

Global Peace Convention 2012, Atlanta, Georgia, United States

November 29, 2012
Keynote Address



Your excellencies, honored guests, and distinguished participants from around the world. It is a distinct pleasure to welcome you from the four corners of the world here to the United States and to this fourth annual Global Peace Convention. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Georgia Senator Emanuel Jones, and Dr. Robert Schuller, for hosting and serving as Co-Chairmen of this Convention. To the members of our Global Leadership Council, to the many distinguished Latin American Presidents, and to the dignitaries from 40 nations assembled here today: thank you for your visionary leadership and ownership of our

mission for peace.

The Global Peace Convention

The Global Peace Convention started in Southeast Asia in 2009, in Manila, capital of the Philippines. We then moved to the continent of Africa, in Nairobi, Kenya, where president Kibaki was patron of the convention. Next, in 2011, we were in Northeast Asia, in my birthplace of Seoul, Korea; and finally this year we have arrived in the Western Hemisphere and my adopted home here in the United States. Thus, this convention brings together the fruits of those past conventions as well as of the numerous festivals, service and community development projects, character development programs, and partnerships that we have had the great fortune to initiate and develop with many of you in this room today.

The theme of this year's Convention is "Moral and Innovative Leadership: Building Healthy Families, Ethical Societies and a Culture of Global Peace." It is particularly fitting that this should be the theme for our gathering here in this great city of Atlanta, Georgia, a place rich with history, faith, and more importantly as a center of the civil rights movement. As a man of faith and student of history, I have always looked at that movement not just as a struggle for civil rights but as America's "Great Awakening" of the 20th century – one of the great spiritual movements of American history which were the harbinger of transformations to come. Today we must rekindle that spirit and take it to a still higher level, laying out a path not only for American renewal but for a hemispheric and even global awakening that will offer a new perspective for peace and harmony in our time.

Where America's True Strength Lies

Ladies and gentlemen, the United States may be the world's sole remaining superpower, but we need to be clear about where America's true strength lies. It is not in U.S. military might, greatly stretched in Iraq and now in Afghanistan. Nor is it in America's geopolitical and economic dominance, now challenged by its debt crisis and questions about its leadership in the Middle East, Asia and the international community.

I believe that America's true strength lies in its moral authority as a nation rooted in spiritual principles and values which has championed human rights and freedoms at home and abroad. This is a nation with the aspiration to become "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." It was this vision that inspired millions from all corners of the world regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality and religion to make the long and perilous journey to a new nation filled with hope and opportunity. In order for the United States to exercise genuine global leadership in today's more complex and fragmenting world, it must rekindle that position of true servant leadership, offering its inclusive national promise to the world.

Now more than ever, the United States must look to its unique founding ideals as the basis for a new Renaissance in the 21st century rooted in universally accepted aspirations, principles and values. Just as the European Renaissance gave rise to the Reformation and the Enlightenment and, thereby laid the groundwork for our modern world, a new global movement for change needs to arise, anchored in the past but bringing a fresh, new vision for the future. This is a time for bold leadership, that is guided by a universal aspiration and tied to those time-tested principles and values that form the basis of our common humanity.

In the course of the last century, the United States has been the catalyst for positive global change, challenging European colonial imperialism, and creating international assemblies to foster peace through dialogue and reason. The League of Nations after the First World War, and the United Nations after the

Second World War, were created as a result. During the Cold War era, American leadership, and faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, paved the way for the eventual collapse of totalitarian, communist regimes around the world. The historical role of the United States in shaping, and then leading, the world to where we are today, is undisputed. The question then is what should be America's role going forward, as we look to this new century and the challenges that it brings.

Three Thematic Challenges Facing America and the World

As a concerned citizen and peace advocate, I see three major themes that the U.S. needs to address as a global leader in the 21st century, together with the world community. The first deals with the religious dimension of U.S. engagement in the Middle East and the contemporary challenge of sectarian-fueled extremism and violence. The second is near to my heart as a Korean-American, namely the resolution of the Korean conflict. The final theme addresses the need for greater hemispheric integration between the United States and its southern neighbors in this era of the Pan-Pacific rim.

The current approach to addressing terrorism over the last eleven years has embroiled the United States in the ever changing politics of the Muslim world where religion and tribal affiliations are powerful socio-political realities. How does the United States meet the threat of Islamist extremism without alienating mainstream Muslims and igniting a wider conflict along religious lines? Moreover, the rise of a potential nuclear Iran with its regional ambitions, coupled with the instability of the Middle East, makes for a still more volatile situation.

Further complicating matters is North Korea's link to the Iranian nuclear program and its role as the arms supplier to rogue regimes worldwide. Given these challenges, the resolution of the Korean conflict is of paramount global importance. What should U.S. and international policy be toward the Korean peninsula given the threats to regional stability, and international security?

