



Report for
**Doha Meeting for Advancing Religious Freedom
Through Interfaith Collaboration**

**Istanbul Process 16/18 for Combating Intolerance and
Discrimination based on Religion or Belief**

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Contents

Executive summary.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Topographic Ecology: A philosophy of rights.....	8
Sites: Interfaith design.....	11
Encounter: Educational research.....	12
Debating Dialogue: A history of convictions.....	15
Anatomy of prejudice: State as umpire.....	17
Appendix: Session summaries.....	18
List of Participants.....	34

Executive summary:

At its March 2011 session, the UN HRC adopted, by consensus, resolution 16/18, which focuses on concrete, positive measures that states can take to ***combat religious intolerance while protecting the freedoms of religion and of expression.***

The Istanbul Process is a series of international conferences seeking to promote implementation of the steps called for in this landmark UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 16/18.

This meeting in Doha, hosted by the Government of Qatar and the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID), was the fourth Istanbul Process meeting, and it focused on ***advancing religious freedom through interfaith collaboration.*** By bringing interfaith community experts together with relevant experts in government, this Istanbul Process meeting contributed significantly to the advancement of religious tolerance and freedom and the formation of collaborative partnership between government and civil society in promoting those goals.

Seventy-six participants took part in the Doha Meeting, the first Istanbul Process meeting in the Muslim world and the first where NGOs and non-state actors were invited. The following were some of the important conclusions reached at the Meeting that are elaborated in this report:

1. A philosophy of rights was discussed by Dr. Al-Qaradaghi and Dr. Burhan Koroglu from Turkey based on earth as womb and rivers of civilizations.
2. Creation and protection of holy days and places was reaffirmed.
3. Educational interactions were highlighted as sources of generating interfaith understanding.

4. There should be dialogue encouraged amongst those who want to stress similarities and debate amongst those who want to stress differences.
5. There should be space made for discussing possibility of truth of revelation for true dialogue to occur.

We hope that future Istanbul Process Meetings will not only have an interfaith component to them but also that they are imbued with a spirit of interfaith understanding reached in the Doha Meeting. There were some issues unresolved to do primarily with domestic implementation of blasphemy laws by some member countries of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation). However, it is hoped that as the Secretary General of the OIC stated that through the effective and comprehensive implementation of the Action Plan contained in Resolution 16/18, incitement to hatred can be tackled in all its manifestations.

Introduction

The Istanbul Process is a series of international conferences seeking to promote implementation of the steps called for in the landmark UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 16/18 on “Combating Intolerance, Negative Stereotyping and Stigmatization of, and Discrimination, Incitement to Violence and Violence Against, Persons Based on Religion or Belief.” At its March 2011 session, the UN HRC adopted, by consensus, resolution 16/18, which focuses on concrete, positive measures that states can take to combat religious intolerance while protecting the freedoms of religion and of expression. This groundbreaking resolution ended the divisive debates in the UN over how to effectively address concerns over religious intolerance. Among the steps called for in resolution 16/18 are the promotion of interfaith dialogue and protection of freedom of religion for all individuals. Since March 2011 this consensus has been reaffirmed repeatedly in Geneva and by the UN General Assembly.

In July 2011 in Istanbul, then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then-OIC Secretary General Ekmelledin Ihsanoglu launched the Istanbul Process by co-chairing a ministerial meeting where it was agreed that there would be a series of experts meetings held to document best practices for implementation of the steps called for in resolution 16/18 and to promote implementation of the steps domestically. There have been three Istanbul Process meetings to date. The first was hosted by the United States in Washington, D.C. in December of 2011, focusing on prohibiting discrimination based on religion or belief, and training government officials, including on how to implement effective outreach to religious communities. The second was hosted by the United Kingdom, in association with Canada, in London in December of 2012, focusing on promoting freedom of religion or belief for all. The third was hosted by the OIC in Geneva in June 2013, focusing on speaking out against intolerance, adopting measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief, and promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

This meeting in Doha, hosted by the Government of Qatar and the DICID, is the fourth Istanbul Process meeting, and it focuses on advancing religious freedom through interfaith collaboration. By bringing interfaith community experts together with relevant experts in government, this Istanbul Process meeting contributed significantly to the advancement of religious tolerance and freedom and the formation of collaborative partnership between government and civil society in promoting those goals.

An open platform was provided at the Doha Meeting where leaders in the field of interfaith dialogue and governmental and intergovernmental officials were able to share experiences and perspectives. Mutual learning was possible since everyone approached each other with openness and a willing to listen and learn, this is a valued quality of those involved in interfaith dialogue. We discussed in this meeting, among other things, the creation and protection of places where interfaith interactions can be possible. We advocated for fair frameworks to the highest levels of law making, stressing the un-politicising of differences that are natural to humanity. The legal community learnt from the cases presented by interfaith workers and may transplant some of those sensible solutions to their own domains of knowledge and activity.

As interfaith workers, we renewed our joint achievements, celebrating the joy of interaction, caring for others as caring for oneself and in the process enabling mutual well-being. We demonstrated our willingness in the international effort for crisis monitoring, standing between parties involved in conflict and helping judge fairly between them. We aspired to encourage responsible consumption. We pledged to attempt to harness the power of digital technologies for memorializing the good, purify imagination and enlighten hearing. These are just some of the values that we do not disagree about in the area of interfaith dialogue as was evident during the conversations that took place during this important and timely gathering.

We agreed that the search for common ground comes alongside the acknowledgement of difference and that the development of dialogical skills is not the same as development of debating skills. Teachers, families and media have a crucial role in raising the youth with this interfaith spirit. Universities and general education authorities were encouraged to include interfaith education in their curricula. Individual schools may find it useful to integrate some technological tools for raising interfaith sensibility and presenting a fair, truthful and attractive image of religions. Researchers at higher education institutes may also benefit from working closely with interfaith organizations to promote interfaith dialogue around the world.

