

International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)

**REPORT OF INTER-RELIGIOUS CONSULTATIONS
FOR CREATING EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES
TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE CONDITIONS
FOR SUPPORTING FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR
BELIEF**

A Follow-up of the United Nations “International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination” held in Madrid, Spain, 23-25 November, 2001.

I. Muslim-Christian Consultation on “Religious Principles and Educational Methods for Muslims and Christians to Protect and Promote Freedom of Religion and Belief”, Geneva, Switzerland, 8-10 June, 2002

II. Multi-Religious Consultation on “Recalling and Rebuilding Common Cultural Heritages at National and Local Levels in Multi-Religious Societies in Asia”, Bangalore, India, 11-14 October, 2002

III. Consultation to discuss “Affirmation and Appreciation of the Religious and Belief Dimensions Underlying African Wisdom and Values and Their Transmission in Schools”, 13-15 January, 2004

IV. Workshop in Central America to discuss “Affirmation and Appreciation of Indigenous Values and Spirituality and Their Transmission in Schools”, 19 November, 2004

The International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) project “Inter-Religious Consultations for Creating Educational Strategies to Maintain and Promote Conditions for Supporting Freedom of Religion or Belief” was designed to take up the challenge from the United Nations “International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination”. That conference was organized by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and held in Madrid in November 2001 on the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The IARF had been active as an accredited non-governmental organization in the Madrid conference and had observed how there had been reluctance in some quarters to address the specific challenge of religious education in the context of widespread ignorance about one’s own religion and/or the religions of one’s neighbours locally or world-wide. Religious education can be education for tolerance, the focus of the recommendations of the Madrid conference. It is true that religious education can be misused for divisive caricatures of others but, properly designed, it can be a force for understanding and mutual respect. Along with objective teaching of history, sensitive and engaged approaches to social studies, and self-critical openness to international and comparative studies of culture, it is possible for religious and inter-religious education to promote not only an active and dynamic value of tolerance but to help to protect the fundamental freedom of religion or belief.

The series of consultations and workshops which were organized by IARF brought members of different religions from within and beyond the membership of IARF; there was a particular opportunity to extend the organization’s contacts in Africa and Latin America. The participants and co-operating institutions in the four meetings which are reported below gave generously of their experiences, time and resources to articulate a series of agreed principles and practical proposals designed to carry forward the recommendations of the Madrid conference. There was realism about the levels of mistrust which exist as a result of misuse of religious education not only in the past but sometimes also in the present. Such misuse has served at worst for social division, cultural superiority, brain-washing or proselytism. There was also the conviction that ignorance breeds arrogance and a commitment that mutually agreed and respectful syllabi can be designed together to create understanding and facilitate cooperation between communities.

The choice of the first two consultations was partly determined by the widespread historical and contemporary tensions between two of the world’s largest religious bodies, Islam and Christianity, but also by severe strains within

one of the world's largest secular but multi-religious states, India, and within its smaller multi-religious neighbour, Sri Lanka. The third and fourth consultations attempted to address the neglect and, at worst, cultural genocide suffered by traditional religions and indigenous cultures, notably in Africa and the Americas. Participants in all the meetings were drawn essentially from the teaching profession but some religious leaders and some secular critics also took part.

It is too soon to assess the long-term effect of the meetings or even of the Madrid conference itself. However, there has been a widespread recognition that vague goodwill and curiosity are not enough to create international understanding, let alone reconciliation of deep traumas from the past or from recent events. Deliberate strategies and commitments to eliminate all forms of intolerance and discrimination, based too often on religion or belief, call for preventive educational action ranging from text-book production to teacher training to field trips for students. The recommendations from the consultations and workshops sometimes reflect confirmation of the success of such methods and the need for them to be extended. In some cases the recommendations point to the need to address a problem which has been exacerbated by neglect or legislative or budgetary impediments. The participants in the meetings made commitments to act individually, for example in re-examining their own attitudes and methods, but they also resolved to exercise their civic duties to bring pressure on relevant authorities, including religious authorities.

