

PRESS RELEASE - YOUTH-LED DISARMAMENT CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

(NEW YORK, 9 November 2009)— The first youth-led global multi-religious campaign on disarmament —led by the youth network of *Religions for Peace*, the world’s largest and most representative global coalition—was inaugurated in San José, Costa Rica, on Saturday.

The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sánchez offered support for this historic initiative, which was launched on 7–8 November 2009 in San José. More than a hundred senior religious leaders of different faiths, youth, and dignitaries committed to the campaign at the event.

During the opening ceremony, President Arias signed the campaign petition, which advances disarmament for shared security. It calls for the redirection of 10% of arms expenditure to achieve urgently needed development as set forth in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

The campaign launch was organized by *Religions for Peace* in partnership with the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress and the University for Peace. The notion of “Shared Security” was advanced by 800 senior religious leaders from more than a hundred countries at the *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, in 2006.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said, “*Religions for Peace* has long been active in advocating for a number of disarmament measures, including the recent adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. This year’s global, multi-religious youth campaign is another welcome effort. I urge you to use this event to build and strengthen the networks of mutual support that are so essential for the success of disarmament initiatives.”

At the campaign launch, Dr. William F. Vendley, the Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, said, “Shared security is a new political paradigm. It echoes the holistic notions of peace that are found in the world’s great religions. It recognizes that each person’s vulnerability is an invitation to approach others with compassion. Our

inter-relatedness calls us to cooperate to protect all persons and our earth. Today, my security depends on yours and no one is safer than the most vulnerable among us.”

H.E. President Oscar Arias Sánchez said, “This campaign recognizes the fundamental role that religious communities must play in building shared security, as well as the role that youth have to play in raising awareness worldwide.”

This year-long campaign—led by youth from the world’s religions—will work to engage religious leaders and believers around the world to unleash the power of multi-religious cooperation through shared action. It will also reach out to international organizations, governments, national assemblies and parliaments, municipalities, media, and all men and women of good will. Through education, mobilization, and advocacy, the campaign will advance shared security by working to reduce nuclear and conventional weapons and to reallocate military spending to support urgently needed development, as set forth in MDGs.

“Our campaign aims for 50 million signatures calling all governments to redirect 10 % of arms expenditure for development. Only 10% of the total global military budget would be sufficient to enable the full achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This must be done!” said Ms. Parker Diggory, the North American representative of the *Religions for Peace* Global Youth Network.