Interfaith dialogue organizations are involved in important initiatives towards establishing social, environmental, economic and medical justice on different levels ranging from initiatives based in one part of a city to prospective global partnerships with the United Nations for protection - among other rights - of rights of religious minorities and their sacred symbols. They stress the importance of addressing “Institutional racism” through approaching justice as an evolving concept and serving people of all faiths. Faiths that firmly hold on to the view that as stewards of wealth that is relatively owned and entrusted by God, must not lead to harm members of the human family. Awareness raising amongst the public about interfaith partnerships can lead to appreciation of their constructive potential. This has been successfully attempted through harnessing the power of transformative personal stories through various media.

General consensus was reached about capacity building of religious and civic leaders for inspiring responsible male and female leadership needed to transform conflict zones into havens of peace. This is especially needed after the end of conflict when the torn social fabric needs to be rewoven in order to build back trust.

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) led by example, remaining impartial even under pressure when asked to

arbitrate on the cases brought to him in Medina. Medinan society was formed of Muslim, Jewish and pagan tribes of Medina and the Meccan Muslims. Healing difference might come through this experience of living in close proximity with others. The familiarity reached between the various families and tribes of Medina is often proffered by Muslim historians as a model of peaceful coexistence that is at the same time symbiotic. Healing can be provided through religions as schools of virtue in and for these God-given communities. The healers are those who can act as mediators and facilitators as ‘people of the middle way’ - upright in character, with passionate patience and loving-kindness. This is the role that people working in interfaith dialogue aspire towards in their work.

H.E. Iyad Ameen Madani, *OIC Secretary General*, delivered the inaugural statement at the Doha Meeting, stressing the importance of the Istanbul Process in developing a better understanding of different perspectives, interests and concerns related to combating discrimination and incitement to hatred and/or violence on religious grounds. Mr. Madani briefly commented on the history of the Istanbul process and its importance as a platform to exchanging views, share information and best practices and devise specific course of action and steps for the effective and comprehensive implementation of the Action Plan contained in Resolution16/18.

He conveyed that in today’s world of increased connectivity, multiculturalism and fast flowing information and migration, religious intolerance and incitement is a recipe for disaster. Such intolerance will have serious repercussions for the unity, stability and coherence of the affected societies as well as pose threat to the regional and global peace and security. He underlined the importance through varying roles of Governments, religious and community leaders as well as civil society actors in ensuring protection of religious minorities, addressing misperceptions and building trust between affected communities.

Agreeing with the need to maintain an open, constructive and

respectful debate of ideas, he emphasized the importance of distinguishing between respectful and critical discussion from hateful, insulting and defamatory discourse which goes in line with hate speech and leads to incitement to hatred, discrimination and violence. He also expressed the view that existing international legal instruments provide sufficient legal protection to combat incitement to hatred and stressed the need to address the gaps in interpretation, implementation and information for better results.

In conclusion, he stressed the importance of utilizing Istanbul process as a vehicle to meticulously discuss and address the triple gap of interpretation, implementation and information through a soft law approach by consensus. Such an approach could take the shape of agreed principles, guidelines or declaration that could reflect the common understanding of international community on this important issue.

U.S. Special Envoy to the OIC, Mr. Rashad Hussain, insisted on the important role of governments to enable an environment of dialogue among the religious leadership. He pointed out countries of the OIC that faced the ever increasing rise in sectarian violence and highlighted some of the follow-up events to the first Istanbul process meeting in the U.S.

Chairman of Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, Dr. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi, welcomed the guests to Doha and explained why it was important for DICID to host this very important event and how it was in line with the work and values of the center as well as in agreement with the work done by interfaith activists and leaders throughout the world. The DICID was proud to host the event on behalf of the Government of Qatar as well as on behalf of the worldwide interfaith community.

Topographic Ecology: A philosophy of rights

A leading Muslim thinker of our times Jamal Badawi has said that Interfaith dialogue is not a mere intellectual exercise. It should include

one of the most powerful quests that are embedded in the upright human nature that are the quest for self-purification, knowledge and wisdom. From that perspective, the essence of the Prophet's mission embodies all. As stated in the Qur'an:

“Allah has been truly gracious to the believers in sending them a messenger from among their own, to recite His revelations to them, to purify them [spiritually] and to teach them the Book [the Qur'an] and wisdom- before that they were clearly astray” [Qur'an, 3:164]

The atmosphere of interfaith dialogue is more enlightened and permeated with love of fellow humans through the inclusion of the common elements of spirituality. The meeting participants discussed the possibility of a new vocabulary of natural rights that are spiritually grounded in nature itself.

Sheikh Ali Al-Qaradaghi a leading Islamic thinker from Qatar pointed out the importance of viewing our dwelling within the kindred 'womb' of our environment and the earth itself. This maternal view of the earth as receptacle and as if 'birthing' us diversifies the language of rights since the rights due to our environment are the same that are naturally due to our mothers, a universal experience of duty.

Dr. Burhan Koroglu related his experience of creating a tool of public education and persuasion—the film *The River that Runs to the West* emphasizing the metaphor of the river, stressing the notions of flow, permeability, mutual influence and interdependence of the cultural streams that unite East and West in the common current of history. Water is central to the ritual purity of Islam and Christianity. This baptismal metaphor of rivers creates another set of imaginings of our common rights for the source of life itself. This again is a universally experience of right that does not require second order explanation.

In the creation of earthly and fluid metaphors the meeting participants were creating a new vocabulary of rights that is viscerally accessible to all people irrespective of their habitat. This process of

vocabulary and concept creation is at the heart of the legal effort of the United Nations as a body that brings humanity together in common dialogue.

The creation of new vocabulary for rights can be tentatively called ‘Topographic Ecology’ for lack of a better appellation for what was taking place at the meeting. This was a development of a philosophy of rights that is based on the topography of habitation and ecology. We were inadequately prepared for what was taking place in front of us. Only in hindsight can we reflect back and label the process as one thing rather than another.

The intention of the meeting participants was to both diversify our language of rights and find a common civilizational vocabulary for speaking simultaneously about ‘difference’ and our ‘common parentage’.

Simkha Weintraub linked this creation of a green vocabulary for faith and rights by bringing to the fore the question of ‘responsible consumption’. A calling that people of faith need to practice, according to him, by ‘greening’ their own places of worship. Living the faithful life after all is about preaching and acting at home first. Building our own communities as models for others to replicate.

