

December 14th 2012  
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Dear Sir and/or Madam:

We, the undersigned, are delighted to express our full and enthusiastic support for the nomination of Prof. Ruzmir Mahmutćehajić for the *World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize*. We do so on a number of different grounds.

Firstly, we have all known Prof. Mahmutćehajić for many years in a variety of different capacities and benefited greatly from our acquaintance and cooperation. We believe that he is an excellent and highly deserving nominee, as in our view no other individual has done more to promote healthy and honest interfaith relations from South-eastern Europe in the wake of two decades of war and ethnic and religious tensions. He has also been a major force for the preservation of the cultural and intellectual heritage of Bosnia. In particular, we believe that his publications on Bosnia, the Bosnian tradition of coexistence, and Bosnian culture as the shared achievement of multiple religious traditions and communities represent a unique resource for the critical reconstruction of interfaith relations under conditions of modernity. While his works generally use a Bosnian prism, they deal with universal themes and problems affecting all contemporary cultures and societies. This past year has seen the publication of eight separate books by Prof. Mahmutćehajić in Bosnian or in English on these themes, an extraordinary achievement which will be marked during *World Interfaith Harmony Week* in 2013.

We are, in particular, honored to be associated with him in his latest initiative, to mark the *World Interfaith Harmony Week* in 2013. This will be the first such event to be organized in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will involve a one day conference on interfaith relations in the region, with presentations by leading representatives of the Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, and Atheist communities, as well as a public discussion of the state of relations presently and over the past twenty years. It is expected that this will result in a publication on the state of interfaith relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be published by the International Forum Bosnia.

The conference will be accompanied by an exhibition of damaged or at risk cultural heritage belonging to all of the major religious communities in the country, under the auspices of the BiH Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments. The purpose of the exhibition is to highlight Bosnia's multi-faith heritage and long tradition of coexistence, as well as the need for renewal and constant work at maintaining good interfaith relations.

There will also be a retrospective exhibition reviewing faith-related publishing in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past twenty years and the aforementioned presentation of Prof. Mahmutćehajić's recent academic work on faith and interfaith related themes. In the past year, Prof. Mahmutćehajić has published in Bosnian and English eight thematically related volumes that together make up a major contribution to the presentation of the unique Bosnian heritage of peaceful coexistence and good interfaith relations between Christians, Jews and Muslims: his recent three volume masterwork on *Hval i Djeva* (The Praised and the Virgin), an exploration of Muslim and Christian relations in Bosnia in the light of perennial philosophy through the figures of the Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) and the Virgin Mary, *Iz Jerusalema* (From Jerusalem), his Edward Bronfman lectures delivered in Jerusalem in 2010, *On the Other*, an essay on relations between religions from the Muslim perspective, *Across the River*, a literary

critical appreciation of the work of Bosnia's most important poet, Mak Dizdar, as a representative of that tradition, *Maintaining the Sacred Centre*, an essay on the destruction of tradition and interfaith coexistence in one Bosnian town by the modern ideological movements, and a new edition of the author's classic work, *Bosanski odgovor* (Learning from Bosnia), a systematic presentation of the Bosnian tradition of religious coexistence as a response to the ideological challenges of modernity and fundamentalism. His work will be discussed by a panel of speakers from each of the main religious traditions present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We believe this will provide a very valuable opportunity to draw attention to a unique body of work, the culmination of a lifetime's study and profound thought, which provides a highly valuable model for the critical reconstruction of interfaith relations in an increasingly globalized world.

In the evening there will be a musical performance drawing on the sacral music of all four religious traditions.

These activities planned to mark the World Interfaith Harmony Week are highly representative of Prof. Mahmutćehajić's efforts over the past twenty years and more, both individually and through the non-governmental organization he founded to promote the understanding of Bosnia as the common home of four interrelated and inextricable traditions and communities, the International Forum Bosnia. As a leading Bosnian intellectual and advocate of peaceful coexistence and good interfaith relations, Prof. Mahmutćehajić has been a major force in the restoration of cultural and intellectual life in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the war that ended in 1995 and has been personally responsible for initiating a large number of projects aimed at increasing understanding and appreciation of the country's complex religious and cultural heritage, work in which we have all been involved in different capacities at different times and which we can categorically state would not have taken place without his leadership. These projects include the physical reconstruction and restoration of national monuments and heritage destroyed during the war, including a large number of sacral buildings from the various faiths present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, annual international summer schools held in the town of Stolac with youth participants and teaching staff from all the Abrahamic traditions, and the annual international conferences organized at Mostar on the theme of Unity and Plurality in Europe, one of whose aims every year is to explore interfaith dialogue, bringing together scholars and academics from the Balkans, Israel, Turkey, the Near East, Libya, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Finland, Norway, Poland, the UK and the USA, etc. These summer schools and conferences provide practically the only opportunity in Bosnia for individuals of the various faith communities to come together with leading thinkers from around the region and the world and to develop new paths to coexistence. This programme of events includes activities renovating and reconstructing cultural monuments and heritage (including buildings and portable and intangible heritage such as manuscripts, antiques, and traditional skills and crafts). These activities incorporate physical reconstruction and work to rediscover and renew our understanding of traditions and of the place and importance of human dignity within traditional and religious world-views.

We therefore wholeheartedly support the nomination of Prof. Mahmutćehajić for your prize and look forward to celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week together with him in February next year,

Yours sincerely,



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