



INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON RELIGIONS AND MEDIATION IN URBAN AREAS

Lleida, March 28-29 2007
SUMMARY REPORT

Unescocat is an institution created in 1984 to become UNESCO's reference in Catalonia. It maintains official relations with UNESCO and has a consultative status with ECOSOC and with the UN Department of Public Information.

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.



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Matthew Weiner, Interfaith Center of New York



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SUMMARY REPORT

OPENING SESSION

José María Contreras (director, Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia)

There is an increasing awareness in the Spanish government and institutions about the importance of interfaith dialogue and the right to religious freedom to improve dialogue and coexistence among cultures. *Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia* (Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation) was created to fulfil the agreements between the minority confessions in Spain and the Spanish government and to foster religious freedom as a duty of the government, not a privilege of confessions (for instance, the opening of worship places is perceived as a privilege, but it is part of the agreements between government and confessions). Unfortunately, most local authorities avoid the religious perspective in their management of diversity. Lleida is an exception to that.

Rosa Guerreiro (programme specialist in charge of interreligious dialogue at UNESCO Pluralism and Intercultural Dialogue Section)

Urban areas are becoming increasingly intercultural and interfaith. This can be a positive asset but also an obstacle to coexistence. It is necessary to promote an innovative approach to the management of this diversity to combat extremism. All members of a pluralist society should be citizens with the same rights. So, UNESCO insists in the principle of reciprocity and empathy. History shows us that all identities are plural, and we must remember that. It is very important to avoid the temptation of withdrawing into one's community and building barriers, both physical and mental. For that reasons, a network gathering political, religious and educational leaders in front of the challenge of diversity is a necessity.

Josep Florensa (Fundació Viure i Conviure de Caixa Catalunya)

Many current armed conflicts in the world claim to be in the name of God. Religious communities have a very important role in the welcoming of immigrants. Catalonia is a leading country in interreligious dialogue in our context.

Enric Masllorens (president, Unescocat)

Wherever human beings live together, there is conflict. Conflict brings questioning and, consequently, helps us to go further. And wherever conflict exists, mediators are needed. It is very important to work from schools too, educating in choosing and renouncing, two basic attitudes to overcome conflict and achieve coexistence.



Xavier Aluja (Councilor of Civil Rights, Cooperation and Immigration of the City Council of Lleida)

Lleida is receiving a constant flow of newcomers, mainly from different countries of Latin America and Africa, Morocco and Romany. The city council of Lleida works in the promotion of rights (religious rights, linguistic rights, etc.) and duties, but to achieve coexistence it is necessary to go further and work on attitudes. And to do that, mediation is crucial.

EXCHANGING EXPERIENCES AND METHODOLOGIES. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE OF THAILAND (Somboon Chungprampree, International Network of Engaged Buddhists)

Current societies are living a conflict (or crisis) at three different levels:

- The relationship of human beings with themselves: more and more people, especially young people, express an existential void.
- Interpersonal relations: Increasing separation between intellectuals and people without education, between urban and rural people, etc.
- The relationship between human beings and nature: many young people don't have any contact with it.

Thailand, with a Buddhist majority, is also experiencing this crisis, being culturally colonized by the west world. In addition, there are other crisis and conflicts, like prostitution (there are 200.000 prostitutes in Thailand), and a conflict of perception between different ways of interpreting the situation.

Many groups are questioning this situation and proposing alternatives. This is the case of the Wongsanit Ashram (belonging to the Spirit Education Movement), a small community proposing a new way of life. The ashram offers leadership training at the grassroots level in different countries of South-Eastern Asia (ex. a Buddhist-Christian joint project in Burma) and a simple way of life (agricultural work, organic food, no freezer), generating relations of spiritual friendship. The architecture of the ashram contributes to this atmosphere and it is very attractive for young people.

The ashram proposes an alternative education, searching the convergence of modernity and peace and facilitating the dialogue between city and country people, helping people to face the experience of death or taking urban people to the forest, so everyone become aware of both positive and negative aspects of their own life. The ashram also works to create a network in Thailand and neighboring countries with representation of all different social levels and both urban and rural contexts.