Inter-faith spirituality is one not informed by the commonality in the aggregation of religious views but vice versa: religious views are informed by the Ocean of Spirituality (or the Spirit, of Love, Of Compassion, of Interconnectedness). The metaphor of rivers flowing into One Ocean has to be reversed to experience the depth and meaning of inter-faith spirituality. In the wholeness of Being, the Ocean is primary, not the rivers. Inter-faith beings are border beings, beings who can seamlessly move across religious borders, compassionately, clearly and courageously. *It is the basis of coming together as one being for the benefit of the sustainable cultures we all need for the generations to come.* Whatever the religion we profess, we are today faced with an ecological crisis that threatens all life and Mother Earth. We need to be together as One in this and there is no other way. To be religiously free from this point of view means to be responsible for Nature or Mother Earth that hold us together. And there is no use of religious freedom without a planet.

Nadarajah Manickam (Global Centre for the Study of Sustainable Futures and spirituality- India)

Sites: Interfaith design

Dr. Munir Tlili, the Minister of Religion of Tunisia, described how Tunisia designed a constitution that protects the rights of values of freedom of religion and belief especially through the protection and celebration of holy days and holy sites. This was a refreshing view of how a modern Muslim state had created a constitution stipulating the principle of absolute equality of Muslims and non-Muslims.

The promotion and preparation of dialogue was accepted by meeting participants as needed on several levels. Each level of dialogue requires its own set of attentiveness. The dialogue preparation required in schools is not the same as that required between clergy and that required between university scholars of religion.

Theological dialogue however, does not need more stress than any of the other levels of dialogue practice and training. The ‘sites’ where multiple dialogues can take place was emphasized.

The creation of university institutions that cater to clergy from multiple faith backgrounds is a welcome development (see the creation of the first university of its kind: ‘Claremont Lincoln University’ in Los Angeles, USA). Bridge building across scholars of religion and religious leaders is also worth noting (between Christians and Muslims see Bridge Building Seminar organized in multiple countries by Georgetown University’s Berkley Center).

The mission of DICID is to encourage the scholars and clergy of the various world religions to respect their theological and cultural differences in order to promote the well being of all of creation. At our Center we create better flows and networks of communication between groups and individuals that form together the human family. Religions throughout history have guided through the exemplary personalities of their founders how to do inner and outer action through a well balanced interaction with fellow humans and our social ecology. At our Center we create opportunities for scholars and clergy to bring forward the exemplary stories from their respective scriptures so that these may guide us on how to attend to the challenges we face. We invite clergy and church officials based in Doha to advise us on how to improve the flows of communication between Qatari and non-Qatari residents of Qatar. We regularly hold workshops to give a platform to non-Qatari residents to express their concerns regarding their well being where we invite local media to write about these concerns. We also annually honour those who have contributed significantly to interfaith harmony and friendship. We have annually hosted the Doha Conference for Interfaith Dialogue for the last six years that began under the patronage of HH the Emir of Qatar and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We have attempted to develop an approach of facilitation in the process of dialogue. We believe it is important for dialogue participants to become familiarised with each other rather than hear our version of how to conduct dialogue. This open platform approach is a hallmark of our Center. We have developed an evolving approach to interfaith dialogue rather than beginning from a blue print. We attend to the functionalities of the dialogue process and let the participants decide on the content and direction. This has thus far given us a credible reputation as a Center for effective interfaith dialogue.

Dr. Ibrahim Saleh AlNaimi (Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue)

Encounter: Educational research

Encounter moves beyond simple ‘learning about’ other traditions, which is not sufficient as a basis for mutual understanding for we can only understand the ‘Other’ by interpreting what we encounter in the light of our own experience. However, through encounter students discover a shared humanity and learn that commonality emerges through different religious stories and practices, and that disagreement and conflict may be the result of ‘distance’ rather than ‘discernment’ at close quarters. This academic process involves exchange and dialogue. It involves listening as well as speaking, an attempt to understand others in their own terms, as we ourselves wish to be understood explains Dr. Ed Kessler (Woolf Institute at Cambridge, UK).

Once we are aware of our own perceptions, we can begin to

engage with others more effectively. Personal encounters foster dialogue. Through dialogue, neither participant is required to relinquish or alter their beliefs but both will be affected and changed by the process. As dialogue increases, so does understanding. There is no alternative than to build on our commonality and face our differences.

The youth are better able than we are to do dialogue because they are more flexible. They are less prone to be stuck in ancient arguments. They are more open to see the good in the other and even to see themselves *within* the other. Our youth may be compared to sparks of light that enlighten the world – if we make room for them. We need to encourage our young people to shine their light onto the darkness of this world, a world that is suffering for our sins and the sins of our forefathers.

There is a traditional legend in Judaism that teaches an important lesson about sparks of light –sparks of divine light explained Dr. Reuven Firestone (Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement, Los Angeles, USA).

At the beginning of time, God’s presence filled the entire universe. At this time before creation, God *was* the universe and the universe was God. Every microscopic portion of space was filled with God. When God decided to bring this world into being, God had to make room for creation. So God reduced Himself and contracted. He withdrew from filling everything by, as it were, drawing in His breath. This is called *TzimTzum* – divine contraction. From that contraction darkness was created. Then God said, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). Great and powerful divine light then came into being and filled the darkness, and ten holy vessels came forth. Each vessel was a container that was filled to the brim with this primordial light, which was, if you will, the essence of God Himself.

God sent forth those ten vessels, like a fleet of ships, each carrying its cargo of light. Had they all arrived intact, the world would have been perfect. But the vessels were not strong enough to contain such a powerful, divine light-force. They therefore broke open, split asunder,

and all the holy sparks of God were scattered like sand, like seeds, like stars. Those sparks fell everywhere, but more fell on the Holy Land than anywhere else, according to this Jewish Legend.

Humanity was the last thing to be created. And this is *why* we were created — in order to gather the sparks of divine light, no matter where they are hidden. God created us so that we would raise up the holy sparks. That is why there have been so many exiles — spread universally to release the holy sparks from the servitude of captivity everywhere in the world. In Jewish tradition, the Jews are the most widely spread community of exiles. It is our responsibility to sift all the holy sparks from the four corners of the earth. How is that done? By doing good in the world. By helping the poor everywhere, by healing the sick everywhere, by inventing remedies to improve the lives of people everywhere and by preserving the natural world all around us. We ourselves have divine sparks within us, and it is that energy which can enliven us to our task.

