



BRIDGING RELIGIONS IN MACEDONIA

THE PROGRAMME BRIDGING RELIGIONS IN MACEDONIA CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS ENRICHMENT OF THE MUTUAL COOPERATION OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING REGARDING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AMONG THE MACEDONIAN PUBLIC.

The most important result of the programme is that the programme has presented, in a systematic way, the dialogue within the high institutions of the two biggest religious communities in Macedonia. It was shown that good will exists and that it can be used as a good basis upon which higher ambitions of tolerance and co-existence can be fostered. The programme enabled activities around which good-will could be demonstrated and could develop. Furthermore, a forum was organised (meetings of the Steering Committee and Publishing Council) where the representatives of the five religious communities were able to meet regularly together in order to make plans and to implement joint activities. The forum sets an important precedent of religious cooperation in Macedonia and in the region.

MCIC, since its establishment, has cooperated with religious communities in Macedonia. Four members of its Council (out of 26 members) and three members of the Governing Board are representatives of the following religious communities: MOC, IC, and UMC.

- ▶ MCIC supported several humanitarian organisations of these religious communities (Charity, Diaconate, Resurrection of MOC, El Hilal of IC, and Miss Stone Centre of UMC) through capacity building (trainings and counselling), technical support and mostly with coordination of humanitarian assistance.
- ▶ During the 2001 conflict in Macedonia, MCIC initiated and organised contacts between the leaderships of the churches and religious communities in Macedonia. Five joint meetings were organised with the representatives of MOC, IC, CC, UMC and JC. Their representatives, organised by the World Church Council and MCIC, in Morges, Switzerland, from 11th to 13th of June, held a meeting to finalise previous activities by signing the joint message for peace. The message was published in the Macedonian daily newspapers.
- ▶ In May 2002 an inter-religious conference was organised in Skopje and within its framework, for the first time in Macedonia were held exchange lectures of the Deans of Orthodox Theological Faculty and Faculty of Islamic Sciences. This event was the basis for the Bridging Religions Programme in Macedonia. The results of the programme are presented below.





Overview

- ▶ 8 exchange lectures of professors of different religious communities for a total of 200 students;
- ▶ 5 visits of Theological faculties with about 84 visitors;
- ▶ 7 visits of religious sites and religious services with about 166 visitors;
- ▶ 4 students participated in study visits abroad;
- ▶ 22 participants to a summer camp in Struga;
- ▶ 18 of the 25 registered religious communities participated in the Days of Religious Communities event in Macedonia.



BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER RELIGIONS

For the first time the Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences held a lecture at the Orthodox Theological Faculty and vice-versa - the Dean of the Orthodox Theological Faculty held a lecture at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences. Additionally, the students of the two faculties exchanged visits.

“For many this is something new, but this is a good way to get acquainted with other religions which is also good for improved co-existence in Macedonia. Where there is dialogue, there is room for understanding,” said the Dean of Orthodox Theological Faculty, Jovan Takovski.

The exchange lecture took place at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences where the Dean of the Theological Faculty, Jovan Takovski, gave a lecture at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in the Skopje village of Kondovo. The lecture provoked great interest among the students of this Faculty.

Here’s what the students of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences think about the lecture of Takovski at their Faculty:

“This is positive step for both communities. Although the time was short, we managed to pose many questions to the Dean of the Orthodox Theological Faculty. There was a huge interest among us to hear more. It is much different when you listen to our professors about certain topics and when you listen to the competent people from that field and vice-versa, said Zuhri Veseli, a student at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences.

“The Islamic religion does not preach not living together with the Christians, on contrary, it states that we should live together with them,” said Ismail Bardi, Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences.

Students of the Orthodox Theological Faculty have their impressions, as well:

“We all visit this Faculty and the religious secondary school for the first time. We had some previous initiatives with my colleagues for such visit, but we did not have the right

contacts. Now we have the chance to suggest to our colleagues from the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, in order to get closer to each other, to go to the movies, to the theatre, to exchange student newspapers and texts. We belong to the group that believe that we are all the same here,” said Aleksandar Zashov, student and secretary of the Student Association at the Orthodox Theological Faculty.





