Religion & Peacebuilding
The teachings of all major world religions advocate a peaceful coexistence and religious communities across the globe are actively committed to improving living conditions for local populations. Yet, religion is also a significant factor in conflicts. While they are rarely the cause of armed conflicts, religions nevertheless play a key role in many conflict situations and can thus have a positive or a negative impact.

This newsletter explores the interface between religion and peacebuilding. The main article highlights the concept of interreligious dialogue as a peacebuilding tool and provides insights into the diverse range of approaches to dialogue between different religious communities. Non-governmental organisations report on their activities involving religious actors and Swiss government agencies explain how religious actors are also included in political efforts to resolve conflicts. This goes to show that the work dealing with armed conflicts with a religious dimension is almost as multifaceted as religions themselves.

Lukas Krienbuehl
Editor

---

**Table of Contents**

- **Editorial**
  - 2

  **FOCUS**
  - The Diversity of Interreligious Dialogue Approaches
    - 3

  **KOFF - SWISSPEACE**
  - KOFF Roundtable Discussion on the Local Elections in Kosovo
    - 5
  - Postgraduate Programme in Civilian Peacebuilding
    - 5

  **SWISS NGOs**
  - The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa
    - 6
  - International Association of Liberal Religious Women
    - 7
  - Interfaith South-South Exchange between Nigeria and Indonesia
    - 7
  - Interfaith Dialogue from the Perspective of the Baha’is
    - 8
  - mission 21 : Interfaith Cooperation in Indonesia
    - 9

  **SWISS GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**
  - Religion, Politics and Conflict in the Context of Swiss Peace Policy
    - 9

  **PUBLICATIONS**
  - Religion Monitor Takes a Comparative Look at Religiousness around the World
    - 10
  - Human Rights and Dignity : Key Factors for Development in Fragile Contexts
    - 10
  - Is Local Beautiful?
    - 11

  **WEB TIP**
  - Religions for Peace
    - 11

  **INTERNATIONAL**
  - International Partner Organisations
    - 12

  **KOFF TEAM**
  - Job Opening
    - 12

  **CALENDAR**
  - Upcoming Events
    - 13
The Diversity of Interreligious Dialogue Approaches

Religion plays a role, both positive and negative, in conflicts as diverse as those in Mali, the Middle East and Myanmar. Although these conflicts are not “about” religion, religious worldviews and identities are of central importance. In such contexts, interreligious dialogue can be a powerful tool contributing to conflict resolution. Despite growing acceptance of the approach as a conflict resolution tool, questions still abound in the broader peacebuilding community as to what interreligious dialogue actually is, what it can achieve and how it can be most effectively used. This article seeks to provide some tentative answers to these questions.

Many people envision interreligious dialogue as theological discussions among religious leaders. Although such dialogues do take place, this is in fact a very limited definition of interreligious dialogue. At its most basic level, interreligious dialogue simply consists of dialogue between persons of different faiths. Participants can be from all sectors of a religious community, not just its clerics. Similarly, the content of interreligious dialogues is not fixed. In contexts of violent political conflict, dialogue is rarely, if ever, limited to theological discussions. Participants more often discuss political issues of common concern, prejudices and grievances. Organisations such as Religions for Peace International, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy and the Community of Sant’Egidio are examples of peacebuilding actors specialised in interreligious dialogue. More traditional peacebuilding actors, states included, also support interreligious dialogues.

At the heart of all interreligious dialogues related to peacebuilding is an effort to build trust and deepen communication across conflict lines. The purpose for which that is done, however, will vary from initiative to initiative and will determine the nature of participants and the content of discussions. The purpose itself depends on the context, on the timing of an intervention and on the peacemaker’s analysis of the role of religion in the conflict being addressed. For example, a third party seeking to contribute to a cessation of hostilities might conclude that religious leaders are important national or community leaders with moral authority over their respective constituencies. Building trust between religious leaders and garnering their commitment to non-violence could help build support for a ceasefire. Examples include the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Iraqi Interreligious Congress, both of which brought together high-level religious leaders to mutually condemn violence.

