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BUILDING WORLD PEACE

**Role of Religions and Human Rights—
International Conference**

Statement by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, October 25, 2006

THE SENATE

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[*Translation*]

BUILDING WORLD PEACE

ROLE OF RELIGIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS— INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, I am pleased to present a brief report on the international conference entitled *Building World Peace: The Role of Religions and Human Rights*, which was organized by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights and held in Edmonton from October 20 to 22.

I had the privilege to co-chair this conference with our former colleague, the Honourable Doug Roche. Senators Mobina Jaffer and Roméo Dallaire attended the conference and gave excellent presentations. I would like to read a few excerpts from the closing statement issued by the John Humphrey Centre at the conclusion of the conference.

The religions of the world must set a very good example by joining together to reject violence and by defending the universal values of respect for the life, dignity and human rights of all individuals, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At this pivotal moment in human history, when differences threaten not only to divide but in fact to destroy all life on the planet, religions must unite beyond borders to establish non-violence as a way of life.

Lastly, religions must affirm that violence must never be practised in God's name, and they must denounce all forms of terrorism and extremism and all attempts to use religion

to justify them. Every individual in society shares this responsibility.

[*English*]

In the words of Federico Mayor, former Director General of UNESCO and Co-chairman of the Alliance of Civilizations Commission, "now we must change." With the existence of 27,000 nuclear weapons as but one example of the warring posture of nations, religions must work to transform the world from a culture of war to a culture of peace. Religions must change their present complacent attitude and enter the modern world in a humble and cooperative mode, reaching out to help heal a suffering humanity.

The conference recognized that respectful dialogue among nations is a prerequisite to the healing qualities of reconciliation and forgiveness. This dialogue should take place not only internationally but also locally. It must occur not only within religions, but also among religions and, further, between religions and secular society. To this end, the conference examined ways to improve peace education, media relations and inter-faith programs. Human rights learning must be the foundation of this dialogue. Telling our own stories to one another is important. Increased attention must be paid to the needs of women and children who, overwhelmingly, are the victims of war, and economic and social discrimination.

[*Translation*]

We must do all this and more to achieve peace in the 21st century. Religions must convey the values of peace at the risk of being shunted aside in these turbulent times.