The role of a non-governmental organization (NGO) like IARF in promoting this process is modest and limited by lack of sufficient resources, but it is to be hoped that there can be a multiplying effect if the experiences and recommendations contained in this report can be used in study groups, facilitated where possible by IARF members at a local level, but, still more desirably, by concerned educationists, leaders and members of religious communities, inter-religious organizations and policy makers. When recommendations are made by a UN conference it is far from self-evident that governments will provide budgets and staff for the UN itself to implement those recommendations. It is the spirit of the recommendations which must be trusted to work within governments and civil society, including religious bodies, and to inspire reforms and activities that promote the conditions for peace and justice.

Geneva, Switzerland

Dr John B. Taylor

I

Muslim-Christian Consultation **on** **“Religious Principles and Educational Methods for Muslims and Christians to Protect and Promote Freedom of Religion and Belief”**

A small group of Muslim and Christian educators met at the John Knox International Centre, Geneva, Switzerland from 8 to 10 June 2002. They first reviewed scriptural and traditional bases for religious tolerance, and then shared experiences of different approaches to religious education and education in other disciplines in order to promote mutual understanding. They noted proposals from UN programmes, and studied draft proposals from IARF for a voluntary code of conduct to safeguard religious freedom. They agreed on the following statement of principles and of proposals for educational strategies to prevent intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief:

“In looking at the promotion of the universally recognized right to freedom of religion and belief in the context of the many different levels and disciplines of education, we acknowledge the frequent failings and misuse of religious education but also affirm that religious education has great potential for preventing intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. We distinguish between:

- a) the teaching of religion by religious institutions or individuals;
- b) the teaching about religions by those who seek or claim objectivity and sensitivity;
- c) learning from religions or religious communities about traditions, values and goals.

“The following principles and proposals attempt to address one or all of these processes of teaching and learning without singling out any single process as particularly problematic or particularly promising; they appear to us to be complementary even if they cannot be always simultaneous”.

PRINCIPLES

- 1. We, as Muslims and Christians, view education as a means of serving the community and of harnessing the potential of every learner so that he or she can find self-fulfilment while contributing to a society where differences are respected and conflict can be reconciled.**
- 2. In teaching our own religious traditions or belief systems to adherents of our own faiths as well as to others we should endeavor to focus on our own as valuable and meaningful in and by themselves without making value judgments on the traditions and belief systems of others.**
- 3. We recognize that self-understanding is incomplete without the ability to attempt to understand others. Religious education and learning about religion must therefore also include a commitment to understanding the traditions of others who share a common space with us.**
- 4. In teaching about other religions we should strive to do so in a manner that is recognizable by their own followers and deal with them in the respectful manner that one desires for one's own.**
- 5. In all teaching dealing with religion we should attempt to combine the value of critical enquiry and a respect of freedom of religion with a reverential attitude towards religion and/or belief systems.**
- 6. All teaching must engender respect for people and their inalienable human rights, as well as for the communities wherein they are located, along with responsibility for our physical environment.**
- 7. To balance creatively the curiosity of learners with respect for the religious convictions of parents in the development of syllabi.**

PROPOSALS

- 1. Even when teaching religion focuses on one's own faith one should draw attention to the wider context of religious pluralism.**
- 2. One should encourage meeting and visiting with people of other faiths.**
- 3. One should ensure that text-books are chosen or designed in conformity with principles of respect and tolerance.**
- 4. It is desirable to promote activism and role-playing whereby one group of believers work on the human rights concerns of another group.**
- 5. It would be helpful to compile a varied list of best practice strategies or models where religious figures/communities or institutions have worked to promote freedom of religion, inter-faith solidarity and educational openness.**
- 6. One should incorporate diversity in the content as well as in the modes of teaching; for example, one should have more than one teacher dealing with a course and should aim for variety in gender and religion.**
- 7. Encouragement should be given to organizing public meetings for encounter and dialogue.**
- 8. One should go beyond the written word in promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief and should make critical use of appropriate audio-visual media.**
- 9. One should develop a comprehensive approach to religious pluralism by involving all stake-holders including parents, teachers, civil society and governments.**

10. One should take seriously the need to train or re-train teachers in the sensitive and relevant presentation of their own and others' traditions (in-service training).

11. There is a need to adapt to different levels and to different capacities. While ensuring that teacher training is accessible and adequate, one should always remember the harsh realities of poverty and deprivation.