Other initiatives might be concerned with community reconciliation and healing and may draw on religious rituals and reference to sacred scriptures as tools and resources for reconciliation efforts. Introducing a spiritual dimension into interreligious dialogues may produce what participants have described as “transformative experiences” where a space for reconciliation and healing suddenly opens up. The work of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy in Kashmir, for example, involved bringing together young, non-clerical leaders from different sectors of the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist communities for a series of faith-based reconciliation seminars. The aim was to begin a faith-based reconciliation movement across both sides of the Kashmiri Line of Control.

Diversity of Approaches

As these examples illustrate, there are several approaches to interreligious dialogue. Approaches may focus on, among other things, the role of religious leaders as peacemakers, the role of common religious values in challenging prejudices or the role of spirituality in nurturing reconciliation. As religion often plays multiple roles in any given conflict and because it can serve different peacebuilding functions, most initiatives will mix approaches. It is important to remain aware of this diversity and of the different objectives of interreligious dialogues. When
designing any dialogue initiative, however, it is crucial to have clearly defined goals and associated theories of change. Without these, dialogues are likely to become ineffective and participants may lose interest if it is not clear to them what the dialogue is helping to achieve. No single interreligious dialogue initiative will solve a conflict. Different dialogue efforts need to involve different constituencies depending on the ends, while linking up to other peacebuilding efforts.

**Effective Interreligious Dialogue**

One way of rendering interreligious dialogues more effective is to incorporate joint action between participants. According to many conflict practitioners, engaging in joint activities is generally a more effective means of building trust and mutual understanding than is discussion. The latter is especially true in conflicts where deeply-held religious values are perceived to be at stake and where parties have different worldviews linked to their different religious identities. In such cases, spoken communication can become very challenging. Moreover, when words are not followed by actions, there is a high risk of further polarisation and mistrust between parties. For this reason, some interfaith dialogues incorporate joint action. Dialogue through action - also known as *diapraxis* – has been shown to be particularly effective in conflicts involving religious communities or sensitive, value-laden issues. Moreover, joint action that specifically addresses conflict issues will be more effective than action unrelated to parties’ main concerns.

Another important consideration for increasing the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue is to ensure that it does not just take place among moderates. Indeed, a frequently-voiced critique of interreligious dialogue is that participants are often like-minded moderates already committed to outreach across religious communities. Moderates, however, may actually have little credibility within their own communities. Although harder to draw into a dialogue, efforts need to be made to reach out to those influential actors who are negatively disposed to the other side. This is why *intra-religious* dialogue, internal dialogue within a religious community, is as important as interreligious dialogue. Such dialogues can help counter exclusive and hostile discourses by bringing forth the variety of religious understandings related to war and peace within a religious community. This task will primarily fall to religious peacemakers within each community. Finding ways of creating safe spaces where exclusivist voices can express their concerns is one of the most important challenges of intra-religious dialogue.

In a world where more than four-fifths of the population identify with a religious tradition, interreligious dialogue will remain an important tool for conflict transformation. Interreligious dialogue is, however, not the only tool for addressing religious aspects in a conflict or for tapping into the peacebuilding capacities of religious traditions. As with any tool, whether it should be used, and how, will depend on the analysis of the conflict. Nor should we make the mistake of thinking that working on religion and conflict can be reduced to some tools or approaches. In conflicts in which religion plays an important role, it has to be understood. This understanding must inform all efforts to address an armed conflict, from interreligious dialogues to high-level political peace negotiations.
KOFF Roundtable Discussion on the Local Elections in Kosovo

International organisations and media outlets have lauded the 2013 “Agreement on the Normalisation of Relations” (April Agreement) as a breakthrough in relations between Belgrade and Pristina. However, the local elections held in November and December 2013 in Kosovo as a first step to implementing the agreement were marred by logistical irregularities, poor security, violence in some polling stations and reports of intimidation. The election results have since been confirmed, with the Belgrade-backed candidates from the Citizens’ Initiative Sprska elected in nine out of ten of the municipalities with a Serbian majority. In the wake of the elections, the Centre for Peacebuilding (KOFF) invited Andreas Ernst, correspondent for the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ) in Belgrade, to share insights on what implications the election results might have on the relationship between Belgrade and Pristina and ultimately, the larger question of Northern Kosovo.

