

**KAICIID Advisory Forum
World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017**

KAICIID



"World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrates the principles of tolerance and respect for the other that are deeply rooted in the world's major religions. The observance is also a summons to solidarity in the face of those who spread misunderstanding and mistrust."

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

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1. Introduction

1.1. World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW)

In October 2010, the United Nations recognized the imperative need for interreligious dialogue to enhance mutual understanding and tolerance among people of different nations. Henceforth, the first week of February has been celebrated annually as the World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) among all religions and faiths.

WIHW was first proposed by H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan and was, a month later, unanimously adopted in a resolution by the UN General Assembly. The idea originated from the 2007 'Common Word Initiative' aimed at interreligious dialogue, by calling for common ground and understanding between Christian and Muslim leaders to promote peace. As a result of the initiative, WIHW provides an opportunity for people of all faiths to engage in interreligious activities and to promote harmony and tolerance.

1.2. KAICIID and World Interfaith Harmony Week

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) is actively engaged in spreading WIHW's message of tolerance and harmony throughout the year.

As part of its local outreach initiatives, KAICIID continued its engagement in the UN Interfaith Harmony Week (IFHW) which was celebrated from 1 through 7 February 2017. With the objective of strengthening dialogue between the Council of Parties (CoP) representatives, members of its Board of Directors (BoD), Advisory Forum members, KAICIID senior leadership and their local IR counterparts, including religious and civil society IR practitioners came together to share and discuss good practice examples highlighting the significance of interreligious dialogue as a tool for overcoming communal challenges.

2. KAICIID Advisory Forum

2.1. About KAICIID's Advisory Forum

The Advisory Forum is a consultative body comprised of influential leaders from world religions and religious and cultural institutions and communities representing more than 20 countries. The Forum supports the activities of the KAICIID Board of Directors and advises on their programs.

The Advisory Forum consists of leading figures from the religious, non-governmental and intergovernmental fields from over 20 countries. In the initial session of the Forum, Ela Gandhi, founder of the Gandhi Development Trust and granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi (South Africa), and Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia were elected as co-chairs of the Advisory Forum. In total the Forum numbers 47 experts in interreligious dialogue and can over time expand to include 100 in total.

2.2. KAICIID's Advisory Forum and World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW)

On the occasion of World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW), the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) hosted the second Advisory Forum meeting from 6 to 7 February to establish task forces that will direct the future work of the Forum. The issue-specific task forces will focus on Capacity Building in the Field of IRD, Governance and Common Citizenship, IRD Training, and Reconciliation and have established action plans for their work, explored synergies and discussed how they will advise KAICIID on its programmes.

Throughout the two days of plenary and breakout sessions, a theme emerged from the dialogue to focus on moving beyond tolerance of the 'other' to acceptance and mutual respect to secure social cohesion and peace. The Secretary General of KAICIID, Faisal Bin Muaammar echoed this message in his address to the Advisory Forum in the closing session and emphasised the importance of interreligious dialogue in creating an environment for appreciation and mutual respect.

"Now is a time of dramatic and sometimes alarming changes. Now is a time for unity – not only tolerance among religions. We need to move beyond simply tolerating the other because only through appreciation and respect can communities in opposition live together. Interreligious dialogue is the medium through which we help the 'others' experience that we value their religious traditions. By valuing each other, we build resilient coexistence."

The diverse and seasoned practitioners, religious leaders and scholars spoke about their concerns and experiences in dialogue. Shared experiences showed there are many commonalities in the goals of the Advisory Forum members and many synergies among the diverse and dedicated group of leaders and peacemakers who are committed to working together across religious, ethnic and political lines.

"Today we don't need walls. We need bridges," said His Holiness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, President of Parmarth Niketan Ashram of Rishikesh, India. "We need to have the value of not only tolerance, but of acceptance and respect. Today we need the music of oneness and we need the music of togetherness and we need the music of love and harmony and respect."

"It is our responsibility as religious leaders to show the world that we can stand shoulder to shoulder with other faiths and ethnicities and communities – that we can fight for the other," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, President of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. "We must keep aglow the light of understanding and caring that truly enables us to see one another."

