



Committee for Interreligious & Interconvictional Dialogue of the Conference of INGO at the Council of Europe
www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/interreligious-and-interconvictional-dialogue

Self-awareness as a key to intercultural and interreligious understanding

Self-awareness is the basis for authentic inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue in the multi-faceted and complex context of today's crises, conflicts, opportunities, ways & means

Webinar on Thursday 13th of October 2022

Summary:

A Brief Introduction of the committee for the interreligious & interconvictional Dialogue **was given by its** co-chair **Sören Lenz (CEC)**. He represents the Conference of European Churches holding participatory status, which includes among its members 114 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe. After studies in Theology, Philosophy, Linguistics and German Literature Sören Lenz has served as a pastor in the Protestant Church of Alsace and Lorraine since 1999. www.ceceurope.org

Explanation of the choice of the topic was given by Gabriela Frey (EBU), co-chair of the committee and representative of the European Buddhist Union (EBU), an international umbrella association of 52 Buddhist organizations and national Buddhist unions in Europe. She introduced participatory status and represents the EBU at the INGOS conference in the Council of Europe since 2008. Gabriela Frey is Buddhist since her young age, has worked for 30 years in European Institutions and is Founding President of Sakyadhita France (French branch of the International Association for Buddhist Women). <https://europeanbuddhistunion.org/>

Explanation of the topic:

Without Self-Awareness - why we do what we do, why we say what we say, and why we believe what we believe - it is difficult to understand the perspective of others. Self-awareness promotes a deeper understanding of our own conditioning and helps us to empathise more deeply with ourselves and with others. This promotes the removal of ideological barriers, builds bridges by learning to accept and appreciate those who are different from us. Through self-awareness, we see the human being in the other and do not hold on to outward appearances. A strengthened self-confidence also inspires the self-confidence of others. Due to deepened self-awareness, a broader view opens up to accept things around us in a fuller and more inclusive manner and to face critical situations in a freer and more empathetic way. An enhanced self-awareness leads to human-cultural and spiritual connectedness and constructive interactions with others for the benefit of the broader community.

Speakers:

Victoria Coleman (FDCW), Executive Director of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom London. Victoria Coleman is a lawyer qualified in Scots and English law. Since 2018, she has been serving as the Executive Director of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW), a global non-profit dedicated to a kinder, more peaceful world that provides educational resources for developing compassion, wisdom and ethics for a happier and more meaningful life. Victoria will present FDCW's vision for a more harmonious, peaceful world. She will share why compassion and wisdom are key components for a happier, more meaningful life and the importance of a framework of ethics or core values. www.compassionandwisdom.org

Virginie Cornet-Butcher (FDCW), Psychologist, Research Follow and Facilitator of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom in London. Virginie Cornet-Butcher is a trained psychologist and psychotherapist. She has been working in the field of personal development for more than 30 years as a consultant and coach. She engages in Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom programs. She promotes awareness and a state of well-being through better management of emotions and the development of new behaviours. Virginie Cornet-Butcher will expand on these core values and lead a short-guided reflection for greater self-awareness and connection with others. www.compassionandwisdom.org

Dr. Kari Flornes (GERFEC), retired teacher, educator and president of GERFEC (*Groupeement Européen pour la Recherche et la Formation des Enseignants Chrétiens*) since 2017 based in Bergen, Norway is an NGO with participative status with the Council of Europe. She holds a PhD (2007) from the University of Birmingham, UK. The work was supervised by Professor John Mark Hull, the first professor in religious education in the world. As a teacher educator in religious education (RE) and an active member of GERFEC, she has been able to combine formal and informal education. The Pestalozzi project was particularly useful for her professional and personal development. Her main interest is to promote Empathic Communication (EC) in the context of GERFEC and in Bergen, a multicultural city in Norway. www.gerfec.com

Kassim Mohamed Addan (TUSMO) from Bergen Norway. He is a managing hospital pharmacist, founder and head of the Executive Committee of TUSMO, a national Association working in the field of social integration of Somalia migrants in Norway. He is also a trainer on parenting and youth guidance in an International Child development Program (ICDP). For the last 10 years Kassim Mohamed Addan has been a dedicated worker in the field of social integration of minorities in the larger Norwegian society using a model of generational dialogue designed and developed by Tusmo association. The model, which is the subject of his talk in the webinar, is based upon enhancing personal awareness in the context of contemporary society in order to promote and contribute to peaceful co-existence. Tusmo Association is engaged in a number of local and national programs in cooperation with the authorities and like-minded NGO's. www.tusmo.org

Moderator: Dr. Thea Mohr (EBU), Doctorate (Dr. phil.) in religious studies in Germany, trainer of intercultural communication.