About the conflict between Muslim and Buddhists in a region of Thailand where the first have a high presence, it cannot be considered a religious conflict, but a result of the imposition of the Thai over all the other peoples in Thailand (the name "Siam" is much more inclusive than "Thailand"). The ashram is not participating directly in the work to set peace between this two communities, but it is in contact with some NGO on the ground, offering training and workshops. The roots of the conflict are back, in the time of the colonization.



In spite of the corruption and ambition existing in the official Sangha, the ashram tries to have good relations with them.

EXCHANGING EXPERIENCES AND METHODOLOGIES. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE OF NEW YORK (Matthew Weiner, Programme Director of the Interfaith Centre of New York)

The centre was created ten years ago. Obviously, New York, a very religiously complex place where all the world traditions can be found, needed such an institution. But there was no previous scheme to inspire it. The first meetings organized by the centre gathered a number of religious leaders but, in spite of the apparent success, it was noted that all the participants were politically liberal, so there was not so much diversity as it can be expected.

For this reason, more conservative and orthodox people were also invited. However, they were not interested in intellectual debates on issues like peace or conflict mediation. This is why new programs were launched about social concerns to which this people are confronted everyday. At the same time, secular experts on domestic violence, immigration, etc. realized that to develop their work they needed to meet the religious leaders. In that way, religious leaders were able to offer religious training to those secular leaders and social workers that came to train them on “secular” issues. On the other hand, not having only liberal participants, working with people with whom one doesn’t necessarily agree, meant being aware of some differences and it was an important change of paradigm.

A new training program about the court system was offered to religious leaders. They are very interested in this kind of program because they want to solve conflicts in their communities, but doing it inside the system. The program gives them information about mediation centres where it is possible to solve small conflicts, and trains them in listening and in mediation skills. It’s been a great success since the beginning.

The definition of “religious leader” in New York is very wide and diverse. The main objective of the program is capacitating the religious leaders to be the bridge, the mediation between the communities and the court system. At the same time, the program makes possible that the experts and managers of the mediation centres get to be aware of religious diversity, so they can act as a bridge as well, and include religious communities in the court system.

It is interesting to underline that religious leaders have developed their own programs. For example, there is a Muslim group interested in the internal arbitration system that the Jewish community, well established and in good relations with the court system, is already running.

The center took the option of not having a program about the war in Iraq, but responding to the problems people face every day in the street and adapting the programs to the needs of communities. The Interfaith Centre is not able to solve the war in Iraq, and a program about it could be the reason for many people to abandon the centre activities, as they don’t approach the centre for that kind of issues.



Is good to know that 9.11 also horrified the members of religious communities and the ghettos of New York. At that moment, Muslims had real troubles, but they had the support of the Jewish members of the centre. Before 9.11, dialogue was something “nice” and “pleasant”. Now it is something necessary. During the months immediately after 9.11 the centre kept working and organizing press conferences with Muslim leaders condemning the attacks, which nobody attended. Many schools asked for the possibility of having Muslim representatives to speak out and condemn violence. In Brooklyn it was organized a program about Islam addressed to judges.

About how to reach religious leaders, we should not underestimate our capacity to meet people and make friends. Organizing programs about Islam was an occasion for the centre to meet other people and organizations that were doing the same kind of activities. It is important that those who participate in a program can feel it as something of their own, that they can shape, not that someone is trying to sell them something.

From the perspective of the centre, religious leaders are not only clerics, but people who represents and shapes the community. Otherwise there would not be Muslim women, as those who take care of sick people and who are vital for their communities, participating in the programs of the centre. Communities are organic and, maybe, it is not so interesting contacting an imam who only makes the prayers in Arabic and doesn't speak English, than someone else more skilful in English. In the same way, these leaders should be able to link different groups inside and outside their community. Some programs make possible the identification of people who can be suitable for other programs. Efforts are made to respect the inner diversity of communities. The centre tries to encourage civil society to go forward through giving visibility to religious leaders, which contributes to their democratisation. The aim is creating an atmosphere where both conservative Jewish and Muslim can feel at ease.