When enough holy sparks have been gathered, the broken vessels will be restored, and *Tikkun Olam* – the repair of the world, awaited for so long, will finally be complete. Therefore, it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from wherever they are imprisoned and to elevate them to holiness. Our youth are brilliantly enlightened – naturally, by the sparks of God within them. We must do all in our power to preserve the energy of their light, not to extinguish it through oppression and ridicule, but to enable it to shine. The youth that have led the movements for justice and liberation in the past years are exactly

Media and its power cannot be underestimated in our world today. Social Media has especially been harnessed by our young interfaith activists in America. Two such projects of note have been ProjectInterfaith and NewGround. Both projects develop innovative approaches in the creation of mutual interfaith understanding based on new technologies of social interaction. PI uses the help of world wide web to develop video reports of how people of different faiths experience their faith in the world. NewGround builds on social interaction and entertainment as modes of bringing interfaith awareness. Their ideas have been addressed at purifying imagination, enlighten hearing and making good narrations memorable through investing on innovative forms of interaction.

these kinds of people, working together as Muslims, Jews and Christians for justice and the liberation of all people.

There are some practical steps that need to be taken to bring interfaith awareness to educational encounters. By developing all of our curricula - and not just religious studies- to cater to living in a world of difference, by equipping teachers with the necessary skills to read these texts and bring to bear real world examples of living in communities of multiple faiths. Moreover, by engaging in research and collaborative projects for the common good of communities of multiple faiths.

Debating Dialogue: A history of convictions

The following prescription of identity is attributed to the Hasidic rabbi Menachem Mendel (1787 – 1859):

If I am I because I am I,
and you are you because you are you,
then I am I
and you are you.
But if I am I because you are you
and you are you because I am I,
then I am not I
and you are not you!

The suggestion here is that our sense of self; our sense of who we are cannot come from any mockery or putting down of others, and the verse from the Qur'an that reminds Muslims of the caution from God:

“O you who believe! Let not a people deride another people. Perhaps they are better!” Qur'an 16 (The Bee): 93

In interfaith communication disparagement and a sense of superiority would be sure fire guarantees of failure. Our sincerely held faiths are of vital importance to each of us they direct us to the essence of who we are and what we are about. Vitally important, too, is the desire we each have to follow truthfully in our faith. This is not to be mocked. But there are many who have cautioned as to possible dangers. Writing with a dry sense of humour in his novel *Lake Wobegon Days*, Garrison Keillor described communities of people who dissected teachings, each sect striving to be purer and purer adherents, until “having tasted the awful comfort of being correct” they could look down on those who had not reached that state. There are, though, powerful goals for all to strive for and these direct us beyond that kind of complacency. Thomas Merton was an American Catholic and a Trappist monk. He spoke of “the mystery of the freedom of divine mercy which alone is truly serious.”

An important part of interfaith understanding is renewing our joint achievements from the past. Our ancestors have achieved much in the past in being able to create the infrastructure of our faiths based on mutual learning. In the medieval period they have been open in learning from the experiences of each others’ faiths. These achievements surely need to be celebrated and acknowledged in any new interaction that takes place today. For example the spirit of *convivencia* that was achieved in Islamic Spain and the removal of *dhimmi* status for the jews of yemen based on a saying of the prophet of Islam in what is called by

As the Archbishop Rowan Williams advises we compare like with like in each religion and don’t ‘compare Apples and Oranges’. We compare the best manifestation and expression with each other in dialogue. And likewise we would like to suggest extending from the Archbishops advice that we make spaces available for debate to take place between those of religious attitudes that would like to emphasise differences in a more critical debate paradigm in order to convert the other. Without looking down upon the people of mission and debate amongst our co-religionists and without a sense of superiority in relation to them we provide them space for expressing their strongly held convictions. Afterall, religion is about convictions. Convictions can be historicized by some of us but others rather chose to live in the present of convictions and that attitude of religiosity has as much if not more of a right for expression than those of us who prefer to historicize our convictions and hence relativize them. It would only lead to mutual enrichment across faith boundaries if we are able to make space for expression of our religious compatriots as well as those of other religious adherents.

Muslims *Israiliyat* literature (Reuben Ahroni, “Some Yemenite Jewish Attitudes towards Muhammad’s prophethood,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 69 (1998): 94).

The important point is to remember that there are parallels in religions both in time and space. We can call this approach of finding parallels as ‘transversal fractals’. This would mean the similarities across time and in the present experience of lived religion between religions like Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Anatomy of prejudice: State as umpire

The title is inspired by John Cardinal O. Onaiyekan (ArchBishop of Abuja, Nigeria) when he argues that the appropriate role of a modern state in the midst of community conflict should be that of an umpire. This view is refreshing in contexts where the state is often viewed as part of Empire building projects.

The modern State is meant to guarantee legitimacy of proportional grievance. Humans with a divine mandate to be stewards of the earth according to religions are meant to repair the earth, mend the ties, heal the wounds and along with the State act with justice. Unjust acts create instability in the scheme of things as created by God and humans are expected to put to right any dissonance in the social order as well as in their personal lives. The State in this sense is the guarantor of the legitimacy of proportional grievance. However, this is in the worst case scenario and religions would still encourage forgiveness in case of harm for rewards in the afterlife since they have a perspective from beyond time and space. Therefore, the only legitimate religious hatred is directed against the act (and not the actor) of causing disharmony in the social sphere since the actor can be forgiven for their human erring and forgetfulness.

Religions also give a balanced approach in celebrating the death of heroes and mourning the death of villains from the perspective of the afterlife. It is also a religious approach to do justice to legitimate grievance when harm has occurred and to advice forgiveness in the case of the victim. Both proportionate measure and restricting excess has been the religious viewpoint in cases of harm.

Interfaith activists can therefore play an important role in societal conflict by standing between parties of conflict. As people of the ‘middle way’, upright in character and practicing the virtues of passionate patience and loving-kindness, inspired by religious traditions, interfaith activists can intervene in resolving conflicts. Often the crisis between communities is fueled by unfair distribution of resources and this is what the interfaith activist can make aware the wider society by arguing for fairness and equality.

