



TALKING – POINTS

Panel debate: Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious Context

Speaker: Ambassador Idriss Jazairy, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

Duration of speech: 5:00

Excellencies, Distinguished Panellists, Honourable Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is my honour to serve as a moderator of today's panel debate entitled "*Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious Context*" organized jointly by the Geneva Centre and the World Council of Churches.
- I would like to welcome you on behalf of our Chairman Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim who was prevented from being with us today for health reasons. As Dr. Al Qassim has said in his statement to commemorate the 2018 World Human Rights Day, "*Education constitutes an important building block to enhance inter-faith dialogue, break down social barriers and to overcome the fear of the Other.*"
- The topic of the conference was borne as an idea during the 25 June 2018 World Conference on religions and equal citizenship rights. This major international conference was held under the Patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan at the United Nations Office at Geneva.
- At this conference, high-level participants and Eminent Dignitaries appealed to the Geneva Centre and the World Council of Churches to organize a follow-up event on the role of education in developing peaceful and harmonious communities by promoting tolerance and empathy between people.
- Together with the World Council of Churches, we felt this idea could be pursued in collaboration with other like-minded religious and lay leaders sharing our aspiration to promote tolerance and empathy through education.
- We are holding the present meeting under the spirit of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal who asked me to convey the following message:

"We unite our voices today to promote education as a vector for enabling diversity to be understood as an asset wherein minds meet into shared aspirations at the national level and beyond as a gateway to peace."

- The aim of today's conference will be to discuss how Education for Peace in multireligious societies can engage different stakeholders to counter violent extremist narratives, build peaceful and inclusive societies as well as to promote universally shared values upheld in diverse faiths and value systems.
- We are currently witnessing a pincer movement of two forces that differ in their expression but both of whom, draw on the rejection of "*the Other*": the rise of xenophobic populism in advanced societies, and extremist violence in the Arab region. This is a worrying context. A context which is likely to worsen in the future if we do nothing about it.
- In these turbulent times, equal access to education can open vital spaces for cooperation. Spaces that will enable us to enhance inter-faith dialogue, break down social barriers, overcome ignorance and the fear of "*the Other*". Education can help lift the veil of ignorance that has befallen many societies.
- It is undeniable that the first step towards social harmony starts with educating our youth. Education stands out as fertile ground to sow and grow, in the minds of the upcoming generations, the seeds of human rights and of equal citizenship rights. It echoes the ambition to instil a sense of solidarity and build learner's resilience among youth to address divisive and xenophobic narratives that prevail among adults in modern societies.
- Through education, youth and other vulnerable social segments of societies can be empowered to move beyond biases and preconceptions that they may have inherited. Education for Peace and equal citizenship rights will help the youth to appreciate religious diversity as a source of richness, rather than as a threat.
- Education in global citizenship in a multi-religious context is part of the fundamental right to education stressed by the Secretary General of the International Catholic Child Bureau, Ms. Alessandra Aula, during the 3 December panel debate on the "*Dignity of Life*" organized by the Permanent Delegation of the Sovereign Order of Malta. She said:

"The violation of the right to education thus involves a violation of all other rights because ignoring the identities of individuals, groups and communities means depriving them of the capacity to build their lives, to weave social bonds and to experience development, and these violations are often responsible for spreading poverty, misery and violence."
- Societies must therefore capitalize on the convergence between major world religions, creeds and value systems with the aim of building a culture of peace, empathy and inter-cultural dialogue. The synergies of providing access to education built on common universal values makes a strong contribution towards the realization of social stability and peace.

- I will now return to my role as a moderator of the debate.
- We are greatly privileged today to have the presence of the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, who will be making an opening statement. But before I give the floor to the General Secretary to share with us his words of wisdom, I would like to inform the audience that today's debate will benefit from the insights of the following inter-religious experts:
 - The first speaker to take the floor will be **Monsignor Indunil Janakarathne**, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue of the Holy See. His guiding theme will be on "*Educating to a Culture of Fraternity in Schools: A Christian Perspective.*"
 - **Professor Anantanand Rambachan**, Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College, will then enlighten us on: "*The enhancement of peace through education from the standpoint of Hindu educational ethos and philosophy.*"
 - Our third speaker will be **Dr. Majeda Omar**, Associate Professor of Contemporary Western Philosophy at the University of Jordan. Dr. Omar was previously the Director of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies of Jordan. Professor Omar will offer us her insights on the theme of: "*Education for peace as a vector to address and roll-back radicalization: The teachings of Islam.*"
 - Following Professor Omar's inputs, we will give the floor to **Dr. Debbie Weissman**, the Former President of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Dr. Weissman will offer us her perspectives on "*The promotion of inter-religious dialogue through education: the guiding principles of Judaism.*"
- The guiding themes of the four first panellists will enable us to benefit from different religious perspectives on how we can channel our joint energies towards the promotion of education for peace in schools and to build peaceful and inclusive societies with multiple faith communities.
- After the contributions from the first round of panellists, I will open for a 30 minutes Q & A session.
- The second part of today's conference will include contributions from subject-matter experts who possess, practical hands-on experience in the field of peace education:
 - The first speaker to take the floor will be **Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe, Director of Arigatou International Geneva - Ethics Education for Children**. Her guiding theme will address the importance of promoting ethics and values-based education in diverse educational settings for children. Ms Uribe will present different examples of practical

case studies where education can make a difference in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

- I will then invite **Mr. Renato Opertti** - *Senior Programme Specialist, IBE-UNESCO* – to offer us his insights on the role of UNESCO in making the case for universal inclusive values and identities.
 - The Founder and Managing Director of the Geneva-based NGO Incitare and former Australian diplomat, **Ms. Beris Gwynne**, will enlighten us on the subject of *“Strategic foresight for education – a forward-looking approach on the future of learning.”*
 - Finally, the last speaker will be a film producer **Mr. Jan-Willem Bult**, Head of Children & Youth Media and Chief Editor of WADADA News for Kids an international network based in the Netherlands. This presentation will address the theme of: *“The impact of communication and information technology in children’s education: Challenges and solutions ahead.”*
- The presentation from the panellists will be followed by a second Q & A session and concluding remarks from Reverend Dr. Tveit and myself.
 - As we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I am also suggesting that those interested may wish to sign the Declaration entitled *“Moving Towards Greater Spiritual Convergence in Support of Equal Citizenship Rights”* adopted as an outcome to the 25 June World Conference on religions and equal citizenship rights.
 - It is now my honour to give the floor to the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches for his opening remarks.