Table of Content:

1. Topic: Self-Awareness as key for intercultural and interreligious understanding.....	1
2. Introduction of speakers	2
3. Victoria Coleman (FDCW): Foundational vision for a more harmonious and peaceful world.....	3
4. Virginie Cornet-Butcher (FDCW): Meditation: body-spirit on respect Guided reflection for greater self-awareness and connection with others.....	6
5. Dr. Kari Flornes (GERFEC): Intercultural dialogue and communication which promotes self-awareness.....	7
6. Kassim Mohamed Addan (TUSMO): Understanding the generations: The generation gap, a step towards fruitful dialogue in the family.....	9

Victoria Coleman (FDCW): Foundational Vision for a More Harmonious and Peaceful World

Why compassion and wisdom are key components for a more meaningful life, and the importance of a framework of ethics of core values. Thank you so much for inviting me to join this webinar today. I am delighted to be here.

Structure of Presentation

- a) My presentation is in three parts. The first part will look at self-awareness focusing on: Our Compassion, Our Ethics and Our Mind.
- b) In the second part, we look at ways FDCW can help develop more self-awareness.
- c) In the third part, we see how people have put this action.

A) What do we mean by compassion?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says: *“Compassion is feeling genuinely concerned for the welfare of others.”* The good news is that we already have it!

From the moment we are born, we experience our mother’s affection and care for us. And we respond. When we watch someone in pain on TV, we instinctively have a feeling a concern for them. It naturally arises. This capacity for caring about the wellbeing of others, can be nurtured and strengthened. It can grow.

Compassion brings us closer to others and a sense of purpose. This is because it leads us away from narrow self-interest and brings us a feeling of being connected with others. This is a crucial factor in deeper happiness.

Compassion includes ourselves as well. We can learn to become more self-compassionate. Compassion doesn’t mean being a doormat and letting everyone walk all over you. In fact, compassion takes strength. It can mean setting a clear boundary with someone. It can mean saying no. It is not a passive thing. It brings courage into our lives.

What are the benefits of compassion:

1. Reduces our fear
2. Boosts our confidence
3. Brings inner strength
4. Reduces mistrust of others
5. Opens us to others and a sense of connection
6. Brings purpose and meaning in life
7. Gives us a break from our own problems

We begin with becoming more compassionate with our immediate family, friends and colleagues. This is sometimes not easy. But with practice, gradually, we can expand that circle of compassion to include more and more people.

So that eventually our compassion becomes universal. We have a strong sense of concern for the wellbeing of everyone. *"We can move beyond our sense of closeness to this or that group or identity and instead cultivate a sense of closeness to the entire human family."* - His Holiness the Dalai Lama, extract from "Beyond Religion".

This kind of universal compassion can be really helpful in our communications with others especially those from other cultures and religions.

B) Let us move on now to Our Ethics or inner values.

All our actions have consequences for ourselves and others. We face many choices every day. If we have a framework of ethics then our choices can be guided each day. As we become familiar with practising ethical behaviour, over time our behaviour becomes more spontaneous. We become focused on the wellbeing of others - effortlessly. This is a kind of mental training.

Ethics can be seen as not so much rules to be obeyed but principles for inner self-regulation. Ethics protect ourselves and our mind as well as protecting others.

We can choose to cultivate the inner values that we see and appreciate in others.

Our 16 Guidelines program offers a framework of 16 values to guide us: humility, patience, contentment, delight, kindness, honesty, generosity, right speech, respect, forgiveness, gratitude, loyalty, aspiration, principles, service and courage. In this program we learn to strengthen these core values and use them to guide our thoughts, speech and actions. For a happier, more meaningful life. We can deal with our emotions more easily and have harmony in our relationships with others. My colleague, Virginie will speak in more about 16 Guidelines and share a meditation on respect.

C) Let's talk about Our Mind.

Deepening our compassion and practising ethics takes effort. Choosing the action that will benefit both ourselves and others does not arise magically but comes from our reasoning. A daily reflective practice can really help here.

For example, in the morning before we start our day, we can set a firm intention that we will behave as ethically and compassionately towards others as we can. Just setting that intention can be very powerful – it can become a very helpful habit. Similarly, at the end of the day, we can review our actions during the day and reflect on what was an ethical choice and where we need to improve.

Research into Neural Plasticity can help to motivate us because it has proved that we can actually reprogram our neural pathways in a more positive way. See the work of Richie Davison, Rick Hanson. We can actually re-wire our own brains. That's pretty exciting!! Often when problems arise, perhaps we view them from a too narrow perspective. It's helpful to remember the principle of interdependence.