We hope that future Istanbul Process Meetings will not only have an interfaith component to them but also that they are imbued with a spirit of interfaith understanding reached in the Doha Meeting. There were some issues unresolved to do primarily with domestic implementation of blasphemy laws by some member countries of the OIC. A basis of future conversations could be the **Camden Principles of Freedom of Expression and Equality** inspiring ‘least intrusive’ and ‘proportionate’ restrictions. Dr. Reuven Firestone explained that we need to teach deeper religious self-confidence in order to live in a world of religious freedom. What appears blasphemous to one religion is religious creed to another. To consider a core principle of a religion to be blasphemy is itself a kind of blasphemy! True freedom of religion requires that there be no blasphemy law. Blasphemy law is, by definition, an enemy of religious freedom. We can demand respect of other religions, but this demand for respect is an issue of education – not legislation. Blasphemy laws do not protect religions. They persecute religions. Laws of blasphemy are perhaps the most horrific barrier to religious freedom. The best kind of dialogue is, when Muslims, Christians and Jews engage together for common cause to repair the world.

Appendix: Session summaries

The first plenary was chaired by Mr Marc Limon, the Executive Director of Universal Rights Group (URG). (URG has carried out research on the implementation of UN resolution 16/18’s action points and the distinctiveness of this resolution.) The first panel on the ‘concept of

religious freedom for all, including religious minorities from the perspective of interfaith collaboration’ attempted to frame the rich discussions that were to follow in the two subsequent days on the interlinked questions of international efforts to combat religious intolerance and incitement, and efforts to broaden and deepen interreligious dialogue around the world.

Nazila Ghanea’s presentation offered a historic background to the UN’s efforts, over half a century, to deal with incidences of religious intolerance. This included the effort to draft a binding treaty on the issue. General Assembly resolution 1510 of December 1960 resolutely condemned ‘all manifestations and practices of racial, religious and national hatred in the political, economic, social, education and cultural spheres’ as violations of the UN Charter. The effort to draft a binding treaty did not lead to fruition. Instead, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief was adopted in 1981 and a UN Special Rapporteur on ‘religious intolerance’ was established in 1986 in order to advance the objectives of this Declaration. Around the turn of the century, in 2000, the name of the Special Rapporteur changed to a Special Rapporteur on ‘freedom of religion or belief’ though in reality the UN has continued to focus on both the promotion, fulfillment and positive measures for upholding freedom of religion and belief as well as protection from incidences of religious intolerance.

Notwithstanding, the OIC began tabling regular resolutions on Defamation of Religions since 1999. The perception was, especially after 9/11, that the UN was not adequately addressing, especially intolerance against Muslims, that is, despite quite a number of relevant norms, treaties, bodies and mechanisms. As we heard from various speakers, these resolutions became steadily more controversial, until 2011 when a group of countries from the OIC and the West came together to draft and negotiate the ground breaking resolution 16/18 on combating religious intolerance and adopted it by consensus. This resolution sets down an action plan for addressing the problem, and is

accompanied by the Istanbul Process, which seeks to bring together governments, religious communities, NGOs and others to promote implementation of the 16/18 action plan.

The resolution action points in para. 5 speak of ‘religious communities’ and ‘stereotyping of persons’ but not of ‘religious minorities’ (except in the preamble). However, two recent UN reports from the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (to the Council) and the Independent Expert on minority issues (to the GA) address this squarely. These clarify the definitions of:

- Freedom of religion or belief, which human rights standards clarify uphold the right of everyone to have, adopt or change their religion or belief, and to manifest it in worship, observance, practice and teaching, and
 - Minorities – as persons in numerical minority and not in power, with ethnic, linguistic and/or religious characteristics they wish to maintain. The state has obligations towards enabling this. The understanding of minority is in light of these understandings and then rests primarily on self-definition. For example, Muslims may not be recognised as religious ‘minorities’ in France because of the resistance towards this term in France. Baha’is in Iran may not be recognised as religious minorities in Iran. In both cases, they are to enjoy freedom of religion or belief as well as minority rights and all their human rights irrespective of the state position, irrespective of sectarianism or the politicisation of the question of ‘religious minorities’.

Resolution 16/18 refers to religious freedom, pluralism, meaningful participation and full respect for all. It therefore suggests recognition of the fact that:

- Religious freedom for all goes far beyond the prohibition of intolerance
- Religious freedom includes religions or beliefs on the basis of self-definition

- That a particular focus is required on religion and belief minorities
 - The rights to have, adopt and change religion or belief; to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching; and positive duties towards religion or belief minorities to maintain their religious, linguistic, ethnic and cultural characteristics.

The meeting in Doha was part of the Istanbul Process, and focused on using interreligious dialogue to combat intolerance. This Doha meeting was the first Istanbul Process meeting held in an OIC country and was the first time NGOs were freely able to request and be granted participation. Although the London meeting also had an interfaith component and focus, Doha's conference – running in parallel with the meeting – gave it a unique focus and flavor. The 'interfaith component' in both Doha and London included Muslims, Christians and Jews. That constitutes some 50% of the world population – which is excellent – but there are other heavenly religions, other religions and beliefs, and a positive step for the next Istanbul meetings would be to include them too: Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, and so on.

In the other plenary presentations we heard a wealth of ideas and information on the nature of intolerance, and how we must strengthen freedom of religion or belief and religious-self confidence in order to confront it. Panelists spoke of the importance of interreligious dialogue in confronting intolerance, and set this in the context of personal experiences. We heard that if each person and each religion believes that it alone knows the truth and how to access God, this leads to intolerance, which actually goes against the objective of those same religions. Instead, we must complete freedom of religion or belief, through the inter-related concepts of religious self-confidence, and confronting blasphemy. Regarding blasphemy, Dr Firestone urged people to teach each other religious self-confidence so they can accept criticism. Regarding the latter, he distinguished between emotional injury caused by efforts to insult religions, and physical injury of defacement or destruction. Physical damage to any person based on religious motive or

any other kind of motive must be forbidden. Dr Firestone argued that true freedom of religion requires that there be no blasphemy law. Blasphemy law is, by definition, an enemy of religious freedom. We can demand respect of other religious, but this demand for respect is an issue of education – not legislation. He also added that blasphemy laws do not protect religions. They persecute religions.

