Interreligious Peace Ethics as Priority for Public Responsibility of Religious Communities in Germany

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1) The UN Pact for the Future (September 2024) and the role of ethics and religions

A few weeks ago, the United Nations General Assembly in New York adopted the "Pact for the Future" as part and final result of the "Summit for the Future", which is very important for the continuation of the commitment to sustainable development. The Pact for the Future focuses, as if in a magnifying glass, on the most important key issues that are of outstanding importance for the common survival of humanity on this planet and the continuation of work on the SDG agenda. The programmatic policy document, which aims to call on and motivate governments to work together in a binding manner, also highlights an important deficit in the UN's work at the level of the General Assembly, particularly with regard to the importance of issues related to the nexus between religion and development. The core themes and main chapters of the Compact for the Future cover five broad key areas, all of which do have key ethical implications:

a) Sustainable development and financing for development

b) International peace and security

c) Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

d) Youth and future generations

e) Transforming global intergovernmental institutions (strengthening multilateralism)

Yet despite the urging of many FBOs who participated in the UN assembly in New York City and played a role in side events, the 32-pages "Pact for the Future" document contains, remarkably, no explicit reference to the role of ethics and the role of religions. The only exception is a brief reference to the need to overcome religious hatred and incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence (para 61 Pact for the Future) and a general reference to the need to involve civil society actors, including "faith-based organizations," in the efforts to implement the Pact for the Future: "our efforts must involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, Indigenous Peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, faith-based organizations, the scientific and academic communities, and all people to ensure an effective response to our common challenges"(para 93 Pact for the Future).[1]

How is it that the role of ethics and religious communities is given so little explicit attention at the level of a strategic plan for the future of the United Nations General Assembly? How is it that the rich experience that many sub-organizations of the United Nations have had in terms of their cooperation with FBOs (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNEP, UNDP, WHO, etc.) has not been evaluated, forwarded and incorporated into the Pact for the Future? Is there an internal problem of coherence and communication between the work of the UN sub-organizations and the level of the UN General Assembly? Or is it due to the general procedure at the level of a UNGA, which by its mandate must put the key role of national governments in the foreground, which might lead to this one-sidedness (or short-sidedness?), that religions are not taken into account and their potential not sufficiently taken

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[1] See: full text Pact for the Future: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4061879?v=pdff

into account? Could it be the case that this deficiency of the Pact for the Future is due to that fact that religious actors are primarily viewed as a potential divisive factor in the world community? Or is this an indication for the situation that there is still a general underestimation of the importance of ethical values in at least a major part of the UN system and might be also amongst governments, which leads to a conscious or unconscious marginalization of the voice of religious communities at the level of the international community of states?

If we consider all five core issues that were negotiated in the Pact for the Future, it can hardly be denied that all of them have extremely important ethical implications. In implementing political priorities in the areas of sustainable developments, peace and security, intergenerational justice, technological revolutions, national governments and alliances of states are hugely dependent on the contribution of religious communities and other voices for ethical guidance and orientations. The transformation processes of a civilization characterized by dependence on fossil fuels and a global growth economy towards more peace and sustainability cannot be successfully designed and managed without a profound change inspiring values and ethical guidance which to a large extend can only be provided by value-based norm systems of religious (and non-religious) actors. It should not be seen as a fault of the religious communities themselves that they were so absent from the official texts of the Pact for the Future. Many of the FBOs were actually present in New York prior or during the UN assembly. In a series of accompanying documents and side events in New York City, it was emphasized again and again that the international community needs the contribution of religious communities in order deepen implementation of new international norms for these key issues and to enforce its ethical obligations: There are now several platforms on which faith actors have expressed themselves during the UN conference on the Pact for the Future, most of them, however, located in the context of side events, and not in a central plenary panel on the role of religion and ethics for the future: Four different platforms in particular can be mentioned: the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-Religion; in existence since 2010, 27 UN entities, last entry 2021/22), [2] the Multi-faith Advisory Council (MFAC)[3] (in existence since 2018, 45 religious leaders), the ImPACT alliance founded specifically for the UN Summit for the Future, the so-called ImPACT Coalition on Faith-based Solutions[4], which published its own declaration,[5] and finally the Partnership on Religion and Development (PaRD)[6], which is managed and co-funded by GIZ. Nevertheless, there has not been a distinct UN Summit on the Future for and with religious actors on their own; that would still be a desideratum. One can ask whether the existing network of these various platforms of religious actors at the UN level is (or has been) effective and visible enough to ensure sustainable work results, visibility and differentiated articulation at the UN level. Individual actors have put a lot of effort into it: Religions for Peace collected and presented Global Interfaith Youth Responses for the Summit of the Future in a forum. [7] Also noteworthy was the peacemakers network, which addressed questions of peace ethics in

