Panelist Biographies

Panel Discussion One – Interreligious Dialogue for Social Cohesion

Alhadji Muhammad Sa’ad Abubakar, the Sultan of Sokoto (Nigeria) attended Sultan Ward Primary School, Sokoto and Barewa College, Zaria before proceeding to Nigerian Defence Academy, for the 18th Regular Combatant Course and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in 1977 into the Nigerian Army Armoured Corps. He retired as Brigadier General in 2006, upon appointment as Sultan of Sokoto. He attended various professional courses and seminar in Nigeria and abroad, including at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, where he worked on a research paper on ‘Religious Extremism As a National Security Problem: Strategies for Sustainable Solutions’. During his military career, he held various appointments in Command and Staff positions, the key ones being at African Unity Peacekeeping Operations in Chad; Presidential Security Unit; Economic Community of West African States Secretariat and Operations in Sierra Leone as Commander; and Nigeria’s Defence Adviser to Pakistan with concurrent accreditation to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States. He is the Chancellor of University of Ibadan, the President-General of Jama’atu Nasril Islam, The President-General Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Leader of Nigerian Muslims, Co-Chairman of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council; Chairman, National Council of Traditional Rulers of Nigeria, etc. His is a recipient of honorary degrees from various universities. During his military service, Sa’ad Abubakar was decorated with Forces Service Star, Meritorious Service Star, Distinguished Service Star, Silver Jubilee Medal, General Service Medal, OAU Medal and ECOWAS Monitoring Group Medal. He was conferred with the National Honour of Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic by President, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt has been the Chief Rabbi of Moscow, Russia since 1993. He is the spiritual leader of the central synagogue of Moscow, the head of the rabbinical court of the Commonwealth of Independent States, president of the Conference of European Rabbis (the rabbinical umbrella group of Europe) and is an officer of the Russian Jewish Congress. Goldschmidt played a major role in founding and developing communal structures from colleges, day schools and kindergartens, soup kitchens and rabbinical schools, to political umbrella structures, such as the Russian Jewish Congress and the Congress of the Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations in Russia. Goldschmidt represents the Russian Jewish
community politically. He published op-eds in the international press pertaining to the issues of the day. He has also addressed among many fora the US Senate, the EU Parliament, The Council of Europe, Oxford University, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Berlin Conference on anti-Semitism, and Harvard University, discussing the state of the Jewish Community, and the threats of anti-Semitism. Goldschmidt takes an active part in interfaith dialogue gatherings with Christians and Muslims in New York, Paris, Astana, Seville, Vienna and Moscow.

Katherine Marshall has worked for over four decades on international development, focusing on the world’s poorest countries. A senior fellow at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and Professor of the Practice of Development, Religion, and Conflict in the School of Foreign Service, she is the executive director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD). WFDD’s mission (and center of Marshall’s current work) is to bridge gulfs separating the worlds of development and religion. During a long career at the World Bank, her leadership assignments focused on Africa, Latin America, and East Asia. From 2000 – 2006, she was counselor to the Bank’s president on ethics, values, and faith in development. She holds or has held various board positions including the World Bank Community Connections Fund, AVINA Americas, the Opus Prize Foundation, the International Shinto Foundation, and the International Anti-Corruption Conference Advisory Board; she served as a Trustee of Princeton University and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Recent books include The World Bank: From Reconstruction to Development to Equity (Routledge 2008), Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers, (Routledge 2013) and (coedited with Susan Hayward) Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding: Illuminating the Unseen (US Institute of Peace). Her daughter, Laura, is a physician and her son, Patrick, is a musician and web designer.

