



D6.2 – Founding Charter of the Interfaith Council for the Safety of Places of Worship in Europe

Date: 18th November 2024



This document was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund.

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Acknowledgment

This document was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund.

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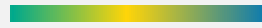
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Preamble

Due to the increasing wave of terrorist attacks and intolerant acts on European soil there is a growing need for greater guarantees of protection for public spaces, in particular places of worship (Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on the Protection of Public Spaces, 2021; Conference on the Protection of Places of Worship in the European Union, 2021[1]). In particular, this concerns Muslim and Jewish communities who become targets of Islamophobic and antisemitic hate crimes – all the more after the 7th of October. But also, other religions are subject to rising violence towards their places of worship as religion recedes in European societies and is perceived as something alien. As the president of the Observatory for Religious and Conscience Freedom (OLRC) states, in Spain, most attacks come from individuals or groups that seek to “impose a radical secularism that tries to eliminate all confessions from the public space” (Evangelical Focus, Nearly 60 attacks against believers and worship places reported in Spain, 2020). In Europe alone, between 2019 and 2020, attacks against Christians increased by 70% due to the intersection of radical secularist and Islamist ideologies (Caldwell, Report IDs five European nations with increasing anti-Christian violence, 2021).

We believe that this issue requires a coordinated response of all major faith communities in Europe. The Interfaith Council for the Safety of Places of Worship in Europe is being created to act against rising violence by promoting interreligious collaboration and a culture of respect and appreciation. The religious communities represented have different histories in Europe. In the constitution and co-operation of this body, we affirm the right of every religion to be practised here and work on a common continuation of the history of an interreligious Europe.

Europe is characterised by a wealth of diverse religious traditions. We honour this wealth of diversity, recognising that our faiths – whether rooted in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism or Baha’i – embody fundamental values of compassion, respect, and the pursuit of peace.

Principles

We establish the following principles to guide our work:

1. Holistic Concept of Security

We recognise that security encompasses not only physical safety but also mental well-being and social cohesion. Our approach is comprehensive, addressing the various aspects related to the buildings and communities we seek to protect. This includes acknowledging the emotional impacts of security threats on individuals and communities and fostering an environment where people feel safe and valued. We adopt a pluralistic definition of threats that extends beyond violent acts to include verbal assaults, vandalism, burglary, and arson. By acknowledging the diverse range of threats targeting places of worship, we affirm that their safety encompasses the set of conditions which allow faith communities to thrive in peace and engage in open dialogue about their experiences and concerns.

2. The Transformative Force of Interfaith Collaboration

We believe that working together across faith traditions can lead to innovative solutions for security challenges. Through collaboration, faith communities are able to draw on diverse resources, perspectives, and expertise. This cooperative spirit not only strengthens the collective security of faith communities but also fosters mutual understanding and respect, laying the groundwork for long-lasting relationships that can extend beyond immediate security concerns. We aim to create a culture of collaboration that inspires joint initiatives and programs, enhancing our capacity to respond to threats effectively.

3. Pan-European Approach

Recognising the uniqueness of each religious tradition and the specific contexts in which they operate, our security strategies will be tailored to address the diverse challenges and opportunities faced by religious communities across Europe. We will engage in continuous dialogue to understand the specific needs of various communities, ensuring that our initiatives are relevant and impactful. Additionally, we will facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learnt, creating a cohesive and effective approach to security that respects the rich tapestry of Europe's religious landscape.

4. Promotion and Empowerment

We support the empowerment of local faith communities to take ownership of their own security. We recognise that local communities are the best equipped to identify the unique challenges affecting them and develop effective solutions. By investing in their capacities and fostering an environment of collaboration and support, we aim to enable these communities to actively engage in interfaith dialogue activities and participate in the development as well as the establishment of security measures concerning their places of worship.

5. Synergies with Authorities

The safety of worshippers often depends on collaboration with local authorities. We will enhance our partnerships with law enforcement agencies and other relevant authorities to ensure that comprehensive security measures are in place. By fostering strong relationships with authorities, we intend to build trust and mutual understanding, ensuring that all parties work together effectively to enhance security.