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[2] https://www.unep.org/resources/annual-report/united-nations-interagency-task-force-religion-and-sustainable-development

[3] https://actalliance.org/act-news/un-multi-faith-advisory-councils-role-and-ambitions-an-interview-with-rudelmar-bueno-de-faria/#:~:text=In%20September%202018%20the%20UN%20IATF%20established%20the,religious%20leaders%20and%20heads%20of%20faith-based%20organizations%20%28FBOs%29.

[4] https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/peacemakers-network-engagement-at-the-79th-session-of-unga/

[5] https://finnchurchaid-my.sharepoint.com/personal/lucy_sobol_kirkonulkomaanapu_fi/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Flucy%5Fsobol%5Fkirkonulkomaanapu%5Ffi%2FDocuments%2FLiitteet%2FFinal%20Statement%20of%20Faith%2Dbased%20Solutions%20250925%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Flucy%5Fsobol%5Fkirkonulkomaanapu%5Ffi%2FDocuments%2FLiitteet&ga=1

[6] https://www.partner-religion-development.org/mission-vision/

[7] See: https://www.rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Concept-Note-and-Programme-SOTF-Official-Side-Event-Interfaith-Youth-Responses-to-the-Centurys-Biggest-Challenges-20-September-2024.pdf

a "side event and multi-stakeholder dialogue on transformative peace" on the sidelines of the summit and, above all, highlighted the nexus between new technological developments and peace ethics.[8]

But overall, it can be clearly stated for the global level: The inclusion of ethics and religious communities in the key questions of a transformation of human civilization into an age of peace and sustainability must be improved - that is in accordance with the basic intention of the Pact for the Future, but not yet realized. The core thesis of this essay is that the role of faith-based actors in the international context in the current situation of the UN must be improved, made visible, deepened and updated as a matter of priority. This applies particularly in the area of broad peace ethics, as the international peacemaker network has just called for while taking a critical look at the increasing automatization and robotization of warfare as well as the implications of AI in the spread of hate speech und misinformation internationally[9], particularly in the Ukraine, but also the Midde East military conflicts. The further development and professionalization of an interreligious peace ethics therefore is the imperative and demand of the day. Interreligious peace ethics in this reflection has to be understood in the broadest sense: It should include international peace between nations and peoples (justice ethics) as well as peace with nature (environmental and development ethics) and peace in the digital network (digitalization ethics).

It is significant that the UN General Assembly has also adopted a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations as annexes to the Pact for the Future:[10] Unlike in some ageing Western European societies, the proportion of the population under 30 years of age in many countries in the South is over 40% or even almost 50%. The voices and fears of the young population are also of central importance for the further development of interreligious peace ethics: The most recent youth sociology study (Shell Youth Study 2024) has developed a map of the priority fears of young people between the ages of 12 and 25 (in Germany): The surprising observation: When asked "what scares me?", over 80% of young people answered that the war in Europe and global wars were their primary fear (83% East, 80% West), followed by the threat of increasing poverty (67% West, 70% East) and growing hostility between people (62% West, 72% East) and environmental pollution (64% West, 64% East). In contrast to the political discourse, the fear of migration and immigration ranks right at the bottom of the list (32% West, 42% East).[11] Of course, these are figures from Germany, but it would be interesting to find out how the values and thus the "fear map" of young people worldwide would be distributed.[12] This means that if we want to make interreligious ethics and value education attractive for the younger generation, we must give priority to the issues that are current and burning in the culture of younger generations today: war and peace, exclusion, hatred, the environment.