Farah Choucair, Technical Specialist and Project Manager, Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region Project, Regional Programme at Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP. Farah Choucair is an economist by training with more than 10 years of progressive experience conducting solid economic and statistical research in political economy, economic and social reforms, macro-fiscal policy, poverty, employment and inclusive development. She has led the development of the first social cohesion index developed for the Arab region. She is one of the co-founders of the Arab Development Portal and has been leading it since May 2013. Among other things, her focus at UNDP includes developing projects and initiatives on social cohesion, violent extremism, open data and SDGs.
Sayataw Ashin Seindida is the abbot of the Asia Light Monastery and also founder of the Asia Light Foundation, consisting of orphanages for boys and girls, an FOC clinic, a monastic education school, and a preschool. He started his foundation before he found a different life-style for himself and for his community. He often give his living example of being a transformative himself “I used to be a prejudiced Buddhist. I hate seeing a Mosque or a church. I thought other religions were heathen”. Sayadaw is now one of the leading monks who negotiate between the Muslim and Buddhists and his foundation is closely working with Muslims. He serve as the core-member of Peaceful Myanmar Initiatives. Adhering to multi-culturalism, he recalled “I thought Bamar (Burmese) is superior to other ethnic groups like Kachin, Chin, Pa-oh, etc. I thought Bamar is not even an ethnic group. However, I now realized that Bamar just happens to be in the majority but it does not mean it is superior to other ethnic groups. I can now understand well about the feelings of the other various ethnic groups living in Myanmar.” Although Myanmar society sees monkhood as being in a higher plane of existence than an ordinary human being is, Sayataw is trailblazing a concept of a monk trying to be a real human. His liberation is working for the people. With this new perspective, he is helping society find peace the way he found it- making changes in his life to bring change to others. Now he is a monk for people of every religion, ethnic group, and level.
Panel Moderator

**Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer** is a Senior Advisor to KAICIID and a professor at the School of International Service at American University. At the International Peace and Conflict Resolution program he served as Director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute (1999-2013). He has conducted interreligious conflict resolution training and interfaith dialogue workshops in conflict areas around the world, including Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Chad, Niger, Iraq (Kurdistan), Philippines (Mindanao), and Sri Lanka. He also founded Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, an organization that focuses on capacity building, civic education, and intrafaith and interfaith dialogue. In addition to his numerous articles and books, Dr. Abu-Nimer is the co-founder and co-editor of the Journal of Peacebuilding and Development.

Panel Discussion Two – Global Partnerships for Dialogue and Promotion of Social Cohesion

**Merete Bilde** is a Policy Advisor on Religion and Foreign Policy to High Representative/Vice President Mogherini, European External Action Service (EEAS). She works on issues at the cross section of religion and foreign policy, which includes political aspects of Islam and cross cultural/religious relations. She has been involved in a number of networks of diplomats and faith-based political actors meeting regularly in an effort to bridge the gap in understanding between religious and secular worldviews. She is the driving force behind setting up an in-house Task Force as well as EEAS training course on Religion and Foreign Policy with the aim to develop collective awareness and skill-set to appreciate the role of religion (whether helpful or problematic) and its implication for diplomatic work. She has been engaged in various initiatives relating to issues such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief as well as the defamation debate. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, her work has focused heavily on the new political actors and the new regional dynamics at play, including between the new Middle East and the US and Europe. Prior to her current appointment, Merete Bilde worked in the Policy Unit of EU High Representative, Javier Solana (2005-09) and before that she served as a Danish diplomat.

**Khaled Abdel Shafi** has been appointed as the Director of the UNDP newly established Regional Hub for the Arab States in Amman. Prior to that, he served in different senior positions at UNDP Headquarters in New York in the Regional Bureau for Arab States (Chief Country Operations Division 2014-2015, Chief of Staff 2012-2013, Senior Program Advisor and Special Advisor 2009-2011). He headed the UNDP Gaza Office for many years (1995-2008), leading the UN development work in close partnership with the newly established Palestinian Authority and Civil Society. He also played a leading role in the UN’s efforts for the reconstruction and recovery of the Gaza Strip. Khaled also served as a member of the Gaza City Council 1995-2002 on
a voluntary basis, heading the Gaza Municipal Committee for the City Development. Khaled is an economist by training and served as a member of Governing Boards of some Civil Society Organizations in Palestine.

Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi is the Director of the Secretariat of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers at the Finn Church Offices in Washington DC. A global network initiated by United Nations Mediation Support Unit, UN Alliance of Civilizations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Religions for Peace, KAICIID Dialogue Center and Finn Church Aid serving as the International Secretariat for the Network. Most recently, Dr. Elsanousi served as the director of Community Outreach and Interfaith Relations for the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) for twelve years. In that role, he was responsible for ISNA’s long-term strategic planning related to interfaith and United States federal government relations. Within this context, he developed and executed creative interfaith initiatives and projects that invited American Muslim leaders to take a more creative role in their communities. Dr. Elsanousi was the national liaison and representative for ISNA at numerous national and international inter-religious forums and conferences, and has contributed articles in various books and journals.