We know that we all depend on each other for our wellbeing and happiness. But interdependence is also how our world works. We see this in globalisation, food chains, eco-systems. Recognising this means we can have a broader perspective. We can relate to the world in a more realistic way.

"Every situation that we face in life arises from the convergence of a great number of contributing factors, so taking a broad view is essential if our responses are to be realistic. It is not enough to look at any given situation or problem from only one perspective. We need to look at it from this direction and that direction, from all sides. From the front and the back, from the left and the right, from the top and the bottom. When we do this, when we take this kind of broader or more holistic perspective, our responses will definitely be more in tune with reality. And with this, we are more likely to achieve our objectives". - His Holiness the Dalai Lama, extract from "Beyond Religion".

What FDCW Offers:

FDCW has produced a wide range of programs to help people to deepen their self-awareness.

a) Our courses

Our main program is the 16 Guidelines for Life. We also have developed other courses. Free App called 16 Guidelines. This introduces the Guidelines and provides daily reflective practices and practical challenges.

b) Free Resource for Adults

This is the most recent resource we created. It's for adults. It's designed to get people talking about their values and what matters to them. It is downloadable from our website.

GLOBAL IMPACT:

Here is how people have taken these tools to make a difference in their communities.

ISRAEL

Here are some of our facilitators in Jaffa, Israel. At the end of 2021, we trained 25 Israeli people who are now working to share tools from our 16 Guidelines for Life program in Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities there. The 16 Guidelines program has been approved by the Israeli Government for use in schools.

NEPAL

Here are some of the 30 teenage girls living in Vistare Foundation Girls Home in Kathmandu, Nepal who learned the tools in our 16 Guidelines program.

MONGOLIA

Here are some children in Mongolia learning about the 16 Guidelines using the Parachute game. This game is described in our free resources The Happy Toolbox for Kids. You can download this in English or Spanish from our website.

MEXICO

These are teachers from a school in Aguascalientes, Mexico. This school integrated the 16 Guidelines program into their curriculum 8 years ago. They host an annual 16 Guidelines training for their teachers.

SCHOOLS IN INDIA

Two schools in Bodhgaya, India have been using the 16 Guidelines in their school program for more than 8 years. This photo is from Akshy school.

CANADA

Craig Mackie who shared the 16 Guidelines with disadvantaged young people at a facility called Pine Rivers in Canada. 16 Guidelines courses have also been taught at the University of Toronto for the past 10 years. Craig facilitates 16 Guidelines programs at the University.

GERMANY

Bruno Rizzi with staff at a hospice in Munich, Germany. Bruno has trained them in the 16 Guidelines to support them in the work they do at the hospice.

UKRAINE and RUSSIA

We have also been working this year with groups in both Russia and in Ukraine. One of our facilitators has been delivering 16 Guidelines for adults including teachers in Moscow this year. There is now a Telegram group of more than 100 people and they have asked for more training in both 16 Guidelines and in Neuroscience.

One of our Russian facilitators is working with counsellors in Ukraine. She said: "Often when they are sitting in a bomb shelter during the siren, they do these meditation practices that I developed for them. It is simply extremely difficult to imagine how useful these meditations can be for their lives. But the Ukrainian psychotherapist, my correspondent, writes that he uses them in different groups, distributed them to 181 people, shared them with colleagues. According to his testimony in the short experience of the started use, there is a benefit."

BIG LOVE SUMMIT

I would like to invite you to join our online Big Love Summit in November this year. There will be presentations, discussions and meditations on 4 themes: love and presence, compassion and connection, joy and gratitude and equanimity.

Virginie Cornet-Butcher (FDCW): Meditation Body-spirit on respect

Guided reflection for greater self-awareness and connection with others

To appreciate the importance of mindfulness in discrimination and dialogue. To discover intercultural and interreligious awareness by listening to the sensitivities of the other.

Comfortably seated, feet on the floor, keep your back straight but not stiff, you can close your eyes and start by taking 3 deep breaths. When breathing in, feel the air entering your body and when breathing out, free yourself from everything you have just heard, from all your thoughts... and focus your attention on your breath, become aware of the sensations of the air entering your body when you breath in and sensations of the air leaving your body when you breath out...sensations at the base of your nostrils or sensations of the abdomen expanding when you breath in and deflating when you breath out.

