such a profoundly sad humanitarian crisis, it is no exaggeration to say that history has never witnessed anything comparable.

The discerning and the conscientiously vigilant continue to search for a compelling justification behind the calamities that have

exacted such a grievous toll on our lives and blood. Yet, they unearth no logical rationale that might condone these catastrophes that descend upon the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the elderly—except, perhaps, one seemingly reasonable and acceptable explanation: the arms trade and its marketing, the assured operation of the factories of death, and the obscene profiteering from dubious dealings, all preceded by rash international political decisions.

It is profoundly disheartening that this severe crisis should unfold in the twenty-first century—a time proclaimed as the so-called pinnacle of civilization, human rights, and scientific and technological progress. This era, marked by the establishment of peace institutions, security councils, and international norms that criminalize the use of force and its threat to global relations, should have been different. It is an epoch renowned for social philosophies and humanitarian ideologies that herald absolute equality and envisions a one-class society, advancing secular modernism and post-modernism, among other social and philosophical achievements that characterize our modern era.

At the heart of this stark paradox lies a poignant question: How, amidst our monumental achievements, has global peace become an elusive Eden? Why does this era, heralded as the zenith of human rights, bear witness to atrocities unseen and unimagined in times past? The answer, I believe you will agree with me, lies in modern civilization's neglect of divine religions and their enduring moral principles—principles that stand unwavering, immune to the caprices of shifting interests, whims, and desires. Chief among these are the principles of brotherhood, mutual recognition, and compassion among people, which serve as a constant reminder

that all of humanity are slaves of God, and the most cherished by God are those who serve His slaves most profoundly. This reminder is crucial, lest our world devolves into a savage jungle where some live off the flesh of others.

The consensus among enlightened minds, from the West to the East, asserts that the only solution lies in reawakening to the messages of the heavens and subjecting the deviant modern discourse to a critical reading that rescues the human mind from the poverty of experimental philosophy and its emptiness, and the excesses of the autocratic individual mind dominating individual lives. The post-modern phase should not merely beautify and patch these doctrines with philosophies of fantasy and emotion. Philosophers and believers alike see no escape from reformulating all this within the context of fraternity and compassion, first and foremost [(1)]. This context acts as an antidote reinvigorating philosophical, scientific, and practical paradigms, with the cure residing solely within the sanctum of religion and religion alone.

I firmly believe that the stage is now set for religions to assert their role in promoting the values of 'peace', justice, and equality, and upholding the dignity of every human being, regardless of their religion, color, race, or language. The Holy Quran, which Muslims recite day and night, affirms this: "Indeed, We have dignified the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions, and privileged them far above many of Our creatures" (The Quran, 17: 70). Additionally, the Holy Quran commands us to embrace the virtues of mutual understanding and compassion: "O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may (get to) know one another" (The Quran, 49: 13).

Yet, before these ideals can fully manifest, there is an imperative need to purify the perception of religions of the misinterpretations that have marred them—distorted applications and a feigned religiosity that kindle conflict, propagate hatred, and incite violence. We must refrain from condemning entire religions for the heinous acts committed by a reckless minority of their followers. Islam is not a creed of terror, despite the actions of some who have misappropriated its scriptures, twisting them to justify the shedding of blood, the killing of innocents, and the spreading of chaos, while being supported by those providing funds, arms, and training. Likewise, Christianity cannot be labeled a religion of terror because some have wielded the cross while reaping lives indiscriminately, without regard for whether their victims are men, women, children, combatants, or captives.

Nor should Judaism be branded as a religion of terror because of the abuse of the teachings of Moses (peace be upon him)—far from his intention—in the occupation of lands, which has tragically affected millions of their rightful residents, the beleaguered Palestinian people. Likewise, European civilization is not a civilization of terror, even though it was the epicenter of two world wars that claimed over seventy million lives. Nor can American civilization be deemed a civilization of terror, despite its role in the catastrophic destruction of both life and infrastructure in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These are all departures from the true paths of religions and the reasoned order of civilizations. Should this door of accusation be opened—as it is now against Islam—no religion, system, civilization, or even history itself could fail to be accused of violence and terrorism.

We hold in high regard, Your Holiness Pope Francis, your fair statements that absolve Islam and its followers from accusations of violence and terrorism. In you, and in the distinguished assembly of both Western and Eastern church leaders, we discern a profound commitment to honoring religious beliefs and symbols, and to uniting against those who malign them or exploit them to fuel conflicts among the faithful.

Al-Azhar remains steadfast in its pursuit of fostering collaboration to anchor a philosophy of coexistence, to rejuvenate the practice of dialogue, to respect the beliefs of others, and to engage collectively on the extensive common ground shared among believers of different faiths.

Together, let us advocate for the oppressed, the hungry, the fearful, the imprisoned, and the tortured across the globe, transcending any division, classification, or discrimination.

Let us join forces to fortify the institution of the family against the threats of moral disintegration and the misdirections of scientific research, and to rescue our environment from degradation and those who perpetrate it.

Together, let us confront the doctrines of dominance, counter the theories of ‘civilizational clashes’ and ‘the end of history’, challenge the calls to atheism, reject the Machiavellian ethos, oppose secular modernism, and dismantle the philosophies of man’s deification, all of which lead to tragedies and disasters across the globe.

As I conclude, I beseech Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, to bless this assembly and to make it a true milestone in our shared journey towards fostering a culture of peace, fraternity, and communal life among all peoples.

Thank you, and may Allah's peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you all.