

PLENARY I:

Advancing *Shared Well-Being* as Multi-
Religious Vision of Positive Peace

Action Point on Charter for Forgiveness and
Reconciliation



ACTION POINT ON THE PEACE CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

PROBLEM BEING ADDRESSED

There is an urgent and profound need for reconciliation in communities in conflict and coming out of conflict. Experience shows that conflict settlements and peace accords tend to be short-lived; and that conflicts resume in the absence of reconciliation, which includes addressing deep wounds, injustices, distrust, fear and hatred. Without reconciliation, disturbed memories lurk under the surface and are not brought out into the open to be slowly healed. In conflict situations, very often urgent efforts to end the physical violence do not address the important process of reconciliation, which needs to be advanced through truth telling, accepting responsibility, embracing repentance and transacting forms of restitution. This absence of reconciliation compromises peace settlements and thwarts true *positive* Peace. *Religions for Peace (RfP)* has repeatedly experienced the absence of reconciliation among people and communities struggling to come out of situations of destructive violence and oppression. In these situations, *RfP* has long recognized that a deeper process of forgiveness and reconciliation is profoundly needed to achieve *positive* Peace. Moreover, *RfP* knows well that religions have profound and unique resources that can—if mobilized and creatively adapted—contribute to reconciliation.

Adopting the *Peace Charter* will help to equip the *RfP* global family of affiliated multi-religious bodies for the important work of reconciliation by raising awareness, deepening understanding, and increasing reflection on the crucial role of forgiveness and reconciliation in sustainable *positive* peacebuilding. The *Peace Charter* is a tool that can lovingly inspire, educate and provide guidance in processes of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace building amongst persons, communities of all types and nations. Importantly, it can also be a resource for healing painful historical memories within religions' various histories. It will also make a vital contribution to value-led peace education in formal and informal settings, thereby strengthening ever more the foundation for more just and peaceful persons, communities and nations.

RfP AND THE PEACE CHARTER FOR FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Religions for Peace is deeply seized by the agony and suffering of people in midst or aftermath of violent conflicts, and it is convinced that forgiveness and reconciliation are profoundly needed and must be integrated into efforts to build sustainable positive peace.

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, Co-President of *RfP*, invited Dr William F. Vendley, the Secretary-General of *RfP*, in 2014, to join him as a Co-convenor of the *Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. Dr Vendley co-convened the Charter's Editorial Panel in 2016, thereby ensuring the strong and foundational contributions of *RfP* leaders. A formal presentation of the *Peace Charter* was made by Bhai Sahib (by video conference) to the *RfP* International Executive Committee and International Trustees meeting on 20th October 2016, in Abuja, Nigeria. Advancing the *Peace Charter* is part of the current five-year *RfP* International Strategic Plan.

CALL FOR ACTION

Being deeply moved by the great suffering borne by persons, communities, and nations in countless lamentable violent conflicts and their unhealed aftermaths;

Being firmly convinced that reconciliation is essential to the resolution of these conflicts and that religions have unique resources for achieving the needed reconciliation; and

Being committed to advancing reconciliation as a vital dimension of *positive* Peace within persons and among communities and nations;

We place before the Assembly the following Motion:

“That the *Religions for Peace* World Assembly adopt *The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation*.”



Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Progress and Outreach Report

1. The Peace Charter Text

Charter Preamble, Purpose and Principles

Preamble

The vision of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the process of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation are to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek justice, harmony and sustainable peace.

Fostering and practising forgiveness has the power to transform memories and deep-seated responses to legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions. Faith and spiritual traditions guide and inspire us to awaken the best of our human potential, by practising compassion, mercy, kindness, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to positively reshape our destinies.

Forgiveness is understood as an activity arising directly out of a compassionate consciousness, rooted in the awareness that we all belong to one human family. Compassion is an indispensable spiritual disposition in every faith, religion, *dharam*, or *deen*, as well as for our everyday human relations. Forgiveness is fostered by our experience of unconditional love and mercy, and an inner calling to live magnanimously and responsibly. It stems from our ability to see a larger context to our individual and collective existence, and from our impulse to lovingly seek and forge genuine and sincere bonds with one another as brothers and sisters.

