

Opening Remarks of Ambassador Mussie Hailu, Regional Director of United Religions Initiative for Africa and Board Chairman of Interfaith Peace-building Initiative at the North American Interfaith Network Annual Connect Conference held in Phoenix, Arizona from July 31 to 26 on the theme of “ Many People, Many Faiths, One Common Principle-The Golden Rule”

Good evening! On behalf of members of United Religions Initiative from diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world and Interfaith Peace-building Initiative (IPI), a URI member organization based in Ethiopia, I present greetings of peace, blessing and best wishes to all of you.

I am very happy to be here with you in Phoenix, Arizona the first Golden Rule state in the nation to take part in this very timely and important meeting of the North American Interfaith Network on the theme of "Many People, Many Faiths, One Common Principle - The Golden Rule." This is the voice the world needs to hear more than ever

It is indeed a great privilege and honor for me to address you at this august opening event. I came all the way from Ethiopia to express my solidarity as citizens of this world and to join hands with you to highlight on the need for the teaching of the Golden Rule more than ever to deepen interfaith harmony, a culture of peace, respect among nations, build right human relationships and a better world for this generation and generations yet to come

United Religions Initiative an international interfaith organization with the aim of promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings , which I have the privilege of serving as Regional Director for Africa, and the Interfaith Peace-building Initiative which I also have a great privilege of serving as Founding Board Chairman, share very strongly the theme of this meeting and work on a daily basis to make this happen.

Dear friends, colleagues and brothers and sisters

As we gather today, I pray for the creator of the Universe to open our hearts and minds to understand the uniqueness of each one of us and to pour out the spirit of unconditional love, Compassion and to understand and fully embrace the idea that, though we are many people of many faiths, traditions, culture and color we all are part of one human family with the common principle of the Golden Rule. Meeting like this based on the teaching of the Golden Rule help us to understand the interdependence of human beings and celebrate our cultural and religious diversity.

As we are living together on this planet earth, no matter what place, situation, or circumstance each of us may find ourselves in, our existence has a special meaning. Each of us has a special role to play throughout our daily lives by living the value of the Golden Rule. In this globalized world, differences of color and place of birth are trivial things. What is important is that we recognize ourselves as citizens of the world.

One of the most important missions for humanity at this stage must be to bring people together with the shared goal of creating a peaceful world for all to live in. And this is what we are trying to address through this gathering. We need to develop a conscience that transcends the trivial differences we have through constructive dialogue, trust and the

teaching of the Golden Rule. Meetings like this help us to reflect together to go in this direction of win-win

I have been attending different meetings over the past many years at local, national, regional, international and with heads of States at the African Union and the United Nations but a meeting like this one is always very special to my heart and has a unique meaning as it addresses the core solution to most of our problem and it address also the issue which is the first article of my faith and the last article of my creed and that is the Golden Rule

Dear Friends, colleagues, brothers and Sisters

Many People in the world are suffering from unemployment, HIV/AIDS, poverty, hunger, violation of human rights, war, ethnic and religion conflicts, lack of visionary leadership, the abuse of drugs, crime, corruption, etc. The divorce rate is growing, the number of single parents increasing, children are growing with out universal moral and spiritual values. Our world is experiencing a fundamental change and global crisis: A crisis in global economy, global climate change, and global degradation of values. etc

This entire global crisis is a crisis which we all share in common. It is not only a problem of a certain country or region but it is a problem of all humanity. To solve this global problem we need a global solution. Each and every one of us needs to be part of the solution by taking our own personal action as the world can only be changed when we change ourselves.

We are constantly hearing and talking that we live in an insane world. While we talk, everything goes on just as before. Why don't we do something to alter all the things that are wrong? Among many other reasons one of the reasons is that we are unwilling to admit that this is something which concerns each and every one of us. If we desire a change, we must also accept that this presupposes a change in our daily lives. As Gandhi so beautifully said, we should "be the change we want to see in the world."

If we work together as one family based to address our common issue under the guiding principle of the Golden Rule, we can help to reverse the insane trends prevailing today in our world. If everyone does his or her bit, together we can accomplish what is necessary.

