

***Out of the clash of cultures,
an ‘Alliance of Civilizations’
and the ‘Building of an Asian Community’***

**Speech of HON. JOSE DE VENECIA
Former Speaker, Philippine House of Representatives;
Founding Chairman and Chairman of Standing Committee, International
Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP);
Co-Founder, Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)**

***at the
8th General Assembly of the International
Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP)
Colombo, Sri Lanka; 18-21 September 2014***

We meet on this *emerald* island in the Indian Ocean—in the setting of a fast-changing world—on which our *home continent* of Asia is certain to have a decisive influence.

A decade and a half after its founding in Manila in September, 2000, ICAPP has become a unique forum open to *all* Asian parties *across* the *ideological* spectrum.

Our fraternal association now counts more than 340 parties—both ruling and in opposition—from 52 Asian states.

Today we thank the President of Sri Lanka, H. E. Majinda Rajapaksa, Chairman of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), H.E. Maithripala Sirisena, Minister of Health and General Secretary of SLFP, who is Chairman of the Organizing Committee, and the opposition United National Party led by H.E. Ranil Wickremasinghe for jointly hosting this great

gathering, a unique ICAPP bi-partisan, multi-party tradition worthy perhaps of emulation by the Western political parties.

Addressing the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians in Sri Lanka's pluralist society, President Rajapaksa has succeeded in putting an end to the protracted and bloody conflict with the Tamil minority, achieved GDP growth between 7% to 8%, while promoting peace and reconciliation, and should be able to craft an inclusive unity government that could serve as a model in South Asia.

ICAPP A PLATFORM FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

ICAPP has become yet another platform for regional cooperation—alongside the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) here in South Asia; the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the Arab world in West Asia; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or the 'Shanghai Six' grouping of China, Russia, and the Central Asian states; the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which inaugurates the historic long-awaited ASEAN Community in 2015, since its long journey in Southeast Asia began in 1967; the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) and the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC), both of which we in ICAPP helped establish; the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) that binds all the littoral states of the Pacific Ocean; the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA); the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS); the South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC); and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC).

Excellencies, friends: Perhaps at some point, ICAPP could play a modest role in initiating the get-together of representatives of Asia's great organizations, which have gone through difficult work and achievement, to a historic meeting to build the beginnings of the Asian Community, the theme of our Assembly, even in the midst of difficult, intractable political, territorial, religious, separatist, ideological, and ethnic conflicts from north to south and east to west of our Asian continent, admittedly the largest and most diverse in the world.

Perhaps, it was easier to build the European Union even in the midst of the Cold War after World War II because of Europe's common overarching Christian civilization which is also the case in North America and Latin America, while our Asia is fragmented among Buddhist Asia, Hindu Asia, Muslim Asia, further splintered by Sunnis and Shi'ites, as were Christianity's Catholics and Protestants in the 16th century, Socialist Asia, Confucian Asia, Christian Asia and Jewish Asia.

So our Conference theme here of 'Building an Asian Community,' might be exceedingly ambitious and we might begin by taking the easier lower ground, although the vision of the Community is, of course, the overarching theme of every ICAPP endeavour—the end-purpose of every ICAPP effort.

Excellencies, fellow delegates: We're gathered here to *reaffirm* our commitment that only deeper, closer regional integration—economically, culturally, and

politically—will bring our countries peace and progress—by easing not only living standards but also historical and ethnic tensions in our plural societies.

Within the scope of our constant theme, let me also brief you on the 6th Global Forum of the United Nations ‘Alliance of Civilizations’ (UNAOC), that I attended—representing ICAPP—in Bali, Indonesia, last month with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, U.N. General Assembly President John Ashe, and U.N. High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser as main speakers.

As you know, we in ICAPP subscribe wholeheartedly to the ideals and aims of the UN Alliance of Civilizations for we campaigned in the U.N. General Assembly, in the U.N. Security Council, in the halls of the U.N. for an interfaith, inter-cultural, and inter-civilizational dialogue with our proposal to create an Interfaith Council in the U.N. or at least a focal point in the Office of the U.N. Secretary General, at a time when discussion of religion was somewhat taboo within the U.N. system.

TRI-CONTINENTAL ALLIANCE AND THE UNITED FRONT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Excellencies, friends: Right now we in ICAPP are in active support of these aims and ideals, for we are in fact already beginning to organize our own tri-continental *alliance* of Asian, Latin American, and African *political parties*.