Panelists also argued that when considering Istanbul process and resolution 16/18 we should think about the goals, as well as the implementation of those goals. A critical component of this is addressing “track 1.5”—creating space for governments and community organizations to engage both formally and informally. In this regard, we should take action in a number of key areas: creating space for dialogue; using academic scholarship to engender exchange and better policy; creating a common vocabulary; and developing a network that maintains connections.

Delving deeper into the issues of having a common vocabulary for inter-religious dialogue, we heard of the importance for both persons and communities or nations of basing dialogue on the scriptures of the world religions and on the natural law that they all share. Finally, we heard that strengthening and deepening inter-religious and multi-religious dialogue can and must make a significant contribution to addressing religious intolerance and incitement, as per UN resolution 16/18 and the Istanbul Process. Only then can we move from tolerance to diversity and finally to pluralism.

In the session on “National Experiences and Frameworks on Religious Freedom”, the panelists focused on the question of what policies and practices have been implemented in different countries that promote religious freedom and tolerance not just as abstract concepts but as people’s concrete experience of living together and developing mutual respect.

The panelists discussed three major approaches that have proved indispensable to this task. First, it is essential to create a *legal*

framework that supports the freedom of religion and belief and protects the rights of all religious groups. Second, it is essential to create a framework of *persuasion*, or a conceptual framework, that frames the public *understanding* of different religions in the same society and helps people accept and place different traditions in relation to each other. Third, it is essential to supplement the above two approaches by creating a *practical* framework by designing specific practices that bring people of different religions together and make them learn about each other, and learn to live together, through concrete experience. Without trust and respect at the level of individuals, no abstract principles or declarations at the policy level would work. Therefore, it is essential to help people build trust and understanding of each other at the grass-roots level, where real life happens.

In the session on “State Responses to Infringement of Religious Freedom” panelists discussed the experience of Interfaith relations as part of the life of most Nigerians, as they meet people of the other faith in their daily places of work and leisure. It was noted that this daily interface was the most powerful instrument for promoting freedom of religion in the society. It was fundamentalist forces of groups such as *Boko Haram*, who’s declared aim is the installation of an Islamic state that is at odds with the protection of freedom of faith as promoted by the Nigerian constitution. To counter this sectarian move groups such as the Nigerian Inter-religious Council have the dual purpose of addressing religious conflicts and promoting cooperation and harmony in the country. Local and less formal groups have likewise worked to promote these values.

Professor Mustafa Abu Sway is the Integral Chair for the Study of Imam Al-Ghazali’s work at the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Quds University Jerusalem. In his work with the Waqf, the official Islamic authority that oversees and has jurisdiction over the Al-Aqsa Mosque Professor Abu Sway addressed the issue of the lack of the freedom of access to the Mosque for Muslims and in particular the restrictions that Israel has placed upon Palestinians from having freedom of access. In

his address he noted that after 1948 many mosques became inaccessible to Palestinian Muslims, including those with Israeli citizenship. Some of these mosques were desecrated by using them for mundane purposes such as turning the Lajjun mosque near Megiddo into a carpentry shop. The Professor went on to note that the infringement on freedom of worship takes place within a larger context of discrimination including lack of building permits, confiscating land, revocation of ID's...etc.

He noted that the most important infringement on freedom of worship is interfering in the affairs of Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel imposes age restrictions on men for access that they need to be 50 years of age to qualify entering the mosque on most occasions but more so lately. Men and women from the West Bank do not have freedom of movement and therefore they can only enter Jerusalem even with a permit since building the Separation Wall. Israel does ease the restrictions during Ramadan. The Professor went on to state that the Israeli authorities restrict the use inside Al-Aqsa Mosque with the facilities at the Golden Gate being inaccessible. He has not had access to his office in the Golden Gate. Furthermore the Islamic Waqf employees are prevented frequently from carrying out their basic duties. He noted that even basic maintenance is often interfered with and must wait until permission is given. He went on to state that Israel undermines the Status Quo and does not respect the role of Jordan as Custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy places as stipulated in the Wadi Araba Agreement between the two countries. The Professor gave several instances where students from the two schools in Al-Aqsa and other schools were denied access to events such as funerals and religious celebrations.

An activist working to protect the rights and the lives of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar spoke about restrictions for all Rohingya of:

- movement,
- educational access,

- employment access,
- marriage permission,
- right to family life and
- no birth registration for newborns.

While there have been official reports of horrific discrimination against Rohingyas, since June of 2012 the group experienced more than 100,000 attacks resulting in over 1000 deaths. In October of the same year the number of attacks increased by 30,000 now including targeting other Muslim groups living in Myanmar. It was reported that there have been forced deportations coupled with the closing of access to hospitals, schools and markets. There are verified reports of human rights abuses by the Military Police including, rape murder and mass arrests. Journalists and other humanitarian workers have been banned from these areas. Rohingya that have been forced into camps experience the lack of clean water and other sanitary conditions, lack of food with many children having starved to death. Doctors without Borders who were treating Rohingya and other Muslim groups in the camps were forced to exit from Myanmar leaving those in the camps with literally no medical treatment opportunities. The regime has barred any international observers at the camps and has claimed that there have not been any deaths resulting from these actions. The President of Myanmar has stated that deportation of the Rohingya is the solution to the problem that the group is, as he noted, in fact illegal immigrants. It was noted that “969”, a Buddhist group lead by a Buddhist monk “WiraThu”, has organized anti-Muslim hate speech campaigns and their leader regularly delivers hate filled sermons in many townships. The anti-Muslim movement is spreading and becoming a wide network throughout the country. Most recently at the Massacre in Mikhtila - central Burma, at least 60 people were killed including 32 Madrasa students. Violence occurs in front of the security forces who do nothing to stop the violence and even helped to commit it and the violence continues under the 144 Act [Martial Law](#) . She also stated that the lack of justice and rule of law as well as impunity are key factors which have encouraged racial hatred

and the anti-Muslim movement. She concluded that she fears that violence will only increase without international pressure.

