

**Joint Statement of the participants in the  
Inter-Religious Dialogue  
at Cessy, France, held from 13<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2013**

**1. Preamble**

In the 1980s, the Lutheran pastor Reinhard von Kirchbach gathered a small group of people from different religions with the objective of *living* the inter-religious dialogue. Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims came together 14 times for between two weeks and three months at a time in Germany, Sri Lanka, Israel, India, Pakistan, Japan, France, and Bali. The approach of this group was based on the conviction that the different religions can no longer exist without one another. The group set out to live the principles of understanding, tolerance and respect as opposed to any form of proselytism or syncretism. These dialogue meetings proved to be a transformative experience for all participants in their search for the divine within their respective traditions and forged a fundamental understanding and bonds of friendship among them.

We, the undersigned, including five long-standing dialogue participants with Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, convened in Cessy in France close to Geneva from 12 to 20 May 2013 on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Reinhard von Kirchbach to review and renew the lessons from the Dialogue. Like many others, we are convinced that an intensive dialogue among the religions is essential both from the perspective of our own spiritual development and for reducing tensions among the different religious communities in our globalized and inter-dependent world.

**2. Benefits of living the Inter-Religious Dialogue**

*The benefits of living together in dialogue were experienced because participants were confronted with both similarities and differences between them in a diverse, holistic, unavoidable, and surprising way and learned how to handle them.*

This experience broadened the individuals' own horizons concerning their own faith as well as that of the others, allowing them to gain greater understanding, deeper appreciation, and respect for the other faiths.

We learned not to limit our faith by our own limitations.

In the dialogue process initial barriers and facades began to come down. The sincerity of the partners created mutual trust.

There was no hidden agenda to persuade the others of one's own beliefs. We became companions who enriched each other in our search for truth.

The peace and happiness we experienced was derived from our commitment to spirituality as we were all seeking the divine. In reality, spirituality unites whereas religion can be used to divide.

We enjoyed unique access to insights, opportunities and treasures of the other partners.

We have come to see each other as friends, to live together as friends and to make new friends.

We enriched ourselves with the disciplines of different religions introduced by the partners such as worship, yoga, guided meditation, constant remembrance of God (zikr), chanting, and common singing.

It proved to be essential not to just talk the dialogue, but to live it. Apart from sharing information about each other, it entailed experiences at the body, mind and spirit levels, leading us to a deeper understanding of each other. Through this, a new intensity came into our lives.

It helped us to overcome prejudices and dislikes resulting in a harmony, which we could then apply to other life situations.

We learned to agree to disagree.

We felt guided by the thought and action patterns of others and felt the comfort of such guidance.

*The Inter Religious Dialogue has touched us profoundly. For some participants it felt like coming home, it felt light and elevating, we felt guided and protected by "those unseen hands."*

### **3. How to live an Inter-Religious Dialogue: some suggestions based on our experiences**

There should be enough time for each participant to be a teacher as well as a learner.

It proved to be helpful to have participants who are resourceful in their own tradition and faith.

Theoretical or theological explanations are meaningful when given as responses to arising situations or questions but they are not the main purpose of such a dialogue.

Throughout the process, it is essential to give equal weight to each participating religion.

Proper gender balance should be ensured in all aspects of the dialogue.

Holding the dialogue in different religious and cultural environments helps to contextualize the experiences and learnings.

Participants' inner experiences from their own traditions should be shared with confidence, even if they are not evident to others.

Music and poems enriched the dialogue.

It is important to agree on an appropriate venue, working language, and translations, as well as to find good solution for food and other practicalities.

Our experience indicates that the process of living the Inter-religious Dialogue requires time. Meetings that last two weeks or more proved to be particularly effective.

It is important to have plenty of space for shared experiences, like working in the kitchen and garden, walking, and playing.

*In silence we discovered the essence of the dialogue even more than when we spoke about our individual religions and our experiences.*

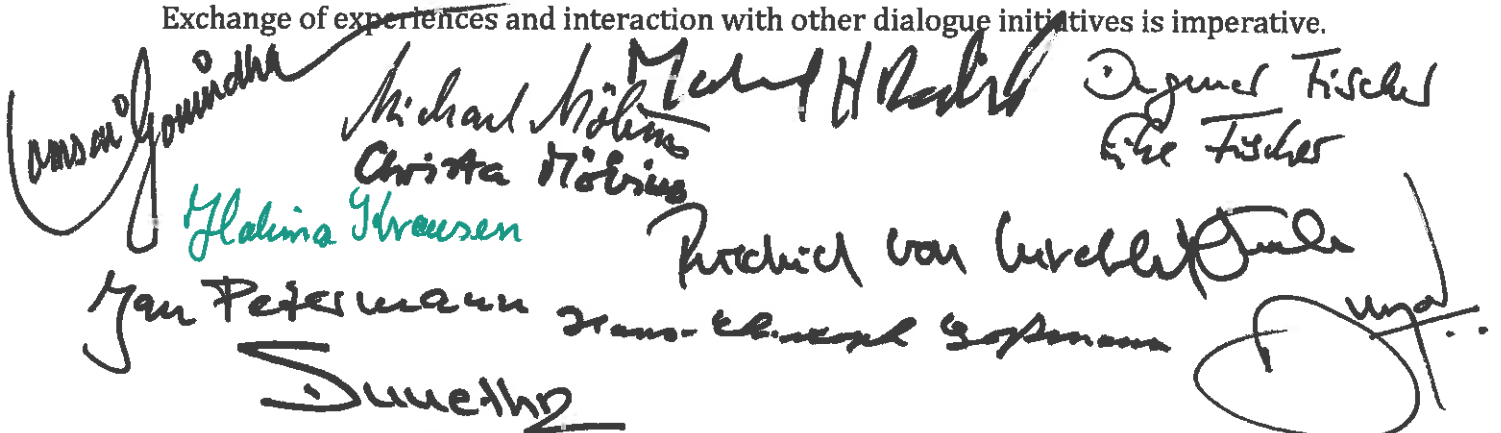
#### 4. Perspectives for the future

Future meetings should build on the past, but focus on discovering the present. We should appreciate the impact of changing circumstances and enlarging global vistas.

The doors of inter-religious dialogue should be open to other relevant initiatives and schools of thought.

The inter-religious dialogue should facilitate integration of newcomers thereby enriching its continuing traditions.

Exchange of experiences and interaction with other dialogue initiatives is imperative.



Handwritten signatures of participants in various colors and styles, including: Govindh K. Bharathan, Michael Möbius, Christa Möbius, Halima Krausen, Jan Petermann, Sunethra Sooriyaarachchi, Dagmar Fischer, Eike Fischer, Margareta Funder, Hans-Christoph Goßmann, Friedrich von Kirchbach, and Deepal Sooriyaarachchi.

Govindh. K. Bharathan, Dagmar Fischer, Eike Fischer, Margareta Funder,  
Hans-Christoph Goßmann, Friedrich von Kirchbach, Halima Krausen, Christa Möbius,  
Michael Möbius, Jan Petermann, Sheikh Mahmood H. Rashid, Deepal Sooriyaarachchi,  
Sunethra Sooriyaarachchi