Inter-Religious Dialogue
1. Introduction – Research Method

Purpose and Methodology of this Document

Our purpose is emphatically not to provide an exhaustive list of projects currently taking place around the world, nor to make targeted, budgeted suggestions regarding particular conflicts. Rather its goal is to highlight a few notable schemes currently operating in regions of inter-religious conflict and the area of inter-religious studies in order to build awareness about the potential these hold as an element of international diplomacy. As such we have chosen to list twelve projects which, whilst not necessarily representative, are noteworthy for their differing approaches yet united through their single aim of promoting inter-religious dialogue. They are derived from around the world, many of which are the sites of religiously motivated violence. By giving examples of organisations engaged in these projects we hope to stimulate further debate and research into the importance and effectiveness of inter-religious dialogue as an element in political and social discourse.

Purpose Religion and Culture in Overview

In order to understand the challenges facing the organisations listed below this introduction seeks to explore briefly some of the complexities and interrelationships which exist when talking about religion as an aspect of culture. In his classic text *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim defines religion as:

...a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things… which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them.

Yet while religion undoubtedly exercises a strong unifying force, bringing together people of diverse ethnicities, nationalities, languages, and economic backgrounds, it can also lead to violence when these communities collide. Whilst by no means a new phenomenon, tension and conflict between communities of different faiths remains as widespread and prevalent now as ever. Moreover the ability of small groups to inflict disproportionately large-scale acts of violence has increased as the technology to facilitate such acts has improved. One of the major challenges of the next century will be to find effective ways of communicating and resolving religious differences through diplomacy rather than aggression.

One of the most important developments in the last 50 years has been the rapid and extensive growth of immigration spurred on by technological innovations, the collapse of colonialism, and the globalization of markets. These have resulted in a burgeoning number of Diasporas, with immigrant communities often living alongside mainstream society and participating as much if not more in their own sub-cultures rather than assimilating into the host society. The most striking example of this phenomenon is found in the United States where the Hispanic population is projected to grow rapidly, particular in the southern states. Nevertheless, the most publicized issue has concerned Muslim populations and their interaction with civil society, particularly within the EU. It is in this context that the overlap between religion and culture become most clear, with Islamic symbolism and concepts of law being viewed by many Europeans as a major barrier to integration. Moreover the importance of integration along the American model is increasingly viewed by politicians as preferable to the traditional conception of multi-cultural dialogue which, in the words of Angela Merkel at a conference of young CDU members in October 2010 “ist gescheitert, absolut
The implications of these assertions are clear: an increasing intolerance for public displays of Islamic identity risks leading to further alienation of the very communities which they hope to integrate.

On the international stage the ideological challenge facing western countries lies in attempting to distinguish between the popular perception of ‘culture’, generally regarded as ephemeral issues largely confined to matters of taste, from those aspects of culture that have shaped modern political discourse, and the ‘belief’ in the absolute value of democratic rule and the upholding of human rights. The attempt to promote these values, itself a form, perhaps, of cultural imperialism, is complicated by the real politik of those very same countries in their support of dictatorships and other forms of non-democratic governance in cases where it suits their interests, leading to a fundamental ambivalence and ultimately an apparent insincerity on the part of ‘Western’ efforts to lead reform. The rise of hard-line Islamic activism in the middle-east, for example, can in large part be attributed to the sense of disillusionment at the failure of Western governments to deliver upon their promises, and indeed the latters’ active collusion with oppressive regimes.

Of course it is not only in the Middle East that we find religious conflict, but all over the world in areas where the distinction between religious and cultural identities become blurred, and where there exist opposing territorial claims or an imbalance in power relations. In places as diverse as Sudan, Northern Ireland, and India religious identities correspond closely with cultural ones and conflict emerges when these groups feel politically unrepresented and discriminated against. Many of the roots of these collisions can be traced to the socio-historical events which led to the existence of these heterogeneous groups existing side-by-side in the first place, often a legacy of colonialism but also economic migration. Moreover these tensions arise just as much within the same broad religious traditions as they do between them, so Sunni-Shiite or Protestant-Catholic relations may prove just as fraught as those between members of different faiths. Again this is because religious affiliation is often tied up inextricably with questions of race, origin, language.