CAPACITY BUILDING

- ▶ Basic English and computers courses for 61 representatives of the religious communities;
- ▶ Project Cycle Management and Institutional Development Trainings for 30 participants;
- ▶ Seminar on inter-religious dialogue attended by about 70 professors and students;
- ▶ Workshop by the Islamic Religious Community.



SEMINAR ON THE INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Lisi Rasmusen and Safet Bektovic of Islamic-Christian Study Center from Copenhagen, Denmark, gave lectures at the seminar and many professors of the two theological faculties participated with their presentations. The seminar began at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences and continued at the Orthodox Theological Faculty.

“Apart from lessons learned and love, confronting this topic also encompasses our responsibility towards the religious culture and its importance in a multi-confessional society. For a short period of time we proved that we know how to cooperate, regardless of various difficulties. The two theological faculties, the Islamic and the Orthodox, showed maturity, skillfulness and knowledge for a wider and deeper cooperation with just one objective – to preserve the purity of faith and to develop the religious culture that it contains,” said the Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Dr. Ismail Bardhi, in his speech.

“This meeting is an additional opportunity to seek ways and forms for further mutual cooperation with the aim to enhance our relations as faculties, and to help in improving the relations between our two peoples” said the Pro-dean of the Orthodox Theological Faculty, Jovan Takovski.

The seminar also included a panel discussion on the topic of “Nationality in pluralistic society – the relation between the state and the churches and religious communities (various types of secular societies)” and two lectures on the following topics “Why inter-religious dialogue?” and “How can Christians and Muslims communicate and work together?”.



TRAINING FOR THE STUDENTS FROM RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

STRATEGIC PLANNING

“What we have learned from this training is that the main task of the leadership and more experienced members of the organisations are to work for the development of their organisation. Strategic planning is the basis for successful development of an organisation,” Ir-sal Jakupi, from the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, told us.

Training objectives were aimed towards acquiring practical knowledge and skills for developing strategic plans, developing awareness about the organisation and its structural elements, as well as its external surrounding.

PROJECT CYCLE MANAGEMENT

“This is not my first time participating on such type of training, but this was the first time for me to befriend participants from various religious communities. I am very glad that the structure of the group was such. During the training we learned many things we thought we knew well,” said Lela Sadikario from the Jewish Community.

“This was my first training on developing projects. The training taught us not only how to prepare a project, but also showed us that how one can sit and work in organised inter-religious and inter-ethnic programmes which will contribute for further cooperation in other aspects and areas of life,” said Hussein Rizan from the Faculty of Islamic sciences.



INFORMATION

- ▶ 4 issues of the Bulletin for inter-religious cooperation in Macedonian and Albanian published;
- ▶ Address book of religious communities in Macedonia in Macedonian, Albanian and English published;
- ▶ 8 different types of inter-religious calendars printed;
- ▶ 3 comparative studies prepared;
- ▶ Inter-religious info and dialogue centre opened.



Inter-religious Info and Dialogue Centre

On July 1st, 2004 the Inter-religious Info and Dialogue Centre began operating. Publications from churches and religious communities were donated to the centre. The centre includes a library with religious contents and presents an opportunity for improved informing and acquaintance with the religions in Macedonia. Apart from the library, the Centre is used for organising meetings of the churches and religious communities. The Centre has seven employees (students and activists of the churches/religious communities) that take turns working during the week. The programme is implemented by an operational team of collaborators from MCIC and the theological faculties.



ADDRESS BOOK OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN MACEDONIA

The Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation published the Address book of religious communities in Macedonia for the first time. The aim of the Address book is to improve the information about the churches, religious communities and religious groups in the Republic of Macedonia among themselves as well as among the public. The Address book encompasses 23 of the 25 religious communities registered by the Committee for relations with religious communities and religious groups of the Republic of Macedonia, according to the Law on religious communities and religious groups.

The Address book contains the general information about the religious communities (contact information, clerical functions and hierarchy, type and number of religious sites, religious ceremonies and holidays, activities and institutions for religious education), as well as photographs of the headquarters and more significant religious sites.