And now I suggest you explore what respect means to you...you can let the word respect enter you, settle quietly into the presence of your heart...and observe what words associated with respect come to your mind, what does respect mean to you...respect for other cultures.....other religions...watch your thoughts...think about situations where cultural or religious differences are not respected... think of specific times when you felt particularly respected or disrespected in your difference... what were those moments... what made you feel respected or disrespected... what did you feel ...what effect did it have on you...on others... I now suggest that you direct your mind to what you particularly respect in a religion other than your own or in atheism... what attracts you to this religion or lack of religion... what do you respect particularly...

We can also have feelings of rejection in relation to certain cultures, aversions in relation to certain religions or certain aspects of a religion...what do you find difficult to accept, what particularly bothers you... does it affect you...what offends you.... How do you behave then... How do others react.....

And if you dig in, can you become aware of your biases, become aware of the impact of your biases on your ability to listen and capacity to discover what is different....

And now, see what stands out for you from this meditative reflection...what kind of understanding have you gained...

When you are ready, I suggest you open your eyes, reconnect with the other people in the group and share what you put behind this concept of respect applied to cultural and religious differences. And maybe also the questions you have.

Dr. Kari Flores (GERFEC): Intercultural dialogue and communication which promotes self-awareness

GERFEC is a European Group for Research and Training of Teachers holding Christian and other Beliefs and Convictions (*Groupeement Européen de Recherche et Formation des Enseignants Chrétiens, Croyants et de toutes convictions*) and was founded in 1979 in Strasbourg

Our guiding principle is: “You must be the change you want to see in the world”
(Mahatma Gandhi)

The Pedagogy of GERFEC:

1. Create a safe school culture, democratic and inclusive
2. Empathic communication is learnt and practiced by all
3. Interconvictional dialog is learnt and practiced
4. Non-violence and no hate-speech are taught in all subjects
5. Teaching of controversial and sensitive issues with respect
6. Continuous contextualisation and revision

What is empathy?

What is the best way to ease someone's pain and suffering? In this beautifully animated RSA Short, Dr Brené Brown reminds us that we can only create a genuine empathic connection if we are brave enough to really get in touch with our own fragilities:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZBTYViDPIQ>

Empathy and Empathic Communication

The ability to put yourself in somebody else's shoes

1. Tell me (your personal story?)
2. What do you feel? (Emotional awareness)
3. What do you think about what you have told me? (Cognitive awareness)
4. Would you like to hear my reflections?
5. What happened?
6. How do you understand it?
7. How do I explain it? (The helper's reflections)

The importance of human meetings:

Bergen is an intercultural city: meeting organised with the Major Mrs. Marte Mjøs Persen, G3i and GERFEC. She is now the Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion. She has been very clever to inspire citizens to work for the city. We will need her help for the success of Tusmo/Gerfec.



Participants in the International Child Development Program (ICDP)
International Child Development Program (ICDP)

GERFEC and the Muslim community in Bergen cooperate to help parents to give their children a better upbringing. Physical punishment is forbidden in Norway.

8 themes identified:

1. Show that you love your child-how?
2. See and follow your child's initiative
3. Share your child's feelings
4. Give praise and show recognition
5. Shared attention –shared experience
6. Make experiences meaningful
7. Make connections
8. Make a plan

GERFEC and G3I (Intercultural, International, Interconvictional Group) organised a seminar on "Learning a new language" in Strasbourg in 2018 in which Adan Kadir Mohamed a teacher in a school in Bergen and Michel Aguilar former President of the Commission for Human Rights took part. The visit to the school deeply moved the two participants.

As a reminder, Gerfec & G3I organised from 2015 to 2018 a series of teacher trainings entitled "**Learning to live together with our different beliefs**", in Bergen (Norway), Birmingham (UK), Athens (Greece), Budapest (Hungary) and in Strasbourg (France)

To highlight the Importance of Human Encounters:

FARGESPILL: (*Kaleidoscope*) was created by Ole Hamre and his wife Sissel Saue
<https://fargespill.no/in-english/>

Fargespill is an artistic organization that produces stage performances with children and youngsters between the ages of 7 and 25 from all over the world. At a typical Fargespill show, you should expect to experience up to 100 people from over 35 different countries on stage at the same time.

The performances are based on the cultural treasures the participants bring with them, such as traditional songs, dance moves and rhythms from their upbringing or heritage. The musical expressions are merged together in medleys, with Norwegian folk traditions or expressions from modern youth culture. The performances are elevated by professional musicians, choreographers, instructors, sound- and light designers.

Fargespill debuted in Bergen in 2004, and has since performed at many festivals and major public events such as the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Concert and the 2017 World Cycling Championships. Fargespill has performed in front of most of the Norwegian ministers and the majority of the European royal families. The ensemble has released two albums, been nominated for Spellemannsprisen (the Norwegian Grammy Awards) and the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize (!).