Dr. Elsanousi is the Founding co-chair of Shoulder to Shoulder, and serves on the board of directors and advisors for numerous interfaith organizations, including the Advisory Board of Louis Finkelstein Institute and Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, member of the Advisor Committee for the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect and recently elected a trustee for the Board of the Parliament of the World’s Religions.

Dr. Elsanousi is an advisor to a number of government agencies and national and international interfaith institutions on matter related to religion and peacebuilding. He served on the Core Group Taskforce for the Department of State's working group on Religion and Foreign Policy under Secretary Clinton and Kerry, charged with making recommendations to the Secretary of State and the Federal Advisory Commission on how the US government can better engage with civil society and religious actors in foreign policy.

Dr. Elsanousi holds a Bachelor’s degree in Shariah and Law from the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan; a Master of Laws from Indiana University; a graduate diploma in philanthropic studies from the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy; and a Ph.D. in Law and Society from the Indiana University School of Law.

Ahmad Alhendawi is the 10th Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM), becoming the youngest to helm one of the world’s leading educational youth movements. Prior to his appointment in WOSM, Mr. Alhendawi served as the first-ever United Nations Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth and the youngest senior official in the history of the UN.
Since the beginning of his career history, Mr. Alhendawi has been a practitioner and strong advocate of youth development and empowerment. Once a Scout himself, he believes that Scouting holds a major solution for youth development in the 21st century.

Before his career at the UN, he served as Youth Policy Advisor for the League of Arab States, a Team Leader for the National Youth Policy Project in Iraq, Youth Programme Associate at the Iraq office of the UN Population Fund, Emergency Programme Officer at Save the Children and as a Regional Consultant supporting the Danish Youth Council’s projects in the Middle East and North Africa.

Mr. Alhendawi was named for two consecutive years as one of the 100 most influential Arabs under 40 and in the Diplomatic Courier’s list of the 99 most influential policy professionals under 33. In 2008, he was selected by the International Youth Foundation as a recipient of the 2008 YouthActionNet Fellowship.

Ahmad Alhendawi holds a Master’s degree in Advanced European and International Relations from the Institut Européen (Nice, France) and a Bachelor’s degree in computer information systems from the Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan.

A Jordanian by birth, he has studied and worked in Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, France, Germany and the United States.

Ulrich Nitschke is heading the Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development at GIZ as well as the International Secretariat on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). Until end of 2014 he has been the Head of the Local Governance and Civil Society Development Programme and Future for Palestine and the Chairperson of the Sector Network Governance for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Before working in Palestine, Ulrich served as Director of the Programme for Decentralization and Local Development in Benin. Between 2001 and 2008, he held several managerial positions with Capacity Building International (InWEnt GmbH) in Germany, in local governance, capacity development and political development education, as well as leadership development.

Prior to this, Ulrich worked 10 years in several development organizations in Germany and abroad. Actively engaged in the South African cause, he played a leading role in the German Anti-Apartheid Movement in the years of transition between 1990 and 1994.

Mr. Nitschke holds a degree in Theology and Philosophy from Fribourg University (Switzerland) and studied Political Science, Economics, Sociology and Development in Aachen and Cologne (Germany). He is also an expert in children’s and youth rights, and wrote several articles on the importance of youth participation in development programmes. He has authored several academic publications on International Cooperation, Urbanization and Development, as well as on Municipalities’ and Cities’ Challenges in a globalized world.

Panel Moderator:
**Dr. Azza Karam** serves as the senior advisor on culture at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), where she coordinates UNFPA-wide outreach with faith-based partners and chairs the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development. Before she joined UNFPA, she was the senior policy research advisor at the United Nations Development Program in the Regional Bureau for Arab States.
Panel Discussion Three – Interreligious Education & Common Citizenship Values

Rev. Dr. Supo Ayokunle served as pastor of Estate Baptist Church, Ogbomoso Road, Oyo and senior pastor of Jubilee-Life Baptist Church for sixteen years before he was elected the 6th Nigerian General Secretary (now President/CEO) of the Nigerian Baptist Convention and President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, the largest ecumenical body in Africa. Rev. Dr. Ayokunle earned a Master of Education (M.Ed) in Guidance and Counselling from the University of Ibadan, and a Master of Divinity in Theology (M.Div Th) from the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso in 1995 before proceeding to the United Kingdom to obtain a Master of Arts (MA) in Theology and Religious Studies from Liverpool Hope University and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Theology with emphasis on liturgical studies. He is an executive member of the Baptist World Alliance whose head office is in Falls Church, Virginia. Equally, he is a Central Working Committee member of the World Council of Churches and member of executive of the World body.