The centre doesn't receive any money from the City Council or the government, but works together with the police and has contacts with local authorities and organizations. The centre tries to avoid political implications, although sometimes it is very difficult. Perhaps many Jews and Muslims don't like each other, but the centre invites them all to its programs.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY OF RELIGIONS OF LLEIDA (Xavier Aluja and members of the Municipal Assembly of Religions of Lleida)

The Assembly was created because of the cultural diversity existing in the city, to prevent intercultural conflicts as those happened in France in the last years. The aim is gathering the representatives of the different religious communities in the same room to speak. The members of the Assembly are proposed by the communities (which must have legal recognition) and appointed by the city mayor, trying to have a wide diversity. The president and coordinator of the assembly are members of the City Council. Other members are specialists in interreligious dialogue representing the Interfaith Group of the UNESCO Club of Lleida and Unescocat.



The Assembly advises the City Council about issues related to diversity, proposes initiatives that foster a peaceful coexistence, acts as a mediator in conflicts between communities and disseminates research on issues related to its work.

The Assembly had its first meeting in 2005. Since then, the assembly acted as mediator in two situations with great impact in the city (when an imam didn't accepted to be interviewed by a woman journalist on the TV during Ramadan, and when a member of the same community was arrested during an anti-terrorism investigation). In both cases, the Assembly made possible the deactivation of possible conflicts in a very short time, informing the society in general and journalists in particular about Islam, about the use of language and about the positive possibilities of interfaith cooperation. The schools participated organizing activities about Islam and other citizen organizations will be engaged in different programs as well. This process was also a good chance to strengthen the links between communities. All this work is also about protecting the most vulnerable communities. It is important to have in mind that Lleida is a small city, and this circumstance makes things a bit easier.

All this work reaches the members of the communities through their representatives in the assembly. Some presentations have been organized to engage the members of secular organizations as well, and the Catholic Institute of Theology of Lleida offers training programs on world religions.

There is a concern about representativity. The aim of the assembly is being as plural as possible, having as main criteria respect to others and dialogue.

Issues related to social work aren't part of the duties of the Assembly, as all this kind of programs are part of the public services managed by the municipality in cooperation with different organizations of the city. On the other hand, an effort is been made to facilitate the participation of the young people of the faith communities in traditional festivals and events.

OTHER EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC POLICIES OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ORIENTED TOWARDS SOCIAL COHESION

Ferran Alonso (Catalan Home Office)

The duty of the Catalan Police Department (*Mossos d'Esquadra*) is serving the community, guaranteeing the rights, preserving civil freedoms (among which religious freedom). The limits to this freedom are the alteration of public order and the violation of the rights of others. The police corps must be aware of and adapt themselves to new societal situations. For that reason, police officers participate in training programs about religious and cultural diversity, and about mediation. The Catalan Police Department also tries to incorporate new officers from different ethnic origins.

The Offices of Relations with the Community (ORC) are police offices spread all over the Catalan territory with the objective of bringing the police work nearer to the citizens and receiving suggestions and proposals from them. The work of the police is much more preventive than reactive.



Mustapha Aoulad Sellam (on behalf of the City Council of Badalona)

The interfaith work initiated by the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue in 2004 in a marginalized neighbourhood in Badalona opened the possibility of wider cooperation with the city municipality. So, in June 2006, an agreement was signed between Unescocat and the City Council of Badalona to implement a Program of Citizen Dialogue between Beliefs and Convictions in Badalona, aiming to improve coexistence and preventing and managing possible conflicts in which religious communities can be involved. The program includes a variety of activities such as the creation and facilitation of interfaith dialogue groups (including specific youth and women groups), a series of panels about different aspects related to religious diversity and coexistence, and the elaboration of a digital religious map of the city. The basis of the program is the right to freedom of religion and worship and the continuous contact with the religious communities of different traditions, as well as with non-religious civil society and staff and policy makers from the municipality.

