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MINISTERIAL SESSION 1

Foreign Policy and Religion

Luigi Di Maio
*Italian Minister for Foreign
Affairs and International
Cooperation*

Since its first edition in 2014, the Interfaith Forum has raised awareness on the relevance of the religious dimension in the international system and the intersection between foreign policy and religion, which is the topic of this panel.

The Forum, by the variety of actors involved and the range of issues discussed, shares with the G20 the inclusive approach needed to foster dialogue and build consensus. The ideas and proposals coming from this platform can stimulate the debate on key social issues, providing the perspective of religious leaders and thinkers.

Religious communities, national governments, and international organizations are natural allies in facing global challenges, such as health, growing inequalities, climate change, education, conflict prevention, and the fight against discrimination. These issues are high on the agenda of the Interfaith Forum and among the priorities of the Italian G20 Presidency. An alignment that clearly reflects our common concerns.

Italy's model of dialogue between civil authorities and religious communities is enshrined in our constitution and based on an inclusive and open approach. Recognizing the importance of cooperation with communities of all faiths means not only guaranteeing their religious rights, but also recognizing their role within society. This approach

has allowed us to achieve important results in fields like health care, assistance to the vulnerable, and other social services. Moreover, as global challenges affect all religions, interfaith dialogue is a powerful tool to identify shared solutions, building on the values that different faiths share, such as the dignity of human life. In this regard, the efforts of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar that led to the signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* in 2019 in Abu Dhabi have set a powerful example for other religious leaders to follow.

The active involvement of religious communities and leaders is key in dealing with major social issues at the national and international levels. Their outreach capacity and credibility can help spread awareness, reinforce public communication, and foster social cohesion. I will offer three examples to highlight the contribution of religious communities to foreign policy: combating discrimination, fighting extremism, and preventing and resolving conflict.

First: combating discrimination. Disinformation and rhetoric demonizing the "other" have resulted in several forms of stigmatization, discrimination, and violence, especially during the pandemic.

Religious leaders can play an important role in preventing the spread of hate speech and intolerance, especially in times of crisis and in conflict areas.

Second: fighting extremism. Italy's approach combines security, protection of human rights, and development cooperation to uproot the causes of violent extremism. The situation in Afghanistan shows that the threat of rising fundamentalism is still concrete and requires a coordinated international response. Italy is engaged in such coordination with all partners, including in its role as G20 President by proposing the G20 as an inclusive platform of dialogue on the Afghan dossier. Our priority must be to continue to ensure assistance to the Afghan people and to preserve the

achievements made in the last 20 years, especially in terms of human rights and civil liberties. The social, economic, and political participation of all ethnic, religious, and cultural components of Afghan society will be crucial for reconciliation and preventing violent extremism. The contribution of the world's religious leaders in this endeavor will be key.

Third: preventing and resolving conflicts. Sustainable peace is achievable only through active mediation and inclusive negotiations. Religious leaders can engage and represent large segments of society, thus fostering dialogue and reconciliation.

I recall the support provided by the Comunità di Sant'Egidio to the peace processes in the Central African Republic, Mozambique, and South Sudan and the mediation efforts of the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, let me mention the Italian NGO Rondine Cittadella della Pace, committed to educating young people in conflict resolution, second-track diplomacy, and human rights.

I conclude by reaffirming Italy's commitment in multilateral forums to freedom of religion or belief and to the protection of religious minorities at the United Nations, in the Human Rights Council, where this is a priority for our mandate (2019-2021), within the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the European Union, as well as in bilateral relations with third countries and through development cooperation programs. In 2019, we co-sponsored the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly to establish the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief.

In the same year, the Italian Parliament launched a fund to support persecuted Christian minorities in crisis regions. Between 2019 and 2021, about 8.4 million euros have been allocated to the fund, and we plan an additional 4 million euros per year. The fund is financing projects in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, and the selection of new initiatives is underway.



Interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the fight against all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief should remain part of our commitment to advance a positive global agenda.

Our capacity to respond to today's challenges will greatly benefit from recognizing the potential of religions as drivers for peace and human development.

Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager Grand Chancellor of the Sovereign Order of Malta

The Sovereign Order of Malta is currently engaged in some of the major humanitarian crises in the world. For nine centuries, our *modus operandi* has been – and indeed, is today – characterized by neutrality and impartiality; the programs that run to help the disadvantaged, the refugees, religious minorities, the marginalized, and the disabled have no political or economic agenda. Our mission is to help those in need, regardless of their origin, religious belief, or ethnic background. This has allowed the Order of Malta and its relief and volunteer corps to enter and be fully involved in crisis areas, often hostile zones, where medical and social programs have been established in partnership with local organizations, many representing different confessions.

Our bilateral and diplomatic network supports these activities. Of the 110 countries with which we enjoy diplomatic relations, 30 are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation with whom the Order has long-standing, ongoing humanitarian projects.

Supporting and advocating for the role of faith-based institutions, facilitating interreligious dialogue – particularly in the Middle East – and promoting international humanitarian laws are today among our primary goals. In the wake of the rising xenophobic and populist movements, the Order of Malta has made countless appeals within the international community to uphold human dignity and human rights.

We are therefore particularly pleased to participate in this important gathering that seeks to promote social cohesion, address inequalities, and heal the wounds – both practical and spiritual – which are the legacy of a particularly challenging and uncertain moment in time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought chaos to the global economies, worsening the living conditions of many communities. The closure of schools has meant that 370 million children worldwide – many of whom are reliant on school meals as the primary source of their daily nutrition – have missed on average 40% of school meals. Addressing the social divide that the pandemic has further exacerbated is mandatory. The Order of Malta firmly advocates for an equitable and fair vaccine distribution so that no country is left behind. Religious leaders can play a pivotal role in supporting vaccination campaigns and should be involved alongside governments in the planning and implementing of responses and in pandemic preparedness policies.

The recent dramatic events unfolding in Afghanistan have caused a new refugee crisis. The United Nations has warned that up to half a million Afghans could flee the country by the end of the year and has called on neighboring countries to keep their borders open. The Order of Malta firmly believes that only a joint and coordinated

response plan on behalf of the EU member states – and all nations – can address such a crisis.

While it is essential to dovetail migration responses, safeguarding dialogue with the country's leaders remains key – however difficult – especially in the quest to protect women, children, and ethnic minorities. In a country torn by decades of unrest, internal rivalries, and power struggles, we must be aware of the danger that religions are used to exacerbate tensions. On the contrary, religions and religious leaders can play a fundamental role in de-escalating the conflict and ultimately protecting the population.

It is estimated that by 2050, the global percentage of believers will grow from the current 84% to 87%. Therefore, it is clear that foreign policy and diplomacy are strongly intertwined with religion. Despite this, the role of religion in the foreign affairs of states is still relatively unexplored.

This is why, in line with our enduring engagement in multilateral diplomacy, the Sovereign Order of Malta has also recently joined the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, a network of many countries working together to advance freedom of religion around the world. Launched by the US State Department, the alliance seeks to enhance global advocacy to protect the right of freedom of religion or belief and serve as a platform to coordinate better the efforts of governments, parliamentarians, and civil society.

To this end, the Order of Malta has been working on a compact called *Religions in Action* drafted with the contribution of Christian and Muslim faith leaders. The document aims at raising awareness of the global geopolitics of religion. Religion is rooted in community and is an integral part of a person's identity. The key findings of the compact *Religions in Action* stem from the Order of Malta's experience from working in the field. In crisis areas, diplomacy's degree of success – with its emphasis on dialogue and negotiation – is unmistakably linked to the capacity to engage with religious communities, religious leaders and include religious infrastructure. This “faith-based diplomacy” approach promotes interfaith dialogue and recognizes religious leaders' key role in conflict resolution and peace-building.

Humanitarian intervention in conflict theatres should always acknowledge the importance of adopting a holistic approach, whereby the local social and cultural values and beliefs are embedded and molded with the operational schemes. Therefore, the compact aims to support religious communities and faith-based organizations (FBOs) that dedicate their social and spiritual resources to help mitigate the effects of conflict and enhance the delivery of humanitarian support. The document appeals to the moral values that are universally shared by those with faith and other persons of goodwill who are committed to the protection of human life and dignity.

The Order of Malta, one of the oldest Catholic religious orders – has extensive experience in partnerships with other confessions. In Lebanon, it collaborates with the Imam Al Sadr Foundation and with the Druze community and the highest Sunni authority, Dar Al Fatwa. The Order of Malta Lebanon created a network of community health centers during the civil war (1975–1990) and mobile medical units in the most remote areas of the country. These centers, open to every suffering person, regardless of race, color or creed, are run in collaboration with religious congregations or foundations. This interreligious cooperation has facilitated the intervention of the Order of Malta in very sensitive areas, especially in times of crisis, to serve, promote social coherence, and advocate peace, justice and respect the dignity of each person.

