
Report on the 12th Sarajevo UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, held on February 5–12,
2024

International Forum Bosnia, Sarajevo

International Forum Bosnia held as announced its programme of events to mark the 12th *Sarajevo UN World Interfaith Harmony Week*.

The key theme of this year's programme was *Global Ethics: Urgent Questions and Challenges*.

The programme took place on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of February as a series of three academic panels. The panels took the form of hybrid meetings, with some participants present in person and others via Zoom. The panels were on the following topics:

- First Panel on *Global Ethics: Jewish, Christian, and Muslims Views on Urgent Questions and Challenges*

The project to conceive of and institute a Global Ethics lies at the heart of all the monotheisms and the universal or world religions. More specifically, the globalisation of the ethical out of our necessarily individual encounter with and responsibility before a personal but transcendent God is the common core of the Abrahamic traditions. His Oneness is the guarantor of our uniqueness. It is reflected in the shared complex of sacrificial individualism on which all three of these traditions and communities are built. Nothing is more urgent at the present juncture of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian relations than the challenge of recovering and developing this ethical common ground in the construction of plural post-secular orders and societies that can balance the demands of identity with those of difference, as we emerge towards global forms of interaction and find ways to respect and manage the conflict of rights and claims that is inherent to coexistence within a world that can never be anything but shared.

- Second Panel on *Lady Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ: A Symbol of Maternal Mercy and the Striving for Peace or Something Else?*

The Lady Mary is both a shared and a discrete symbol – connecting and dividing the traditions and their adherents. Born into the Jewish tradition and a major presence in the Muslim, she is nonetheless principally identified with the Christian traditions, within which she has been represented and interpreted as both fundamental and foreign to its core. She has been variously interpreted as an inheritance of paganism and an expression of the primordial feminine divine. At the same time, she is seen as offering a compensatory mechanism that both preserves and contests the paternalistic nature of Abrahamic monotheism, as both a symbolisation of oppressive heteronormativity and phallogocentrism and one of resistance to phallicism by the encompassing feminine. Finally, she has been seen as a symbol that allows us to transcend the binary and opens up pathways of identification that transgress reductive identity. It is particularly striking under conditions of modernity and post-modernity that

Mary and Marian apparitions, shrines, and pilgrimages have become major mechanisms for mediating access to the divine and of hierophany. Mary has become a powerful symbol of peace and the striving for peace, but, like any powerful religious symbol, her cloak has always also been deployed ideological cover to projects that promote peace by the redirection of violence and the reinforcement of boundaries.

➤ Third Panel on *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Hans Küng's Project of a Global Ethic*

The question of a global ethic or Weltethos is particularly associated Hans Küng, one of the leading Catholic theologians of the second half of the 20th century, whose relationship with the Catholic hierarchy and magisterium was, to say the least, complex. His comprehensive project to restructure Christianity's self-understanding involved major attempts to reconceptualise the sister religions of Judaism and Islam as well, efforts ultimately integrated into his project for a Global Ethic or the establishment of a common substrate and content to the world religions and the distillation of a shared set of values to underpin global justice and politics, global business practice, and global culture. For some, this is the only pathway to building a shared world space within which difference can flourish and justice be provided a forum. To others, it can seem like the appropriation of projected commonalities in the service of reification, the imposition of imagined traditions, and the reduction of fundamentally other histories and cultures within a post-Christian frame – not unlike Habermas' post-secularism.

The sessions were open to the public/members of International Forum Bosnia.

The programme was opened at 11 a.m. on February 8, with opening remarks were made by Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, President of IFB, followed by an address by Benjamina Karić, Mayor of City of Sarajevo and a brief statement by Asim Zubčević, the Director of the IFB Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, the focal point for organization of the event.

This was followed by the First Panel., which on *Global Ethics: Jewish, Christian, and Muslims Views on Urgent Questions and Challenges*, and was moderated by: Džamna Duman. Unfortunately, two of the planned speakers were not able to be present and deliver their papers. One of them, Alen Krstić, was replaced by a last-minute change in the programme, while the other, Mile Babić, spoke on the third panel instead. The speakers were therefore:

Jakob Finci, *Muslim-jewish initiative of peace*

Amra Hadžimuhamedović, *Perceiving the Creator through the Veils of Arrogance and Oblivion: Contemporary Shaping of Religious Heritage by Navigating the Nature-Culture Interplay*

Rusmir Šadić, *The Aesthetics of the Sacred: On Navid Kermani's Books, God is Beautiful and Wonder beyond Belief: On Christianity (by Zoom)*

Krsto Mijanović, *The Ethics of Bosnianhood as seen from the Orthodox Church*

Dr Finzi spoke in English. The others spoke in Bosnian with a summary of their presentations provided by Desmond Maurer. The presentations were followed by a lively discussion and the session lasted for the full envisaged time slot, until 15:00.

The Second Panel took place the next day, February 9, started at 14:00. It was on *Lady Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ: A Symbol of Maternal Mercy and the Striving for Peace or Something Else?* In a change to the programme, the panel was moderated by Desmond Maurer rather than Asim Zubčević, who was ill. The speakers were:

Desmond Maurer, *Mary and the Politics of Peace*

Marko Antonio Brkić, *Lady Mary as 'point of recognition' in process of transformation of social capital*

Mujadad Zaman, *Our Lady of the Niche: Conversing Islamic Theology today with the Image of Mary*

Ivo Marković, *The Catholic Political Use of Marian Piety in the Struggle against the Communist Ideologies*

Abdel Latif Chalikandi, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus: Her Image in the Quran and Islamic Tradition as a Unifying Figure* (on Zoom)

Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *Lady Mary in Miguel de Unamuno's Philosophy*

All the speakers presented in English. The discussion lasted about an hour and the session closed at 17:00 as envisaged.

The Third Panel was on *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Hans Küng's Project of a Global Ethic*, and took place on Saturday, February 10, starting at 11 a.m. The moderator was Fatima Mahmutćehajić

Two of the envisaged speakers, Asim Zubčević and Asim Delibašić, were unable to present. The speakers were:

Mile Babić, *A Reflection on the Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*

Theresa Beilschmidt, *Global Ethic: From Hans Küng's Abrahamic Research to Practical Interfaith Collaboration at a Local Level*

Paul Ballanfat, *The Ambivalence of Might*

Desmond Maurer, *Post-Secular Sacrifice and the Global Particular: Abraham, Kant, Benedict*

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion that brought the session up to 13:00, when the panel was closed.

After closing remarks by the President of International Forum Bosnia, the participants retired for an interfaith lunch.