2) Lindau Commitments, the UN Agenda for Peace and the Unfinished Tasks of an Interreligious Peace Ethic

If one wants to summarize a core conviction of these considerations in a nutshell, one can formulate provocatively: "The future of interreligious ethics needs to be young(er), more professional, more targeted, and more digital!" Although ethics, the question of good action, is a traditional core

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[8] https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/peacemakers-network-engagement-at-the-79th-session-of-unga/
[9] https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15359.doc.htm; https://unu.edu/article/militarization-ai-has-severe-implications-global-security-and-warfare
[10] https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/09/1154671
[11] Matthias Albert u.a.: Shell Jugendstudie: Jugend 2024. Pragmatisch zwischen Verdrossenheit und gelebter Vielfalt. Beltz Verlag 2024, p. 49
[12] The World Value Survey is an important scientific network for this question on global levels: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp

component of almost all religious traditions (alongside spirituality and liturgy and the systematic development of doctrine), interreligious ethics is a relatively late product of processes of interreligious rapprochement in various countries, often only beginning after catastrophes (such as 9/11).

Interreligious cooperation in Germany also has a relatively short history of around 40 years. Interreligious peace ethics in particular is a late comer. There is a considerable history of research and collaboration on interreligious peace ethics, particularly in relation to local groups of Religions for Peace (particularly from Nürnberg).[13] The two major churches continue to dominate public perception, and there are rarely interfaith statements of public responsibility in which religious representatives of different religious communities stand together. However, there are increasing occasions for interreligious understanding in the area of spirituality and liturgy, such as interreligious peace and mourning services, for example on occasions such as attacks or the remembrance of the horrors of terror and violence (October 7).[14] Therefore, today it is a matter of urgency remembering again the beginnings of the commitments to interreligious peace ethics and the legacy of Religions for Peace both on national as well as on international levels. The Lindau General Assembly of Religions for Peace in 2019 put questions of interreligious peace ethics at the forefront. Federal President Steinmeier gave a deeply impressive speech and emphasized the responsibility of religious communities to stand together for peace and to overcome hatred in public.[15]   A central declaration was the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation[16] adopted in Lindau, which emphasized the central role of religious communities in processes of healing memories and building trust between hostile groups and nations. Confidential background discussions (second track approaches, back stage negotiations) between delegations from countries in conflict have long been part of the standard methodological repertoire of Religions for Peace conflict resolution strategies.[17] But where has this commitment and methodological approach more recently played a recognizable role in today's virulent major military conflicts (Ukraine/Russia, Israel/Palestine, DRC Congo, Sudan?) in addition to the conflicts of the past (Myanmar, Bosnia, Sudan?). We must become more self-critical with regard to the practical implementation of our own commitments to peace-ethical initiatives by religious communities!

In 2023, the United Nations' New Agenda for Peace[18] underlined the central role that conflict prevention and the transformation of violent conflicts in peace scenarios should play in future. It also pointed to the increase of regional conflicts and the weaponization of technologies, including the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, demanding that these challenges should play a key role in the future of UN work. It is not yet clear how far Religions for Peace has come with the implementation of commitments like this leading to a more ambitious interreligious peace ethic, of which the "second track approach" of background discussions with direct conflict partners in certain regions is just one methodological step and example. Religions for Peace's overall strategic plan 2020-2025 remains too vague and undefined with regard to the implementation and formulation of clear, result-oriented goals

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[13] Prof. Johannes Lähnemann from Erlangen is a pioneer and outstanding international expert on these issues, having also served as the chair on Interreligious Learning and Peace Education Commission in Germany and member of the Standing Commission Interreligious Education von Religions for Peace International. See: Johannes Lähnemann: Interreligious and Peace Education in Times of Crisis. A History of Religions for Peace. EB Verlag, Nürnberg 2024; see also pre print publication: Interreligious Learning and Peace Education. A History of Religions for Peace;
https://users.ox.ac.uk/~fmml2152/publications/Laehnemann2024-RfP-PrePrint.pdf
[14] https://religionsforpeace-deutschland.de/mitteilungen/interreligioeses-trauergebet-zum-7-oktober/
[15] https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2019/08/190820-Religions-for-Peace.html
[16] https://www.charterforforgiveness.org/peace-charter-for-forgiveness-and-reconciliation-adopted-by-10th-world-assembly-of-religions-for-peace-in-lindau-germany/
[17] https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Declaration-of-the-10th-World-Assembly-of-Religions-for-Peace-FINAL-2.pdf
[18] https://dppa.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace

for the global network. [19] A joint reorientation of groups working towards interfaith peace ethics towards the "New Agenda for Peace" by the UN from 2023 is demanded for. The UN New Agenda for Peace is one of the most important framework documents in which the ethical reflection of churches and religious communities with regard to interreligious peace ethics is demanded for. Referencing to this umbrella new strategy of the UN could lead to a new flourishing of interfaith peace approaches and become a useful step in focusing and clarifying joint work in this area.

