

**World Meeting of Religion and Cultures  
For A New World Cultural Contract**

**“A Fortress of the Spirit:  
The Olympic Spirit in Today’s Geo Political setting.”**

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Honorable Prime Minister Constantinos Karamanlis

His Beatitude, Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and all of Greece

His Grace, Nikiforos, Bishop of the Kykkou Monastery of Cyprus

Professor Yangos Andreadis and the Organizing Committee

Honorable Ministers and Members of the Parliament

Members of the Clergy

Distinguished Speakers & Colleagues

Ladies & Gentlemen

It is an honor & privilege for me to be here this afternoon.

Indeed, we all are all truly honored to be here this week to participate in this Conference offering so many contributions with various views and visions on the road toward “A New World Cultural Contract.”

It is a particular privilege to be here in Athens prior to the commencement of the historic XXVIII Olympiad returning once again to their ancient place of origin. Further, to be in Athens as the Olympic Torch itself is readied for its first global relay with runners, taking it across five continents under the motto, “**Pass the Flame, Unite the World.**” Thus pledging to leave politics, conflicts, turmoil and despair aside for a noble ideal. The motto itself, could be the very theme of our proceedings here.

Indeed, the ancient Olympic Games provided the world with history’s longest reigning peace treaty, lasting over 1000 years and proclaiming peace and safe passage. Truly, the Olympic Games provided the ancient world a beacon of light with a higher sense of goodwill, peace and humanitarian ideals. The common perception of the Olympics is reflected strongly in the words of the 5th century, lyric poet, Pindar:

**"As in the daytime there is no star in the sky warmer and brighter than the sun, likewise there is no competition greater than the Olympic Games."**

In accordance with the ancient tradition of "Ekecheiria" during the Olympic Games, on the 3rd of November 2003, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Olympic Truce resolution submitted by Greece. Entitled, **"Building a Peaceful and Better World Through Sport and the Olympic Ideals,"** the resolution calls upon both the United Nations as well as the International Olympic Committee to make a joint pledge in calling for a

**"Truce during the Games that would encourage a peaceful environment and ensuring the safe passage and participation of athletes and others at the Games, and thereby, mobilizing the youth of the world to the cause of peace . . ."**

Underlining the importance of this historic resolution, **UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan**, stated:

**"I think it sends a powerful message, telling the warring parties to stop and reflect, give a chance to peace. . . I hope that people in all conflict areas from Iraq to Afghanistan to Liberia to the Congo will really listen to the message. But it is not just those who are actually fighting. The populations should also work to make demands that they want peace and that the fighting must stop."**

The ancient Olympic Games give us insight into the ideals of ancient Hellas. As we come together in common purpose in an effort to find guidance toward a New Cultural Contract, let us recall the Spirit of Hellenism and the best of the Golden Age. Let us further recall all the Beacons of Light from across the globe that have transformed the world from the darkness of barbarism into a world of light. Let us come together to recapture the essence of world's great civilizations that have served to elevate humankind and human needs and transported those ideals as new Beacons of Light throughout the centuries, across the seas and to new lands. Let us now pass the Torch toward a new, post-modern society that gives new meaning to inclusion and justice for all.

The age of the nation state, of nation building, of ethnic cleansing and melting pot theories, all served to deny the cultural heritage and sometimes even the freedom of many peoples of the world. Forging a modern nation state often left behind the principles of inclusion, understanding, humanism, cooperation, peace, and the rights of minorities and of the poor. Today, we are looking at a new paradigm for the nation of the new age: A post-modern, nation state that is based

on the essence of freedom, justice and democracy. This post-modern nation is one that encourages multicultural solutions, a mosaic of inclusion of all peoples, ethnic groups and minorities. The new cultural contract is one based on principle, on vision and on a new sense of justice and solidarity of all peoples. The post-modern nation is one that thrives as the Olympic Torch burns, passed from hand to hand, from individual to individual, from region to region, from continent to continent, as we “**pass the flame, and unite the world,**” toward a universal cultural contract based on the simplest and most treasured of all words, freedom!