And as a successful start, we have already created and registered the Global Parties Climate and

Ecological Alliance (GPCEA), composed of ICAPP, the Permanent Conference of Political Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPPAL), the Centrist Asia Pacific Democrats International (CAPDI), and the International Ecological Safety Collaborative Organization (IESCO), representing political parties and civil society organizations, as a global united front in the battle against climate change, environmental degradation, and ecological crisis.

ICAPP WOMEN'S/YOUTH WINGS

Recently, we have established the ICAPP Women's Wing and the ICAPP Youth Wing, and we should launch our Asian-Latin American Business Council in Mexico City in November or the first quarter of next year.

Our Co-Chairman and Secretary General Chung Eui-yong and Special Rapporteur Sen. Mushahid Hussain Sayed will confirm that we are still making slow but steady progress in our announced bid to achieve "observer status" in the General Assembly of the United Nations.

So in a real sense, we in ICAPP and our associates groups are making real progress in the field of political integration.

And yes, we will work with the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations and the U.N. system to achieve our shared vision of a multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-civilizational world unified by peace, fraternity, and mutual prosperity.

ICAPP'S SUPPORT FOR ACTION AGAINST EXTREMISM

ICAPP has had a good track record in international action against extremism since its founding in the year 2000.

I recall that, when Spain's then Prime Minister *Zapatero* and Turkey's Prime Minister *Erdogan* were starting to organize international group action against extremism through inter-cultural, inter-religious, and inter-civilizational dialogue, we in ICAPP were among the first to speak on their behalf—and to bring these proposals to the halls of the U.N.

Iran's fifth President, the statesman Mohammad Khatami, was known for his proposal of Dialogue Among Civilizations which was declared by the U.N. in 2001.

Another early leader against religious extremism has been King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia.

No statesman realizes terrorism's global threat more acutely than he does—since his kingdom lies in the *vortex* of an *imagined* 'clash of civilizations.'

In middle 2008—King Abdullah initiated a series of 'Inter-Faith Dialogues'—first, between the *Sunni* and *Shi'ite* schools of Islam in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina; and then in the key western cities of Madrid, Geneva, and the Vatican.

I had the honor to speak in both the Madrid and Geneva dialogues—on the invitation of Saudi Arabia’s *Rabitah*, the Muslim World League.

These Interfaith Dialogues called on all peoples—irrespective of race, religion, culture or country—to promote *together* a global culture of peace and mutual understanding.

Madrid made a historically appropriate site for the *third* of these Inter-Faith ‘Dialogues’—a conversation between Christendom and Islam.

During their first 350 years of co-existence—beginning early in the eighth century—Spain had been the region of their greatest contact and interaction.

Spanish Islam enriched both the classical Arab civilization and Europe’s emerging Christian culture. Toledo—then the Spanish capital—was the first centre for the *transmission* across civilizations of culture and learning—including the Greek and Roman legacy the Arabs had preserved in *translation* throughout Europe’s Dark Ages.

COMMON GATE FOR 4 RELIGIONS

Here in Sri Lanka, H.E. Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne built a center for all religions, an interfaith park called “*Ambuluvawa*.” In this park, there is a Buddhist temple, a Christian church, a Hindu kovil, and a Muslim mosque where people can pray, sing, chant or meditate. And there is only one gate to the park, so everyone, whatever faith or religion, must walk through one gate to enter the places of worship.

A BLOODY AND RUTHLESS ‘CALIPHATE’

Excellencies, friends, in the dozen-odd years since the epochal ‘9/11/2001’ attacks on New York and Washington, terrorism has been like some lingering, low-grade fever for humankind—until the rise of the radical jihadist grouping that styles itself the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.”

Formed in Iraq last year, from remnants of Al Qaeda—the terrorist group that carried out the 9/11 attacks—ISIS began immediately to carve out a *religious state* from portions of Syria, Iraq, and Kurdistan.

Its medieval character and the very ruthlessness of its efforts to restore the *Caliphate* abolished by the Turkish modernizer Kemal Ataturk in 1924 has attracted foreign jihadists—particularly those from the Muslim migrant communities of Western Europe—to its black and bloody banners.

So that, like you, we believe our world is at a *perilous turn*—making the time ripe—not only for fullscale revival of another series of Interfaith Dialogues—but also for a full-fledged “Alliance of Civilizations.”