3) Interreligious peace ethics and peace education as an opportunity to raise the profile of the voice of religious communities in the secular public

The positive potential and opportunities that can arise with an interreligious peace ethics should be explicitly brought to mind again: The combined work of interreligious councils as well as platforms of religious leaders point to the hope that strengthening a new interreligious peace movement in Germany as well as internationally should be possible and can become a meaningful and visible antidote against the growing spirit of militarization and hopelessness in today's political circumstances. In an increasingly secularized society, religious communities are sometimes perceived less by what they believe and practise for themselves in the area of spirituality and worship, but more by what they do together in public or by what they articulate in common ethical public reflection. Interreligious ethical work therefore offers an opportunity not to be underestimated both to increase the reputation of churches and religious communities as a whole and to publicly add profile to central religious ethical positions on issues of peace, human rights, development and sustainability.[20] Why not trying to structural interreligious collaborative public responsibilities and occasions more intentionally and regularly? An annual joint "interreligious summer academy" on ethical key topics, for instance interreligious peace ethics, could be a useful measure for focussing interreligious ethical work on areas where expectations of the general public and the media are high and common involvement could likely achieve also a high public impact?

An important area of application and practice for interreligious ethics learning is primarily in educational work in schools, particularly intercultural and interreligious peace education (see: Religion for Peace's Interreligious Education - Peace Education working group).[21] Many schools lack sufficient Middle East expertise and, for example, competent Muslim and Jewish discussion partners. Both the Interreligious Peace Education working group and the networks of the Abrahamic Forum teams have gained intensive experience of how ethical issues of conflict transformation can be meaningfully explored in an interreligious perspective in the field of education.[22] A school-related handbook or textbook on interreligious peace education[23] that is both inclusive and inter-contextual could be a very

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[19] https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/STRATEGIC-PLAN-FINAL.pdf

[20] See on this also the rich expertise of Johannes Lähnemann: No Peace Among Nations and Religions without Interreligious Learning and Peace Education! The Endeavours of Religions for Peace (RfP), in: https://oxfordinterfaithforum.org/thematic-international-interfaith-reading-groups/peacebuilding-in-interfaith-contexts/no-peace-among-nations-and-religions-without-interreligious-learning-and-peace-education-the-endeavours-of-religions-for-peace/; and the publication from 2022: Azza Karam et al.: Faithful Peace. Why the Journey to Build Resilience Is Multi-Religious; in: https://www.rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Faithful-Peace-Why-the-Journey-to-Build-Resilience-is-Multi-Religious.pdf

[21] https://religionsforpeace-deutschland.de/aktuelles/interreligioeses-netzwerk-deutschland/

[22] https://abrahamisches-forum.de/beispielthemen/)

[23] A related handbook for interreligious education in state schools could be further developed (and partly also translated) from the excellent first project: Reinhold Mokrosch, Werner Haußmann, Hansjörg Biener (eds): Handbuch Friedenserziehung. interreligiös - interkulturell – interkonfessionell. Gütersloh 2006, see: https://lbib.de/Handbuch-Friedenserziehung-interreligioes-interkulturell-interkonfessionell-38070

useful joint project with which the Interreligious Network can raise its profile publicly and also apply for funding from government agencies.[24]

4) Need for joint ethical competence development and training among religious leaders and interreligious multipliers

If religious communities want to raise public awareness of the ethical challenges presented by the UN Conference on the Future of Religions and really tackle them together, they need to train their own skills in a targeted manner: In order to position themselves sufficiently qualified and differentiated on the regional, national and international stage and to conceptually present guiding values and ethical orientations, it is not enough to simply present general elements of religious traditions with ethical associations, protest motives and emotions of outrage to the public. Careful and differentiated ethical reflection and analysis of ethical dilemmas within and between religious traditions is required if they want to be perceived as competent dialogue partners of society in the search for guiding values and ethical criteria. This includes in particular the connection between *intra-religious dialogue* on the ethics of peace and the instrumentalization of religion for ethno-nationalist motives and hate propaganda, as well as *inter-religious dialogue* on questions of overcoming distortions towards extremism and nationalist introversion, which also potentially can emerge in all religious communities in minority traditions (example: the critical dialogue with tendencies in Russian Orthodoxy to sacralise the war against Ukraine and against Western civilization; or the tendencies in American evangelicalism to idolize their own nation in parts of the Trump camp). This requires, on the one hand, more systematic training and promotion of common ethical competence. It also needs the ability to communicate responsibly, publicly and jointly on ethics in and between religious communities. Our contemporary society needs both, to take up a proper dictum by Ulich Hemel: We need religions capable of democracy and, at the same time, we need a religion-capable and religiously sensitive democracy and also democratic leaders!