Dr. Rosalle Ewell, Executive Director of the Theological Commission for the World Evangelical Alliance, spoke from her experience as a biologist on the unique nature of the Advisory Forum. She equated it to an 'edge', meaning, in biological terms, a boundary between two habitats that fosters unique forms of interaction and life. To Ewell, the Forum itself is an edge where different cultures, peoples and religions meet and interact.

“Certain things can thrive in ways that they might not thrive elsewhere. In terms of cultures, one of the great things about edges is that they can be beneficial, and we can see life flourish in ways that are challenging – in good ways – so that people are transformed and learn about one another and create something that is unique together. For our work here at KAICIID, it's about how can we create and be part of beneficial edges.”

In the closing plenary, each task force presented action plans and objectives for 2017. As a whole, the Advisory Forum members committed to advocating for dialogue and supporting KAICIID programmes through increasing visibility of KAICIID's work and seeking synergies with other organizations and networks to promote partnerships and cooperation.

The task forces also determined specific goals for their work within the next year, such as facilitating interactions between policymakers, religious leaders and communities to advocate for dialogue, promote human rights including religious freedom and to support the efforts of dialogue practitioners in the field. Other objectives included promoting common citizenship, support for refugees and empowering youth through dialogue education, providing safe spaces for dialogue and acknowledging young peoples' role in promoting peace.

3. Advisory Forum World Interfaith Harmony Week Interactive Dinner 2017

3.1. Description

Following the 2016 Interactive Breakfast (c.f. Annex 4), which was an IR peer event, the 2017 interactive IR event was conceived as an evening dialogue and networking buffet in the framework of World Interfaith Harmony week. The event included participation from KAICIID's Council of Parties representatives, Board of Directors, Advisory Forum and Austrian religious community and lay representatives.

To underline that the objective of the evening was to share good practice examples and engage in individual exchange, rather than a formal ceremony, it was decided to hold the gathering at Albert Schweitzer Haus, a Viennese non-profit venue operated by the Lutheran (Protestant) charitable and humanitarian religious organization, *Diakonie*.

In addition, KAICIID chose this particular venue as part of its efforts to commemorate the 500 anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Since feedback from participants and stakeholders was encouraging, in the future, the Dialogue Centre plans to use facilities run by non-profit religious organisations to host some of its events.



The room was set up with roundtables to emphasize the interactive element of the evening and to facilitate dialogue among the participants. To foster a geographically balanced and fruitful exchange among the participants, it was further decided to evenly allocate seats to the members of KAICIID’s governing bodies and to Austrian representatives.

3.2. Programme

The event was opened by **KAICIID’s Secretary General, Faisal Bin Muaammar** who welcomed the participants to Vienna stating that “I see today a much more urgent need to build bridges between different people and religions. People are talking much more about their concerns for their security and their future than they were a year ago.” Emphasizing the importance of interreligious dialogue, the Secretary General added: “I know that we all agree that dialogue is the best way to create a sense of shared values and respect between diverse groups. A shared sense of common principles and goals supports social cohesion. Social cohesion supports robust communities that resist discrimination and bias”



Upon the KAICIID Secretary General’s invitation, special guest **H.E. Dr. Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa**, the newly appointed Secretary General of the Muslim World League, travelled to Vienna on the occasion of WIHW. In his speech, Dr. Al-Issa noted the efforts of international organisations, notably KAICIID, in promoting the values of interreligious dialogue between followers of different religions and cultures, including mutual understanding and respect. Dr. Al-Issa stated that “too many people suffer from an understanding of other religions, faiths and religious communities that is not based in truth”. Reflecting on the current state of affairs, the World Muslim League’s SG stated that “we all are deeply disturbed by violence and we all reject any violence committed in the name of religion”, adding that “extremists cannot succeed if enough people can be convinced to enter into dialogue that builds respect”.



Speaking on behalf of KAICIID’s Advisory Forum, **Ela Gandhi** emphasized the need to encourage love rather than hatred to proactively create conditions of peace for our descendants.



Her remarks were followed by **Dietmar Böhmer**, a longstanding dialogue advocate, KAICIID local outreach cooperator and founder of the interreligious initiative MenschenRechteReligion, who together with the Iraqi asylum seeker **Qusai Albajati** shared stories of successful refugee integration in Austria's rural Styria region and lauded KAICIID's support for German teaching and particularly the Centre's Cultural Orientation visits for asylum seekers.