Ernst acknowledged that the April Agreement was an important step in normalising Belgrade-Pristina relations, but meanwhile cautioned that it was premature to call it a “turning point”. In his view, the need for both sides to achieve success in regard to the EU accession process motivated Belgrade and Pristina to come to an agreement (and to do it fast). For politicians progress on EU membership appears so important because of upcoming national elections in both Serbia and Kosovo in 2014. This sense of urgency has resulted in an accord that is “top-down, radical”, and excludes the affected population. In order to assuage this effect, Ernst sees it as the major task of the international community to work with the population and support bottom-up initiatives.

Ernst also relayed that a major consequence of the elections is the imminent establishment of a community of Serbian municipalities whose competencies are still unknown. This may result in greater ethnic division and slow down the negotiation process between Belgrade and Pristina on other issues, such as the integration of the judicial system. A more positive outcome is not impossible, but unfortunately highly unlikely, according to Ernst.

Postgraduate Programme in Civilian Peacebuilding

What impact does peacebuilding have? How can it be measured? What are the particular challenges of working in fragile contexts? How do gender roles change during a war and what does this mean for post-conflict societies? When is the right time to begin mediation during a conflict and how can talks be set up? How can a society deal with gross human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law? How can an economic system that is conducive to peace emerge from a “war economy”? The one-year Postgraduate Programme in Civilian Peacebuilding (CAS) puts these questions centre stage.

Over 25 course days experts from academia and practice will address current debates and peace processes. They will encourage critical reflection on personal professional experiences and peacebuilding activities. After successfully
Flyer

Further information

swisspeace
Franziska Sigrist

SWISS NGOs

The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa

Having been established in 1959, the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) is the oldest and most widely recognised organisation dealing with Christian-Muslim relations in Africa. It is a Christian organisation, supported by local churches and managed by a secretariat in Nairobi. The work of PROCMURA is based on two key basic principles: first, to faithfully and responsibly witness the Christian Gospel in an interfaith environment of Christians and Muslims that respects the spirit of good neighbourliness; and second, to promote constructive engagement with Muslims for peace and peaceful coexistence for the holistic development of humankind.

Due to various political and economic crises and an increasing radicalisation of certain groups – mostly but not exclusively Muslim groups – relations between Christian and Muslim communities in Africa have noticeably deteriorated over the past few decades. This presents considerable challenges for PROCMURA. Thanks to well-established networks among the highest Christian, Muslim and governmental circles, however, PROCMURA has been able to play a mediating role in crisis situations on various occasions.

In recent years, the focus of PROCMURA's cooperation with mission 21 has been on South Sudan, where they have succeeded in establishing good Christian-Muslim relations. More events are planned for this year in Cameroon, Nigeria and Tanzania. The aim of mission 21 is to increasingly move from conflict management, which is often still needed, to conflict prevention. In addition to concrete programmes implemented at local level, which specifically involve women and young people as well as leadership figures, mission 21 is strengthening the education of specialists by, for example, awarding grants for Master's degree studies in “Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations” at St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya.

Further information

mission 21
Armin Zimmermann

Links

PROCMURA
mission 21
International Association of Liberal Religious Women

Under the motto “Ordinary Women Doing Extraordinary Things”, the International Association of Liberal Religious Women (IALRW) is dedicated to building a culture of peace and justice for all. It also aims to reinforce the friendship and cooperation between like-minded women by creating a network of women with liberal religious mindsets and backgrounds. The association has over 100 members in more than 20 countries, representing more than ten different religions. The organisation was founded at the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress (now known under the name of the International Association for Religious Freedom – IARF) in Berlin in 1910. There remains a close, personal connection between the IALRW and the IARF to this day. The international secretariat of the IALRW is currently based in Japan, with Kathy R. Matsui, a professor at Tokyo’s Seisen University, serving as president.

