FINAL REPORT

RELIGIONS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY: MEDIATION TOWARDS SOCIAL COHESION IN URBAN AREAS

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The value of cultures

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PREFACE

As of January 2007, our world has entered a new era of urbanisation: over half of the world's population now lives in cities. This puts cities at the forefront of the problem of developing appropriate policies to integrate migrants and to ensure social cohesion and security for all urban dwellers, most of whom are marginalised since they have little chance of getting a proper education and finding a job. Poverty is a major trend in the world's largest cities. Alleviating poverty should be the aim of society as a whole, but also of religious community leaders. The Millennium Development Goals will not be attained without this common and committed effort.

The relationship between cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue—and between religious diversity and interreligious dialogue as instruments for building strong, inclusive and peaceful societies—has been addressed by several UNESCO normative instruments, documents and reports. Specific reference is made to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance (1995) and the Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace (1994), as well as other declarations and recommendations issued at major UNESCO conferences on interreligious dialogue. These include the Report on the Culture of Peace, presented by the Director-General of UNESCO to the UN General Assembly according to General Assembly resolutions 60/3, 60/10 and 60/11.

The Unescocat International Congress on Religions and Cultural Diversity: Mediation towards Social Cohesion in Urban Areas launched an international comparative study on criteria and particular ways of mobilising and promoting the positive resources of religions and convictions, by gathering appropriate scientific studies and good practices and promoting networking among cities and associations. Indeed, the role of mutual knowledge on shared spiritual and ethical values should be taken into account to promote urban policies that foster social cohesion.

The congress made important and pertinent contributions to UNESCO's programmes in the social and human sciences and culture.
In the area of social and human sciences, the congress focused on human rights and urban areas undergoing accelerated social transformation. It addressed linkages between social transformation and urban policy priorities, with a particular interest in the interrelation between international migrations and social cohesion in urban settings. In the area of culture, the congress gave specific examples of ways to deal with cultural diversity at grassroots levels, recognised the need for prospective cultural policies to enhance intercultural and interfaith dialogues and understanding, and addressed issues related to migrations and religious minorities in terms of equal footing and reciprocity. Without relinquishing their identities, newcomers in a city should make an effort to become citizens of their new urban environment and local decision-makers. Likewise, associations should work to quickly integrate these newcomers. Of course, many misunderstandings may take place during this process; this is why the role of mediation is so important to ensure social cohesion. The Congress on Religions and Cultural Diversity: Mediation towards Social Cohesion in Urban Areas demonstrated how intercultural and interreligious dialogue can help prevent and manage conflicts related to cultural and religious diversity in urban environments. The congress was clearly linked to UNESCO's approach toward 'humanising the city': by involving religious leaders and communities in actively preventing and solving com-

munity conflicts, ethical and spiritual traditions can be mobilised in favour of social cohesion and new urban identities can be built for multiethnic urban settings.

The UNESCO General Conference recognises the importance of dialogue among peoples, cultures and religions, which is a guarantee of respect for cultural diversity and a factor for building peace and social cohesion, and reaffirms the need to devise educational tools and specific forms of teaching.

This Unescocat initiative specifically illustrated how UNESCO Centres may support UNESCO in implementing the programmes approved by the member states.

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FOREWORD

The International Congress on *Religions and Cultural Diversity: Mediation towards Social Cohesion in Urban Areas* was a joint initiative of the Social Work Section of the "la Caixa" Foundation and Unescocat. It was sponsored by UNESCO and enjoyed the support of the Councillorship for Women and Civil Rights of the Barcelona City Council, as well as the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Catalan Government. For three days, about 200 people from all over the world assembled at CosmoCaixa to engage in theoretical yet pragmatic debate on one of today's deepest challenges: how to ensure freedom of beliefs in the public sphere through dialogue which, starting from one's own identity, recognises the other.

As I mentioned at the inauguration of this Congress, no religious belief is necessary (and I certainly have none) to recognise that religion is still today one of the most powerful forms of cultural identity in the whole world. To explain why so many people are members of one religious tradition or another, it is therefore no longer useful to employ the tired cliché that 'religion is the opium of the people'. If this cliché has become pseudo-progressive drivel, it is because it fails to help us understand the reasons for the strength of religious beliefs, the depth of the worldviews that accompany them, and the potential for conflict that may adhere to them. It is in this sense, then, that belief and culture are joined together. Ultimately, it is deeper than opium. Intelligent laypeople—quite different today from the staunch laypeople of the 19th century or the first third of the 20th century—know that it is an error to live in hostility towards the faith of others.

I suppose you'll agree that cultural diversity is the only guarantee of freedom. This is a well-formed statement because, while it may seem paradoxical, it isn't freedom that guarantees diversity but vice versa: diversity fills freedom with truth. And if we know that this is true for national diversity, gender diversity, linguistic diversity and the diversity of sexual orientation and thus for all aspects that make up our identities, then why should it not also be true for religious faith, which also forms part of our identities? Taking this approach, then, if we admit that belief is a cultural construct that is essential for some people, it is obvious that when we defend cultural diversity we defend, without reservations, the freedom to believe in a religion (or not believe in any religion, of course). Only by doing this can we ensure coexistence (which is essential to being free), social cohesion (which is the ideal of equality) and, consequently, peace.

There are those who think that religious identity is a menace to coexistence and freedom. For me, this is an excessive prevention, for it is only as much a menace as are conventional ideologies, which have provoked as many or more conflicts than have the various faiths of the world. It is true that religious fanaticism often generates undesirable extremisms and violent clashes that are incompatible with democratic canons. This cannot be denied. I would go even further: faced with this phenomenon, we must not appeal to cultural relativism—that analytical plague spread by certain Western academics—to cast doubt on democracy as a principle of coexistence and as a unique modern political system that makes us free. It would be an error and a step backwards to give in to any of the menaces derived from a closed, strict interpretation of religious convictions, or to yield to such relativism in exchange for integration (which, from another perspective, is uncertain). Nevertheless, true coexistence can never be based on putting up with in others something we disapprove of,

like their beliefs. This way of permitting something without accepting it has certain lethal effects which faith does not have. Furthermore, it can be a form of injustice.

Nor do I wish to deny the conflictive nature of religions. Religions are conflictive, among other reasons because today's societies are no longer culturally and religiously homogeneous. This is not to say that there was no plurality in the past, but it is evident that great migrations, especially to urban areas, have reinforced this pluralism. And the more plural a society is, the more complex it becomes. It is hardly necessary to give examples of possible conflicts, because it seems to me that we have them next door. The very existence of such conflicts underscores the need for prevention through mediation. I have no doubt that social mediation is a form of diplomacy. It is clearly an informal form of diplomacy, but it must be if it is to be truly effective and interreligious. Ensuring the social cohesion of communities means giving a chance to dialogue—to conversation, in more poetic terms—and to the coexistence of cultures, languages, ethnic groups and religions. It means giving peace a chance.

Agustí Colomines
Director of Unescocat

FINAL REPORT
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON RELIGIONS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY: MEDIATION TOWARDS SOCIAL COHESION IN URBAN AREAS

Editor: Jordi Pigem

I. SUMMARY

- Religions are often perceived as sources of conflict and delusion, and yet they are a key element of contemporary life and of the cultural identity of many people. Besides, religions often play a crucial role in promoting harmony and peace. The Congress showed many examples of best practices that are nurtured by the deep religious faith of the key people involved.

- Religions, like many other institutions, are in crisis today: they need to practice self-criticism and update their language and vision to address the challenges we face.

- To build a more peaceful world, we must work with religious leaders and religious grassroots organisations (both of which have their own particular strengths).

- Respecting cultural diversity is essential to fostering peace and understanding.

- Intercultural harmony must be achieved without eroding cultural diversity. Respect for other cultures and religions is best cultivated by standing on one's own cultural ground. The dignity of diversity must be reclaimed.

- The new urban realities of the 21st century increase the potential for intercultural conflict in urban areas.

- It is much more effective to work to prevent conflict during easy times than to wait until a conflict has emerged. Many conflicts are prevented or solved because intercultural mediation was already at work.

- Intercultural or interreligious centres funded by city councils can be instrumental in preventing and mediating intercultural conflict.

- Interreligious calendars may help to increase respect for other cultures. Interreligious celebrations (like Oldham's Festival of Lights) can be highly effective in building social cohesion.

- To build a more peaceful world, we must empower key agents such as open-minded clergy, women and youth.

- Communities should aim to reach a 'critical mass': the point where integration is more normal than segregation.

- Building networks of relationships across the different groups in a city or town helps to build social cohesion. Some people can be regarded as 'anchor points' in this web of relationships.

- Mediators that come from an external, neutral, fresh mental space (like that achieved by regular meditators and advanced spiritual practitioners) can be of great help in entrenched conflicts: 'If you want peace in Jerusalem, hand the keys of the city to the Dalai Lama.' Those who are aware of all the complexities of a given conflict are equally necessary in mediation.

- In many ways, we still live under colonialism. Exclusion generates envy and breeds violence. Pacifying the economy is a key step towards a more peaceful world.

- The rich and vanishing cultural treasure embodied by indigenous peoples needs to be acknowledged.

- 'Faith-based diplomacy', sometimes involving 'interreligious action teams' and 'prayer teams', can reach deeper and therefore be more effective than conventional diplomacy.

- Social cohesion needs to be built on self-esteem. This requires nurturing the identities of cultural minorities. 'A secularist response that denies the relevance of religion or culture will undermine social cohesion. By understanding and affirming the necessary and valid identities of all those who make up our communities, we enable en-

gagement, address inequalities and so create social cohesion.'

- The encounter between cultures must not obliterate the host culture, which provides a local context, a common language, a legal system and a reference point for social cohesion.

- Conflicts arise within our minds. Actions are derived from underlying attitudes, values, beliefs and perceptions.

- Words shape our awareness and need to be chosen carefully.

- We need to move beyond the shallow notion of 'tolerance' towards a deeper attitude of real understanding and genuine respect.

- Our usual conceptual approaches need to be balanced with other forms of knowing, including the imagination and the epistemologies of the heart. The unity we seek in mediation is not an affair of the mind but of the heart.

- Fear is the worst enemy of humankind. Our time calls for fearlessness.

II. REPORT

The International Congress on Religions and Cultural Diversity brought together representatives of a wide variety of cultural perspectives, religions (including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and the Bahá'í Faith), practical approaches and geographical areas (Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas). (Brigitte Colin, giving voice to a widely shared feeling, expressed in the closing ceremony how impressed she had been by the diversity and commitment of the speakers and participants.) At the end of the Congress, an International Network of Religions and Mediation was launched under the initiative of Unescocat.