In fostering more harmonious international relations, then, it is imperative that we appreciate the important role religion has in shaping identities, and that this role is understood in relation to wider issues of cultural difference and self-identification. Inter-religious dialogue will serve as one crucial element in attempts to forge better understanding between communities and in so doing offers the possibility of ameliorating the violence all-too-often perpetrated in the name of religion.
2. Academic Promotion of Inter-Religious Dialogue

2.1 The Tanebaum Center for Inter-religious Understanding

Project Details
Location: Washington, U.S.A.
Telephone: +1 212 967 7707
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Website: http://www.tanenbaum.org

Organisation Description
A secular, non-sectarian Organisation, The Tanenbaum Centre was founded in 1992 in honour of the late Rabbi Tanenbaum, who was involved in orchestrating inter-religious dialogue between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. With a working budget of around $500,000/annum and assets totalling more than $3 million, Tanenbaum is a non-governmental organisation funded entirely by private donors engaged in both research and practical programs.

Project Description
Tanenbaum operates five programs aimed at improving inter-religious relations in different contexts. The areas they focus on are improving religious diversity in the workplace, health care, and education, promoting religious dialogue as part of conflict resolution, and conducting academic research into the roots of religious animosity.

Tanenbaum hosts working retreats for religious peacemakers from around the world, allowing them to forge lasting collaborations and to adopt more effective approaches to peace-building, as well as introducing their efforts to an academic audience through conferences aimed at higher education specialists. They also offer training for teachers aimed at improving the understanding of different religions and their implications for educational practice, as well as tailor-made reports for corporations seeking to improve inter-religious dialogue within their workforces.

Aim of the Project
By highlighting the trend towards ever greater religious diversity in both public institutions and the workforce, and by making recommendations to ease and improve the relations between members of different faiths in these environments, Tanenbaum begins at the most basic level required for improving the relations between religions. By targeting everyday interaction between different faiths and not only the prominent antagonism in areas of conflict they adopt a grassroots approach with much longer-term goals. On the other hand neither do they neglect conflict situations, but rather than working on the ground they choose to provide forums and support which attempts to empower independent religious peacemakers. This latter approach identifies the importance of individual charisma and passion with respect to conflict resolution, and particularly religious conflict resolution where the self-identification of the communities is often tied in to a complex web of local religious personalities.
2.2 The Foundation for Universal Responsibilities (FUR)

Project Details
Country: India
Telephone: +91 11 24648450
E-Mail: furhhdl@furhhdl.org
Website: http://www.furhhdl.org

Organisation Description
The foundation is a not for profit, non-sectarian, non-denominational Organisation established with the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Dalai Lama in 1989. It seeks to reconcile people of different faiths through a variety of initiatives.

Project Description
Projects conducted by the Organisation include the promotion of Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu women’s efforts at effecting reconciliation in Kashmir (WISCOMP); Interfaith Confluence; educational programmes; scholarships for professionals involved in academic research and media projects promoting intercultural dialogue; film festivals and documentary screenings.

The Project includes
The WISCOMP effort is particularly notable as an initiative which brings together people of different faiths in a highly fractured and war-torn environment, whilst at the same time empowering women in a traditionally male dominated region. Whilst funded by the FUR it is largely an autonomous venture which employs regional expertise to ensure the efficacy of its training program.

Similarly, the foundation’s efforts in the film world offer a novel way of augmenting conflict resolution on the ground and raising awareness. By providing funding to documentary filmmakers producing films on themes of interfaith dialogue, the message of people living in conflict areas can be transported to a far broader audience. One example of this is the Transcending Conflict film festival held in New York in cooperation with the Coexistence Initiative, a New York-based charity.