In 2010, the IALRW celebrated its centenary at its international conference on the topic of “Women in Action for World Peace”, which was held in the city of Kochi in the Indian state of Kerala. In its Kerala Declaration for Peace, the organisation laid out the foundations for its future engagement. The women committed themselves to promoting religious cooperation and understanding, to resolving conflicts through non-violent means, and to exerting influence on states to encourage governments to stop nuclear armament. For years, the IALRW has also been lending its support to specific projects, such as the Mahabodhi Women Literacy Project, which aims to improve literacy among women in Ladakh.

The next IALRW international conference is due to take place in Birmingham in August 2014 and will focus on the theme of “Raising Our Voices for Change toward a Sustainable World”. It will be followed by the IARF World Congress. Birmingham was chosen as the congress location because it is a city which sets a prime example for interfaith integration and offers a variety of opportunities for people to meet and exchange views.

Interfaith South-South Exchange between Nigeria and Indonesia

In October 2013, as part of a South-South peacebuilding exchange, a mixed-faith group of prominent actors involved in interfaith peace work in Nigeria paid a visit to mission 21 partners in Java and Kalimantan, Indonesia, for the first time. During the visit, the Nigerian delegation was able to observe various similarities between the Nigerian and Indonesian situations: the destabilising influence of transnational Islamist movements, the role of tradition and culture as a common basis for religions, the deliberately vague legal framework and the role of politics in general. In both contexts, security forces are perceived as inefficient and incompetent actors who can even exacerbate conflicts. The exploitation of religious groups for economic or political purposes is also proving to be a major problem for both countries.
The exchange gave rise to some surprising moments. Dr Dali, President of the Nigerian peace church EYN, admitted, for example, that they had initially been very anxious about travelling to Indonesia, as it is a country with a predominantly Muslim population. This made them all the more surprised to find how warmly they were welcomed not just by their fellow Christians, but also by the Muslims, and how well they got along with one another. Dali said that after these experiences in Indonesia he no longer has any fear of Muslims in Nigeria either. E. Kadala, who is in charge of EYN’s peace work, added that he obtained a Master’s degree in Islamic studies to enable him to help Muslims gain a better understanding of Christianity. With this purpose in mind, he also spent six years teaching prospective pastors about Islam in the context of theological seminars. It was not until this trip that he realised that this was the wrong approach. He now believes that interfaith dialogue is not about converting people, but about how people live and work together to find ways to improve their coexistence and society.

Interfaith Dialogue from the Perspective of the Baha’is

“Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein”, wrote the founder of the Baha’i faith, Bahá’u’lláh (1817-1892). At the same time, religion all too often represents the biggest obstacle on the path to peace. To overcome this barrier, Baha’is engage in interfaith dialogue. Crucial to this, in the Baha’i perspective, is the belief in the unity of God and religion, in spite of all the various cultural forms of expression and human interpretation. This principle of the unity of religion, an idea which the Baha’is advocate through educational classes for children, in community activities and at the United Nations, does not question the validity of any of the major world religions involved in interfaith dialogue. Instead, in accordance with the Baha’i view, it guarantees that religion will continue to exist. In 2002, the supreme governing Baha’i institution, the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, sent an urgent message to the world’s religious leaders, calling for them to focus on the common ethical values shared by all religions rather than on the differences between them. The revelations were always made in a way that the people who receive them will be able to grasp: differences are due to the cultural and social environment of the time.

The Baha’i faith is now practised in more than 180 countries around the world. Its representatives actively partake in interfaith dialogues in the countries where the political situation allows them to do so. In Switzerland, Baha’is are participating in the board of the Roundtable of religions in St. Gallen and the Interfaith consortium of Switzerland (IRAS-COTIS).