In Palestine, the Order of Malta Holy Family Hospital provides top-quality medical assistance to mothers and infants. It represents a reference point for the whole region being the only hospital with a neonatal intensive care unit. The Hospital employs Catholic and Muslim staff and provides assistance to mothers and children, without regard to religion or national origin.

In Iraq, the Ninevah Plains in the north are home to a variety of religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians, Muslims, Shabak, Yazidis, Turkmen, Arabs, and Kurds. Many were internally displaced (IDPs) during the Daesh occupation and in subsequent operations to retake or liberate the area. Through its worldwide relief agency, Malteser International, the Order of Malta has been engaged in the areas of shelter, education, livelihoods, and social cohesion to encourage IDPs to return to their homes. Its programs have given key relevance to the religious leaders in charge of local reconstruction committees, managing funds from overseas donors, and overseeing distribution.

Federica Mogherini Rector of the College of Europe

It is of the utmost importance for a gathering such as this one to discuss the topic of foreign policy and religion.

We can approach it from the interfaith angle or the foreign policy angle. Both these perspectives can be perceived as part of the solution or part of the problem. For me, the big question is: how can interfaith dialogue support foreign policy and how can foreign policy support interfaith dialogue? There are some very practical things that foreign policy can do to support healthy, interfaith practice and dialogue, not only at the top, but also at the grassroots.

Some very good examples are given to us from all over the world. I can mention only a couple of things that I happen to have witnessed and supported during my years in Brussels as the High Representative, of which I am very proud.

One of them was the one that Minister Di Maio already mentioned: Rondine Cittadella della Pace, which was indicated by the European External Action Service, and by myself, as worthy of an award on how to build peace through interfaith dialogue on a grassroots level with young people. And that was, for me at least, a moment of pride. It also highlighted the role of the younger generations in preventing and solving conflicts, because we focus so much on the radicalization of the younger generations that we do not focus enough on how much good they can bring in understanding each other and each other's priorities.

But also, there is a program that was put in place just over these last few years at the European Union level. The program is called GERIS (Global Exchange on Religion in Society). It gathers 500 activists, faith and non-faith based, working on the role of religion in different societies in all different continents and in different age groups and different backgrounds. I was inspired to do so in Indonesia when I saw how the interfaith organizations could work there.

Minister Luigi di Maio at Ministerial Session 2,
Biblioteca d'arte e di storia di San Giorgio in Poggiale,
13 September 2021.



I believe this is something whose support on an institutional level would be very helpful and which, for instance, in the Mediterranean, it could make a lot of sense to invest in. Because – if I can jump to what foreign policy can do to find a healthy way in which religions can interact with societies, or at least support the role of religions in society – I think that there is a lot that can be done there to increase our knowledge.

We always talk about tolerance, and rightly so – even though tolerance is a word that I, personally, do not like very much; we talk about respect, which I believe is more realistic than love. Maybe I will play the cynic here, but I think that the European experience itself shows that loving each other is something that, let us say, can be a name for those who believe, but in real life and for sure in real politics is complicated, even within one family, one political family, one country, sometimes one government coalition; imagine it across such a complicated region as the Mediterranean. On the contrary, respect and shared interests can be very powerful engines for preventing and solving conflicts, transitioning from a conflict to a non-conflict situation, which is, as the minister mentioned, the weak part of any experience we have lived in the last 20 years. What happens when the conflict is supposed to be over? That is what we did not really understand so far. In this, the role of interfaith dialogue and religious leaders and communities can be of extreme help in rebuilding the connections and the fabric of communities. This is what we sometimes miss in this binary temptation we can have of good against evil and vice versa.

If we really want to reach a respectful global, or even regional, environment, I think we have to start from the knowledge angle. And I do not say this because I am now a college director, but out of my personal experience. If I can share an anecdote, without saying any names, I graduated in Rome at La Sapienza, a prestigious university with excellent professors, in 1998 – it took many years for me to graduate because, in the meantime, I was starting my political activities – I wanted to write my thesis on political Islam and the role that religion played in political legitimization in the Arab world. In the 1990s, even before 9/11, I found it extremely hard to find any professor in political science who recognized that this was a subject for political science, and I was sent to study Islamic studies in the Faculty of Philosophy, because that was the place for those kinds of studies. So again, I think that we need to invest in understanding, and before even understanding, in knowing, what religions imply. This is the basis for beliefs, behaviors and community building, because knowledge is the basis for respect; otherwise, respect becomes empty, and if it is empty, it can be easily broken.

The other element that is needed, together with knowledge, is knowledge of yourself. Now that I have to deal with so many young students – we have more than 50 nationalities at the College of Europe – I find that sometimes increasing awareness of everybody's identity is also a good investment. I find that fragility takes hold when somebody is not confident about who he or she is. And here comes the fear of the other. Here comes the conflict. Here comes the confrontational attitude. Interfaith dialogue and religious organizations and communities can help a lot the foreign policy angle in building communities and societies, including in Europe, maybe especially in Europe, that are self-confident in their own identities enough not to fear the other and dialogue with the other. I would not go into any political consideration about that, but I think there is cultural work to be done here, on younger generations in particular.

And last but not least, I believe the idea of bringing the Helsinki spirit to the Mediterranean can be extremely helpful, because it is exactly when the complexity and the apparent impossibility of problems to be solved is laid out clear on the table, that you cannot afford anymore not to tackle them. And indeed, I share your view: there is a temptation to look elsewhere, and there might be urgent things to be done elsewhere, but focusing on what is urgent should never distract you from what is important. The Mediterranean, the relations between Europe and Africa, between the Middle East at large and Africa, and Africa and Europe – being something that is there and yet is not there, in uneasy ways and for thousands of years – cannot be neglected ever. I believe that starting a process of knowledge, understanding, and the creation of shared interests – which at the end of the day is what worked so well for the European Union – could be an extremely wise place to start in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean. I say in the Middle East because I think that trying to find ways to increase the basis of common interest, for instance in a region like the Gulf, could be extremely wise. Difficult, but wise. And not so difficult, if we think that the EU started with something as unpoetic as steel and coal.

When you have a shared interest and you also have some common ground for understanding each other and respecting each other's cultural and religious identity, there is a possibility to prevent conflict or, at least, to handle difficulties. So, I believe that this is not such a crazy idea. You probably need crazy ideas to face crazy times. I think this would be extremely worth exploring and I think that one good starting point would be the younger generations, for instance, with the Young Leaders Program of the Anna Lindh Foundation. So I really think there could be the basis for developing interesting experiences that could lead to pilot projects and then to something probably bigger, because sometimes you start with something small, and then you come up with some good practices.

Again, I would define this exercise neither as naive nor cynical. I think that this is exactly what we need to do, not only in Europe, but all around the world. Because we are indeed in the same storm, not only regarding the pandemic, but also because we are coming out of 20 years of complex and multifaceted crises worldwide. We are at a point where the world needs people of goodwill, good knowledge, and good interests to come together across regions of the world to try and find common ground and common solutions. Interfaith dialogue and religious communities and organizations and leaders can contribute enormously to guiding foreign policy towards wiser, more constructive, and cooperative roads. At the same time, foreign policy can be of extremely important support for a healthy, interfaith interaction in the world, starting from Europe, where we have a lot of work to do in this respect.

Mirosław Wachowski Undersecretary for Relations with States of the Holy See



When analyzing the situations of tension and conflict that have emerged during recent years, a dangerous temptation arises to place them in the narrative of a “clash of civilizations”. Such an interpretation also entails a negative spin on the role of religions. On the contrary, at the heart of these dramatic situations of violence, there is a limited vision of the human person, which paves the way to injustice and inequality.

True peace is the necessary condition for the construction of fraternal societies that are just and respectful of the human dignity that is shared by all. But, as Pope Francis said in his Message to the President of the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons on 7 December 2014, “the desire for peace can never be satisfied by military means alone. ... Peace must be built on justice, socio-economic development, freedom, respect for fundamental human rights, the participation of all in public affairs and the building of trust between peoples”.

Too often, religion and religions have been exploited as an instrument and as a justification for war. Sadly, this has undermined the possibility of lasting peace in the past and continues to be the tragedy of our current world, a situation that Pope Francis described at the General Audience of 18 January 2018 as a “third world war fought piecemeal”.

