



Preliminary Report  
on  
SARAJEVO UN WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK  
Sarajevo, February 1st and 2nd, 2013  
The Holiday Inn

The International Forum Bosnia's Centre for Interfaith Dialogue is pleased to report the successful completion of our programme to mark UN World Interfaith Harmony Week in Sarajevo for the first time. The planned events were held on the 1st and 2nd of February, 2013, in accordance with the published programme.

At 20:00, on February the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013, Prof. Rusmir Mahmutćehajić opened proceedings for the first Sarajevo UN World Interfaith Harmony Week on behalf of International Forum Bosnia in the Congress Hall of the Holiday Inn with a short presentation of the history and purpose of the initiative by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and its adoption by the UN General Assembly. Prof. Mahmutćehajić stressed the essentially plural nature of all societies and that the preservation and cherishing of religious plurality in open societies is amongst the most important and pressing tasks of the contemporary world. It was for this reason that the first event was to be a concert of sacred music by the Sarajevo-based Pontanima Choir, established in 1996 on an initiative by the Bosnian Franciscan Priest Fra. Ivo Marković. The Choir's 35 members come from all the major religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their repertoire includes sacred music from the Jewish, Serbian Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic and International traditions. The concert included 15 songs. An interlude of three instrumental pieces for guitar was also performed by 11 children from the Sarajevo Guitar School. The concert was attended by approximately 300 people and was filmed by one of the main Bosnian TV stations (TV1) to be used in the production of a documentary film about the events to mark this week. Five photographs from the event are attached. More details about the award-winning Pontanima Choir, its inspiration and music, and testimonials from

distinguished international statesmen and leaders may be found in the programme also attached.

At 10:30, on February the 2nd, 2013, the main series of events to mark World Interfaith Harmony Week in Sarajevo was opened in the Hercegovina Hall of the Holiday Inn by Prof. Mahmutćehajić with an address on the nature and significance of the initiative.

The first event was the opening of an exhibition on “Cultural Memory – A Disappearing Treasure: Bosnia and Herzegovina's Sacred Heritage,” which was presented by Dr Amra Hadžimuhamedović, Commissioner for the Preservation of National Monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The exhibition presents the at-risk built heritage and treasures of all the main religious traditions in the country, including Orthodox and Catholic monasteries and churches, Mosques and Dervish lodges, and Synagogues, as well as manuscripts. The exhibition will be open to the public through the first week of February and there are plans to have it installed as a permanent exhibition in the new UN headquarters building in Sarajevo. Photographs are attached.

This was followed by the presentation of an exhibition on “New Works of Sacred Culture,” by Mr. Izedin Šikalo, the owner and chief editor of the Dobra Knjiga publishing house from Sarajevo. The exhibition presented a selection of the most important books published in the country on the topic of sacred culture in recent years. Photographs are attached.

Dr. Žarko Papić then opened an exhibition on “15 years of the *Forum Bosnae* Journal.” Speaking as the journal’s editor-in-chief, he spoke about its significance for the cultural life of the country, in particular as a unique forum for the publication of texts and works by members of all Bosnia’s religious and ethnic communities, which has made it the most widely read and cited Bosnian publication of this sort, both in the country and internationally.

The jubilee sixtieth volume of the *Forum Bosnae* journal was also presented by its editor, Professor Lejla Nakaš. This volume was prepared specifically for publication under the programme of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week as a contribution to interfaith understanding in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to mark the country’s long history of religious coexistence between the major Abrahamic traditions. The volume is a facsimile and diplomatic edition of the Bosnian Psalter from the Miscellany of Hval the Krstjanin,

one of the oldest and most significant monuments of Bosnian mediaeval religious literature. It is a medieval translation of the entire Psalter from Greek into Old Bosnian. There is a specially commissioned afterword by Catherine Mary MacRobert, Professor of Russian and Comparative Slavic Philology at Oxford University. The Psalter was chosen for publication during this week because of its centrality to all four of the main religious traditions in Bosnia, Judaism, Catholicism, Serbian Orthodoxy and Islam. It is accompanied by an audio CD of Prof. Josip Raos of Sarajevo University reading the Psalter aloud as it would have been read in medieval times. A copy of the book is being forwarded by post.

