



## **USAID BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

WORLD CONFERENCE OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE

Inter-Religious Action for Tolerance and Co-Existence in the Balkans

**Final Narrative Report**

**Report Period: March 1, 2004 – March 31, 2005**

**Contract #: 168-G-00-04-00101-00**

JUNE 2005

WORLD CONFERENCE OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE  
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## PROJECT SUMMARY

*Religions for Peace* builds, equips and networks Inter-Religious Councils to harness the largely untapped power of multi-religious cooperation to transform conflict, promote peace and advance sustainable development. Founded in 1970 as an international, non-sectarian organization, *Religions for Peace* is now the largest coalition of the world's religious communities, with affiliated Inter-religious Councils in four regions and fifty five countries.

Since 1996, *Religions for Peace* has worked with senior religious leaders and officials in South East Europe's main religious communities – Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Jewish – to facilitate and support their efforts in cooperation and peace building through establishing inter-religious councils (IRCs). IRCs are currently established in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo and Albania.

The IRC-BiH in particular has made important contributions to the peace process, drafting new laws on religious freedom, issuing joint advocacy statements for peace, educating civil society through radio programs that span the region, publishing papers that promote societal cohesion and facilitating inter-religious dialogues for reconciliation that include women, youth and religious leaders. As they gain autonomy and self-sustainability, their influence and involvement in the development of the civil society will continue to rise. The IRC-Bosnia serves as a particularly strong model for inter-religious collaboration in *Religions for Peace's* global network. It is now an independent organization that receives financial and in-kind support from the Bosnian government. It continues to operate as the primary inter-religious body in Bosnia that is consulted on local and diplomatic levels with regards to religious affairs and is increasingly taking on a role in fostering regional inter-religious cooperation.

In tandem with the development of IRCs, *Religions for Peace* strives to promote regional, inter-religious initiatives. In South East Europe, religious leaders cooperate through several regional mechanisms – the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL), South East Europe Inter-religious Network (SEEN) and the South East Europe Women of Faith Network (WOFN). These bodies strengthen the identity of the IRCs and establish networks of religious leaders and women who can promote values necessary for establishing a strong, democratic region.

Although challenges to inter-religious cooperation remain in the region, the religious communities of South East Europe continue to be engaged in the dialogue process. The full participation and support by all religious communities in BiH, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro and Albania in the regional meeting in Belgium, in November 2004, demonstrates the communities' continued goodwill and true commitment to strengthening their unified inter-religious voice. Moving forward, *Religions for Peace* hopes to pursue two objectives: 1) to secure direct support for the IRC-BiH to develop and implement programs and increase its role in civil society development; and 2) to facilitate regional cooperation and IRC development in the region and provide opportunities for the religious leadership in South East Europe to link to the global network.

This narrative report comprises the final report on the grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to the World Conference of *Religions for Peace* for the period from March 1, 2004 through March 31, 2005. The grant supported *Religions for Peace's* ongoing efforts to foster and facilitate multi-religious cooperation for reconstruction, reconciliation and development in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and the region. Specifically, the main goals of this project were: 1) to further support the development and sustainability of the Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina (IRC-BiH) by providing support and technical assistance that will enable the IRC to play a leading and constructive role for peaceful change and religious tolerance; 2) to establish a regional network of inter-religious leaders that can collectively promote peace, reconciliation and conflict prevention throughout South East Europe; 3) to strengthen the role of religious women to advance their leadership positions in the social transformation and peace development of their communities; and 4) to build an inter-religious youth group in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The body of this final narrative report follows the objectives laid out in the original project proposal and reports on what has been achieved during the period of this grant contract. This will be followed by a section on program challenges and concluding remarks.

## **SUMMARY OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **OBJECTIVE 1: Build region-wide senior religious leader network to support regional religious initiatives for the advancement of peace, stability and security in the Balkans.**

- Responding to the March 2004 clashes in Kosovo that resulted in 19 people killed, several thousand displaced from their homes, and religious sites vandalized and destroyed, a delegation from the European Council of Religious Leaders/*Religions for Peace* (ECRL) traveled to Belgrade and Pristina in April 2004 to meet with senior religious leaders and help reduce tensions between Serbian and Albanian communities. During this solidarity trip, *Religions for Peace* was able to lay the groundwork for the formation of a South East Europe inter-religious body to be realized under this project. As a multi-religious body comprised of senior religious leaders, the ECRL/*Religions for Peace* condemned the Kosovo violence, the worst episode since the official end of the conflict in 1999, and offered support to leaders from Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic communities. The pan-European body called on all citizens to reject violence and stand in solidarity to build a sustainable peace. In Belgrade, the delegation met with His Holiness Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Mufti Hamdija Jusufspahic of the Islamic Community, and representatives of Catholic Archbishop Hocer. The Mufti escorted the delegation through the burnt library and mosque and explained that Serbian and Jewish neighbors tried unsuccessfully to dissuade a mob of about 2,000 people to resist burning the library and mosque in reaction to the violence in Kosovo. He expressed special gratitude to the Serbian Orthodox Bishop who personally tried to stop the mob, saying, "I don't know who did it (the destruction) but I know who tried to help us." The delegation then traveled to Kosovo and met with His Grace Artemije, Bishop of Raska-Prizren, Kosovo and Metoxija, Mufti Ternava, Head of Islamic Community of Kosovo and His Grace Marko Sopi, Catholic Bishop of Prizren. Despite the danger and difficulties that prevent these leaders from meeting together at this time, the demonstration of solidarity from the senior European religious leaders helped strengthen their resolve to remain engaged in the multi-religious process. Each expressed his commitment to a multi-ethnic, multi-religious future for Kosovo. Given the delicate state of the peace process in Kosovo, the Executive Committee of ECRL/*Religions for Peace* proposed to address these tensions at the next meeting of the full ECRL in Brussels in November 2004. The religious leaders from Kosovo accepted the ECRL's invitation and the Serbian and Bosnian religious leaders were also invited to attend.
  
- *Religions for Peace* convened a regional gathering of religious leaders from South East Europe under the auspices of the European Council of Religious Leaders/*Religions for Peace* (ECRL) in Leuven, Belgium from November 8-10, 2004. The ECRL is a body of senior religious leaders of Europe's historic religions including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, with Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians in Europe who have committed themselves to cooperating for conflict prevention, peaceful co-existence and reconciliation. (See Attachment 1 for list of participants.) The meeting in Leuven brought together these leaders to discuss the role of religious communities in promoting peace, stability, and democracy in the region, with particular attention to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The ECRL drafted and published two Communiqués which outline the results of the meeting and future commitments by all participants. (See Attachment 2 and 3 for the Communiqué and a statement on the present situation in Kosovo.) In order to assist in the communication and development of a South East Europe network of religious leaders, *Religions for Peace* moderated a separate meeting held specifically for the region's leaders and

representatives. Senior leaders from Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities came from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania to discuss their common problems and find ways to work together for the promotion of peace and stability in the region. After brief comments by all of the South East Europe religious leaders and representatives, the following proposals and conclusions were brought forward:

All participants agreed that continued dialogue and cooperation with religious leaders and representatives in South East Europe is important and productive in building solid relationships which will foster a peaceful and stable region. Such dialogues are important for sharing experiences and views and correcting misunderstandings or misinterpretations between communities and churches. The participants united in the belief that inter-religious structures have definite potential benefits; however, an inter-religious structure should always be a part of the community instead of above it.

Participants agreed that future exchange visits or similar meetings such as this should take place, and mentioned possible venues for future gatherings such as Prizren, Pristina, Novi Sad or Sarajevo. Prizren was brought up several times as a symbolically significant location because of the historical Islamic and Orthodox monuments, even though many of the Orthodox sites were destroyed or damaged this past March.

A proposal to rebuild one church and one mosque with the assistance of the religious communities and churches was well received by all participants, and a solid commitment to support this initiative was offered by all faiths represented. It was further suggested that the religious communities and churches join together to advocate to respective governments for the return of the Orthodox Theology School in Sarajevo to the Church and for the rebuilding of the mosques in Nis and Belgrade.

*Religions for Peace* then provided an update on the work of the South East Europe Women of Faith Network, requesting the continued support from religious leaders on this important and dynamic initiative. Participants noted the essential contributions women continue to make within religious communities, and agreed to assist in the development of women's programs.

Finally, all participants agreed that *Religions for Peace* remains an important partner in supporting inter-religious cooperation at local, national, regional and global levels. Participants recommended that *Religions for Peace* assist in broader publicity of initiatives and dialogues by the religious communities and churches.

