



INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES, NEW DELHI
TWO-DAY OFFLINE/ONLINE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON

**“NEED OF INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING FOR
PROMOTING PEACE AND HARMONY”**

In collaboration with
G.M. MOMIN WOMEN'S COLLEGE, BHIWANDI, MUMBAI

On March 19-20, 2022

CONCEPT NOTE

The world in its entirety is now preoccupied with the issue of terrorism. In fact, terrorism is now a catchword dominating the media as well as scientific and political forums. But despite the extensive use of the term, Terrorism, the world has yet to concur on a specific definition for it. The Arab League Council has attempted to work out a common definition for the concept of terrorism in 1989: “Any organized act of violence or threat of violence that causes terror or fear including killings or assassination or hostage taking or hijacking of planes or ship or the detonation of explosives or any other politically motivated act leading to anarchy and disturbance”. Referring to state terrorism, the council said the most appalling form of this type is being practiced by Jews in Palestine. It was also practiced by the Serbs in Bosnian Herzegovina and Kosovo. The council drew attention to the danger this type posed to international peace and security and considered standing up to it for self-defence and to launch a worldwide struggle against such activities, which vitiate the peaceful existence on earth. Thus Islam has nothing to do with traits like oppression and coercion, shedding blood and barbarism, and terrorism. To spread *fitnah* and *fasad* on earth by shedding blood, disturbing peace and tranquilly, burning the green fields and orchards, and destroying the inhabitants—all these vicious acts are attributable to the misguided, disobedient and worldly people.

It is perhaps in this context that a famous US scholar and the former CIA official has acknowledged the Islamic approach towards its subjects. Graham Fuller says about Islamic culture: “It is a culture of profound intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and social thought. But it is also a culture currently rubbed raw, best not gratuitously provoked at this sensitive stage in its development and when it feels under existential threat. Such assaults against it only heighten its most atavistic and narrow aspects, side-line impulses for reform and moderation, and cause Muslims to circle the wagons.”

Therefore, in such situation, there is a dire need for peace and harmony in society at national and international level. And for promoting peace and harmony, religion can play a vital role. In the perspective of religion, the dialogue and understanding is very vital. The term inter-faith

dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions (i.e., "faiths") and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels. It is distinct from syncretism or alternative religion, as dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions or beliefs to increase acceptance of others, rather than to synthesize new beliefs. Throughout the world, there are local, regional, national and international inter-faith initiatives; many are formally or informally linked and constitute larger networks or federations. The often quoted: "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions", was formulated by the Roman Catholic priest and theologian Dr. Hans Küng, a Professor of Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theology at University of Tübingen and Professor Emeritus and President of the Foundation for a Global Ethic, Tübingen. Some inter-faith dialogues have more recently adopted the name inter-belief dialogue, while other proponents have proposed the term inter-path dialogue, to avoid implicitly excluding atheists, agnostics, humanists, and others with no religious faith but with ethical or philosophical beliefs, as well as to be more accurate concerning many world religions that do not place the same emphasis on "faith" as do some Western religions. Similarly, pluralistic rationalist groups have hosted public reasoning dialogues to transcend all worldviews (whether religious, cultural or political), termed Trans belief. Dialogue and searching for common grounds (*KalimatulSawa*) have to be the actual mission of every Muslim according to the Quranic injunctions. Among those people, we have to do the work for mutual understanding; we have to see whether there is any basic thing which is acceptable to both that can be called *KalimatulSawa*. To some, the term inter-religious dialogue has the same meaning as inter-faith dialogue.' To the World Council of Churches, 'inter-religious' refers to the action between different Christian denominations. So, 'inter-faith' refers to interaction between different faith groups such as Muslim and Christian or Jew for example:

1. "In the dialogue of the head, we mentally reach out to the other to learn from those who think differently from us."
2. "In the dialogue of the hands, we all work together to make the world a better place in which we must all live together."
3. "In the dialogue of the heart, we share the experience of the emotions of those different from us."

Inter-religious dialogue in contemporary society is conducted to create better relationships between people, belonging to different religions by bringing them together in dialogue: it, thus, aims to establish peace and harmony in a society, which has been devastated by religious conflicts. There are several important aspects in dialogue in this regard.

The "religious conflicts" or "conflicts in the name of religions", are often more than "religious" conflicts and, often, not even "religious" conflicts at all. "Religion" has become a mere useful peg to hang the violence.

Thus, in the contemporary period, inter-religious dialogue is not simply any conversation between people with different religious identities. Rather, it is presented as an important step in understanding one's own religion and one's neighbour's religions, and thus a step towards better understanding and relationships between people of different religions.

Thus Inter-faith understanding and dialogue is an approach in which positive attitudes and openness to other religions are implied, the view being that such positive attitudes between members of different religions are necessary to create better relationships among humans in society. This positive attitude varies from showing mutual openness and mutual sharing among the participants, while keeping the distinctive features of their respective religions, or affirming and acknowledging the differences between religions while emphasizing the unity of aim or intention of all religions, even though the latter is sometimes criticized in dialogue circles.