A representative of the JACOB BLAUSTEIN INSTITUTE (JBI) for the Advancement of Human Rights, based in New York, an independently endowed institute of the American Jewish Committee, spoke about strengthening the effectiveness of international human rights mechanisms based on the understanding that strong and effective UN human rights machinery would benefit all people, including but not limited to members of religious minority communities around the world. They work together with NGOs that engage directly with victims of violations of religious freedom in countries experiencing serious challenges; they work with these organizations to explain the functions of the various UN mechanisms and to offer guidance on how to more effectively engage with these and other special procedures of the Human Rights Council in the most effective way possible.

She noted that the human rights paradigm has a central role to play in ensuring religious freedom. The JBI's work, including their project with the Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, approaches this issue from within a human rights framework. She stated that the State has an obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of all citizens, including but not limited to those whose rights to freedom of religion are being infringed upon. Their project with the Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Prevention of Genocide aims to develop the normative content of the obligation to "prevent genocide" in the Genocide Convention. The premise of the project is that one component of the obligation to prevent genocide is to prevent a set of clearly identifiable systematic human rights abuses that are "risk factors" for genocide; among these is the systematic denial of the right to freedom of religion or belief of members of particular religious groups, as well as systematic violent attacks against members of those religious groups. The first stage of the project was to clearly identify what the "risk factors" are; our expert Steering Committee identified 22 of them that include systematic rights violations perpetrated against particular

religious groups including denial of the right to profess and practice their religion, but also killing, torture, rape and other sexual violence, forced marriage, enforced sterilization, arbitrary detention, subjugation to forced labor, transfer of children to families of a different religion, forcible transfer or denial of the right to freedom of movement, systematic dehumanization, systematic destruction of religious sites, expropriation of property, denial of citizenship, denial of the right to participate in public affairs, denial of access to education or health care, deliberate destruction of or blocking of access to food and medical supplies.

She noted in her presentation what the human rights framework brings to the issue of response to infringement of religious freedom is a set of ground rules all emerging from the principles that (1) every individual has rights that are inalienable and (2) it is the State's essential responsibility to empower all individuals to enjoy their rights and ensure that their dignity is respected.

The State must ensure that it is creating this space by defending the rights to everyone of freedom of speech and association and do all it can to prevent the same individuals or groups who provoke religious hostility to threaten and intimidate those who seek to defend the targets of their hatred. Without vigorous protection there is a serious risk that the same forces that are infringing religious freedom will similarly chill interfaith efforts to promote tolerance.

In situations of communal violence or conflict, the State must also take action to restore order and resolve the disputes, but it must do so in a way that internally conforms to the rights-based framework. The State must promote and enforce lasting, just, fair solutions to conflicts and avoid perpetuating impunity and patterns of abuse and discrimination. She concluded that the UN human rights machinery has contemplated the question of what States should do in response to religious intolerance, civil society groups have repeatedly emphasized that the State needs to refrain from becoming an obstacle to inter-group action to

spread messages of religious coexistence. States must ensure that abuses of the rights of religious minorities – as well as those of individuals from any group seeking to promote religious tolerance – are not committed with impunity, but rather that perpetrators are held accountable.

The session on “Philanthropy and Healthcare” focused on promoting the well-being of the underserved by providing the access to high quality health care and philanthropic services for people of different faiths. In this session the panelists agreed that one of the very good ways to promote UN resolution 16/18 is if faith communities were to work more together on grass roots level on the promotion and protection of human dignity for all people no matter which ethnicity, religion or belief, gender they belong too.

Activities and actions organized by churches and religious communities through their charities should not be politicised and instrumentalised by the political parties or governments or any other party. The Charities need to have full freedom to witness their faith though their work in order to avoid politicization. The finances running through the charities need to be handled very carefully in order to avoid mistrust of people for whose benefit funds are collected.

Good practices discussed in the session, including for e.g. work of Jewish community on running the hospital in the slums in San Paolo in Brazil, or work with children with disabilities of Our Lady Charity in Jordan or Qatar Charity initiatives donating to hospitals and investing in education, were just some of the activities where the freedom of religion or belief is witnessed in practice.

The panelists agreed that it is important to urge those states who signed the UN convention on the rights of the child to work on its implementation in practice and to promote mutual interfaith cooperation on the issues which relate to peoples’ life.

The diverse presentations in the session on “Making Common Ground” provided an opportunity for panelists and attendees to explore how political, religious and human rights groups might variously interact depending upon the specific context. Panelists spoke to how the relative strength of political, religious and civil society infrastructures often determines which strategies are likely to be effective given the particular resources that are available within the community. Panelists came from diverse regions of the world to share how they are making common ground in the wake of serious community conflicts. The moderator set the tone for dialogue with the following opening remarks:

“We are here to discuss making common ground where there has been conflict. But the truth is in the making. For if we reach for the pen of the victor to rewrite history with propaganda—if we choose hegemony over understanding, we reach for an easy solution that does not endure. We say peace, peace where there is no peace. Even victors bring partial truths to a common meeting place because social truths are constituted by the narrative truths of every member within the community. So let our stance also be partial. In the Jewish tradition, there is a term—*TikkunOlam*—that defines the joyful act as repairing the world. Each of our panelists comes from regions of conflict. Let us interact today with joyful actions that repair the world. In preparation for this panel, I read the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation report. A sobering read that includes more than 300 pages of single line records of who did what to whom over a ten year period of civil war. This should not be an easy session if we consider the atrocities that define the background in each context. Common ground is made when we reach deep within ourselves to choose peace when we feel like war, to invest in the common good when politics would overwhelm the agenda, when we emotionally commit to forgive when the heat of hatred hungers for retribution, when we summon the courage to trust when suspicion is all we can hear, and when we discern an opportunity for the light of wisdom when darkened doorways obscure the entrance to a way forward in this world. When we welcome the sacred among us, we make common ground”. (Dr. Sherrie Steiner)

At this point, each panelist spoke about making common ground in their context. Mr. Petrit Selimi spoke about Kosovo, Reverend-Engr. Gabriel Leonard Allen spoke about Sierra Leone and South Africa, Dr. Joseph Wandera spoke about the legacy of Somalia affecting refugee resettlement efforts in Kenya, and Mr. Claudio Epelman spoke about religious leadership in Argentina.

