

**SGI-USA PARTICIPATES IN RELIGIOUS SUMMIT
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Symbolism and ceremony greeted approximately 1,000 of the world's preeminent religious and spiritual leaders as they gathered together at the United Nations for the First Millennium World Peace Summit on Aug. 28. This unprecedented event sought to bring together the leaders of the world's great faith traditions to discuss how to forge a partnership of peace with the United Nations and coordinate spiritual leadership as a driving force for building tolerance, fostering peace and encouraging interfaith dialogue. The conference, spanning four days, was attended by an SGI-USA delegation headed by SGI Vice President Guy McClosky.

Following the ceremonial blowing of a conch shell by Swami Bua, an Inca Blessing by Peruvian Q'ero Elders and a call to Prayer by Sheikh Ahmed Tijani Ben Omar, religious leaders of all the world's faiths conducted prayers for peace and the success of this gathering. Through the words of these representatives, it became evident that just as conflict begins in people's hearts, so must peace. Numerous speakers urged those present to guard against the misuse of religion by those in power.

Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan addressed the gathering, urging those gathered to work together with a spirit of justice, equality, reconciliation and faith. He expressed hope that religious leaders be the first to speak out when they see injustice and stressed that no religion can claim a monopoly on tolerance. There must be no room for religious bigotry in the 21st century.

Ted Turner, honorary chair of the Millennium World Peace Summit and vice chair of Time Warner Communications, related his personal experience in the development of this event. Mr. Turner had considered a religious vocation in his youth and maintained an interest in religion and philosophy, studying doctrines of the world's great religions. Through this background, and through a simple conversation with Secretary-General Annan, this gathering became a reality.

In an assemblage composed of a majority of men, women representatives made three especially powerful and challenging addresses. The Honorable Ela Gandhi, great granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi and member of Congress in South Africa, stressed the importance of active, rather than passive, nonviolence. Betty Williams, Nobel Peace Laureate from Northern Ireland, reminded all that it was the women of that region who moved to stop the violence. Finally, Reverend Bishop Vashti McKensie of the African Methodist Episcopal Church challenged the assembly to examine our role in conflict, stressing that "peace doesn't just happen, it must be pursued." She further stated that "if we can come together in this room, then the world will follow us."

The response to these women was so positive that the organizers held a breakfast meeting on the final day titled "Women and the Birth of World Peace." Attended by approximately 80 women and a few men, this session provided one of the few opportunities for informal dialogue and networking. The women present expressed concern that the over-all representation so heavily favored men, and agreed to aim for equal participation in the future.

As the summit progressed, the many difficulties facing ongoing dialogue became evident. Historic animosities surfaced as well as symbolic reconciliations. In an especially moving moment, Benjamin Waparia, a Shaman from the Amazon Region in Brazil, stood

before the gathering dressed in body paint and traditional ornaments, stating that this was the first time one of his people had ever been invited to address the United Nations. He stressed that they must remember the image of him standing there and he would remember looking at them. Together we must make peace happen, he concluded.