It is therefore worrying that we no longer see sufficiently sustained and fundamental, i.e. not just occasional, interest on the part of state representatives and federal politicians in questions of religion and interreligious dialogue. The dramatic decline in public state budgets for international humanitarian and development-related work (one billion Euros reduction for international humanitarian and development work just in 2024) also affects the ability of religious communities and related NGOs to articulate their views. Nevertheless, we must be honest and state that, with regard to the internal situation of religious communities, we ourselves are still relatively at the beginning of developing a continued culture of strategic planning, of sensitive thematic prioritization, of division of labour and process planning in the various ethical challenge areas for interfaith collaboration. Who in a given region or on national level can specialize on which subject areas and promise a meaningful content contribution that will be heard both nationally and internationally? In Germany, we have a relevant tradition of public responsibility among the two major Christian religious communities, which jointly articulate questions of public and ethical interest and shared public responsibility (the chambers of the EKD and joint studies with the RKK Bishops' Conference were an important instrument for this). A culture of comprehensive interreligious ethical orientation work by religious communities for politics and society in Germany is still rather underdeveloped. This is not primarily due to the churches, which have long been among the main financiers of all interreligious work in Germany, but rather due to the fragmentation and lack of inner cohesion and leadership of the other religious communities. The question is whether we have developed sufficient institutional, financial and "man- or women-power"

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[24] See on standards and criteria for interreligious peace education in school books: Johannes Lähnemann, Interreligiöse Schulbuchforschung und –entwicklung: Vorschläge für Standards, in: https://www.evrel.phil.fau.de/files/2021/06/511.pdf

instruments for the interreligious ethical orientation work of religious communities which we support as a vision. Here we also need critical discussions with political authorities in Germany, because the interest in and financial support for instruments of interreligious cooperation has unfortunately declined over the past five years and the future of instruments such as the Forum for Religious Communities and Responsibility for Peace (which was successfully called for at the time – 2018 - by the Foreign Office, but in the meantime dissolved)[25] and the cooperation of religious and state actors in development cooperation is unfortunately more than uncertain.

At the international level, there are attempts to promote such platforms for coordination, thematic bundling and competence development in education and training in the field of ethics and religion in various regions of the world. This includes the Globethics Foundation in Geneva, which has specialized in four subject areas according to its latest strategy 2023-2027:

- ethical questions of peace, security, governance and overcoming violence

- ethical questions of sustainability and the preservation of creation

- ethical questions of newer technologies, e.g. responsible communication with AI and media culture, especially violence, hatred and fake news in digital media

- ethical competence development in academic education and further training

The belief is that we can learn a lot from each other and between regions, and the Global Ethics Forum[26] is an important platform for this, which takes place regularly in Geneva. The question here is what we need within Germany and the work of the Interreligious Network or Religions for Peace in terms of forms and platforms for better networking and division of labour in the area of questions of ethics and public responsibility of religious communities.

5) Common places – common public responsibility – common ethical orientation

Shared public responsibility and shared ethical orientation also require shared visible places and meeting points or working centres in the landscapes and contexts of urban communities. Shared ethical work by religious communities - as the learning path of many interfaith councils and associations in German cities has already shown - requires both (religious) scientific **and** political, academic **and** municipal or state support: A shared place to meet and encounter each other is essential for building trust, for municipal visibility, for the development of a culture of togetherness, for the rootedness of interfaith educational work. There is a need for a new availability of interfaith platforms and institutions such as a House of Cultures and Religions in cities[27], which can represent something like public discourse sites for social and ethical dialogue in processes of shared coexistence. An institution such as the House of Religions in Hanover, the House at the Cathedral (Haus am Dom) in Frankfurt or similar centres in other places are an enormous enrichment and enabling framework for the development of a culture of ethical dialogue between religions in our society. It would also be important to ask again and to clarify more specifically with political authorities whether Germany