Rabbi Jeff Berger leads the Rambam Sephardi Synagogue and is an adjunct faculty at the Judith Lady Montefiore College. At the College, Rabbi Jeff has taught hermeneutics and rabbinic practice. He attended the 2013 Cambridge Co-Exist Leadership Programme and was a 2015 Ariane de Rothschild Fellow. Previous fellowships include; US Department of Education, Japan Iron & Steel, and Nippon Glass. Ordained in 2009, the rabbi has a degree in Business Administration and a Master’s in Asian Studies. He previously attended Keio University in Tokyo and did post-graduate research at Stamford’s Inter-University Center in Yokohama. He also spent 2 years in a Jerusalem Yeshiva.

Father Dr. Fadi Daou is the chairman and CEO of the Adyan Foundation as well as the Priest in the Maronite Church. Father Daou is a university professor and an expert and consultant in theology of religions, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and Geopolitics of Religions and Middle Easter issues. He holds a PhD in theology and a Master in political philosophy. He is the director of Rashad Center for Cultural Governance, and the director of the Lebanese public policy reform: “National Strategy for Education on Citizenship and Coexistence”, that is implemented in partnership between Adyan Foundation and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Center for Educational Research and Development in Lebanon. Dr. Daou is also author and editor of a number of books and articles in the field of interreligious dialogue, Political theology, and Citizenship and cultural and religious diversity.
Mitri Raheb is the pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, and the founder and president of the Diyar Consortium, a group of Lutheran-based, ecumenically-oriented institutions serving the Bethlehem area. Dr. Raheb pursued a higher education in Germany, first at Hermannsburg Mission Seminary (1980–1984) and then at Philipps University in Marburg, Germany (1984–1988), where he completed his graduate studies and a doctorate in theology. He returned to Bethlehem in 1988 to serve as the pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church (Christmas Lutheran Church), as well as working as the managing editor of the *Al-Liqa’ Journal* for religious and heritage studies in the Holy Land (1992–1996).

Ms. Mabrouka Rayachi is the Inspector for the Islamic religion teachers in Lower Austrian schools. Mabrouka Rayachi completed a Master of English and German from the Bourguiba school in Tunis in 1991 and earned a pedagogy diploma from the Islamic Religious Pedagogical Academy in Vienna in 2004. She was a religious teacher in Viennese schools from 1993 to 2012. During this time she organized many interreligious programmes with other religion teachers (mainly Catholic and Protestant). In April 2012 she became an Inspector for the Islamic religion teachers in Lower Austrian schools and initiated an interreligious seminar with her Catholic and Protestant colleagues on subjects such as the celebration of religious traditions in Islam and Christianity. As an active member within her Islamic community, she was chosen as the official Austrian representative to the first International Women’s Congress for a Culture of Peace in Algeria in 2014.

H.E. Dr. Al-Sediry works as the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawa and Guidance. He has previously worked at the Ministry as the General Manager of International Islamic Organizations, and later as Assistant Deputy of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Since August, 2001 he has held positions of Deputy of the Islamic Affairs and Head of the Preparatory Committee of the High Council of Islamic Affairs, and as Deputy Manager of Mosque, Dawa and Guidance Affairs, Head of Preparatory Council of Dawa and Guidance, Head of the Hajj and Umrah Islamic Awareness Organization. He holds a Ph.D. with first class honors from the Faculty of Dawa and Media and a Master’s degree with honors including a recommendation for publishing his dissertation on Constitutional Systems in Islam both from the Imam Mohammed bin Saud University. He has published over six books and has many research papers and articles in the fields of Management, Administration, Intellectual thought, countering terrorism and Islamic extremist groups.
Panel Moderator

Rev. Dr Margaretha Hendriks-Ririmasse of the Protestant Church in the Moluccas was dean of the Theological Faculty of the Indonesian Christian University in Moluccas, and until 2013, the Vice moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (CC WCC). Hendriks-Ririmasse supported in an interfaith peace and reconciliation initiative in the conflict-ridden Moluccas region of Indonesia. She serves as one of four chairpersons of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia and was the vice-chairperson of the Association of Theological Schools in Indonesia. Moreover, she is a member of the Advisory Forum at KAICIID.