To see forgiveness as a most profound expression and manifestation of our spiritual and human nature, and a catalyst for inward and outward change, is at the heart of the Charter. To love ones neighbour as oneself means that the efforts to seek forgiveness for oneself are related to endeavours to forgive and receive forgiveness from the other. Our human journey of forgiveness and reconciliation can only be navigated freely and voluntarily. Sharing forgiveness can therefore only be inspired, not demanded.

Existing, inspirational examples of forgiveness compel us to practical and effective actions, leading to reconciliation, conflict transformation and peace building. Forgiveness and reconciliation are an indispensable part of our journey to peace, in our interconnected and interdependent world and our quest for restorative justice.

Throughout history, acts of forgiveness have helped to de-escalate national and international conflicts, and to restore and sustain harmonious relationships in the daily lives of individuals, families, communities and societies. Insights from the lives of outstanding individuals and inspiring grassroots movements, combined with learning from a shared global heritage of sacred teachings, provide guidance to take forward the Charters work.

By offering paradigms of forgiveness, the Charter inspires commitment and directs activities that contribute to a growing practice of forgiveness and reconciliation, both in public processes and in private settings, in order to foster healing, harmony and peace in a wounded and fractured world.

Purpose

We, people, mindful of our shared humanity, commit to practise and nurture forgiveness and reconciliation, to foster healing, harmony, justice and sustainable peace in our world.

Principles

1. The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is the founding document of a worldwide movement of people, seeking forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and sustainable peace, being aware of the oneness of our human family.
2. We seek forgiveness, reconciliation and peace between individuals, families, communities, public institutions, states and religious traditions.
3. We believe that forgiveness and reconciliation are needed for peace to be sustainable, and to end cycles of violence.
4. We co-create reconciliation and peace, by seeking and receiving forgiveness. Forgiveness is the first step towards a deeper reconciliation.
5. We believe to be forgiving and to let-go of past burdens is in the hand of each of us.
6. We believe that forgiveness cannot be demanded from others, can only be freely offered and is for the benefit, freedom and inner peace of the one who forgives.
7. We believe forgiveness finds completion in becoming unconditional.
8. We aim to express respect, compassion, mercy, kindness and love in all our interactions with others.
9. We believe that peace is more than the absence of violence, and that it includes inner peacefulness as well as peacefulness with others and with the environment.
10. We join hands and reach out to others to free ourselves of destructive pasts, to heal personal wounds, to overcome conflicts and wars, in order to create a better future for all.
11. We draw upon the wisdom of the worlds traditions, which include religious, spiritual, indigenous, and philosophical worldviews, as well as on our intuitive sense of compassion.
12. We seek cooperation with all interested and like-minded people, organisations, public institutions and the UN System, bearing in mind the interdependence and unity of humanity.
13. We affirm the equal rights and responsibilities of all women and men, as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities.
14. We practise open inclusiveness of all, regardless of gender, traditions, affiliations, and ethnicity.
15. We are committed to non-violence and restorative justice, always seeking peaceful resolutions to conflicts and wars, even if self-defence may be necessary in some circumstances.
16. We support all efforts and initiatives of healing, reconciliation and peacebuilding, and encourage intercultural, interreligious, and interethnic dialogue, understanding and cooperation.
17. We seek to foster harmony within our Earth community and unity amongst our human family, valuing the interconnectedness of all life.
18. We welcome as members and supporters all individuals, organisations and institutions who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. We will seek affiliation with institutions and networks that support the Vision, Purpose, Aims and Objectives of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

Web Site: <http://www.charterforforgiveness.org>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/charterforgive>

Email: office@charterforforgiveness.org

2. Introduction

The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is an international initiative to inspire, foster and strengthen forgiveness, reconciliation, restorative justice and peace worldwide.

The Preamble of the Charter opens with the following words: The vision of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the process of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation are to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek justice, harmony and sustainable peace.

