YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL News Release

CONTACT: Gustav Spohn, Director of Communications and Publications
203-432-3466, gus.spohn@yale.edu

For immediate release: July 15, 2008
Revised: July 23, 2008

Muslim and Christian Leaders Meet at Yale for Historic "Common Word" Conference

New Haven, Conn. — More than 150 Muslim and Christian leaders, including some of the world's most eminent scholars and clerics, will gather at Yale University July 28 –31 to promote understanding between the two faiths, whose members comprise more than half the world's population.

Prominent U.S. and international political figures and representatives of the Jewish community will also speak at the conference, which will be the launch of a series of pioneering interfaith events planned for the next two years around the world as the "Common Word" process. The historic open letter, *A Common Word Between Us and You*, was signed last fall by an unprecedentedly broad coalition of top-tier Muslim leaders from every major branch of Islam, seeking transformation of Muslim-Christian relations. One of the most discussed Christian responses was an open letter drafted at Yale Divinity School and signed by a similarly broad coalition of 300 well-known Christian leaders from around the world. Many of these Muslim and Christian leaders will be participating in the July conference.

This major meeting on Muslim-Christian relations was organized by Yale Divinity School's Center for Faith & Culture under the leadership of its founder and director, Miroslav Volf, together with the director of the Center's Reconciliation Program, Joseph Cumming. A distinguished author and theologian, Volf will co-teach a course on faith and globalization at Yale this fall with former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Commented Blair, "I firmly believe that few things are more vital to our shared future than that people of different faiths understand each other better, respect each other more, and work together more closely. That is why I, along with countless others, was hugely encouraged when *A CommonWord* was published. I warmly welcome the fact that one of the world's premier academic institutions, by hosting this gathering, is seeking to carry the debate and the dialogue further and deeper."

Yale Divinity School Dean Harold Attridge said, "I am extremely pleased that Yale Divinity School is hosting this important conference. The Divinity School is committed to bringing the best insights of faith and intellect to bear on contemporary life, and the relationship between Christians and Muslims is one of the most pressing issues of our time."

Notable leaders at the conference will include Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan, who will co-host the event and is a principal author of the *Common Word* letter. Other key leaders attending are two prominent Ayatollahs from Iran; Sheikh Tayseer Tamimi of Palestine; government ministers and the chief Muslim clerics (Grand Muftis) of several Middle Eastern countries; representatives of the Saudi interfaith initiative; Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Geoff Tunnicliffe, international director/CEO of the World Evangelical Alliance; David Burrell of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame; John Esposito of Georgetown University; Antonios Kireopoulos of the National Council of

Churches; and Emanuel Clapsis of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology**.** In addition, Senator John Kerry is expected to address the gathering via satellite transmission.

Most sessions of the conference will be open to the press, and some will be webcast live. A press conference will follow the final keynote addresses on July 31. Members of the media wishing to cover the conference or to interview conference participants must register with Dorie Baker of the Yale Office of Public Affairs, 203-432-8553, via email at dorie.baker@yale.edu. All events require pre-registration and credentials for admission.

For up-to-date information, visit the conference website at:

http://www.yale.edu/divinity/commonword

# # #