

**MEĐURELIGIJSKO VIJEĆE U
BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI**

**МЕЂУРЕЛИГИЈСКО ВИЈЕЋЕ У
БОСНИ И ХЕРЦЕГОВИНИ**

*Interreligious Council in Bosnia-
Herzegovina*

The Inter-religious Council in BiH (IRC-BiH) has been in existence since 1997 through joint commitments by :

- **Reisu-l-ulema dr. Mustafa ef. Cerić, Islamic Community in BiH**
- **Metropolitan of Dabar-Bosna Nikolaj, Serbian Orthodox Church**
- **Vinko Cardinal Puljić, Archbishop of Vrhbosna-Sarajevo, Roman Catholic Church**
- **Mr. Jakob Finci, President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina**

**The religious leaders
met in the fall of 1996 and formed a Working Group
which included high level representatives from each
church and religious community .**

- This process led to the public issuance of
a “Statement of Shared Moral
Commitment” on 9 June, 1997, which
also formally established the Inter-
religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina
(IRC-BiH)**



STATEMENT OF SHARED MORAL COMMITMENT

Concerned at the visibly slow and inefficient implementation of the Dayton Accords as they pertain to civil society, and deeply disturbed by recent unpleasant events in the Zone of Separation, the Reis-ul-Ulema of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the responsible representatives of the two Christian Churches Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic, and the President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, have decided to issue the following common statement:

1. The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina have undergone enormous suffering. But, thanks be to God, the war has ended. Our task now is to establish a durable peace based on truth, justice and common living.
2. We, the Reis-ul-Ulema of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the responsible representatives of the two Christian churches (Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic) and the President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina recognize that our Churches and Religious Communities differ from each other, and that each of them feels called to live true to its own faith. At the same time we recognize that our religious and spiritual traditions hold many values in common, and that these shared values can provide an authentic basis for mutual esteem, cooperation and free common living in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
3. Each of our traditional Churches and Religious Communities recognizes that the dignity of man and human value is a gift of God. Our faiths and religions, each in its own way, call us to recognize the fundamental human rights of each person. Violence against persons or the violation of their basic rights are for us not only against man-made laws but also breaking God's law.
4. We jointly, in mutual recognition of our religious differences, condemn all violence against innocent persons and any form of abuse or violation of fundamental human rights.

Specifically, we condemn:

- Acts of hatred based on ethnicity or religious differences. We express our especial concern at the burning of houses, the desecration of religious buildings, and the destruction of graveyards;
- The obstruction of the free right of return;
- Acts of revenge;
- The abuse of the media with the aim of spreading hatred.

5. Further, we call for respect for the fundamental human rights of all persons, regardless of religious or ethnic affiliation, which must include:

- The freedom of all responsible representatives or religious leaders of Churches or Religious Communities in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina to fulfill their mission in every part of the country;
- Opportunities for the free performance of religious services and all forms of pastoral care by all means of the Islamic Community, all Christian priests (Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic) and all representatives of the Jewish community;
- The right of every child to religious instruction in his or her own faith; and
- Guarantee that no one shall be compelled to attend instruction in the institution of another church or religious community.

6. Finally, we call on all people of good will to take responsibility for their own acts. Let us treat others as we would wish them to treat us.

7. With this Statement we appeal to believers of our Churches and Religious Communities, and all citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and

Mr Alija Izetbegovic, President of Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina
Mr Momcilo Krajinik, member of Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina
Mr Kresimir Zubak, member of Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina

Dr. Mustafa Cerić
Reis-ul-Ulema of the
Islamic Community of
BiH

In the name of and with
the authorization of His
Holiness Serbian
Patriarch Pavle,
Metropolit
dabrobosanski Nikolaj

Vinko Cardinal Puljić,
Archbishop of Sarajevo
and President of the
Bishops' Conference of
BiH

Mr. Jakob Finci,
President of the Jewish
Community of Bosnia-
Herzegovina, Sarajevo

Following the signing of the “Statement of Shared Moral Commitment”, the Council agreed on their first joint project which included drafting a glossary of basic religious terms used by the Muslim, Serbian Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish believers in BiH.