In this changing world, we can't remain as we are, nor can we go back to conditions that are now behind us. We can only move forward, but we should not go on the same road which has been leading us into war, conflict, violence, discrimination, disrespect, hate, violent extremism and all the negative elements our world is facing. We need to progress towards positive change and a value system that nourishes and sustains all living beings and Mother Earth

Therefore it is high time for all of us as citizens of the world to find a new direction for our individual and collective common future and to focus on the practical solution to the problem we are facing than chanting on the problem. Now the question must be: "which side of the road we are in?" We must not wait for fundamental change to come from somewhere; meaningful change must come from within.

I am happy to be part of a movement like URI and IPI and people like you from all over the world who decide to take concrete action to bring positive change in the world and believe that the future is in our hands. We need to focus on what we can do in a practical

term to change the things we can change than talking about things we can not change. As Albert Schweitzer said "In my opinion it is Man's temperament that decides his fate. There is no other kind of fate. I do not believe therefore that he must necessarily continue to follow the path which leads only downwards; he may yet turn about before he arrives at the very end." To me this turn about is the Golden Rule which will lead us from war to peace, from killing each other to co-existence, from disrespect to honoring each other, from hate to love, from despair to hope, from darkness to light, from being selfish to living for the sake of others and from revenge to forgiveness

One of the tremendous achievements of humanity in this century is that ordinary men and women like you and me are increasingly recognizing our responsibility to help resolve issues of local, national and international concern by being active member of interfaith organizations. And it is this responsibility that brought us together to reflect on how best we can help to bring change through the Golden Rule in our self, family, community and in the world in light of the complexities of the 21st Century.

Dear Friends, colleagues, brothers and Sisters

If we truly want to open a new chapter in human history and see a new world based on a culture of peace and social justice, I believe it is high time to promote the Golden Rule throughout the world as it is a fundamental principle that addresses critical issues such as democracy, human rights, respect for each other, gender equity, social development, interfaith harmony, constructive dialogue among nations, conflict prevention and building right human relationship.

It is with this core values in mind that in 2007 through the Interfaith Peace-building Initiative (IPI) we declared April 5 as a "Golden Rule Day" and called upon all citizens of the world, religious leaders of the world, mayors of the world, heads of state of the world, the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the League of Arab States, interfaith organizations, schools, higher learning institutions, the business community and civil society etc to join IPI in proclaiming this day as Golden Rule Day and to live accordingly to make this world a better and ethical place for all.

I am happy to inform you that in answer to the call we made we have now in over 95 countries organizations including different religious leaders and faith representatives who joined us in proclaiming it. Golden Rule Day is now celebrated every year in over 100 countries including at the United Nations building in New York. Through this action we are creating more awareness on the teaching of the Golden Rule as our common guiding principle for co-existence and harmony. Every day many organizations joining us from different part of the world in proclaiming the Golden Rule Day

In addition to this we also started at IPI a Golden Rule Goodwill Ambassador program to highlight the need for the Golden Rule in the world to promote a culture of peace, interfaith harmony and a Global Ethic. We have so far Karen Armstrong, Paul McKenna, Red Cross, Mother Teresa Home, and others as Goodwill Ambassadors of the Golden Rule. Currently I am working to get the United Nations to proclaim the Golden Rule Day.

I also wrote a letter to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Secretary General of the United Nations, to all heads of States of members of the United Nations including President Obama to support the Golden Rule Day proclamation. Also

made an appeal for the Golden Rule to be proclaimed by world Peace Prize laureates and by the 3365 Mayors of the world through Mayors for Peace, an international organization which is working to raise international public awareness regarding the need to abolish nuclear weapons and contributes to the realization of genuine and lasting world peace,

Dear Friends, colleagues, brothers and Sisters

Why do I say the Golden Rule is the answer to most of our problem in the world and put all effort to proclaim the Golden Rule Day throughout the world? It is because the Golden Rule is