Aim of the Project
Whilst they operate a highly diverse series of initiatives the focus is predominantly centred on peace-building amongst the different cultures, religions, and ethnicities occupying the Indian subcontinent. The main role of the Organisation is to provide funding and expertise to independent groups and individuals whom they identify as gifted in this particular area, and giving their projects and media a platform to allow them to reach a far wider audience.
2.3 Elijah Interfaith Institute

Project Details
Country: Canada, India, Israel, Taiwan. United Kingdom, U.S.A
Telephone: +972 2 672 9276 (Israel office)
E-Mail: admin@elijah-interfaith.org
Website: http://www.elijah-interfaith.org/

Organisation Description
Founded in 1997, the Elijah Institute is a consortium of academic institutions of all major religions – not only the Abrahamic faiths – which aims at building bridges among them in order to foster peace, by improving religious education and comparative approaches. This is an initiative at the highest levels between religious leaders and high ranking scholars therefore respect for all religions stands at the core of all activities.

The Institute It has received the status of UNESCO affiliated academic network, and has achieved a very strong recognition in both interfaith and religious circles.

Project Description
Its activities vary between diversifying the spiritual perspectives of all religious communities, providing a relevant academic insight on all major faiths (through research projects, public conferences, and inducing change through action-oriented programs). The Elijah institute seeks through these diverse channels to initiate dialogue within communities as well as at the level of top religious leaders.

The Project includes
- Interfaith academic conferences in Jerusalem;
- A master’s program in interfaith studies;
- Elijah board of world religious leaders, aiming at initiating dialogue at the top of all major religious communities, in a top-down approach;
- Elijah educational network, which brings together interfaith organisations to help them in their educational endeavour, at the community level;
- HOPE Centre (House of Prayer and Education), based in Jerusalem, and brings together Christians, Muslims and Jews in its inter-religious objectives of education, dialogue and common prayer. Setting such an example of peaceful coexistence in the city of Jerusalem bears a lot of symbolic weight, which can serve as an example for the millions of believers of those three religions.

Aim of the Project
The project aims at educating about religion, in a comparative perspective, and initiating a peaceful and respectful dialogue among religious leaders and believers. Knowledge is the key element for understanding, and education is the main tool through which dialogue can be fostered. Education and fostering understanding are the central objectives of the Elijah Institute, which does not seek to take sides or peruse religious conversion. These policies allow the Institute to initiate peaceful forums for discussion, and building bridges over conflict.
2.4 Three Faiths Forum

Project Details
Location: London, United Kingdom
Telephone: +44 207 482 9549
E-mail: info@threefaithsforum.org.uk
Website: http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk

Organisation Description
The Three Faiths forum was founded in 1997 in order to bridge the gap between individuals from various religious communities. It has no religious agenda; rather it seeks to bring together Christians, Muslim and Jews within the United Kingdom.

Project description
The organisation has two complementary approaches. First, it seeks to have a top-down efficiency by educating religious leaders from all three communities during seminars and through common event planning. The Three Faiths Forum is also present at the grassroots level, by educating the youth about their individual faiths (and by training trainers to help the word to spread out) and offering them volunteering opportunities to engage for a longer term in inter-religious dialogue.

The Project includes:

- **3FF Middle East**: in collaboration with Cambridge University's Inter-faith Programme, has developed Scriptural reasoning workshops in Jerusalem, which includes the study of religious texts with people from other faiths. The workshops have become a compulsory part of study in three hospitals on the city, as it has proved effective in creating inter-religious dialogue within the team and with the patients. It has been developed outside of hospitals, with young university students.

- Other workshops offer a chance for dialogue, such as “Encountering faiths” which initiates a Q&A session with a person from a different faith, “Skills 4 Dialogue and Communication” which teaches tools for respectful exchanges between people from different religious background, or “Faith and Fashion” which fosters collaborative behaviour between students.

- **Undergraduate ParliaMentors** is sponsored by the British Council (among others) and involves 45 students from 15 universities across the UK. This UN award-winning programme teaches young people about how politics work while bringing the different faiths together. It has been expanded to a greater number of religions, including non-religious beliefs.