Again, the Olympic Torch becomes a symbolic Beacon of light, of civilization and of vision and commitment. The ancients from many lands gave us beacons of civilization for us to treasure and advance.

One of the strongest Beacons of Light came from a place not far from our proceedings. It was here in Athens that humankind was given the most sacred of all words in any language, “**eleftheria,**” or freedom! The ancient Hellenic ideal of Freedom has many dimensions, is spoken in many languages and has many followers. The peculiar genius of the Hellenes is to give the world the concept of “civic” freedom for citizens to participate in public life and political institutions. “Philosophical” freedom serves as a direction of rational human thought and discourse. Freedom of expression as well as freedoms from fear, want and hunger all comes from ancient Hellas. In his ***Politics***, Aristotle writes that the state itself is defined as a “community of freemen.” For Aristotle, freedom and democracy are joined as “The end (goal) of democracy is freedom. . . . Aristotle tells us that,

**“Democracy . . . arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects; because men are equally free, they claim to be absolutely equal.”**

For us to find the road to a new cultural contract, we must draw upon the very Beacons of light that have illuminated the great civilizations of the past. We know their history, but we are eternally grateful for the existence across alien centuries, oceans and continents. What is the essence of civilization that has traveled through time? Freedom itself serves as the Bright Light of Morning in the realm of Civilization.

But it is the very Essence that is under siege, perhaps like no other time in history. And it is to that essence that we are here to commemorate, to defend, to protect and to perpetuate.

In these days of **tension, terrorism and war** we gather together to seek a renewal of our spirit. We seek a refuge from the world’s turmoil and strife. These days together give us solace to renew and regenerate our strength. We seek our “**fortresses of the spirit.**”

Back in the bleakest days of the second world war, when the war threatened to extinguish freedom for so many in the world, we heard the heart felt words calling us to seek refuge in the **“fortresses of the spirit”**.

Once again, we must recall the words of **Edith Hamilton** in her first edition, written in 1943 of **“The Greek Way.”**

**“When the world is storm driven and the bad that happens and the worse than threatens are so urgent as to shut out everything else from view, then we need to know all the strong fortresses of the spirit which men have built through the ages.”**

With the world suffering from threats of terrorism and war, the legacy of the Beacons of Light of all history seems more preciousness given the real possibility of its extinction.

We must seek our **“fortresses of the spirit”**.

For The **first bricks** of the fortress were laid by the Hellenes through their commitment to both freedom and peace in the spirit of the Olympic Games.

Today, there is no nation of the world, Western or not, that does not desire the advantages freedom. Those powerful ideals of the human spirit of individualism democracy, humanism and freedom, that all free men seek are the very The **“fortresses of the spirit”** given to us through the Hellenes. When Chinese dissidents in May 1989 demonstrated in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square demanding civic freedom to participate in government, the students constructed a universal symbol for freedom, the goddess of democracy. This symbol does not come from their own ethnic or national traditions, but one of universal appeal.

The spirit of consensual government and freedom was evident in the fall of the Berlin Wall, Russian Peristroyka and even the transformation of Canada into one of the world’s first all inclusive states with the freedom of inclusion now incorporating language, tradition, religion and heritage. The spirit of the freedom, the Mythic spirit of life , the modern spirit itself serves all of these nations as they enter post modern state development. That fortress of the spirit was:

**Discovered by the Hellenes.**

**Taken by the Romans.**

**Cherished by Byzantium.**

**Spread throughout Mediterranean cultures.**

**Rediscovered by the Renaissance.**

**Transmitted by the Enlightenment.**

**and Proclaimed by the United Nations Charter and all freedom loving peoples of the world.**

Today we must not apologize to those that are mean spirited, revisionist and quasi historians for distorting the legacy of this Beacon of Light and the very beacons of civilization itself! It comes a time for us to proclaim it! Resurrect its strength and challenge those distorting history for political correctness.