12. One should encourage initiatives to mobilize and equip women for leadership in education and other spheres.

II

Multi-Religious Consultation **on** **“Recalling and Rebuilding Common Cultural Heritages at** **National and Local Levels in Multi-Religious Societies in Asia”**

A consultation, held in Bangalore, India, from 11 to 14 October 2002, brought together educationists from India, Sri Lanka and Switzerland. They came from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Zoroastrian and Christian backgrounds, and described as follows some of the problems that prevent cultural heritages from being learned and applied:

“A culture of violence has replaced a culture of tolerance. Systemic social violence is being provoked by causes as varied as unjust forms of globalization and domestic corruption. Religions themselves have been misused and too often failed to practise the values of peace, justice and compassion which they preach.

“Communal violence has often developed and been justified along religious lines even if the causes or motives have been political or economic. The traumas of recent events in Gujarat or Sri Lanka as well as many crises and conflicts across the world show that ignorance of the teachings of one’s own and of one’s neighbours’ religion, culture and history often produce prejudice, stereotyping, selective or distorted historical memories. Such ignorance breeds arrogance and violence.

“Multi-religious and multi-cultural heritages are at risk not only from political but also from educational policies designed to impose ideological or chauvinistic uniformity. History is being re-written in such a way that critical appreciation of pluralism in our cultural heritages is suppressed; the cultural heritage of many oppressed and marginalized communities is in danger of extinction. There can be undue haste and lack of consultation in proposing curricula which do not carry the agreement and confidence of all communities.

“Misuse of freedom of religion by some groups has caused some instances of education to be used as a means of proselytism. Responsible religious leaders and educationists in all communities have roundly condemned this. However problems of proselytism can be controlled without blanket measures which could undermine fundamental freedoms for access to knowledge, as well as for choice and profession of faith or secular belief.

“The phenomenon of religious fanaticism is found all over the world in all religious communities. It may sometimes be explained as a defensive reaction to social, ideological or political oppression or to economic or constitutional injustice. In extreme cases it may result in terrorism and in counter-terrorism both of which can violate fundamental freedoms. Any resistance to fanaticism or terrorism must address the root causes of these phenomena, which usually lie in experiences or perceptions of injustice and marginalization.

“The low priority given to international and national expenditure on education compared to expenditure on armaments could cripple chances to achieve universal literacy let alone education for all. The vast numbers of children and adults excluded by social taboos or economic injustices from opportunities for the most basic education is a formula for continuing and worsening violence and an impoverishment of our entire society.

“The failure to provide democratic, equitable and enabling access to education for the entire population underlies almost every manifestation of injustice”.

The participants agreed on principles for conduct in teaching and learning about religious and cultural heritages and made proposals for education and action to rebuild cultural heritages of tolerance.

PRINCIPLES

- 1. Tolerance should be understood in the sense of respect for and celebration of diversity rather than grudging toleration of differences.**
- 2. Teaching should adopt multi-cultural and child-centred approaches, and should allow self-esteem and self-expression for all pupils, especially for those from marginalized communities.**
- 3. Learning should develop critical faculties of appreciation and rejection as well as social skills of service and conflict-resolution.**
- 4. Schools should have close relationships with the social realities and cultural diversities of their neighbourhoods and, eventually, of the wider world.**
- 5. Education as transformation can be not only an intellectual experience but also a spiritual one. It should help to motivate service to community, nation and world.**
- 6. Education should aim at building cultural and cognitive capital among those denied educational opportunity.**

PROPOSALS

1. Teacher training in syllabus development and teaching methods for new and existing teachers is a priority if new subjects such as comparative study of religion are to be responsibly and effectively introduced. A subject badly taught is sometimes worse than the neglect of such a subject.

2. Simultaneous attention and equal priority should be accorded to reaching those already in schools and those excluded from schooling. This calls for links between schools and surrounding society but also for strategies and methods which work outside the classroom in visits to places of worship, social institutions, museums, villages, etc.

3. Whatever name is used – “religious education”, “education for tolerance”, “values education”, “life education”, “peace education” or “human rights education” – there should be links with other academic disciplines such as history, political science or literature. A coherent and integrated syllabus will show the relevance of religion in society and in all human thought, experience and practice, and will enable critical exposure of misuse of religion.

