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**SECRETARY GENERAL OF *RELIGIONS FOR PEACE* URGES END TO VIOLENCE
BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HEZBOLLAH IN LEBANON,
AND ISRAEL AND HAMAS IN PALESTINE**

— RELIGIOUS LEADERS MUST “REJECT THE GROTESQUE MISUSE OF RELIGION IN
SUPPORT OF VIOLENCE” —

— Calls on United States to Re-engage the Middle East Peace Process —

(NEW YORK, July 24, 2006) – Dr. William F. Vendley, the Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, the largest coalition of the world’s religious communities, today issued the following statement:

“Acts of violence are pushing the peoples of Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and neighboring states toward an abyss of destruction. Innocent people are being killed, civilian infrastructure is being destroyed and the fires of hatreds are being fanned. Today’s acts of violence must stop. Violence kills the innocent, inflicts profound suffering and causes vast damage. It strengthens extremists and weakens moderates. Violence will neither provide real security nor lead to a sustainable peace.

Serious alternatives to violence need to be advanced on all sides to stop the slide into a widening war and to create conditions to return to a comprehensive peace process. Key immediate steps should include:

- An end to the bombing of Lebanon and the rocket attacks on Israel;
- The return of the Israeli soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon unharmed;
- The release of the arrested Palestinian ministers and parliamentarians; and
- An end to Israeli military operations and withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and Lebanon.

The United Nations needs to take action to assist the conflicting parties to take these steps. So does the United States, a global superpower that has largely disengaged from the Middle East peace process. The United States needs to re-engage and work constructively with the United Nations, other states and all of the relevant parties in the region.

Religious leaders also need to take action. Religious leaders need to stand together to reject the grotesque misuse of religion whenever it is hijacked in support of violence. They need to work together to find new ways to stop the violence and suffering. They need to continue to encourage their faithful – millions of sincere Jews, Muslims and Christians – to not lose heart, but remain steadfast in prayer.”

Religions for Peace will convene senior Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders, including religious leaders from Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iran, at its Eighth World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan (26-29 August). *Religions for Peace* will support religious leaders in the region to work together to stop violence and build peace.

The *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly will convene almost 500 senior religious leaders from every region of the world and all major faith traditions to address the power of religious communities to confront violence and advance shared security. Assembly delegates come from the *Religions for Peace* network of more than seventy national and regional affiliated inter-religious councils and groups.

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