The very essence of humanism and tolerance comes to us from the mythic vision of life itself. Indeed, would we have a civilization without the concepts of Freedom, Democracy, Humanism, Justice, Philosophy, Majority Rule, Rights of Mankind?

When Pulitzer Prize winning author, Will Durant described what he was trying to accomplish in his "The Story of Civilization," he said that he too was looking for his own fortress of the spirit, or as he put it,

**"a keyhole through which we can spy . . . a celestial city, a special Country of the Mind, wherein a thousand saints, statesmen, inventors, scientists, poets, artists, musicians, lovers, and philosophers still live and speak, teach and carve and sing."**

That very "country of the mind" unites many with common heritage and tradition. It provides a fortress of the spirit. But now we must proceed to define our new road toward a New Cultural Contract. A contract carved from the Beacons of the past, yet one that has the spirit of the Olympiad itself. Thus an all inclusive model for a post-modern state that is based on true civic freedom with goals of inclusion, humanism, development, multiculturalism, the transfer of technology and science, but most of all, the Fortress of the Spirit to continue to travel the Beacon of Light.

Tonight we are reminded of Pericles himself that asked his fellow Athenians to prove worthy of their heritage, and we must ask the question to ourselves and of our children throughout the years, to broaden the beacon of light, transform it and yet learn from it. Will efforts at a new post modern state, a new social contract finally provide the vision for inclusion of all peoples and all cultures? Will the nation states of today give birth to the new age and the new commitment of people abhorring the ever-advancing globalization and commercialization of civilization? Will the strong give way to a new generation, to the young, the courageous, the determined? Will the global institutions, nations and economic powers lead us to a world that works, abolishes crimes against humanity, builds bridges rather than bank accounts and multinational corporate profits?

Is this honor to be that of a Prometheus, the god of forethought? He was given the task of creating mankind by Zeus. He felt great compassion for his creations and stole fire from heaven and cheated the gods in the apportionment of the sacrifice to aid them. After stealing the fire from the gods, will a new cultural contract achieve its vision for mankind? Will the today's gods, the political powers, allow it?

Tonight, it is more important, that we all should ask:  
What is it that all cultures and people have in common?  
What is it that we share in the light of our inheritance?  
What form and vision will guide the post modern state and their organizations to a more inclusive, cooperative world that thrives in peace, opportunity and a multicultural mosaic of peoples?

It is the **“fortresses of the spirit.”**

That Mythic Vision Life that the Miracle of Greece has given mankind. The Common vision to Clarify the Universals in the Daily Chaos of Life. It is the Timeless Essences of Life, It is precisely the Values of Hellenic Heritage that transcend the centuries that we celebrate tonight.

It was **Plato** himself that taught us to seek out the Ideal. To formulate our fortress for all eternity to see!

To engage in a **Quest** to discover the absolute moral and esthetic values and to simplify them into concrete terms--to what is **Good, Beautiful and Just.**

It is these values together with the high moral value we place on Family, Faith, Humanism, Peace, Justice, Cooperation and Heritage that we celebrate in the timelessness of the Human Spirit and the spirit of the Olympic Torch as it crosses many lands.

The metamorphoses of classical Hellenic concepts of Freedom and democracy and the Olympiad itself, were all monumental achievements of the greatest magnitude of all.

And now, when we gather together in deliberations, it is at once a homecoming--much like a return to Greece, or like the deep ache of **Odysseus for Ithaca**. Or In the words of T.S. Elliot,

**"to arrive where we started and to  
know the place for the first time."**

In an age of uncertainty when others lament over the loss of values and direction. Let us take refuge into our **“fortresses of the spirit.”** Let us take pride in our spirit, our faith, our culture and our Heritage. We must look to the future for strength in order to advance in the light of the past.