*Religions for Peace* is following up with all participants in order to move forward on the proposals and initiatives raised at this meeting and assist in the organization of the next gathering.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: Enhance the skills and resources of the IRC-BiH and religious communities in conflict transformation.**

- The violence that broke out in Kosovo from March 17-19 led to the destruction of religious sites throughout the region, including an Orthodox church in Bugojno, BiH. The IRC-BiH immediately issued a joint statement condemning the violence (See Attachment 4). *Religions for Peace* provided technical assistance in drafting the statement, which was drafted with the input of all four religious communities, and assisted in distributing it to national and international media and relevant bodies on March 19. An estimated audience of 4 million was potentially exposed to the press release. Joint statements such as these demonstrate one of the essential purposes for the

Council – the coming together of different religious communities in order to jointly combat and condemn acts of violence.

- Changes in the political climate and shifts in the internal structures of the religious communities have continued over the past several months. In order to support the process of inter-religious cooperation through these changes, *Religions for Peace* proposed a restructuring of the IRC-BiH which will allow the four founding communities to remain as permanent members of the IRC-BiH without requiring their consistent participation (see Attachment 5). Instead, a lower level Governing Board or Executive Body will manage the IRC-BiH with decision-making power. This body will meet regularly (i.e. 6 times a year) and will become the new “face” of the IRC. This will allow the Council to continue to move forward during difficult times or when personal issues between the religious leaders become apparent. All communities approved this change in structure, and it was constituted on April 1, 2005 when the Cardinal took over the position of Presidency and the responsibilities of the Secretariat were transferred from *Religions for Peace* to the IRC-BiH.
- The IRC-BiH took an important step towards self-sufficiency and sustainability during the first period of this project cycle with the opening of their new office space in Sarajevo. The centrally located office, which was donated by city officials, underwent renovations that were completed in March 2004. The new office space will allow the IRC-BiH to establish a fully operational Secretariat. The IRC-BiH held a reception to mark the official opening on April 23, 2004. Nearly 75 representatives from religious communities, members of the BiH Presidency, senior staff of national and international organizations, ambassadors, and other high level representatives were present (see press release in Attachment 6). Unfortunately, the Orthodox community did not send an official representative because of issues with the international community and their temporary withdrawal from the Council at that time. (See section on Program Constraints.)
- The reception also provided an opportunity to formally announce the publication of the Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Religious Communities and Churches in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On March 9, 2004, this law was published in official Gazette and on March 17, 2004 it officially became effective (see Attachment 7). The law was drafted at the request of the IRC-BiH by the Legal Experts’ Group (PEG), which is comprised of prominent lawyers from the four traditional religious communities and churches: the Islamic Community of BiH, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish Community. International lawyers from various European institutions were also involved in the drafting to ensure that the law conformed to European standards on freedom of religion. The law defines issues relating to freedom of religion, the legal status of churches and religious communities, the registration of religious communities and churches, and the relationship between religious communities and the state. Under the law, religious communities and individuals choosing to practice their religion will have rights and recognitions previously not provided in the pre-war 1976 Law on Religious Communities.
- After eight years of developing a solid Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina (IRC-BiH), it was agreed that the beginning of 2005 would be the right time to hand over the responsibilities of the Secretariat from *Religions for Peace* to the IRC-BiH in order to solidify their independence and sustainability. *Religions for Peace* met extensively with the leadership and working committee of the IRC-BiH to discuss and assist with the transitional plan which was finalized and implemented on April 1, 2005. Over the last several months, *Religions for Peace* continued to provide capacity building assistance in order to ensure the necessary financial support for the operations of the IRC-BiH will be acquired. The Bosnian government has already pledged to support the Council and is considering implementing an annual budget line specifically for the IRC-BiH. The IRC-BiH met twice over the first quarter of 2005 and handed over the Presidency responsibilities from Mr. Jakob Finci, President of the Jewish Community, to H.E. Vinko

Cardinal Puljic Archbishop of Vrhbosna, Roman Catholic Church. The IRC-BiH is now a fully operational, national, non-governmental organization with well trained staff, donated office space and a clear strategic plan for the next several years.

**OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the role of religious women.**

- The women's programs in South East Europe continue to thrive with well-established inter-religious relationships and action for peace by courageous Orthodox, Islamic, Catholic and Jewish women from the region. The Bosnian Women's Working Group (WWG), which falls under the auspices of the Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina, has remained extremely active over the past year. Members of the WWG are nominated by representatives of the faith communities who come together with *Religions for Peace* to identify and act on issues of common concern and shared interests. Meeting approximately every six weeks, the group identified several joint projects it believed would assist needy populations and strengthen the role of women in peace building. The Bosnian women were interested in collaborating on concrete projects that can directly assist the community. They designed a project to identify five needy families in each religious community and provide them with appropriate assistance. With support from *Religions for Peace*, modest resources were made available to the Women's Working Group to purchase items that these families needed, such as food, clothing, heaters, children's books and medication. Each family was warmly greeted by the WWG and presented with a letter about the work of the Inter-religious Council of Bosnia and the WWG. The letter stressed that the assistance was being made in the spirit of peace and inter-religious cooperation by women from all four religious communities. Over the course of the next twelve months, the women will continue to collaborate with each other and *Religions for Peace* in order to develop and implement their identified common projects.
- The WWG also collaborated on a project to provide assistance to returnee or internally displaced families from all four religious communities. Villages of returnees were identified by each community and a needs assessment was conducted. It was agreed by the WWG that each family receive 25 kilos of flour, 15 litres of oil, 10 kilos of sugar, 3 kilos of washing detergent, 2 liters of dishwashing detergent, 1 kilo of salt, cakes, juices and 1 kilo of coffee. The Orthodox provided assistance to returnee families in Biljesevo (close to Zenica) and Planinica (close to Vares). The Islamic community distributed the food and supplies to three villages close to Visegrad, the Catholic community to families in the suburbs of Stup, and the Jewish community to families in Sarajevo. In total, approximately 100 families (400 people) received assistance through this project. The women distributed the aid together and explained that the project was an interfaith effort involving all four religious communities. Additionally, a letter explaining the mission and goal of the women's working group was included in each aid package. These kinds of projects have proven to be successful in building relationships between the women from different faiths and produce tangible results. This project enabled the religious communities to gain experience and thereby become comfortable taking on a larger, humanitarian-focused role in the civil society.
- Another inter-religious project implemented by the BiH Women's Group was the drafting of a book which features information and pictures from Orthodox, Islamic, Catholic and Jewish communities on their different traditions and customs. Active women authors in each religious community were commissioned to draft the text and the women in the working group wrote an introductory page before each chapter. The book was published in March 2005 and is currently being distributed to religious communities and schools around the country to educate students about the customs of all faith communities.
- Under the auspices of *Religions for Peace* and with the support of USAID, the South East Europe Women of Faith Network came together in Neum, BiH from October 1-4, 2004 for an

inspirational, regional inter-religious consultation titled “Building Bridges for Peace.” Expanding upon last year’s gathering, which inaugurated the regional network, representatives of women of faith from the inter-religious councils and religious communities of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro and Macedonia focused on common areas of concern for their regions and religious communities and identified ways to address these issues through joint actions. The women varied in ages and backgrounds, but all shared stories of pain and loss caused by the conflict and continual instability in the region. Even with their difficulties and suffering, however, the women stressed their common desire to engage all women of faith in order to build a strong network for peace and to empower women as catalysts for reconciliation and stability. The four-day event began with extensive exercises and dialogue which enabled the women to become familiar and comfortable with each other. The women discussed ways to increase cooperation and communication as they develop the form and purpose of their regional network. A basic needs assessment was conducted to determine the priorities facing each region and religious community. Two representatives from each territory were elected to sit on the Executive Committee for the network, which will meet in early 2005, and a one-year work plan was developed in order to identify action steps to be taken by all stakeholders. With the further development of this regional network, *Religions for Peace* plans to ensure the sustainability of this unique and important body, as well increase the profile and role of women of faith within their own communities and churches. The South East Europe Women of Faith Network is committed to building and strengthening relationships among religious women in the region and promoting their role as advocates for peace. Additionally, *Religions for Peace* continues to ensure the inclusion of religious women in other regional bodies, such as the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) and the South East Europe Inter-religious Network, in order to give gender perspective and balance to regional initiatives for peace. Attached is the Communiqué drafted and published by all of the women attending the consultation (see Attachment 8). This Communiqué was distributed to religious communities, national and international organizations and media.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: Build an inter-religious youth group.**

