

# RELIGIONS, CREEDS AND VALUE SYSTEMS: JOINING FORCES TO ENHANCE EQUAL CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS



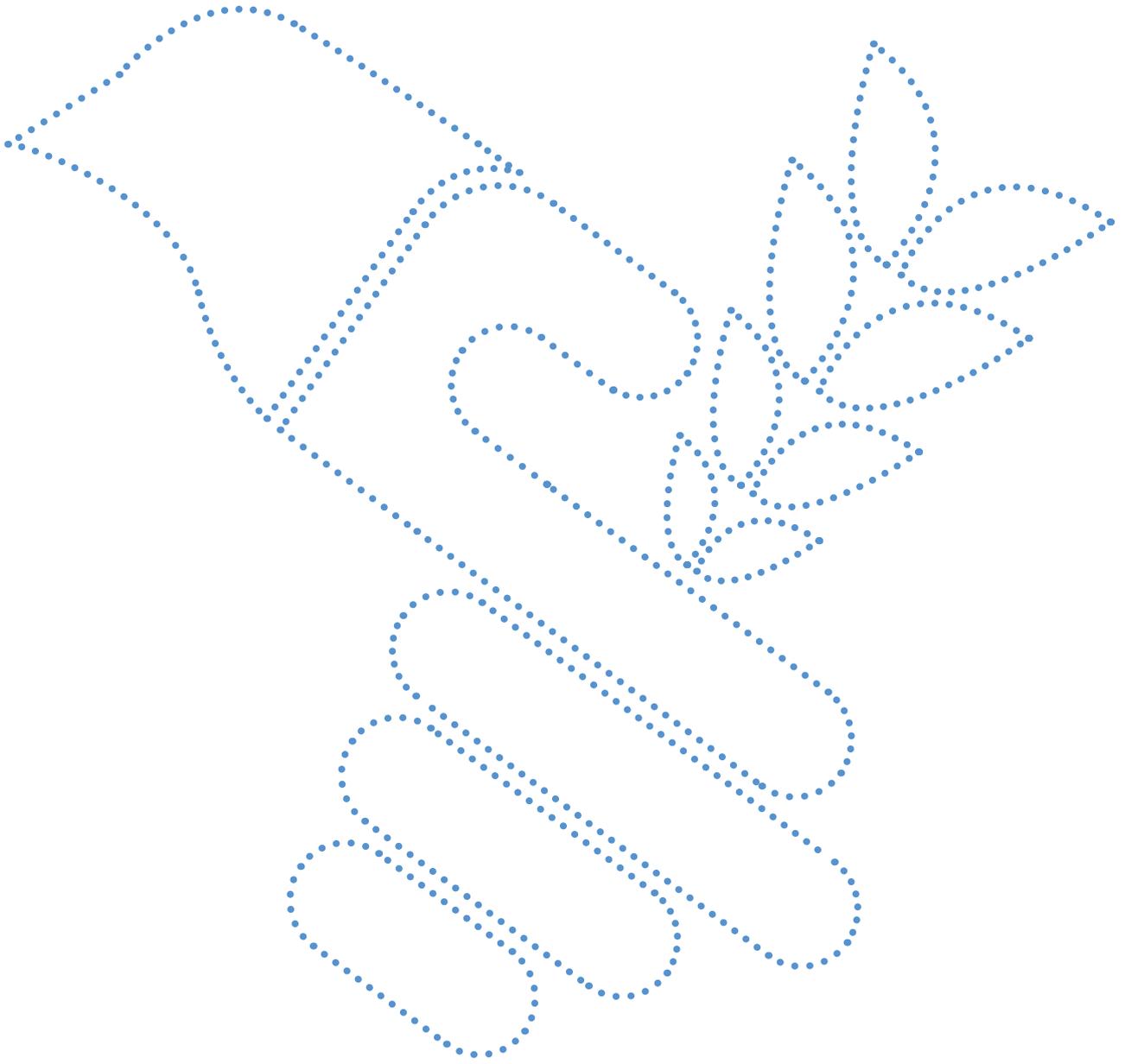
**GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE**

مركز جنيف لحقوق الإنسان والحوار العالمي

**CENTRE DE GENÈVE POUR LA PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET LE DIALOGUE GLOBAL**

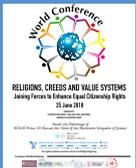
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## 1. Introductory remarks from the Chairman of the Geneva Centre

Dear readers,

I am pleased to announce the third edition of the Geneva Centre's "*Human Rights Without Prejudice*" newsletter. The present edition reports on the Centre's endeavours to enhance mutual understanding and cooperative relations between peoples and societies. These noble goals remain at the very heart of our efforts to promote a more tolerant and peaceful world society.