Panel Discussion Four – Social Media as a Space for Dialogue

Kowther Mousa Ayesh Al-Arbash is a member of the Shura Council of Saudi Arabia, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Saudi Culture and Arts Association. She is an opinion writer for a weekly article in Al-Jazirah Saudi newspaper, and a member of the Saudi Journalists Association, as well as a member of the board of directors of the art of the Ministry of Culture and Arts. She has been awarded the ‘Muftaha 2016 Award’ for her nationalistic positions and activities showing dedication to national harmony, and won the most influential personality in 2015 and 2016, respectively, among statistics of several channels and media officials. She won the best Arab political writer for 2016, and was honored in Egypt in 2016, among the Arab pioneers in the category of opinion book in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Culture. She was awarded the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Prize for the 2016 Gulf Creators, and is an Advisor to Saudis for Peace.

Father Rifat M. Bader has been a priest in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem since 1995. He has been the Founder and director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media, since 2012 and founder and Editor of www.abouna.org since 2003 (widest Arab Christian website; Arabic and English ).

Waiting to defend his PHD degree in political philosophy, at the Lebanese University.

Published many books and researches, such as ”The name of God is Mercy”, of Pope Francis, translated from English 2016.

Speaks besides the Arabic, as native language, Italian, French and English. Active in Social Media.
Father Bader believes – and calls- that the solution of the Problems in the Middle East, will be through realization of the Values of Equality and Citizenship on the ground and not only in speeches.

Sultan Almousa is a member of the Joint Committee for Interfaith Dialogue at the Vatican, Director of the ‘Future of Culture’ project at the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Charitable Foundation, Advisor to the King Abdulaziz Department for programs related to the history and civilization of the Arabian Peninsula. He is an influential figure in social networks and active in the fields of interfaith dialogue, promoting peace and coexistence.

Ayman Salah is an expert in digital communication sciences. He works as a lecturer at Cairo University, the American University and the Canadian University. He has also worked with several international institutions such as the United Nations, the American Aid, the International Center for Journalists and the Areej Foundation for Investigative Journalism, he collaborated with several media institutions in the Arab world such as Al-Ahram newspaper, Al-Masry Al-Youm, Al-Ghad Newspaper in Jordan and Radio Al-Balad. He has more than 25 years of experience in marketing and digital marketing with several international companies in varying fields. He has also contributed to the development of several government websites and services such as eGovernment Portal in Egypt, Ask and Play, and Career Middle East.

Alissa Qotrunnada Munawroh Wahid, publicly known in Indonesia as Alissa Wahid, is a trained family psychologist, but is most recognised for her work in the social sector on multiculturalism, democracy and human rights and moderate Muslim movements in Indonesia. She currently focuses on leadership development for interreligious youth leaders.

She is the National Director of Gusdurian Network Indonesia (GNI), named after her late father, President Abdurrahman Wahid who is also known as Gus Dur. GNI hosts thousands of grassroots-level activists in more than 100 cities in Indonesia, working to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, active citizenship, democracy and human rights. GNI is known for its work at the local level, for example the 2015 International Day for Tolerance that took place in 50 cities.

Alissa has a master’s degree in psychology and is also active in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the biggest Muslim organisation with more than 50 million members, as General Secretary of its Family Welfare Agency. In this role, she aims to promote just, strong, and moderate Muslim families.

Wahid meets with and speaks to thousands of people annually through public events. She is a Civil Society Ambassador for Sustainable Development Goals in Indonesia, focusing on Goal 16: Peace, Good Governance and Access to Justice. She received Indonesia Shine-On Award in 2015 from Good
Housekeeping Indonesia magazine. She was also awarded the Women Award 2016 from Indonesia Marketing Week.
Panel Moderator:

**Marianne Ejdersten.** Director of Communication at the World Council of Churches. Coming from Sweden and the Church of Sweden, Ejdersten has more than 25 years of professional experience in the fields of communication, media, marketing, fundraising and management, both with the churches and international ecumenical organizations. Ejdersten and her team were honored with the Grand Prix and Gold EPICA 2009 award for conducting the best integrated and interactive campaign “The Prayer” in Europe. Ejdersten is Vice President of the European branch of the Word Association for Christian Communication. Ejdersten has been the President of the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SWEFOR).