- 1) a cornerstone for peaceful co-existence
- 2) a fundamental principle that addresses critical issues such as democracy, human rights, respect for each other, gender equity, social development, interfaith harmony, constructive dialogue among nations, conflict prevention and building right human relationship
- 3) the most consistent, most prevalent, and most universal ethical principle in history and found worldwide throughout cultures, ethnic groups, religions, secular philosophies, and indigenous traditions.
- 4) the most concise and general accepted principle of ethics and life.
- 5) a universal, simple and yet a profound act which concentrates on vital human relations that are mutually beneficial in spite of numerous diversities that exist in the world
- 6) It deals with mutual respect for our neighbor, for every other human being in our community, the nation and the whole world regardless of the difference we have
- 7) It possesses tremendous moral authority and reveals a profound unity underlying the diversity of human experience
- 8) It is not just a moral ideal for relationships between people but also for relationships among nations, cultures, races, sexes, economies and religions
- 9) It has the capacity to be the ethical cornerstone in developing a Global Ethic as the human family works together to build a peaceful, just and sustainable global society.
- 10) It is well suited to be a standard to which different cultures could appeal in resolving conflicts
- 11) It truly knows no boundaries and is a proven tenet upon which peace can be built
- 11) It is a common principle and denominator in different religions and cultures

Let us have a look how different religions have the same stand when it comes to the Golden Rule

In Christianity, we find Jesus saying in the New Testament: "Do to others what you would like others to do to you."

In Islam we discover Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) saying in the Hadith: "Wish for others what you wish for yourself." A true believer is viewed to be one who is genuinely concerned with the welfare of all other people without exception.

In Judaism we learn from Hillel in the Talmud: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." This is considered as the essence of the whole Torah, all the rest is viewed merely as commentary.

In Buddhism we hear Buddha stating in Udana-Varga: "Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful."

In Hinduism we notice in Mahabharata the statement: "Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you." This is viewed as the sum of duty from which no one can escape.

In Confucianism we read in the Analects what Confucius has stressed to all of his followers: "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself." To this end this religious leader advocated good conduct revealed in loving-kindness.

In Taoism, we hear Lao Tzu telling us in T'ai Shang Kam Ying P'ien: "Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss." This means we should identify our neighbor as an integral part of ourselves.

In Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib expressed his basic message to those embracing this religion saying: "I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all." This approach has proved to be a real source of peace.

In the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah underlines the importance of good human relations stating: "Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself."

In Jainism, in Suttrakritanga the basic teaching of this religion was expressed by Mahavira as follows: "One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated." In Zoroastrianism we find in Shayast-na-Shayast the following important statement: "Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself."

In Unitarianism, we notice the following basic principle of Unitarians: "We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

In Native Spirituality, Chief Dan George affirms the belief of his religious group stating: "We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive." This is based on the belief that for all people to live strong and healthy as well as happy we must protect our environment from air and water pollution. The quality of air and water we have does make a big difference.

In Shinto teaching it says "The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form"

In Zoroastrianism *Shayast-na-Shayast* 13.29 it says "Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself."

In Humanism it says "Don't do things you wouldn't want to have done to you."

British Humanist Society

The Greek *Philosopher* Plato said "May I do to others as I would that they should do unto me."

The other Greek *Philosopher* Socrates also said "Do not do to others that which would anger you if others did it to you."

Immanuel Kant said "Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature."

Dear Friends, colleagues, brothers and Sisters

As we have seen, the Golden Rule is at the core of each religious and faith traditions and the basic teaching of all religions is peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion, love, live for the sake of others, treat others the way you want to be treated. Therefore religion can no longer be an accomplice to war, to terrorism, or to any other forms of violence, organized or spontaneous, against any member of the human family. Nobody should be killed in the name of God or religion.

As member of interfaith organizations it is our task to put a spotlight on helping religions understand the important role they must play in promoting a culture of peace, reconciliation and harmony among people

Religions of the world should provide a powerful example in their common rejection of violence and defence of universal values of respect for life and the dignity and human rights of all individuals as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At this critical juncture of human history, religions must unite across boundaries to install non-violence as a way of life. Religions must affirm that violence can never be justified in the name of God.

People of many different faiths and beliefs live side by side. The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure. But this society can only be built on a sure foundation of mutual respect, honoring our differences, and trust based on the teaching of the Golden Rule. This means finding ways to live our lives of faith with integrity, and allowing others to do so too. Our different religious traditions offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterized by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit.

