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Ban Ki-moon

General Secretary of the United Nations

New York (USA)

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Dear Secretary General, *Dear, friend*

I am writing to share with you a project I have been reflecting on and that I have been developing in various international forums I have been invited to, in my capacity as former Prime Minister of Spain, and accessorially, co-sponsor of the Alliance of Civilizations.

The document, that I attach, is a proposal for the creation of a "Council of Religions for Peace" as a component within the Alliance of Civilizations. As you will see, the main goal of this institution would be to bring together the main religious denominations to strive towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts by their active participation and the messages of peace they would transmit to their followers.

I hope you will find it useful and interesting. I remain at your disposition, were you interested to discuss this.

I would like to take the opportunity to send you my very best regards and hope this letter finds you well.

J. Zapatero

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

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GENERAL

PROJECT OUTLINE FOR THE FORMATION OF A COUNCIL OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE AS PART OF THE UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

There is probably no evil that is more paradoxical within all human civilizations than the use of religious faith to justify war. Peace among peoples is a prerequisite of any faith. Or, put another way, violence in the name of God not only fails to strengthen faith in that God, but rather thoroughly negates it.

Exploiting the name of God brought about the massacres that took place on September 11, 2001 in New York, March 11, 2004 in Madrid and July 7, 2005 in London. The exploitation of God's name fuels ongoing armed conflict and terrorist activity in several regions of the world, some of which, such as those in the Middle East, have a devastating effect on world peace and the welfare of peoples.

Religious fanaticism can only be effectively opposed in the long term through religious faith. Those who have sectarian and fundamentalist beliefs can only be changed by those whose beliefs are moderate and spiritual. In this context, it is necessary for the world's established religions to make a momentous effort to achieve peace.

In October 1970 the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) was held in Kyoto. This non-governmental organization that has its headquarters in New York and which was recognized by the United Nations has been working to promote interfaith dialogue for over four decades. Its extensive experience could serve as a seed for creating within the United Nations, as part of the Alliance of Civilizations, a Council of Religions for Peace that can develop and give institutional standing to an ambitious program for upholding the role of religion within the context of peace. A Council that condemns outright, based on religious authority, the use of religious violence in any part of the world under any circumstances or for any alleged moral reasons.

This Council of Religions for Peace will be solely composed of religious authorities. There will be dialogue with governments and national and transnational political forces but without them intervening in any way or taking on a

prominent role. The Council will rely on the involvement (to the extent that each religion's hierarchical structure permits), of each religion's most senior levels of leadership. It shall at all times maintain an unbiased position toward different faiths: it is not a forum for discussing religious beliefs or for spreading or opposing them, rather its sole purpose is to assert the fundamentally pacifist message inherent in any religion.

The project aims to bring together all the world's religions without exception, although its cornerstone will obviously be the leadership of the five major religions: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

We propose that the creation of this Council be linked with the review of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, bearing in mind that peace and coexistence between faiths are necessary pillars for attaining them. We will not be able to eradicate hunger, prevent infant mortality, further gender equality or achieve sustainable, universal economic development etc. unless we first manage to stop the barbarizing conflict resulting from religious friction.

The Council will have the freedom to develop its plan and set its interim targets, and the recommendation of public policies that contribute to putting a stop to any kind of violent fundamentalism will most certainly feature among its general targets. It is proposed that the first step for raising its international profile be the publication of a Sacred Book of Peace, translated into all the languages represented in the United Nations (in keeping with the publishing requirements called for by the different religious traditions) and consisting of texts on the subject of peace from all the sacred books.