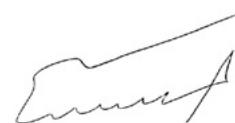
I believe the present edition is special as it reports on the Geneva Centre-initiated World Conference held on 25 June at Palais des Nations in Geneva. For more than 15 months, the Geneva Centre - with the support of the Arab Thought Forum, the World Council of Churches, the International Catholic Migration Commission, the European Centre for Peace and Development, Bridges to Common Ground and the World Council of Religions Leaders - was preparing the very first conference at the UN on the interplay between religion and equal citizenship rights. "Religions, Creeds and Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights" was organized under the Patronage of one of the world's most renowned and inspiring peace-makers; HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It likewise involved the participation of more than 30 world-renowned Eminent Dignitaries and Messengers of Peace from all major religions of the world who were united by two common goals: make peace prevail in every society of the world and to make diversity the foundation for social cohesion and the promotion of inclusive societies.

The present issue likewise reports on the Centre's endeavours to promote greater understanding of human rights through cross-cultural, religious and cross-civilization dialogue. In this connection, the Geneva Centre carried out numerous advocacy initiatives to address the adverse impact of the

migrant and refugee crisis and to promote inter-faith tolerance. The outcomes of the Centre's meeting on 9 July with UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Mr. Volker Türk on the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration have received special mention. The Geneva Centre also played an active role in the commemoration of the 2018 International Day of Living Together in Peace and in the first round of informal consultations on the long-term efficiency of the work of the UN Human Rights Council. The outcomes of these endeavours are referred to in this newsletter. Other developments related to the Centre's activities - including the messages I issue in relation to the observance of the UN International Commemorative Days - are also available to our readers.

Finally, the present version of the newsletter contains an overview of upcoming publications that the Geneva Centre will publish during the course of the year. Our publications have become the main expression of our main mission: to offer a depoliticized view on human rights issues to decision-makers in the Global South and the Global North.

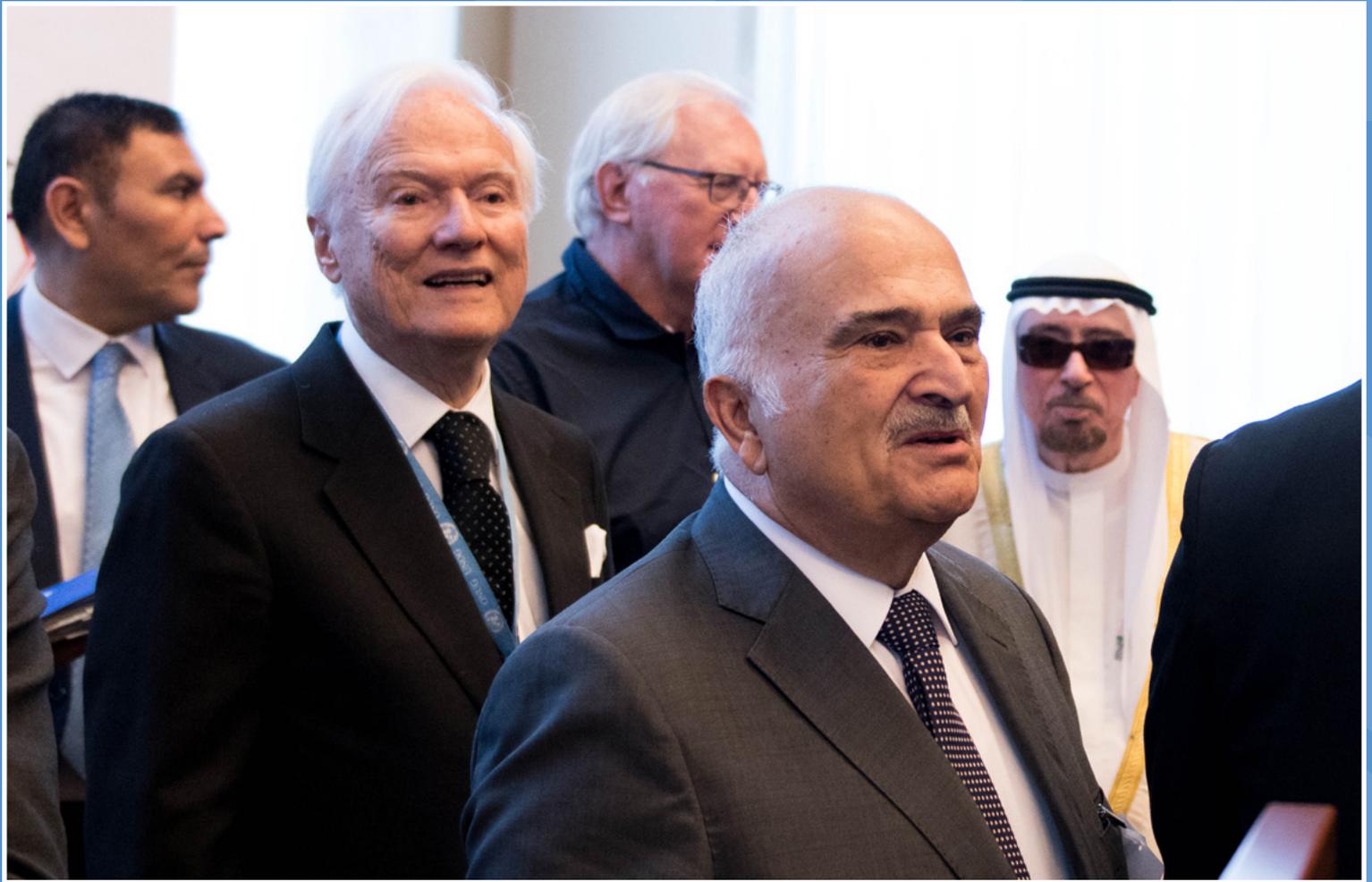
In this spirit, I encourage our readers to stay tuned for forthcoming research that gives "*voice to the voiceless.*"



**Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim**

Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue





## 2. World Conference on religions and equal citizenship rights

On 15 March 2017, the Geneva Centre organized a panel debate at UNOG on the theme of “*Islam and Christianity: The Great Convergence, Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights.*” In the presence of more than 250 participants at Palais des Nations in Geneva, the audience appealed to the co-organizers of the conference to broaden the theme and to include all religions, creeds and value systems striving for greater equality, fraternity and unity. Equal citizenship rights could unite all world citizens in their common aspiration for justice, solidarity and tolerance. The audience was clear in its meaning and in its purpose.

Together with the eminent panellists, who graced us with their presence last year, 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. This could become – it was felt – the starting-point of a broader movement to promote greater understanding within and between societies and peoples, regardless of religious, ethnic, cultural belonging, and to fulfil one of the core aims of the UN Charter: the promotion of peace. This year will also mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Let us also not forget that in several regions of the world, we had already witnessed a steep rise in xenophobia, racism and intolerance. Distortion and abuse of religions and faiths - for the purpose of carrying out odious crimes and implementing policies justifying marginalization, exclusion and racism – are being carried out. Altogether, national unity is being undermined in many societies in the MENA region and in Europe. Global cooperation has been sidelined in favour of protectionist and populist ideas that have gained stronger ground and acceptance among decision-makers.

The World Conference could therefore not happen at a better time as it would be held at a moment where the ‘fear of the Other’ has stimulated the growth of populism, hatred and marginalization.

The Sponsoring Committee of the World Conference – of which I was a Co-Executive Secretary together with Dr. Majeda Omar (Director of The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, Jordan) – agreed that these manifold challenges could be addressed through a

universally shared understanding and recognition of the concept of equal citizenship rights to reverse these ominous trends and contribute to the promotion of peace, mutual respect and greater understanding.

The enriching debates - that were held during the plenary sessions of the event - echoed the Sponsoring Committee’s commitment to foster greater mutual understanding and tolerance. The following three key takeaways summarize likewise the main thrust of conference;

- I. We must reject the instrumentalization of religions, creeds and value systems by vested interest and warn against the spread of hatred, xenophobia, racism, and intolerance;
- II. We must advocate openness and plurality of approach towards the Other;
- III. We must harness the collective energy of religions, creeds and value-systems in the pursuit of commonality of social purpose and of the promotion of equal citizenship rights.

I wish to express my gratitude to the high-level Eminent Dignitaries - representing all major religions, faiths and regions of the world both lay and religious leaders, – who graced us with their presence during the World Conference. It is thanks to their contributions that the event became a major success and a standard-bearer in the future for similar international conferences addressing the interplay between faiths and equal citizenship rights.

I will not be in a position to summarize the panel proceedings in this article. But I would like to enlighten our readers with a “*Words of Wisdom*” table that the Geneva Centre has put together. This table highlights some essential remarks that were made by the Eminent Dignitaries on the solutions required to identify the foundation for common action to advance equal citizenship rights.

I invite you to read this table and to stay tuned – in the near future – for the Centre’s forthcoming publication on the World Conference. In this publication, we will offer our readers a compelling summary of the panel proceedings and the lessons learned from the very first conference held at the premises of the UN on religions and equal citizenship rights.

**Ambassador Idriss Jazairy**  
Executive Director of the Geneva Centre

# World Conference Words of Wisdom

## Opening session



**HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal**  
of the Hashemite Kingdom  
of Jordan

"We were not put on this earth to go forth and multiply, desecrate and destroy but to bring life and hope for future generations."



**Mr. Antonio Guterres**  
UN Secretary General

"Let us defend our common humanity. Let us unite for equal rights for all without discrimination"



**HE Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan**

UAE Minister of State for  
Tolerance (statement of support)

"Successful societies are those that manage diversity and pluralism successfully and effectively"



**Ambassador William Lacy Swing**  
IOM Director General

"All faiths invite us to demonstrate our care and our concerns for others through acts of kindness and generosity"



**HE Al Sayed Ali Bin Al Sayed Abdul Rahmen Al Hashim**  
Advisor for Religious and Judicial  
Affairs at the UAE Presidential  
Ministry

"The values of freedom and justice pave the way for people everywhere to be prepared to recognize the variety of manifestations of diversity"



**HE Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim**  
Chairman of the Geneva Centre

"We are here today to open dialogue between world faiths and nations around the important idea of levelling citizenship rights for diverse communities"



**Ambassador Idriss Jazairy**  
Executive Director  
of the Geneva Centre

"All world religions converge, with 10% specificity, and 90% similarity. People focus on the 10% specificity and forget the 90% commonality"



