

Training in Religion and Mediation

Project Brief, April 2017

Background

In a world where over 80% of the world's population identifies with a religious community, there is increasing recognition of the necessity for understanding and addressing religion's role in violent conflict.

The training component of the Culture and Religion in Mediation program (CARIM) run by the Religion-Politics-Conflict (RPC) Desk of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, aims to build the capacity of peace practitioners and policy makers to work on conflicts with religious dimensions.

Objectives

The Religion and Mediation training courses, implemented jointly by CSS and RPC, involve a varied training methodology, including theoretical and case-study presentations from expert scholars and practitioners, active contributions from participants, practical exercises and role-plays. The primary focus is on the following five areas:

- Appreciating why religion matters when working on conflict
- Understanding different ways of thinking about religion and its role in conflict

- Acquiring tools for integrating religion into a conflict analysis
- Learning about a variety of mediation approaches that address the interplay between religion and conflict transformation
- Designing processes that address the role of religion in a specific conflict

Activities

The five-day Religion and Mediation Course (RMC) has been held annually in Switzerland since 2014. Each year it brings together around 25 participants to equip them with the attitudes, knowledge and tools for thinking about the role of religion in conflict, and for translating that thinking into action to transform violent conflict.

Since 2015, a shorter, 3-day version of the course has been run in collaboration with the Mediation Support Unit of the United Nations (UN) for both field and headquarters staff of the Department of Political Affairs.

Both courses are supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

Abridged elements of the course have also been offered as part of training sessions for the European External Action Service and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. Furthermore, interviews with participants and experts from the course have been used to develop a series of videos on religion and mediation to bring the material to a wider audience. The videos illustrate the diversity of ways in which religion is relevant to conflict and offer insights into different aspects of working on conflicts with religious dimensions.





RMC 2016 and UN RMC 2016

Outcomes

Feedback from past courses has been very positive, with alumni going on to use the skills and knowledge learnt in their work.

The courses also provide an important networking opportunity for practitioners from different regions to meet and learn from each other, as well as fostering closer working relationships between existing partners. A number of collaborations on joint projects have since developed.

The courses have helped to raise the profile in policy-making circles of the importance of the topic of religion and conflict. The participation by representatives of government and international organizations, and the development of the UN 3-day course, has confirmed that there is a need for more training on this topic. Discussions are ongoing about how further training can be developed within specific institutions as part of a wider strategy to support the international engagement with the topic of religion and conflict transformation.

Further Information

<http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/foreign-policy/human-rights/peace/religion-and-conflicts.html>

To find out more about the Religion and Mediation Course, including details on how to apply and a link to the religion and conflict transformation videos, see: www.rmc.ethz.ch



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Reflections

“I think the course is an important one and part of the overall puzzle in developing competence in how religion and conflict resolution are related to each other.” *Dr. Isak Svensson, Associate Professor at Uppsala University, Sweden.*

“I have been able to gain a deeper insight into the role of religion and the dynamics of religion and politics. I think it is a very rich course in content and I believe at the end I am going back more enriched, better prepared and it has really opened my eyes to a lot of issues.”

Rev. Fr. (Dr.) John Bogna Bakeni, Priest of the Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

“This course is going to prove tremendously useful for my work and for the work of Al-Amana Center. I have been to many of these courses over the years in religion and conflict and I have to say this course is the most substantive, the best course I have been to. It’s exceptional.” *Douglas Leonard, Executive Director of Al Amana Centre, Oman.*

Contact Details

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Jean-Nicolas Bitter

Senior Advisor: Religion, Politics Conflict

jeannicolas.bitter@eda.admin.ch

Tel. +41 58 46 28983

Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich

Angela Ullmann

Program Officer

angela.ullmann@sipo.gess.ethz.ch

Tel. +41 44 63 20790