Aim of the Project
Through the various programs, the participants learn that they do not have to put their religion and cultural background aside while they work or interact with others. Rather, they get a chance to exchange, build strong personal ties with people from other faiths, through mutual respect and education.
2.5 Building Bridges of Peace through Interfaith Leadership in Honour of “the World Interfaith Harmony Week”

Project Details
Country: Indonesia
Sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation

Organisation Description
Having recognised the need for dialogue among different religions and the necessity to strengthen harmony and cooperation among people, Indonesia has welcomed the UN initiative, the “World Interfaith Harmony Week”, by organizing a Conference, titled “Building Bridges of Peace through Interfaith Leadership.” The Conference was held in Jakarta on 27 January 2011, as this location can be considered a model for inter-religious harmony and a pluralistic society.

This initiative was organised by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in collaboration with The Wahid Institute, the Indonesian Conference for Religion and Peace, and the IPMI Business School.

The UPF is a global network willing to bring new solutions to problems that are affecting the world, while encouraging all religions to start dialogues and to cooperate for peace. That's why this institution supported the Conference in Jakarta focusing its attention in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among different religious communities, as inter-religious dialogue represents the basis for a “culture of peace”.

Project Description
The Conference was able to bring together prominent Indonesian religious leaders, American religious and civic figures, as well as religious leaders from the South-East Asia region.

As the speakers represented the various religions, the role of interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance and respect can be easily understood just from the beginning of the conference through the words of Mr Harbans Singh. The Member of UPF-Indonesia Advisory Board, in fact, was able to summarize in a sentence the day's discussions and the common belief of the participants: “though God has many names, there is only one God”, thus spreading through different communities a message set towards building peace. Beside the eminent political and religious figures, several non-governmental Organisations took part in this event, as they are highly committed in promoting peace-building through dialogue and tolerance.

Aim of the Project
“Building interfaith bridges of peace” Initiative is willing to enforce understanding between diverse communities and to address challenges of peace-building and development in the region. But it aims also to encourage all States to support “the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill around the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues and temples”.
2.6 Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA)

Project Details
Country: Nairobi, Kenya
Telephone: +254 202 511 182/+254 721 205 541
E-Mail: saliou.mbacke@ifapa-africa.org
Website: http://www.ifapa-africa.org/

Organisation Description
Launched by the Lutheran World Federation, the Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa initiates dialogue between the main African religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Baha’i faith and traditional African religion). The IFAPA creates room for dialogue between religious representatives, and launches common initiatives, which aim at promoting peace on the continent.

The initiative became concrete in October 2002, when the first continent-wide inter-faith peace summit took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. Over 100 religious leaders were present, and developed the Johannesburg plan, setting goals and projects which would be monitored by a continuation committee. This committee was later turned into a more permanent structure, the IFAPA Commission, located in Kigali, Rwanda.

Project Description
The main goal of IFAPA is to foster inter-faith encounter, discussion, and consultation by religious experts and leaders. The first Inter-Faith Peace Summit of October 2002 brought together over 100 religious leaders, who launched Johannesburg Plan of Action. In 2005, over 250 leaders met and set new goals for the JPA, which would be implemented by the newly created IFAPA Commission. This summit was preceded by a larger forum dedicated to the women of Africa.

The Project includes
- Sub-regional summits in Southern, Western and Eastern Africa, as well as central and the Horn of Africa regions;
- Interfaith delegations sent to conflict affected countries to promote peace;
- Monitoring legislative elections in Togo;
- Capacity-building workshops;
- Intervention, communication towards leaders and other organisation to influence their action (in response to droughts, and other humanitarian or political crises);
- Youth, Women summits.