During the evening, KAICIID Advisory Forum members and interreligious dialogue advocates Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, Eva Ruth Palmieri and Canon Dr. Andrew Smith offered examples of interreligious dialogue in action to build trust, inspire action and promote social cohesion in diverse communities:

- **Bibi Kiranjot Kaur** shared with the capacity audience the interreligious work of her Sikh organisation in India that is providing humanitarian relief to all religions and working to create an environment for dialogue, where all people can feel comfortable with each other.



- **Eva Palmieri** spoke about her personal experiences, growing up as a Jewish minority in a predominately Catholic country and how she went back to the schools where she had experienced discrimination to enable dialogue between people of majority and minority religions. Thereby she highlighted the importance of standing up for each other in the face of bigotry and hate.



- As an exemplar of interreligious dialogue, **Canon Dr. Andrew Smith** introduced the participants to a Christian charity he had founded in Birmingham, called ‘The Feast’ that is working to bring together Christian and Muslim youth to build friendship and understanding. It now has mirror organisations in three other British cities as well as Beirut and Berlin.



3.3. Objectives

The objectives of the interactive evening event were:

- Fostering dialogue among members of KAICIID’s governing bodies and Austrian religious communities’ representatives as well as IR practitioners
- Sharing good practice examples of how IR can serve as a tool to overcome communal challenges and foster social cohesion
- Promoting KAICIID and its activities and strengthen the Centre’s relations in Austria
- Identifying areas for potential collaboration
- Commemorating WIHW; reiterating the value of IRD

3.4. Participants

The evening event brought together a total of 77 participants. These included the KAICIID Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and Director General, as well as five members of the Centre’s senior leadership. Present at the event was also special guest of honor the Secretary General of the World Muslim League, H.E. Dr. Al-Issa, three representatives of KAICIID’s Council of Parties, Mr Mutaz Hyassat from the Embassy Of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, eight members of the Centre’s Board of Directors, twenty-seven members of the KAICIID Advisory Forum, thirteen delegates, as well as sixteen Austrian religious and academic representatives.



4. Media Coverage

4.1. Media Coverage (c.f. Annex 1)

A large number of news outlets in the Arab world have covered the interfaith dinner and networking event on the sidelines of the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Among many other important figures, the participation of the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Al-Issa, was highlighted, quoting his remarks praising the work of KAICIID and the organization's activities. Various articles explicitly quote the remarks of KAICIID's Secretary General in this regard.

An Egyptian news source has reported about the participation of Dr. Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, and quoted his comments during his visit to KAICIID in Vienna last week.

The website "speakingtree.in" has published an opinion piece titled "Interfaith: Hope for the world", in which the author commends KAICIID on its work and also mentions the current gathering of interfaith leaders in Vienna in the course of the 2nd KAICIID Advisory Forum meeting.

4.2. Social Media Coverage (c.f. Annex 2)

On Twitter, during WIHW, KAICIID had an average engagement rate of 2.2%, with 198.000 impressions and 4,486 engagements.

The average engagement rate is approx. 0,5% and this result provides insight into the high level of stakeholder interest in the Advisory Forum World Interfaith Harmony Week Interactive Dinner 2017.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: Media Coverage