The Congress was held (as noted by the Gandhian scholar, Rajiv Vora) in the centennial year of Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement,[1] doubtlessly a prime example of a nonviolent approach to intercultural conflict, as well as a source of inspiration in any effort towards social cohesion and true respect for cultural diversity. Rajiv Vora also praised how this Congress was 'a real reflection of Europe's struggle to embrace multiculturalism'.

II.1 RELIGIONS, DIVERSITY AND THE NEW URBAN REALITIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

II.1.1 Religions as key social agents

Religions are a key element of contemporary life. Up to the 1970s, most Western intellectuals and civil servants thought that the advance of laicism, secularism and rationalism was unstoppable, that religions were the 'opium of the people', and that their expiry date was soon due. Michael Millward explained how in UNESCO 'it was politically correct for a long time not to talk about religion', whereas 'now, thanks to civil society, we address it'. UNESCO being 'a body for things cultural', it cannot eschew religion. Many people today still perceive religions as sources of conflict and delusion[2]. Stein Villumstad quoted the well-known four negative Ds that are attributed to religions (as summarised by Katherine Marshall in the World Bank):

- Religions are *divisive*. They are competitive and exclusive, dividing people and creating conflict.
- Religions are *dangerous*. They are against development, democracy and equal rights for women.
- Religions are *defunct*. They are becoming less and less important. They belong to the past.
- Religions are *delusive*. They are based not on reason but on deception.

Politicians have been ignoring religion on the basis of the separation between religion and state, argued Douglas Johnston, and yet religion gives many people their reason for being. Besides, religions often play a crucial role in promoting harmony and peace. The Congress showed many examples of best practices, from central Africa to Oldham, that are nurtured by the deep religious faith of the key people involved. And, as noted by Douglas Johnston, 'religion is very rarely the cause of a conflict' (except in the Middle East, where there are competing religious claims to the same piece of land).

1 The Satyagraha movement was launched in Johannesburg on September 11, 1906. Satyagraha means 'coherence with [holding fast to, devotion to, effort towards] the truth'.

2 An outspoken example is Richard Dawkins in his latest book, The God Delusion.

As stated in the opening plenary by Agustí Colomines, religions are a 'key to the cultural identity of many people', and respecting cultural diversity is essential to fostering peace and understanding. 'Religions cut across all sectors of society, but they are often reduced to a particular corner' (Stein Villumstad). Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola reminded us of how, in Africa (as in many traditional areas of the world), all aspects of life are linked to religion: farming, hunting, economics and community life. In Africa, religions are a way of life in relation to God, the ancestors and one another. 'The living-dead ancestors' are highly important and alive (according to Bishop Ochola, much in the same way that saints are alive for Catholics).

Religious identities are not superficial garments that can be changed at will. As noted by Phil Sumner, 'for many people, affiliation with a faith is inherited. It is part of their history, part of the rock from which they have been hewn. In this sense, even if people, as adults, choose other faiths, they still have to address and understand how their former affiliations continue to affect who they are, how they are perceived and how they behave.'

II.1.1.1 Religious leaders and grassroots organisations

Religions are capable of empowering us both towards the highest good and the worst evil. That is, religions (partly because of the way they re-link us with something greater than us, beyond ourselves) are one of the most powerful forces at play in our world. With this realisation comes the responsibility of tapping into this most powerful force with our best attitude, particularly at a time of dramatic social changes and growing ecological imbalances. This can be done by working on three levels (all of which were highlighted, not necessarily by the same speakers):

—the top level: with religious leaders;
—the bottom level: with grassroots organisations; and
—the inner level: within our heart, at the core of our being.

As for the former, religious leaders have, as pointed out by Stein Villumstad, five comparative advantages for triggering positive change:[3]

—a clear vision and message, often reaching far beyond their constituencies;
—a historical and widespread presence in local communities and in society at large;
—a well-developed infrastructure, often including effective communication networks;
—a legitimacy that enables them to make courageous statements during crises; and
—a traditional orientation towards peace.

As for grassroots organisations, Dena Merriam explained how her peace-building work has benefited from working with grassroots organisations and spiritual persons rather than leaders of religious institutions: 'Institutions are limited. They don't lead. They follow the grassroots.' Gandhi and Mandela are model examples of charismatic spiritual people not formally involved in any religious hierarchy. Unescocat itself, as reported by its Programme Coordinator, Onno Seroo, is engaged with grassroots mediation at various levels in Catalonia. A good example of international grassroots development is the Partner Cities Network of the Goldin Institute, which aims to empower 'grassroots leaders, organisations and communities from all sectors of civil society to share and develop the knowledge, skills, tools, networks and inspiration needed to create a peaceful, just and sustainable future within and between its cities'.

As for the inner level of the heart, see below.[4]

II.1.2 The need for self-criticism in contemporary religions

We must not overlook what Jean-Marc Aveline aptly described as the 'diseases of religion', such as absolutism, when a religion mistakes the absoluteness it sees in God for the absoluteness of its own institutions. As Dena Merriam stated, 'most of the main religions are in crisis today'. Rajiv Vora spoke of the need for religious traditions to prac-

3 Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, Prevention and Management of Deadly Conflicts. Carnegie Corporation, New York, 1997.
4 Section II.3.4

tice self-criticism, particularly at a time when religious intolerance is growing (in India's case, in spite of centuries of nonviolence and interreligious harmony). In light of the Hindu-Muslim riots, Rajiv Vora stated: 'As a Hindu, I have a duty to be critical of my own religion.' Another recurrent question was how to deal with purportedly 'God-inspired' violence, either by small fanatic groups or by the president of a powerful state. In fact, religious violence often results from (nonreligious) underlying pressures, such as those imposed in many poor areas by the global market. In the words of Rajiv Vora, 'if religious leaders are not able to interpret today's forms of repression (like economic globalisation) they are not doing their job'.

As Stein Villumstad put it, 'if religions are part of the problem, they also need to be part of the solution'. The Kyoto Declaration[5] gave strong recommendations on how religious institutions can engage in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Kofi Annan recently affirmed that 'the problem is not religions, but religious people'. Stein Villumstad argued that religions today are being hijacked and that religious leaders must stay within their mandate rather than try to step directly into politics. Bishop Ochola stressed the need for good leadership in both religious and secular institutions: poor leadership creates poverty, while good leadership creates plenty.

Religious leaders fall into the category of 'middle-range leaders' in John Paul Lederach's three-level pyramid of conflict transformation actors. Religious leaders have direct access both to the grassroots level and the top national political leadership level. And yet an Argentinean participant and former priest explained how in Greater Buenos Aires, as in many other places, working in the grassroots with the people amounts to disengaging from institutionalised religion.

In order to face creatively the challenges of the present time, religious traditions need to reform their language, as well, rather than hiding in the false safety of literalism. Rajiv Vora spoke of the need for today's religions to 'update' their language to that 'of the common people' and of our present situation. In this regard, he referred to a Buddhist scholar having said that today he would choose as a fundamental religious text Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* rather than the *Dhammapada* (the ancient and venerable Buddhist classic).

Needless to say, religions are not the only institution needing transformation. As Jean-Marc Aveline noted, while society needs to point out diseases in religion, religion should also denounce what doesn't work in society.

II.1.3 Diversity as a strength

As Francesc Guillén reminded us, 'societies have always been plural', but cultural diversity stands out more prominently today due to migrations and our more open societies (diversity still exists under authoritarian regimes, but is repressed). Democracy has to protect the rights of minorities, not just the will of the majority.

An initial statement by Shabnam Olinga emphasising the underlying unity of all religions ('God is one and... beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one') was balanced by other speakers emphasising the positive value of diversity and the fact that intercultural harmony must be achieved without eroding cultural diversity. As argued below,[6] to feel the value of one's own identity acknowledged is essential for social cohesion. The deep respect towards other cultures and religions expressed throughout this Congress is best cultivated by standing on one's own cultural ground. It is crucial to reclaim the dignity of diversity.

Bishop Ochola argued that there are as many religions as community-based identities in the world. Conflicts can only be solved with the realisation that 'peaceful coexistence' is necessary—and peaceful coexistence requires interfaith cooperation. Cultural diversity needs to be seen as a factor for peace and even economic prosperity (e.g. through improved linguistic skills, as Desmond Cahill suggested). Desmond Cahill also

5 The Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security. Religions for Peace 8th World Assembly. Kyoto, August 29, 2006.

6 Section II.2.6.

commented on how Australian religious leaders' initial reluctance about training in an educational programme on pluralism eventually turned into true enjoyment at getting to know other perspectives. One image that was presented to convey the value of diversity was the famous metaphor of the elephant being inspected by five blind men (or, in other versions, an elephant in a dark room) and being variously taken to be a pillar, a piece of ivory, etc. The implication is that our view of things is never absolute and therefore can be enriched by listening to other perspectives. In the words of Dena Merriam, multiculturalism or interculturality 'can be a really enriching reality'.

An example, among many, of the need for otherness in a healthy society was provided by Jean-Marc Aveline. When the last Christian monks had decided to leave Algeria, they were asked to stay: 'If you leave, we will lose our only example of otherness in Algeria.' Those who uttered these words were Muslim believers who felt that the presence of otherness wouldn't weaken their faith and would indeed strengthen their culture.

Douglas Johnston quoted a famous verse of the Qur'an praising cultural diversity: 'God could have made us one, but he made us into different nations so that we may learn form one another.'[7] From a Christian perspective, Jean-Marc Aveline referred to the mystery of 'the divine sense of what separates us'.

Migrations are part of humanity. They foster cultural diversity but also trigger conflict in situations of stressful economic competition, as has been the case in underprivileged urban areas. On the other hand, underlying all cultural diversity is our basic unity as human beings. International Migrants Day was commemorated on the first evening of the Congress, in a spirit of solidarity with the plight of the world's many migrant people. The panel of speakers included three people who had migrated from their countries of origin into Europe: Fazal Rahim (from Pakistan to England), Salwa l'Aouaji el Gharbi (from northern Africa to Catalonia) and Jean-Bosco Botscho (from sub-Saharan Africa to Catalonia). Mr. Botscho, quoting well-established scientific research, said that as we all ultimately came from eastern Africa, we are all migrants, and therefore International Migrants Day is everyone's day.

7 Chapter 49, verse 13. A more traditional rendering of this verse is as follows: 'O mankind, we created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another.'