**Reverend Dr Olav Fykse Tveit**  
Secretary General of the World  
Council of Churches

"We need to address the issues confronting humanity as one humanity in this spirit of justice, peace and love"



**HE Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar**  
Secretary General of KAICIID

"Interreligious dialogue has the power to create lasting innovation and change"



**HE Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran**

Former President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (statement presented by Monsignor Vitillo)

“No one, no ethnic, religious or political group can claim more rights than others because of their belonging to a particular ethnicity, religion or a political party”



**Mr. Albert Guigui**

Chief Rabbi of Brussels

“True dialogue implies an effort to understand others in their point of views, not ours. It implies sharing, a relationship of respect and mutual confidence”



**His Holiness Swami**

**Paramatmananda Saraswati**  
Secretary General and Convener of The Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha (India)

“Mutual respect is needed for religious diversity to flourish”



**Dr Bawa Jain**

Secretary General of The World Council of Religious Leaders

“Every human being, every faith teaches us to respect and to love each other”

**Panel 1:**  
**Concept of equal citizenship rights and points of convergence of religions, creeds and other value systems**

▼



**Most Venerable Phrathepkittimoli**  
Abbot of Wat

Srinagarindravararam and the first Vice-president of the Union of Thai Sangha in Europe

“Buddhism is not a mere teaching of liberation, but a perfect example of how to live in perfect harmony, peace and compassion”



**HE Amr Moussa**

Former Secretary General of the Arab League  
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt

“Believing in diversity and promoting diversity should be our task”



**Ambassador Mark D. Siljander**

Former US Ambassador to the UN  
President of Bridges to Common Ground

“There is power in reaching out to the other”



**Rabbi Avi Tawil**

Director of the European Jewish Community Centre

“If we want to have a better tomorrow, the change has to happen within ourselves”



**Monsignor Robert J. Vitillo**  
Secretary General of the  
International Catholic Migration  
Commission

“God created all people in  
His image and likeness and  
gave both a unique identity  
as well as equal rights and  
fundamental freedoms to all  
His creatures”



**Professor Dr Harro von Senger**  
Professor of Sinology at the  
University of Freiburg (Germany),  
Expert on Confucianism

“I end my contribution with a  
Confucian vision of an ideal  
world, called ‘da tong 大同 Great  
Togetherness.’ This means: ‘When  
the Great Way is practiced, the  
world is for the public”



**Professor Shahrzad  
Houshmand Zadeh**  
Professor of Islamic Studies,  
Gregorian University, Rome  
(Italy), Expert on Shia Islam

“This is the point of  
convergence between religions:  
To work for the good of others,  
‘compete’ in righteousness”



**Dr Ahmed Al-Dawoody**  
ICRC Legal Adviser on Islamic Law  
and Jurisprudence  
Assistant Professor at Al-Azhar  
University (Egypt), Expert on Sunni  
Islam

“There is no room for  
discrimination among people  
except through their own good  
deeds”

**Panel 2:**  
**Equal citizenship  
rights and vulnerable/  
disadvantages/  
discriminated social  
segments: Case-study  
of gender, religious  
minorities, people  
with disabilities and  
indigenous people**



**Dr Majeda Omar**  
Director of the Royal Institute for  
Inter-Faith Studies (Jordan)  
“Equal citizenship rights requires  
promoting different equalities”



**Dr Azza Karam**  
Coordinator UN Inter-Agency Task  
Force on Religion and Development,  
Senior Advisor UN Population Fund

“Citizenship is rooted in the  
sense of humanity”



**Mr Fernand de Varennes**  
UN Special Rapporteur on Minority  
Issues

“Inclusiveness is rejected  
in favour of an exclusionary  
portrayal of others as  
outsiders”



**HE Hoda Al-Helaissi**  
Member of Saudi Arabia’s Shoura  
Council  
Former Vice-Chairperson at King  
Saud University

“It is time to identify and to  
promote shared values and  
dialogue in favour of cultural  
diversity, and to uphold mutual  
understanding”



**Ms Catalina Devandas Aguilar**  
UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

“Until we accept that persons with disabilities are a fundamental part of diversity, we will not change anything”

**Panel 3:**  
**Equal citizenship rights and vulnerable/ disadvantaged/ discriminated social segments: Case-study of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons**



**Ms Eva Svoboda**  
Deputy Director of International Law and Policy at ICRC

“Persons with disabilities still face significant obstacles to participation, social inclusion and economic development”



**Mr Alexander A. Mejia**  
Director of Division for People and Social Inclusion, UNITAR  
Editor-in-chief of UN Special

“Every 60 seconds, there is a person under strain”



**HE Lakhdar Brahimi**  
Former Foreign Minister of Algeria  
Member of The Elders

“Keep in mind the Palestinians when you will be working together to advance this wonderful idea of equal citizenship rights for all”



**HE Ambassador Juan Somavia**  
Former Director General of the International Labour Organization

“Understanding the spiritual challenges involved in the move to a Sustainable Development World opens fascinating possibilities into the future”



**HE Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann**  
Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta

“Equal citizenship rights are crucial for migrants, refugees and IDPs, but are also beneficial for societies and States”