- The Inter-religious Youth Group, established under the auspices of the IRC-BiH, has continued to build a network of youth from the Orthodox, Islamic, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant communities from around the country. Through regular meetings and constant correspondence, the youth stay informed and engaged in inter-religious activities and in the development of their own network (see Attachment 9). Following the success training-of-trainers workshops in conflict resolution for youth in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, the Inter-religious Youth Group held another workshop for designated youth from Brcko on March 13-15, 2004. As in the previous workshops, the youth learned different communication and resolution skills through interactive exercises and discussions. An important aspect of the program is an exercise designed to elicit reflection and dialogue among the youth. They were asked to: identify positive things about their city and country, imagine a future the way they prefer, communicate with each other and name the things they would like to see change in their country. The program was designed to train and empower youth to lead inter-religious youth activity, and the participants from the Sarajevo and Banja Luka workshops played a major role by serving as facilitators. They were able to exercise and build upon the skills they had learned while building new relationships with youth from different parts of their country.
- As a result of these training workshops, three strong, local inter-religious youth groups have been formed in Bosnia. These groups collaborated to hold a two-day educational seminar to look at inter-religious dialogue from the perspective of each of the four communities. Entitled “Religious Dialogue Between Communities in BiH” and held on April 13-14, 2004 the seminar was attended by 20 youth from the Islamic, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant communities and churches from all three cities. Unfortunately, the Orthodox youth did not participate due to their

community's temporary disengagement from the IRC-BiH a few days before the seminar due to non-related events (see section on Program Constraints). Distinguished scholars from each community made presentations on the historical significance of their religion and the similarities it shares with the other traditional religions. The scholars also discussed the history of past and present cooperation between the communities. Dr. Zovkic, a professor from the Catholic Church, stated, "All of us have to work on dialogue and must respect the others, because that is the only way to keep peace in this country. We cannot wait until the country becomes normal. We should find a way for common life now." The youth were given an opportunity to ask questions and hold discussions. Participants found the seminar helpful in learning both about other traditions and about the history of inter-religious cooperation in Bosnia.

- The youth then agreed to hold a conflict resolution training on the national level with designated Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant youth from Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Brcko on August 3-6, 2004 in Bihac. This training, entitled "Hope for a Better Future: Transforming Attitudes and Building Society," built upon lessons which the youth had already learned in previous trainings on conflict transformation. The training focused on developing the necessary skills for positive communication, problem solving techniques, and leadership abilities. The first day of the training focused on the necessary skills for implementing projects and the second day was dedicated to actually formulating a work plan for joint youth projects. One exercise incorporated into the training required the youth to divide up into teams of three and put in visual form what they felt were the divisive issues or groups in BiH society. There was a wide range of answers including the relationship between BiH and the Diaspora of BiH, old and young generations, urban and rural peoples, rich (especially those with connections or who use corruption) and poor, traditional and fashionable, men and women, returnees and the local population, citizens and the government, and inter-religious relationships. By acknowledging from where these social struggles emerge, the youth were better able to actively target their projects toward these divisions. The second day of the seminar was dedicated to developing several concrete projects for future involvement. In the previous seminars in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Brcko, the youth had brainstormed potential projects. At the end of the three-day event, the youth collectively drafted a joint communiqué which outlined their accomplishments and clearly noted their calls to action for not only themselves but for the religious communities and other relative actors (see Attachment 10). The training in Bihac clearly allowed the youth to exercise and build upon the skills they had learned from previous trainings while establishing new relationships with youth from different parts of their country. A solid inter-religious youth network of BiH has been launched through these projects and the youth remain committed to strengthening their unique group and building their sustainability.



## **ALBANIA PROGRAM**

Although program activities in Albania were supported by other donors, the regional office in Sarajevo maintained overall supervision for the project during this report period and will therefore report on the accomplishments.

The religious leaders from the Albanian Islamic Community, Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church and Bektashi Community signed an historic “Statement of Shared Moral Commitment” on March 18, 2005 (see Attachment 11). With this declaration, the religious leaders of Albania, who endured enormous suffering for over four decades, affirm their shared moral values while recognizing their unique faith traditions. The declaration also clearly states their continued commitment as religious leaders to promote tolerance, coexistence and the positive development of a vibrant, open civil society in Albania. Additionally, the statement calls upon civil authorities to protect the religious freedom of each individual and the practices of religious communities.

During the signing ceremony, moderated by *Religions for Peace* and attended by leading national figures and representatives including of many foreign embassies, the Statement was presented by the religious leaders to the Albanian peoples. The religious leaders pledged to work together on the development of civil society and the growth of religious freedom. During the ceremony, the Prime Minister of Albania, H. E. Fatos Nano, declared his support for the multi-religious initiative, stating that “these religious leaders are far more important (to Albania) than any political officer.”

The event marked an important step in a year-long process facilitated by *Religions for Peace* designed to support the leadership of the heads of the Albanian religious communities. The communities expressed their appreciation for the partnership with *Religions for Peace*, noting the complementary strengths of multi-religious cooperation on national, regional and international levels.

## **PROGRAM CONSTRAINTS / VARIANCES**

Although the overall objectives and expected results have clearly been achieved for this project, unforeseen political and security events occurred which temporarily hindered certain aspects of the program.

For more than a year, the Catholic Church has been in discussion with the BiH government to formalize an agreement between the state and the Vatican City which would give their community additional rights and privileges under the laws of the Vatican. In the spring of 2004, some of the religious leaders did not support this request by the Catholic Church, and therefore the Cardinal chose to “freeze” their status within the IRC-BiH as a form of protest. It is unclear at this time whether the BiH government will grant this status, especially considering they are the smallest religious community in BiH and no community has a similar agreement with other nations. During this period of stalemate with the Cardinal, *Religions for Peace* held numerous bi-lateral meetings with the Cardinal and other high level representatives of the Catholic Church in order to keep lines of communication open and to assist in finding a way for the Cardinal to come back into the Council. *Religions for Peace* met with Vatican officials and BiH government officials to discuss various options for the Catholic Church with regards to some of their concerns. Although this issue remains unresolved, the Cardinal publicly rejoined the IRC in January 2005 and took over the position of the Presidency in April 2005.

The Orthodox community also temporarily withdrew not only from the IRC-BiH but from engagements with the broader international community in protest of a NATO raid on an Orthodox parish while attempting to apprehend the war criminal Radovan Karadic. During the raid on the parish in Pale, a priest and his son were severely injured and much of their house destroyed. Although NATO issued a statement stating the events were an “unfortunate consequence,” the Orthodox Church remained dissatisfied with the explanations of NATO and lack of condemnation by both the international community and local

religious leaders. The Orthodox Bishop's Conference quickly cut all ties with the international community and withdrew from the IRC-BiH shortly after the raid. Fortunately, the Orthodox Church did not discontinue relations with *Religions for Peace* during this turbulent time.

*Religions for Peace* held a number of bi-lateral meetings with the leadership of the Catholic and Orthodox churches to find a way to work through these issues and advance the development of the IRC-BiH. It was made clear that both communities remain committed to affiliating with the Council and that their current status is temporary. Additionally, both communities remained strong supporters of the work of *Religions for Peace* in BiH and globally, and stressed that they had no intentions of permanently severing ties with the organization.

In trying to resolve these issues, *Religions for Peace* turned to its experience in other parts of the world and pursued a new strategy. Firstly, it became clear that a two-track approach to the development of the IRC-BiH and religious communities is the most effective approach. Attention to the development and relations of the IRC-BiH at the leadership level remains a priority for *Religions for Peace*. However, these efforts are complimented by initiatives to expand grassroots collaboration. Through grassroots programs, the broader religious communities have an opportunity to interact and become engaged in the good works of their community as well as other communities. The process has the effect of strengthening individual participation in interfaith programs. Additionally, the greater BiH community becomes more aware of the humanitarian role which the religious communities can and should play. During the past year, *Religions for Peace* continued to focus on this two-track approach and was able to develop solid programs with the women and youth inter-religious groups in order to keep the religious communities cooperating on the community level.

Secondly, as unforeseen political and security situations arise which inevitably hinder the cohesion and development of the IRC, *Religions for Peace* realized that a new operating structure of the Council would assist in this process. In order to keep the Council operating and engaged in grassroots programs in times of crisis, the structure should encourage and rely on the participation of high-level representatives instead of requiring the direct involvement of the religious leadership. *Religions for Peace* was able to negotiate and obtain approval by the religious communities to change the structure of the Council. This was implemented on April 1, 2005.

## CONCLUSION

Although challenges to inter-religious cooperation remain in the region, the communities have continued to be engaged in the dialogue process. The full participation and support by all religious communities in BiH, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro and Albania in the regional meeting in Belgium demonstrated the communities' continued goodwill and true commitment to strengthening their unified inter-religious voice.