Alain Jordà (City Council of Manresa)

In the last years, immigration in Manresa has increased considerably, especially with citizens coming from Morocco. Manresa is a city with a strong catholic heritage, mainly related to the Jesuits, which is at the origin of the current interfaith dialogue group of the city. There are also some key interfaith personalities. Manresa has been home for some big interfaith events as the meeting of the Goldin Institute in 2004 and the second Catalan Parliament of Religions, in 2006. A magazine on interfaith issues is also published.

Manuel Pérez Browne (on behalf of the City Council of Blanes)

The work of Unescocat in Blanes consisted basically in contacting the different religious communities of the city to facilitate the interaction between them and create an interfaith platform. Other activities have been organized in cooperation with the municipality, such as an exhibition on religious diversity an interfaith dialogue and a panel to introduce the local religious communities to the citizenship. All this contacts provided the information to elaborate a digital religious map of the city, as a means to inform locals and visitors (Blanes is a touristic town on the sea shore) about worship places and times, etc.

Francesc Rovira (Interreligious Center of Barcelona - CIB)

The work of the CIB is based on the regular contacts with the communities as a basis for knowledge, trust and collaboration, as well as acting as an advisor for municipal decision makers and the mayor. The centre also develops a number of programs (such as series of conferences and panels about religious diversity, visits to worship places, a newsletter) and collaborates with other institutions and religious communities in their own activities.

The centre also develops some mediation programs which include mediation between religious communities to share worship places; between communities and the municipality about regularization of premises, use of the public space, language courses, etc; with the owners of the premises the



communities rent to develop their activities; with the neighbours of the worship places because of different annoyances (noise, occupation of the street, parking places, etc.); with civil society, having in mind integration and cooperation.

PRESENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Fazal Rahim (Oldham Interfaith Forum), United Kingdom

Two programs of the Oldham Interfaith Forum are highlighted. On the one hand, the work with young Muslims, as the terrorists of 9/11 were young as well. The program also includes workshops with the leaders of the mosques, who consider themselves as British although they are not recognized as such.

On the other hand, next summer six young Muslims, six young Christians and four young Hindus will travel to Auschwitz to see the consequences of radical extremism, and to the Balkans to discover different peace initiatives. The program will also include a visit to the parliament in London, to get in touch with the power structures and reflect on the shapes of institutional racism. Finally, they will also visit Reims, the cradle of European civilization, and Paris with its mosque. The BBC will record the activities of the group during the tour.

Marc Campine (Humanist Alliance), Belgium

The Humanist Alliance is a local platform about convictions, which is not an exclusive word, working on interconvictional dialogue. The platform gathers different secular organizations and representatives of convictions committed in the building of a better city. The criterion to select projects is that they are as much interconvictional as possible. The aim of the Alliance is doing a preventive work through conferences, exchanges, etc.

Fr. Albert Nambiaparambil (World Fellowship of Interreligious Councils), India

Raimon Panikkar speaks about the difficulties that will always exist in relation to dialogue. The limits of language, for example, will always imply problems when communicating moral and religious issues. There are many different ways to facilitate dialogue, and overcoming these difficulties and limitations: interfaith prayers and meditations, processions, school programs, etc. Dialogue is not an option, it is a necessity. We all must convert to it.

Nourreddine Boudouaia (Horizon – Espoir – Solidarité), France

Allah is the propriety of no one, we all belong to Him. In his immense generosity, He created different communities. Living in France is not easy for the Muslim community. There is stigmatisation, and those who are more far away from the original message of Islam are those who have a greater visibility.

Horizon-Espoir-Solidarité began a series of contacts with other religious communities, organizing joint dinners. They work in an intra-community work about what is Islam. Muslims must adapt themselves to



present times, and not trying to live as people used to centuries ago. They shared their premises with the Jewish community and, after the Muslim community had the opportunity to have their own space in the cemetery, they also shared this place with the Jews.