It was the commitment to the preservation of the spirit of Hellenism and the ideal of democracy that brought the Enlightenment to the world and for future generations that carried their **fortresses of the spirit** to new lands.

Our immigrant fathers and grandfathers put public service and American citizenship first in their minds, as America was their adopted home. My grandfather was one such immigrant. He and my father were the Beacons of Light that carried their Hellenic Heritage in their hearts and souls and sharing it with their children. My grandfather left Constantinople, seeking refuge from the Ottoman Empire, he arrived in America 100 years ago this year. In America, he opened the First Greek coffeehouse to cater to the new immigrant, help find jobs and homes for the young boys who were coming to Los Angeles.

In that age, new immigrants arrived to a strange, New World. Strange language, customs, work habits and attitudes were pervasive. The inhumanity of the industrial age called upon ever increasing waves of immigrants to be lost in heartless factories.

The new immigrant needed help in the alien sounding language and customs to become American Citizens. They also needed, however, the comfort of their compatriots and the aid of common spirit to build new homes, while preserving their golden heritage.

The immigrants continued their spirit and commitment. That spirit, was itself a Beacon of Light, traveling across oceans, was seen as the foundation where a diverse Heritage could be promoted for future generations of Americans.

The early American immigrant needed aid, comfort, direction and unity. They needed an organization to preserve, protect and perpetuate their cultural heritage in a brave new world. The AHEPA would be such an organization.

A future that would have the vision to see the end of the Melting Pot of the heartless, thoughtless industrial age that would eventually usher in a new, humanitarian and multicultural nation. But the industrial age and nation building were the pervasive goals of the times. Immigrants worked the factories, railroads, mines and mills to the beat of industry. A young nation was being created, crafted and carried across a continent. The Melting Pot would predominate and forge a new American. "E pluribus Unum," out of many, one, was the call of nation building. But the new immigrant needed more. They needed aid, direction and most of all, a touch of their Hellenic Heritage. Each new wave of immigrants was treated more harshly. Those from Mediterranean cultures were not regarded as from the same "stock" as earlier immigrants. Immigrants were denied the inclusion into the "sidewalks of gold" that they came to capture. Guided only by their spirit, their personal fortress, the immigrant withstood the test of the forging nationalism. On railroad gangs, mining crews,

factory assembly lines, the new immigrant voices were silent, but their vision and spirit remained, like the legendary “Greek Fire” of Byzantium, that would stay lit, even when underwater, reemerging at a time to ignite the flame once again.

My organization, **the AHEPA**, represents the largest Hellenic American cultural organization in the world. The AHEPA provided the Beacon of Light to the hundreds of thousands of Greek Immigrants that arrived in America. The AHEPA was a means for preserve the Hellenic culture within the context of the American Dream.

For over 8 decades, the AHEPA has fostered a proud history of programs that promote Hellenic Heritage, education, and charitable and humanitarian goals.

The legacy of AHEPA accomplishments is long. In the early years, the AHEPA offered the Greek immigrant aid, protection and comfort. The AHEPA fought discrimination on a broad scale. Early Greek immigrant businesses, Churches, homes needed an organization defend them in the Melting Pot of America. The AHEPA set off a noble goal of education to create new citizens, productive learners and members of their adopted country. The AHEPA saw the wisdom of promoting Hellenic Culture, but along with American citizenship.

As the immigrants matured, grew and prospered a new threat to Hellenic culture emerged. The loss of heritage among the young. The AHEPA transformed its early goal of making Americans out of Greeks, into preserving the Greek heritage for the children of the immigrants. Education remains the highest goal of AHEPA. Today, AHEPA continues to donate to education, giving scholarships, grants, cultural and dramatic presentations and aiding programs in Modern Greek studies. Again, the emphasis is on preservation of culture today.