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[25] https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/politik/religionen-in-der-pflicht; https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/roth-friedensverantwortung/2107104; https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/politik/religion-und-konflikt-friedenspotenzial-der-religionen

[26] https://globethics.net/events/global-ethics-forum-2024; https://globethics.net/news/re-envisioning-future-through-ethical-leadership

[27] Vgl. Peter Bender u.a.: Interreligiöse Initiativen in Deutschland. Ein Wegweiser, Herausgegeben von Religions for Peace Deutschland e. V., Stiftung Weltethos, Bundeskongress der Räte der Religionen und Forum Religionen im Kontext; Ergon Verlag 2024, vgl.: vgl.: https://religionsforpeace-deutschland.de/aktuelles/buchveroeffentlichung-interreligioese-initiativen-in-deutschland/

should not be able to afford to build an internationally effective, visible and active **Academy of World Religions for Peace and Sustainability** in a central urban location, in the federal capital or elsewhere, in order not just to create for general interreligious encounter and dialogue,[28] but in order to place ethical and interreligious reflection for promoting the common good, human rights and interfaith peace work at the top priority on a broader and more professional basis and with public funding.

6) Towards a charter of interreligious peace ethics – a draft

These considerations should be concluded with a vision, a wish or a suggestion:

It would be very desirable if we could develop a common Charter of Interreligious Peace Ethics (CIPE) for the current context in Germany and beyond, building on previous initiatives such as the Religions for Peace Charter on Forgiveness and Reconciliation from the international level (Lindau 2019). This could be an instrument and a common platform to motivate and support the development of initiatives for a broader interreligious peace ethics. A Charter of Interreligious Peace Ethics (CIPE) on the one hand should be formulated so simply and down to earth that it can be displayed in every local mosque or church community to serve as a stimulus for discussion. On the other hand, it should also be differentiated enough that it can serve as a basis and framework for inspiring regional conferences and strategic dialogue on conflict resolution with different religious representatives and with conflict parties. Religions for Peace has made various statements on the Middle East conflict[29] and has also developed an interreligious mourning and peace or healing of memories liturgy.[30] However, a more fundamental and conceptual Charter on Interreligious Peace Ethics, which would always have to keep an eye on various conflict situations outside and beyond the boundaries of Germany and the corresponding inner-societal conflict zones in our own society, is still missing. A corresponding Charter on Interreligious Peace Ethics could very tentatively contain the following points (essentials):

a) Religious communities have different beliefs and ethical traditions, but the vast majority of religiously oriented people understand *the call to peace and justice as a common human task and spiritual obligation for all religious traditions*: We are one humanity. Differences, diversities and conflicts can never be so great that they call into question our common humanity and the obligation to respect the dignity of every human being, from the youngest to the eldest, in every community and religious tradition. The tradition of the Golden Rule is a reminder existing in its various forms in all religious communities that we have a common core tradition of peace ethics.[31] Peace among religions is a core prerequisite for peace in the international community of nations. Values such as non-violence, truthfulness, justice, ecological responsibility, reciprocity and equality are essentially common to all people and religious communities, however different the individual accentuations of their understanding may be. The fact that there are religious leaders (and partial traditions) which violate essential obligations for peace, justice and mutuality and distort the very essence of their own religious

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[28] Like the Akademie der Weltreligionen in Hamburg: https://www.religionen.uni-hamburg.de/akademie-der-weltreligionen/ueber-die-awr.html

[29] Vgl.: von RfP International vom 8. Oktober 2024: https://religionsforpeace-deutschland.de/aktuelles/religions-for-peace-international/

[30] Vgl.: https://religionsforpeace-deutschland.de/mitteilungen/interreligioeses-trauergebet-zum-7-oktober/

[31] Martin Bauschke: Die Goldene Regel als moralisches Weltkulturerbe, in: https://weltethos.at/iweo/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/vortrag%20bauschke%20wien%202012.pdf; Parlament der Weltreligionen: Erklärung zum Weltethos 1993, in: https://www.weltethos.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/weltethos-erklaerung-2018.pdf

orientations does not counter the very core and existence of a common ethical basis of the vast majority of all religious belief systems.

