

Concept Note

“Inter-religious dialogue on religion and peace, religion and human rights” Conference, 2 May 2022

Background

The Council of Europe has recognised the Inter-religious dimension as an important part of intercultural dialogue and encouraged religious communities to actively engage in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in a diverse and multicultural Europe.

Since 2000, the Organisation has also been actively involved in facilitating Inter-religious dialogue, first through a series of seminars organised by the Commissioner for Human Rights (2000-2006), then through the annual Exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue initiated by the Committee of Ministers (2008-2017). In 2015, the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) elaborated a comprehensive compilation of the most relevant standards relating to the principles of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as the links to other human rights protected by the ECHR.

With this new initiative, the aim of the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers is to relaunch within the Council of Europe a dialogue amongst leaders of traditional religious faiths, in order to foster mutual respect, peace and greater awareness of diversity in European societies. Several delegations in Strasbourg have already welcomed on an informal basis such an initiative proposed by the Committee of Ministers' Presidency. The first stage of this process will be to adopt a set of fundamental principles for Inter-religious dialogue, which can form the basis for future work in this area in the Council of Europe.

This new initiative is taken in full respect of other successful global initiatives of Inter-religious dialogue, such as the recent G20 Interfaith Forum, which brought together very high-level attendees, as a Council of Europe-led initiative could offer additional value, as well as attract renewed interest and engagement.

The way forward

Date/venue: 2 May 2022 in Strasbourg

Participants: Religious leaders from groups that have a strong historical and traditional presence in Europe, such as the Catholic, Protestant and reformed, Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim communities.

It is proposed a keynote address by Professor Heiner Bielefeldt, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, before the main speakers from each religious group are given the floor. A very prominent speaker has been added to the program: Ms Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace.

The Chair of the Ministers' Deputies, Ambassador Michele Giacomelli will open the Conference which will be moderated by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Bjørn Berge. The concluding remarks will be delivered by Dr Fabio Petito, on behalf of the Italian CM Presidency.

Program: A half-day meeting, including lunch, is envisaged, consisting of an opening ceremony, one working session, as well as a closing/concluding remarks by the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

Outcome: 1) Discussion on religion and peace, religion and human rights, leading to the possible support and endorsement by the religious leaders of the "Strasbourg principles for Inter-religious dialogue", which could form the basis for future work within the Council of Europe on this issue. The document would in due course be officially brought to the attention of the 46 member States by the Presidency of the CM.

2) A commitment to follow-up meetings on an annual basis is envisaged, in metropolises associated with a prominent religious presence/group, such as for example Rome or Istanbul.

Financing: By extrabudgetary contributions by Council of Europe member States.