The AHEPA provided the immigrant Greek respect, accomplishment and fulfillment. Numerous programs were undertaken to promote the interests of the Greek American community. A leader in finding a cure for Thallasimia, in a national bone marrow registry program, programs to promote the study of Greek culture and language in schools. Further, as the AHEPA memberships ages, a new program building senior citizen housing programs in a number of major American cities. Providing the elderly with safe, comfortable housing on a broad scale.

Another Beacon of Light is in the area of charitable goals. The AHEPA continues to foster aid and donations for many worthwhile projects. Greek War Relief collected funds to aid Greece in the Second World War. A system of 12 clinics was built all over Greece. Later, Hospital's in Athens and Slaking, Earthquake, hurricane and disaster relief also color the AHEPA's rich contribution

In the attempt to preserve our religious faith within the diversity of America, the AHEPA provide yet another Beacon of Hope and Faith to the early church in America. From the beginning of AHEPA in Atlanta, Georgia, AHEPA has come to the aid of our Holy Orthodox Church. We must not forget that In the early days of immigration, the AHEPA was vigilant in protecting our immigrants and our churches from the Ku Klux Klan, No Nothing Parties and other agents of doom. Eventually, the AHEPA served the new immigrant well, kept the spirit alive to help organize communities and build over 300 churches and 1000 chapters throughout the United States, Canada and Australia.

AHEPA's record is a recognized one raising a million of dollars on behalf of St. Basil's Academy and Hellenic College. Further, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island National Museum received sizable AHEPA donations and support. In the service of their adopted nation, the AHEPA would go on record in contributing to the very fabric of the American nation.

Yet, the Brightest Beacon of all is in the support of our youth and the future of Hellenism in America. Here, the AHEPA continues to foster a proud history and support in programs, education and community support.

The AHEPA serves as an instrument of Hellenic Culture in America. The Torch has been carried through three and forth generation Hellenes. As my grandfather carried the Torch to America in the beginning of the last century, it is my children that will carry it proudly into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Its role as a Beacon of Light has served to maintain our culture and traditions in what would have been an alien environment.

The strength of the Torch is evident in the address of Professor Kimon Doukas, Past Supreme President of the AHEPA given to the 44th Supreme Convention in:

Our Hellenic background, steeped in the Christian teachings of our Holy and Venerable Church of Orthodoxy, has given us the courage and strength to understand and to absorb our American environment in a perfect union, which:

**Promotes loyalty to the USA**  
**Revives the Glory of eternal Hellas**  
**Respects inalienable rights of mankind**  
**Strives for the betterment of Society**  
**Abhors political corruption**  
**Defends and protects oppressed people**  
**Labors for the perfection of Morality**  
**Champions the cause of Education**  
**Loves God and Man and**  
**Hopes for a measure of Happiness.**

Today, Ahepa continues to promote our Hellenic heritage into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Torch is being passed to a new generation of Hellene. A generation that is to keep the spirit alive, the flame burning and the strength of will to carry the Torch. No longer do we have the heartless factories and mines, but today we have the growing commercialism, mass communications and all pervasive pop culture to help stray our youth from continuing their mission.

The guiding lamp of the Beacons of civilization can once again serve as the Beacons for the 21st Century. For our future generations to have that wonderful **“fortresses of the spirit”** that transcends time and oceans let us remember the importance of the Journey itself. Like Odysseus, let us commit our spirit, our love and our determination to carry the Journey on through future generations. In our hearts, let us keep the Odyssey alive, As C.P. **Cavity** stated in his memorable **“Ithaka:”**

**Setting out on the voyage to Ithaka  
You must pray that the way be long,  
Full of adventures and experiences.  
The Laistrygonians, and the Kyklopes,  
Angry Poseidon, --don't be afraid of them;  
You will never find such things on your way,  
If only your thoughts be high, and a select  
Emotion touch your spirit and your body.  
The Laistrygonians, the Kyklopes,  
Poseidon raging--you will never meet them,  
Unless you carry them with you in your soul,  
Unless your soul raises them up before you.  
*Ithaka,***

**-- C.P. Cavafy**