In our globalized world, it seems more important than ever to stress the value of dialogue at all levels: diplomatic, intercultural, but also among religious traditions. Indeed, religion and diplomacy can complement and reinforce one another. Please allow me to make three points:

1. The Holy See strives ardently to promote religious dialogue and fundamental human rights, especially religious freedom. Pope Francis, through many symbolic actions in favor of inter-religious dialogue and his numerous apostolic journeys, particularly his visit to Iraq, has proven that “meeting one another in fraternal friendship is a powerful sign, one that shows the harmony which religions can build together, based on personal relations and the goodwill of those responsible”, as stated in his address at the interreligious meeting with the Sheikh and with the representatives of the different religious communities of Azerbaijan in September 2016. In his speech at the Global Conference of Human Fraternity held at the Founder's Memorial in Abu Dhabi (4 February 2019), Pope Francis made it clear that, “there is no alternative: either we will build the future together, or there will be no future. Religions, in particular, cannot renounce the urgent task of building bridges between peoples and cultures”. For the Catholic Church, peacebuilding through active nonviolence is the natural and necessary complement to its continuing efforts to limit the use of force by invoking moral norms (Message for the 2017 World Day of Peace: “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace”, 1 January 2017).
2. In the pursuit of the goal to inspire and support every initiative on a path to peace, religious leaders have a central role to play. It is crucial that civil authorities recognize this role and engage and facilitate collaboration and dialogue with religious leaders. We know all too well the unfortunate, even fatal, consequences that occur when foreign policy decisions ignore, or outright deny, the significant place of religion in addressing the challenges that governments must confront.
3. Today, in spite of the presence of many conflicts in the world, we have grown accustomed, especially in the Western world, to taking peace for granted. In a sense, we seem to have lost a sense of “fear of war”. On the contrary, we have developed the thinking that war per se is not such a dramatic and terrible event. We need to change this mentality because it trivializes the suffering of others and does not contribute to the spread of foundational values such as compassion, dialogue, and cooperation.

According to Pope Paul VI, building peace is an ongoing process, as stated in his Message for the First World Day of Peace on 1 January 1968. As Pope Francis recalled in the address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See on 9 January 2017:

“Peace is a gift, a challenge, and a commitment”. It is a gift because it flows from the very heart of God. It is a challenge because it should never be taken for granted and must constantly be sought. It is a commitment because it demands passionate effort on the part of all people of goodwill to seek and strive for peace (Pope Francis Message for the 2017 World Day of Peace).

With this in mind, I would like to conclude by stressing the responsibility of religious leaders to help counter the spread of hatred and violence in the name of religion and to promote more inclusive and peaceful societies (Card. Pietro Parolin, Intervention at the High-level meeting on the Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Atrocities, 20 September 2016). Religion can also be instrumental in “preventing” conflicts! But as we know well, for religious leaders to fulfill this mission, national authorities must continue to recognize and ensure religious freedom as an inalienable fundamental human right, indispensable to all other human rights.

Evarist Bartolo Maltese Minister for European and Foreign Affairs

1. Cooperating with the Enemy – Sharing Our Divided Mediterranean

We all navigate the same Mediterranean Sea, but we are all in different boats. Even when we face similar storms, they hit us differently. Those of us who have stronger and more resilient boats have a much better chance of survival than those on more fragile boats. Although our boats belong to the same flotillas that are meant to bring us together to face common enemies like the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency, we tend to consider each other as bigger enemies and devote most of our energies to turning against each other instead of cooperating to deal with our regional and global challenges.

Wherever we may be around both shores of the Mediterranean, we are caught in the disputes among neighbors in the region. If we do not find ways of resolving them for the common good, we will all get hurt. In the spirit of compromise, not of capitulation, and being sensitive to all the interests of all those involved and making an effort to see issues through the eyes of our adversaries, through patient dialogue, without humiliating each other, we can find ways of living together and sharing our Mediterranean for the common good. Is this “the peace of the foolish” or naïve preaching of “lilies” and “the grass of the field”?

The divisions in the countries of the Mediterranean are not in the sea and land or on maps, but primarily and ultimately in the hearts and minds of all of us involved, our histories and traditions. To complicate matters more, geography does not help when neighbors occupy such crowded space in which their interests overlap, especially on the sea.

2. Forget Loving Thy Neighbor

The Bible exhorts us to “love thy neighbor as thyself”. We know how difficult this is, even among neighbors in the same block of apartments, let alone when neighbors are countries with divergent interests and long histories of conflict and mutual hatred and distrust.

In “the Narcissism of small differences”, Freud tells us how communities with adjoining territories and close relationships are especially likely to engage in hateful feuds and mutual distrust, driven by the need to stress differences rather than similarities, what divides rather than what unites.

This does not minimize such differences and psychologize them away in the belief that if such disputes among neighbors did not exist, they would feel the need to invent them. There are other disputes that are substantial and real and will not go away if we are simply nice to one another and have lots of coffee together until we hug and kiss.

As Amos Oz says, conflicts among neighbors are usually “not a struggle between good and evil ... (but) a clash between right and right, a clash between one very powerful, deep and convincing claim and another, very different, but no less convincing, no less powerful and no less humane claim”.

Oz goes on and says: “Some conflicts are very real; they are much worse than a mere misunderstanding”. To try and solve them, we need “a painful compromise”, and note that the word compromise has a terrible reputation in the region. “And the opposite of compromise is not idealism, not devotion; the opposite of compromise is fanaticism and death. We need compromise. Compromise. Not capitulation”.

Our role as friendly neighbors is not to add fuel to the fire unless our agenda is to exploit these differences for our own ends, such as exporting arms to them.

There is not one single issue in the area – from COVID-19 to climate change, to energy and water sources, decarbonization, digitalization, lack of economic growth, unemployment and brain drain, poor infrastructure, weak regional integration, immigration, organized crime, terrorism, religious intolerance, hating the “other”, etc. – which can be solved by one country alone. We are condemned to solve these problems together or not at all.

We are like Thomas Schütte's sculptures called “United enemies”. Down from the pedestal and on the ground among us, we come face to face with two pairs of men, who hate each other and want to get away from each other but cannot as they are bound together with rope. They have to find ways of living together, even against their will.

3. Let Us Continue Hating Each Other, but...

In our small world and even smaller region, connectivity has made us each other's neighbors. We stress our differences and find it very difficult to get on with each other. Yet we are bound to each other, and however much we hate each other and want to kill each other, we have to find ways of living together if we are to address our regional and global challenges adequately. Like Schütte's paired figures tied together in couples, we are "united in struggle and bound together in intimate enmity ... Struggling to be rid of its mate, each figure is nevertheless incapable of standing alone" (David Birnbaum).

With eyes wide open, I dream that the way forward for this region is to resurrect the Helsinki spirit and call a conference on security and cooperation in the Mediterranean. Not many had high hopes for that conference in Europe nearly 50 years ago when it was held in the middle of the Cold War, but it proved to be a turning point in easing tensions between the West and the East. We need *détente* in the Mediterranean. Dialogue and negotiation are mostly needed with those with whom we least agree.

Simply calling for hostile neighbors to sit together opens you to accusations of sleeping with the enemy. We have weakened multilateralism through division, polarization, and mutual distrust, and then we blame it on fragility and ineffectiveness. We have deprived inclusive multilateral structures and processes of leadership, legitimacy, and resources, and then we blame them for being dysfunctional. We set up alternative arrangements of fake multilateralism that often marginalize and exclude those we disagree with, and we withdraw into a bubble of "like-minded" countries and talk to ourselves.

Even when we are not friends and hate each other, we must not abandon attempts at regional cooperation. Let us define and make workable at least the minimum cooperation we must have to address our common challenges. The alternative is catastrophe. Whether we like it or not, we are bound to each other, if not as friends, then as strangers, as neighbors, as enemies.

Even as enemies, we need to find ways of working together, not because we love our enemies and wish them well but because we need to survive. Even our selfishness and narrow interests dictate that we cooperate with our enemies.

Marina Sereni

Italian Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

I would like to warmly thank our distinguished panelists for their insightful remarks on such a critical topic as the relationship between foreign policy and religion.

We have listened to the view of the Sovereign Order of Malta in this respect and the direct experience of Sri Lanka. I have very much appreciated the reference Minister Bartolo has made to Malta's commitment to relaunch dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean through new initiatives on the political level. This is an objective that Italy not only shares, but also actively supports.