**Ms Alexandra Bilak**  
Director of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

“Faith-based organizations play an important role in providing assistance to IDPs and other vulnerable people and communities”



**Dr Arthur Dahl**  
President of the International Environment Forum

“Migrants are denied the most fundamental human rights”



**Dr Farhan Nizami**

Director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

“Rights emerges from people learning to live their obligations to their human and natural environments”

## Panel 4: Equal citizenship rights: Moving towards a new paradigm



**Dr Safi Kaskas**

Co-author of the book entitled “A Contemporary Understanding, The Quran with References to the Bible”

“Pluralism (...) raises the intelligence and virtue of the society in general”



**Professor Dr Etibar Najafov**

Head of Department of Interethnic Relations, Multiculturalism and Religious Issues of Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan

“Azerbaijan is one of a few states in the world in which multiculturalism is a state policy”

## Concluding session



**Sheikh Khaled Bentounes**

President of the International Association Sufi Alawiyya

“Let us leave this [conference] with a hope and with a new energy to enable us to build this culture of peace together without any distinction as human beings”



**Mr Sami Kanaan**

Mayor of the city of Geneva

“I have repeatedly heard the word ‘hope’ today: I believe that your initiative today generates hope”



### 3. Promoting a value-driven human rights system on the principles of justice and solidarity

#### A: Geneva Centre newsroom

##### Geneva Centre and World Council of Churches discuss long-term partnership opportunities

As a follow-up to the 25 June World Conference, the Geneva Centre's Chairman HE Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim and Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy met with the Secretary General of the World Council of Churches Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit to discuss long-term partnership opportunities. During the meeting held on 13 July, the Geneva Centre's Chairman expressed his utmost gratitude to Reverend Dr. Tveit for the extraordinary support offered by the World Council of Churches during the World Conference. The participants likewise agreed to capitalize on the momentum of the World Conference and the appeals made by participants to examine inventive ways to carry the process forward to harness the collective energy of religions, creeds and value systems in the pursuit of equal citizenship rights. It was agreed that joint efforts should be made to promote the concept of Education for Harmony in Diversity through the holding of a panel debate at UN Geneva.

Read more at:

<https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-visits-world-council-churches-discuss-long-term-partnership>



##### Co-signatories of Geneva Declaration on migration and human solidarity meet with Mr. Volker Türk, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection



On 9 July 2018, the Geneva-based co-signatories of the Geneva Declaration entitled “Mobility and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region” were received by the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Mr. Volker Türk. The meeting served as an opportunity to present the added value of the Geneva Declaration to

the consultations and negotiations on issues addressed in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees.

During the meeting, the Geneva Centre's Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy – who headed the delegation – informed Mr. Türk about the endeavours of the co-signatories of the Geneva Declaration to endorse the view that mobility can become the driving-force of social progress, emancipation and sustainable development. Mr. Türk, who serves as the focal point for the Global Compact on Refugees, commended the Geneva Declaration and noted that both Global Compacts, on migration and on refugees, had been influenced by the Declaration, and that numerous ideas contained in the latter where echoed in the Compacts as well.

An electronic copy of the Geneva Declaration can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/2MRE5rR>

## Ambassador Jazairy meets with the President of Central African Republic



On 7 June, the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre Ambassador Idriss Jazairy was given an audience in Geneva by the President of the Central African Republic HE Faustin-Archange Touadéra - in the presence of the Permanent Representative to UN Geneva HE Ambassador Leopold Ismael Samba. The President expressed his support to the World Conference on “Religions, Creeds and Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights” and indicated that the approach of the conference was consonant with the policy of reconciliation promoted in Central African Republic.

Read more about the outcomes of the meeting between the President of Central African Republic and the Geneva Centre’s Executive Director at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/president-central-african-republic-expresses-interest-forthcoming-geneva-conference>

## Agenda of the World Conference announced at a World Council of Council – Geneva Centre joint press conference

On 5 June, the Geneva Centre and the World Council of Churches jointly organized the agenda of the World Conference on religions and equal citizenship rights. The Geneva Centre’s Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy and WCC’s programme executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation Reverend Dr Peniel Rajkumar presented the World Conference programme agenda to journalists, human rights experts and other non-governmental stakeholders in Geneva. In his statement, Ambassador Jazairy concluded that “90% of religions, creeds and value systems converge on the basic values of society worldwide. Unfortunately, people have tended to concentrate on the 10% where they differ. The purpose is to bring out the common space of religions, creeds and value systems and not just for the purpose of ecumenical world approach or syncretism.”

Visit our website at to learn more about the joint press conference: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/agenda-world-conference-announced-wcc-%E2%80%93-geneva-centre-joint-press-conference>

## Geneva Centre’s Executive Director presents agenda of the World Conference to African Group Ambassadors at the HQ of the African Union in Geneva



On 5 June, the Geneva Centre’s Executive Director was invited by the Permanent Delegation of the African Union to an official meeting of all African Group Ambassadors in Geneva to present the rationale and purpose of the 25 World Conference. Ambassador Jazairy noted that the World Conference would bring together leaders from the world’s main religions, whether spiritual or lay, to give further concrete substance to the ideals that unite humanity. Ambassadors of the African Group expressed their strong support to the work of the Geneva Centre and the endeavours of its Executive Director to carry the process forward towards the successful holding of the World Conference.