The IRC-BiH is currently operating as an independent local organization with financial and in-kind support from the Bosnian government. Over the past several months, *Religions for Peace* has worked together with the IRC-BiH to develop a long term strategic plan and proposal which will enable them to approach local and international donors for financial support. The IRC-BiH continues to operate as the primary inter-religious body in Bosnia that is consulted on local and diplomatic levels with regards to religious affairs. As they gain their autonomy and sustainability, their influence and involvement in the development of the civil society will continue to rise. Additionally, the Women and Youth Groups in BiH have been working together effectively in the design and implementation of projects which promote the goals of the "Statement of Shared Moral Commitment" first signed by the IRC-BiH on June 9, 1997. These projects are supported by active women and youth who are identified as leaders in their religious communities.

In March 2004, the first law of BiH that protects the rights of individuals to religiously affiliate and recognizes religious communities as legal bodies in the civil sector was officially published. This historic milestone was the result of hard work by the IRC-BiH and the persistence of *Religions for Peace*.

The signing of the "Statement of Shared Moral Commitment" by the Albanian religious leaders was widely covered by all electronic and written media in the country for several days. The local and international community have been surprised and impressed with this bold and brave development of multi-religious solidarity. Currently there is much interest by the religious leaders to establish a national inter-religious body which will allow the communities to communicate and advocate for common issues on a regular basis. Over the next six months, *Religions for Peace* will continue to work closely with the communities in order to develop a multi-religious body that is appropriate for their historical and political context.

*Religions for Peace* would like to express particular gratitude for the generous support that the United States Agency for International Development has contributed to this project. This support has allowed *Religions for Peace* to capitalize on lessons learned as we strive to engage the religions of the region in peacemaking and reconciliation. It is our conviction that the religious leaders are a very important part of any peace process. We know, through your support of our work, that you agree.

**EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS/  
*RELIGIONS FOR PEACE (ECRL)*  
Third Meeting in Leuven, Brussels,  
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**Mustafa Jusufspahic**, Chief of Cabinet Islamic Community, Belgrade  
**Mufti Naim Ternava**, President of Islamic Community, Kosovo  
**Dr. Qemal Morina**, Vice Dean of Islamic Faculty, Kosovo  
**Mr. Ejup Ramadani**, Chief of Cabinet Islamic Community, Kosovo

Serbian Orthodox Church:

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**Bishop Grigorije**, Bishop of Zahumlje and Herzegovina, Serbian Orthodox Church  
**Bishop Athanasie**, Serbian Orthodox Church

Catholic Church:

**Msrgr. Stanislav Hovecar**, Archbishop of Belgrade  
**Bishop Marko Sopi**, Bishop of Prizren, Kosovo  
**Rev. Don Shan Zefi**, General Vicar, Kosovo  
**Vinko Cardinal Puljic**, Archbishop of Vrhbosna, Bosnia-Herzegovina  
**Bishop Franjo Komarica**, President of Bishops Conference, Bosnia-Herzegovina  
**Mr. Spajic Zdenko**, ( Assistant to Cardinal, Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Jewish Community:

**Mr. Jacob Finci**, President of Jewish Community, Bosina-Herzegovina



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## **Forging Peace through Multi-Religious Cooperation**

**Communiqué from the European Council of Religious Leaders/*Religions for Peace*  
Leuven, Belgium  
7-10 November, 2004**

Members of the European Council of Religious Leaders/*Religions for Peace* (ECRL) reiterated their commitment to multi-religious cooperation for a just peace and stability in Europe. The ECRL offers its partnership to the European institutions, believing that such partnership is essential in addressing and resolving the challenges Europe confronts in its present transformation.

Its third meeting since its inauguration in 2002 was convened in Leuven, Belgium. Belgium's capital Brussels is today a city that symbolizes for so many Europeans and countries the new Europe that is under construction. During the meeting, senior religious leaders from diverse religious traditions and many parts of the continent continued to have dialogue with one another. Representatives of political institutions with responsibilities to uphold and enhance peace, democracy and stability in Europe such as the European Union (EU), Council of Europe, NATO and South East Europe Stability Pact took an active part in this dialogue.

ECRL welcomes the major enlargement of the EU that took place May 1 2004 when the EU embraced 10 new member states. Other states are in the process of negotiating for membership. Among them are countries in the Balkans, as well as Turkey as the first country with a Muslim majority population. This transition brings both challenges and new opportunities. ECRL maintains that the EU needs partners in civil society to be successful in this process. The Council offers partnership and commits itself to work together with the EU and its institutions as stated in a document adopted in this meeting. ECRL brings European churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and gurdwaras into networks that transcends national boundaries throughout the entire European region and are related to the wider world.

ECRL urges the EU to set up a mechanism for regular, transparent open and genuine dialogue with religious communities in accordance with article 52 in its new Constitution. Such a mechanism should be inclusive, participatory and non-competitive and aim at helping the EU to better understand the prevailing religious sentiments in the different regions and traditions of Europe. This mechanism should provide an arena for mutual sharing of ideas and initiatives for peace and stability. ECRL is ready to serve as one of the major partners in this endeavor.

The ECRL condemns the recent violent acts in Europe, including murders, and any acts of violence. Violence in the name of religion is violence against religion. Hatred in the name of God is hatred against God.

ECRL deplores bans on religious articles and symbols including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, large Christian crosses and Sikh turbans in public schools. ECRL is of the opinion that the wearing of prescribed religious attire should not be seen as a threat to secular principles of any state. ECRL considers that such a ban threatens individual freedom to practice religion and is therefore an infringement of universal human rights.

The members of the ECRL noted with great concern the rise of Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other expressions of racism in Europe. ECRL supports the work of the European Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) and recommends all faith communities to make proactive efforts to combat racism, e.g. educational programs and youth exchange.

Special guests at this ECRL meeting have been senior religious leaders from countries of South East Europe. During the meeting these leaders have been actively engaged in a dialogue to follow the way of truth, justice and reconciliation in their own countries.

ECRL encourages the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Inter-Religious Council of Kosovo to continue their commitment to work for healing the scars of war and building a just peace. There are deep lessons to be learned, bitter lessons taught by brutal recent ethnic conflicts and hopeful lessons born of the courage to forge a lasting peace. ECRL likewise encourages the religious communities and others in Bosnia and Herzegovina to contribute to the realization of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the country.

Additionally the ECRL encourages the continued initiative of the international community, particularly the Council of Europe and UNESCO in the reconstruction of religious sites and monuments in Kosovo. It calls upon these bodies to extend their assistance to the Islamic community in Serbia as well.

ECRL also welcomes the development and advancement of a network of religious leaders from South East Europe to continue to have dialogue, share experiences and seek ways to forge peace, stability and security throughout the region.

*European Council of Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace (ECRL) is a body of senior religious leaders of Europe's historic religions including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, with Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians in Europe who have committed themselves to cooperating for conflict prevention, peaceful co-existence and reconciliation. ECRL is a participating body of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.*



**European Council of Religious Leaders/*Religions for Peace*  
Leuven, Belgium  
7-10 November, 2004**

**Statement on the Present Situation in Kosovo**

The growing dissatisfaction and frustration within both the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities have been clearly heard as the European Council of Religious Leaders/*Religions for Peace* (ECRL) met in Leuven (Belgium) on 7-10 November 2004. Religious leaders from South East Europe, including those of Kosovo, were among those participating in the meeting together with representatives of European political institutions and international guests.

As a result of deep, frank and fruitful discussions, ECRL came to the following conclusions:

The international community was taken by surprise by the ethnic violence which resulted in many victims, destruction of houses and religious sites in March 2004. It had failed to understand the depth of the frustration of the population and to defend the rights of the minority. A serious lack of economic progress, together with the absence of a clear political direction and the pressure on the minority population has contributed to this situation.

The ECRL acknowledges the past suffering of the Albanian population and the current sufferings of the Serb population. The fact that only a small number of Serbian national refugees have been able to return, as well as refugees from other non-Albanian communities, is a continuing cause of grave concern for the ECRL. In order to create all necessary conditions and an atmosphere to enable the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons, it is essential that religious and church communities, local communities and international institutions all fulfil their responsibilities.

The ECRL demands respect and protection of all human rights, in accordance with democratic principles and international law, including the fundamental rights to life, freedom of movement, justice, property, employment and human dignity.

The ECRL commends the initiatives taken by the international community represented by

UNMIK, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and through the Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG) to plan the reconstruction of religious and cultural sites damaged in March 2004 in Kosovo. While understanding the need to define a framework for the rebuilding, we regret the lengthy process which so far has failed to produce concrete results on the ground. The frustration created within the Serb community by this slow process can be understood, but we urge the immediate re-establishing of cooperation between all communities and parties.

Religious sites are places of peace with a unique symbolic character for the past, present and future for every religious community and for the entire society. To rebuild those Islamic and Christian religious sites that violence, war and hatred have destroyed during recent years, would give hope for a common future in Kosovo in which minorities are welcomed and their rights protected.