Horizon-Espoir-Solidarité has created a symbol of peace in their city through the meetings with people from Palestine, Belgium and other countries. For that people it was very hard to go back to their countries in conflict. They wanted to remain in this place of peace.

André Porto (Viva Rio – United Religions Initiative), Brazil

The work in Rio is based on the cooperation between religious groups and NGOs in the city where the police causes more victims by firearms in the world, in the country where more young people are killed by firearms. There is a positive difference between other Latin American countries and Brazil, where religious groups are socially committed, which has much to do with Liberation Theology.

Every year, Viva Rio organizes an interfaith caravan, travelling all around the country. The first year, its aim was disarmament: the churches became centres to deliver and destroy firearms (about 600.00 in one year). The following year, the caravan was focused on the police reform, visiting police stations and sensitizing the officers on human rights. This work was done with the cooperation of “good” police officers (they exist too). This year, the focus is on violence and youth: in Rio there are 17 violent deaths and eight people dying because of “lost” bullets everyday.

There are no interreligious conflicts in Brazil but a humanitarian crisis. It is necessary to involve religious communities and NGOs in this kind of campaigns and others like drugs fighting. Other projects try to raise environmental awareness or to facilitate the exchange of best practices among religious communities, secular NGOs, authorities and social workers and visiting marginalized neighbourhoods. In the foundation of all this work there is the concept of “spiritual citizenship”.

Shabnam Olinga (Alternatives to Violence Project), Uganda

There are no major religious conflicts in Uganda, and the religious leaders of different communities have met in Kampala to deal with issues like poverty and corruption. Religious leaders are very respected and are taken into account whenever there is a problem, even if it is not religious. They participate in any peace processes. There is also an increasing involvement of women in mediation and an active participation of the bahá'í community. The Africa Network of Professionals for Conflict Management and Peace is a network of professionals of conflict management, linked to Ugandan universities, one of which is an Islamic university.

Jehangir Sarosh (Religions for Peace - Europe), United Kingdom

Religions for Peace facilitates the development of religious organizations at different levels (local, regional, etc), and in that way the organization is able to work simultaneously both at the leaders and the grassroots level.



The mediation and conflict management work of Religions for Peace includes an intervention in Kosovo, where Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities were in conflict because of the funds provided by the UN to rebuild mosques and churches, and the creation of an Interreligious Council in Iraq, which joins Shia, Sunni, Kurd and Christian representatives, meeting out of the country. Religions for Peace-Europe also coordinates networks of youth and women, aiming to giving visibility to their work and initiatives.

Nell Derrick Debevoise (The Glocal Forum), Italy

The Glocal Forum develops its projects at the urban level, promoting coexistence and establishing networks in urban settings to offer capacity building and sharing knowledge and skills (i.e. through meetings and conferences of mayors). Youth projects are emphasized (i.e. a program in which 15 young people from the Balkans travel around the world), based in new technologies and in the creation of synergies between projects.

Vittoria Cacciandra (Institut Universitaire Catholique de la Méditerranée), France

The Institute offers training about majoritary religions addressed to journalists, health system staff, public servants, etc. in the extremely diverse city of Marseille.



CONSTITUENT DOCUMENT FOR THE *INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON RELIGIONS AND MEDIATION IN URBAN AREAS*

(Lleida, 28-29 March 2007)

(The following document is the final version of the constituent document and charter of the International Network on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas, including all the amendments approved after the discussion of the draft by the plenary)

UNESCOCAT

Unescocat defends and promotes the value of cultures, focusing particularly on the areas of peace, human rights, development, education, sustainability, interreligious dialogue, linguistic diversity and heritage. It also promotes the programs and materials created by UNESCO, while providing technical support and visibility to UNESCO's civil society efforts, through library and school networks, university chairs, and UNESCO associations and clubs throughout Catalonia.