In 1986, the international year of peace, the Baha’is delivered a message to all the heads of state around the world. This message, entitled “The Promise of World Peace”, stated that achieving lasting world peace would depend on more than just overcoming religious prejudices. An overhaul of people’s way of thinking and moral concepts is also necessary for ensuring that the unity of humankind, in all its diversity, is recognised. “The wellbeing of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established,” wrote Bahá’u’lláh more than a century ago. Now this historical turning point has been reached.
mission 21: Interfaith Cooperation in Indonesia

Over the past decade, mission 21 has gradually built up a peacebuilding programme in Indonesia which focuses on interfaith dialogue and cooperation. This work has highlighted the importance of specific regional context and conflict analyses, because local causes of conflict, relations between religious communities and ways of dealing with religious minorities vary within Indonesia. Since religion and religious leaders play an important role in people's everyday lives and since the communities are interconnected at both grassroots and national level, a successful interfaith dialogue can help to defuse conflicts. Interfaith dialogue provides a basis for reinforcing commonalities with regard to values, cultural practices and social systems and converting them into tangible interfaith cooperation. In Indonesia, there are radical tendencies within both Christian and Muslim communities. It is therefore often very difficult to establish a dialogue within the religious community itself which includes the radical elements.

mission 21 is keen to strengthen its successfully established cooperation with Muslim and interfaith institutions, as well as with the Pasundan Christian Church, which is based in the predominantly Muslim province of West Java. The aim is to reach out to younger adults and youth who represent a very broad religious spectrum. At the same time, the interfaith networks which have been set up are in need of more support and capacity development including in areas such as conflict analysis. The Indonesian interfaith working group thus facilitates the transfer of knowledge among project partners, promotes networking and is involved in programme planning.

Religion, Politics and Conflict in the Context of Swiss Peace Policy

Today's world is characterised by diversity in terms of religions and world views, which are also relevant to the world of politics – and to peace policy in particular. The existence of different world views can stir up tensions and play a decisive role in conflict situations. Switzerland's international peace policy therefore also places emphasis on this dimension: since 2005 the desk Religion, Politics, Conflict at the Human Security Division (HSD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has been focusing on conflicts shaped by religious and political factors. This engagement is based on a number of basic principles: firstly, all actors in a conflict with de facto or de jure political responsibility, and particularly religious actors, are to be involved in the search for a solution. Secondly, this process is to be conducted within a non-denominational political framework. Thirdly, a cognitively, religiously and ideologically neutral methodology should be applied. Fourthly, no particular world view is to be considered superior to any other, and finally solutions will be sought which are compatible with the world views concerned, are acceptable to all conflicting parties and respect international legal frameworks. Hence, the key tool is not interfaith dialogue, but diapraxis, a practice-oriented dialogue, in which actors in conflict work out specific, practical solutions enabling their coexistence. Experiences have shown that the joint search for practical
Religion Monitor Takes a Comparative Look at Religiousness around the World

Religion is a key factor in determining the way in which many people think and act and is therefore a significant social force all over the world. One of the main challenges facing societies is working out how to enable people from different cultural and religious backgrounds to peacefully coexist. If societies want to live together in freedom and diversity in the future, it is essential to gain a better understanding of religions and their significance for social change. This also raises the question of whether religion strengthens social cohesion or whether it is more likely to cause conflicts. The Bertelsmann Stiftung launched a new evaluation tool in 2007 to produce a global overview of religiousness. Using representative surveys from 21 countries, the Religion Monitor made it possible, for the first time, to compare the individual religious attitudes of people from all world religions and across all continents. In 2013, the revised publication also carried out an empirical survey of the social and political relevance of religion. More than 14,000 people in 13 countries were asked about their personal religious views and the relationship between religion and society. The dataset was analysed jointly by experts of religious studies, sociologists and psychologists to gain insights into the relevance of religion around the world.

Human Rights and Dignity: Key Factors for Development in Fragile Contexts

Respect for human rights is what makes security and sustainable development more than just an illusion. The latest Asia Brief from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) shows how SDC applies a human rights-based approach to its development programmes in South Asia. Drawing on examples from Nepal, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, the publication discusses the significance of human rights and human dignity for sustainable development. It also examines the importance of a continued engagement for human rights even in difficult or fragile environments.
Is Local Beautiful?

Based on the swisspeace annual conference 2012, the publication examines the delicate balance between external interventions and locally-led initiatives. It addresses the question of what “local” means in the peacebuilding and development context; which actors on the ground actually represent the local level and how external actors choose their partners from amongst them. Moreover, it examines how local ownership - emerging as key criteria for any external intervention - is constituted: does this concept only imply local participation or is local control from the outset a must? Finally, it assesses the potential of locally-led initiatives and local conflict resolution mechanisms and their interaction with external interventions. Several authors provide insights on these questions and nuance our thinking about both local ownership and external interventions. As such, the publication aims to encourage critical reflections on this topical debate in peacebuilding and development.