Kosovo has a profound need for concrete inter-religious efforts which demonstrate commitment to reconciliation. To achieve this, the ECRL recommends the immediate revival of the Working Committee of the Inter-religious Council of Kosovo at local and regional levels, gathering representatives of the churches and Muslim community, to identify and to discuss issues of common interest.

The members of the ECRL call upon the religious leaders of Kosovo to acknowledge and confess our shared responsibility before God and our brothers and sisters of all communities. We are all conscious of our moral obligation to work together for the establishment of a new environment of dialogue, mutual trust and sincere cooperation.

PRESS RELEASE

March 19, 2004

In the strongest way we, the Inter-religious Council of Bosnia Herzegovina, condemn the recent violence in Bugojno, Kosovo, Nis and Belgrade. We especially condemn the murders of innocent civilians from all communities. We are saddened by the destruction and attacks on religious sites in all of these areas and call people to calm down and find their way to peace.

We call on all religious leaders in the region to stand up and speak publicly against this violence. And declare that murder of innocent people or act of violence against religious buildings cannot be justified in the name of any religion.

We call on all local and international authorities to take appropriate action to calm this situation and bring peace to those who are suffering or at risk.

We also call the media to resist causing further tension through provocative reporting and language. It is important that all individuals and civilian and military institutions work together at this crucial time so that our beloved region is not again thrown into violence.

May merciful God give us the strength and wisdom to fight for peace and justice and not revenge.

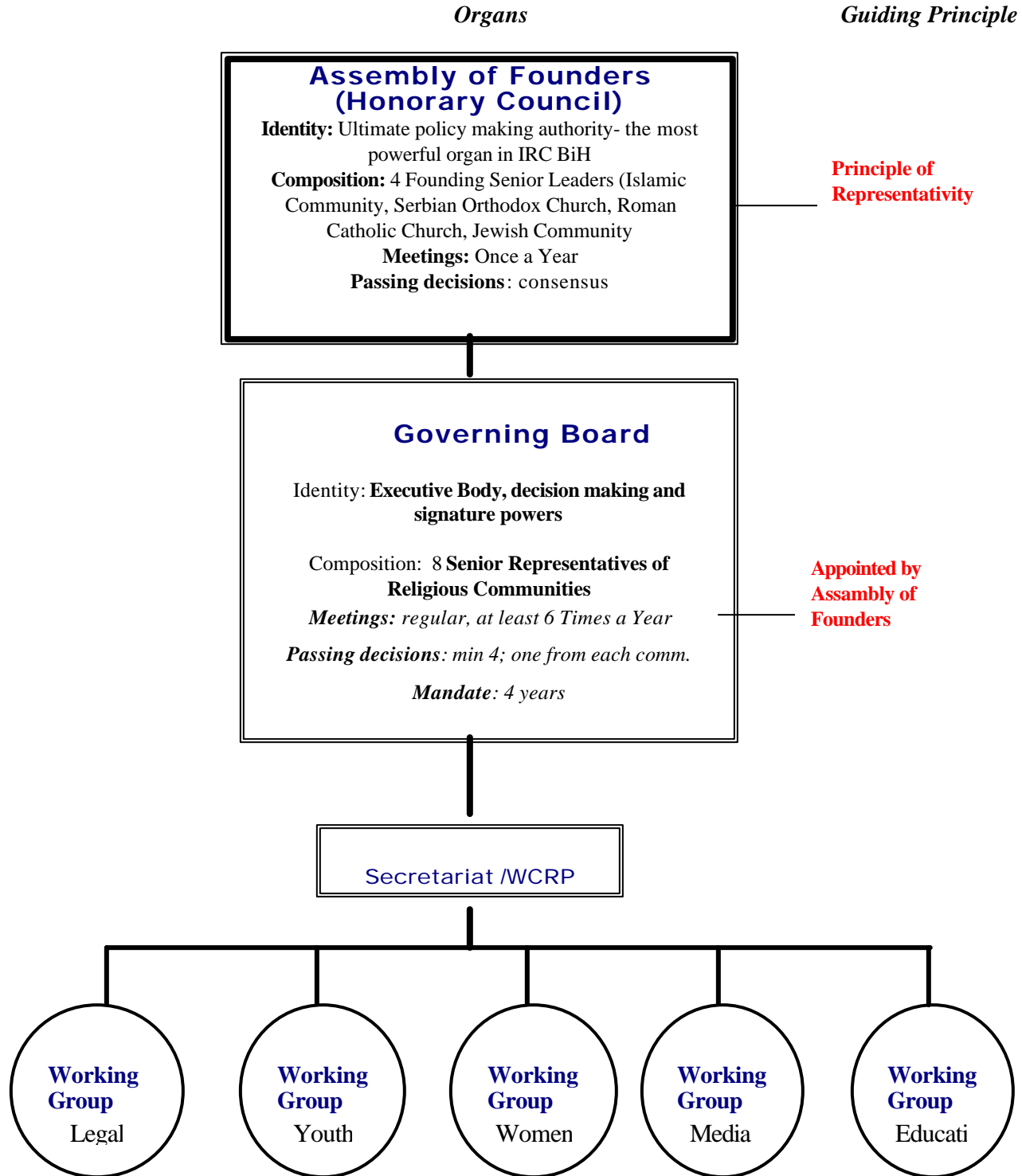
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**Draft Model Structure of Religions for Peace / Inter-religious Council in BiH**



## PRESS RELEASE

INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA / *RELIGIONS FOR PEACE*  
ANNOUNCE OFFICIAL OPENING OF OFFICES

April 23, 2004



Today the Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina (IRC) / *Religions for Peace* held a reception for the official opening of the new premises of the IRC. This important step towards the development and sustainability of the IRC has been possible with the hard work of the religious leaders from the Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish communities as well as the support of the Sarajevo, Stari Grad municipality and its Mayor, the United States Agency for International Development, the German Embassy and the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

In attendance at the reception were representatives from the religious communities, members of the BiH Presidency, senior staff of national and international organizations, Ambassadors from many of the Embassies and other high level representatives.

During the reception, Mr. Finci, current President of the IRC and leader of the Jewish Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina stated on behalf of the council, "When we first started, we agreed to work together. We believe the IRC is a place where beliefs can be harmonized and not some para-religious organization which will impose its attitudes and beliefs on the churches and religious communities. Everyone must have full autonomy and freedom to make decisions on all issues; therefore, no belief will or may be imposed on any church or religious community."

The IRC was established on June 9, 1997 with the signing of a *Statement of Moral Principles* by the leaders of the Bosnian Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish communities. The Council continues to play an essential role in rebuilding Bosnian society through its work on reforming the legal system, facilitating inter-faith dialogues, outreach to the media and education projects that promote tolerance and understanding, humanitarian assistance to vulnerable families through the women's working group and establishing and supporting a nation-wide multi-religious youth network.



**LAW**  
**ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND LEGAL POSITION OF CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS**  
**COMMUNITIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

*I General Provisions*

Article 1

*Respecting* own heritage and traditional values and tolerance, and coexistence of those present in multi-confessional character of Bosnia and Herzegovina and *considering* the contribution to the advancement of mutual understanding and respect for the right to freedom of conscience and religion, *this Law governs* a uniform legal framework within which all Churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina shall act and be equal in rights and obligations, without any discrimination.

This Law guarantees the right of all to freedom of conscience and religion in conformity with the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*hereinafter referred to: the Constitution*), the highest international standards of human rights comprised in the international declarations and conventions of freedom of conscience and religion, being an integral part of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Article 2

For the purpose of this Law:

1. Discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief means any exclusion, restriction, preferential treatment, omission or any other form of differentiation on the grounds of religion or belief having for its purpose or which may bring about - directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally - the revocation or diminution of the recognition, equal enjoyment and exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in civil, political, economic, social and cultural matters.
2. The making of distinctions or preferences by churches and religious communities when they judge it necessary to comply with religious obligations or needs shall not be considered as discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief.
3. Churches and religious communities are communities, institutions or organizations of believers founded in accordance with their own precepts and regulations, doctrines, beliefs, traditions and practices, and of which the legal personality is recognized and which are registered in the Register of Churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Article 3

1. This Law shall be applied uniformly *throughout the territory* of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
2. All other laws and regulations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in this field shall be brought into conformity with this Law.
3. The authorities of entities, cantons and municipalities, when issuing regulations from their own jurisdiction, shall take into account the right to freedom of enjoyment and confession and shall ban any discrimination on the ground of religion or different belief.