The Fargespill-method is resource-oriented where everyone has something to contribute. We should ask each other «what do you have? », not «what are you missing? ». The philosophy explores what happens if people dig for gold within each other instead of looking for dirt.

In 2017 the Fargespill foundation opened a new office in Oslo. The Fargespill-concept is licensed to several municipalities all over the country – and many more are on the verge of starting up their own ensembles. These are independent units.

Kassim Mohamed Addan (TUSMO): Understanding generations

The generation gap, a step towards fruitful dialogue in the family

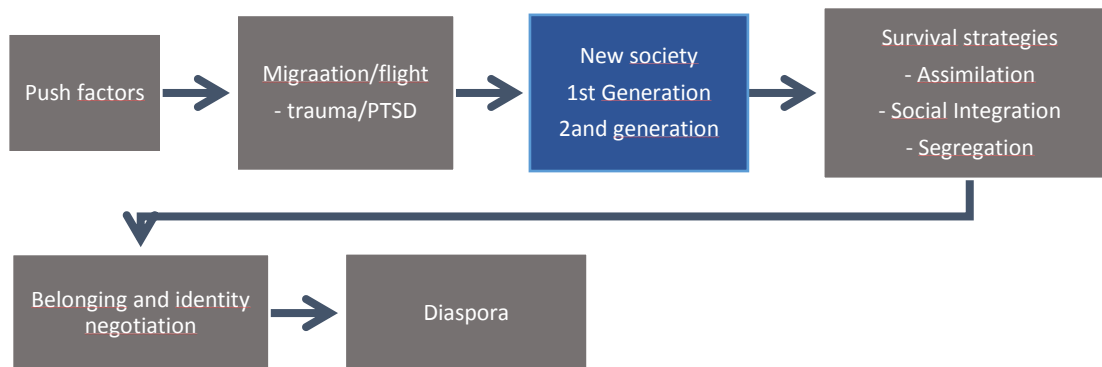
Objectives:

The main objective is to understand and navigate generational differences in a diaspora context

Sub-objectives:

- Background for generational difference among diaspora families
- The demands of modern society
- Generation concept
- Tackling the generational challenge
- Generation dialog in practice

Background: Migration and Diaspora



The demands of modern society

- Democratic welfare society
- Democratic welfare society
- Work environment
- Societal organization, infrastructure and environment
- Cultural and religious differences (Conflict?)
- Unbringing and the function of the family

The generation concepts

- The first generation: migrants with varying degrees of trauma
- Adults or young adults on arrival at host country
- Strong ethnic or religious identity: Palpable fear about losing identity
- Approach to authority
- Strong inclination to show cultural difference
- A dream to return
- The second generation: Children of migrants or underage on arrival at host country
- Fairly strong attachment to host country
- Weakened attachment to «home» country
- Experience varying degrees of poverty in childhood
- Identity challenges – many live a double/triple life
- Discrimination and other barriers to full social participation

The generation dialogue in practice

- We know the issues involved are difficult to tackle
- Parents generally want what is best for their children and have to deal with their own traumatic past
- The youth of the second generation are desperate to find a good balance between the cultures
- Many want to stay with their families in spite of difficulties
- Need an open and safe channel to discuss issues

Generation Dialog is a program developed by Tusmo Association in Norway

- Objective is to provide a safe space/ environment for both generations to discuss and find solutions together in a controlled and guided process.

www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/interreligious-and-interconvictional-dialogue

- Controlled process: suitably arranged environment that is a safe haven for both parties.
- Guided process: trustworthy experts are on standby to offer support and convey relevant information in an effort to build trust and respect for each other.
- The discussions focus on areas of interest for the participants in order to nuance cultural practices and explore ways of interpreting norms differently.
- The process is then evaluated by the participants to give room for improvement

First: Seminar for youth and parents separately

This is followed by a joint session where the concerns of both parties are laid out. Each group gets an opportunity to ask questions and explain their positions better.

Any issue that requires further attention is delegated to a trained guide who follows up the parents or the youth either separately or jointly.

Needs for confidentiality are taken care of by asking the participants to consent or not.

Results so far:

This concept has been in use since 2019 and the feedback has been remarkably positive

The demands for the programs are high and are usually fully booked.

New approaches are being taken into use due to feedback:

Father's role in parenting

Research and Development

In a joint effort with the University College of Western Norway (HVL), a number of surveys are planned early next year. This is intended to evaluate the usefulness of the concept.

Resource booklet has been developed and launched this year