The purpose of the book was to provide accurate information to the media so they could correctly report on religious events and persons following the ousting of religion in the community from 1945 to 1991. The book entitled “Glossary of Religious Terms” was published in 1999.

GLOSAR

RELIGIJSKIH POJMOVA

MEĐURELIGIJSKO VIJEĆE
BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE

The Structure

**The Assembly of IRC BIH
(religious leaders)**

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graph TD; A["The Assembly of IRC BIH  
(religious leaders)"] --> B["Executive Board"]; A --> C["Secretariat"];
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Executive Board

Secretariat

THE ASSEMBLY

- **The Assembly of IRC-B&H consists of high religious leaders of Islamic community, Serbian-orthodox church, Catholic church and Jewish community.**

THE ASSEMBLY

- **Vasilije Kacavenda, Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla Eparchy, President of the Assembly of IRC**
- **Dr. Mustafa Ceric, reisu-l-ulema of Islamic community in B&H, member of the Assembly of IRC**
- **Cardinal Vinko Puljic, Archbishop of Vrhbosna Archdiocese, member of the Assembly of IRC**
- **Jakob Finci, President of Jewish community in B&H, member of the Assembly of IRC**

Presidency over the council is based on a yearly rotating system. The Assembly meets on request, but not less than once a year. The Assembly's decisions are made by consensus.



The Executive Board

The Executive Board consists of the 4 members which meets at least once a month, makes decisions in coordination with the Secretariat on administrative and project activities of the IRC-BiH Office.

The Secretariat

The Secretariat consists of four representatives of the respective religious communities and churches, who work on behalf and in coordination with their communities and the Executive Board of the IRC-BiH.

IRC's work is based on existence and activities of 5 working groups:

- **Legal Experts Group**
- **Media Group**
- **Education Group**
- **Women's Group**
- **Youth Group**

LEGAL EXPERTS GROUP

Background

The IRC's Legal Expert Group – formed in 1999 of representatives from each religious community – worked together to draft a new law regarding freedom of religion and legal status of religious communities and churches in BiH. The text of the law defines issues relating to freedom of religion, the legal status of churches and religious communities, the registration of religious communities and churches, and the relationship between religious communities and the state. In cooperation with OSCE, IRC organized public presentations of the Draft Law in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla and Mostar.

In the fall of 2002, the draft law was submitted to the BiH Presidency's office for further review. In early 2003, the Law on "Freedom of Religion and the Legal Status of Religious Communities and Churches" was presented to the BiH Ministry of Human Rights. Several meetings were held between the Ministry and the IRC-BiH Legal Experts Group in order to finalize a few remaining issues, and in March 2004, the law was approved by the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and passed the Parliamentary procedure and published in the Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The final text of the law conforms to European standards on freedom of religion.

Legal regulations

- **Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities in BiH**
(Published on March 9, 2004; Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina No. 5/04; Sarajevo)
- **Regulations on the establishment and maintenance of a central register for registration of all churches and religious communities issued by the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina**
- **Instructions for the purpose of implementation of the Law issued by the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of BiH**

Some of activities regarding law issue

- 10 round tables: “Implementation of the Law on religious freedom and legal status of churches and religious communities in BiH”
- Round tables were organized in: Tuzla, Banja Luka, Brčko, Mostar, Sarajevo, Zenica, Bihać, Foča, Bijeljina and Livno.
- The round tables were organized by the Inter-religious Council of BiH (Međureligijsko vijeće u BiH), in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 2006 and in 2008 in cooperation with US Embassy.
- The round tables were attended by representatives from various sectors of BiH society, such as: religious communities and churches, political parties, government representatives, NGO (which deal in human rights and issues related to religion) and independent intellectuals.
- The main goal of the round tables was to open up the public debate on the issue of implementation of the Law on religious freedom, with special emphasis on problems and challenges in implementation of the Law
- As a rule, a public statement was issued after each round table





- **MONITORING THE EXTENT TO WHICH FREEDOM TO MANIFEST RELIGION IS UPHELD IN BiH**

At its 41st regular session, the IRC Assembly resolved that it would in future gather information on violations of the right to freedom of religion, such as attacks on religious officials and religious buildings and property, and other conduct undermining the freedom to manifest one's religion.

