

**OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding - Follow-up to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance
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Plenary Session 1**

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The Swiss Council of Religions

The inter-religious dialogue has started in Switzerland 1947 at the conference in Seelisberg, a village in the Swiss Alps, where for the first time Catholics, Protestants and Jews met for a full week. Since then it has been very important in our country, but up to now it existed mainly in form of bilateral dialogue and working groups.

Last year, the responsible religious leaders in Switzerland have created the Swiss Council of Religions. Actually it is composed of the representatives of the abrahamic religions only: the Federation of the Swiss Protestant Churches, the Swiss Bishop Conference, the Old catholic Church, the Muslim Associations and the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, but it will be opened to the other religions too.

The aims of the Council are:

- To learn to know one another better
- To favour mutual comprehension
- To create a climate of confidence and tolerance between the religions
- To keep and promote religious peace in the country
- To establish a dialogue on the actual religious politics
- To express a common point of view on actual problems, like the admission of refugees seeking admission in our country
- To become the privileged of the authorities for all these questions

The Swiss government has looked favourably to the establishment of this institution. Among other problems the Council has already dealt with, there are all the situations created by conversions from one religion to an other one, the freedom to practice one's religion, the dominance of the laws of the country over the religious laws, the construction of religious buildings with external signs like minarets, the wearing of a veil, a cross or a kippa in schools.

All these problems have been discussed in an atmosphere of reciprocal respect and tolerance. Such an institution goes beyond the respect of any religion towards the other ones. It leads to a better understanding of the other one, it allows to find out what all these religions have in common and what

values they share, rather than to put forward what differentiates them, it allows to insist on the convergences and not on the differences.

Too long the religions have been a cause of wars. Today, for whomever believes in God, they will allow to get closer, to look at the other one with a good willing eye. If somebody just immigrated, it will help him to integrate and to feel well in our country. For our authorities, it is important to count on an institution which allows every citizen , whatever his convictions are, to feel well and to live according to his religious identity if he wishes so, but of course inside the limits of the respect of the other one.