

Religions for Peace

European Interfaith Youth Network

Report

Religions for Peace, European Interfaith Youth Network (EIYN)

organized in the Framework of the
Arms Down! Disarm for Development campaign in Europe.

Paris, 25-27 June 2010



Summary

20 participants from different organizations from across all Europe, representing Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths, met in Paris for the two-day meeting of the General Assembly of the European Interfaith Youth Network (EIYN), Religions for Peace. Two years after the Regional Assembly in Rovereto, May 2008, the summit was the key encounter for EIYN members, re-affirming commitment to the mission and vision of the EIYN, evaluating the implementation of the strategic plan (Road Map) and advancing multi-religious cooperation for peace.

The Assembly was organised in the framework of Arms Down! Disarm for Development campaign in Europe. After its launch in November 2009, the year-long disarmament campaign is the common action for shared security advanced by Religions for Peace's, Global Youth Network. In Europe EIYN coordinates the implementation of three projects, in the framework of the campaign. The Paris summit was the main point in the schedule of the campaign's activities in Europe.

The religious youth leaders were joined by: two representatives of Religions for Peace New York secretariat - Ms Katerina Ragoussi, Associate Director, Youth & Network Coordination, Ms Allison Pytlak, Disarmament Program Coordinator; two leaders of Religions for Peace Europe - Revd Dr. Hans Ucko, President of Religions for Peace Europe, Revd Vebjorn Horsfjord, Secretary General, European Council of Religious Leaders. and by the guest speaker/expert in the field of disarmament - Mr. Benoit Muracciole, Member of the Arms Trade Treaty Steering Board, Caritas France.

The Paris summit had two goals: one being the General Assembly of member organizations with a goal of strengthening the network, second planning the future activities of Arms Down! Disarm for Development campaign in Europe. The religious youth leaders evaluated the activities of the Core Group (5-people body coordinating the network) since Rovereto 2008, planned together the future development of EIYN, listened to the interventions on how religions can contribute to peace and disarmament in the world and what is the way youth can engage the religious leaders for their peace actions. In the three sessions devoted to the Arms Down campaign, two presentations by the experts in the disarmament field were heard as well as presentations on current campaign activities in Europe. The participants discussed and planned the possible additional campaign activities, to be implemented by member organizations in the next few remaining months of the campaign, mainly related to the collection of signatures for the Arms Down petition. Until now the Global Youth Network collected over three and a half million signatures around the world.

The discussions of the summit have had many practical outcomes and many important decisions were taken and plans were made for future. The member organizations reaffirmed their commitment to the mission and vision of the EIYN and their trust in the Core Group's role in coordinating the network. One new member was chosen to join the Core Group, in place of one previous member who stepped out from this position. The participants of the summit officially started the implementation of the second phase of the Road Map.

The summit was prepared and organized by RfP, EIYN Core Group and RfP, EIYN Program and Development Consultant, with the help of RfP New York secretariat and financed from the budget of the Arms Down campaign in Europe.



Content and outcomes of the discussions:

The summit started with an opening dinner on Friday evening, 25 June, in a restaurant La Bella Angela, Paris. The sessions started on the morning of Saturday, 26 June, and were held in the conference room of the Hotel Ibis Opera.

Opening session

The session was started by **Ms Katerina Ragoussi**, Associate Director, Youth & Network Coordination, Religions for Peace, who presented in her opening remarks two goals of the meeting (mentioned above). The opening remarks were followed by introductions of each participant and their organizations.

After the introductions **Daniel Barton** – European member of International Youth Committee (IYC) and **Julia Maria Koszewska** – member of the Core Group, gave a presentation on the history of the EIYN, under the title: “From Bakuriani to Paris with a Roadmap in our hands.” The participants could learn from Julia and Daniel about the first regional meetings in Bakuriani and Geneva, during which the European Interfaith Youth Network was established, and about the General Assembly in Rovereto, where the Road Map was created and Core Group – the executive body of the network, consisting of 5 individuals, was selected. Some of the participants of the Paris summit were present at previous meetings of EIYN in persons, and 90 % of organizations represented in Paris were involved in previous EIYN encounters – either Bakuriani, Geneva or Rovereto. The presentation on the history of the EIYN linked the participants – privately and organizationally - with the beginnings and birth of EIYN.