3. Progress, Outreach and Development Report (Update July 2019)

- In 2011, the question of developing a Charter for Forgiveness was first raised by Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, Chairman, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, in a series of conversations between Bhai Sahib and Dr Josef Boehle (University of Birmingham). In these conversations the initial idea, vision, concept and project proposal for a Charter for Forgiveness were developed.
- After gaining the support of the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace (UK) (in 2011) and the Fetzer Institute (USA) (in 2012) for the initial project development phase, additional organisations were approached to seek their support, most prominently Religions for Peace International. In the early Charter development phase, Forgiveness and Reconciliation were identified as being closely related values and both being necessary to achieve sustainable peace between individuals, communities and states.
- Dr William F. Vendley, Secretary-General of Religions for Peace International, lovingly embraced the Charter idea, vision and project, and joined Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia as Co-convenor of the Charter project in Spring 2014. Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh and Dr William F. Vendley as Co-convenors, and Dr Josef Boehle as Director, have since formed the core leadership team.
- Rabbi David Rosen (International Director of Interreligious Affairs, AJC, Israel), Rev Kosho Niwano (President Designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, Japan) and Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah (President of Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies), World Council and Executive Committee members of Religions for Peace International, agreed to be Co-chairs of the Charter.
- A very successful International Symposium on Forgiveness and Reconciliation was held in Birmingham in April 2014, bringing together 30 international experts, leaders and practitioners.
- A Statement of Vision and Purpose was developed by a working team and aided by contributions from the participants in the 2014 Symposium. This Statement summarised succinctly the core aims, principles, values and objectives of the proposed Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation. This Statement of Vision and Purpose then formed the basis on which the Preamble of the Charter was written.
 - An Editorial Panel with 13 members was formed in 2016 to jointly develop the Charter text and to promote universal ownership, open inclusiveness and ensure a high-quality Charter from the beginning.

The Editorial Panel consisted of the two Co-convenors, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh and Dr William F. Vendley, 10 Editorial Panel Members and the Director of the Editorial Panel, Dr Josef Boehle.

Editorial Panel Members:

Prof Pal Ahluwalia, Vice-Chancellor, University of South Pacific, Fiji.

The Rt Rev Dr Bishop Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry, UK.

Dr Marius Felderhof, Director, Museum of Worlds Religions (UK), UK.

Dr Omnia Marzouk, President Emeritus, Initiatives of Change International, UK.

Rev Kosho Niwano, President Designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, Japan; Co-Moderator and Executive Committee member of Religions for Peace International.

Prof Anantanand Rambachan, Professor of Religion, St Olaf College, USA.

Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, AJC, Israel; Co-President and Executive Committee member of Religions for Peace International.

H.E. Prof Dr Din Syamsuddin, Chairman of Advisory Council, Muhammadiyah; Moderator of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, Indonesia.

Prof Garrett Thomson, CEO, Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace, UK and USA.

Maria Voce, President, Focolare Movement, Italy; Co-President of Religions for Peace International.

After a two year period of revisions the Charter text was completed in early 2018 and consists of a Preamble, Purpose and Principles section. The Charter text has received very positive feedback and appreciative responses and has been welcomed by a wide diversity of audiences internationally.