b) Deadly violence can never and nowhere appeal to the core of religion. Terror and blind violence have no religion. Genocide, hate propaganda, anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim or anti-Christian hostilities have no religious justification. They destroy the essence of humanity and pervert all religion. Where religious groups are in danger of being instrumentalized by extremist distortions or hate propaganda from within or from outside, they must face critical questioning from both their own religious fellow communities and the interreligious and secular circles surrounding them and must be forced to undergo a transformation process to correct their course. All religions that focus on the sanctity of life are in contradiction to terror and violence. They refuse to legitimate the continued vicious circles of violence and aim at limiting violence and preventing or limiting the destruction of people, of living beings and nature.

c) At the heart of the contribution of religious communities to questions of global ethics in the context of the comprehensive crisis facing humanity today (climate crisis, inequality crisis, financial crisis, crisis of trust and democracy) is an *ethics of respect*. In contrast to the pseudo-ethics of pride and might that contributes to destroying the earth and peace among peoples, today there is a shared commitment of religious communities to an ethics of respect, of humility and of mindfulness. An ethics of respect can have different roots and justifications, but what many approaches have in common is an attitude of reverence for all what is living on earth. In the awareness of human dependence on a divine being, a supreme entity or a spiritual existence, religious communities today remind us of the attitude of respect - an attitude of respect and mindfulness for all living beings, for all people (young and old), for all cultures, for all living entities and treasures of the planet Earth that are entrusted to us and for the generations that were before us and will be after us. No one can treat life as if it were only there and available for him or her and does not have to be shared with everyone who lives with us or with those who come after us.

d) War cannot be fought sustainably and overcome with war and its escalation. The cycle of violence and counter-violence, attack and retaliation, destruction and even greater destruction must be countered with exit strategies from the senseless perpetuation of violence. We need exit strategies from vicious circles of violence. This begins with the opposition to cultures of hatred and images of dehumanization of the enemy. The path to understanding and peace begins with empathy for others. The development of attitudes of mutual empathy, of understanding for the injuries, traumas and vital interests of others is an important ground condition for an interreligious peace ethics. Religious communities are advocates for the fact that encounters across all frontiers can have an impact on changing the narratives on both sides through empathy. Sharing in the complex stories of mutual hurt, mistrust and prejudices is at the core of interreligious peace and conflict resolution skills.

e) Religious communities share a spirit of respect and adherence for the law. They recall the validity of international law, of treaties binding under international law and systems of rules governing multilateral responsibility, as laid down in the UN Agenda for Peace in 1992, the Helsinki Final Act in 1973 and the Paris Charter for a New Europe in 1993. For some religious communities, this includes the right of self-defence for nations and countries that are attacked without reason or subjected to military

violence. However, religious communities never stop at purely allowing the dynamics of military models to unfold in their own logic. Conflict resolution strategies that rely only on (defensive) violence (peace of victory, peace of surrender, peace of attrition and exhaustion...) are often futile in the long run and need to be complemented by non-violent means. Many know for experience or intuition that peace cannot ultimately be secured just by violence alone, but can only come about through the final renunciation of violence. Any commitment to legitimate self-defence must therefore keep in mind the concerns of non-military conflict resolution strategies. Military defence must always be accompanied and flanked by diplomatic initiatives for negotiations. These provide a place where conflicting interests can be mediated outside and beyond the battlefield. The opponent in religious perspectives must never be seen as just an enemy to be killed, but it must be seen - even in the midst of a war - potentially as a partner capable of reconciliation.

f) At its core, an interreligious peace ethics today is about the transformation of a system and understanding of security still shared by many that is unilaterally defined as security through threat, security by deterrence and security by military power. In its greatest perversion, this system currently exists in the global umbrella of nuclear total deterrence, which in essence consists of 1221 combat-ready nuclear weapons distributed among nine states. It stands for the absolute perversion of multiple total destruction of the entire human civilization on earth (MAD: mutually assured destruction). One of the core tasks of religious communities in terms of peace ethics is to replace this system of nuclear deterrence.[32] A new system of common security has to be based on principles of shared security by formulating contractually regulated balances between different spheres and fields interests between East and West. This should take the legitimate security interests of the other side just as seriously as its own security interests.[33] At the same time, a new system of alternative security through partnership of interests must never provide for or allow rewards for countries that have committed or are committing serious violations of international law and rules.

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[32] See: https://www.icanw.de/; International: https://www.icanw.org/
[33] See: https://www.sicherheitneudenken.de/