Next presentation was given by **Taoufik Hartit**, member of the Core Group, who evaluated the achievements of the Core Group since Rovereto 2008, and reviewed the implementation of the first phase of the Road Map. Taoufik discussed different achievements and difficulties, in the work of the Core Group:

- **Identifying the EIYN staff** – part time Program and Development Consultant.

Accomplishment of this task took a long time, due to several difficulties and unfortunately the first Consultant left the job after a month, due to problems in communication and other misunderstandings.



The second call for finding a suitable candidate for this position was successful, and a new Consultant was hired with the day of 23 May 2010. **Daniela Malec**, member of the Core Group since Rovereto 2008, decided to step out from the Core Group in order to take the position of the Consultant. This point of the Road Map was then successfully implemented.

Julia Maria Koszewska reminded the discussion from Rovereto 2008, when it was decided that the future Consultant didn't necessary need to be based in the office (it was possible to have a Consultant based in one of RfP offices, that is ECRL office in Oslo). The Core Group decided not to take this option, as it would mean: relocating the Consultant or searching for the candidate only from Norway, where the costs of work and life are very high.

- **Working on setting up the network.**

This task has been accomplished successfully, in the context of establishing the EIYN's firm place in the bigger Religions for Peace structure. The EIYN now has representation in the following bodies:

Religions for Peace Europe, Governing Board (2 seats)
Religions for Peace Europe, Executive Committee (1 seat)
Religions for Peace European Women of Faith Network (1 seat)

The representatives of the Core Group took part in the meetings of those structural bodies. A representative of the Core Group took part also in the annual European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) meeting, in Istanbul, May 2010 and it is official information that youth will have permanent representation on the council of the ECRL, starting in 2011.

- **Facilitating the sharing of information and communication between the partners, building knowledge database.**

This task has been accomplished partially. The Core Group supported production of the film "Hearing the other side" done in Netherlands, by providing contacts to the communities of Muslim immigrants and actors of dialogue. The members of the Core Group assisted senior religious leaders of Religions for Peace network with some information on youth faith groups in Europe. There was not much of communication between the member organizations of EIYN, fostered by Core Group and the work on knowledge database is only on basic stage.

- **Additional activities.**

The Core Group has been coordinating the implementation of the Arms Down campaign in Europe (explained in more detail later in this report). The duties related to the campaign were the main part of work of the Core Group since November 2009 till the summit in Paris.

- **Preparing the Youth Assembly (Summer 2010)**

Accomplished successfully.

In a summary of his speech Taoufik concluded that all steps of the first phase of strategic plan (Road Map) were realized, only one step was accomplished just partially. The Core Group has been realizing activities and tasks not included in the Road Map (implementation of the campaign).

In a commentary to Taoufik's presentation Daniela Malec added that the partial accomplishment of certain tasks were due to the fact that the Core Group consist of individuals who work for the network on voluntary basis, who work/study full time +lead their own organizations, and have limited time for implementing all the steps of the Road Map. The assumption from the beginning was that the Consultant will perform most of the needed activities, but due to the fact that there was no Consultant for almost 2 years, the Core Group was dealing with all the work. Now, when the Consultant is finally hired all the EIYN work should speed up.

It has to be added, in this point, that all work of Core Group has been assisted very much by the European members of the IYC (International Youth Committee)



After the coffee break, the participants heard two interventions by the leaders of Religions for Peace Europe. **First Revd Dr. Hans Ucko**, President of Religions for Peace Europe talked about the way how religions can contribute to peace in the world, despite the fact that religions seems nowadays to many people to be rather a threat to peace (fundamentalist face of religion in the Media etc.). Revd Dr. Hans Ucko said that owing to the interfaith movement, during the recent years the interfaith concept became known more than ever in the world and there was a

hope born, among some people, that religion can in fact contribute to world peace. He said also that peace means deep listening and religions know about this fact, so this is how they can contribute to a more peaceful world. People of religions should take risks for peace, seek peace and pursue it. They should reach to their own religious traditions, language and paradigm and from there talk about peace plus they should put efforts to make sure that in case of conflict religion will not be used as a fuel for this conflict.



