



## Using the power of religions to foster peace

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### **The Federal Foreign Office wants to work more closely with faith communities. A conference in Berlin (May 22/23, 2017) marked the start of this initiative.**

Foreign Minister Gabriel invited religious leaders from all over the world to the Federal Foreign Office on Monday (22 May). Over 100 representatives of many different faith communities from 53 countries travelled to Berlin for the dialogue-based event. At the start of the conference, Gabriel called on the religions to live up to their responsibility for a peaceful world. "I have faith in the great peacemaking potential of all religions," he said.

The Conference on the Responsibility of Religions for Peace marks the start of a new initiative. Interfaith dialogue is to become an integral part of a new foreign policy of societies. The initiative is based on the idea that almost all religions underline the fundamental importance of peace. Nevertheless, questions of faith are repeatedly at the heart of conflicts – although the actual causes mostly lie in political or economic issues.

#### Fostering peace and stability in concrete terms

Gabriel said that the Responsibility of Religions for Peace initiative called on religions to "rise to a challenge", as the aim of the dialogue was not to discuss theology or freedom of religion, but rather to explore how the various faith communities can foster peace and stability in their regions in concrete terms. The main idea is that the religions speak with – rather than about – each other. To this end, the religious leaders are meeting in working groups at the conference to explore how their communities can foster conflict prevention, mediation and reconciliation endeavours.

A further aim of the Federal Foreign Office is to expand its foreign policy tools. "Religion and faith are not only questions of personal identity – they also define the realities within a society," Gabriel said. It is scarcely possible to understand – let alone resolve – the large number of regional conflicts in today's world without the viewpoint of the churches and faith communities, he continued. Looking beyond the conference, the Federal Foreign Office therefore aims to build up a network for interfaith dialogue that could serve as an early warning system and the starting point for talks on the ground.

#### Strategic realignment

The Federal Foreign Office already supports interfaith peace projects, such as the Catholic lay movement Community of Sant'Egidio's projects in Mozambique and Dar al-Fatwa's dialogue among Sunnis in Lebanon. Opening Germany's foreign policy to greater input from civil society is also part of the strategic realignment of the Federal Foreign Office's cultural relations and education policy. It involves moving away from foreign policy between countries and towards a foreign policy of societies. In a world full of conflicts of a pseudo-religious nature, that is more important than ever.

### **Joint statement of the participant on the attack in Manchester, 22 May 2017:**

“We are deeply saddened by the attack in Manchester last night, as we are by the many violent attacks that take place throughout the world. Our hearts and prayers go out to all affected. We aim to continue together to work to heal the wounds of history, to learn to live with difference and to build a culture of peace. Nothing will deter our joint aim to work for peace and reconciliation.”

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