II.2. GOOD PRACTICES FOR MEDIATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

II.2.1. Urban interreligious work towards social cohesion

For the first time in human history, more than 50% of the human population is about to be living in cities—a threshold that is being crossed in 2007. As noted during the Congress, today's cities are new, unprecedented realities that pose new challenges—like the increasing difficulty that rural migrants face in adapting to the city's pace. In the words of Brigitte Colin, 'the globalisation of desires and representations' has led to close contact between previously remote human cultures. Given the acceleration and the economic and social pressures associated with it, this contact is a potential source of conflict, particularly in urban areas, as 'cities are the key spaces for social cohesion and the bulwark against the fracture of globalisation'. In the urban global context, there is increasing exclusion and alienation, causing increasing poverty and insecurity. Cities need to become more inclusive by reducing exclusion and increasing social cohesion.[8]

Brigitte Colin reminded the Congress that the UN Millennium Goals include the right to development and to a fair distribution of development gains, aiming at the eradication of poverty by 2015. All citizens should benefit from what cities have to offer. It has been argued that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights needs to be amended to include the right to develop, the right to drink clean water and the right to enjoy the benefits of the city. The individual is the focus of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it is increasingly clear that there are no individual rights without collective rights and vice versa. Similarly, it was pointed out that, by overemphasising freedom, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights overlooks *justice* (as Rajiv Vora said, Marxism went to the opposite extreme, emphasising *justice* at the expense of freedom).

A wealth of examples from urban areas were presented, ranging from big cities in both the North and South (Barcelona, Chicago, Marseille and Rio) to smaller cities with a potential for intercultural conflict (Jerusalem, Oldham and Lleida):

II.2.1.1 Municipality-based centres

The successful experiences of two Catalan municipality-based interreligious centres were presented at the Congress. Francesc Rovira, coordinator of the Interfaith Centre of Barcelona (CIB), a four-person office set up and financed by the Barcelona City Council and currently being run by Unescocat, explained the CIB's work to safeguard the right to freedom of conscience and religion in the city and to prevent conflicts between religious communities. Religious freedom is a fundamental right that needs to be protected ('rights are extremely fragile', as Xavier Sàez stated), and yet it cannot override the rights of others and other rights. Protecting religious freedom and freedom of conscience is seen as a means of helping minorities to feel acknowledged, respected and integrated in the city, therefore fostering social cohesion. The CIB sends expert mediators every time a potential conflict emerges between a religious community and other citizens (for instance, due to prejudice, noise, lack of parking space or abusive landlords), other religious groups (in fact, the CIB has managed to have diverse communities successfully share the same spaces), or the city council itself (as sometimes miscommunication arises between religious communities and the city council, or some civil servants may be unduly restrictive of religious freedom). The CIB helps minorities find the right information and resources, and encourages civil society initiatives to raise awareness about religious diversity in the city. Exchanges between communities are also encouraged to prevent their isolation and compartmentalisation. The CIB's underlying philosophy is to be aware of potential conflict and ready to act before problems actually emerge, thereby fostering understanding

8 There are a number of initiatives pointing in this direction, among them the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities, the City Statute of Brazil, the European Charter to Safeguard Human Rights in Cities, the Aberdeen Agenda and the Charter of Educating Cities.

between communities (religious or not) and social cohesion in the city.

Xavier Sàez, president of the Municipal Assembly of Religions in Lleida (a city with 125,000 inhabitants from 130 countries who speak 83 languages), explained that the Assembly was instrumental in preventing conflicts with the Muslim community from escalating. Again, the underlying idea is to protect the rights of minorities, including the right to religious freedom (as José María Contreras put it, quoting a ruling by the European Tribunal, the ideal is 'to have the maximum possible freedom and the minimum necessary restrictions'). Religious organisations may receive funding from the Council—not for proselytising, but for their contribution towards cultural and spiritual wealth.

Similar initiatives have been introduced in other Catalan cities. In Badalona (215,000 inhabitants, next to Barcelona), after a long period of interviews and field work, Unescocat is producing a report-map highlighting areas of potential interreligious or intercultural conflict. Also in Badalona, an interreligious meeting is held every year, and there are plans to create a Council for Interconvictional Dialogue.

II.2.1.2. Community cohesion through interreligious dialogue

Jean-Marc Aveline reminded us that behind the glamour of interreligious dialogue there is often a difficult reality: 'meeting with believers of other religions is a tremendous challenge'. Travis Rejman made a number of recommendations based on his experience in Chicago:

- There is a need for interreligious dialogue involving the whole community (town or city), but this must be preceded by *intra*religious dialogue, in which each religious community explores where they are and how they perceive the other.
- Work must be *place-based* in order to envision what kind of neighbourhood or city we want.
- Community-building through dialogue needs to be balanced by social action. Some agents prefer to dialogue while others prefer to act.
- *Social cohesion* will help bridge the gap between global and local.
- *Multi-sector* partnerships need to be built, engaging all sectors of society.

In May 2001, serious riots broke out in Oldham (northwest of Manchester) after an extreme right-wing political party exploited small incidents. The Oldham Interfaith Forum was set up in 2002 to prevent future conflicts. It provides a forum for dialogue among faith leaders, works with the local council and, by its very existence, speaks in favour of intercultural harmony. If an incident occurs, i.e. a racist attack, the religious leaders of the Oldham Interfaith Forum meet and, as a preliminary measure, issue a press release to the local papers, showing that there is clear awareness of the situation. After the 7/7 attacks hit London, the Oldham Interfaith Forum organised a vigil in a public place, and within two days 400 people had joined it. Members of the Oldham Interfaith Forum completed a three-day training programme in Belfast organised by Mediation Northern Ireland after representatives of this organisation were invited to Oldham by the Oldham Council. Among other initiatives, they have helped set up an Oldham Mosques Council, a Women's Interfaith Network and a Youth Interfaith Network.

André Porto's work with Viva Rio and other organisations has been aimed at helping Brazil grow into a more peaceful society by addressing gun control, police reform and the role of youth in armed conflict. A small arms collection project established 600 collection points with the collaboration of many priests, who were happy to take concrete steps towards peace rather than just preaching it. Guns were brought in (in exchange for a small sum, far below market value) and either the person bringing the gun or the priest would smash the gun to render it useless. Some priests collected up to 12,000 guns. A Safe Community Campaign toured 12 metropolitan areas of Brazil giving three-day workshops to address violence and police corruption: on the first day there was a workshop for police and civil society involving faith leaders, and on the remaining two days there were visits to police commanders and civil

society leaders, finally bringing them together. Every effort was made to involve the local media.

Yehuda Stolov's experience of interreligious dialogue in Jerusalem shows that it is possible to build community links and real understanding between people who, despite living next to each other, had never communicated. They are running 400 programmes, including interfaith groups that meet once a month to talk about religion (not politics), allowing people to come from a deeper place within themselves and create a safe space to put their differences on the table.

II.2.1.3. Interreligious celebrations building social cohesion

Sincere interreligious celebrations can be a decisive catalyst for social and intercultural cohesion, particularly in urban areas, given their high concentration of people from different cultures and creeds. Instances of interreligious prayers can be found today in many places, after the watershed interreligious meetings organised by Mario Giro in Assisi since 1986.[9] In Catalonia, the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue organises a yearly interreligious prayer on the occasion of World Aids Day, and has also organised interreligious prayers for the Earth. Marseille Espérance, an organisation created in 1991 that involves the leaders of Marseille's major religious and ethnic communities (Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Armenian, Orthodox, Protestant and Buddhist), prints 15,000 copies of a highly popular interreligious calendar every year. An interreligious calendar published by the Goldin Institute has similarly sparked increased respect for diversity in Phoenix and Rio de Janeiro.

A particularly significant example, in an area that had recently witnessed severe intercultural conflicts, is Oldham's Festival of Lights, highly successful both in terms of attendance and the visible increase in social and intercultural cohesion that it triggers. Organised by the Oldham Interfaith Forum, on December 6, 2006, the Festival of Lights saw its fourth edition, simultaneously observing (in a respectful and nonsyncretistic manner) four different religious celebrations held during the same time of year, around the winter solstice, when darkness reigns and the light strives to come back: the Hindu (as well as Sikh and Jain) festival of Diwali,[10] Christian Christmas, Jewish Hanukkah, and the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Adha. On October 12, 2006, the Oldham Interfaith Forum also held a joint celebration of the harvest thanksgiving festival (belonging to English tradition, but with parallels, for instance, in the Jewish *Sukkot* and the Sikh *Vaisakhi*) and the Muslim celebration of Ramadan (which in 2006 happened to take place around this time).

II.2.2 Empowering key agents towards positive change

Throughout the Congress, there was agreement on the need to support and empower key agents for change. In particular, three kinds of agents were repeatedly mentioned:

- We need to support and empower the open-minded clergy that are trying to build bridges, particularly in contexts otherwise prone to dogmatic, literalistic interpretations—a point emphasised by a Muslim participant from Baltimore. More generally, we need to support all efforts by religious leaders and religious people to address violence within and beyond their communities. Douglas Johnston argued that, given that US Muslims have great freedom of thought and are making an effort to bridge the gap between modernity and Islam, it is important to empower them to establish links with Muslims in other countries.
- The *youth*. The need to include more fully the specific perspectives and concerns of young people was mentioned a number of times. In 2007, a Viva Rio caravan-campaign specifically focused on youth is travelling through Brazil.
- *Women*. Congress participants emphasised the need to include more fully the specific concerns

9 Mario Giro was unable to come to the Congress from Darfur due to last-minute problems with flight connections.

10 Or Deevapali, meaning 'row of lights', 'festival of lights' or, at a more inner level, 'awareness of the inner light'.

and perspectives of women and to empower women within organisations, both religious and secular, institutional and grassroots, global and local. One of the comparative advantages of women, it was argued, is their usually more direct access to the 'heart of the mother' perspective discussed below.[11] André Porto noted that 'the spiritual dimension is very feminine' and Dena Merriam argued that 'we desperately need a spiritual perspective that women can more easily bring in'. In some cases, it has been essential to establish or support women-only groups. There are extraordinary women with a potential for leadership in many traditions, but they often tend not to be very visible.

Other agents whose role was highlighted include businesspeople and all those involved in education.