In this spirit, we have contributed to launching the new Agenda for the Mediterranean of the European Union by drawing our partners' attention to the need to cooperatively manage the "Mediterranean common goods" our region is endowed with. Among this set of tangible and intangible resources, intercultural and interreligious dialogue has the potential to trigger positive spillovers on wider political and economic cooperation as well as on our common fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

With no intention to be exhaustive, I would like to point out three main lessons that I think we can draw from today's debate:

First, politics and religion cannot afford to ignore each other as was, unfortunately, the case in too many circumstances in the past. Mutual ignorance may lead to missed opportunities at best and to serious tensions at worst.

Second, dialogue and cooperation between civil and religious players should be conducted on a basis of mutual trust, respect, and non-interference. Attempts to instrumentalize the matter would jeopardize efforts to pursue the common good and only serve parochial – and short term – interests.

Finally, yet importantly, it has now become clear that civil and religious actors share, within their distinct domains, a common responsibility to advance a positive agenda based on shared values such as human development, dignity, mutual understanding, and peaceful cooperation.

As Minister Di Maio has stressed in his remarks, Italy is willing to capitalize on the contribution of religious leaders and communities to the advancement of the global agenda by exploring and expanding synergies within the priorities of our G20 Presidency and beyond.

Let me conclude by seizing this opportunity to thank and congratulate the Fondazione per le scienze religiose and the Presidency of the IF20 for their remarkable work in paving the way to this Summit. I wholeheartedly encourage them – and all potential partners and stakeholders – to intensify their efforts to strengthen the partnership between civil and religious players. This will help all of us to better respond to global challenges while always keeping people at the heart of our common action.

MINISTERIAL SESSION 2

Education and Religion Diversity

Scherto Gill

Senior Research Fellow

at the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace

The IF20 2021's theme "A Time to Heal" is extremely pertinent to education. Indeed, for the past 18 months, children and young people globally are among the groups who suffer most from the multiple, overlapping emergencies: the COVID-19 pandemic, social and economic deprivation, the constant threats of outbreaks of violent conflict, and most important of all, the possibility of an imminent, climate change tipping point, highlighted in the latest UN IPCC report, a moment of "code red for humanity" according to the UN secretary-general.

Clearly we are confronted with unprecedented, interconnected crises. The harrowing effects of these traumatizing situations have been felt first and foremost by our children. Every single young life has been affected, be it coping with disrupted education, gaps in digital access to learning, isolation during lockdown, anxiety and depression, poverty, and losses of loved ones to both COVID-19 and climate related disasters. No wonder there have already been widespread mental health problems among youth worldwide, a phenomenon that has been termed a "hidden pandemic". According to UNICEF, about 1 billion highly vulnerable children live in the shadow of these combined crises.

To relate the global situation more closely to the IF20 2021's concerns here in Bologna, we can see that the more foreboding these emergencies, the more intense the fear of the unknown, the more threatening the violent conflicts, the greater the need for faith, love, global ethics, and solidarity.

So, to heal these wounds experienced by our children and young people, and to prevent further brutality upon humanity and nature, many have suggested that it requires concerted political will, coherent global policies, and radical collaboration across differences in religious persuasions, moral imperatives, identities, and affiliations. In particular, it calls for an interfaith alliance, whereby each faith community offers their best gifts from the depths of their spiritual experience to our collective action towards building back better, and co-flourishing.

Thanks to the IF20 Association, we have here with us a very distinguished high-level panel of ministers and religious leaders. We are eager to hear your comments on eventual questions:

How might education, formal, informal and non-formal, contribute to healing and well-being?

In what way might interreligious or interfaith learning nurture our children's and young people's social and emotional capacities and critical competencies so that they can cherish the dignity of all peoples, and embrace our co-belonging?

What conditions must characterize an educational ecosystem that takes children and young people's well-being and the planet's wellness as its core concerns?

Salim M. AlMalik

Director General of the Islamic World

Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (ICESCO)

I am honored here today to address the very important and timeless subjects of education for peace, culture and interfaith dialogue, and understanding between religions. Yet they are the most overlooked subjects as nations become increasingly polarized and extremisms of all kinds continue to jeopardize the peace efforts that the global community has been building.

As Nelson Mandela once said, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Today, we shall reaffirm our commitment to these immutable principles and restore the universal values of humanity that should reign supreme over all the other ideologies, which continue to separate us today.

Despite relentless attempts at fostering peace, our world is still beset with conflict, bigotry and hate. Where have we gone wrong? What have we not done right?

The answer lies in the way we approach peace and education. In education, we prepare future generations not just in how to read and write, but in how to become thoughtful and responsible members of society and part of the creation of a culture of peace. In peace, we always look at peace as an environment devoid of war. We look at peace as the antithesis of war. And as such, we focus our energy on chas-

ing a utopia of peace. But peace is not only the mere absence of war. It is the conscious and assertive effort in creating a structure where agents of change, leaders, institutions, and policies continue to promote unity, coexistence, and understanding between human beings.

That effort requires multilateral thinking, which includes a myriad of factors across economic, educational, cultural, environmental, psychosocial and gender dimensions. This is why we at ICESCO pride ourselves on a uniquely multisectoral and holistic approach to peacebuilding to tackle issues of peace across these dimensions.

This is done by galvanizing our different sectors and departments to work in tandem to produce a unique solution to education for peace that can withstand the pressures of modern conflicts.

But we cannot achieve peace alone in isolation from others. That is why we need to acknowledge the crucial importance of building institutions and communities of peace around the world to provide the necessary checks and balances to prevent a conflict that may lead to war.

In this regard, we have to admit that one of the most important developments in the history of modern humanity is the establishment of the global institutions that have made it possible for peace to be the norm and war the exception.

Our education system is predominantly focused on industrial development rather than human emancipation and coexistence. This has a profound effect on the modern human psyche and its propensity to engage in conflict and wage war, in the pursuit of scarce resources. This is why it is our duty as leaders to integrate the peace and human coexistence discourse in every facet of education in our countries, lest we slip down that dangerous slope of war yet again.

In ICESCO, we place a huge focus on mercy and compassion, which is integrated with the educational corpus of our 54 member states. During ICESCO's International Conference on Civilisational Values in the Prophet's Seerah, held on 27 May 2021, we took the decision, among many other things, to call on the United Nations to proclaim 21 April as the "World Day of Mercy".

We believe that if the values of mercy and coexistence can seep through the pages of our children's educational textbooks, we stand a chance at nurturing peace-loving citizens in the next generation. Also to this end, ICESCO initiated ambitious programs aimed at promoting peace, especially by mobilizing youth, women and religious leaders through our flagship Leadership Training in Peace and Security Program. The 2021 cycle allowed for the mobilizing and training of 30 young people as peace ambassadors, including 18 women from 24 countries on 4 continents, by providing them with knowledge and leadership skills while reaching hundreds of thousands of youth through social media platforms. An important part of this training emphasized interfaith and civilizational dialogue which we believe are key components of the peacebuilder's toolbox.

Since 2009 ICESCO has developed in Yamoussouakro, Cote d'Ivoire, the Regional Centre for Culture of Peace. This center optimizes our strong commitment to instilling within key social actors (youth, women and religious leaders) a culture of peace that they can spread throughout all society. These initiatives must ensure that the seeds we plant will blossom and grow in order to become sturdy trees of peace that will resist the strongest wind, especially in these times of crisis and turmoil.

ICESCO has held the high-level international virtual Forum on the "Role of Religious Leaders in the Face of Crises" under the theme Towards Global Moral Solidarity on 21 July 2020. This conference brought together a large number of eminent authorities from all over the world in order to identify the best initiatives and practices of religious institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, explore the regenerative and future features of religious thought, and set up working mechanisms to make use of crisis gains as well as address their adverse repercussions. The conference declaration is of great value to all stakeholders and is accessible on our ICESCO website.

Peace among cultures also means mutual understanding between religions, because no peace can ever prevail when extremism becomes the dominant ideology in religion. Peaceful coexistence is possible only when we establish a middle ground, a set of common universal values that bind us together rather than tear us apart.

We are living through a devastating pandemic that continues to disrupt the lives and livelihoods of millions of people around the world as well as pull the fabric of our societies apart.

Responsible leaders, therefore, have to inculcate the spirit of solidarity, understanding, social justice and tolerance within our people, and to ensure that the same spirit permeates every corner of our daily lives and touches the hearts and minds of people across the globe.

This is our supreme responsibility and the reason why ICESCO proposes a new societal project called the Societies We Want (SWW). It aims at building peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, resilient and sustainable societies, lest we fall into the trap of distrust and spiraling hate and bring about our biggest fear of war and conflict. This is the crux of the Makkah Charter which builds a powerful narrative of coexistence between different religions of this world. This charter affirms the supremacy of common human values, ethics and mutual respect.