The assumption that religion(s), or religions contribute to violence, and the uncritical acceptance of this notion in dialogue has, in fact, set many limitations for dialogue. It is often overlooked that what is claimed as religious violence usually stems from socio-economic and personal struggles of people, and from the political intervention, which plays with the religious identities of people in order to receive votes and to achieve political power. For instance, in India, religious conflicts has been, at the root, mostly a social issue, involving caste domination and oppression, or economic struggles between people or people's groups, or political manipulations for power or even personal problems between people.

Questions such as how they evolve into religious conflicts and how and why they are projected as such, and how these economic, political and social realities are overlooked in dialogue need attention.

How to maintain peace in our society despite divergent denominational identities is a question in the present chaotic times. Therefore, we need various kinds of dialogical engagements for the purpose of understanding. The dialogue that promotes "engaged pluralism" is one that seeks understanding and accepts difference. Dianna Eck says: "The encounter in a pluralistic society is not premised on achieving agreement, but achieving relationship."

An eclectic philosophical approach can be developed to solve religious conflicts between various traditions because, ultimately, it is religion that holds before a man's imagination the vision and hope, transcending all limitations imposed by temporal life. Because there are two dimensions of religion.

For achieving a holistic treatment to communal problems permanently, first of all, we need to know how we can identify the content about inter-religious understanding in our major religions like—Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism and Islam at a philosophical level. Then we need to take stock of the fact that there might have been attempts made by our earlier generations of scholars and Ulama to promote such understanding and what were the perimeters of religious phenomenon in general and what insights we can get from luminaries like Buddha, Nanak, Ibn Hazm, Shristani, Mullah Muhsin Fani al-Biruni from earlier times and Nehru, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Azad etc. in present times.

Islam is very clear about the relations of Muslims with non-Muslims and had laid down the catalogue for treating them with tolerance and justice. Because Islam is a religion of peace, progress and prosperity.

It is an honourable intention if a Muslim creates "harmony between himself and the one who does not believe in Islam, so that to have dialogue with him." (Fatawa Islamiyah, Vol.I, Darussalam Riyadh 2001, p-233 (Permanent Committee). Even Muslims "can trade with a person who does not believe in Islam" and "there is no objection—to using what they produce in case of need." (Ibid, Ibn Jibreen, p-234). Muslims can live among the people who don't believe in Tawhid (Oneness of God) to create the ambience of harmony and understanding. We can reciprocate the greetings of non-Muslims by "*Wa Alaikum*" and can ask about the welfare of their family members as had been permitted by number of scholars, including Ibn Taimiyah.

There is no objection to shake hands with a non-Muslim and using their things, which they manufacture. (Ibn Jibreen)

Muslims have been allowed by Islam to be sympathetic and courteous with non-Muslims in general. According to Ibn Arabi Maliki, we may even spend one portion of our wealth on them to do good treatment with them and be kind to them.

In the atmosphere of peace and security, there are more chances of Islam being understood by the people in its legitimate and credible form, and in a war-like circumstance, these all

possibilities get diminished. We have a living example of this dialogical spirit created by Islam in the personality of Imam Bediuzaman Said Nursi. Although, by nature, he was attracted to solitude and silent reflection, Nursi's life shows him in constant dialogue with Muslim scholars of various points of view, with secular authorities and ideologues, with ordinary people, who posed questions to him on countless topics, even with his jailers, magistrates and others who oppressed him. Particularly towards the end of his life, he took initiative to seek dialogue with committed Christians and Jews. For Nursi, dialogue is a typical work that characterizes Islamic society.

In light of the above details, the Institute of Objective Studies is going to organise a two-day offline/online International Conference on "Need of Inter-religious Understanding for Promoting Peace and Harmony" in collaboration with K.M.E. Society's G.M. Momin Women's College, Bhiwandi, Mumbai, on March 19-20, 2022 at Mumbai.

The themes suggested for writing papers are given below:

1. Peace in the context of Indic Religions
2. Semitic Religion and Peaceful living
3. Islam and peaceful behaviour
4. Ahinsa
5. Gandhi and Non-Violence
6. Buddhist traditions of harmony
7. Samvad and its Indian ethos
8. Maulana Azad
9. Nursi and inter-religious understanding
10. Aurobindo Ghosh and life Divine
11. Vivekananda on Universality of Religion
12. Tagore and his rational approach to harmony
13. Mullah Mohsin Fani and Indian Religions
14. Albiruni and his understanding of Indian Religions
15. Bhakti Movement and Religious harmony
16. Sikhism and its legacy of peaceful teaching
17. Sufism and peaceful dialogue
18. Indian Constitutional and a secular harmonious society
19. Peace for preserving peaceful harmonious society
20. NGOs and their role in peace building
21. IOS and its initiatives for inter-religious Understanding

Any other theme relevant to the Conference.

Please note the important deadlines below and send us your abstracts not exceeding 300 words. After receiving the confirmation email from the Institute regarding selected abstract, you are requested to send us the full paper, which should be around 5000-6000 words.

Important Deadlines:

Last date for receipt of abstracts (in PDF & doc file)

February 25, 2022

Notification of selected abstracts through email

February 28, 2022

Last date of receipt of full paper (in PDF and doc. file)

March 10, 2022

Language

English

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