4. Development of syllabi and curricula must not be left only to politicians or to ideologically motivated subject- experts. A national debate with all stake-holders is required. State governments and recognized educational consultative mechanisms should be involved. The experience of active teachers and the close cooperation and confidence of parents are also needed. International instruments already recognize the rights of children and of parents to access to education in a religion of their choice.

5. Many countries have already adopted “agreed syllabi” which offer objective and sensitive education about all religions and which have been developed by committees of officials, teachers and parents from all communities. Each nation and state should pursue such broad consultation, for example on planning to introduce comparative study of religion.

6. Educational efforts and innovations can be strengthened or undermined by the media. The celebration of violence in any form can erode values of peace and tolerance. Whether in the treatment of international affairs or domestic relationships the focus should be on hopeful and wholesome events. Enemy-imaging and caricaturing of distant or neighboring states or of religious communities, whether majorities or minorities, should be checked.

7. Professional teachers and other concerned persons should protest, if necessary by public interest litigation, against imposed curricula, especially where statutory consultation and sufficient preparation has not occurred.

8. Peace cannot be built without justice being seen to be done. A process of healing can be initiated by rendering justice to victims of violence by bringing the perpetrators of such violence to justice.

9. Symbolic actions such as marches or charitable fund-raising for victims of communal or religious violence should be used to raise public awareness about the trauma of past events and to sensitize against future such events.

10. Public awareness and concern about international instances, both in the past and in the present, of cultural genocide, religious conflict and discrimination, communal disturbance and violence should be promoted. One may learn from failures and successes in other parts of the world in order to rebuild the best of Asian cultures of tolerance, peace and justice.

III

Consultation to discuss “Affirmation and Appreciation of the Religious and Belief Dimensions Underlying African Wisdom and Values and Their Transmission in Schools”

A dozen persons, drawn from educational institutions and civil society movements in various parts of Africa, met in South Africa from 13 to 15 January, 2004, on the Potchefstroom campus of the newly established North West University, some 100 miles SW from Johannesburg. They shared diverse concerns for and experiences of introducing authentic African dimensions into syllabus development in subjects such as religious studies, history, anthropology, ethics and civics.

Ubuntu is an ancient African code of ethics, referring to the “humaneness” of the human spirit. It embodies the generosity, warmth and togetherness that is so typical of African communities. One concept of Ubuntu - “*I exist because you exist*” - expresses the recognition of the value of each individual, the acceptance and appreciation of differences, and the sense of belonging to one human family, thus promoting respect for elders, youth and women, and co-operation and trust between individuals, cultures and nations. The Ubuntu theology of Archbishop Desmond Tutu guided the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, helping to heal the wounds of apartheid by implementing the values of compassion, forgiveness, personal accountability and dignity. Nelson Mandela demonstrated the spirit of Ubuntu: despite serving 27 years in jail, he never lost the African culture of forgiveness, reconciliation and solidarity.

The participants made proposals and suggestions for educational strategies to use African traditional values in promoting tolerance and freedom of religion or belief. They addressed these proposals and suggestions under four headings: government bodies, professional bodies of educators, religious bodies, and community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations.

PROPOSALS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Proposals and Suggestions to Governmental Bodies

1. Most African nations should be commended for having already ratified so many existing UN declarations on the elimination of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, on the importance of cultural diversity and traditional values, and on the need for dialogue and mutual respect between civilizations. However, regional bodies and national governments should be strongly encouraged to monitor the implementation of such declarations and instruments at regional, national and local levels.

2. In particular, African nations should initiate or pursue deep analysis and discussion about the important contribution of African traditional values with a view to their inclusion in educational programmes at many levels. This may involve strengthening dialogue between governmental, professional, religious and other bodies to ensure co-operation and co-ordination and to prevent possible obstruction by extremists or neglect by apathetic attitudes.

3. The international community should be kept fully informed of and challenged by the relevance of African traditional values (such as Ubuntu/solidarity or holistic spirituality) in addressing global crises of economic injustice, environmental degradation, ethical confusion and social disruption. In particular people belonging to the African diaspora on many continents could be enriched by the revitalization of African traditional values, and could be enlisted in their appropriate application in educational, social and ethical contexts.

