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religious freedom
belief with integrity

Agenda Item 5: Promotion of constructive interfaith dialogue, consultation and exchange
Oral Statement by the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)
6th Session Forum on Minority Issues, 27th November 2013

Thank you Madam President.

I am speaking on behalf of the Interfaith Encounter Association a member association of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), an international organisation of over 70 member associations of religious and faith based organisations working for freedom of religion or beliefs in over 30 countries.

My intervention on this agenda item focuses on eight good practices of constructive interfaith dialogue, consultation and exchange that is taking place in the Middle East, specifically between Israel and Palestine. In 2012 alone, these projects have overall conducted 195 encounters and events, engaging over 4000 participants.

The overarching aim of the Interfaith Encounters is “citizens building communities”, and the goal of the organisation is to develop “mini-communities” to exemplify the desired relations of mutual respect and friendship while respecting and reinforcing the unique identity of each community, acting as models for their surrounding communities of how multiple faiths can live side by side in peace.

Positive examples of interfaith dialogue and exchange

The highlights of Interfaith Encounters initiatives are:

- *Womens Interfaith Encounters and Youth Interfaith Encounters*, where Muslim, Christian, Druze and Jewish women, or young adults come together, as mini-communities, to learn from the perspective of the different religions. Their study is used as a vehicle for understanding, acceptance and respect, and becomes a source of strength and empowerment whereby women can recognise shared struggles and shared values.
- *God’s Holy Mountain* initiative, is an independent study project aiming to transform the Temple Mount, from a place of contention and strife, to one that is truly God’s Holy Mountain, a house of prayer for all people.

- *The Oil for Peace Project*, is a non for profit business that strives to bring Jews, Muslims and Christians together for the promotion of mutual respect, cultural appreciation, and coexistence.
- *Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue, Cross Cultural Study Visits, Middle East Abrahamic Forum* and the *Friends of the IEA* projects are all initiatives to work towards peace, interfaith, and cross-cultural understanding for peace building in the Middle East.

Recommendations

The IARF welcomes draft recommendations 51-56 on interfaith dialogue, consultation and exchange, in particular, *reinforces* the importance of recommendation 55, the role of religious and political leaders in helping to build tolerant, inclusive societies and to publically condemn any acts of religious hatred, discrimination, hostility or violence.

And further *emphasises* draft recommendation 56, that interreligious and interfaith dialogues should be encouraged at the grass-roots level and be as inclusive as possible, ensuring the meaningful participation of women and young people of religious minorities who are often disproportionately vulnerable, excluded and marginalised.