THE DARK SIDE OF GLOBALIZATION

In our time, international terrorism has become the *dark side of globalization*; and it has brought our world to a new age of war.

Violence in the name of religion is, of course, contrary to *nature* and to *reason*. On this plain truth, the great religions are agreed.

Like the most venerated Muslim teachers, Catholic leaders *reject* a religious motivation for violence—*wherever* it may come from.

Certainly the use of terror as a political and military means is a *true crime* against humanity—and peoples have every right to defend themselves against it.

But Pope John Paul II, in his New Year's Day Message of 2002, declared *memorably* that if we are to *restore* the moral and social order *shattered* by the horrific violence of September 11, 2001, we can do so only by *responding* to organized terrorism in a way that combines *justice* with *forgiveness*.

And while injustices existing in the world can *never* be used to excuse acts of terrorism, John Paul II *insisted* also that the anti-terrorist coalition is duty-bound to *alleviate* the *oppression* and *marginalization* of peoples that facilitates terrorist recruitment.

OUR NEW CULTURE OF MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Every experience contains a lesson, and the shock of terrorism has given us all—in John Paul II's phrase—"a *clearer sense* of the *oneness* of the *human family*."

The global community has come to realize that *anarchic forces* in the world system threatens every

state; and that poverty, oppression, and despair *anywhere* in the world must become the *concern of all*.

The *fact* is that the rules that have governed the global environment for the past 150 years are no longer applicable.

THE IMPACT OF 'CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION'

Technological and cultural revolutions are *shaping* a whole new world. Globalization's impact on traditional lifeways has been even more wrenching than economic change has been for fragile transitional societies.

We need a better understanding of the unavoidable consequences of 'cultural globalization' that will enable the global community to mitigate its ill-effects and maximize its good effects.

Our globalizing world needs to develop a system of *ideas* and *ideals* that will make globalization *work* for all our peoples.

The Asian and global community must also do all it can to remove poverty as a source of conflict—by helping the world's poorest peoples to take part in humankind's adventure of development. Even with the accumulated great advances in GDP growth, there are still tremendous gaps between rich and poor in many nations of the world.

A NEW ECONOMIC IDEOLOGY FOR THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Before the *Heritage Foundation* in Washington D.C. in 2009, I proposed a *re-think* of the dominant global political and economic system in the aftermath then of the Wall Street meltdown.

I also made a similar proposal at the International Institute for the Alliance of Civilizations of the United Nations University in Barcelona, Spain in 2011, which I repeated at the 6th Global Forum of the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations in Bali, Indonesia, August 28-30, 2014.

BEST ELEMENTS OF CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM

I suggested then that there might be merit in *bringing together* the *best elements* of both capitalism and socialism in a new *applied art* of governance—based on what *works best* for a *particular* society over a *specific* historical period considering the persistent huge gaps between rich and poor in our time.

The concept could also integrate the finer features of Germany’s ‘social market’ economy, and should operate under the aegis of a liberal constitutional democracy committed to free elections, free markets, and a free press.

In China, the then paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, hero of China’s successful modernization and opening to the world, advocated—in fact *started off*—a Chinese economic system *neither* Marxian socialism *nor* Adam Smith-type capitalism, but something in between or what has been called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” or “Confucian synergism” which has worked exceedingly well for

China, lifting it to a leading economic power in the world.

SUNNI-SHIITE DIALOGUE

Excellencies, friends: On the raging Sunni-Shiite issues, one cannot discount the magnitude of the barriers that intense *doctrinal separation* has raised between these two great schools of Islam.

As we promoted before in our letters to Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah and Iran's spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, it would be of great relief to our region and the world, if the two leaders of Islam, representing the Sunnis and Shiites respectively of the Muslim world, could perhaps meet in Mecca and bring about the beginnings of reconciliation and the end of violence in the lands of Islam.

Recall how the *schisms* within Christianity took many centuries to temper, after they broke out in the early sixteenth century.

UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE GREAT CIVILIZATIONS

We must also strive to achieve the *multicultural understanding* that is the only basis for the long-term security of the global community.

Understanding between the great civilizations is the only basis for global peace that will endure. And to this purpose we *must mobilize* churches, temples, synagogues, mosques—Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, and Jews, no less than Christians and Muslims—as well as political parties and the whole of civil society in Asia and the world.