Aim of the Project
The IFAPA seeks to eliminate the culture of violence through dialogue, recommendations, workshops, concrete action that foster and educate about cultural and religious tolerance and exchange. The example that is thus set by religious leaders discussing, advocating and building projects together has a chance to be reflected in the communities, at the local level.
3. Grassroots Organisations and Initiatives

3.1 Community of Sant’Egidio

Project Details
Country: Rome, Italy
Telephone: +39 06 899 22 34
E-Mail: info@santegidio.org
Website: http://www.santegidio.org/

Organisation Description
The Sant’ Egidio Community, founded in Rome in 1968, is a Christian Community and it has been recognised as a “Church public lay association”. Since 1987, it has undertaken action at the international level through meetings, encounters and in prayer ‘the spirit of Assise’. The Community’s values include assistance to poor people, which has led them to tackle the roots of poverty: conflict, and in particular inter-religious conflict. The Sant’ Egidio Community is present in many countries and it has been taking efforts in order to share its values through action at local level, within the catholic population but also outside.

Project Description
The Community mission is focused on internal as well as international aims: that means not only helping those in need, but also becoming a “Mediator of peace negotiations”, as war is the “mother of every poverty”. In fact, the Community was able to undertake several humanitarian and peaceful initiatives, such as Mozambique in the late 1980s. Thanks to the Community efforts, Mozambique signed an agreement that put an end to the war. During the 1990s Sant’Egidio participated in initiatives with the aim to solve controversial situations in the Balkans, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Project includes
- Setting up refuges for the old and building hospices for AIDS patients;
- A moratorium on all capital punishments since 2000, along with other international organisations;
- Humanitarian action in case of antipersonnel mines, helping refugees, acting against food crisis and wars in Burundi, Albania, Kosovo, the southern region of Sudan;
- Mediation and facilitation initiatives in Mozambique and Guatemala;
- Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition (DREAM).

Aim of the Project
The Community of Sant’Egidio aims to project the peace and values such as brotherhood abroad, through a policy intervention among the poorest on earth, those in need, while helping to solve controversial situations through mediation.
3.2 Religions for Peace

Project Details
Country: USA (Headquarters), Kenya, Norway, United Kingdom, Peru
Telephone: +1 (212) 687 2163
E-Mail: info@wcrp.org
Website: http://www.wcrp.org/

Organisation Description
In 1961, some senior leaders from the world’s major faith traditions came together with the aim to explore the possibilities of organising a religious summit to address the need of the followers of the faith to take action to achieve world peace. Since then, following the same idea, the Organisation is now organised on several levels: the International secretariat in New York, Regional Conferences in Europe and Asia, around 75 affiliates at the national level and more local units.

Project Description
Religions for Peace brings together hundreds of key religious leaders every five years to discuss the relevant issues concerning world peace. In August 2006, the Eighth World Assembly was convened in Kyoto.

The Project includes
Apart from the World summits, the Organisation has also undertaken some humanitarian aid projects which are as follows:

- Building a new climate of reconciliation in Iraq;
- Mediating dialogue among warring factions in Sierra Leone;
- Organising an international network of religious women’s Organisations;
- Establishing an extraordinary program to assist the millions of children affected by Africa’s AIDS pandemic, the Hope for African Children Initiative.

Aim of the Project
The purpose of the organisation is to “respect religious differences while celebrating the common humanity.”
3.3 West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

Project Details
Country: Spain, Israel, Palestine
Telephone: +1 212 662 0030 (US Foundation)
E-Mail: barenboimsaidfoundation@yahoo.com
Website: http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/

Organisation Description
Created in 1999 by Daniel Borenboim and Eward Said, Palestinian literary scholar, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra aims at bringing together young musicians from Israel, Palestine and other Arab countries, thus enabling an intercultural dialogue and promoting a common interest. It is sponsored by Daniel Barenboim Foundation, Barenboim Said Foundation and Fundacion Barenboim-Said.

Project Description
The WEDO has played in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, for Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations in 2006. Its peculiarity is due to the multicultural and religious composition of the musicians; in fact the aim of this project is to bring together young people coming mostly from controversial areas in order to refine their musical competences and to spread a message of peace and brotherhood.

The Project includes
- A yearly workshop in Seville, with rehearsals, lectures and discussions;
- An international concert tour;
- CDs and DVDs for concerts, Emmy-winning documentaries (2006).