Meeting at KAICIID on co-existence in the Austrian capital Vienna

In gerasnews (Saudi Arabia); addustour.com (Saudi Arabia); ararttimes.com (Saudi Arabia); alhadathonline.org (Saudi Arabia); <http://www.spa.gov.sa/> (Saudi Arabia); al-jazirahonline.com (Saudi Arabia); mobile.sabq.org (Saudi Arabia); aleqtisady.com (Saudi Arabia); 5abr.com (Saudi Arabia); saouss (Saudi Arabia); altamauz (Saudi Arabia); profilenews (Saudi Arabia); Sudia News (Saudi Arabia); albumasher (Saudi Arabia); Oroba News (Jordan); inlightpress.com (Jordan); almalaf (Jordan); addustour.com (Jordan); albarqnews.com (Jordan); mnctoday.com (Jordan); arabsvoice.com (Jordan); jfranews.com (Jordan); Petra News Agency (Jordan); Alghad.com (Jordan); Jordan.shafaqna.com (Jordan); Sahara News (Jordan); ghorbajo.com (Jordan); i2arabic.com (Jordan); 3yoon.com (Jordan); Masrelbalad (Egypt); khabaralyoum (Egypt); gomhuriaonline.com (Egypt); elgornal.net (Egypt); elfagr.com (Egypt); akhbaralsr.net (Egypt); freepen.com (Egypt); ahlmisrnews.com (Egypt); tahyamesr.com (Egypt); bwabtk.com (Egypt); ejaz.ws (Egypt); leadersnews.com (Egypt); elmonzar.net (Egypt); s777.com (Egypt); lomazomo.com (Egypt); akhbarkom.net (Egypt); nafeza2world.com (Egypt); elwehda.com (UAE); elwehda.com (UAE); iponews.com (UAE); rasseen.com (UAE); newsressxyz (UAE); elhadas.com (UAE); elbayan (UAE); Shula News (Kuwait); shamlnews.com (Kuwait); alkhablyoum.com (Kuwait); alaangate.com (Kuwait); alraya.com (Kuwait); mehwar.co (Kuwait); rasd24.net (Yemen); wisalnews.com (Palestine); fananews.com (Arabic); fananews.com (Arabic); fananews.com (Arabic); fananews.com (Arabic); mwl-news.net (Arabic); ar.shafaqna.com (Arabic); ar.alshbaka.net (Arabic); muheet.net (Arabic);

Article Excerpt

The King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue held a meeting in the Austrian capital of Vienna on Tuesday on the sidelines of the World Harmony Week in order to promote co - existence and tolerance between religions and cultures.

The Secretary General of KAICIID, Mr. Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, stated that the meeting aims to discuss the mechanisms and appropriate tools to promote coexistence and confront contemporary challenges. Bin Muaammar said that the meeting includes discussing with the participants best practices in their respective communities, which have shown a good impact on individuals and communities. (...)

The meeting was also attended by a number of scientific and intellectual figures, which included the spokesman for the president in this meeting, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Mohammed al-Issa, members of the founding parties of KAICIID, the Board of Directors, the Advisory Forum, members of the diplomatic corps in Austria, and the heads of associations religious, and some heads of international

organizations, as well as some personalities of the Austrian society as well as nearly one hundred participants representing international and religious institutions in the field of dialogue.

It is worth mentioning that KAICIID plays a leading role in building bridges between religious leaders and political decision-makers on a global scale. It also implements projects within the global program "United against violence in the name of religion" and works on strengthening efforts of peace and coexistence in the world by implementing programs in diverse areas such as Africa, the Middle East and Asia in addition to its activities in Europe, America and East Asia.

Al-Issa: KAICIID is a Saudi Initiative that has impressed the world

In El Ghad (translated from Arabic into English); lomazoma.com (Saudi Arabia); daralakhbar (Arabic); hamrinnews (Arabic); El Monzar (Arabic); bwabtk.com (Arabic); 7dramoutnet.com (Yemen); El Wehda News (Arabic); aleqtisady.com (Saudi Arabia); almowaten.net (Arabic); alwantv.net (Saudi Arabia); s777.org (Saudi Arabia);

Translation Summary

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, praised the work of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, whose mission is the promotion of peace-building and the fight against extremism in the world.

His remarks were made during a visit to the headquarters of the organization in the Austrian capital of Vienna yesterday, where he was received by the Secretary-General of KAICIID, Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, and members of the Board of Directors.

Al Issa, who was briefed on the activities of the center and its wide array of programs, stated during the meeting that the center is a sign of Saudi civilization and that it has achieved enriching the world of modern thought and knowledge and research through its activities held in the past few years in multiple countries in the world. He furthermore stressed that the center serves as a true example of cooperation between the different religions and cultures.

In the course of his visit, he called for a tighter cooperation between the organization and the Association of the Islamic world so as to contribute to the promotion of the values of coexistence between communities and also suggested enhancing cooperation between the organization and other international organizations.

On his part, Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar welcomed the visit of Dr. Al-Issa, pointing out how important the visit is in terms of addressing and discussing a wide range of issues and problems that the Arab and the Muslim world has been facing.