***II Freedom of religion and belief***

#### Article 4

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the freedom to publicly profess or not a religion. Also, everyone has right to adopt or change his or her religion, and the freedom - individually or in community with others, in public or private - to manifest his religion or belief in any manner in worship, practice and observance, maintenance of customs and other religious activities. Everyone shall have the right to religious education, which shall be provided solely by persons appointed so to do by an official representative of his Church or religious community, whether in religious institutions or in public and private pre-school institutions, primary schools and higher education which shall be regulated according to the specific regulations.
2. Churches and religious communities shall not, when teaching religion or in other actions, disseminate hatred and prejudices against any other Churches and religious communities or its members, or against the citizens of no religious affiliation, or prevent their freedom to manifest in public their religion or belief.

#### Article 5

1. All discrimination based upon religion or belief as defined in Art. 2.1. of this Law is prohibited.
2. The following acts are also prohibited:
  - a. Attacks upon or insults against religious officials;
  - b. Attacks against or damage to the religious buildings or other property of Churches and religious communities;
  - c. Activities or actions aimed at the dissemination of religious hatred against any church or religious community or its members;
  - d. The denigration or ridiculing of any religion;
  - e. The public use of religious symbols, signs, attributes or the name of a church or religious community without the consent of the said church or religious community;
  - f. The formation of associations of religious officials or believers without the consent of the relevant church or religious community authorities, nor such existing associations, established without relevant church authority, may exist without such a competent consent.
  - g. Incite, encourage or call for religious hatred and prejudices.

#### Clan 6.

1. Churches and religious communities have an established code of religious rights and duties pertaining to their members, which are in conformity with the nature of their calling and other precepts of the Church or religious community to which they belong.
2. In conformity with the established code of religious rights and duties under paragraph 1 of this Article:
  - a) No one shall be compelled to profess or prevented from professing a faith or belief or to participate in any way in religious worship, ritual or festivals of any rite whatsoever or any religious activity of his or her church or religious community.
  - b) No one shall be compelled, directly or indirectly, to reveal his religious beliefs.
  - c) No one shall be compelled to swear an oath contrary to his religion or belief.
  - d) Religious officials or persons preparing for such service shall be exempt from military service, but shall not be prohibited from military service if it is their wish to serve, in accordance with the law.

#### Article 7

Freedom of religion or belief includes the right of everyone, individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, including *inter alia* the right:

1. In daily life to practise the principles of his religion or belief and act in accordance with them;
2. To practise religious rituals in own, leased or rented buildings or premises which, according to specific regulations, meet the requirements for gathering larger number of people, in the open spaces of the religious buildings, cemeteries and houses and estates of its believers;
3. Freely to organize public religious celebrations and other religious and religio-cultural gatherings in public places in accordance with the Law on Public Assembly;
4. To establish, maintain and administer religious institutions, including institutions formed for humanitarian and educational purposes in compliance with the law;
5. To make, acquire, possess, import, export and use items and materials relating to the rituals or customs of his religion or belief in compliance with the law;
6. To establish, possess and dissolve public information services in compliance with the law;
7. To write, publish and distribute books, textbooks and handbooks and disseminate relevant publications in written or pictorial form via the press, electronic media and other forms of electronic communication in compliance with the law;
8. Freely to organize attendance at public religious celebrations, places of worship, processions, organized pilgrimages etc., both within the country and abroad;

### **III Legal status of churches and religious communities**

#### Article 8

1. Churches and religious communities have the status of legal/juristic persons.
2. This Law confirms the continuity of legal personality of the historically based churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with all other churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina of which the legal personality has been recognized prior to the entry into force of this Law.
3. Newly formed churches and religious communities also acquire legal personality in Bosnia and Herzegovina as provided for in *provisions of Article 18.4 of this Law*.
4. All churches and religious communities shall have an official title that shall be defined by their canonical, constitutional, statutory regulations and that as such shall be in general use.
5. All churches and religious communities may establish, alter and dissolve existing internal bodies that have the status of legal/juristic person.
6. All churches and religious communities shall determine by their own internal acts which of their internal bodies shall have the status of legal/juristic person and shall be deemed as such in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
7. Churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina may form associations of churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with this Law.
8. Churches and religious communities and their organizational forms, having acquired status of legal/juristic person by registration into the register, shall individually be responsible for their relevant liabilities with their whole assets in compliance with the Law.

#### Clan 9.

On the basis of their status churches and religious communities shall enjoy such concessions and privileges as are characteristic of non-profit organizations, and in accordance with this Law and with

statutory provisions for the internal regulation of religious communities, provided that or to the extent that they do not distribute assets or profits that inure to the benefit of private persons, except where such distributions themselves have a legitimate charitable purpose.

#### Article 10

Churches and religious communities may:

1. Establish business enterprises, institutions and associations; acquire, dispose of and administer property; and undertake other activities on the basis of resolutions of their bodies and membership, in compliance with the Law;
2. Produce, publish, import, export and distribute religious literature and other printed and audio-visual and other forms of electronically transmitted material or items of general use in the practice of religion, in compliance with the Law;
3. Found cultural, charitable, health and educational institutions of various types and for various purposes, with rights equal to those enjoyed by institutions *founded by the State or other authorized entities*, and carry out the activities appropriate to the said institutions and manage the said institutions autonomously and directly in compliance with the Law;
4. Establish and maintain international relations and contacts with churches and religious communities and all other subjects in conformity with the messages of the church or religious community;
5. Carry out all such activities as are not prohibited by positive law.

#### Article 11

1. Churches and religious communities shall be self-administering in accordance with their own laws and doctrines, which shall have no civil-legal effect and shall not be forcibly imposed by the public authorities nor applicable to non-members.
2. Churches and religious communities shall autonomously regulate their internal organization in accordance with their internal regulations, laws and doctrines.
3. Churches and religious communities shall have autonomy in the selection, appointment and dismissal of their personnel in accordance with their respective requirements and regulations.
4. Churches and religious communities shall have right to solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions.

#### Article 12

1. Churches and religious communities may acquire property in accordance with the law.
2. Churches and religious communities may own property and property rights, which they shall be free to use and administer.
3. Churches and religious communities shall have the right to restitution of expropriated property throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, without discrimination, in accordance with the law.
4. The State has the obligation to regulate the pensions, disability and health insurance for religious servants by special regulations, initiated by any institution under Article 15.1 of this Law.

#### Article 13

1. Churches and religious communities and their organizations and commercial enterprises shall, in accordance with the Law, pay taxes and contributions on the earnings of their employees (pension, health and invalidity insurance contributions) together with other legally prescribed contributions.

2. All churches and religious communities may collect membership fees and receive income from within the country and abroad.
3. Donations and income of churches and religious communities shall be treated in accordance with the laws and regulations relating to non-profit educational and charitable organizations.

#### **IV Relations between the state and churches and religious communities**

##### Article 14

Churches and religious communities are separate from the state and that means:

1. The state may not accord the status of state religion nor that of state church or religious community to church or any religious community.
2. The state shall not have the right to interfere in the affairs and internal organization of churches and religious communities.
3. Subject to clause 4) below of this Law, no church or religious community and their officials may obtain any special privileges from the state as compared with any other church or religious community or their officials, nor participate formally in any political institutions.
4. The state may provide material assistance for health-care activities, educational, charitable and social services offered by churches and religious communities, solely on condition that the said services be provided without discrimination on any grounds, in particular on the grounds of religion or belief, by the said organizations.
5. Churches and religious communities may perform functions relating to the field of family law and the rights of the child in the form of aid, upbringing or education, in conformity with the relevant laws on the said rights and domains of law.
6. The public authorities shall not have any involvement in the election, appointment or dismissal of religious dignitaries, the establishment of the structures of churches and religious communities, or of organizations performing religious services and other rituals.
7. Freedom to manifest religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and in accordance with international standards when it is shown by the competent authorities to be necessary in the interests of public safety, to protect health, public morals, or for the rights and fundamental freedoms of others. Churches and religious communities shall have the right of appeal against such decisions. Prior to the decision on appeal the appellate body must request from the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH an opinion relating to such case of limitation of the freedom to manifest religion or belief.

##### Article 15

1. The matters of common interest for Bosnia and Herzegovina or some or more churches and religious communities can be governed by an agreement made between the BiH Presidency, the Council of Ministers, the governments of entities and churches or religious communities.
2. Implementation of this Law and other regulations thereof, which regulate the relationships between the state and churches and religious communities, together with other issues significant for status and activity of churches and religious communities, shall be, according to the *Law on Ministries and other bodies of administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, under jurisdiction of the *Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH*.

##### Article 16

1. Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter referred to as: *Ministry of Justice*) issues regulations on establishment and maintenance of unified register for registration of all churches and religious communities, their associations and organizational forms requested so by church and religious community.
2. The register under previous paragraph is kept by the Ministry of Justice.
3. Churches and religious communities under Article 8.2, show the following data in their application for registration:
  - name of legal person;
  - seat of legal person;
  - service of the person authorized to represent legal person;
  - seal and stamp used by legal person in its activity;
4. In addition to the information stated in the previous paragraph, non-registered or newly founded church or religious community provides in its application the information under Article 18 of this Law.