MEDIATION AND RELIGION IN URBAN AREAS

Unescocat has many years of experience in promoting and defending intercultural and interreligious dialogue, as well as the right to freedom of religion and conviction as a means of improving social cohesion. One of its aims is to foster positive relationships between religious communities, civil society and the Catalan government, while keeping in line with the current international trends in diversity management in the public sphere.

In autumn 2004, Unescocat started a new program for mediation and prevention of interreligious conflicts. To this day, its main purpose remains the promotion of understanding and coexistence between different religious communities and, if possible, between these groups and the civil society or governments, especially in places where religious communities are directly or indirectly involved in current or potential conflicts. Most such incidents take place in urban areas. In addition to serving Catalonia's religious communities, the program is also aimed at its civil society and public administrations.

Unescocat is founded on the general doctrine of the United Nations and, particularly, that of UNESCO. It is an organization driven by the belief that intercultural and interfaith dialogue can help prevent conflicts and bring about reconciliation by working towards improved social cohesion and solidarity within local communities [*Resolution 202 (2005) on intercultural and interfaith dialogue: initiatives and responsibilities of local authorities*, Council of Europe, n.6]. Furthermore, the organisation believes that when local authorities enter into dialogue with religious groups that respect the fundamental values of



democracy, human rights, pluralism and the right to respect (*ibidem*, n. 8-11), local democracy is developed and preserved. Thus, the Council of Europe encourages local authorities and local elected representatives in Europe to be publicly and steadfastly committed to promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue and to let this position be reflected in all areas of local politics (*ibidem*, n. 12).

In societies where diversity is increasing from an ethnic, cultural and religious point of view, the only way to ensure a viable coexistence among the various cosmovisions, among the religious and spiritual beliefs and convictions present in cities, is through dialogue. For this reason, Unescocat's scope of activity is aimed at promoting the creation and development of forums and programs for local interreligious dialogue as well as fostering dialogue among the different religions and convictions, civil society and government institutions within a non-confessional laic framework. Interreligious dialogue, within the realm of managing religious diversity, has proved to be a useful tool for conflict mediation/transformation and prevention.

THE NETWORK

The International Network on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas is a network established and coordinated by Unescocat, which also has secretarial responsibility. The Network was introduced within the framework of the International Congress on Religions and Cultural Diversity: Mediation towards Social Cohesion in Urban Areas, held in Barcelona 18-20 December 2006, under the auspices of UNESCO. It is intended to be an innovative, invaluable tool for society and a specific response to the challenges of social cohesion in societies that, from a cultural and religious point of view, are characterised by their ever increasing plurality and diversity.

Justification

The Network was created for a number of justifiable reasons:

- Diversity has been a significant factor in recent conflicts and demands innovation for managing and preventing situations of serious tension and/or violence.
- In each new conflict, the mediator faces complex situations that require new and different methodological approaches.
- The potential void existing between the theory and the processes of practical mediation.
- The omission of and ignorance about the practical and specific use of positive religious, spiritual and philosophical resources in mediation processes.



- The need to offer systematized information on issues related to the network's objectives, in a way that can be used by grassroots groups and communities.
- The need to transform prejudices and stereotypes.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the *International Network on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas*, whose first meeting was held in Lleida 28-29 March 2007, is to develop reflection, analysis and exchange on religious and interreligious mediation and prevention of conflicts in urban settings. It is a global, permanent tool for aiding religious, interreligious and interconvictional mediation, which shall help improve the theoretical understanding of mediation in practical situations. The network organisations, experts and projects shall support one another in a special way for developing mediation and conflict transformation practices that pave the way to greater social cohesion. To achieve this goal, a new way of working toward a culture of peace must be promoted and built a creative new social coexistence in the urban areas where plurality is an ever increasing reality.