II.2.2.1 Critical mass and critical yeast

Speaking from his experience of mediation in Oldham, the Reverend Phil Sumner identified a number of keys to intercultural understanding in urban areas:

- *Critical mass*, that is, the point where interaction becomes more normal than segregation. Achieving critical mass requires the strategic involvement of all the decision-making and service-provision partners that can enable interaction. In Oldham, there are programmes, for example, to link up monocultural schools with others having different ethnic or religious intakes. There are events to bring members of the different faith communities together to discover more of what they share while respecting differences.
- The *critical yeast* approach: one only requires a little yeast to cause the dough to rise.[12]This involves building networks of relationships across the city or town, rather like a spider might build a web. The spider finds anchor points that will enable the web to cover the whole area and then links all those points to each other and to the centre. To build the web, the spider has to be completely aware of the area in which it operates. It has to build in a flexible and sustainable way so that the web can cope with individual attacks on the structure without being completely ruined. Burnley and Oldham are both using this approach. Choosing anchor points from different sections of the political spectrum, as well as from different religious backgrounds and from positions of social leadership, both towns brought people representing the 'anchor points' together for a series of meetings. Besides discussing agreed issues, the meetings witnessed the telling of individual stories that were sometimes painful but always engaging. The Oldham Interfaith Forum has applied for funding to take about twenty young people who could be described as 'anchor points' to Srebrenica and Auschwitz, as well as to the seats of political power in England and Europe.

II.2.2.2. Present-centred mediation

Dena Merriam explained the usefulness of having mediators coming from an external, neutral, fresh, empty, emotion-free mental space (like that achieved by regular mediators and advanced spiritual practitioners), bringing an approach that is present-centred rather than burdened by the awareness of the conflict's past. As an example, she mentioned how in the Israel/Palestine conflict the mediation of Israeli Buddhists and Israeli Hindus (Brahma Kumaris) had been useful to shake entrenched assumptions and positions. 'If you want peace in Jerusalem, hand the keys of the city to the Dalai Lama', as graphically expressed by Dena Merriam (taking the Dalai Lama as an example of a person of undisputable goodwill not involved with any side). Similarly, Dena Merriam commented how Buddhist meditators had been the best mediators between Shi'is and Sunnis in Iraq. Meditation grounds us in the present. Forgiveness happens when we move from a past-centred to a present-centred attitude. Speaking about people that had committed multiple crimes in Burundi, Marguerite Barankitse stated: 'Even if

11 Section II.3.4.
12 See John Paul Lederach, The Moral Imagination, Oxford University Press, 2005.

they are murderers they are still our brothers. I'm not interested in their past. They can turn it into a better future.'

The value of this approach was widely appreciated and also balanced with complementary positions. Phil Sumner noted that it is good to have people coming from the outside, 'but you also need inside people who know the history and the issues'. Others mentioned how a conflict cannot be successfully addressed unless the structural factors underlying it (e.g. vested political or economic interests of powerful foreign groups) are taken into account. It seems that both mediators coming from a fresh, detached perspective and those fully aware of the complexities of a given conflict can help to find satisfactory solutions for all parties involved.

II.2.3. From exclusion to integration

In the opening plenary, Brigitte Colin spoke about the colonisation of minds generated by the might of modern culture. On the whole, cultural and linguistic diversity is being eroded as much as biological diversity. André Porto offered a telling example of how 'we still live under colonialism': Peruvian schools still teach history from the Spanish coloniser's perspective, completely overlooking 'the intercultural and interfaith richness of the Inca Empire. Dena Merriam, among others, spoke about the marginalisation of non-Abrahamic religions in the standard discourse on religions and interfaith dialogue. Other cultures and religions, besides being important in themselves, bring in 'a different energy' that can enliven some of the dead ends of interfaith dialogue. The realisation that 'everyone is a minority somewhere' was mentioned a number of times as a way to balance the subtle (or not-so-subtle) sense of superiority that majority groups tend to feel.

There was a clear awareness of the inequalities persisting, and sometimes increasing, in our world. Participants stressed the need not to fall into the lure of the gadgets, commodities and comforts of the privileged world, forgetting our underprivileged brothers and sisters. Marguerite Barankitse reminded us that people in Africa are our 'children, brothers and sisters', and that it is a 'shame' the way we in the North ignore Africa. She summarised her address as the 'cry against the spoiled lifestyle of the too-rich world, from a suffering mother' (and yet her cry was full of the joy of unconditional love). That cry was shared by many, particularly the speakers coming from Africa and Asia. Rajiv Vora, looking at the roots of violence, stated: 'If a way of life is decadent and creates envy, it breeds violence. The roots of violence are in those who create an envy-breeding way of life.' Similarly, Patrice Brodeur argued that 'exclusions lead to violence', that 'representative democracy needs to be complemented by participatory democracy' and that human survival requires us to move from competitive to cooperative values.

Dena Merriam mentioned how her peacebuilding work has benefited by deliberately trying to empower women and attain an East-West balance. Besides the more commonly mentioned exclusions due to poverty, gender, cultural origin and religious affiliation, there was an emphasis on the 'need to pay attention to cultures relegated to the margins', and, more specifically, to the rich and vanishing cultural treasure embodied by indigenous peoples worldwide. For instance, several speakers (including Desmond Cahill from Melbourne) explicitly spoke about the unique cultural and human value of aboriginal Australians, who have been living there uninterruptedly for the past 65,000 years. Their dispossession has lowered their self-respect, giving rise to problems such as widespread alcoholism. An effort has to be made to include the values and perspectives of indigenous peoples.

III.2.3.1. Successful policies for the integration of immigrants

Desmond Cahill discussed policies that have proven useful for the integration of immigrants in Australia during the second half of the 20th century (although the current conservative government has undone some of this progress; it has also infamously refused to apologise to the original Australians for having been dispossessed of their land). There are six policies worth noting:

1) Equal wages policy (some businesses actually wanted to pay immigrants less).
2) Housing affordability policy. Immigrants would tend to concentrate in poor areas, leading to the creation of ghettoes. To prevent this, immigrants are given help to purchase three-bedroom houses in different areas.
3) Full employment policies. Immigrants are positive for the economy (because of their ability, for instance, to take second jobs), but in times of crisis they would be the first casualties.
4) A well-funded programme for English as a second language, for both adults and children. Students get a living allowance if they choose to study English full-time, which is particularly good for refugees. Children spend 6 to 12 months only learning English before moving to normal schools.
5) A measured policy of separation between religion and state. The state is actively neutral. In the public school system (which educates 70% of the children), there is one hour per week that any religious group can use to teach about their beliefs. (Professor José María Contreras explained how Spain practices 'positive laity', in which personal convictions are not the state's concern and all beliefs deserve the same recognition.)
6) A multicultural policy to fund programmes for different immigrant languages, which has led to a multicultural range of television channels, three ethnic radio stations (used by over 50 ethnic groups), migrant resource centres matching the profile of the area (helping those in need, with welfare workers of the same origin as the people being helped), and nursery homes for people of particular language groups.

Australian citizenship is easy to achieve after three years of residence (previously two years), but not all immigrants succeed in integrating. Of all immigrants, 3-4% are classified as 'defeated'—that is, they haven't been able to integrate successfully (often because of some personal tragedy). On the other hand, some immigrants are highly motivated and end up in high political or economic positions. Some of the richest people in Australia (as in the UK, as reported by Fazal Rahim) are second-generation immigrants.

It is not only the immigrants who have to adapt. Australian law has had to accommodate new practices, like Muslim burials and the Sikhs' use of turbans and daggers.

II.2.4. Pacifying the economy

Participants noted how foreign vested interests (craving for diamonds, precious metals and other valuable resources) have played no small role in the origin of local conflicts in Africa and other areas. The greed and competitiveness entrenched in the contemporary global economy (described by Arundhati Roy as 'a mutant variety of colonialism'), with the cost-benefit analyses often eclipsing ethical, social and ecological considerations, and often widening the gulf between the privileged and the underprivileged, seems incompatible with a world of harmonious coexistence of different cultures and beliefs. Pacifying the economy means, first, reinserting the economy back into the world of ethical considerations and the global common good. Second, it means dealing with those aspects of the global economy, like the arms trade, that work directly against the grain of a peaceful world. As noted by Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola, 'the guns that have killed millions of children in Africa' are part of a deadly business originating in Western countries. 'We need to stop the arms trade'.

André Porto gave another example of present-day 'colonialism': in Brazil (as indeed in many other countries) 'we pay more to Europe and the US in terms of debt repayment than we invest in schools'. Our efforts towards a more peaceful and harmonious world take place within an international economic system that tends to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, therefore creating exclusion and breeding violence. Underlying the rule of all human endeavours by the economy is our secular worship of materialism. Rajiv Vora argued that 'we need a secular politics of disaffection to materialism', like the disaffection that Gandhi sparked against colonial rule, as 'otherwise we will fall into anger and violence'. Nonviolence

is not just a protest strategy, but a whole vision of what life, the economy and the polity should be.

III.2.5. Contributions by religions to peace-building

Cynthia Sampson has identified four approaches or areas of action for religious institutions involved in peace-building,[13] which are endorsed by Stein Villumstad and Religions for Peace:

- *Education* includes nonviolence training for use in confrontational stages of conflict. Conflict transformation training is needed in hot conflicts and in post-conflict phases. One segment of the latter is 'preparing people for peace'.
- *Advocacy* is historically known through Gandhi's movement. Examples of it include the role played by religious institutions during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the role of the churches in the People Power Revolution of the Philippines, and the efforts of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum in the country's peace process.
- *Religious actors* can successfully play intermediary roles. The World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches mediated a peace accord for Sudan in 1972. The role of St. Egidio in settling the civil war in Mozambique is well known. The mediation by the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone contributed to the country's peace accord in 1999.
- *Observation* provides a watchful physical presence intended to discourage violence, corruption, human rights violations and other threatening and undesirable behaviour. Religious bodies and religiously affiliated humanitarian and human rights organisations are present in most conflicts in the world. Examples of observation include providing humanitarian assistance, monitoring human rights and observing elections. Civilian peacekeeping teams are a more active form of observation. Religious 'peace teams' are in place in a number of conflict areas, including Central America and the Middle East.

Douglas Johnston reported on 'interreligious action teams' ready to be deployed, whose members either share or deeply understand the beliefs at stake, and provided several examples of 'faith-based diplomacy'. In Sudan, links of trust were established with the Islamic regime and a meeting of 30 religious leaders, Muslim and Christian, was convened. It was the fist time in many years that leaders form the north and south of the country spoke to each other from the heart. Each day would begin with prayers from both the Qur'an and the Bible, and a 'prayer team' was flown in from the US with the sole purpose of fasting and praying during the meeting, thereby improving its chances for success. According to Douglas Johnston, 'even the most hard-boiled Muslim politicians open up when they see that you respect deeply their belief'. Another example concerned Pakistan, where, in partnership with a Muslim group, they tried to stimulate reform in the madrasas (Muslim schools), which after their peak of high learning in the Middle Ages have often gone back (partly because of the influence of colonialism) to the mere memorisation of the Qur'an. The aim was to empower them to develop their own reforms, and it was crucial to remind them of their very glorious past. As in other examples given at the Congress, the door was opened through genuine respect for the other.

