

Faith and Development Leaders Meeting
Faith-inspired networks and organizations:
Their contributions to development programs and policies

A meeting organized by the Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics at The World Bank, the UK Department for International Development, and the World Faiths Development Dialogue

Accra, Ghana, July 1-3, 2009

Opening remarks, Lord Carey of Clifton

My name is George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. It is wonderful to be here as co-leader, together with Graeme Wheeler. Rather like Cardinal McCarrick, I'm retired, and like him, seem to be busier than ever. How one longs for an ice cool lemonade on your back porch, letting the world go by... but, both of us, and all of us here, are impassioned people. We want to do something, and that is why we're here. I want to thank the World Bank so much for convening this meeting and for Graeme Wheeler's leadership in it, together with Joy Phumaphi, for her responsibility. We will be hearing from her later on. I particularly also want to thank Katherine Marshall, because her energy, inspiration, and hard work has brought this about. As you know, she works in the World Bank, but also at Georgetown University.

I want briefly to give you some background as to how we got to be here today, because the World Faiths Development Dialogue actually came out of the World Bank, so it has a very distinguished history. It was near the end of 1997 when I had a strange call from the President of the World Bank, Jim Wolfensohn. I recall that I received this call with some amazement. What did he want? And he set out a vision. He said: "I've just recently been to Tanzania, and I've seen what the faith communities are doing there, and it struck me with amazement that the World Bank doesn't have any official dialogue going with the world faiths. We must do something about it."

So, we convened the first leaders' meeting at Lambeth Palace in 1998. You have in your folders a description of this history, so I will not repeat it – just to pick up on some central features. That was an amazing meeting, in a room rather like this. The views were harsh to begin with; there was one Hindu leader who attacked the World Bank for undermining the work of faiths around the world in terms of development. Jim hit back strongly, and after the strong exchange of views, there was a commitment that we must change this all.

Over the years, there have been some ups and downs. The ups have been to see the way the work has exploded. I look around here and I see fellow trustees – not only Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Martin over there from Dublin... and Rabbi David Saperstein, one of the key leaders in our trustees. We've had some wonderful moments where we've done a lot of very path breaking country work, in African countries and elsewhere. Some of the frustrations have been that Jim himself found the governors of the World Bank and Graeme rather reluctant to have firm relationships with religious communities because they said, "We need to have a separation between church and state." One recognizes that. So, there have been times when we've moved along... And I'd like to say that were it not for foundations like the Aga Khan foundation and Mr. Handa, a remarkable Japanese businessman from the Shinto tradition, and his senior colleague Midori, who's representing him here, were it not for such individuals, we would have sunk many years ago. And so we've moved along, and we've had a wonderful leaders' meeting in Dublin, under Archbishop Martin's leadership, in which we focused on gender issues, education, HIV/AIDS. I know that through this meeting, we will come to similar themes that we'll want to bring up.

I won't bore you with the history; all I want to say is that today and tomorrow give us a wonderful opportunity to take the work forward. I just want to share with you my hopes and dreams for the next two days. My personal longing, and this has been my passion for a very long time, is to help to break the grip, the iron grip, that poverty has on the lives of so many today; Graeme Wheeler has spoken eloquently about that. Be in no doubt about it, we can do something, and be in no doubt about it – that millions of people suffering around the world today, and of course that spiral of poverty leads to the imprisonment of AIDS and HIV, and a sense of hopelessness on the parts of so many. So that's the basic hope.

Secondly, it is my hope to strengthen the link between the World Bank and the world faiths. Now whether it is the World Faiths Development Dialogue, or whether it is us representing our different faith communities, it doesn't matter. The World Bank recognizes, and Graeme has said so, the tremendous work that world faith networks are currently doing. We are doing more than people realize. I think of Islamic Relief, represented here, I think of the extensive Catholic organizations in Africa – and Anglican, Methodist, and so on. So I think to strengthen that link is important.

Thirdly, is to strengthen Katherine's work as leader and director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue. As I say, she inspires us all, and I would like to see her work strengthened. And then, fourthly, to focus on strategic directions – what can we do together? How can we empower one another? What new friendships, and what new philosophies and policies can be brought out of this meeting? So, you see, I have an agenda, and I want to see us working more closely together.

Against the background that Graeme Wheeler has spoken of, against huge problems and climate change, there are times when we might want to throw up our hands and say "Little can be done. Let's give up and just go down with the Titanic." And I want to say now that we must resist that temptation. So I will end with some words by Edmund Burke, the former Prime Minister of Britain in the 18th Century. He was just out of office when the American Revolutionary War occurred (I suspect that, had he been in office, America would still be part of the United Kingdom). Edmund Burke was a man who once said these wonderful words: "No-one has made a greater mistake than he or she, who because they could do so little, did nothing."