The main steps toward achieving this goal are:

- Building an international network, taking into account fundamental aspects of the role of religions and interreligious dialogue in the mediation, transformation and resolution of conflicts or crises such as:
 - A. urban contexts
 - B. municipal governments as agents and
 - C. the culture of mediation within the processes of conflict transformation
- Defining criteria and ways of promoting the positive resources of religious and spiritual traditions and convictions: scientific research, best practices and networking.
- Bringing together experts and activists in religious, interreligious and interconvictional mediation to offer them a permanent network with a forum to exchange ideas and experiences.
- Examining the most significant international examples of religious, interreligious and interconvictional mediation in urban areas.
- Helping to develop, in a special way, mediation and conflict transformation practices that allow greater social cohesion, and build up the new theories that can be derived from this practice.



- Promoting locally, regionally and internationally a new way of working for a culture of peace and coexistence in urban areas, which shall take into account the role of religious and spiritual traditions and their resources.
- Offering, as far as possible, a database of human resources able to work as mediators from the perspective of religious and/or interreligious or interconvictional mediation.

Members

Members of the Network must fit into one of the following categories:

1. Civil society organisations, particularly:
 - Religious and convictional organisations working in the field of mediation and conflict transformation, paying attention to the balance among traditions.
 - Interreligious and interconvictional organisations working in the field of mediation and conflict transformation.
 - Other civil society organisations interested in the importance of religion and conviction in the process of mediation and conflict transformation.
2. Public bodies, particularly:
 - Local governments and institutions interested in the importance of religion and conviction in the process of mediation and conflict transformation.
 - Governments, institutions and public organisations, at the regional, state or international level, interested in the importance of religion and conviction in the process of mediation and conflict transformation.
3. Experts or activists in the area of mediation and religious, interreligious and interconvictional conflict transformation.

Where possible, decisions will be taken by consensus; when the rejection of candidates is suggested, however, only the members of the first category may decide.

All members shall have the right, among others, to access the restricted areas of the website and to participate in the periodical meetings that may be held, provisionally set for every three years.

All members undertake to contribute content to the Network and offer resources, according to the participation criteria.

Founding members of the Network are considered those that were invited to and/or participated in the *International Congress on Religions and Cultural Diversity: Mediation towards Social Cohesion in Urban Areas*, held in Barcelona from 18 to 20 December 2006, as well as those that were invited to and/or



participated in the first meeting of the *International Network on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas* held in Lleida on 29 March 2007, if they declare it.

The selection process for all new members of the Network shall be as follows. Each candidate must:

- a) Declare in writing their wish to join the Network by signing an internal document formalising their request (Membership application form). In this document, they will declare acceptance of the Charter (Appendix 1).
- b) Be endorsed or recommended by another member.
- c) Be accepted by two-thirds of the network members.
- d) To facilitate the work of the coordination, a report on the candidate will be prepared to inform all the members.

There will be an effort to add a number of new organisations to the Network each year, so that its growth and scope can be assessed.

Criteria for participation in Network forums

- Contributions must be pertinent and relevant to the central theme of the Network, that is, its aims and objectives.
- Contributions must be guaranteed to respect the right to freedom of religion, creed and conviction (art. 18 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), and religious, spiritual and convictional diversity, taking into account the respect for religious and convictional symbols, signs and expressions.
- Contributions shall not favour any type of proselytism or discrimination on the grounds of beliefs or convictions.
- Care shall be taken that contributions do not allow any type of religious phobia, directly or indirectly.
- There will be a standard form to be completed by contributors to ensure that all of the basic information concerning each initiative is included.

Languages

The standard languages of the Network will be English, Catalan and Spanish, depending on available resources. The aim of the Network coordination is having all the documentation online in the three languages. Meetings, when held, shall be in English and, when possible, efforts will be made to provide



simultaneous interpretation into Spanish and other languages, depending on the specific location of the meeting.

Operation

The Network shall operate on an IT platform. Unescocat website (www.unescocat.org) shall include an area for dialogue reserved for the Network and containing the following:

1. Online area. Mediators and institutions can make suggestions, exchange opinions, express their doubts or discuss cases of conflict. An effort will be made to ensure that an international team of experts is answering the questions received.