- A Plan of Action and Development Stages were outlined in the Charter brochure, which included the now completed Charter drafting process, the outreach to relevant organisations and the wider public, the development of Charter related activities, as well as the planned engagement with public bodies, international institutions and the United Nations System which is progressing and expected to be accelerated after a global presentation in August 2019.
- On 4th February 2017 the Inaugural Annual Peace Forum on Forgiveness and Reconciliation was held by the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation at the Nishkam Centre in Birmingham, as part of World Interfaith Harmony Week. On 4th February 2018 the 2nd Annual Peace Forum on Forgiveness and Reconciliation took place at the Nishkam Centre in Birmingham.
- The finalised Charter text on a scroll and the Charter Project was presented to His Holiness Pope Francis and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on 2nd May 2018 in Rome. HH Pope Francis was delighted to learn about the Charter Text and Project and joyfully blessed the Charter scroll. During a second meeting on occasion of this Rome visit, the Charter Text and Project was presented to a group of senior leaders of the Focolare Movement who expressed their appreciation and support. Maria Voce, President of the Focolare, has been a member of the Editorial Panel.
- The Charter was presented to an Interreligious Peace Pilgrimage and Conference attended by approximately 90 leaders and activists during 26-29 June 2018 in Assisi, Italy.
- A conference for the development of a teaching module on forgiveness, to be incorporated into the school curriculum, was hosted by the group of Nishkam Schools with over 150 teaching staff. After the morning plenary session which included presentations and discussions on forgiveness, staff started to work on developing a syllabus for pupils aged 4 to 18. This work will lead to a key area of impact for the Charter in the education field and it is planned to share the developed modules as fully resourced modules with all interested schools.
- The Charter text was presented to the Birmingham Faith Leaders Group (BFLG) and blessed by them on 11 September 2018. The BFLG was supportive of the Charter from the beginning.
- The Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation web site was redesigned and relaunched in November 2018, to be easily readable on computers and on mobile phones.
Please visit: <http://www.charterforforgiveness.org>
- A very successful Seminar on Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Perspectives from the Worlds Religions was held with 140 participants on 2 November 2018 at the Parliament of the Worlds Religions in Toronto, Canada.
- Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh gave a keynote address at the 2018 Parliament of the Worlds Religions in Toronto, Canada, and highlighted the Charters contribution to seeking a more peaceful world.
- The Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation scroll and project was presented to UN Under- Secretary-General Adama Dieng on 8 November 2018 at UN Headquarters, New York.
- The Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation scroll and project was presented to Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, a Co-chair of the Charter, on 8 December 2018 in Abu Dhabi.
- The Charter name was decided to be Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation in May 2019, to highlight the interconnected 3 core values (Peace, Forgiveness and Reconciliation) of the Charter together.
- The Peace Charter was presented to Maria Voce, President of Focolare Movement, during a visit of Focolare members to GNNSJ, at the Nishkam Centre, Birmingham, UK, on 30 June 2019.
- A global presentation and adoption of the Peace Charter is planned for the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace (RfP) International in August 2019 in Germany.
- A workshop on Sustainable Peacebuilding: Understanding and Supporting Processes of Forgiveness and Reconciliation will be co-convened by the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation at the 10 World Assembly of RfP International.

4. Peace Charter Development Highlights



SYMPOSIUM ON FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION
(NISHKAM CENTRE, B'HAM UK, 2 APRIL 2014)



1ST PEACE FORUM ON FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION
(NISHKAM CENTRE, B'HAM, UK, 4 FEB 2017)



2ND PEACE FORUM ON FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION
(NISHKAM CENTRE, B'HAM, UK, 4 FEB 2018)



UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES DISCUSSING THE CHARTER
(LONDON UK, 10 MAY 2017)



POPE FRANCIS BLESSING THE CHARTER SCROLL (ROME, ITALY, 2-3 MAY 2018)



[L to R]
Father Santiago,
William Ozanne,
Dr Marius Felderhof,
Bhai Sahib Ji,
Bishop Ayuso,
Dr Josef Boehle,
Brigitte van Baren,
& Dr Gopinder Kaur Sagoo.

CHARTER MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE (ROME, ITALY, 2-3 MAY 2018)