As we ponder our quest for an Asian Community, we note the most discouraging ongoing multiple crises in our region: the extremist violence in Iraq and Syria, the continuing violence in the Palestinian and Israeli conflicts, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Egypt, Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Korean Peninsula, the Buddhist and Muslim Rohingya clashes in Myanmar and Southern Thailand, the maritime conflicts in the South China Sea and East China Sea, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and the other problem areas in West and East Africa.

We hail the recent signing of the peace agreement between the Philippine government under the reformist President Benigno Aquino III and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), one of the breakthroughs in peacemaking in Asia.

We also commend the much earlier successful peacemaking in Aceh, Indonesia, led by now Vice President-elect Jusuf Kalla, Chairman of CAPDI, that ended a separatist conflict that had lasted 30 years; between Indonesia, led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and East Timor, led by former President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jose Ramos Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, following East Timor's 24-year battle against Indonesian military occupation; and in Cambodia, led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, which had achieved the difficult feat of integrating the Khmer Rouge, responsible for the death of more than 2-million Cambodians, and the other private armies into the regular army, while organizing

a unity government and prosecuting those responsible for war crimes in concert with the U.N. Tribunal.

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR HIGH DIPLOMACY AND COMPROMISE

On the crisis in the Ukraine, which has threatened to revive the Cold War among the U.S., Russia, the European Union and NATO, on the tension in the South China Sea, and the East China Sea, we in ICAPP believe there is still much room for sustained high-level direct diplomacy with effective back-channeling of the type which enabled Mssrs. Nixon and Kissinger and Mr. Brezhnev to achieve the historic U.S.-Russian détente and the breakthrough in China, achieved on the pragmatic statesmanship of Mssrs. Mao Tse Tung, Chou En-lai, Nixon and Kissinger.

The whole world benefitted from these great diplomatic achievements in the last quarter of the last 20th century.

Excellencies, friends: More than ever, we in ICAPP should encourage the renewal and mobilization of diplomacy at various levels, respect each others' core interests and major concerns, put the world at ease and enable all of us to concentrate on our basic work of building our Asian Community.

For in the many conflict areas in Asia and the world, there is still no substitute for diplomacy, no substitute for compromise, no substitute for peace and reconciliation.

And if there are historical grudges that remain, let us bring them out into the open—so that they may be threshed out by consensus and compromise.

It is, of course, true that dialogue should *neither* aim to unite religions *nor* to mix them up, since their differences are destined by the *will* and *wisdom* of the Lord.

But beneath these differences, as the Universal Peace Federation has said so well, “*we’re one human family under God*”—and I for one *envision* the Lord, in His own good time, *gathering* all His children from one end of the earth to the other, and *bringing* them into His heavenly kingdom.

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE INTER-FAITH DIALOGUES

From these Inter-Faith Dialogues, we should expect *no miracles*—except those epiphanies that result from open hearts, the willingness to see the other side’s viewpoint, and a multitude of patience.

To institutionalize these Dialogues, my country—the Philippines—has proposed setting up an “Interfaith Council” *within* the United Nations *system*.

If creating a new council is overly difficult—as some legalists have warned—then, perhaps, we could write an interfaith mandate in the mission order of the Trusteeship Council, which has anyway run out of trust territories to supervise.

Now to sum up—and conclude.

WE MUST LEARN TO CREATE SPACE FOR OTHER FAITHS

President Bill Clinton says—memorably—that the twenty-first century will be *defined* by a *simple* choice the *nations* must make:

And that choice is whether or not to *emphasize* their ethnic, ideological, and religious *differences*; or to *emphasize* their *common humanity*.

But nations can *never* make the right choice for as long as their peoples insist that “our faith *must reign supreme*”—since this claim can be *affirmed* only by the *negation* of all other faiths.

So we must *reinterpret* our traditions to embrace *pluralism* in culture and in society.

We must learn to create space for alternative faiths.

After all, every great religion arose from the same *wellspring of faith*—accepting, for its central belief, God’s direct and decisive intervention in human history—by revealing Himself to humankind.

MOBILIZING THE GREAT ORGANIZATIONS IN ASIA

In sum, I believe our goal should be to build among our peoples peace that is more—much more—than the absence of conflict: but *peace as a community of sharing*: the peace of “every man living under his vine and his fig tree.”

Toward that mutual understanding, let us—in the spirit of the prophet Isaiah—sit down and *reason* together. Then we in ICAPP and the great

organizations of Asia, working in these early years of the Asian Century, not separately but together, we can begin the difficult but not impossible task of building the Asian Community.

Now let us begin.

###