After analyzing the information gathered in the field, the IRC will issue public statements on the state of human rights in BiH.

- **PUBLICATION OF A BOOKLET**

The booklet consists of the text of the Law on Freedom of Religion, the Book of Rules on the Register of Religious Communities, and the Directive on the Application of the Law. Print run: 3000 copies.

- **THE POSITION OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION AT THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND ARMED FORCES OF BIH**

Joint efforts combined with participation of legal representatives of three traditional religious communities and churches in BiH on one side and representatives of the Ministry of Defence of BiH on the other, resulted in harmonised text of the Agreement and the Rulebook for functioning of religious unit at the Ministry of Defence of BiH, within which the following units are active: Military Muftiluk, Catholic Guardianship and Orthodox Guardianship.

- **PREPARATION OF LEGAL REGULATIONS THAT WILL DEFINE THE APPLICATION OF THE LAW ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN PRISONS AND HOSPITALS**

IRC supports the initiative from the Federal Ministry of Justice to define legal regulations which will provide a unique way to regulate the issue of guidance and religious service in corrective institutions on the territory of FBiH. We are very excited by the fact that the Federal Ministry of Justice is implementing these activities in close cooperation with religious communities and churches in BiH.

- **PENSION AND HEALTHCARE
INSURANCE OF RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS**

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Government of Federation of BiH and the Government of RS invested in resolving the issue of support for religious communities and churches regarding payments of pension and healthcare insurance for imams, priests and pastors. We would like to express our support for the cooperation established between the Commission of Government of FBiH and the Secretariat for religions at the Government of RS who have been working on the proposal to regulate this issue. We need the regulations in FBiH and RS to be harmonised and non-discriminatory whatsoever. Once entity solutions are achieved, we believe it would be good to enact a state-level regulation for this area.



YOUTH WORKING GROUP

Youth Working Group Projects:

- **The Youth Working Group, also established in 2003, organized a series of inter-religious conflict resolution trainings in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Brčko and Bihać. These trainings, entitled, “Hope for a Better Future: Transforming Attitudes and Building Community”, provided a platform for youth from the different religious communities and churches to engage in dialogue and conflict transformation activities.**



Group *Svi zajedno (All Together)*



Svi Zajedno (All Together) is a group of young people, organized through the Inter-religious Council of B&H. The group was founded in November 2007 and consists of 14 young people, students of different university departments, coming from different religious communities. Their work is based on children without parental care.

Their first project entitled “Open Our Harts” was aimed at raising awareness about the problems of children without parental care and strengthening the principle of solidarity amongst the members of the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The first of the key objectives of the project is to demonstrate to the wider public that the young people in BiH, regardless of the languages they speak, which religion or ethnicity they belong to, regardless of their social status or gender can, together, identify and achieve such goals that will alert the public in BiH.

The second specific objective of the project is to make the citizens and public in general in BiH perceptive to the unresolved social problems by drawing their attention to the current situation of the children without parental care.

The third objective of this project is to offer possible models or solutions to some key issues the institutions that take care of the children without parental care have been faced with.

The fourth, and most important objective is to strengthen the principle of solidarity amongst the members of the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina by a specific date or messages dedicated to protection of the rights of the children without parental care.

On April 2nd 2009 a Conference entitled "Day of Solidarity with Children without Parental Care" was organized by the Youth organization of IRC B&H, in the Multimedia Hall of Sarajevo's Novi Grad Municipality. On this occasion, group "All Together", presented the Report on Status of the Children in B&H; different forms of caring for children without parental care were presented (orphanages, children villages, socio-pedagogical host communities, fostering and adoption). In addition donors who provided help to the children without parental care were introduced to the audience.