Learn more at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/geneva-centre%E2%80%99s-executive-director-presents-agenda-world-conference-african-group>

## Geneva Centre participates in International Day of Living Together in Peace commemorative events in Paris and in Geneva



In commemoration of the 2018 International Day of Living Together in Peace, the Geneva Centre was invited to attend a commemorative event organized at UNESCO's Headquarters in Paris on 16 May. The aim of the event was to celebrate the adoption of Resolution 72/130 by the UN General Assembly on 8 December 2017, of which declared 16 May as the International Day of Living Together in Peace. The event was attended by, inter alia, UNESCO's Director-General Audrey Azoulay and Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences Ms. Nada Al-Nashif as well as the Ambassador of Algeria to France HE Ambassador Abdelkader Mesdoua. The Geneva Centre's representative Ms. Homeyra Jazairy used the occasion to invite high-level delegates and representatives to the Geneva Centre's World Conference on religions and equal citizenship rights.

On the same day, the Geneva Centre also participated in a commemorative event held at UN Geneva held under the auspices of the Association Internationale Soufie Alâwiyya (AISA ONG Internationale), The Geneva Centre's Executive Director's statement for the event was delivered by Mr. Moucharaf Paraïso, member of AISA, former director of the International Training Centre at the ILO and former professor at Lyon University in France. In Ambassador Jazairy's statement, it was highlighted that religions represented a fundamental tool for promoting living together in harmony, compassion, solidarity and openness to diversity. It was also remarked that the 25 June World Conference echoed the same values and objectives that had led to the creation of the International Day of Living Together in Peace.

Find out more about the Geneva Centre's presence at these commemorative events at:

-Paris : <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/geneva-centre-participates-2018-international-day-living-together-peace-celebration-unesco%E2%80%99s>

-Geneva : <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/geneva-centre-participates-celebration-international-day-living-together-peace-geneva>

## The Geneva Centre participates in the first round of informal consultations on the long-term efficiency of the work of the UN Human Rights Council

Further to the invitation by the Secretariat of the Human Rights Council, the Geneva Centre was invited to participate in the first round of informal consultation session on the long-term efficiency of the Human Rights Council held on 3 May at UN Geneva. The first part of the session began with discussions on improving the annual programme of work of the HRC. This was followed by discussions on rationalization of resolutions and initiatives of the UN human rights body. The last session was dedicated to the use of information technology to enhance the facilitation of information and raise awareness about the activities of the HRC. In its statement, the representative of the Geneva Centre Mr. Blerim Mustafa - junior project and communications officer - appealed to the Secretariat to follow-up on operative paragraph 6 of Resolution 60/251 which calls upon, inter alia, the Council to review and consolidate the mandate of Special Procedure Mandate Holders. It was also remarked that speaking time for stakeholders should not be reduced. A fund should also be created to further advance the development of cooperative action to enhance human rights among UN member States, it was suggested by the Geneva Centre.

## B: Statements of the Geneva Centre's Chairman

The statement that was delivered during the informal consultancy session can be downloaded at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/geneva-centre-participates-first-round-informal-consultations-long-term-efficiency-work-un>



### Access to safe family planning is central to enhance women's empowerment

In relation to the commemoration of the 2018 World Population Day (11 July), the Geneva Centre's Chairman called for comprehensive reproductive health care for women worldwide. In his statement, he remarked that lack of access to safe family planning affect more than 200 million women worldwide. Despite this figure, Dr. Al Qassim noted that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has commended the efforts made by Arab countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Jordan and Oman for enhancing the role of women in the family. He appealed to all countries in the Arab region to enhance access to family planning programs so as to meet future needs related to reproductive health care for women. The Geneva Centre's Chairman likewise called on all States in the region to consider fixing by law the minimum age of marriage at 18.

Read Dr. Al Qassim's statement:

<https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-%E2%80%99Access-safe-family-planning-central-enhance-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment%E2%80%9D>

### World society must express greater solidarity for refugees worldwide

The 2018 World Refugee Day – observed on 20 June 2018 – served as another opportunity for the Geneva Centre's Chairman to express his standpoint on a global issue of relevance to the Arab region. In his statement, Dr. Al Qassim appealed to international decision-makers to express greater solidarity to destitute refugees from the Arab region and to work jointly to address the protracted refugee crisis. Countries in the MENA

region – he said – has offered refuge to more than 5 million refugees. In Europe, the unprecedented inflow of destitute refugees and migrants – he noted – have been exploited by populist and right wing extremists justifying their political aspirations through extreme forms of nationalism and chauvinism. In this context, the Geneva Centre's Chairman appealed to countries in the West and in the Middle East “to express greater solidarity for refugees worldwide,” it was concluded.