World Interfaith Harmony Week: Meeting on coexistence at King Abdullah Centre for interreligious and intercultural dialogue in Vienna

In 24.com.eg (Egypt, translated from Arabic into English); Makkah (Saudi Arabia); Bahrain News Agency (Bahrain); gerasnews.com (Arabic), Bahrain News Agency (Bahrain); wisalnews.com (Arabic); Bahrain Shafaqna.com (Bahrain); dotemirates.com (UAE)

Abstract

The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue Centre hosted a meeting on the sidelines of the World Harmony Week to promote tolerance and coexistence between religions and cultures in the Austrian capital of Vienna yesterday. The Secretary General of the Center, Faisal bin Muaammar, stated that the meeting aims to discuss appropriate mechanisms and tools to promote coexistence and confront contemporary challenges.

He explained that the meeting includes best practices in the field of dialogue concerning its impact on individuals and communities. The meeting aims to develop activities aimed at developing governance mechanisms, and the activation of the results in order to achieve social cohesion, and the face of contemporary challenges, especially with regard to political and ideological extremism

The meeting was attended by a large number of intellectual figures, including the keynote speaker, Dr. Al Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League (...)

Al-Issa lectures on harmony between cultures and religions in Vienna

In El Bashayer Online (Egypt)

Translation Summary

His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, stressed that most political conflicts between states are due to a cultural collision between the peoples, due to ideological aversions. There is often a lack of the most basic common sense principles and communication skills, which then leads to tensions and collision.

This came during a speech as the invited guest of honor and speaker at an event which took place in the context of the World Interfaith Harmony Week, which took place in the Austrian capital of Vienna and was attended by many religious, intellectual and political world figures and members of the diplomatic corps in Vienna.

He stated that Islam calls for coexistence, peace, love, kindness and compassion for all human beings. Eventually, awareness and love, the spread of tolerance and coexistence will defeat extremism, violence and hatred.

ANNEX 2: Social Media Coverage



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 

KAICIID SG: Compared to a year go, I see today a much more urgent need to build bridges btwn different ppl & religions



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 

KAICIID SG: As we enter 5th year, I am pleased to have active regular dialogue w/Austria through our outreach progs





KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 

KAICIID SG: Common principles support social cohesion, which supports robust communities that resist discrimination



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 

KAICIID SG: Fear & mistrust of the other sadly becoming features of everyday life for many - dialogue is much needed





KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d

KAICIID SG: its a pleasure to say this is the most intense interfaith harmony week we have experienced at the Centre



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d

KAICIID SG: For good reason, Vienna is called the city of dialogue





KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d

KAICIID SG: The Muslim World League played an essential role in the creation of KAICIID & is supportive of its work



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d

KAICIID SG introduces a special guest who has traveled to Vienna for #WIHW: SG of @MWLOrg_en





KAICIID ✓ @KAICIID · 6d

The SG of Muslim World League, Dr. Mohammed Al-Issa, takes the floor: Religions were exploited to justify violence



KAICIID and Muslim World League





KAICIID ✓ @KAICIID · 6d

SG of @MWLOrg_en Dr. Al-Issa: Extremists have a long history of exploiting religions to serve their evil interests





KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 
SG of Muslim World League: religious leaders have an important role in realizing peace through dialogue #WIHW





Muslim World League and 2 others



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 
SG of @MWLOrg_en at KAICIID #WIHW
dinner: Through our awareness & love,
we will overcome ignorance & extremism
#WIHW





KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 
SG of Muslim World League: religious leaders have an important role in realizing peace through dialogue #WIHW



Muslim World League and 2 others



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d 
SG of @MWLOrg: Hate & extremism sadly reveals the essence of some individuals not the essence of religion



KAICIID and Muslim World League



KAICIID @KAICIID · 6d

SG of @MWLOrg: The core of any religion is forgiveness, reconciliation, goodness, and love. #WIHW



KAICIID @KAICIID · 6d

We must be proactive in creating conditions of peace so that our children & grandchildren can live in a better world





KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d

KAICIID Advisory Forum Chair, Ela Gandhi: Hatred is learned, but so is love... And that is what we must encourage



KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d

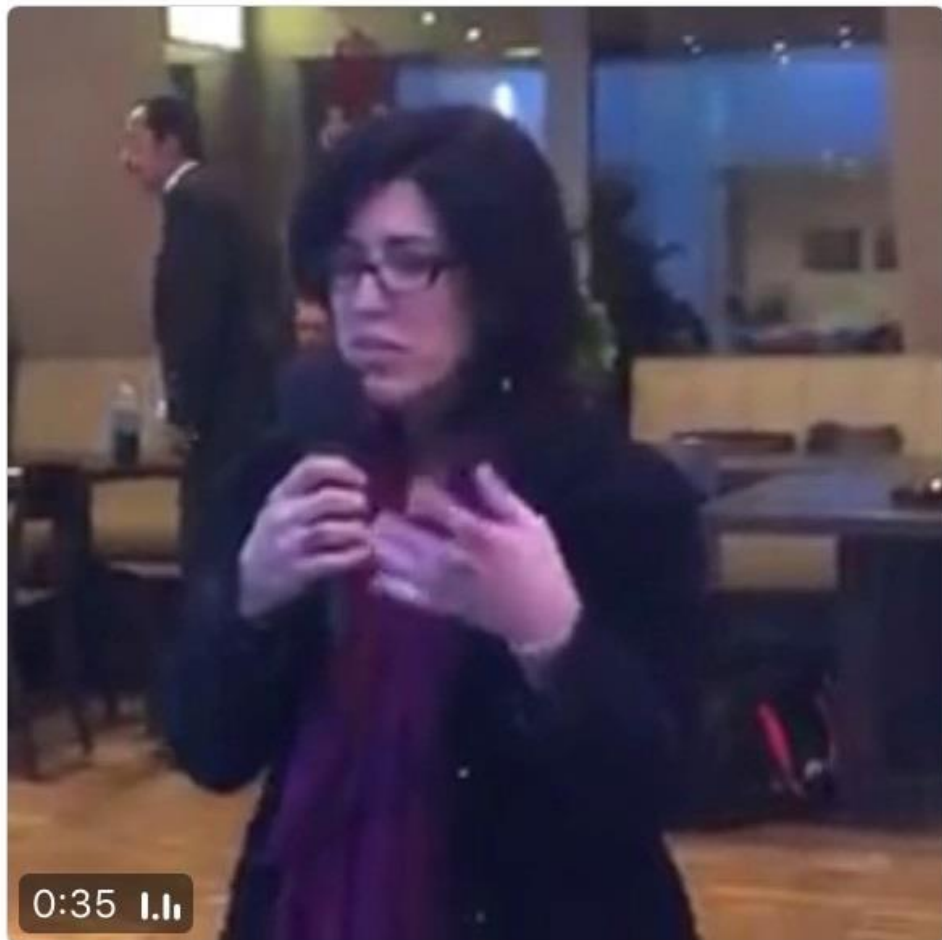
KAICIID local outreach partner & Iraqi refugee tell success story; dialogue proved essential to overcome stereotypes





KAICIID  @KAICIID · 6d

KAICIID Advisory Forum Member: We must stand up for each other in the face of bigotry & hate kaiciid.org/who-we-are/gov...



ANNEX 3: World Interfaith Harmony Week Activities 2015 – 2016

KAICIID has been actively participating in WIHW celebrations since 2015.

- In February 2015, the Centre supported the URI Eastern Tyrol chapter's initiative "Candle of Forgiveness" and lit up the Centre by placing candles in all windows to symbolically commemorate all those who lost their lives in conflicts where religion is abused to justify violence and atrocities.



- On 08 February 2015, a KAICIID delegation, led by Director General Fahad Abualnasr participated in the Austrian Foreign Ministry's Peace Brunch at Melk Abbey.



- On 01 February 2016, a KAICIID delegation including Board of Directors members Dr. Mohammad Sammak and Reverend Kosho Niwano participated the Austrian Foreign Ministry's WIHW Peace Vesper at Melk Abbey.



- In 2016, former Austrian President Dr. Heinz Fischer spoke at KAICIID on the importance of interreligious dialogue and its role in solving current problems, including the refugee crisis.



ANNEX 4: Advisory Forum Interactive Breakfast

On 11 April 2016, KAICIID hosted an interactive, interreligious breakfast that gathered members of the Centre's Advisory Forum, just one day after its constituent meeting, as well as diplomats and stakeholders from intergovernmental organisations, policy-makers, civil society and the media,



The meeting took place in a nearby hotel with a roundtable room set-up that allowed for interaction and fostered dialogue among the participants.