We at ICESCO strongly believe that we must transcend the mere absence of war and promote the building of an environment that forms the breeding ground for a positive culture of peace within societies, one that translates to peace-induced domestic and regional policies.

As they say, “if we want to reduce the conflict, do not say no to war, but say yes to peace”. We at ICESCO, stand ready in working together with all our peacebuilding partners towards building this narrative in achieving global peace.

Noemi Di Segni

President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI)

Contribuisco con alcune riflessioni al tema di questa sessione, anzitutto ribadendo l’apprezzamento al governo italiano e a tutti i membri del G20 per aver previsto questa dimensione religiosa, dell’essere e del fare spirituale e umano valoriale accanto all’agenda più prettamente economico-finanziaria che solitamente caratterizza questi incontri. Per un paese come l’Italia che poggia su una Costituzione postbellica, post-fascista, faro di principi attuali e quotidiani, e per l’Europa tutta che ancora attende una costituzione, la preservazione e la promozione di una cornice di valori e morale che trae forza dal patrimonio valoriale che hanno le religioni è un atto di responsabilità. Grazie alla Fondazione per le scienze religiose per averlo portato avanti nell’intera organizzazione.

La sfida che abbiamo non è solo di dialogo interreligioso ma anche di dialogo tra religioni e istituzioni statali che definiscono politiche e programmi nel paese e, quindi, l’apporto delle collettività religiose, con il loro bagaglio di cultura e tradizioni, al contesto non religioso e al di là del loro impegno nel forgiare identità religiose all’interno dei propri contesti e comunità.

L’ebraismo stesso è tutto basato su un percorso di studi e istruzione e la stessa parola Torah, alla base della nostra fede, ha come significato il verbo insegnare.

Quindi verso l’esterno con una funzione di condivisione e sostegno ai processi non religiosi, portando le nostre esperienze di integrazione, accoglienza, di nuclei comunitari come concetto di rete e di protezione del singolo, metodologie didattiche, capacità di coniugare saperi antichi in contesti in evoluzione e resilienza, adattamento ai cambiamenti anche drammatici, e aggiungerei: narrazione coerente della storia ebraica all’interno della storia del paese. Questa sfida si traduce nella cura di strumenti didattici, nella revisione dei testi di studio (ad esempio con un progetto, molto importante, che abbiamo avviato con la Conferenza episcopale italiana), in un programma coerente di didattica della Shoah e per arginare razzismo e antisemitismo. Eventi da vivere assieme nei quali condividere tradizioni altrui reciprocamente e verso l’interno, sapendo definire percorsi educativi e di formazione dell’identità religiosa che sia solida, orgogliosa della propria origine e del proprio passato, capace di relazionarsi con contesti esterni e purtroppo a volte minacciosi. Essere forti nell’animo per affrontare la maturazione, la vita di famiglia, di comunità e del paese in cui si vive anche con altri.

L’educazione inizia al giorno uno della vita ed avviene come sappiamo in molti contesti in contemporanea – nelle famiglie, negli asili nido, nelle scuole, nelle università, in contesti sociali che man a mano si allargano – e assieme alle materie didattiche si impara a vivere con altri. Ha come protagonisti sia gli alunni che gli insegnanti, il corpo amministrativo e direi anche gli spazi stessi per come sono articolati e modulati e per i simboli che riportano (mi riferisco anche alla recentissima sentenza della Cassazione sui simboli da esporre nelle scuole pubbliche). È quindi fondamentale, per gli enti e le istituzioni che hanno responsabilità politica, sostenere percorsi di conoscenza culturale e dei percorsi didattici. È una responsabilità comune e solo il raccordo tra enti religiosi e le istituzioni può favorire un miglioramento per poter affrontare una società che oggi ha bisogno, urgente, di sicurezza, contro fenomeni di odio, diretto e per il tramite delle reti sociali, sempre più preoccupante.

In questo senso faccio appello alla necessità di ripensare l’insegnamento della religione nella scuola pubblica. Non dovrebbe essere sede di un servizio religioso offerto dalla Chiesa agli studenti di fede cristiana o specificatamente cattolica – questo ha senso nella scuola religiosa o in altri contesti paralleli – e che comporta la sospensione didattica nelle ore dedicate alla religione per tutti gli altri studenti, rarissimamente ben compensata da altre attività formative.

“L’ora di religione” deve diventare l’ora delle religioni, e di creazione di uno spazio ideale che consolida conoscenza e approfondimento culturale e anche storico, abbinato ad un rafforzamento della tutela delle libertà religiose anch’esso minacciato da vari processi sociali e legislativi (anche a livello europeo). Le religioni hanno da contribuire con un’infinità di bene e su questo ci concentriamo oggi per ragionare sul nostro utile apporto, ma ricordiamoci che il male di guerre basate sulla rivendicazione di supremazia religiosa, la lettura distorta delle parole rituali e di preghiera non appartiene solo alla storia e al passato. Le guerre fondamentaliste sono un presente, sono l’oggi ad appena poche ore di volo da qui. E sono anche in atteggiamenti celati e pericolosi accanto alle nostre abitazioni. Non le possiamo sottovalutare e solo con un chiaro progetto di formazione di coscienze e conoscenze le si potrà superare. Ma sono processi lunghi e vanno quindi ben strutturati.

Va quindi ripensato il format adottato oggi e che ho vissuto con i miei tre figli nella scuola pubblica. Ne sono, penso, credibile testimone.

La sfida, lo dico con sincerità e ponderando le mie parole, è anche per le stesse comunità ebraiche, al proprio interno – scuole e movimenti giovanili. Affrontare il tema dell’insegnamento e della conoscenza di altre religioni, conoscere gli altri e i loro percorsi storici e le loro tradizioni è elemento di forza, non di minaccia e indebolimento. Se abbiamo ben formata la nostra identità religiosa e viviamo il nostro ebraismo in modo pieno, gioioso e sereno nelle famiglie e nelle comunità, nelle feste e nel ciclo delle nostre vite, possiamo anche insegnare nelle nostre scuole in modo ragionato come sono strutturate le altre religioni. Ciò non significa insegnare a praticarle o perdere la propria fede.

Siamo all’avvio di un nuovo anno ebraico 5782, nei giorni più importanti dell’anno di espiazione e introspezione personale, ragionando sulle cose che avremmo dovuto fare diversamente e sugli impegni da assumere per l’anno nuovo. Lo facciamo come singoli ma anche come leader e istituzioni. Questo bilancio intimo è doveroso affinché l’anno che matura sia ricco di buone azioni e non solo di propositi. Estendo a tutti gli auguri di Shana Tovà – di buon nuovo anno, oltre che di un ottimo e gioioso anno scolastico.

Miguel Ángel Moratinos Cuyaubé

High Representative of the United Nations Alliance for Civilization (UNAOC)

It is a great pleasure to be here today in-person and to see many friends and colleagues with whom I have been meeting virtually over the past 15 months. I am sure this is the case for most of the participants at this Forum. So I thank Prof. Alberto Melloni and his team at the G20 Interfaith Forum and I thank the government of Italy for their great efforts in organizing this Forum in the magnificent city of Bologna which houses the oldest and one of the most prestigious universities in Europe.

At the outset, I wish to call for a moment of silence in remembrance of the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and to honor the nearly 3000 lives lost on that day.

As we reflect on 9/11, we think of how those terrorist attacks have shaped the relations between the United States and the Muslim world in particular, and the West and the Muslim world in general. The malignant act of a band of terrorists with twisted ideologies led to the vilifying and demonizing of an entire faith community. There was a clash of ignorance. An absence of knowledge and education about each other’s cultures and religions and of how very much we share in common as one humanity.

This brings me to the creation of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in 2005. The idea was conceived as a response to the chain of terrorist attacks that followed 9/11, namely on Madrid, Bali and London. The Alliance aims at addressing the root causes of polarization and radicalization and at drawing solutions for conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

The other event of significance to our topic is the celebration of peace. Next week on 21 September, the United Nations invites people around the world to celebrate peace by observing 24 hours of ceasefire and non-violence. The theme we have chosen this year is “Recovering Better for an Equitable and Sustainable World”. I look at this Forum as a precursor to such celebration. It is indeed time to heal, and to reimagine a better future for people and for our planet.