Finally, a presentation was made of eight books by Academician Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, by Franciscan Brother fra. Mile Babić and Nerin Dizdar of Mostar University. The books published during 2011 and 2012 in both English and Bosnian include – *On the Other: A Muslim View* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); *Across the River: On the poetry of Mak Dizdar* (*ibid.*); *Maintaining the Sacred Center: The Bosnian city of Stolac* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2011); *Hval i Djeva 1: Vječnost u vjesničkim otkrivanjima* (Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2011); *Hval i Djeva 2: O trajanju i prekidu* (*ibid.*); *Hval i Djeva 3: Sabiranje rasutog* (*ibid.*); *Iz Jerusalema: O jednosti, vjesništvu i povratku* (Profil: Zagreb, 2012); and *Bosanski odgovor: O modernosti i tradiciji, treće dopunjeno izdanje* (Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2012). As fra. Mile Babić stated, these books represent an unparalleled and sustained discourse on the nature of relations between the major religious traditions present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the question of religiously plural societies as the emerging norm in the world today. The publication of the trilogy on the Praised and the Virgin, a meditation on the nature and role of the Prophet Muhammad and the Virgin Mary in both the Muslim and the Christian traditions within Bosnian history is expected later this year by the Brill publishing house in the Netherlands, making Prof. Mahmutćehajić the most translated Bosnian author to date. Photographs attached.

At 11:30, the main panel discussion on Intellectual Perspectives on Interreligious Relations in the Contemporary World was opened by Mr. Yuri Afanasiev, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mr Afanasiev spoke about the nature of interfaith relations both in the world generally and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, with a particular stress on reasons behind the

UN General Assembly's initiative for the World Interfaith Harmony Week, the reasons for relative neglect of this area in the past and the reason why it has now moved up on the world agenda as an issue of ever increasing importance under conditions of globalization and the gathering crises related to various forms of sustainability of world systems. The panel discussion was moderated by Asim Zubčević, the Chair of the International Forum Bosnia's Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and the principal speakers were: Dr. Žarko Papić, Prof. Marica Petrović, Prof. Krsto Mijanović, Mr. Desmond Maurer, Brother Ivo Marković, Prof. Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, Prof. Mehmedalija Hadžić, Prof. David Kamhi, Prof. Samir Beglerović and Prof. Mile Babić O.M. The speakers addressed the question of religious plurality in the contemporary world from a variety of different intellectual and religious perspectives. These presentations served as the basis for a discussion, which was open to the public, which included leading members of civil society organizations active in the field of interfaith relations and the promotion of social, cultural and religious plurality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was agreed that the participants will prepare extended versions of their talks for publication in a volume of the *Forum Bosnae* journal dedicated to the question of interfaith harmony. The formal discussion continued until 14:45 and was followed by an interfaith luncheon for participants and interested members of the public, at which lively discussion lasted for several more hours.

Given the inherent importance of the theme, the success with which the event went forward, and the interest shown on the part of the public, it was proposed by participants that a commitment be made to hold a similar event next year, with a greater level of involvement by civil and religious leaders and preferably to involve a public event to mark the week sponsored by the Sarajevo City authorities and the UN agencies present in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Photographs of the panel discussion are attached. A number of media were present at the event and participants gave a large number of interviews to print, online, and radio and TV outlets, including the main press agencies of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Coverage will be monitored and the most interesting articles collected for forwarding. Two television stations, TV1 and HEMA, committed to preparing documentary programmes about the events.

Asim Zubčević

President of IFB Center for Interreligious dialogue

061/913-582

Nermina Ahatović

IFB Coordinator

061/564-225