From his extensive experience in conflict transformation, Stein Villumstad ventured to suggest a number of conclusions:[14]

- If religion is not at the heart of the conflict, tensions between the religious communities may be overcome in a common search for the greater good.
- A common platform of explicitly stated, deeply held and widely shared values may serve as a strong instrument for joint action in conflict situations.
- Religious communities in search of peace should not primarily engage in philosophical

13 Cynthia Sampson, 'Religion and Peacebuilding', in Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques, ed. by I. William Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen, US Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., 1997.

14 Stein Villumstad, 'Mobilising Religions and Religious Institutions for Conflict Transformation', text of his presentation at this Congress, Barcelona, December 18, 2006.

or theological dialogue. Rather, they should use dialogue as a platform for joint action.
- Religious leaders seem to have the best chances of influencing political and military conflicts by staying within their primary religious mandate. Their credibility and legitimacy seem to be bolstered by coherent words and deeds within this mandate. Individual religious leaders may be respected politicians. As a group, however, religious leaders do not seem to have strong political credibility. Their ability to mobilise their respective faith communities for peace counts more than their ability to act as 'diplomats' towards the parties involved in the conflict.
- Key individuals who hold both secular and religious authority can be effective resources in bridging divides.
- Governments may overlook individual religious leaders and communities, but when they unite in search for peace, governments are encouraged and pushed to take their initiatives seriously.
- Symbolic actions (explicitly religious or not) are powerful catalysts of peace. These actions need to be contextualised and followed up by tangible efforts to alleviate the suffering of the victims of conflict.

II.2.6. Social cohesion through the nurturing of identities

Participants repeatedly emphasised how conflict has to be *prevented* by creating social cohesion, rather than waiting to act when a conflict arises. Desmond Cahill described some prevention strategies used in Australia: community policing (in each community there are two multicultural police officers who partake in key cultural events, like the end of Ramadan), the Muslim Youth Employment Programme (given that this group was particularly affected by unemployment) and a programme to educate immigrants about how a multicultural society works.

Phil Sumner spoke about three key strands in the work for community cohesion: *identity*, *engagement* and *equality*, noting that, by addressing identity properly, 'one also partly addresses the other two'. For instance, in education, 'if there is a failure to nurture necessary identities through the mission statements adopted by schools, through the delivery of every curriculum area and through the provision of role models who share those identities, equal access to achievement is denied.'

In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison told the story of an African-American girl growing up in the 1930s in a dysfunctional family. This girl experienced self-hate in a world that had led her to believe that to be valued one has to be fair-skinned and blue-eyed like Shirley Temple. Nurturing identities is crucial. The well-known psychologist Carl Rogers wrote about the 'self-concept', its importance for education, and how this 'self-concept' is affected, both consciously and subconsciously, simply by living in a particular society, and by the many messages that spark a process of self-comparison and self-evaluation. A black British clinical psychologist, Jocelyn Maxime, has carried out research showing that children of African descent, whose ethnic identities are not nurtured through their schooling, lose motivation for education and lack of a sense of identity and self-respect, which results in poorer performance at school. In the words of Phil Sumner:

'For people to enter into healthy relationships requires the ability to believe that they are loveable. If a person's self-esteem is low, then he or she either avoids entering into a relationship or tries to control the relationship to prevent getting hurt. The same applies to cultural and religious communities. For there to be good relations between communities, each community has to believe that it is highly estimable. Then, as bridges are built, there have to be good foundations on each side. People from both cultures need to know who they are and be proud of who they are.'

In Oldham, there has been a successful effort to nurture ethnic and religious identities in the educational system: 'We gave time to lead practitioners in each curriculum area specifically to develop lesson plans and resources which their colleagues could use to nurture different religious and ethnic identities. In Oldham, we have annual teacher development days according to curriculum area,

at which each secondary school teacher must be present... We have also put schools in contact with imams and priests, who have good relationships with each other. For them to deliver assemblies together in schools is, in itself, a statement of respect for each other's faiths that nurtures the identities of both Muslims and Christians. Employing mentors from the different ethnic and religious communities, especially when there are few, if any, teachers from those communities, provides necessary role models.'

Mario Giro has made a distinction between the universality advocated by religions (in which identity and difference should be preserved) and the *homologation* that is often promoted today, which finds its terrible epitome in ethnic cleansing.[15] The homologation of the world under the cultural standards of modern Western culture also results in what Raimon Panikkar calls the 'inferiority complex' that most traditional cultures feel towards the mighty globalising Western culture.[16]

There is a subtle contemporary assumption that cultural diversity (particularly in its more festive and folkloric aspects) can be tolerated and even promoted but, when it comes to seeing things as they really are, modern Western culture, with its science and technology, is the one to call the shots. This subtle assumption reinforces the 'inferiority complex' and the lack of self-esteem that many traditional cultures and religions feel today. Towards the end of her address, Marguerite Barankitse spoke of the need to regain our dignity and self-esteem. This was also emphasised by other speakers: it is an essential part, for instance, of the work towards *Swaraj* (self-rule) advocated by Rajiv Vora. Marguerite Barankitse's example, among others, seems to imply that the more we practice compassion and love the more we regain the dignity of our true nature, which she expressed in these words: 'We are all princes and princesses. We have been created in the image of God. No one can take our crown from us.' It seemed to be implicit in many points made at the Congress that this 'We are all princes and princesses' applies not just to each of us as individuals, but also to every genuine cultural and religious tradition.

Another unfortunate assumption is that identities are single and monolithic. In fact, diversity exists not only *between* us but also *within* us. We all have several identities whose prominence depends on the language we are speaking (if we are multilingual) or the professional or social context we happen to be in. This nurturing of identities is not meant to solidify rigid, exclusivist, either-or identities, but identities that in their healthy state are flexible, permeable, ever-evolving and willing to coexist. Rajiv Vora explained that in traditional India (as in most traditional societies) every person had multiple identities, each fulfilling a different role in the community and allowing people to be interrelated at multiple levels. Under the influence of modern Western culture, 'all these links were usurped. We became individual citizens, not interdependent anymore.' The abstract protection of the state cannot compensate the loss of a living sense of interdependence in a diverse community, argued Rajiv Vora. Xavier Sàez provided examples of how people's multiple identities create community links: a white man and a black man sharing their identity as supporters of the same football team; or two mothers, one Catholic and the other Muslim, reading books together to their children in the initiative Llegim Junts ('Let's Read Together'). Religious identities have come to be seen as mutually exclusive in the West, but traditionally that hasn't been the case in Asia, where a single same family often partakes in different creeds for different purposes. One example of the permeability of religious identities is the fact, reported by André Porto, that most Brazilian Catholics believe in reincarnation.

Interreligious and intercultural understanding, like all mutual respect, is not possible when one of the partners feels inferior. It is only truly possible when both partners are grounded on an inner feeling of dignity and self-esteem. In the words of Rajiv Vora, 'the human being has a calling to subli-

15 'Mediació i religió', Dialogal, Barcelona, 20 (winter 2006), p. 15.

16 For Panikkar, even the very concepts on which we base our science, like space, time, energy and matter, are culturally Western. Therefore, Western understanding of reality shouldn't be imposed over that of traditional cultures on the assumption that ours is 'true' and theirs is 'unscientific'. Like Mario Giro, at the last minute, Raimon Panikkar was unable to attend the Congress, but his ideas were cited on several occasions.

mate his identity and at the same time regain the power of his or her identity.' To quote the concluding remarks of Phil Sumner: 'Diversity is a growing reality for our towns and cities. A secularist response that denies the relevance of religion or culture will undermine social cohesion. By understanding and affirming the necessary and valid identities of all those who make up our communities, we enable engagement, address inequalities and so create social cohesion.'

II.3. THE NEED FOR NEW WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING

II.3.1. Conflicts arise from within our minds

In the closing ceremony, Brigitte Colin quoted Article 1 of the UNESCO Constitution: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.' A recurrent theme of the Congress was that we need new theoretical and practical approaches, including new ways of thinking and new ways of understanding. Shabnam Olinga stated that 'the crises we are now encountering are interrelated aspects of a universal spiritual crisis'; the implication is that we need to look into our deepest convictions (explicitly spiritual or not) in order to address this crisis. Michael Millward pointed out that there are plenty of theories and strategies at the UN and that practical approaches must now become the priority. Nevertheless, these approaches cannot truly be new without an awareness of their underlying beliefs and assumptions. For instance, as pointed out by Michael Millward himself, the way 'cultural diversity' is used in most of the literature 'stems from a Western view of culture as separate from nature', a view with which most cultures wouldn't agree. Bishop Ochola showed, during both his presentation and his closing keynote speech, a fivefold image of how actions are ultimately shaped by our perceptions (graphically associating these five steps with each of the fingers of his left hand): perceptions beget beliefs, beliefs beget values, values beget attitudes, and attitudes beget actions. Shabnam Olinga added that there is a 'growing realisation that we must change our attitudes and values before we can change our behaviour'.

In his contribution, Millward stated that 'we need to reopen inquires into the mechanisms of mutual understanding' and to 'think outside the box' of our current assumptions. Specifically, for instance, he questioned whether our traditional, Platonic, notion of dialogue is the most appropriate. Even if reliance on *logos* often guarantees understanding, this traditional form of dialogue invokes fixed positions and orchestrated confron-

tations, and can easily be misused. It is relevant to mention here Raimon Panikkar's notion of a *dialogical dialogue*, the aim of which is not to win or to convince but to search together 'in order to reach that dialogical, translogical realm of the heart' that allows for the emergence of a shared understanding 'in which we may commune'.[17] As Jean-Marc Aveline explained, 'dialogue should have no requirements', and should arise from an 'ascesis of listening' and from an attitude of humbleness: 'we must be humbled when faced with the truth, with God, with the mystery of being human'.

This new understanding may need to go beyond the usual quantitative tools of the social sciences. Rajiv Vora spoke of the 'intellectual corruption' of modern institutions, which are unable to attend to the real needs of human beings, and described as 'folly' the fact that people's needs are often regarded as exclusively material, thus denying them their spiritual identity. For institutions that, as Rajiv Vora put it, are often intrinsically despiritualising, this can be difficult to perceive.