B. Proposals and Suggestions to Professional Bodies of Educators

1. Educators should be equipped and encouraged to have re-active and pro-active development of syllabi/curricula at all levels of education. Many social crises in terms of illiteracy (not least of the girl child), unemployment, epidemic disease, poverty, violent conflicts, ranging from open warfare to domestic violence, call for immediate remedial measures. The prevention of attitudes and practices of unfair discrimination and intolerance for others' different traditions and opinions must start in the family, school and community. Educators should play a special role in ensuring that sufficient links are made between school and wider society. Children need to be helped to discover and express their own identity but also to understand and respect that of others.

2. At higher levels of education, and as a pre-requisite to effective implementation of the teaching of tolerance and ethical values in the schools, critical and appreciative analysis of the African traditional values, norms, customs and perspectives must be conducted. This will help to achieve relevant emphasis of the positive or affirmative aspects of values. Such values can include the sanctity of all life, the privileges and responsibilities of humanity, the pursuit of peace and communal co-existence and co-operation, the need for honest dealings, and the need for reverence and respect for other people and for institutions.

3. Africans affirm the need for an authentic education which must include the values of sacredness and religiosity as they have been upheld in African traditions. These aspects may be subjects for research for eventual inclusion in the syllabi and curricula of schools and institutions of further education. This will call for close collaboration between teachers at the grass-roots level and those who are in further education.

4. The integration of the teaching of ethical, cultural and religious values can enter, where appropriate and relevant, into many disciplines and subjects. An inter-disciplinary approach of this kind can apply to education

at all levels. It should be encouraged beyond the schools into extra-curricular and community-based activities.

5. People all over the world can learn lessons from those positive African experiences and successes, over many generations, in maintaining, sustaining and developing ecological and social co-existence. Education for sustainable development cannot be restricted to economic or technical solutions, but must include ethical disciplines and motivations in order to share the limited resources of the world, which are sufficient for human need but not for human greed.

6. There is a special opportunity for educational institutions to promote tolerance, negotiated resolution of conflict, and mutual respect through innovative methods such as peer-counselling and peer-mediation, but one can also use conventional methods of games and sport, arts and music.

C. Proposals and Suggestions to Religious Bodies

1. Although religious communities have made and continue to make substantial contributions to education and to the formation of attitudes throughout Africa, sometimes they have promoted exclusive, or even polemical attitudes towards other religions or cultures. Instead of this, they could have an important role to encourage tolerance and respect, self-criticism and openness towards others.

2. In a world where religion and ideology have both been misused to justify violence and oppression, religious communities are conscious that they have sometimes lost credibility and influence. A spirit of inter-religious tolerance and a scrupulous respect for the fundamental right to the freedom of religion or belief, including secular belief, should be strengthened if religion is to prove relevant.

3. Religious bodies, through their leaders and members, have a particular task to advocate and speak out for the application of moral and ethical values in ways which are culturally sensitive and socially effective. There are contentious and divisive issues ranging from polemical proselytizing and denominational in-fighting to the discrimination against women and stigmatization of victims of AIDS. Religious communities need to empower people as peace-makers and advocates for social and economic justice.

D. Proposals and Suggestions to Community-Based Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

1. Freedom of religion and belief is not only a matter for UN instruments, national constitutions, governments, educators and religious communities but it will only be safeguarded and implemented effectively if there is local support. Community-based organizations and NGOs are to be encouraged to promote and give expression to living values shared with African traditional religions such as reverence for nature, human dignity and co-operation, respect for others and self-respect, tolerance and love, honesty and sharing, peace and humility, freedom and unity.

2. Community-based organizations and NGOs need to demonstrate co-operation amongst themselves, sometimes crossing ethnic, political or religious frontiers in their common work for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction. This work may range from formal projects for economic empowerment, health care, environmental conservation or educational advancement to informal activities such as youth camps, children's clubs or women's circles.

3. Community-based organizations and NGOs must seek to consolidate the educational approaches or humanitarian agendas with appropriate cultural traditions, life experiences and contributions of all people: traditional and modern, spiritual and secular, rich and poor, urban and rural, women and men, youth and elders, teachers and learners...

4. Values such as active tolerance and non-violence, including instances where they are drawn from or supported by traditional religions or cultures, need to be celebrated and publicized as the only sure way to dynamic peaceful coexistence. Encouragement should be given and use should be made of all media which promote non-confrontational and reconciling communication.

