



The Oslo Global Meeting of Experts September 2nd – 5th 2004

“Teaching for tolerance, respect and recognition in relation with religion or belief”

Hosted by the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief in cooperation with UNESCO within the framework of the UNESCO Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Dialogue Programme and the Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

This Global Meeting of Experts was organised as a part of the Oslo Coalition project *Teaching for Tolerance and Freedom of Religion or Belief* (TTFRB). The main aim of the project is to

- encourage school education that increase understanding and respect between people of different religions or world views and that foster knowledge about and respect for freedom of religion or belief as a human right,
- and by this contribute to combat discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief and prevent violations of the human right to freedom of religion or belief

The project was initiated after the 2001 Madrid Consultative conference on Tolerance, Non-Discrimination and Freedom of Religion or Belief in Relation with School Education, and has as a main aim to help turn into practice the aims and recommendations of the Madrid Conference and conferences organized by UNESCO in this field. The Oslo Global Meeting of Experts is also a follow-up to the “UNESCO Survey on Education and Teaching of Intercultural and Inter-religious Dialogue”, within the framework of the UNESCO Inter-religious Dialogue programme. The meeting hence had its focus on implementation, with particular reference to the need for development of new pedagogical material in various regions.

The preparations for the Global Meeting of Experts, was made by participants in the TTFRB project network at the Oslo Strategy Development Seminar (held in December 2002) and at the Rabat project meeting (May 2003). The meeting gathered experts in the

field of *intercultural and inter-religious education, human rights education* and other *civic/citizenship education* for developing tolerance, respect and recognition in relation with religion or belief. Among the experts of various disciplines (such as education, human rights law, history of religion and other social sciences), coming from various world regions, including Central and South East Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and America. The participants included academic experts, state representatives, representatives of organisations working both at a regional and international level (for instance UNESCO; UN OHCHR; OSCE/ ODIHR) as well as representatives of NGOs working at the international level with tolerance and human rights education.

The participants at the Oslo Global Meeting of Experts agreed that education shall:

- *PROMOTE*
 - *respect for Human Rights (HR), in particular Freedom of Religion or Belief (FRB)*
 - *tolerance in relation with religion or belief*
 - *respect for plurality of religions, opinions and belief*
 - *cross-cultural and inter-faith understanding and respect*
- *COMBAT*
 - *discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief*
 - *stereotypes and prejudices based on religion or belief*
- *EMPHASIZE*
 - *that respect for HR and FRB are preconditions for protecting equal human dignity and for peaceful co-existence in pluralistic societies*
- *SECURE*
 - *the right not to receive religious instruction/education inconsistent with ones own conviction*

Taking these aims into consideration, states, international institutions, educators, NGOs and other experts should work to:

- *study of "best practices" of education in these fields*
- *develop relevant teaching material, curricula and methods*
- *encourage research and disseminate of knowledge and experience*
- *foster motivation, attitudes and skills of teachers*

The discussions at the Global Meeting of Experts focused both on obstacles and promising approaches to teaching for tolerance, respect and recognition of 'the other' in relation with religion or belief through school education, and examined the needs for development of new models, methods and materials in these fields.

In one of the final sessions of the meeting, the participants gathered in three groups, divided by regions*:

- 1: Africa and Asia
- 2: Euro-Mediterranean
- 3: Central/Eastern/Northern Europe and the Americas

Among the main conclusions and recommendations of the participants at the global meeting of experts were the following:

- 1) There is a need and wish for more contact and exchange between experts of the various fields and levels, both within and between different *regions**.
- 2) The participants of this meeting, and others already involved with the TTFRB project network, should hence find ways of developing the network at a global level, but also find ways of communication and exchange at the regional level, building upon already existing network and structures of relevance
- 3) To foster such exchange, there is a need for further development of meeting points and coordination via Internet.

- For instance with the web site of the TTFRB project of the Oslo Coalition as a global focal point with overview over existing models, methods and material and links to other networks and organisations involved in the field, in particular to relevant UNESCO and other UN web sites (in particular UNESCO's Inter-religious and Inter-cultural dialogue programme and the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights/OHCHR HRE Programme), and to other networks and organisations involved in the field.

- In addition, the internet site should have regional 'rooms' for discussion, coordination and exchange of ideas, open only for those involved with the work in that region, as well as open access regional web pages with overview over material and activities at the regional level.

- Also, newsletters from the regional networks as well as from the UNESCO Inter-religious program & the OHCHR program on HRE should be made available at the Oslo Coalition TTF project site

- 4) Also, there is a need for finding ways to reach out to experts and educators in regions where most people do not yet have easy access to internet (like in Africa and Central Asia, and parts of South East Asia).

- This could be done e.g. by finding a focal point of each of the regions, that could select basic information from the regional and global web site of the project, and send out a brief newsletter to member of the project network in their region that have expressed a need for this.

- 5) In cooperation with UNESCO and the members of the experts network, the Oslo Coalition should encourage the development of new manuals for teachers training and school education at the regional and national level according to the needs and conditions of each context, providing overview of ideas, methods and material for tolerance and human rights education in relation with religion or belief.
 - In the development and dissemination of such material, the expertise of the UNESCO's Chairs on Intercultural and Interreligious dialogue as well as the UNESCO regional offices and National Commissions will be of particular importance.
 - Also, coordination and cooperation with the HRE program of the UN OHCHR is of importance to ensure that the human rights dimension is included in the teaching material.
- 6) Material produced by members of the network or other experts in this field, should – as far as possible - be presented and made available at the coordinating global and regional web sites.
- 7) UNESCO and the Oslo Coalition should encourage regional network meetings and work shops that could foster exchange of ideas and material and other kinds of cooperation (text book and curricula analysis etc) at the regional level.

This report has been approved by all the participants of the Oslo Global Meeting of Experts.