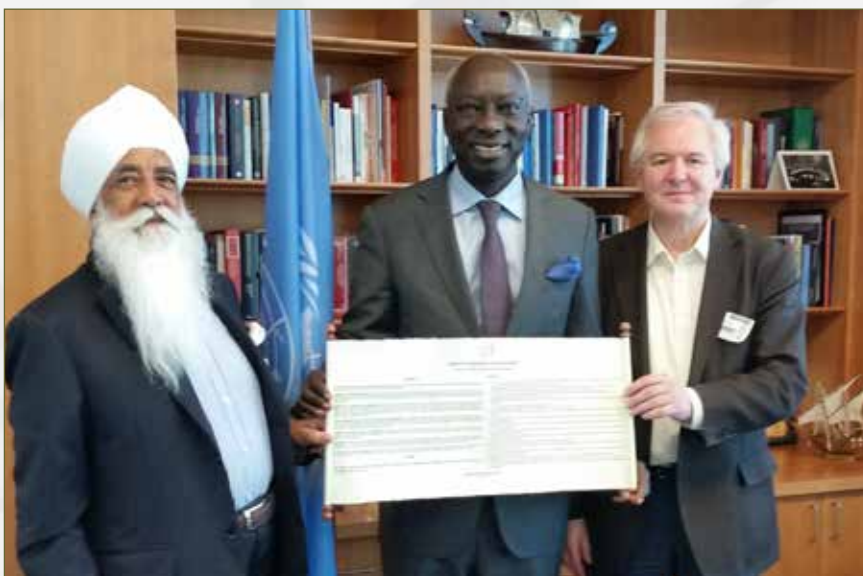
[L to R]
 Dr Josef Boehle,
 Dr Francisco Canzani,
 Gloria Duarte,
 Tim King,
 Nicoletta Bernasconi,
 & Bhai Sahib Ji.

CHARTER MEETING WITH FOCOLARE MEMBERS
 (ROME, ITALY, 2-3 MAY 2018)



[L to R]
 Rabbi Yossi Jacobs,
 Archbishop Bernard Longley,
 Amrick Singh Ubhi,
 Rabbi Margaret Jacobi,
 John Beard,
 & Bhai Sahib Ji.

Birmingham Faith Leaders Group
 (Nishkam Centre, B'ham, UK, 12 Sept, 2018)



[L to R] Bhai Sahib Ji, Adama Dieng - UN Under-Secretary-General & Dr. Josef Boehle
 (UN Headquarters, New York, USA, 8 Nov, 2018)

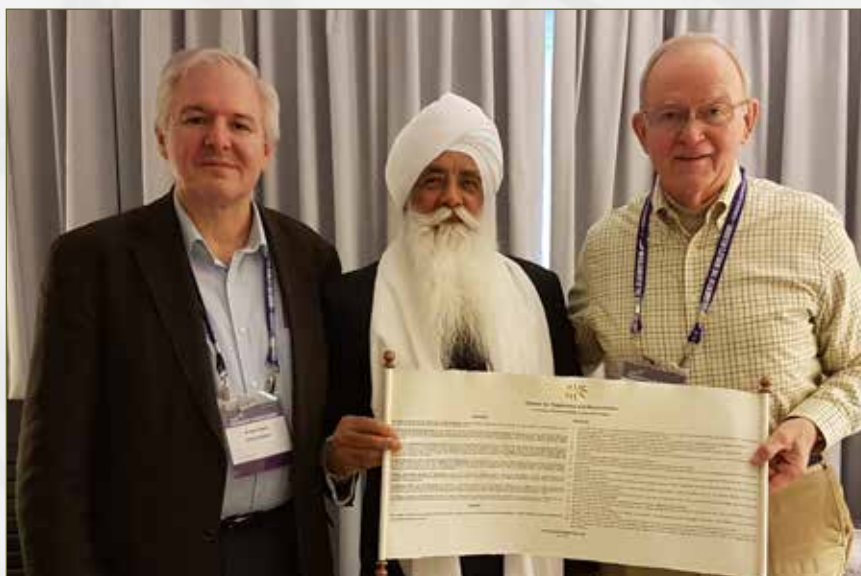


[L TO R] DR. JOSEF BOEHLE, CANON SARAH SNYDER- ARCHBISHOP'S ADVISOR FOR RECONCILIATION, & BHAI SAHIB JI (LAMBETH PALACE, LONDON, UK, 25 OCT 2018)



[L to R]
 Prof Mohammed Abu-Nimer,
 Bhai Samrath Singh,
 Rabbi David Rosen,
 Dr Josef Boehle,
 Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati,
 Bhai Sahib Ji,
 Delegate of Parliament,
 Dharma Master Hsin Tao,
 & Jathedar Singh Sahib,
 Giani Iqbal Singh Ji

SEMINAR ON FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION HELD AT THE
 2018 PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS (TORONTO, CANADA, 2 NOV 2018)