Finally, there is the question of the future of the Americas. It is clear that the Hispanic community will be ever more influential in the domestic, social, political and economic life of the United States. Whether considering immigration, socio-economic opportunity, or regional trade and partnerships, it seems clear that the future of the US and the hemisphere as a whole lies with greater integration and cooperation. This becomes even more important given the rise of China as a significant competitor and growing force on the global stage.

A Nation Founded on Principles

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me repeat: to provide global leadership in meeting these challenges, the United States must rekindle its founding ideals and find in them the inspiration for dealing with today's realities. This nation was given birth through the declaration of certain universal transcendent principles and values that uplifted human dignity and freedoms. Those "self-evident truths" formed the foundation of a new nation in which a common commitment to shared ideals and values bound us together as "one nation under God."

I have traveled widely around the world and gained a unique perspective that has enabled me to appreciate the distinctive genetic code of America's greatness. As a student of history I have often asked myself, "What is the essence of the American Dream?" I came to the conclusion that the American Dream is not about the democratic political process or the free market economic system. Processes and systems are external structures that succeed or fail depending on the spirit and values that infuse them. The secret of America's success lies in the vitality of the spiritual principles and values that motivated the American experiment and were poured into the structures of the new nation.

They are conveyed in the Declaration of Independence, a secular document that nevertheless enshrines spiritual principles that form the basis of our modern notion of human rights. Its ringing words declare : "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." They make clear that those rights and the human dignity, freedom, and responsibility that flow from them, are not granted by any human power or institution but come as our natural heritage from the Creator and, therefore, cannot rightfully be abridged or denied. They are a shield against tyranny and corruption. In this context, the First Amendment to the Constitution is of particular importance, guaranteeing freedom of expression and religion. In so doing it set a precedent that has made a global impact, protecting and promoting essential freedoms of conscience, worship, and speech everywhere.

It is in these core principles that America's greatness lies. It was to them, for example, that Dr. Martin Luther King appealed in his powerful and charismatic speeches that transcended sectarian religious differences and spoke to the larger humanity of us all. He said that the civil rights movement was not just a struggle for African-American equality but the pursuit of a timeless ideal rooted in the fundamental principles that shaped America's founding.

From One Nation under God to One World Family under God

This moment may prove to be a historic crossroads, for the United States, and for the world. The time is ripe for a new spiritual awakening that galvanizes the community of righteous and faithful citizens around universal principles and shared values, not just in the U.S. but throughout the Western hemisphere and the world. In other words, humanity needs a vision that is more powerful than the forces driving us apart. American founding ideals gave rise to the vision of One Nation under God – a nation where people of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds could live together and create the model of a unified world. The time is ripe for this model to be expanded to the global level -- from the nation to the world.

A shared spiritual vision for humanity is the objective needed for these challenging times. Such a vision is found in the simple but profound idea that all human beings, everywhere, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion, are part of “One Family under God.” Political authority cannot mandate, nor can money buy, the virtues needed to resolve conflicts and build ethical societies. We need a new framework rooted in our shared spiritual aspirations and principles that give rise to the values needed to build peace.

Moral and Innovative Leadership

What do I mean by moral and innovative leadership? First, it has to promote a “greater good” that can benefit not only the individual but the larger society, nation and eventually the world. This is the moral orientation of the leadership I am describing. For it to come to fruition it has to be guided by a vision or aspiration and a clear set of irrevocable universal principles and values that could have the breadth and depth to encompass the diversity of the human family.

Secondly, it has to harness mankind’s natural creative need to advance and develop the human condition. This is the innovative component of leadership. As you all know, every culture has examples of extraordinary men and women who propelled humanity forward in the fields of philosophy, ethics, the sciences, athletics and the cultural arts, by freely exercising their God-given talents even to the point of challenging existing paradigms. Although many faced difficulties due to religious, societal and legal constraints of their time, it is fair to say that the modern world with its greater freedoms and advancements has benefited greatly due to the sacrifices of these innovators.

Three Thematic Challenges Addressed

Ladies and gentlemen:

When fundamental human aspirations are expressed in universal principles and given form through shared values; and when moral and innovative leaders rise up to give them practical substance; then we will see profound change in our societies, nations, and world, and the dawn of a new era of harmony and peace. In particular, this will provide the key to resolving the three challenges facing America and the world, that I laid out earlier.

Interfaith Cooperation Based on Universal Principles In order to meet the threat of global religious conflict, a new type of interfaith movement must appear, much like the civil rights movement of the 1960s which addressed the injustices suffered by African-Americans through an appeal to universal principles and values. This era should be one where people of every faith come together on the foundation of such principles and values in a new Great Spiritual Awakening. The promise that America makes to its citizens through the First Amendment must be extended to all the world’s peoples through such an interfaith movement.