The Geneva Centre Chairman's statement is available at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-world-society-must-express-greater-solidarity-refugees-worldwide>

### We must put an end to the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence around the world

On 19 June, Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim offered his support to victims of conflict-related sexual violence in a statement issued to international media on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. In his statement, the Geneva Centre's Chairman stated that “the global epidemics of violence against women and sexual violence pervades all aspects of societies worldwide, irrespective of geographical setting, religion, revenue or culture.” He deplored the wide-spread use of rape and other forms of gender-based violence as a weapon of war against civilians. Global decision-makers must also address – he remarked - “the nexus between trafficking, sexual violence, terrorism and transnational organized crime.” He concluded his statement by calling for increased transitional justice as the latter “contributes to healing the wounds inflicted by conflict to communities, and provides closure to victims of sexual abuse”.

Statement on International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict can be downloaded at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/statement-international-day-elimination-sexual-violence-conflict>

## **Aggression of children in the Arab region needs to come to an immediate end**

The Geneva Centre's Chairman also commemorated the 2018 International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression, that was observed on 4 June. In his statement, Dr. Al Qassim deplored the rise of all forms of violence against children in armed conflicts as witnessed in Syria and Gaza. In the case of Syria, he remarked, more than 3 million Syrian children are indiscriminately affected by acts of violence carried out by belligerents. Regarding the situation in Gaza, the Geneva Centre's Chairman underlined that more than 50% of children in Gaza depend on humanitarian assistance. In order to address all forms of violence against children, Dr. Al Qassim remarked that "impunity must not prevail and that all perpetrators who have committed crimes against children must be brought to justice."

Dr. Al Qassim's statement entitled "Aggression of children in the Arab region needs to come to an immediate end" is available at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/%E2%80%9Caggression-children-arab-region-needs-come-immediate-end%E2%80%9D-says-chairman-geneva-centre>

## **Cultural diversity remains the greatest strength of humanity**

On the occasion of the 2018 World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May), the Geneva Centre's Chairman reiterated the importance of embracing cultural diversity within societies and "acknowledging the common heritage of humanity". In this connection, he mentioned that "cultural diversity has been a force for social progress and development since time immemorial" and that it remains, in addition, "the greatest strength of humanity." Dr. Al Qassim warned, however, that an atmosphere driven by extreme forms of nationalism, bigotry and fear against the other is on the rise in many societies. This situation – he said – "contributes to an atmosphere of social exclusion, division and rejection." In conclusion, he appealed to decision-makers to enhance dialogue and intercultural exchanges between people belonging to different religious and cultural background.

Read the Geneva Centre's statement at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/%E2%80%9C-cultural-diversity-greatest-strength-humanity%E2%80%9D-says-chairman-geneva-centre>

## **A free press is indispensable for facilitating good governance and transparent societies**

"A free press is indispensable for facilitating good governance and transparent societies," said Dr. Al Qassim

to international media outlets. This call to action was made by the Geneva Centre's Chairman on the occasion of the 2018 World Press Freedom Day observed annually on 3 May. In his statement, HE Dr. Al Qassim referred to media as the fourth estate and a vector for the promotion of plurality of opinions and ideas in open and tolerant societies. However, the Chairman cautioned against the rise of hate speech and online bigotry targeting religious communities in advanced and developed societies. The "misconceived conflation between terrorism and Islam" – he noted - "has given rise to marginalization, bigotry and discrimination threatening the social harmony of multicultural societies worldwide." As a solution to address these ominous trends, the return to the founding principles of press freedom - encompassing accountability, liability and transparency - is key to promote peace, tolerance and justice. "Societies that demonstrate respect for press freedom and the safety and freedom of journalists will make a valuable contribution to the fulfilment of the provisions set forth in SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," Dr. Al Qassim concluded.

The 2018 World Press Freedom Day statement is available at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-%E2%80%9C-free-press-indispensable-facilitating-good-governance-and>

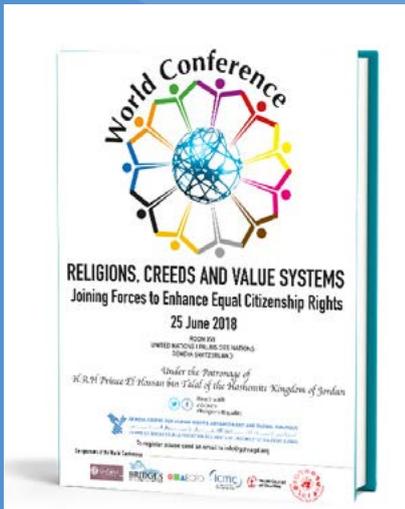
## **Dr. Al Qassim: Equal citizenship rights is the gateway to peace**

On 19 May, the Geneva Centre participated in the commemoration of the 2018 International Day of Living Together in Peace. In his statement, Dr. Al Qassim appealed to societies worldwide to harness the collective energy of religions, creeds and value-systems in the pursuit of equal citizenship rights. In this regard, he noted that the "common good" is threatened by a "pincer movement of two extremes: violent extremism originating in the Middle East and xenophobic populism rearing its head in advanced countries." He also noted that "these trends undermine national, regional and global citizenship models" and contribute to the spread of "religious intolerance, bigotry and fear of the Other." The Chairman concluded his statement by appealing to decision-makers to "create an open space for interfaith and intercultural dialogue to foster social cohesion" and to promote models of equal citizenship rights. "Equal citizenship rights is the gateway to peace," Dr. Al Qassim stated.