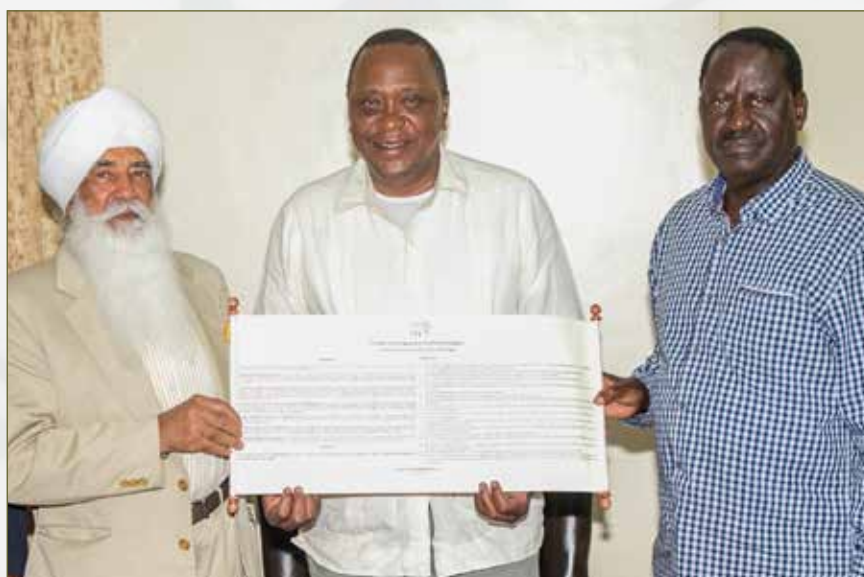
[L TO R] DR. JOSEF BOEHLE, BHAI SAHIB JI AND BISHOP BILL SWING
 - PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF THE URI (TORONTO, CANADA, 2 NOV 2018)



[L TO R] DR. JOSEF BOEHLE, BILL VENDLEY - SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE (WCRP) & BHAI SAHIB JI (ABU DHABI, UAE 8 DEC 2018)



[L TO R] DR. JOSEF BOEHLE, BHAI SAHIB JI & SHEIKH ABDULLAH BIN BAYYAH - PRESIDENT OF THE FORUM FOR PROMOTING PEACE IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES (ABU DHABI, UAE, 8 DEC, 2018)



[L TO R] BHAI SAHIB JI, HON. UHURU KENYATTA - KENYAN PRESIDENT & HON. RAILA ODINGA - OPPOSITION LEADER (KISUMU STATE HOUSE, KENYA, AFRICA, 18 JAN, 2019)



[L TO R] DR. JOSEF BOEHLE, PROF ROBIN MASON - PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR (INTERNATIONAL) - UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM UK & BHAJ SAHIB JI (NISHKAM CENTRE, B'HAM, UK, 23 JAN, 2019)



L to R]:
 Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh,
 Mr Oded Wiener, Rabbi David
 Rosen, Rabbi Professor Avraham
 Steinberg, Rabbi Rasson Arousi,
 Rabbi Moshe Dagan, Dr Brinder
 Singh Mahon, Rabbi Yossi Jacobs,
 Dr Josef Boehle and Rabbi Eliezer
 Weiss

DELEGATION OF CHIEF RABBINATE COUNCIL (ISRAEL) VISITS GURU NANAK NISHKAM SEWAK JATHA
 (GNNSJ HEAD QUARTERS, B'HAM, UK, 25 MARCH 2019)



PRESENTING THE PEACE CHARTER TO MARIA VOCE, PRESIDENT OF FOCOLARE MOVEMENT,
 NISHKAM CENTRE, BIRMINGHAM, UK, 30 JUNE 2019



Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Preamble

The vision of the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that the process of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation are to take place, as part of our collective efforts to seek justice, harmony and sustainable peace.

Fostering and practising forgiveness has the power to transform memories and deep-seated responses to legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions. Faith and spiritual traditions guide and inspire us to awaken the best of our human potential, by practising compassion, mercy, kindness, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to positively reshape our destinies.

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[First three paragraphs of the Preamble]