The Day of Solidarity with
Children without Parental Care

The aim of the conference is to link the various orphanages, children villages, and socio-pedagogical host communities in order to achieve a better form of cooperation among each other and the state authorities, as well as with companies from our country and region, which through their help may aid the life of those children. Five of the orphanages and children villages have presented themselves in the program with music, recitation, acting and dance acts.





Prior to the Solidarity Day the youth had designed a booklet about the orphanages that included all the important details, and have contacted 60 companies of which a certain number replied and made a donation in total amount of 14,000 KM (food, hygienic products, clothing and shoes) to the orphanages, children villages and socio-pedagogical communities.



Meetings of young theologians



Since 2006 IRC-BiH is organizing theology students exchange visits, where Muslims visited Orthodox and Catholic students and vice versa. There have been already more than 15 meetings including few conferences about different subjects such as: 'Dialogue between believers and atheists and agnostics', 'Bioethics', etc.









- **The Youth Working Group, also took part in EUPM-s anti drug campaign that started in summer 2006.**
- **A visit by the youth from the Inter-Religious Council to the therapy centre of Cenacolo in Medjugorje.**
- **Round table entitled “Raising awareness on the harmfulness of drugs especially within youth” was held in IRC-BIH offices.**





Media Working Group

The Media Working Group has produced a number of programs aimed to spread the IRC-BiH's message of tolerance and peace. In January-May 2000, a radio program series entitled *Susret* ("meeting of persons") aired on several radio stations in the Federation.

In March 2003, the Media Working Group began producing and airing nine Thursday evening one-hour radio programs on BiH Radio. BiH Radio has the largest radio span in the region, covering the entire territory of BiH.



Education Working Group

The group has been actively involved in developing a comprehensive religious education program for BiH's public school system. In 2003, the working group drafted and submitted a common view of IRC principles on the issue of religious education in BiH. New joint opinions and principles regarding religious teaching and lecturing on religions in schools and other educational institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina were released on November 4th 2008, following introduction of new subject entitled 'Culture of Religions' in public schools.

Education Working Group worked together with the Association of Blind Persons' of BiH, to complete professional audio recordings of religious music and significant religious texts by the Islamic, Orthodox and Catholic communities for distribution to blind persons. Approximately 1,000 tapes were distributed to religious communities with blind populations around the country.





Women Working Group

The Women's Working Group, established in 2003, decided to focus on social problems in BiH, such as poverty, education of the poor, women's rights and fostering cultural and religious heritage. They have successfully implemented several project of assistance to the poor and displaced families with basic food and other necessities.





The Women have also facilitated several large, regional, inter-religious seminars which provides the rare opportunity for women of different faiths from around the region to share their views and perspectives on important issues affecting their communities.



The most recent project by the Women's Group has been the drafting of a joint publication on religious customs of Muslims, Orthodox Serbs, Catholics and Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The book was published in March 2005 and is significant because it is the only book of its kind to exist in the country.



Same book on religious customs of Muslims, Orthodox Serbs, Catholics and Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to be published in 2009. in Braille's script, as well as audio recordings for blind persons.

Interreligious Children Summer Camp

Interreligious Children Summer Camp entitled “Meet my Custom” driven by the idea of the women’s book on customs, was organized in summer 2007. 40 children(10 from each religious community) attended 7 days camp on Vlasic mountain. Children from each community presented customs related to high religious holidays to other children.











Annotation of The International Day for Tolerance

On occasion of the International tolerance day, declared by the United Nations, on November 16th, the Interreligious council in Bosnia and Herzegovina implements project entitled “Going to the field on occasion of the International tolerance day”. Last year every respected church and religious community delegated one location as positive example of religious tolerance. We share opinion that by these examples we send positive message to the general public about religious leaders devotion to the tolerance and coexistence.



Specific goals of IRC-BiH:

- **Raising awareness of the importance of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation through developing relationships between churches and religious communities throughout BiH**
- **Promoting the relationship between the State and the churches and religious communities through mutual commitments**
- **Linking the IRC-BiH with regional and international inter-religious initiatives**

**For further information,
please access our web site:**

www.mrv.ba

and Youth Group's web site:

www.svizajedno.org