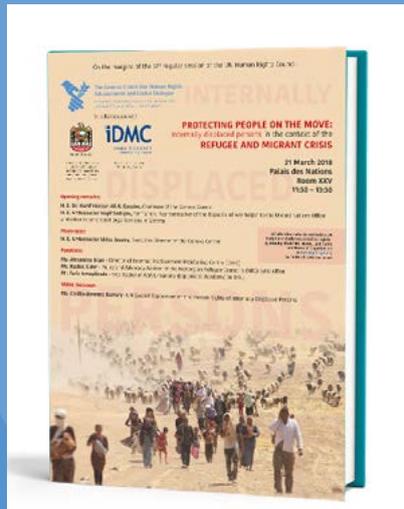
Read Dr. Al Qassim's viewpoints on equal citizenship rights at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/%E2%80%9C-spread-equal-citizenship-rights-gateway-peace%E2%80%9C-says-chairman-geneva-centre>

## 4. Publication alerts

As part of the Geneva Centre's endeavours to promote mutual understanding and cooperative relations between people and to promote a depoliticized view of human rights issues from the viewpoints of the Global South and of the Arab region, the following publications will be issued during the course of the year



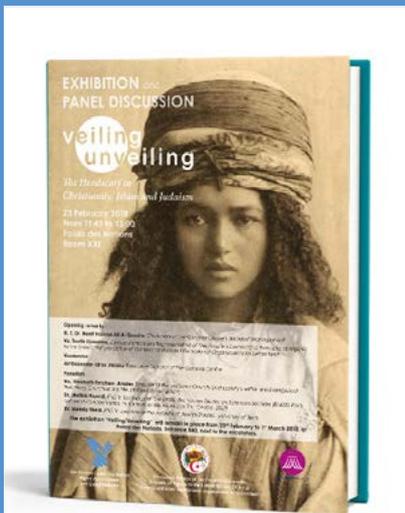
**Title:** Religions, creeds and value systems: Joining forces to enhance equal citizenship rights  
**When & where:** 25 June 2018, UNOG  
**Co-organizers:** Geneva Centre, World Council of Churches, International Catholic Migration Commission, Arab Thought Forum and Bridges to Common Ground and the World Council of Religious Leaders



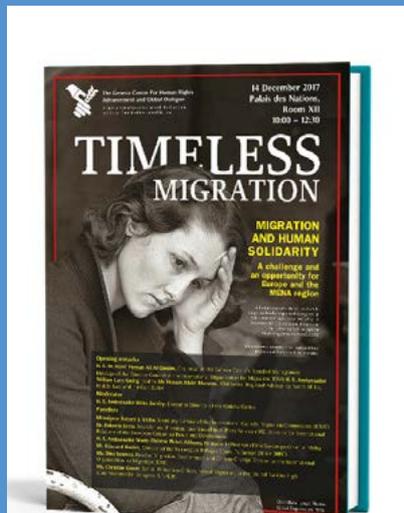
**Title:** Protecting people on the move: Internally displaced people (IDPs) in the context of the refugee and migrant crisis  
**When & where:** 21 March 2018, UNOG  
**Co-organizers:** Geneva Centre, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates



**Title:** Improving access to justice for workers: the case of UAE  
**When & where:** 20 March 2018, UNOG  
**Co-organizers:** Geneva Centre, European Public Law Organization and Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates



**Title:** Veiling/unveiling: The headscarf in Christianity, Islam and Judaism  
**When & where:** 23 February 2018, UNOG  
**Co-organizers:** Geneva Centre and Permanent Mission of People's Democratic Republic of Algeria



**Title:** Migration and human solidarity: A challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region  
**When & where:** 14 December 2017, UNOG  
**Organizer:** Geneva Centre



**Title:** Women's rights in the Arab region: Between myth and reality  
**When & where:** 15 September 2017, UNOG  
**Co-organizers:** Geneva Centre and the Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt

## **THE GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE**

The Geneva Centre, an organization with special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, is a think tank dedicated to the promotion of human rights through cross-cultural, religious and civilizational dialogue between the Global North and Global South, and through training of the upcoming generations of stakeholders in the Arab region. The Centre works towards a value-driven human rights system, steering clear of politicization and building bridges between different narratives thereon of the Global North and of the Global South. Its aim is to act as a platform for dialogue between a variety of stakeholders involved in the promotion and protection of human rights.

As of the latest Board meeting held on 29 May 2018 at the Geneva Centre's Headquarters, the Board of the Geneva Centre is constituted of the following members: H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim (Chairman of the Board of Management – UAE); Dr. Mohamed Butti Thani Tarish Al Shamsi (Treasurer – UAE); H. E. Mr. Saad Ahmed Al Farargi (Board Member - Egypt); Dr. Michael Kouly (Board Member – Canada); Mr. Trevor Mostyn (Board Member - UK).

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