A. There will be a restricted-access forum (via password) where Network members will deal with cases in progress—in the intervention stage.

B. There will be a general-access, open forum including: (1) the description of cases that are labelled as finished processes and are still considered best practices; and (2) blogs where the detailed progress of mediation and conflict transformation processes can be followed.

2. Compilation of best practices from the field around the world.

3. Reference resources. Extensive bibliography of reference material regarding mediation, beliefs, interreligious relations, etc. This shall be available online.

4. Material about religious and spiritual traditions and about convictions. Collection of sacred or reference texts related to peace, coexistence and social cohesion organised by semantic fields.

5. *Compilation of full articles on the subject and a list of links to other related websites.*

6. Compilation of local, regional, national and international legal framework related to this kind of projects.

Implementation will be progressive and shall depend on the resources available.

Funding

During the initial period, which shall last one year and may be extended if needed, Unescocat will act as coordinator and secretary and shall be responsible for the setup costs of the Network. Unescocat is driving the project, but after a trial period these conditions shall be subject to review in order to look into the inclusion of co-funding clauses. The objective is for the Network to move progressively towards joint



funding, which shall entail some form of member collaboration that guarantees the sustainable development and independence of the Network.

In addition to direct collaboration from members, consideration may be given to receiving funding from public or private institutions of local, regional and international scope.



APPENDIX 1

CHARTER

The organizationa and individuals that are members of the *International Network on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas* are committed to respect and promote:

- 1.- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in its entirety, with special emphasis on Article 18, which bestows the right to freedom of thought, consciousness and religion.
- 2.- The unrenounceable cultural, human and spiritual value of spiritual and religious traditions and of non-religious convictions to build a culture of peace and better social cohesion in an urban context.
- 3.- The unrenounceable value of interreligious and interconvictional dialogue for social cohesion and peace in local contexts.
- 4.- The importance of individual and synergistic work of religious institutions, interreligious and interconvictional initiatives, and of public administrations in mediation and conflict transformation efforts in which religious, spiritual and convictional traditions have, or may have, a role.
- 5.- Tolerance and promotion of equality and non-discrimination concerning religious and spiritual traditions and non-religious convictions, and the eradication of any and all kinds of phobia and hate directed at religions and convictions as well as racism and xenophobia.
- 6.- Religious, spiritual and convictional diversity and pluralism within the framework of urban, culturally plural societies as a source of mutual richness and sustainable social cohesion.
- 7.- The initiatives and declarations from the United Nations and UNESCO that are aimed at promoting the culture of peace and dialogue between cultures, civilisations, convictions and religions.



NETWORK MEMBERSHIP FORM

MEMBERSHIP FORM
**INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON RELIGIONS
AND MEDIATION IN URBAN AREAS**

..... AGREES, WITH THIS SIGNATURE, TO JOIN THE **INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON RELIGIONS AND MEDIATION IN URBAN AREAS** AND HEREBY UNDERTAKES TO RESPECT ITS CONSTITUENT DOCUMENT, APPROVED AT THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NETWORK, HELD IN LLEIDA ON 28 MARCH 2007.

ON BEHALF OF THE ORGANIZATION, ADMINISTRATION OR EXPERT:

FULL NAME:
FISCAL ID NO. / NATIONAL ID NO.:
SIGNATURE:

ON BEHALF OF THE COORDINATOR:

FULL NAME:
SIGNATURE:

In:
On:

(Copy for the coordinator)



MEMBERSHIP FORM
**INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON RELIGIONS
AND MEDIATION IN URBAN AREAS**

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FULL NAME:

SIGNATURE:

In:

On:

(Copy for the organization or individual)



Organizers:

LA PAERIA



Ajuntament de Lleida
**Regidoria de Drets Civils,
Cooperació i Immigració**



Lleida
Capital de la Cultura Catalana
2007

Supported by:

Fundació Viure i Conviure

CAIXA CATALUNYA 



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament d'Acció Social i Ciutadania
Secretaria per a la Immigració

With the participation of:

