

Documentation

The Peace Committee of Chinese Religious Circles

*Introduction by Anthony Lam
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Introduction

According to a report from New China News Agency the Peace Committee of Chinese Religious Circles was established in Beijing on July 2, 1994. The meeting was chaired by Zhao Puchu, a vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the head of the Chinese Buddhist Association.

Vice-chairmen of the Committee are Bp. Ding Guangxun, chairman of the activities committee of the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Association; An Shiwei, chairman of the Chinese Islamic Association; Bp. Zong Huaide, chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association; Rev. Ming Yang, vice-chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association; Han Wenzao, vice-president of the China Christian Council; and Fu Yuantian, president of the Chinese Daoist Association.

The 39 founding members of the new committee, were drawn mostly from members of every religion who serve on the Religious Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress. The Committee's objectives are: to strengthen every religious body in China; to safeguard believers; to participate in religious activities for world peace; to develop better exchanges with world peace organizations of every religion and with their members involved in such work, to promote and safeguard world peace.

Looking at the history of the past decade or so, religion and peace has been a topic discussed regularly within Chinese religious circles. Chinese religious circles have participated in many religious activities for world peace. The First International Council of the Fourth World Conference on Religion and Peace met in Beijing from June 24-30, 1986. A total of 140 delegates from over 30 nations at-

tended, including 30 from China, belonging to the Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Daoist and Islamic faiths. The theme was *Prevention of Nuclear War*. Three Catholic delegates came from overseas: Archbishops Angelo Fernandez of India, John Quinn of the U.S., and Remi Joseph De Roo of Canada.

The following is the inaugural address presented by Zhao Puchu, the chairman of the Peace Committee. This speech was published in Chinese in the August 1994 issue of *Dharmadhosa*, the magazine of the Chinese Buddhist Association.

Peace Committee Inaugural Speech

by Zhao Puchu

Comrades Wu Xueqian, Zhang Shengzuo, Chi Nai, Tian Pengnian, esteemed colleagues and honoured guests.

Achieving human happiness and world peace is a common hope shared by all of our nation's religions. For many years now, we have nurtured strong ties among ourselves at home, and especially with those religious organizations dedicated to international peace abroad. Also we cooperated with each other to make whatever contributions we could in order to further the cause of peace throughout the Asian region and beyond. What became evident to each and all of us as we worked together in this area was the lack of a national organization dedicated to peace through which we might unify our efforts, maintain closer contact and multiply opportunities for increased dialogue with each other. After several years of germination, the seed has finally taken root, due in no small part to government encouragement and, more specifically, the strong support of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. We are most privileged to witness today the realization of our fondest hope. The Peace Committee of the United Chinese Religions has now become a reality. This marks a first step for our religious organizations in the task of safeguarding human dignity and sustaining world peace. And because of this our happiness today knows no bounds.

We Chinese ardently love peace. The religious organizations of China have worked tirelessly day after day, year after, decade after decade, along with the entire Chinese people,

campaigning for peace. Shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic our religious groups sent representatives to the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in Vienna, and, subsequently, to innumerable peace conferences at home and abroad. We went to Hiroshima, Japan, to support the ban on nuclear weapons, and to international conferences hosted by religious groups of five continents. Here we were given many opportunities to articulate to the world at large the deep yearning our own Chinese religious believers have for the establishment of a lasting peace. Through these many experiences, we were able to reaffirm our commitment to maintaining peace at home and throughout the world.

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As the 20th century draws to a close, we are aware of the great changes that have taken place in its final two decades, not only in the world but in our nation as well. Economic development, ecological balance, environmental concern, global harmony and world peace all have become part of the ordinary expectations of peoples everywhere. On the other hand, we witness an upsurge in local and regional conflicts that plunge peoples into an abyss of human misery and despair. The hard-won peace of half a century is threatened on every side. Today we have taken one small step to bolster a commitment to peace. The initiative we have taken at this conference to institute a Peace Organization of Unified Religious Associations will have on this nation of 1.2 billion people a profound influence. With such an organization, we shall be able to mobilize more effectively all religious believers into a unified force devoted to safeguarding peace, resolving armed conflict and stamping out those evils that make war possible. We shall, then, be able to better establish and develop international relationships and cooperate with religious believers around the world in making common cause for a lasting peace on behalf of the whole human

race. We must begin now to increase ties with global peace groups, promote even closer relations and more frequent dialogue with them, to seek common ground from which to launch a more effective protests against the proliferation of nuclear power, and support efforts calling for the destruction of nuclear weapons. Together, we must seek out the root causes of war and ways and means to protect the peace and tranquility of all human beings.

We are all members of the one fellowship of religious believers, and our new organization represents the peaceful aspirations of all Chinese religious believers. All of us believe that peace in the world is founded on peace in the individual heart. Unless the human heart knows peace, there is little hope of establishing it elsewhere in the world. It is very much part of the role of religion to bring peace and tranquility to the human heart, and to order and strengthen it through traditional, concrete and practical ways. Thus the centre point of our new committee is the teaching that each of our individual religions has to offer. We commence with purifying our hearts and then move to a purification of our societies, in order that the peace of every individual heart may be given a solid foundation. In this way will world peace finally be realized in our world. We who hope to further the development of our Peace Committee must become peace activists, tirelessly researching how peace may be achieved and promoting the cause of peace above all other concerns. Today I call upon you all to ponder these things and resolve to make them part of your own future commitment.

In conclusion, I know I speak for all our honoured guests when I express heartfelt thanks to Comrade Zhang, Chief of the National Religious Bureau, for his support and encouragement, and our thanks to all of you who took time to be present at this conference. The Peace Committee, which we have brought into being here today, is a fresh entity in the cause of world peace. We must dedicate ourselves to bringing its message to each and every stratum of society, enabling it to grow and mature, as we hone it into an effective instrument of our common concern for peace in our time. I sincerely look forward to your cooperation, concern and support in the days ahead.

Thank you.
