

Interfaith Dialogue and Reconciliation: Creating and Sustaining Spaces of Encounter

Concept Note

The existence of a pluralistic society, particularly in terms of religion, faith and culture, requires a platform in the community. In this sense, **interreligious and interfaith dialogue can be seen as an effective platform to build mutual understanding and tolerance in society**. This process can be followed by anyone, from ordinary people to religious leaders, academics, and politicians operating at international, national and local levels. The term *interfaith dialogue* refers to cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels. It aims to promote mutual understanding and to increase acceptance and tolerance. When employed as a tool or strategic practice, interfaith dialogue may facilitate discussions to **combat intolerance, hate speech and discrimination and to promote peacebuilding**.

The panel discussion “Interfaith Dialogue and Reconciliation: Creating and Sustaining Spaces of Encounter” will focus on interfaith and interreligious engagement, dialogue and collaboration. Its intention is to **map and discuss some of the most prominent initiatives and best practices for using interfaith and interreligious dialogue and collaboration**. Interfaith dialogue creates spaces for promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in diverse and multicultural environments. The panel discussion will **consider methodologies of successful interfaith dialogue and its limitations**. Building on the outcomes of the Global Forum on Civilizations,¹ the panel discussion will analyze challenges, needs and benefits in an effort to provide a channel of communication among faiths and beliefs in a spirit of tolerance, truthfulness, sincerity and empathy, without forcing one’s own paradigms or ideas on others. The panel will also consider different approaches to pluralism and the interrelation between diversity of faith and economic, social, historical and political factors of inclusivity, peace and prosperity.

The **Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue** acknowledges the need to enhance the promotion of human rights, through intercultural, interfaith and interreligious dialogue. In this regard, the Geneva Centre emphasizes the importance of fostering mutual understanding and tolerance among individuals for building peaceful societies. It invites multiple actors to play their part and collaborate with each other in order to achieve this critical goal. Safeguarding our common humanity and shared values, raising voices in support of multicultural communities, and mutual understanding must remain a driving force. A world society enriched with diversity and empathy needs to be actively promoted.

Panel objectives

- Identify international initiatives and best practices of fostering interfaith dialogue, reconciliation and exchange at the international, national and local levels;
- identify challenges and opportunities that proactively create, promote and support spaces of interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding;

¹ The 9th Global Forum for the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), entitled “Towards An Alliance of Peace: Living Together as One Humanity”, was held in Morocco on 22-23 November 2022. It adopted the Fez Declaration, which stressed, among others, the importance of the central role of education, women as mediators and peace-makers, combating discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief anchored in human rights, sport as a vector for peace and inclusiveness, balancing migration narratives through programming, the role of religious leaders in promoting peace, coexistence and social harmony, reinvigorating multilateralism through culture of peace and on countering; and addressing online hate speech. For more details: <https://fezforum.unaoc.org>

- Raise awareness of interfaith and interreligious dialogue in response to and in prevention of human rights violations;
- Provide an opportunity for dialogue and information sharing between different stakeholders with diverse religious and faith-based backgrounds.

The panel event seeks to address a series of questions, including:

- In relation to the interaction between diverse groups, what are the strategies and initiatives that policymakers should develop and operationalize?
- What societal and policy conditions enable effective interfaith dialogue?
- What are the positive outcomes of interfaith and interreligious dialogue in relation to human rights?
- What can be the role of governments, international organizations and civil society in 1) adopting measures at the national and international levels on interfaith dialogue and reconciliation in order to create and sustain spaces of encounter and dialogue; 2) and building on the Fez Declaration?

Panel format

The panel discussion will be held online via Zoom. The panel will begin with opening remarks by the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre, who will be the panel Moderator. Each panelist has 8 minutes for their presentation, after which there are 10-15 minutes reserved for Q&A. The panel discussion aims to provide recommendations to governments, civil society, the private sector, international partners and individuals to foster tolerance and dialogue in multi-religious societies and promote human rights.

Expected outcome

A follow-up publication, containing summaries of the panel proceedings, the Q&A sessions, an analytical think-piece on lessons learned and ways forward, and the full written statements by the panelists, which can be lengthier than the oral presentations, will be issued and distributed widely online, including to the Permanent Missions in Geneva, International Organizations, NGOs, Academia and the media. The publication will be announced on the Geneva Centre's social media platforms and shared on its website.

About the organizer

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue is an independent, human rights think-tank and advocacy institution, established in 2013 with its headquarters in Geneva. The Centre is dedicated to promoting a universal, value-driven human rights system anchored in the principles of equity, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and solidarity. The Centre was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2017. The Centre's principal activities consist of research and publications, training in human rights, reporting on human rights conferences, and organization of thematic panel debates and international advocacy to further the promotion of human rights.