Pipob Udomittipong explained that, according to the Buddhist tradition, conflicts arise from within our minds, and to understand our minds we have to become aware of the *three marks of existence* that all things and experiences ultimately share: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) and *anatta* (not-self). Another key concept of Buddhism to which Udomittipong referred to is *interrelatedness* or *interdependence* (*pratîtyasamutpâda*): a greater awareness of our interrelatedness is a crucial factor in creating social cohesion. This awareness of our interdependence as members of the human family and dwellers in the delicate balance of the Earth's biosphere is an example of the 'ties that unite us in diversity' that Michael Millward emphasised as a new standpoint for mutual understanding.

Shabnam Olinga quoted a powerful statement by Einstein:[18] 'The release of atomic power has changed everything except our way of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled disaster... The solution to this problem lies in the heart of mankind.' Pipob Udomittipong also mentioned a metaphor by the Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, in which anger is compared to a closed flower. The flower will bloom when sunlight penetrates deeply enough into the flower. If one keeps breathing and concentrating, mindfulness will penetrate the anger. The flower cannot resist opening up under the sunshine. In the same way, Thich Nhat Hanh argues, anger will be dissolved sooner or later if one shines enough compassion and understanding on it. Compassion is not something to be practiced on special occasions, but throughout our daily life. Finally, Pipob Udomittipong explained how according to his teacher, Sulak Sivaraksa, the Buddhist term *abhaya* (fearlessness) is also equivalent to forgiveness. A long quote from Sulak Sivaraksa followed: 'Buddhism teaches me to forgive the so-called enemy. Indeed, without an "enemy" we can never improve our minds to be calm in the face of difficult situations... We must cultivate the realisation that the real enemies are within us: greed, hatred and delusion. In other words, external enemies are really a projection of inner fears. Once these internal enemies are overcome we will not perceive external enemies. All sentient beings will be our friends. There is no such thing as a nonrelational "I"; we are all interrelated and depend on one another. We should be grateful to all sentient beings, not only human beings. Without trees, we would not be able to survive either. Hence, I have learnt to be grateful to all, and it is beginning to pay off.'

Rajiv Vora asked the participants in a workshop what experiences in their lives had given them the deepest joy and contentment: they were all altruistic experiences, aiming at the welfare of others; none had anything to do with the person's self-interest or ego, or with the gratification of senses and desires. These experiences strongly suggest that human nature is intrinsically nonviolent, aimed at giving and loving, compassion and sacrifice, brotherhood and sisterhood. Our fulfilment and joy arise from working for others and for justice, and by going beyond our own senses, ego and self-interest. Rajiv Vora noted that, in the last

17 Raimon Panikkar, Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics, Bangalore: ATC, 1983, p. 9.

18 Or at least widely attributed to him. There are several versions of the quote, but no source has been identified.

six months before his assassination, Gandhi said many times 'Don't call me Mahatma until I've reduced myself to zero... until the bullet pierces my chest and there is no other word on my lips than the name of the Lord' (Gandhi indeed exclaimed 'Oh, Rama!' when the bullet came, as he had foreseen).

II.3.2. Words shape our awareness

Patrice Brodeur referred to 'the importance of the words we use', given that language is the vehicle of history and genealogy. A statistic had been given that '42% of the Australian population are either immigrants or children of immigrants', implying that the white, non-immigrant Australians (more than 50% of the population) are the true Australian natives, and therefore obliterating the truly native, aboriginal Australians. Patrice Brodeur used this example to emphasise that words shape our awareness and must therefore be chosen carefully.

The concern about using the right words was also made explicit by other participants. For instance, the British priest Phil Sumner pointed out that when we speak of granting equal rights to citizens '*regardless* of their race, religion, etc.', the implicit assumption is that the diversity of races and religions amounts to a problem. If we value diversity, it would be much more coherent to say '*respecting* their race, religion, etc.'. More poignantly, it was noted how misleading the expression 'Islamic terrorism' can be, and how a systematic distortion of the realities of Islam (and the scapegoating of Muslims) has been taking place since 9/11.

Xavier Sàez distinguished between 'multicultural', i.e. any situation involving the presence of several cultures, and 'intercultural', where the encounter between cultures does not obliterate the host culture, which gives a local context and a reference point for social cohesion. This latter approach is the one favoured by the Municipal Assembly of Religions that Sàez chairs in Lleida. As noted by Phil Sumner, the British debate on multiculturalism has led the two most prominent British politicians to misleadingly imply that Britain is the only civilised country in the world. Gordon Brown defined 'Britishness' as 'liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all', while Blair defined it as 'the right to be different, the duty to integrate' (it was ironically noted that countries that have experienced the annual influx of British holidaymakers wouldn't tend to associate the latter half of this statement with the term 'British').

One of the last plenaries, chaired by Fèlix Martí, was about *interconvictional* mediation methodologies. It had been argued that *interconvictional* is a much more encompassing (and therefore better) term than *interreligious* or *intercultural*, given that everyone has convictions, no matter how much they may disregard religions or feel disaffected by their own culture. Patrice Brodeur suggested instead another word he had been using with the same aim: *interworldview* (though he acknowledged that German speakers didn't much care for its German counterpart, *Interweltanschauung*). Fèlix Martí felt that *interworldview* is too conceptual, missing the crucial embodied and experiential aspect (which in German could be rendered as *Interwelterfahrung*; another suggestion was *interawareness*, conveying our mutual awareness of each other). Others preferred *interworldview* because of its link with our visual experience, given that vision is the most active and dynamic of our senses.

II.3.3. Real understanding and genuine respect

Throughout the Congress, and since the welcome address by Unescocat Director Agustí Colomines, participants stressed that we need to move beyond the notion of 'tolerance'. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*[19] gives three definitions of the verb tolerate: to 'allow the existence or occurrence' of something one dislikes or disagrees with (this, as noted by Agustí Colomines, is closer to pity than to justice), to 'endure (someone or something unpleasant) with forbearance' and to 'be capable of continued exposure to (a drug, toxin, etc.) without adverse reaction'. Therefore, what we tolerate

19 We adapt into English an example that was originally given from a standard Catalan dictionary.

is commonly understood as dislikeable, unpleasant, even as a toxin, all in keeping with the original Latin meaning of *tolerare*: to endure. If tolerance is what we have to apply to religious and cultural diversity, it follows that this diversity is seen as a problem, not as a strength and a source of enrichment. As a participant from Northern Ireland put it, 'tolerance' is a line that we throw to those who differ from us, but a line much too thin: it may hold under easy circumstances but is prone to break as soon as some stress arises. Yehuda Stolov stated that rather than tolerance we need *friendship* (Travis Rejman had reminded us that 'you can trust a friend you don't agree with'; there can be trust and friendship in spite of specific disagreements). Other participants spoke of the need to move past tolerance towards *genuine respect* (Douglas Johnston) and *real understanding* (Dena Merriam). As an example of this need for respect, several speakers mentioned the tactless statement of the current Pope during a recent visit to India: 'I came to India to plant the Cross'. This was felt as disrespectful and neocolonial by the majority of the local population. Similarly, a large interreligious summit that was being organised had to be cancelled due to the Vatican's insistence that 'you cannot treat religions as if they are equal'—a claim to superiority obviously incompatible with genuine respect.

Tolerance is only a shallow form of the deep, genuine respect for other cultures we need today. To this shallow form of interculturality also belongs the occasional appreciation of the folklore, songs and colourful dances of other cultures. On the other hand, a respectful introduction of genuine foreign celebrations in our communities can be a decisive agent of intercultural cohesion, as exemplified by Oldham's Festival of Lights, discussed in Section II.2.1.3.

II.3.4. Epistemologies of the heart

This is an unusual subject in the mainstream scientific approach to social science, and yet it was present throughout the Congress and was presented both by activists and academics. It may be that this subject sounds unusual because it is a powerful reality that we have been missing. From an academic perspective, Patrice Brodeur argued that we need epistemological pluralism, including more than purely conceptual approaches. As he argued, the unity we seek in mediation is not an affair of the mind but of the heart, a kind of spontaneous deep compassion like the empathy we feel when we communicate with a baby.

A simple but telling example of the contrast between the usual Western conceptual approach and more traditional, feeling-based ways was given by Desmond Cahill: in the US-China negotiations of the 1970s, the US representatives wanted long talks and short coffee breaks, whereas the Chinese wanted short talks and long coffee breaks, as they felt that by getting to know each other better at a personal level (knowing about each other's children, for instance) the negotiations would be more smooth and effective.

Interestingly, the words of Einstein quoted above put the key locus of change not in the mind but in the heart: 'The solution [to our current predicament] lies in the heart of mankind.' Another example was provided by Rajiv Vora. Gandhi's disciple Vinova Bhave travelled throughout India trying to get landowners to share some of their land with landless peasants. He would aim to find the key to the *heart* of the person he wanted to convince.

Marguerite Barankitse gave the first keynote address of the Congress. She spoke from the heart and asked the audience to listen with the heart. It is her conviction that social cohesion 'comes from the bottom of our heart', and that 'there is only one [true] religion: that of love, of the heart'. Her work towards healing the psychological wounds created by the war in Burundi (during which, on one occasion, 72 people she was protecting were murdered in front of her) is based on a compassion that stems from the heart, as exemplified in her book *La haine n'aura pas le dernier mot* ('Hatred Won't Have the Last Word'). She took Hutu children to meet those who had murdered their parents. The door at first wouldn't open. Then, those who had committed the crimes, unable to face the children directly, would ask Barankitse to ask the children for forgiveness on their behalf.

Some time later the wounds had healed and they were building houses together. Barankitse herself said to the man who had burnt her aunts alive: 'Despite all, you are still my brother.' Barankitse's love and compassion are nurtured by her deep religious faith (as is the case for another extraordinarily compassionate woman, Aung San Suu Kyi, mentioned during the same plenary; the power of prayer, particularly powerful when done in groups rather than individually, was mentioned by several participants). They were also empowered by what she calls 'the heart of the mother', as 'the vocation of a mother is to love all'. Other speakers, like Dena Merriam, agreed on the need to 'bring out the heart of the mother'. Barankitse is regarded as the mother of 10,000 children (the number of people she has sheltered in her Shalom House is actually higher),[20] a whole new generation educated in forgiveness and deep respect for the other.

