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High-level debate at the UN on promoting tolerance and reconciliation as means of countering violent extremism

Focolare president Maria Voce has been invited to be a panelist by the President of the UN General Assembly

On April 21-22, 2015, the UN General Assembly will hold a high-level thematic debate on “Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism.”

The debate, to take place at the iconic United Nations Headquarters in New York, is an initiative of the current President of the General Assembly, Sam K. Kutesa; Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon; and UN High-Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Nassir Abudlaziz Al-Nasser. The event will be an opportunity for the 193 Member States and diverse stakeholders, including faith leaders, to address key issues and challenges relating to the promotion of tolerance and reconciliation and share concrete experiences on how to counter the forces that fuel polarization and radicalization. Focolare president Maria Voce will be among them.

The first day will include a plenary session and a panel discussion allowing a vast exchange among the representatives of Member States. The second day will be centered on interfaith dialogue, featuring high-level statements and interactive panel discussions with faith leaders on community engagement aimed at countering violent extremism. It will also focus on the role of faith leaders in promoting tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights. In addition, they will address how faith leaders can influence government policy and social norms. Having faith leaders from around the world represented at the United Nations will be a powerful demonstration of how diverse religious communities can address common challenges.

Maria Voce has been invited to participate in an interactive panel discussion on the second day. She will be accompanied by Ermanno Perotti, a young Italian from Rieti, who is a graduate student in Development Economics. Maria Voce wanted to bring a youth representative of the Focolare, stating that it is “in line with the work the Focolare Movement does, together with the various generations, rooted in the present and looking toward the future.”

Other panelists include Abdallah bin Bayyah, president of the Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies; David Rosen, international director for interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Committee; H.H. Samdech Tep Vong, Great Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Cambodia; Beatriz Schulthess, president of the Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council; and Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, chairman of the Guru Nank Nishkam Sewak Jatha. Moderator will be Laura Trevelyan, BBC anchor and journalist.

The goal of the debate is to identify strategies that will promote peaceful and inclusive societies, as radical alternatives to the forces that nourish extreme violence. The outcome will be a President’s summary, which will be circulated to all Member States and stakeholders, who will be formulating the post-2015 development agenda in which the topics of tolerances and reconciliations will take on a critical role.

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