#### Article 17

1. The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees shall have the right and duty to draw the attention of the entity, cantonal and municipal governments to every case of violations of the right to freedom of religion, and to require that the legally prescribed measures be undertaken to prevent such violations.
2. In such cases the authority referred to by the Ministry from the above paragraph shall within seven days inform the Ministry of the measures undertaken for protection against violations of freedom of religion.
3. Ministry of human rights and refugees shall establish contacts and cooperation with all registered and to be registered churches and religious communities and discuss all the issues relating to freedom of religion and legal status of churches and religious communities in conformity with the Constitution, international conventions and this Law.

### **V Formation of new churches and religious communities**

#### Article 18

1. New church or religious communities may be formed by 300 (three hundred) adult citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, without regard to their entity citizenship. A new church or religious community may not be founded bearing the same or similar name as that of an existing church or religious community. No one may use the symbols, insignia or attributes of church or a religious community without the said religious community's or church's consent.
2. Written application for the formation of a church or religious community shall be submitted to the Ministry of Justice, and shall comprise:
  - The Statute or Bylaws of the church or religious community, with obvious content and method of practice of religion and confession, scope and manner of activities;
  - A statement of its official religious doctrines;
  - The signatures of at least 300 citizens-adherents (forename and surname, date and place of birth, current address, personal identity number and signature);
  - A resolution on formation adopted by at least 30 founders of the church or religious community; the forename and surname of the leader of the church or religious community and a designated deputy or other representative who is authorized to represent the church or religious community before the state authorities.
3. Within 30 days of submitting an application for the formation of a church or religious community the Ministry of Justice shall issue a decision on registration in its register of churches and religious communities.

4. In reviewing the submissions required pursuant to previous paragraphs of this Article., the Ministry shall respect the right of every church or religious group to autonomy in structuring its own affairs so long as it does so within the framework of the constitutional order, this Law and in accordance with international law.
5. The Ministry may refute the application for registration, provided it concludes that the content and manner of worship and other manifestation of religion is contrary to the legal order, public morale or is damageable to the life and health or other rights and freedoms of believers and citizens.
6. If the Ministry fails to issue such a decision within 60 days, the new church or religious community or shall be considered to be registered with the expiry of 60 days from the date of submission of the application for registration of the church or religious community. Legal personality shall be acquired on the date of the decision's acquiring legal force.
7. The applicant or registered church or religious community shall have the right to file an appeal with the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina against the registration carried out in the manner provided for by the preceding paragraph or against refusal to register the new church or religious community. The Council of Ministers issues final decision on registration or rejection to register. The appeal may be justified on the basis that the legalization of the said church or religious community would violate the provisions of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Protocols thereto, or the provisions of other treaties relating to freedom of religion and other freedoms and rights.
8. Administrative litigation against such final decision may be instituted within three months before the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina .

#### Article 19

##### **Associations of churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

1. Two or more churches and religious communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina may found associations of churches and religious communities.
2. Associations shall be formed by agreement, statement or other document in which the founders shall be enumerated, and the aims and objectives of founding the association, the manner of forming joint administrative and representative structures, and the period for which the association is formed shall be set forth.
3. Associations of churches and religious communities formed on the basis of Article 19.2. shall have the status of juristic persons.

#### **VI Transitional and final provisions**

##### Article 20

1. Ministry for human rights and refugees of BiH shall, within the period of six months after coming into force of this Law, issue the Instruction for the purpose of implementation of this Law.
2. By coming into force of this Law, the "Law on legal status of religious communities of SR BiH" shall be out of force ("Official Gazette of SR BiH", No. 36/76)

##### Article 21

This Law comes into force on the eighth day after its publication in the «Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina».

(Published on January 28, 2004; PS BiH No. 3/04; Sarajevo)





**Building Bridges of Peace: South East Europe Women of Faith Network  
Advocate for Reconciliation, Peaceful Co-Existence and Religious Tolerance  
in a Historic Gathering in Bosnia-Herzegovina  
Final Communiqué**



Under the auspices of the *World Conference of Religions for Peace (Religions for Peace)*, we, women of faith from Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) and Macedonia have gathered in Neum, Bosnia-Herzegovina on October 1 – 4, 2004 on the occasion of a regional consultation on Building Bridges of Peace: South East Europe Women of Faith Network, to affirm the role of women in the reconstruction, healing and development of our respective communities and churches, and to seek ways of inter-religious cooperation.

Coming from the Islamic, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Jewish communities and churches, we represent the diverse and rich heritage of South East Europe. With the growth of this regional network we wish to strengthen our unified voice, while still recognizing our unique and distinct differences.

We note with grave concern the continued suffering of people in the region due to on-going ethnic tensions, security concerns and economic instability. We note our commitment to stand in solidarity and support symbolically and practically all religious leadership and communities and to work together in partnership with them. We confirm our commitment, personally and collectively to non-violence and to the positive development of our civil societies.

We further highlight our commitment to work across BiH, Kosovo, SCG and Macedonia and to expand our network to include women of faith from around South East Europe. To realize these commitments we are prepared to work in partnership with *Religions for Peace* to actualize programs in the region.

With the further development of this South East Europe Women of Faith Network we seek to:

- ❖ Continue building trustful relationships and networks between women from all religious communities and churches in the region;
- ❖ Increase the profile and role of religious women in peace building;
- ❖ Strengthen our collective and individual networks of women of faith through shared experiences and information;
- ❖ Take active leadership roles at every level in building civil societies;
- ❖ Continue to advocate and sensitise the population on issues pertaining to religious women and children;
- ❖ Strive for the rights and freedom of expression for religious women within our civil societies;
- ❖ Face our own prejudice and stereotypes regarding different faith communities and work towards building our tolerance and understanding;
- ❖ Become effective advocates for peace and stability on a local and global level through widely distributed joint statements;
- ❖ Conduct network and leadership trainings within our respective communities to pass on the skills and knowledge gained from this consultation;
- ❖ Develop programs which will assist the children, elderly and other vulnerable populations;
- ❖ Continue to pray for sustainable peace in the region and the well being of the population.

To strengthen our commitments we call upon leaders to recognize and support our work for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction. And we therefore call upon the following actors:

- ❖ The religious leaders of BiH, Kosovo, SCG and Macedonia to support inter-religious women's groups and initiatives;
- ❖ The governments to endorse and support our unique input and efforts;
- ❖ Civil society actors in South East Europe to partner with us to achieve common objectives of stability and security in the region;
- ❖ All international organizations and agencies especially the United Nations, European Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe to endorse our multi-religious initiatives for peace.

The participants fully expressed gratitude to the religious communities of BiH, Kosovo, SCG and Macedonia and to the people of BiH for hosting, and to *Religions for Peace* for convening, facilitating and supporting this consultation.

This communiqué is fully endorsed by all participants and agreed upon on the day of 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2004, in Neum, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This program is supported with the generosity of United States Agency for International Development and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.



# MRV

MEĐURELIGIJSKO VIJEĆE BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE  
 MEЂURELIGIJSKO VIJEĆE БОСНЕ И ХЕРЦЕГОВИНЕ  
*Interreligious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina*

**Inter-Religious Youth Group**  
**Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina**

**Declaration**  
**March 2004**

As there is a need for the promotion of religious tolerance and human rights, the building of the civil and democratic society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we establish ourselves as a youth inter-religious group, under the auspices of the Inter-Religious Council of BiH (IRC-BiH). By this we will organize ourselves with support from the IRC-BiH, the World Conference of Religions For Peace (WCRP) and with the generous funding of United States Agency for International Development (USAID). With this support we will promote human and religious rights, assist by the available tools development of civil society, including itself in solving societal problems, and it will be active locally and regionally and globally.

With belief in 'all people equal under God' we shall conduct our self, authorized by our faith communities and equally representing our religious communities Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant.

We take it as an honor to represent our groups and there together with our youth activities promote our above mentioned goals and strengthen the BH society.

Our primary goal is to serve and encourage all youth and all people to contribute and include them in solving life problems and support changes which are happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In our statutes and documents we will include work on practical help to the citizens who are in need, either physical or any kind. In that purpose we will develop programs which will serve those who are in need.

Our group will not promote any particular religion but rather make and work on an atmosphere of peace where these religions can act and live together.

We shall commit our self's to act and encourage the changes which are needed in our society by creating a network of those who have in mind tolerance and peace and exposure and expulsion of any kind of disrespect and extremism.