Rationalism has both benefits and dangers, as Gandhi saw and as Rajiv Vora reminded us. It seems clear that what we need is neither mindless passion nor dry grey concepts, but conceptual analyses balanced and guided by the intuitive knowledge that emanates from the heart. Closely related is the need to move from literalistic to imaginative approaches.

II.3.5. From literalism to the empowerment of imagination

Literalism (interpreting things in a strictly literal way, with no awareness of the context and no imagination) can be seen as the key tenet of fundamentalism. Jean-Marc Aveline, speaking as a Christian, said that he often feels more like a humanist than a literalist Christian. All open-minded religious believers tend to feel closer to open-minded believers of other creeds than to the literalist believers of their own religion. But as Patrice Brodeur argued, literalism is not exclusive to religious fundamentalisms. So-called scientism, the pretence of explaining everything with the tools and assumptions of today's mainstream scientific worldview, is a form of literalism in that it reduces reality to only that which can be objectified, implicitly discrediting as unscientific or superstitious any views to the contrary. There are both religious and secular fundamentalisms, both coinciding in their absolute positions and in that they objectify and literalise reality. Instead of literalism, we need pluralistic, open-minded and imaginative approaches. To foster social cohesion, as Patrice Brodeur said, 'using imagination is crucial'.

II.3.6. From fear to fearlessness

On the first day of the Congress, it was argued that the most fundamental enemy of human beings is fear. Pipob Udomittipong commented on Aung San Suu Kyi's nonviolent struggle and her daily meditation practice of loving kindness and compassion even to her oppressors. In particular, he referred to her book *Freedom from Fear*, which includes the famous statement: 'It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.' Rajiv Vora spoke about the core of Gandhi's thought contained in the *Hind Swaraj*.[21] One of the most unknown features of Gandhi's thought is the fact that he saw fear and cowardice as even worse than violence. For Gandhi, in the words of Rajiv Vora, 'cowardice is the worst violence, because it is a repression of your own truth, which is God's truth; to submit to cowardice is a betrayal of God.' Praising Tibet's nonviolent struggle for its own *Swaraj* (in Tibetan, *rang-wang*), Rajiv Vora added: 'compassion comes when fear is conquered and a state of fearlessness is attained. The state of fearlessness is the foundation of *Swaraj*.'

André Porto made a call to 'inspire the hero within us'. Fearlessness was also advocated by Bishop Ochola at the end of his closing speech through a fable about a hare, an elephant and a tortoise. The hare represented the 1% of humanity that is manipulative and power-hungry, triggering

20 Marguerite Barankitse uses the term Shalom in a universal and not exclusively Jewish sense; her faith is deeply Christian.

21 Swaraj literally translates as 'self-rule', and comes very close to Raimon Panikkar's notion of ontonomy.

most of the conflicts and injustices that surround us. The elephant represented the fearful and accommodating 98% of us that believe everything they are told and don't dare challenge established structures and beliefs. Finally, the tortoise represented the 1% of humanity that is brave and fearless and therefore most effective in triggering positive changes. This was an unexpected way of restating the call to fearlessness that had been made during the Congress: a call to be true to our deepest convictions, to be true, as emphasised above, to our heart.

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SPEAKERS

Jean-Marc Aveline

Jean-Marc Aveline is a diocesan priest who founded the Institute of the Science and Theology of Religions in Marseille. He is the director of the Mediterranean Catholic Institute and teaches Theology of Religions at the Theology Faculty of the Catholic University of Lyon. He is the author of *l'Enjeu christologique en théologie des religions* (2003) and has organised and directed interfaith mediation courses.

Marguerite Barankitse

Marguerite Barankitse is the coordinator of Shalom House in Burundi. Known as the 'woman of 10,000 children' and 'Maggie the Mad', she has extensive experience in conflict management in her country. In 1993, she founded Shalom House, which has provided care for 10,000 children. This shelter, where children of all ages live together without discrimination, has enjoyed great support in Burundi, a country with various religions and ethnic groups. She was named Doctor Honoris Causa in 2004 by the Catholic University of Louvain and has received various prizes for her defence of children's rights. In 2004, she was awarded the World's Children's Prize, also known as the 'Children's Nobel'. In 1998, the French government honoured her with the Human Rights Award on the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Patrice Brodeur

Patrice Brodeur is a professor in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at Montreal University. He holds the Canadian Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism and Globalisation. Brodeur has studied and contributed to Canada's outstanding tradition of conflict prevention and preservation of peace. He is developing a theory on the sharing of university space, based on the role and impact of the three transnational university networks influenced by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the Canadian specialist on Islam, and by the globalisation process since the end of the modern age and the beginning of the postmodern age. In addition, Brodeur is developing a theory on the sharing of sacred space (i.e. places shared by different religious groups). In his work, he focuses on conflicts related to Jerusalem and highlights the most effective research-action methods for solving similar conflicts. Finally, Brodeur is developing a theory on the applied university study of religions, including the role played by the multifaceted interfaith dialogue for peace.

Desmond Cahill

Professor Cahill teaches intercultural studies at the School of International and Community Studies of RMIT University (Australia). He was the first professor of intercultural studies at an Australian university. He has worked at RMIT University (including previously at Coburg State College and the Phillip Institute of Technology) since 1979. He designed and directed until 1991 the Associate Diploma of Ethnic Studies, which began in 1981, and the Bachelor of Arts in Multicultural Studies, which began in 1986. In 1997 and 1998, together with Professor Michael Singh, he developed, as a partial replacement course, the undergraduate programme in International Studies, which he directed from 1999 to 2002. The programme is built around the three constructs of (1) global-local interconnectedness, (2) cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and (3) international and cross-cultural professional practice.

Jean-Marc Charron

Jean-Marc Charron was the dean of the Faculty of Theology at Montreal University in Quebec (Canada) from 1997 to 2005. He is now a professor in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, where he conducts research on psychoanalysis and theology. He is interested in practical theology, psychology of religion, religious psychohistory, religion and education, psychology and spirituality. His work has been instrumental in helping the government of Quebec develop a religious education framework. Since 2000, he has chaired the Religious Affairs Committee of the Department of Education. He is a board member of the International Conference of Theological Centres.

Brigitte Colin

Since 1995, Brigitte Colin has been a programme specialist in charge of intersectoral urban projects at the International Migrations and Multicultural Policies Sec-

tion in UNESCO's Division of Social Sciences, Research and Policy. She is also works in the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme. With a degree in architecture, she joined UNESCO in 1982 in the Culture Sector for the Arabian region, working on preservation projects for historic monuments and towns, conducting archaeological research and providing technical assistance in museum development. She is co-leader of the UNESCO and UN-HABITAT project on the 'Right to the City'.

José María Contreras

José María Contreras is the director of the Pluralism and Cohabitation Foundation. He is also a member of the Religious Freedom Advisory Committee and an associate professor in state ecclesiastic law at the Pablo de Olavide University in Seville. He is the author of books and monographs on religious minorities, culture and basic human rights. He has also been editor-in-chief of the journal of the Spanish Society of Sciences of Religions. He sits on the academic board of the Bartolomé de las Casas Institute for Human Rights and the editorial committee of the journal *Laicidad y libertades*.

Francesc Guillén

Francesc Guillén is the head of projects and organisation at the Secretariat of Public Security in the Internal Affairs Department of the Catalan Government. He was head of research at the Catalan Police School from 1992 to 2004. He has been a part-time lecturer in constitutional law at the Autonomous University of Barcelona since 1990 and an advisor in constitutional law at the Open University of Catalonia since 1999. He has participated in several European projects related to minorities and the struggle against discrimination (NAPAP, PAVEMENT and TRANSFER). He is a member of the European group 'Policing a Multicultural Society' and of the European Police and Human Rights Programme. He has participated in Council of Europe missions in Georgia, Moldavia, Albania, Armenia and Serbia.

Douglas Johnston

Douglas Johnston is the president and founder of the International Centre for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD). He led the seven-year study that produced the book *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, published in 1994 by Oxford University Press and now in its 13th printing and second foreign-language translation. This book offers a methodology whereby religion becomes not only part of the resolution of identity conflicts that lie beyond the framework of traditional diplomacy, but also a very powerful force for peace. Dr. Johnston has edited and authored other books: *Foreign Policy into the 21st Century: the US Leadership Challenge* (CSIS, 1996); and *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (Oxford University Press, 2003). Dr. Johnston's hands-on experience in the political/military arena coupled with his work in preventive diplomacy has guided the work of ICRD since its inception. His deep interest in religion and conflict resolution stems from his extensive involvement with the National Prayer Breakfast fellowship.

Fèlix Martí

Chairman of UNESCO seminars on the contribution of religions to the culture of peace (1993 and 1994) and global ethics (1998), Fèlix Martí was the driving force behind the Declaration on the Contribution by Religions to the Culture of Peace, signed by the leaders of the world's major religious traditions (1994). He worked on peace initiatives in the Sudan promoted by UNESCO and the United Nations Development Programme (1995 and 1996), and was a participant in the peace mediations on the Sahara and Palestinian conflicts. He was also adviser to the International Forum of Cultures Barcelona 2004, in the fields of interreligious dialogue and linguistic diversity. He was promoter of the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue (1998) and is a member of the editorial board of the interreligious magazine Dialogal, which was launched in March 2002 by the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue. He received the Sant Jordi Medal of the Catalan Government, in 2002.

Dena Merriam

As the founder and convener of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, Ms. Merriam has worked to engage women in peace-building activities in conflict and post-conflict regions around the world. She has organised major international interfaith events and has built up a global network of well-known women spiritual leaders.

Currently, Ms. Merriam is working with the United Nations to organise a series of regional youth leadership summits around the world to mobilise young people to initiate efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Dena Merriam is a partner and vice chairperson of the Ruder Finn Group, a global communications company. She holds a master's degree from Columbia University and has served on the advisory boards of the Harvard University Centre for the Study of World Religions, the International Centre for Religion and Diplomacy and the Manitou Foundation.

Michael T.L. Millward

He is the secretary of the UNESCO General Conference and the director of the UNESCO World Reports Unit. Previously, he was the interim director of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe. Also at UNESCO, he was the director of the Executive Office of the Natural Sciences Sector and was engaged in other interim assignments, the senior executive officer of the Office of the Director-General, the secretary of the Directorate and a liaison officer of the NGO Section of the External Relations and Cooperation Sector. He was also the assistant executive director of the International Council for Science (ICSU).