IV

Workshop in Central America to discuss **“Affirmation and Appreciation of Indigenous Values and** **Spirituality and Their Transmission in Schools”**

Informal conversations to address the context of indigenous religions in the Americas had been started in Geneva by Dr John Taylor, representative of IARF to the UN, during the Human Rights Commission in March 2003, and then, with educational and government authorities, during his visit to Costa Rica in November 2003.

The Mesa Nacional Indigena, the University of Costa Rica and IARF, together with other partners, brought together to a workshop (held in San José, Costa Rica, on 19 November 2004) some 15 persons from indigenous communities in Central America as well as another 15 persons who work in academic research and teacher education. Their objective was to examine the various relevant initiatives being developed, notably in Costa Rica itself, which serve to understand and celebrate the rich, but too superficially recognized, indigenous contributions of this region and to explore the educational implications. The workshop helped to identify some of the belief-based teachings in indigenous traditions which support the building of inclusive community, mutual tolerance, and respect for the principle of religious freedom.

The indigenous participants met separately to hear an evaluation of the International Decade for Indigenous Peoples given by Donald Rojas and a presentation by Oscar Rojas Flores on Unfulfilled Promises for Indigenous Education. Participants made personal brief presentations to share their experiences and project their visions of educational opportunities for indigenous peoples in the region. They also prepared for the discussions later in the day at the University of Costa Rica some questions and some recommendations for educational strategies aimed at building confidence and improving methods in educational research and teaching.

A plenary session, open to students and teachers, was held in an auditorium of the University of Costa Rica. José Manuel Martínez, director of the Psychology Department of the Faculty of Social Sciences addressed the theme of Tolerance in Inter-Cultural Education with special reference to the university educational system. Donald Rojas urged that the workshop would lead to concrete methodologies for educational reforms at every level. The Dean of the Faculty

of Social Sciences, Mercedes Munoz, spoke eloquently of the cultural contributions made by indigenous peoples and of the importance of a human-rights-based approach to their needs. She emphasized how important it was that all universities should win the confidence of indigenous peoples. The representative of the Indigenous Department of the Ministry of Education, Severiano Fernandes, hoped that in Costa Rica there would increasingly be an ethos and education system conducive and fully respectful of cultural diversity and integrity.

After a beautiful musical interlude and a sacred song celebrating peace and the sanctity of all creation, the Vice-Rector of the University of Costa Rica, Henning Jensen, gave an address which welcomed the concerns and initiatives of the workshop. He recalled the indelible effects on all spheres of life of the *conquista's* cultural genocide. A European culture of conquest and colonization was being continued today not only in the invasion of Mesopotamia but could also be seen wherever any country, even a "paradise" like Costa Rica, failed in its responsibility to assume its sometimes dark history.

PRINCIPLES AND EXPERIENCES

1. There is a need for a psychological and educational approach to reconciliation with indigenous peoples but education itself can become a form of colonization or even genocide. Tolerance should recognize differences and there is accordingly a place for a politics of inclusion which does not assimilate but which honours and includes everyone's interests and gifts. Inter-cultural tolerance needs dialogue and discussion but there should also be a radical approach to historical and contemporary injustices.

2. The invited indigenous teachers and leaders together with members of anthropology, psychology, education and sociology departments from the same and from other universities reviewed a large number of projects being undertaken by universities with indigenous communities notably in fields such as health care, education, linguistics and human rights. They regretted that the results of such studies and research were not sufficiently or systematically shared back with the indigenous partners.

3. There is need for a methodology which takes full account of emotional dimensions of mutual respect, self understanding and passing of the initiative to the indigenous peoples themselves in formulating priorities and in drafting relevant questionnaires. Areas of spirituality and religion should be respectfully recognized and, where appropriate, explored.

4. Distance-learning should provide for direct consultation with indigenous communities in establishing what is relevant for their needs. There is need for methodologies which are fully participatory and mutually agreed. A tendency to verbosity and prolixity in the academic world could be corrected by a few well-chosen words of wisdom from an indigenous teacher or leader.

5. A methodology which allows for both physical and spiritual acceptance of each other avoids any assumptions that one's own knowledge is superior to that of one's neighbour. A process of mutual tolerance calls for genuine consultation between educational institutions and indigenous communities. Beyond an agreed methodology, there should be shared challenges of defining positive goals and a common will to make necessary changes.