On that common foundation, people of faith must stand together to uphold those principles and resist the violent appeal of religious extremism. I want to recognize the representatives here of Nadhlatul Ulama from Indonesia, one of our major international interfaith partners. NU is the world’s largest Muslim civic organization from the world’s most populous Muslim country. NU promotes a moderate and peaceful vision of Islam that supports the Indonesian polity based on unity in diversity and respect for religious freedom. They act vigorously against Islamist extremists whose actions are contrary to Islam’s core principles and mission of peace.

Here in America, the Coalition for American Renewal is building a grassroots network among religious and civic leaders to revive the American founding spirit and apply it in practical social and educational initiatives nationwide. It is upholding First Amendment freedoms, particularly freedom of religion, which is the foundation for freedom of conscience. I also want to recognize the many other interfaith partners in this room from around the world, such as the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, who are building peace through track two diplomacy.

A Principled Approach to Korean Unification With Korean unification, the Foundation has taken an

innovative approach that has altered the framework of the debate. To start with, we challenged the idea that unification was impossible or could only be achieved over generations. Our Global Peace Leadership Conferences put it on the table as an imminent possibility. Next, we took it out of the exclusive top-down realm of high international politics and made it a popular, bottom-up campaign that engaged ordinary Korean citizens. Through the Korea United campaign we have engaged a broad-based coalition of 400 grassroots civic organizations with an innovative values-based approach to Korean unification.

Finally, and most important, we shifted the debate away from the process to a focused discussion on the desired outcome – what sort of a nation, governed by what principles, should a united Korea be? Thus, for the first time, a grassroots movement for Korean unification, based upon spiritual principles, has emerged. Ultimately, unification based on such principles is urgently needed to resolve the threat of North Korean nuclear arms and nuclear proliferation.

A Great Hemispheric Awakening for the 21st Century Work to promote greater integration within the western hemisphere, between the Americas, is already under way. Yesterday, eight former heads of state of Latin American countries, with the committed support of several others, met at the Carter Center to kick off the Americas Summit. This afternoon they will announce the founding of the Latin American Presidential Mission. Building on earlier meetings in Paraguay in 2010, and in Brazil last year, and the Asuncion and Brasilia Declarations that emerged from these meetings, they are developing a blueprint for the closer integration of the Latin American countries and a deeper connection between North and South America.

The project is not just about diplomacy or economics. At its core is the affirmation and propagation of our common spiritual roots and of the same “self-evident truths” that informed America’s founding. Upon such a foundation we can experience a Great Hemispheric Awakening and see the opening of a new era in the history of the Americas that will have a positive impact throughout the world. In particular the western hemisphere can establish societies that value human rights, freedoms, and responsibilities. These will stand as beacons for the aspirations of people everywhere and bulwarks against authoritarian regimes that deny those rights.

Worldwide Initiatives

Significant initiatives are also being undertaken with many dedicated partners in Africa and Asia. There are distinguished African leaders here today who have worked with GPF to forge national campaigns of social cohesion that have stemmed the post-election violence in Kenya. Also here are African religious and political leaders who convened recently at the United Nations in Nairobi for the Africa Conference on Volunteer Action for Peace and Development. There, 25 partners launched Africa’s own multi-national regional approach to a peace corps, engaging African youth in international service.

In Asia, young people are being engaged in development in rural villages such as the All Lights project that brings solar powered lighting to communities that are not on the electrical grid. This effort reaches out across Southeast Asian nations.

Ladies and gentlemen: The demands of this moment in history are great, but so are the opportunities to forge a bright future for humanity. Now is the time to revive America’s founding vision and expand that dream onto a global stage through the universal vision of “One Family under God.” This should be the clarion call of our age. In the words of my father, who committed his life to the cause of peace, the time has come “to tear down the man-made walls of race, culture, religion and country, and establish the peaceful, ideal world of God’s cherished desire.”

The power of one human family united, can quell the turmoil of conflict throughout the world---from the strife and poverty of Africa, to the conflict in the Middle East, and the final remnant of the Cold War on the Korean Peninsula. As Americans and global citizens, let us make a solemn pledge to expand this dream to all people and lead the world to peace through the vision of “One Family under God.” Then, as surely as light overcomes the darkness, an era of peace and prosperity will emerge from the depths of distrust and hatred, both at home and in the far corners of our world.

Join with me and all our partners, and dare to dream the greatest dream of all, that we can all live as One Family under God, and make that dream a reality.

Thank you for your support and engagement in this great work and may God bless you and your families. Thank you.