Peace should be the building block as we chart that course. Peace is at the heart of the work we do at the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. We firmly believe that peace should be embraced as a way of life. A continued process, not a one time, feel good action. Attaining a sustainable peace is not an easy path but it is an inevitable one. A culture of peace should be nurtured through the strengthening of mutual respect, the promotion of diversity, and the protection of the dignity of all members of society regardless of their race, religion, belief or gender. This is where education at an early age, in fact at every age, becomes an indispensable tool. By grasping diversity as richness rather than as a threat, the common values we share as one humanity, compassion, empathy and mutual respect are values that should be nurtured at an early age in schools. They are also common values that all faiths and religions embrace. The absence of knowledge about these commonalities creates a fertile ground for hate mongers to sow the seeds of their toxic hate. Therefore, the role of education is to create the conditions that build the defenses – within learners – against hate, stigma and racist sentiments and which strengthen their understanding of and commitment to mutual respect, humility and peace. This educational approach is best promoted through Global Citizenship Education in order to instill respect for human rights, social justice, and religious and cultural diversity which are fundamental values that will help in building the critical thinking skills and peace-building capacity of young learners.

What I have said is especially important given the current global human crisis. We are fighting on two battlefields: fighting to save our lives through health measures and vaccines and fighting to save our humanity against the virus of hate and racism that is dividing our societies and threatening their stability.

One of the antidotes against hate and racism is education. As such, education is one of the pillars of our work at UNAOC. UNAOC has been working on exposing younger generations to media litera-

cy and critical thinking skills with the goal of helping them acquire a set of skills needed to create counter-narratives against hate and intolerance and develop innovative techniques to create compelling content that promotes positive values and responds to the misrepresentations of facts.

We have just completed the EDIN (Empowering Dialogue and Interfaith Networks) project, which UNAOC jointly implemented with the UN Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT).

The program targets young leaders, representatives of Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) for diverse faiths denominations, and media makers. It equips the leaders and representatives with effective communication tools through a peer-to-peer learning process in collaboration with media makers so as to enhance their capacity to challenge terrorist ideologies on new online platforms. Similarly, young media makers are provided with religious literacy tools that broaden their understanding of the common values shared between religions and faiths so as to debunk terroristic and hateful discourse and promote religious understanding, which is key to social cohesion and inclusion.

I am also pleased that we are working jointly with the University of Malta on the Inclusive Religious Education (IRE) initiative. The initiative is not about faith education. It is aimed to complement the either faith or non-religious instruction that learners get from their families and/or faith communities. In other words, through the IRE initiative individuals would learn from religion and learn about religion, whereas in faith communities and places of worship they are instructed in religion. The curricula are expected to promote the appreciation and engagement with a diverse range of religious and secular ideas and world views and practices.

As the Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan mentioned in his intervention, UNAOC is very pleased to partner with his government in implementing the Peace for Culture initiative. I have agreed with H.E. the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev during my visit to Azerbaijan last June to draw a 5-year plan of action for the implementation of this initiative. Our teams are working together towards that end.

Here are some of the UNAOC’s other projects in the area of education.

First, the UNAOC Young Peacebuilders program is a peace education initiative that creates a safe space to support young people in gaining knowledge and skills (media and information literacy, project management, conflict resolution, etc.) in order to enhance their positive role in issues of peace, security and preventing violent extremism. The program also brings visibility to actions initiated by young people towards peace and the promotion of diversity and dialogue. This month we will launch a handbook for Young Peace Builders in 3 languages.

Second, with UNESCO and UNOCT we have launched a project on “Intercultural Dialogue and Socio-Emotional Competencies for Peacebuilding” in collaboration with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) in New Delhi, India. The initiative aims to support young people in co-designing and co-creating games that will serve as pedagogical tools for transferring, enhancing and developing skills and competencies for intercultural dialogue and for social and emotional learning to prevent violent extremism.

Third, emanating from UNAOC’s recognition of the importance of the two intersecting pillars of education and youth as a tool to help prevent violent extremism as well as the role of youth in promoting peace and security, UNAOC launched phase II of #YouthWagingPeace: A Whole Community Approach to Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education in partnership with UNESCO and the MGIEP. It was implemented early this year. In the context of the rise in religious and ethnic related intolerance in South-East Asia, young people are being pushed and pulled to the fault lines of violent extremism conducive to terrorism. Thus, the project aims to empower and train Southeast Asian youth leaders with skills and tools to create and implement community-wide PVE-E (prevention of violent extremism through education) activities and mobilize their respective communities so as to lead to a positive socio-change towards sustainable peace.

MINISTERIAL SESSION 3

Religious Affairs and Peaceful Coexistence

Luciana Lamorgese

Italian Minister of the Interior

Ho accettato con grande piacere l'invito a presiedere l'odierna sessione del G20 Interfaith Forum, dedicata alla riflessione sul contributo che le religioni possono assicurare al processo di creazione di una società inclusiva e coesa, nella quale popolazioni di culture e credi diversi possano convivere pacificamente, nel rispetto delle relative identità e differenze.

Il ruolo svolto dalla religione nel processo di formazione delle identità individuali e collettive, nella definizione del sistema di valori e della visione del mondo dei fedeli, pone in evidenza la centralità del dialogo interreligioso quale strumento attraverso il quale evitare il radicarsi delle ragioni del disaccordo e favorire, al contrario, attraverso il rafforzamento della conoscenza e della comprensione tra culture diverse, l'incontro su un comune terreno etico.

Come testimonia il lungo cammino percorso dalla chiesa cattolica a partire dal Concilio Vaticano Secondo, il dialogo tra persone di religioni diverse può condurre a reali convergenze su valori universali e comuni da difendere e promuovere insieme, quali la pace, la giustizia, la dignità umana, la protezione dell'ambiente, ed aprire la strada alla costruzione di un mondo migliore, poiché, come afferma il *Documento sulla fratellanza umana per la pace mondiale e la convivenza comune*, firmato ad Abu Dhabi da Papa Francesco e dal Grande Imam di Al-Azhar, "le religioni non incitano mai alla guerra".

Odio e ostilità, estremismi e fanatismi sono piuttosto il frutto della strumentalizzazione delle religioni per fini politici o economici o la conseguenza di interpretazioni degli insegnamenti religiosi, proposte in alcune fasi della storia, che nulla hanno a che vedere con le verità di fede.

I veri insegnamenti delle religioni, citando ancora il *Documento sulla fratellanza umana* – pietra miliare nel cammino del dialogo in-

terreligioso – invitano a "restare ancorati ai valori della pace ... della reciproca conoscenza, della fratellanza ... e della convivenza comune", riconoscono la libertà, anche di credo, come diritto di ogni persona e l'eguaglianza dei diritti e dei doveri quale canone del concetto di cittadinanza ed antidoto contro ogni forma di discriminazione.

Perché i frutti dell'incontro delle religioni sui valori universali e comuni non restino confinati sul piano teologico e filosofico, è tuttavia necessario che essi siano portati all'attenzione dei leader del pensiero, delle istituzioni pubbliche – a tutti i livelli – delle organizzazioni della società civile, oltre che dei credenti, affinché possano tradursi in politiche ed atti normativi, in programmi di formazione e comunicazione sul valore della pluralità e della differenza ed infine in comportamenti collettivi e individuali conseguenti.

Questo, come esponenti delle istituzioni, ci interroga su come rendere produttivi di conseguenze concrete quei frutti e dunque su come concorrere, valorizzando i ponti tra culture edificati dal dialogo interreligioso, alla creazione di una società pacifica e giusta, inclusiva e rispettosa della dignità umana e dell'ambiente; di una società in cui nessuno possa percepirsi come minoranza isolata o esclusa e di cui, al contrario, tutti si sentano cittadini attivi, con il diritto e il dovere di contribuire al suo sviluppo.

È un impegno che avvertiamo tanto più urgente nella società contemporanea in cui, anche a seguito dell'intensificarsi delle migrazioni, si vive insieme e si vive tra diversi.

In tale quadro, il principio di laicità dello Stato è garanzia della neutralità delle istituzioni nei confronti delle confessioni e delle organizzazioni religiose.

Nel sistema delineato dalle norme costituzionali e dall'interpretazione data dalla Corte Costituzionale, tuttavia, questa neutralità non implica indifferenza delle istituzioni rispetto alle religioni, ma garanzia ed impegno dello Stato per la tutela della libertà di coscienza, di pensiero e di religione, nonché dell'uguale libertà di fronte alla legge delle confessioni religiose, nel rispetto di tutte le opzioni religiose e dei comportamenti che ne discendono, purché frutto di libera scelta e non confliggenti con altre libertà costituzionalmente garantite.

In tale prospettiva, unitamente al dialogo tra le religioni è necessario un continuo rapporto tra le autorità pubbliche e le comunità religiose in un'ottica di comune impegno nell'edificazione di una società multiculturale e multireligiosa.