6. Customary law and indigenous rights must be respected in embarking upon research projects and educational programmes; admission and evaluation procedures should be appropriate to indigenous communities as Peruvian experiments were showing; Costa Rica does not sufficiently facilitate transition from indigenous to “modern” education systems and some students are being alienated from their culture. Schools must be embedded within the local community.

7. Attempts to give a more humanistic face to technology have shown that there are unique indigenous talents to promote sustainability in forestry, tourism, music, etc. and these need to be encouraged. A recent conference at the National University on “equality of cultures” has urged policies and human rights that treat all religions and cultures equally, not least in providing education about minority as well as majority religions and cultures.

8. Experiences in Guatemala show that projects can be re-oriented to win the full confidence of indigenous communities. The interests of the concerned indigenous partners are paramount and should not be sacrificed to academic interests. Improved communication can show that indigenous people are ready and even enthusiastic for cooperation with sympathetic educational institutions and appreciative of appropriate educational materials (but these should take account of technological and linguistic restraints and limitations).

9. Gratitude was expressed for the special courses for indigenous teachers in the University of Costa Rica as well as for many other research projects, despite the fact that they have not always given sufficient priority or sensitivity to the interests and concerns of the indigenous peoples.

PROPOSALS

1. Education should include social studies from an indigenous perspective. Languages should be reinforced not only within “reservations” but across the indigenous communities. Education about human rights should include reference to concrete issues such as respect for intellectual property and protection of sacred sites.

2. Continuing respectful and trustful relations between universities and indigenous communities require co-ordination, two-way communication and regular meetings. There is need for inter-departmental coordination and for the sharing of results, not merely of statistics, with the indigenous partners. Shared budgets might be called for across all the four involved universities in Costa Rica together with the partner indigenous communities. Many politicians accord too low a priority to education in their plans for development; universities could help by challenging politicians on this point.

3. The Mesa Nacional Indigena is asked to join its voice to that of others in advocating inter-cultural and inter-religious contents in educational curricula. A follow-up process should be designed with an appropriate methodology so that each educational sector could feel involved and each of the eight indigenous communities that had been represented in the workshop could make its own agenda. A time and place and agenda could be chosen for another such workshop, perhaps with wider involvement by indigenous educationists from the region. There is need to examine innovative ways in which secular and private school teaching can help re-discover the contributions of the indigenous peoples. An important objective would be to make concrete proposals for curriculum development.

4. Text books are needed not only to explain indigenous cultures to the wider population but also to re-state and reaffirm the cultural identity of indigenous students. Exchanges between the medical profession and “medicine men” should include concrete issues such as nutrition and women’s health and the results of such discussions should be “translated” into educational materials.

5. Distance-learning is seen to be very useful for the in-service training of teachers. Some indigenous teachers have not yet completed their own secondary education; they need new teaching materials and motivational encouragement. Such teachers should not be seen as “problematic” but as bringing great gifts if their genuine needs (including health, housing, language and further education) can be met.

6. Non-formal methods for training of teachers who will work in very undeveloped areas may be needed alongside modern computer-based technologies; options should be offered, evaluation should be flexible and appropriate, practical and domestic difficulties should be realized. At present there is insufficient continuity or transitional assistance from primary to secondary and then to higher stages of education.

7. Attention should be paid to how difficult the transition from indigenous schooling to university study and research can be. Economic and financial difficulties and the lack of professional and vocational opportunities for indigenous students can lead to deep frustration in indigenous communities when promising and gifted students do not return to serve their own communities.

8. Tolerance calls for the art of listening but this can lead to a powerful dynamic for change and for renewal as well as for consolidation of traditional values and wisdom. One should heed the indigenous leader who concluded the consultation with a concise and powerful appeal: “We have knowledge, but you ignore it”...“We must change harmful mentalities”...“We are no longer conquered, but we are still dominated”.

**Issued by:
International Association for Religious Freedom,
2 Market St.,
Oxford OX1 3EF,
United Kingdom <http://www.iarf.net>**

**(Representative at United Nations, Geneva:
Dr John B. Taylor,
L’Echappée,
1264, St-Cergue,
Switzerlandechappee@bluewin.ch)**