Objectives

The Interfaith Council's objectives include:

1. Promote Interfaith Dialogue

The Interfaith Council seeks to foster open and constructive communication among different religious communities, building trust, understanding, and mutual respect. By promoting dialogue, it aims to create lasting connections that transcend differences and contribute to a culture of peace.

2. Enhance Security Measures

The Council is committed to co-developing and implementing strategies to safeguard places of worship from potential threats and ensure the safety of worshippers. It will focus on creating clear response mechanisms that can be utilised in the event of threats, which will be shared with local faith communities to empower them in their response efforts. By equipping communities with the necessary knowledge and skills, the council aims to create a proactive culture of safety and preparedness.

3. Centralise and Facilitate Knowledge Sharing

To promote effective security practices, we will act as a platform that centralises the exchange of information, experiences, and best practices related to the protection of religious sites. By fostering a culture of shared learning, we can enhance the overall effectiveness of our security measures and ensure that valuable insights are accessible to all member communities.

4. Strengthen Community Networks

Collaboration between faith communities and other organisations, including local authorities, is essential for coordinated responses to threats. The members of the Interfaith Council are committed to build strong networks among faith leaders, security experts, academics, and civil society organisations to enhance the safety of places of worship and their congregants. These networks will facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise, enabling communities to respond to challenges more effectively. We will also explore joint initiatives that leverage the strengths of various stakeholders, creating a comprehensive approach to community safety.

5. Raise Awareness

The members of the Interfaith Council will work to increase awareness of the importance of interfaith cooperation in protecting religious heritage and promoting peace. The awareness campaigns intend to engage a broad audience, utilising various media platforms to highlight the value of diversity and the contributions of different faith traditions to society. By fostering a culture of understanding and respect, we aim to mitigate fear and encourage solidarity among communities.

Structure and Activities

The Interfaith Council will consist of representatives of the major religions present in Europe including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Baha'i. The members will meet online every six months. Each meeting will be chaired by one of the following organisations: Arco Forum, Fedactio, House of One, Intercultural Dialogue Platform, Istituto Tevere, Religions for Peace Italy, Stiftung Dialog und Bildung and University of Leiden. The meetings serve the exchange of information between the members and the coordination of activities contributing to the objective listed in B. The activities executed by the members of the Interfaith Council include:

1. Data Collection and Analysis

The Interfaith Council will be responsible for gathering, analysing, and reporting incidents affecting places of worship. It will produce an annual report highlighting trends, recommendations, and areas for improvement. By systematically collecting data, we aim to identify patterns that can inform our strategies and enhance our understanding of the challenges faced by religious communities.

2. Policy Development

The Interfaith Council will develop evidence-based policies and guidelines to enhance the security measures of member communities. It will create toolkits for best practices in security planning and response, providing practical resources that communities can implement. By collaborating with experts and stakeholders, the committee aims to ensure that our policies are relevant, effective, and adaptable to the changing landscape of security threats.

3. Education and Training

The Interfaith Council will create regular forums, workshops, and seminars that foster open communication among different faith communities. These initiatives will encourage the sharing of experiences and perspectives, helping to break down barriers. Additionally, training programs focused on security awareness, emergency preparedness, and conflict resolution will be designed and implemented to equip community leaders and members with the skills necessary to navigate potential threats.

4. Publications

The Interfaith Council will draw on the expertise of its members and the collected data to publish reports, statements and recommendations to relevant actors. The publications will include different perspectives of the members from their respective religions and/or academic background. They will address a wider public as well as politicians and leaders of religious communities.

Conclusion

In unity, the signatories of this charter reaffirm their commitment to fostering an environment where all individuals can worship freely and safely. In equal partnership, we aspire to build a more secure and harmonious society, standing as a testament to the transformative power of interfaith collaboration. Through our collective efforts, we aim to create a future where diversity is celebrated, and all communities can thrive in peace.

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[1] <https://www.romorth.eu/single-post/virtual-conference-of-the-internal-security-fund>