The Deputy Foreign Minister described how the Interfaith Kosovo Initiative is making common ground in the Kosovo context. The horrible war of 1999 created huge divisions between ethnic and religious communities. One million people were displaced in a campaign of brutal ethnic cleansing, an estimated 20,000 women were presumed raped by Serbian forces, and over 10,000 people were killed. NATO intervened and Kosovo became independent in 2008, but communities still needed reconciliation. The human rights intervention had stopped the genocide and normalized political relations. Now the important work of shaping Serbian-Albanian relations could begin. Something needed to be done to ensure that the tragedy that had engulfed the Balkans in the 1990s would never again be repeated. The Kosovo conflict was initially about territory, but religion became misused by extremists on both sides during the war. Determined to break the cycle of violence, the Kosovo Foreign Ministry launched an Initiative to address one of the most difficult consequences of the Kosovo conflict: religious intolerance. They partnered with faith communities and civil society because they knew that government programs would have no meaning if it didn't trickle down into civil society and faith communities. They tell success stories on an interfaith social media portal, they sponsor conferences, build Holocaust stone memorials, involve academia and publish literature about stories of reconciliation. The Interfaith Kosovo Initiative uses cutting edge tools in digital and public diplomacy in combination with grassroots outreach and the involvement of international partners from Rome to Doha, to create a space for dialogue and to promote a diversity agenda as a platform for nation building efforts of the young republic of Kosovo which has a 90% Muslim population.

The Minister of Methodist Church TheGambia Reverend-Engr. Gabriel Leonard Allen described how the *Truth and Reconciliation Commissions* are making common ground in the African contexts of Sierra Leone and South Africa. In contexts where political institutions weaken or collapse, governance roles sometimes shift to the remaining religious infrastructure. The collapse of apartheid in South Africa and

the ten year civil war in Sierra Leone were contexts where governance functions shifted to religious leaders who played important public roles. Drawing on examples from the *Truth and Reconciliation Commissions*, Rev. Allen described how secular and religious leaders identified a ‘doable goodness’ by offering wisdom, providing hope, and developing workable strategies for making common ground in their respective communities. He described how leaders could have chosen the legal framework, but they specifically chose the path of reconciliation in an effort to resolve racial conflict in South Africa and bring co-existence among tribal and religious antagonists in Sierra Leone. Rev. Allen rooted the principles of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in the theological concepts of *righteousness*, *reconciliation* and *forgiveness* that are originally sourced in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. He traced the theological concepts as originating from God as revealed in Scripture to their application by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commissions* with the secular outcome that dignity is now valued as a basic human right. The interfaith work of the Sierra Leonean *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, in particular, models a form of Christian-African dialogue and diapraxis which offers ‘restorative justice’ possibilities for making common ground in situations where atrocity, tribalism, and religious bigotry undermine peace and prosperity.

Dr. Joseph Wandera from Kenya discussed how the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh (CCMRE) is making common ground in a local context characterized by frequent tension stemming from state harassment by some Kenyan police of Somali Muslim refugees who are resettling in the predominantly Christian neighbourhood of Eastleigh, Nairobi. The pedagogical approach of CCMRE counters the experience of conflict with cooperation created by partnered programs of joint action on matters of common concern. The legacies of devastating experiences result in stereotypes that are overcome through the bonds of friendship that are established by the trust building programs. By incorporating the element of experience into their educational program, CCMRE is re-articulating interfaith

‘dialogue’ as “diapraxis.” Christian and Muslim students encounter one another through exposure programs, research activities, and interreligious dialogue meetings. In particular, CCMRE created twelve Muslim-Christian youth research pairs to jointly collect, analyze, present and publish data. The joint research activity between Muslims and Christians created space for interaction and learning as they encountered one another in their daily lives. This exposure program serves as a model for interreligious encounter that moves beyond ‘talk about belief’ to a broader model that integrates experience into their pedagogy.

Mr. Claudio Epelman from Latin American Jewish Congress spoke about trust-building travel initiative for making common ground between Jewish, Muslim and Catholic leaders. Mr. Epelman identified how building the needed trust among leaders is a major challenge after a conflict occurs between communities. A group comprised of 15 Jews, 15 Muslims and 15 Catholics traveled together and visited the holy places of the three religions in Israel, Palestine and Jordan, and concluded their pilgrimage with a meeting with Pope Francis in Rome. The experience of visiting together the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Holy Sepulcher and the Western Wall allowed leaders the opportunity to learn about each of the religion’s traditions and how it is lived by its faithful while simultaneously safeguarding the religious identity of each participant. This experience developed a network of interpersonal ties involving authentic dialogue between the leaders of the communities involved. The interreligious trust building experience affects community ties as leaders subsequently support and develop increased understanding of other faith traditions among the groups they represent. The presentation was on the day of the anniversary of the beginning of the dictatorship in Argentina when there was a “Dirty War” (1976 and 1983) during which an estimated 30,000 people ‘disappeared.’ More than thirty years later, mothers of the disappeared continue to march every Thursday; the military released the military files on the detention centres to civilian authorities and the general public the day before this session. At the conclusion of his presentation, participants asked specific questions

about how the interfaith initiative addressed the history of conflict and human rights abuses in the Argentinian context.

The Istanbul process fosters political, religious and human rights dialogue for purposes of advancing religious freedom through interfaith collaboration. In the wake of a series of presentations that had variously emphasized either religious freedom or human rights, the ensuing discussion explored ways in which legal and religious frameworks might variously play off against each other depending upon what might be most appropriate to the particular context. The killing must stop before communities can heal, but communities may never heal if they fail to address the relationships that exist between people living side-by-side amid sublimated animosities. One participant emphasized how hypocrisy and self-righteous attitudes block progress and that the rare virtue of humility is integral to the development of deeper understanding. Having lived through civil war, several participants emphasized that tolerance is an improvement upon open conflict, but community reintegration into pluralistic societies was generally agreed upon as being the more desirable long-term strategy. And yet, while growing the prison population does not address the need for community reintegration, human rights advocates emphasized how impunity can itself be a driver of more conflict. Unaddressed injustices can also be a driver of conflict if interreligious communities remain silent about human rights violations and their complicit role in those violations where they exist. In this regard, participants considered how conflict can actually contribute to building healthier communities if the approach taken focuses on building democratic and human rights.

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