Le comunità religiose rappresentano un punto centrale di riferimento per le persone che ne fanno parte.

Al loro interno non si svolge solo la vita religiosa dei fedeli. Esse sono luogo di confronto e di crescita e, attraverso gli insegnamenti,

la formazione e i servizi che offrono, svolgono una funzione di utilità pubblica, contribuendo alla socializzazione e all'integrazione e ponendosi quale interfaccia, oltre che con la società, con le istituzioni.

Non può dunque prescindere dalla conoscenza e dal dialogo con le comunità di fede, attivando percorsi che conducano dall'ignoranza alla conoscenza, da questa alla comprensione ed infine alla fiducia reciproca.

In questa direzione sto orientando la mia azione, in particolare nei confronti delle comunità e delle associazioni islamiche, nella convinzione che sia sempre possibile incontrarsi e rispettarsi e che la cultura del dialogo e della conoscenza non sia un'utopia, ma la condizione necessaria per vivere in pace, nel rispetto della legalità, e lasciare alle generazioni future un mondo migliore.

Mohammed Al-Mamari

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman

It is my great honor and a real pleasure to be in this historic city of Bologna, and in this significant gathering that revives us, renews hope in our spirits, and gives us time to heal as we experience the consequences of this pandemic and face its serious challenges together.

Let me first extend my deepest gratitude, on behalf of His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah bin Muhammad Al Salmi, the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs in the Sultanate of Oman, for this kind invitation, and to the government of Italy for their hospitable reception and warm welcome, to Professor Alberto Melloni, and to all those who developed their efforts to make this Forum come to life.

The pre-COVID-19 world and post-COVID-19 world has transformed an unlikely reality. A reality that is unfamiliar to us all: economic and ideological currents, conflicts of beliefs and identities, the spread of hate speech, the change of social values and ethical standards, refugee movements, climate change, and imbalances in justice, equality, and human freedoms – such challenges have troubled the world and will continue to do so. Therefore, I call upon all of us to reflect on the fate of the stability of this interconnected, inter-related, and harmonizing global system.



President of FSCIRE, Alessandro Pajno and Italian Minister of the Interior, Luciana Lamorgese.

Mohammed Al-Mamari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman and Alberto Melloni, Secretary of FSCIRE.

Ministerial Session 3 at Biblioteca d'arte e di storia di San Giorgio in Poggiale, 13 September 2021.

In this regard, Oman's positive impact and interactions with the peoples of the world, have been witnessed over the centuries. Peace and tolerance are Oman's identity, an identity that is passed on generation after generation; Oman has always strived towards pursuing development and prosperity for this world.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq as a leader of the renewed renaissance of Oman, affirmed that, "in the foreign front, the Sultanate of Oman shall trace the course of the late Sultan, reaffirming the fundamentals of our country's foreign policy, based on peaceful co-existence with nations, good neighborliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for countries' sovereignty and international cooperation in various spheres". His Majesty the Sultan has also affirmed that Oman "will remain as the world had known us during the reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. We will call and contribute to resolving disputes by peaceful means, sparing no effort in finding satisfactory solutions in a spirit of harmony and understanding". His Majesty Sultan Haitham also said, "Oman's message of peace would continue to roam the world, carrying a great heritage and noble goals, building and not demolishing, reproaching and not distancing". Oman's 2040 vision strives to promote tolerance and global peace. It aims for Oman to become "a globally leading society in the areas of mutual understanding, coexistence, and peace". Focusing on promoting these standards among Omani youth through various engagements and activities.

The world peace and stability that we all seek demand accepting our differences, accepting human changes and renewed human needs, then returning to the basics and constant values affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to help us all establish a common ground for a dialogue that leads towards rebuilding the present and creating hope for the future. In the Sultanate of Oman, attaining global peace and safety and importing concepts of tolerance, mutual understanding, and coexistence from the depths of intellectual thought to the surface of reality contains three dimensions: reason, justice, and global ethics.

Reason: to honor human beings insofar as they are human beings, without discrimination.

Justice: this casts a shadow over all human beings.

Global ethics: the sum of shared human values that protect reason and justice from drifting towards personal whims and negative discrimination.

The Sultanate of Oman has been sharing its peaceful philosophy at home and abroad for centuries. Oman's Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs has been promoting dialogue among nations for decades to foster mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence on a global scale. Among these initiatives, I would like to highlight two in particular.

The first one is the exhibition entitled "Tolerance, Understanding, Coexistence: Oman's Message of Islam", established in 2010 as one part of its comprehensive approach promoting these values. This was not a public relations campaign, nor was it done simply out of the goodness of one's heart, but as a continuation of Oman's long-standing tradition of conducting dialogue and commerce with diverse communities and cultures. This exhibition has appeared in more than 130 cities and in more than 39 countries since its beginning in 2010. During the last 11 years an international team has built a unique worldwide network, reaching almost all levels of society in more than 40 nations.

The second one: the initiative entitled Towards United Human Values, which is also known as the Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values, was launched in 2020. It was a celebration to mark the International Day for Tolerance, to promote religious tolerance, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence. This Omani initiative is very timely given the present turmoil in the world, which comes from hatred, terrorism, and the misinterpretation of the teachings of various religions.

In conclusion, in this one world, where human beings of different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and religions are living together, where societies have become multicultural and full of diversity, establishing harmony has become crucial, and fostering peaceful coexistence has become vital. Security and stability are essential elements for any society, but achieving social cohesion is needed. Without social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, as the set of our human values, a lasting peace among nations cannot be preserved, and a common ground between people cannot be established.

The lack of coexistence, the lack of social cohesion leads the way to violence, and it destroys the peace and stability of mankind. When people or even nations fail at dialogue, they become intolerant, and then they use force and aggression to support their opinion.

Lastly, without wise leaders who realize the extent of responsibility and the weight of the trust they have been given, we cannot achieve success in all the plans, efforts, and funds for the attainment of the global peace and stability that we all aspire to and have invested in.

May God bless all our efforts, and may this Forum be fruitful, have tangible results and provide effective recommendations. And may God unite us all in brotherhood, peace, and harmony.

Afra Al Saabri,
General Director of the Ministry
of Tolerance and Coexistence
of the UAE.

Afra Al Saabri General Director of the Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence of the United Arab Emirates

It is my distinct honor and privilege to convey to you the greetings and best wishes of His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence in the United Arab Emirates. Unfortunately, he was unable to be here today in person. He asked me to express to you his great appreciation for your strong commitment to searching vigorously for justice, tolerance, understanding, and peace in our world. His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan has sent a special message to this important Forum. It is my honor to read this message to you on his behalf.

"Greetings from the United Arab Emirates. We are deeply grateful to the people and city of Bologna for hosting this G20 Interfaith Forum. My country wishes the greatest success for this gathering. We reaffirm our national commitment to exchanging ideas and experiences, to discussing issues of common interest and concern, and to strengthening cooperation among us all.

The objective of this Forum is for us to build bridges among cultures and religions. We seek ways to bring hope and optimism to relationships that have long been characterized by doubt and lack of trust. This Forum makes the statement that common ground is possible if we come to know one another as equals and as champions of peace and human well-being.

I address you today, as the Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence in the United Arab Emirates. We have long recognized in the United Arab Emirates that tolerance and peaceful coexistence need our constant effort of support to make them an integral part of our lives. We must accept others and welcome them as effective participants in society without discrimination. We must consciously reject negative stereotypes and seek dialogue to resolve misunderstandings and build trust.

We must understand that religious fundamentalism is not unique to any one religion, nor to any single region. We must help societies deal with it in a normal, constructive way. Reform and economic prosperity inspire confidence and realistic hopes for a better future – a future characterized by healing, understanding, progress, and stability.

These hopes for the future of human societies were on the minds of the pope, and the Sheikh of Al-Azhar when they issued the Abu Dhabi Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together in 2019. That historic document asks everyone to commit themselves – and I quote – "to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace, putting an end to wars, environmental decay, and moral and cultural decline". The declaration emphasizes that peace and understanding promote the qualities and experiences that unite, rather than divide, and enable a shared stake in public wellbeing and happiness, regardless of cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.

Our experience in the UAE has shown that for peace, tolerance, fraternity, and understanding to reach their full potential, they must begin with the individual, by educating them and providing accurate information about relationships between religions, cultures, and peoples. We must also focus our efforts on local communities and then on countries, and ultimately on the entire world. In all of this, tolerance and understanding must extend to positive and honest dialogue among all of us regardless of our religion, ethnicity, nationality, culture, economic status, or political belief. We must actively seek that dialogue and become accustomed to exchanging knowledge and opinion and to listening carefully and respectfully to the views of others. Such dialogue can enable us to accept differences and recognize shared values. Tolerance and understanding require the courage to confront the unknown, and embrace diversity because tolerance rewards the courageous with peace, harmony, and prosperity.