Macleord Baker Ochola

As the vice chairman of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) and a retired Anglican bishop for Kitgum Diocese (Uganda), he has had a personal and very prominent role in the negotiations between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. He has consistently opposed the genocide that has been occurring in northern Uganda for the last 20 years. This genocide has been committed by both the LRA and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) and exacerbated by the many deaths caused by inhuman conditions in refugee camps where diseases and malnutrition were endemic. The LRA has used over 30,000 children as sex slaves and killing machines. Crime, including rape, has unfortunately been very common among the Acholi and Lango people. Macleord Baker Ochola has described his experience of sitting face-to-face with the rebels, trying to initiate peace talks. He has argued for granting LRA members amnesty, even though an LRA land mine killed his wife and LRA rebels raped his daughter, who later committed suicide. He led an Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) delegation on a solidarity visit to Sudan to try to engage African religious leaders in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts. He received the Paul Carus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Interreligious Movement in 2004 during the 4th Parliament of the World's Religions.

Shabnam Olinga

Shabnam Olinga of Uganda is a member of the Bahá'í faith, a social worker and a master's student in peace and conflict studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. She is an activist in the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and a member of the Pamoja Cooperation Circle, which in turn belongs to the United Religions Initiative (URI). She is also a founding member of the African Network of Professionals for Conflict Management and Peace, whose mission is to empower people throughout Africa with information and skills for peace-building and peaceful conflict management. Her working method involves participating in public dialogues and various interreligious gatherings where she contributes to the process of mediating interreligious conflicts in urban areas by sharing the best practices of the Bahá'í faith.

André Porto

André Porto of Brazil is 35 years old and lives in Rio de Janeiro, where he is a social and interfaith activist. He has served as the volunteer director of the Rio Interreligious Movement (MIR) since its creation at the Earth Summit in 1992. He has been the Latin American coordinator of the United Religions Initiative (URI) since 2000 and the coordinator of the Religion and Peace project at Viva Rio since its inception in 1993. He is also an astrologer and photographer. His main interests are spiritual citizenship and strategies for bridging social and spiritual movements. He sees his spiritual path as service to creation.

Fazal Rahim

Born in Pakistan, Fazal Rahim has lived in Oldham since 1986, running a number of successful businesses. He represents the community on the management board of Single Regeneration Budget Round 6 (SRB6) and sits on the management boards of a number of local organisations. He directs a local taxi company, which gives him insight into what 'people on the ground' are thinking in times of stress in the Borough of Oldham. He has been the co-ordinator of the Oldham Interfaith Forum since April 2003, where his project was finalist in the Oldham Equality and Diversity Awards for promoting diversity, equality and interfaith relations. His work with the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Jewish faith communities involves organising events such as 'Any Questions on Faith?', a panel discussion featuring members of the above faiths, and visits to places of worship for schoolchildren, groups and organisations. His other achievements with the Interfaith Forum include the successful Festival of Lights, now in its fourth year, where a crowd of 500 celebrates events on the Oldham religious calendar. With Mediation Northern Ireland, he trained as a mediator with a group of 30 people from Oldham and now works to build good relations and mediate among groups or organisations.

Travis Rejman

Travis Rejman is the founding executive director of the Goldin Institute and the Partner Cities Network. Prior to creating the Goldin Institute, he served as a director on the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions, heading the programmes for the 1999 (Cape Town) and 2004 (Barcelona) Parliaments. Prior to working in the interreligious field, he was active in the environmental movement, focusing on coalition building, grassroots education and civic engagement. He has conducted on-site consultative visits and worked on-location in over twenty Partner Cities in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and North and South America. He currently lives in Chicago with his wife, Gia, and son, Maxwell.

Francesc Rovira

Francesc Rovira i Llopart (Vilafranca del Penedès, 1972) graduated in philosophy from the Autonomous University of Barcelona and also studied at the University of Wales. Since 1997, he has worked in the Interfaith Dialogue Department at Unescocat, where he was second secretary and coordinator of UNESCO Association activities for interfaith dialogue from 2000 to 2005. He was also in charge of communication activities for the Parliament of the World's Religions (2002-2004). He has been chief editor of the Magazine *Dialogal*, launched in 2002, and coordinator of the Interfaith Centre in Barcelona, which was transferred from the Barcelona City Council to Unescocat in 2005. He is also currently working with UNESCO and UN-HABITAT on urban policies and law in the city. He participates in the Asia-Europe Forum meetings on matters related to interfaith dialogue. He is a board member of the European Section of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. He has written several books and many articles about interreligious dialogue and religious diversity and is co-editor of the book *Diàleg entre religions* ('Dialogue among Religions').

Xavier Sàez

Xavier Sàez is the Deputy Mayor of the Lleida City Council, where he has also been the head of the Culture, Sports and Civil Rights Department. Since 1995, he has been the spokesman for the political party Esquerra Republicana in the City Council. He has a degree in Catalan and works as a secondary school teacher. He was the coordinator of the Secondary School Educational Programme of the Catalan Language Teaching Service in Lleida. He has also written several pedagogical and scientific books and articles on education and has received several awards for his research and essays. Since 1985, he has been a member of the International Association of Catalan Language and Literature, and is also a member of the ecological association IPCENA. He is a founding member and patron of the Josep Irla Foundation and a member of the Catalan Language Social Council and the Museums Board of Catalonia. Since 2005, he has chaired the Municipal Assembly of Religions.

Yehuda Stolov

Yehuda Stolov is the Executive Director of the Jerusalem-based Interfaith Encounter Association, which works towards sustainable peace and coexistence by using interfaith encounters to foster respectful and friendly relations between people and communities in the Holy Land and the Middle East. He holds a Ph.D. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is active in many international organisations and initiatives. He is the author of many publications, a well-known public speaker and was awarded the 2006 Prize for Humanity by the Immortal Chaplains Foundation.

Phil Sumner

Phil Sumner has been a priest in Moss Side and Hulme, Manchester, for 25 years. He is currently the parish priest of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Patrick, Oldham. He was the chairman of the National Conference of Priests of England and Wales from 1997 to 2000. He was the first chairman of the Oldham Interfaith Forum, where he now sits on the executive committee. He is a project manager for the Interfaith Development Project in Oldham. He is the chair of the Oldham Community Cohesion Advisory Group and, as such, is an advisor to the executive of Oldham's Local Strategic Partnership in matters of community cohesion. He has a degree in canon law from Ottawa University, where he also completed a master's degree, and he serves as an ecclesiastical judge in the Salford Diocesan Matrimonial Tribunal. He is also one of a team of presenters for the BBC Radio 4 programme *Daily Service*. In February 2006, he was the individual and overall winner of Oldham's first Diversity and Equality Awards. In September 2006, he was named in a British national newspaper as being amongst the top fifty British 'campaigners, thinkers and givers transforming our world' (*The Independent, 'Good List'*, September 1, 2006).

Francesc Torradeflot

Francesc Torradeflot earned a bachelor's degree in the history of religions from the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL), a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and a Ph.D. in theology from the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia. He is a professor at the Centre of Studies on Religious Traditions in Barcelona, the Higher Institute of Religious Studies in Tarragona and at Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona (Master of History of Religions). He is now the secretary of the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue and the chief coordinator of the Interreligious Dialogue Section of Unescocat. He has published several articles and books concerning interreligious issues and theology of religions.

Pipob Udomittipong

Pipob Udomittipong is an activist on a range of issues. He is a member of the Thai steering committee for the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). His formative years were spent with spiritually-based organisations, including the Thai Interreligious Commission for Development and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), working to promote spiritual teachings and practices in social and environmental action. He has also been involved with the No Nukes Asia Forum (NNAF) since its inception and was one of the hosts of its fourth annual meeting in Thailand in 1997. From 1997 to 2000, he was very active in the campaign against the Thai-Burmese gas pipeline. Since then, has worked with Oilwatch, which campaigns against oil investment worldwide. At present, he is the co-founder and a board member of Environmental Litigation and Advocacy for the Wants (EnLAW), which uses litigation as a means of addressing human rights violations and environmental destruction. He is also an advisor to Salween Watch, a coalition of more than 50 civil society and ethnic organisations in Thailand and Burma that campaigns against the construction of a series of hydroelectric dams on the Salween River. He has also worked as an interpreter/translator for various civil society organisations for more than a decade.

Stein Villumstad

As deputy secretary-general of Religions for Peace, Stein Villumstad has extensive and distinguished experience in international development, conflict transformation and human rights. He served as a regional representative for Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) in eastern Africa, where he oversaw development activities in ten countries and managed five regional suboffices. Previ-

ously, he was the assistant secretary-general of Norwegian Church Aid and the head of the Department for Policy and Human Rights. He brings a history of working in partnership with religious communities in conflict and post-conflict situations. He has worked closely with religious leaders in Sierra Leone and Ethiopia- Eritrea in their conflict-transformation efforts. In 1995, Mr. Villumstad became the first co-chair of the Action by Churches Together (ACT International) Executive Committee, charged with coordinating church-based emergency relief for more than one hundred organisations worldwide. Until 2006, he was a member of the Commission on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (WCC). His writings include the book *Reconstruction of Africa: Perspectives from Within and Without* (2005) and a number of articles in periodicals and newspapers. In addition to his bachelor's degree in education, Mr. Villumstad holds a master's degree in international administration from the School for International Training in Vermont, where his thesis focused on policy considerations for nongovernmental organisations involved in humanitarian assistance during conflicts and complex emergencies.

Rajiv Vora

Rajiv Vora is the Asia regional coordinator for Nonviolent Peaceforce. Mr. Vora is a lifelong Gandhian who has devoted his life to nonviolent struggle for social justice and reconciliation. He helped develop the Nonviolent Peaceforce pilot project in Sri Lanka and provides training for the organisation's field-team members there. He also trains and supports Tibetan and Burmese refugees in their nonviolent struggles for justice and works with Muslim leaders to develop nonviolence training for a Shanti Sena (Peace Army) in the Indian Muslim community. Mr. Vora served as co-director of the Gandhi Peace Foundation for over 20 years. He has played a crucial role in the development and application of nonviolence in his home country. He is one of the world's foremost interpreters of Gandhi's seminal work, Hind Swaraj, and is frequently interviewed in the international press.

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Final Report of the International Congress on Religions and Cultural Diversity: Mediation towards Social Cohesion in Urban Areas

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Unescocat defends and promotes the value of cultures specially in the fields of peace, human rights, development, education, sustainability, interreligious dialogue, language diversity and heritage. Unescocat publicizes the programmes and materials elaborated by UNESCO and offers technical support and visibility to the action of UNESCO's civil society channelled through the Catalan networks of UNESCO libraries, chairs, associated schools, associations and clubs.