Religions for Peace

Statistics show that four fifths of the world's population identify themselves as members of a religious community. In every country, faith communities are among those involved in working to improve people's living conditions. Religious communities thus offer great opportunities for helping to create a more peaceful world: Religions for Peace aims to exploit this potential. On its website the organisation provides sound studies, guidance and toolkits which can be used to support work with religious communities and transform conflicts with a religious dimension. The website also offers guidelines, expert reports and videos arranged by topic. Users can access a comprehensive database covering various themes, such as the fight against poverty, conflict transformation, disarmament, environmental protection and building fair societies by promoting religious freedom and democracy. The organisation, which was founded in 1970 and has a well-established network of working groups in 90 countries, can draw on a wealth of experience from religious communities in dealing with these issues. In doing so, it makes a particular effort to encourage interfaith cooperation that goes beyond dialogue and aims to pave the way for concrete common action.
International Partner Organisations

Info
News from KOFF’s international partner organisations.

FriEnt
The latest edition of the FriEnt-Impulse newsletter addresses the peace process in Colombia and the challenges for church-based development work. The feature article analyses the new challenges facing development efforts by church communities and civil society following a possible peace agreement. It particularly highlights the areas of human rights, peacebuilding and the improvement of livelihood for marginalised sections of the population.

Berghof Foundation
The Berghof Foundation recently published another comment article for the Berghof Handbook Dialogue No. 10 on peace infrastructures in Nepal. In the article “Serving People’s Need for Peace: Infrastructures for Peace, the Peace Sector, and the Case of Nepal”, the authors explain the current needs and services relating to peace in Nepal.

International Alert
International Alert has released a podcast of the conference on “Olympic politics: Sochi 2014 and beyond”. During the conference, which was held at the end of 2013, experts and analysts examined what impact the Winter Olympics, which are due to take place in the Russian city of Sochi in February, will have on conflicts and peace in the Caucasus.

Heinrich Böll Foundation
At the end of 2013, the Heinrich Böll Foundation published the 10th volume of the publication series by the Gunda Werner Institute on “Transitional Justice – Gender Perspective for Transitional Societies”. The study in German by Rita Schäfer reveals that gender-specific forms of violence are largely forgotten in dealing with the past and reconciliation efforts following a war or a period of systematic human rights violations. She argues, however, that peace processes can only be sustainable if attention is paid to these forms of violence too.

Job Opening
Newsletter Editor
The Centre for Peacebuilding (KOFF) is looking for an editor (part-time 60%) starting on 1 March or by agreement. The main responsibilities include the planning and editing of the KOFF newsletter and further communication tasks within the KOFF. More information in German.
Upcoming Events

01 + 08/02/2014

In February, Peace Watch Switzerland (PWS) and Peace Brigades International (PBI) Switzerland are holding public information events in Bern and Zurich on voluntary international human rights accompaniment missions in Guatemala, Honduras, southern Mexico, Colombia, Kenya and Palestine/Israel.

31/03/2014

At the end of March, mission 21 is organising a symposium on interfaith peace work, focusing on the topic of “Religious minorities in jeopardy”. The participants will discuss the causes of religious conflicts and present examples of interfaith peace work.

05 - 06/04/2014

The Build Peace Conference will take place at the Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge/Boston in early April. Peacebuilding experts, activists and technology specialists will exchange ideas on how technology can be used for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Further information and registration.

June/Sept./Dec. 2014

The Institute for Peacebuilding Steps for Peace has published its 2014 training programme entitled “Boosting Peace Potentials”. The programme includes the training course on “Designing trainings for peacebuilding”, which is held twice in Berlin from 30 June to 4 July and from 1 to 5 December. The training course on “Building peace by managing change” takes place from 1 to 5 September and focuses on the topic of organisational development and change management in crisis areas.

In the online calendar you can find more information about upcoming roundtables and events organised by KOFF.