As Dr. Hans Kung once said, "No world peace without peace between the religions. No peace between the religions without dialogue between the believers of different religious traditions."

As the quest for peace and justice and the need to overcome violent extremisms binds religions, interfaith organizations, governments and the United Nations together, we all need to work in partnership to reduce conflict and address the critical needs of humankind. Bearing this fact in mind, the United Nations is giving more attention to the role of religions for peace and interfaith harmony in the world.

As the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions and beliefs call for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding there is a strong need in our world for dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people. With this in mind and to build more trust, understanding, harmony and respect among followers of different religions, and to create the opportunity for them to

come together to resist forces of division that spread misunderstanding and mistrust among peoples of different religions, His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan introduced a World Interfaith Harmony Week at the Plenary Session of the 65th United Nations General Assembly in New York and a resolution was adopted by the United Nations on October 20, 2010. Following this, the first week of February, every year, has been declared a United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs in the world. This is an idea whose time has come.

In proclaiming this observance, the United Nations General Assembly encourages all States to use the first week of February to spread the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's places of worship, based on love of God and love of one's neighbor or on love of the good and love of one's neighbor, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions. To me this is the other version of the Golden Rule

The World Interfaith Harmony Week has more meaning for us, as interfaith organizations, as it is a week when we all can express our collective commitment, vision and action for peace, interfaith harmony and co-existence among all nations and one guiding principle which can make this a reality is the message of the Golden Rule.

The world interfaith harmony week will also help the world to foster a genuine and lasting peace based on more equitable, fraternal and harmonious societies—societies that fully respect human rights and all manifestations of life, in which sharing is more important than competing, where dialogue replaces all forms of violence for resolving conflicts, and where cultural and religious diversity are appreciated. I call upon different religious leaders and interfaith organizations in the world to spread the message of world interfaith harmony week and the teaching of the Golden Rule in Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples and other places of Worship during and beyond the week to make the world interfaith harmony week a reality.

It is my pleasure to inform you that I sent message to His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, to the Secretary General of the United Nations and to all members of the United Nations that the Golden Rule is the way to manifest world interfaith harmony in the world.

In answering to the call of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Interfaith Peace-building Initiative (IPI) and United Religions Initiative of Africa (URI), called upon the African Union and its 53 member States to celebrate the first World Interfaith Harmony Week in Africa.

As Interfaith Organizations we also need to welcome with appreciation and work closely with the United Nations on its resolutions like World Interfaith Harmony Week and the other resolutions on the promotion of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation, and the Alliance of Civilizations

On behalf of URI, IPI and all interfaith organizations in the world I want to register my thanks to the UN for its commitment in organizing the high level dialogue on Inter-religious and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace and passing number of resolution to involve faith based and interfaith organization in the peace work of the United Nations. In this opportunity I would like to reconfirm the commitment of URI and IPI to enhance more our partnership with the UN and other peace and interfaith

organizations in bringing religions of the world to work for peace and harmony, based on the principles of the Golden Rule, justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people

URI and IPI have been encouraging the African Union Commission to pay attention to interfaith issues and the role of religions for peace, security and to counter violent extremism. I am happy to inform you that in August in Kampala, Uganda we are going to organize a conference on this theme.

I am also happy to inform you that the African Union Commission and African Religious Leaders Council launched an Interfaith Dialogue Forum to harness the power of religious communities for the integration, peace, security and development in Africa

Dear Friends, colleagues, brothers and Sisters

At this point allow me to congratulate and thank the North American Interfaith Network for its work in promoting interfaith harmony and for choosing Phoenix as the place to come for its annual "Connect". I also want to thank and acknowledge the Arizona Interfaith Movement for hosting this event and inviting me to be a keynote speaker and take part in the meeting. I appreciate the outstanding work of Arizona Interfaith Movement to build bridges of understanding, respect and support among diverse people of faith through service, dialogue and the implementation of the Golden Rule

As the first Governor in the world to proclaim the Golden Rule Day, I take this opportunity to thank the Governor of Arizona, Janice K. Brewer

