

**CONSTITUENT DOCUMENT FOR THE
*INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON RELIGIONS
AND MEDIATION IN URBAN AREAS*
(Lleida, 28-29 March 2007)**

2007

UNESCOCAT

Unescocat is an institution founded in 1984 as a subsidiary of UNESCO in Catalonia. It has official relations with UNESCO and has a consultative status with ECOSOC and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations.

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.
- Local, regional and international promotion of 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) for handling cases in progress—in the intervention phase.

- 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

UNESCOcat
El valor de les cultures

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)

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In:

On:

(Copy for the organization or individual)