Aim of the Project
The original aim of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra was to promote new ways of finding peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict: “Building new bridges between the Israeli and the Palestinians. No military solution can be found there; and the destinies of those two people are inextricably linked”. Over time, the Israeli Palestinian conflict has become a seemingly irreconcilable religious separation, therefore any cultural initiative aiming to solve this conflict is actually building bridges between Islam and Judaism. This artistic endeavour brings together individuals, regardless of their cultural or religious background, into a common purpose: that of music.
3.4 Children of Abraham

Project Details
Country: New York, U.S.A
Telephone: +33 6 12 88 71 01 (France office)
E-Mail: info@childrenofabraham.org
Website: http://www.childrenofabraham.org/homePage.html

Organisation Description
The project first originated in 2003 but was incorporated in November 2004, starting as a comparative photographic project, seeking at revealing the similarities between the Jewish and the Muslim faiths – thus overcoming the strong preconception that those communities are irremediably unreconcilable. This initiative later grew to be the current Children of Abraham organisation, which fosters dialogue between the Muslim and Jewish youths via the Internet. Funding comes on an equal basis from Jewish and Muslim sources.

Project Description
At the moment the Children of Abraham organisation is seeking to develop its activities, in order to include as many young participants as possible and increase its reach.

Its main program has been the Global Discovery Program, an online course where young people from both sides of the faith divide work together on common projects, and build bridges through education and by keeping an open mind. From this program, 240 students from 45 countries have graduated. Members of the advisory board are high ranking officials and lecturers, who are strongly involved in the educational purpose of the organisation: apart from taking part to the development of the organisation, they remain available to the young participants for any question they might have, so as to improve and work towards a better mutual understanding of each other’s religion.

The Project includes
- The Global Discovery Program: this is a four month online collaborative program, which aims at mutual discovery of the participants’ Abrahamic roots, their mutual cultural similarities and differences.
- A new project in partnership with the government of France is soon to be launched, which will include many more participants.

Aim of the Project
One image stands behind the whole project: that of 10-12th century Spain which represented a golden age in which Jews and Muslims worked together and coexisted peacefully.

The interindividual approach adopted by the Children of Abraham complies with the tradition of dialogue promoted by both faiths. The principles of the organisations rest on the belief, shared both by Islam and Judaism, that life must be preserved, and conflict must be solved peacefully. The young participants get a chance to learn about the other faith but also their own, through sustained dialogue towards a common goal (i.e. the realisation of a photographic, research or any other kind of project).
3.5 Interfaith Mediation Centre

Project Details
Location: Kaduna, Nigeria
Telephone: +234 803 303 9716
Website: http://www.imcnigeria.org

Organisation Description
The Interfaith Mediation Centre is a non-governmental, non-partisan, not for profit, faith-based organisation working in Nigeria. Established in 1995 it arranges events and workshops for interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Their wider mission is to achieve this objective by using non-violent and strategic engagements in Nigerian society. It aims to address various challenges, first and foremost social and religious misconceptions. The prevention of this is the central activity of the Centre, to prevent there use by political or religious leaders to fuel conflict. On a more daily basis, the organisation’s sustainability is also under question (mainly because of the lack of sustainable funding and long-lasting efforts towards peace from institutional funders), despite its impressive record of over 10,000 members and over 10 awards for its peace building activities.

Project description
The Interfaith Mediation Centre uses religion as an approach to prevent and solve conflict, and more generally foster dialogue between the various communities of Nigeria. In order to do so, the IMC includes a broad range of activities (from consulting to producing publications in Conflict management and Trauma Counselling, but also advocacy work).

The Project includes
- Multi-track approach using scriptural texts, which help individuals from one community to learn more about the others through the study of foundational texts;
- Reconciliation programs such as the Peace Building and Reorientation for Religious Community Youth Leader in Jos Metropolitan Areas, Nigeria which aimed to reconcile communities after the ethno-religious violence in the country;
- Workshops and symposiums aimed at the education of a broad number of participants in peace building principles and concepts, such as the Co-Existence Training Workshop for Peace Networks in Kaduna State which worked on improving co-existence and multi-faith harmony in area of religious tension.

Aims of the Project
The aim of the Interfaith Medication Centre is to have interfaith coexistence towards a developed society free of violent ethno-religious and socio political conflict. Their work is important to help with the reconciliation of all religious communities in Nigeria; indeed, tensions are very strong between the different groups. The IMC’s work helps solving conflicts on the short run, and changing mentalities in the longer run through their education work, and their top-down approach (reaching the communities through their leaders).
3.6 Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Project Details
Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina
Telephone: + 387 33 666 776
Mail: office@mrv.ba
Website: http://www.mrv.ba/

Organisation Description
Despite the many tensions that had been taken place in the past among different religious communities, now Religious leaders have been showing a particular interest in emphasizing tolerance within different faiths, and at the same time they have been trying to solve religious conflicts and to facilitate reconciliation. A clear example of the efforts made by Bosnian communities to encourage brotherhood, despite the differences, is visible in the principles proposed by the non-profit, nongovernmental Organisation “Inter-religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, which strive towards a peaceable future. The work of this Organisation is mostly connected with the idea of building awareness of each other’s beliefs, customs, and practices and to foster joint activities at the local level within the Region.

This Institution was established on 9 June 1997 thanks to the commitment of Mustafa Ceric, Reis-ul-Ulema of the Islamic Community of BiH; Metropolitan Nikolaj Dabrobosanski in the name of the Holiness Serbian Patriarch Pavle; Vinko Cardinal Puljic, Archbishop of Sarajevo and President of the Bishops’ Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Jakob Finci, President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Its foundation has been supported also by the US Institute of Peace and the World Conference on Religion for Peace (WCRP), which is an international multi-faith organisation with members in 100 countries.

Project Description
The inter-religious dialogue and mutual understanding is considered as the basis of pacific coexistence and it represents the pillar of the Council itself. It is composed by two mainly bodies that are an Assembly and an Executive branch, in which religious leaders of Islamic community, Serbian-orthodox church, Catholic church and Jewish community have been working together, side by side in order to promote freedom of worship and durable peace based on mutual respect for each religious tradition.

Aim of the Project
As the Inter-religious Council declared, it will operate towards the following goals:

1. “To decrease religious prejudice and raise awareness of the importance of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation through developing relationships between churches and religious communities throughout BiH;
2. To promote the relationship between the State and the churches and religious communities through mutual commitments;
3. To link the IRC-BiH with regional and international initiatives”. 
3. Inter-religious Dialogue: Concluding Thoughts

Through the 12 examples above, this report has sought to ascertain what form inter-religious dialogue can take. It has not explored dialogue between any specific faiths, nor in any specific conflict zone where religion is a key factor, be it in Israel-Palestine or the Kashmir. Either of these would require a specific focus on one faith, or a concentration on a specific geo-political theme.

While an institution such as the Foundation for Universal Responsibility, located in India, is based on a broad desire to encourage dialogue between all major world faiths, it also works towards the specific goal of achieving a solution to the Kashmir conflict. This is comparable to the West-Eastern Divian Orchestra, which seeks to solve the conflict in the Middle-East through cultural connections – in this case music. Other Organisations, like Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa, which does have a broad geographical aim, seeks to work with all religions across the continent towards a general aim of peaceable coexistence.

Inter-religious conflicts remain a key problem in international relations; they also continue to pose a threat to international security. However, another common characteristic in these conflicts is the apparent failure of violence, military force and other forms of ‘hard-power’ to solve them. The programs and projects listed above, and many more world-wide demonstrate clearly that inter-religious dialogue, *ergo* ‘soft-power’ and cultural diplomacy on the whole offer an alternative solution to conflict, a solution that can be applied to conflicts regardless of geographical location.
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5. Glossary

FUR: The foundation for Universal Responsibility
IIP: Iraqi Institute for Peace
UPF: Universal Peace Federation
IFAPA: Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa
WEDO: West-Eastern Divan Orchestra
IMC: Interfaith Mediation Centre
WCRP: the World Conference on Religion for Peace
IRC-BiH: Inter-religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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