I also want to acknowledge Paul McKenna, Scarboro Missions, United Religions Initiative Team at the UN mainly Monica Willard Rep of URI at the UN, Deborah Moldow facilitator of URI at the UN, Tina Petrova- producer of the Golden Rule Move, Sharon Hamilton & The Sacred and Transcendental Arts working group of the NGO Committee on Spirituality, values and Global Concern, Project Harmony, Karen Armstrong and all members of the Charter for Compassion, The Fetzer Institute, Avon Mattison and Pathways To Peace, All members of URI throughout the world, Religions for Peace, Temple of Understanding, Council of World Parliament of Religions, all organizations and religions who join us in proclaiming the Golden Rule Day, The Institute on Religion and Public Policy, African Council of Religions Leaders, The Coalitions for Initiative for a UN Decade of Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace whose purpose is a call to put the Golden Rule into united practice all over the world, Path way to Peace, Dr. Harry Gensler, Professor Jeffery Wattles, David Keating founder of Golden Rule Radical, Marilyn Wilhelm who has been working on the teaching of the Golden Rule since 1974 and founder of Wilhelm International School, Tanenbaum Center for Inter-religious Understanding. And the many others individual and organizations who are practice the Golden Rule and doing their best to promote interfaith harmony and cooperation. I want to thank all of them.

Dear Friends, colleagues, brothers and Sisters

For new ways to unfold before us, for enemies to bow before each other. for tears to bathe wounds of war, for hatred to soften into harmony, for greed to turn to generosity and for the Golden Rule to be the order of the day we need to ask ourselves "what is my role in making this happen? What should I do to create such peaceful homes, communities, countries and the world?"

World peace is only possible when we start to make peace within ourselves, our families and in our respective communities. Therefore if we want to see and live in a peaceful world let us make extra effort to practice every day and be :- A person who embraces all people with respect and dignity, a person who has a clear vision for the good of all living beings, including Mother Earth and the environment, A person who thinks about generations yet to come and takes responsibility for the future, and not only for the present. A person who is committed to action and serve unconditionally A person who lives by the guiding principles of the Golden Rule and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A person who respects and has reverence for all forms of life. A person who views leadership as service to the others and the world. A person committed to stewardship of the planet and its resources for the common good of all. A person who sees herself or himself not only as a citizen of a certain country, but also as a Citizen of the World and embraces humanity without any partiality. A person who respects and values deeply different religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions. A person who believes in the power of forgiveness and reconciliation. A person who is not quick to judge others. A person who listens to others and understands A person who is always ready to learn and appreciate others. A person who believes in constructive dialogue. A person who believes in team spirit and cooperation. A person who believes in the power of unconditional love. A person committed to action which brings a positive change to our world. A person who takes concrete action to replace the individualism and selfishness of the dominant culture with human solidarity as stated in the golden rule. A person who respects the self, affirms others and avoids uncaring criticism, hurtful words, physical attacks and self-destructive behavior. A person who shares his/her feelings honestly, looks for safe ways to express his/her anger, and works at solving problems peacefully. A person who listens carefully to others, especially those who dialogue with him/her, and to consider others' feelings and needs, rather than insist on having his/her own way only. A person who apologizes and makes amends when he/she hurts another, forgives others, and keeps from holding grudges. A person who treats the environment and all living things and beings with respect and care. A person who respects and upholds the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A person who lives by, upholds and is guided by the Golden Rule and uses it as his /her principle in life.

May our hearts open more and our minds understand the depth of our call as people who are living in the 21st century to serve humanity and Mother Earth.

Let us be with the presence of each other at deep levels of our thinking, feeling and acting.

Let us be instruments of peace and a living example of the teaching of the Golden Rule.

Let us support the initiative of Karen Armstrong Charter for Compassion.

Let us walk the talk.

May Peace and Golden Rule Prevail in our Mind

May Peace and Golden Rule Prevail in our Heart

May Peace and Golden Rule Prevail in our Family

May Peace and Golden Rule Prevail in our Communities

May Peace and Golden Rule Prevail in our Countries

May Peace and Golden Rule Prevail in our Regions

May Peace and Golden Rule Prevail on Earth