*From this declaration the inter-religious youth group will derive and develop programs suitable to youth and in context of BH society, as well this includes developing our statutes, mission, vision, conducts and all activities.*

**World Conference of Religions for Peace  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Inter-Religious Youth Event Communiqué**

On August 3-6, 2004, we, youth of the religious communities in Sarajevo, Brcko, and Banja Luka gathered in Bihac, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) to develop projects for youth to engage in the process of conflict transformation and building a better society. This event was made possible by the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) and their diligent effort to have youth participate in rebuilding their community.

During our work in Bihac, we discussed perceived divisions in society. The divide between BiH and the Diaspora of BiH, rural and urban environments, rich and poor people, liberal and conservative worldviews, and men and women were believed to be the most prevalent causes for tension.

To address these social problems, we learned leadership and problem-solving skills and chose concrete projects to work on that could help ameliorate the social conditions. We chose to focus on creating and maintaining a website for youth interested in peace building efforts, providing for children with needs, making a radio program to provide an outlet for social discussion as well as instruction, meeting with the youth from Kosovo and other areas of the former Yugoslavia, and discussing these social issues with the religious leaders in BiH, perhaps in conjunction with visiting key religious sites and monuments.

Our Youth event in Bihac gave us hope for the future and empowered us with the notion that we, as a multi-faith youth group, could have an effect society here in BiH. We believe that our trainings and project ideas are an important step in enabling youth to participate in building a better future. We further believe that these projects will help impact the social tensions already existing in BiH, but in order to be most effective they require the help from several parties. We note our commitment to stand in solidarity and support symbolically and practically all religious leadership and communities and to work together in partnership with them. We confirm our commitment, personally and collectively to non-violence and peaceful resolution of conflicts in our societies.

We further highlight our commitment to work across BiH to expand our network to include youth from faith communities from around BiH. To realize these commitments we are prepared to work in partnership with WCRP/ Religions for Peace to actualize programs in the country.

To strengthen our commitments we call upon the religious leaders to recognize and support our work for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction. And we therefore call upon the following actors:

- ❖ The religious leaders and leadership of the Inter-Religious Councils of BiH to support inter-religious youth groups and initiatives by encouraging youth from your religious communities and churches to participate our programs;
- ❖ We also ask from the religious leaders further support by agreeing to meet with our inter-faith youth group to engage in dialogue about common concerns shared by all religious groups.
- ❖ The government of BiH to endorse and support our unique input and efforts;
- ❖ Balkan civil society actors to partner with us to achieve common objectives of stability and security in the region;
- ❖ All international organizations and agencies especially the United Nations agencies, European Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe to endorse our multi-religious initiatives for peace.

To this end, we youth from faith communities in the region call upon ourselves to:

- ❖ Take active leadership roles at every level in building civil societies;
- ❖ To be proactive in realizing the multi-faith projects we have outlined;
- ❖ Work with the IRC leadership to ensure youth programs are incorporated in all program implementation;
- ❖ Continue to advocate and sensitize the population on issues pertaining to religious youth;
- ❖ To spread lessons learned to other youth in BiH;
- ❖ To continue building relationships and networks between young people of faith who are interested in engaging in peace work throughout the country;
- ❖ To use our leadership and problem solving skills obtained in our conflict resolution trainings;
- ❖ Facilitate communication among other youth associations world wide;
- ❖ Continue to pray for sustainable peace in the region and the well being of the population.

This communiqué is fully endorsed by all participants and agreed upon on the day 6th of August 2004, in Bihac, Bosnia-Herzegovina

This program is supported with the generosity of United States Agency for International Development and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

## RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF ALBANIA SIGN A HISTORIC JOINT STATEMENT OF SHARED MORAL COMMITMENT

TIRANA, ALBANIA  
March 18, 2005



In a historic ceremony Friday, the leaders from the Albanian Islamic Community, Orthodox Church, Catholic Church and Bektashi Community signed the first public, joint statement by the religious leaders in their “Statement of Shared Moral Commitment.”

With this declaration, the religious leaders of Albania, who endured enormous suffering for over four decades, affirm their shared, moral values while recognizing their unique faith traditions. It also clearly states their continued commitment, as religious leaders, to promote tolerance, coexistence and the positive development of a vibrant, open civil society in Albania. Additionally the statement calls upon civil authorities to protect the religious freedom of each individual and the practices of religious communities.

Attending the ceremony were representatives from the religious communities, Prime Minister Fatos Nano, senior staff of national and international organizations and representatives from many of the Embassies.

During the formal procedures, moderated by the World Conference of *Religions for Peace*, the statement was read to the press and attendees followed by brief comments by the religious leaders. The Prime Minister of Albania also spoke for a few minutes, offering his continued support for this multi-religious initiative and stating that, “these religious leaders are far more important (to Albania) than any political officer.” *Religions for Peace* also affirmed their commitment to continue working in partnership with the religious communities of Albania to develop a joint platform that will enable them to speak with a common voice.

The following is the final Statement of Shared Moral Commitment signed on March 18, 2005.

**STATEMENT OF SHARED MORAL COMMITMENT**  
*18 March, 2005*

- In view of the long, peaceful and fruitful co-existence of traditional religious communities in Albania;
- Bearing in mind that after a common suffering of almost 50-years of total prohibition of faith and religious institutions, the values and ideas of our faith traditions could survive thanks to enormous sacrifice;
- Recognising that, with gratitude to God, the period of repression is behind us and religious life can once again blossom in Albania in its various forms and retake its hereditary place in a democratic society;
- But at the same time, recognizing the reality of religious disharmony in ethnic, social and political conflicts in many parts of the world and even within our region;

We, the traditional religious communities in Albania: the Muslim Community, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania (Orthodox Church), the Catholic Church, and the Bektashi Community, feel called upon to point the way to the future and have made the decision to release the following joint statement.

We recognize and accept that our religious communities differ from each other, and that each of us feels called to observe their own faith. At the same time, we recognize that our religious and spiritual traditions hold many values in common, and that these shared values can serve as an authentic basis for mutual esteem, cooperation, and free common living throughout the territory of Albania.

We, the Muslim Community, the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Bektashi Community are proud of our history of multi-religious co-existence in Albania. We proclaim that the dignity of the human person and human value is a gift of God. Our faiths, each in their own way, call us to respect each person's fundamental human rights. Discrimination and violence against persons or the violation of their basic rights, for us, breaks not only man-made laws, but also God's law.

As representatives of the respective religious communities we express our conviction that, after rebuilding our religious communities, we have now entered into a new phase of challenges. These challenges require us to strengthen and renew our efforts to promote the traditionally good relations as well as dialogue and cooperation among ourselves, while also enhancing the role of our religious communities as important institutions in our society. With this statement we pledge the following:

- We will continue to commit ourselves to pray for and to promote tolerance, coexistence, and peace both within our own communities and for the entire Albanian society. We also pledge ourselves to continue the promotion of a "climate of peace" within our communities by stressing to our own officials that preaching must not cause religious hatred;
- We will continue to educate all persons to understand and respect our different faith traditions in order to prevent ignorance and fear from fuelling discrimination and violence. To this end, we must ensure that school curriculum and textbooks treat each religious tradition in an equal and open manner;

- We will continue to be open to cooperation with other civic and social organizations to carry out common activities for which we share a common concern;
- We will continue to cooperate through reciprocal meetings to maintain and promote inter-religious understanding in Albania and in the region;
- We will continue to pledge ourselves to find the means to provide assistance for all those who suffer in our society;

Further, we, the Muslim Community, the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Bektashi Community call on civil authorities at the local and state level:

- To protect the freedom of all authorized representatives or religious leaders to fulfil their mission;
- To protect the traditional religious communities from any person or group (within or outside the community) who tries to misuse the name and/or property, seals, and symbols of a religious community. In such cases we believe it is necessary that the state, under the rule of law, firmly intervenes in favour of the welfare of these communities;
- To provide support for the development of a strong civil society through adopting appropriate laws, financial regulations, and other policies that will promote the necessary environment for religious communities and other civic organizations to thrive;
- To furthermore promote and practice democracy, human rights and rule of law;
- To work towards a resolution on the legal status of religious communities and on the restitution of property of religious communities that was nationalized or expropriated in the past;
- To develop media practices that do not promote division, mistrust and hostility among peoples, but can contribute to the building of a healthy democratic society. In this context we also call on the media to be fair and respectful in their coverage of religious topics;

Finally, we call on the entire Albanian society to return once again to the values of faith, protection of life, and human dignity. Let us treat others as we would wish them to treat us.

Muslim Community,  
of Albania

Orthodox Autocephalous  
Church of Albania

Catholic Church,

Bektashi Community  
of Albania

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**H. Selim Muca**

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**Archbishop of Tirana  
Durrës, Elbasan &  
All Albania  
Prof. Dr. Anastasios**

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**H.E. Mons. Rrok Mirdita**

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**H.D. Reshat Bardhi**