

Youth For Peace

FAITHS AND TRADITIONS REPRESENTED IN CC: Agnostic, Christian Catholic, Christian Orthodox, Islam Muslim, Jewish

LOCATION OF CC: Bosnia and Herzegovina

KEY AREAS OF FOCUS: Youth Leadership, Interfaith Dialogue, Action, Peacebuilding

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QUESTIONS:

1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?

Our CC is working in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina. Our country is divided in several different ways including division based on religious and ethnic background. B&H consist of many mini-regions where one of three ethnic /religious groups is dominant while others are a minority, bigger or smaller. There are plenty of problems which minority groups are faced with.

But also our country is very rich with differences. Different religions, traditions and cultures, mostly Christian-Catholic, Christian-Orthodox, Islam and Jewish, are living all together in one area.

Even though 20 years have passed after the war, our country is still a postwar/post conflict country. Because of this interfaith dialogue is necessary for building positive relations.

2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?

Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not possible without interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Different cultures are entangled all over the country with people of different faiths living next to each other. It is necessary to create an atmosphere for coexistence and living with each other not only next to each other.

Young people in our country deserve to learn about each other in a positive way. And bridges can be built through interfaith/intercultural dialogues, meetings, seminars, all kind of different activities. Chances should be given to all those young people willing to work on this field, because they'll put a seed of peaceful events in the future, with positive dialogues and experiences.

3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?

Youth for Peace CC is in the process of starting a “Youth Ambassadors Program” through which 10 young activists will be gathered, educated and empowered to implement their own common activities. Our goal is to gather young people from all around B&H and to teach them, motivate and empower them to create their own project that will be focused on resolving intercultural/interfaith conflict in their community. Besides this program Youth for Peace is working on projects for children without parental care: sponsoring their education as well as students educating them on the topic of inter-religious dialogue and coexistence. Also we celebrate and organize activities for International Peace Day and World Interfaith Harmony Week.

4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?

In B&H, it is important to bridge all present major religious groups (Islam, Catholicism, Orthodox and Judaism) along with bridges between ethnic groups (Bosniacs, Serbs, and Croats).

5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.

The main entering point for Youth for Peace is education and encouraging others to participate in joint activities. In our work with children and youth we often gather participants of different communities and cultural backgrounds and invite them to sit together, to communicate and to learn together. Moreover, usually they are challenged to solve various problems together which later can lead toward their common actions on the field.

We are giving them the chance to come to our training, seminars, cultural meetings/evenings, to learn from each other’s experiences and stories. Throughout their own experiences, positive experiences of course, they can meet and see that enrichment of their own lives with experiences with other people coming from different background is something special and worth cherishing.

6. Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)?

We aim to reach as many youth as we are able, to share our ideas of dialogue and coexistence, and to link with youth who want to think and do work similar to that of Youth for Peace. Raising awareness about drawbacks of separate living among youth is another very important goal for us.

Also by educating generations of young people, we hope to create a better place for people to be themselves, to feel comfortable with their history, origins, traditions, and religions.

7. How do you see your CC’s work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?

Experience from many former seminars gave an obvious example that youth are happy because they had the opportunity to meet new peers and to share with them many common problems, to learn from each other and to exchange experiences. Their willingness to participate in our seminars again also shows the impact of our work.

By having an opportunity to meet other young people, our youth realized that there are many positive ways to work and live together with youth from different backgrounds.

8. How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict?

(NOTE: This question is relevant only in areas with violence/open conflict.)

9. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?

We've seen friendships form after seminars among youth regardless of their faith; joint activities which they decide they want to do; and less hate speech and better non-violent communication in social networks.

10. Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.

You are able to work well on inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue only if you really live for it. Moreover, you will be able to help others better with these problems only if you had similar ones you managed to overcome.

During our seminars, there were a few occasions when young people coming from different parts of the city or country came together and discovered that their fathers and family members were fighting against each other during the war. At first those youth were in shock, but after they met and spent some time together, they realized that they are not responsible for those events because they were babies and that they are now responsible to work together on peace building and preventing new conflicts, building a better future for all of us.

11. How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?

Our CC shares the same mission and vision as URI and all our activities are on the same line and promoting URI ideas.

12. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?

In our CC we have young adults on behalf Islamic Community, Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Jewish Community as well as agnostics. Cooperation is very good because we help each other to understand our lives in a diverse society. We also learn about our cultures much better among ourselves then from some experts; that's because in a comfortable atmosphere everything can be asked and challenged and everything will be answered. The biggest challenge is to put yourself in another's shoes while you are trying to understand him or her.

13. How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?

The upcoming Youth Ambassador program with URI will directly help to reach our goals. URI experts can provide additional education for our members.

14. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?

Providing education (e.g. project management, nonviolent communication), creating international platforms for cooperation and international conferences as well as in process of linking a few CC to create international common project and apply for funds.