



Family Federation for World Peace and Unification

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Jews, Muslims and Christians Journey to the Holy Land to Celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Signing of the "Jerusalem Declaration" for Interfaith Harmony and Cooperation

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From May 14-19, 2013 more than 200 spiritual pilgrims and activists from around the world will travel to the Holy Land as an expression of interfaith solidarity and unity among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. These pilgrims are gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the signing of the "Jerusalem Declaration" for interfaith cooperation and peace.

In February of 2003, the Universal Peace Federation, an interfaith NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, launched the Middle East Peace Initiative in order to promote peace in that troubled part of the world through "people to people" diplomacy, sometimes called "Track II" diplomacy, utilizing the power of civil society and, especially, faith-based organizations and actors. The first interfaith pilgrimage, the first of more than 40 during the next ten years, convened in May of 2003 and culminated in a dramatic expression of interfaith harmony, as representatives of faiths that have often been locked in bitter conflict came forward one by one to lend their signature to the "Jerusalem Declaration" which called for unity among the Abrahamic faiths as a foundation for peace in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East.

The Middle East Peace Initiative, or MEPI, is one of the leading interfaith peacebuilding efforts addressing the enmity, divisions, and conflicts that plague the region through a wide range of programs that include "Peace Walks," interfaith tourism, people-to-people dialogue, seminars, and conferences. Faith leaders from nearly every religion and more than 120 nations have participated in MEPI programs. In 2010 Martin Luther King III joined the MEPI program and spoke at Hebrew University. In addition to programs in Israel and visits to the holy sites of Christians, Jews, and Muslims (including the Western Wall, Al Aqsa Mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, Galilee, Nazareth, and Bethlehem) the MEPI programs are also carried out in the Palestinian territories in Gaza and the West Bank.

Perhaps no other place on earth has endured more division, suffering, and conflict. As this MEPI program begins, the backdrop includes ongoing civil war in Syria, nuclearization of Iran, the risk of Iraq becoming a failed state, and a faltering "Arab Spring" in Tunisia and Egypt. While most initiatives for peace are attempted at the governmental and inter-governmental level, there is a desperate need for faith leaders to get involved. Religion is surely one of the contributing factors to the intractable nature of the conflicts in the Middle East, but the real potential and power of religion as a leading instrument of peacebuilding has yet to be fully tapped. The MEPI programs are at the cutting edge of faith-based activism. At this 10th anniversary of one of MEPI's landmark accomplishments, the people of faith who will assemble are determined to continue and even expand their efforts for peace.