As the world continues to weather the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of tolerance, peace, fraternity, and understanding looms larger than ever as global principles that are essential to safely and successfully navigating this global crisis. Years from now, when we reflect on this time, I am hopeful that we will see that it was peace, cooperation, and adherence to human values that sustained us and provided us with the dedication, and resolve to unite, persevere, and to succeed.

Because of our positive experience with tolerance and understanding, we in the UAE are eager to join with other countries and organizations in support of tolerance, human fraternity, and peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence. We are ready to share our experience and to gain from others a wider understanding of the universal power of tolerance. I call on you to join the United Arab Emirates in demonstrating that tolerance and understanding within diverse human societies is a positive and creative force for development and stability everywhere.

While I could not be with you in person, I am with you in the spirit of peace, tolerance, and understanding. You have my most sincere best wishes for a successful Forum".



Atefeh Sadeghi

Community Development Officer,
Enhancing Faith Institutions (EFI)

Religious affairs have always been affected and have always affected all the affairs of each society in various ways throughout history and in our modern times. In some countries, different religions have naturally practiced diverse ways of being together peacefully in a conscious state of cooperation and mutual understanding that I summarize as “your existence matters as much as mine, no matter what we hold in our minds and beliefs”. Such an existence is still present in some villages in Palestine/Israel where Muslims and Jews live regardless of the pressures that come from outside their villages and beyond. Their way of living together has come to them naturally and through generations long before the conflicts known today existed. The passing of knowledge and cultural values of both sides has been the key to creating such peacefully cooperative societies.

However, with the extension and the depth of religious based conflicts, it is no longer possible, in most situations, to live peacefully without the need for interventions. The reason for this I find to be the promotion of coexistence without an equal promotion of informed knowledge about one another. In fact, the creation and promotion of informed knowledge should precede encouragements of coexistence. We have been inviting communities and states to dialogue without providing the tools and the grounds to understand each other truthfully. What happens is that, even when we agree that there is no way to live other than peacefully together, conflict is there in silence waiting for a moment to burst out. Such an uninformed coexistence is only tolerance and tolerance has a negative nature to it whether we want to accept it or not. It means we exist together because we are forced to and we tolerate each other because we have no other option and therefore we avoid conflict. Such an approach is doomed, I believe, as at the sight of any disagreement, any pressure, any disturbance, conflicts arise and peaceful coexistence ceases to exist. That is why we should agree that a conflict delayed is a conflict multiplied. A conflict should be acknowledged, learnt from, understood, transformed, and then we can talk about peaceful coexistence.

A lot has been said about interreligious dialogue over the decades, but in fact it is a community dialogue which we need. That means engaging everyone at every level without framing them according to different groups. This is the ground for creating change in a world where religion might have faded from many lives but still plays a major role in social and political decision making, which, in the end, has a direct effect on citizens.

The importance of interdependence, of creating security and bringing society together within a synchronized approach lies in the fact that such security will never take shape without knowledge, and uninformed opinion is ever more threatening to everyone and should be taken seriously. The responsibility lies as much on members of societies as it does on states and religious leaders. What we need to do is help communities to assume their own responsibilities by taking into account their perspectives concerning what they feel is needed for their security. We can bring communities together to engage with one another and build social cohesion, which will not give any more room to extremism of any form and is the essence of security. As we know, creation of healthy societies is now the ultimate goal of, at least, developed countries and, indeed, should be the goal of all. Such a society has many factors to be considered as was mentioned by other distinguished guests. Diversity and security are to be kept at the heart of the matter.

What is necessary now, the imminent need of our time, is to educate communities to inculcate an understanding of the other before we expect them to live together. And by educating them I mean providing real, lived stories of members of communities to give a true picture of their circumstances, their backgrounds, their belief systems and everything else that comes with it. Such an education provides an understanding and there comes respect and peace. This is the way to security. Providing learning systems to acknowledge coexistence through knowing each other and not through tolerance. We have been imposing integration without providing a truthful education about differences and that is where we have gone wrong.

It is with such an approach that we can form powerful communities that can recreate and multiply models of peace. Regarding security, it is the community that needs to assume their roles, if not before the state, then alongside state actors. The need to belong to a community is felt ever more strongly and thus community engagement can provide security through the creation of a sense of belonging.

The current propositions for peace are no longer – nor should be – limited to holders of religious authorities/committees. Faith, diplomacy, the inclusion of women, diversity of engagements, and all other pressing matters should be carried out by members of each society, while leaders remain facilitators and not major actors at this time. We need to move beyond the already known paths and take a track that moves alongside, and as fast as, all the innovations at work in today's societies.

Alessandro Pajno

President of the *Fondazione per le scienze religiose (FSCIRE)*

This roundtable on religious affairs and peaceful coexistence is quite a significant one, because around this table we have the people responsible for religious affairs. They are the real protagonists of interfaith dialogue and they are actors in two different dimensions, because not only do they take part in interfaith dialogue, but they also promote it. So this draws our attention to the addresses heard here today, which underline how religious and civil dimensions can meet and cooperate to shape a world where peace, listening, understanding, freedom and justice become shared values. Our discussion reminds us of the value of diversity and of collaboration in diversity.

We thank the participants for reminding us that ignorance is an enemy of peace and for having recalled the central role of building peace in a multicultural world and also the role of religions and their capacity for a dialogue that shapes a shared future. Previously, I have said that religions give hope to the future, and this is precisely the concept at the very heart of our commitments and concerns today.

We further thank the participants for recalling the value of diversity and the dimensions and value of globalization in a positive sense. I mean, not only an economic and financial globalization, but also globalization of values, cultures and religions, and also the role played by religious leaders when it comes to fostering common and shared values. This is very important, because it provides us with an indication that helps us limit this threat, the threat of a different and improper use of faith that divides, and a painful use of faith too, which creates violence and which is manipulated to perpetrate terror attacks and so forth. So thank you very much for offering us your views and your indications. Special reference was made to tangible programs: all this talk cannot just be words, words and more words; rather, we should put them into practice so that our sons and daughters can experience a better world. Well, this is hopefully what we are going to do very, very soon.

We are also reminded that religions can involve elements of contrast and confrontation. Of this we are aware. We are also here to make sure that the right and proper use of religion prevails. The participants recalled the role of new technology of AI and algorithms. The algorithm dates back to many centuries ago and so from this perspective, I believe that we should examine what it is. The debate is open and we know that we have, on the one hand, Big Tech and on the other hand, the Big State and so the challenge here is creating a technological democracy. This is actually the new aim which has been undertaken by the European Union too by promulgating the regulation of the use of AI due to its possibly negative consequences. But I believe that awareness is the most important thing, because tools that have negative consequences can be produced, but it is awareness that counts. I mean, rifles and guns do not shoot by themselves but need a hand behind them. For this reason, we need to work to change awareness and consciences and to support our values with the awareness that we are united in our destiny as human beings. And I believe that, despite all difficulties, this can happen. Our numbers and figures, too, are Arabic, of course. And I believe that this is something for which we need to thank the Arab world, because it is a shared heritage.

The message delivered to us from His Excellency the Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence indicates the words necessary for tolerance, comprehension and understanding at a universal level. This reference to loyalty is very important, because loyalty and well, actually *fiducia*, which is the Italian word for loyalty, comes from *fides*, which is faith. So you need to have faith – you need to keep the faith – and hope for a common future, for a shared future. Thus, those who are loyal and those who believe have hope in a better future. And I think that this is a path that we need to pursue. We need to rebuild faith. We need to rebuild faith and we need to rebuild the capacity for understanding each other and for moving forward. In the time of the pandemic, we can say that faith is a vaccine against social diseases and difficulties.

Finally, thank you all also for indicating the fact that diplomacy and religions need to cooperate in order to find shared solutions and that from this perspective, G20 interfaith can represent an important place in this respect.

FORTHCOMING

In the forthcoming supplements, the following speeches will be published:

A Ahmed Abbadi
Moustadroine Abdou
Pshtwan Sadq Abdullah
Mohammed Abu-Nimer
Khaled Akasheh
Otabek Akbarov
Adel Abdulrahman Al Asoomi
Elie Al Hindy
Abdullah Alhomaïd
Sayyed Jawad Mohammed Taqi Al-Khoei
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