The next intervention was given by **Revd Vebjorn Horsfjord**, Secretary General, European Council of Religious Leaders, Religions for Peace, who talked about how youth can involve the senior religious leaders to the peace/disarmament activities. He described his experience of working with religious leaders, who with their spirituality and humility have a lot to offer to peace work, but they don't always have the organizational abilities to put them in effective practice. The youth have

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abilities to help them with that. Revd Vebjorn showed to the participants a few documents prepared by the ECRL, available in a form of booklets/publications, also online: Berlin Declaration on Interreligious Dialogue <http://www.rfp-europe.eu/index.cfm?id=216896>, Lille declaration on a Culture of Peace <http://www.rfp-europe.eu/index.cfm?id=241899>, Istanbul Declaration on Tolerance <http://www.rfp-europe.eu/index.cfm?id=295421> . All three of these documents can be used by youth for engaging others for peace/interfaith involvement.

Session I: Disarmament for Development Campaign

This session was the first one of the three sessions devoted to Arms Down, Disarmament for Development Campaign. The participants could hear two presentations by the experts in the field of disarmament. First was **Ms Allison Pytlak**, Disarmament Program Coordinator, Religions for Peace, who gave an introduction to the campaign theme and global campaign aims. She described the campaign as led by youth from the world's religions that work to engage religious leaders and believers around the world to unleash the power of multi-religious cooperation through shared action. It also reaches out to international organizations, governments, national assemblies and parliaments, municipalities, media, and all men and women of good will. It works towards realizing its goals through education, mobilization and advocacy.

The three goals of the campaign are:

1. Abolish nuclear weapons.

Development of a universal Nuclear Weapons Convention.

Adoption of measures that strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in the 2010 Review Conference to achieve complete nuclear disarmament by 2020.

2. Stop the proliferation and misuse of conventional weapons.

Passage of a global Arms Trade Treaty. Full support and implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

3. Redirect 10% of military expenditure to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Reduction of arms expenditure in each state and re-allocation of those funds to support completion of the MDGs. Implementation of the United Nations General Assembly resolutions that commit member states to disarm and support development.



Ms. Pytlak explained the key terms, described the conventions and treaties. She stressed the fact that disarmament campaign advocacies can be very effective. An example of it is the Mine Ban Treaty - 153 countries had ratified or acceded this treaty, which means mines are not used any more in most places in the world. More information on the campaign can be found on the Arms Down campaign website: <http://www.armsdown.net/>

Second speaker was **Mr. Benoit Muracciole**, member of the Arms Trade Treaty Steering Board, Caritas France. He spoke on The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which is a proposed treaty that would establish common international standards for import, export and the transfer of conventional arms.

It was inspired by Nobel Peace Laureates and developed by lawyers, human rights organizations, and humanitarian NGOs. It now enjoys the support of a growing number of governments (153 States), as well as more than 800 civil society organizations worldwide. Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is meant to be a legally binding international instrument, which will draw together and consolidate states' current obligations under international law. If properly implemented, an ATT would reduce the human cost associated with the proliferation of conventional arms. Mr. Muracciole vividly talked about the campaign promoting the ATT, many high profile people (football stars, famous actors) were involved in the campaign, raising its profile and gaining media coverage. It gave us - the participants – inspiring ideas on how to promote the Arms Down campaign.



Session II: Disarmament for Development Campaign in Europe

This session was devoted to all the campaign activities that had taken place until now, in Europe and other continents. The first speaker was Ms Katerina Ragoussi, who talked about the campaign activities that took place in all the continents, apart from Europe. She started from reminding that the campaign was launched in November 2009, during the meeting in Costa Rica (some of the EIYN member organizations were present at this meeting), and since then, on each of the continents, in many countries of the world, youth have been implementing different activities in support of the campaign. On updates about the campaign activities in Africa, Americas, Asia, Australia, Europe, Middle East, you can read on a facebook page of Arms Down: <http://www.facebook.com/arms.down>

After the presentation about activities on other continents, Daniela Malec – Program and Development Consultant, gave information on the campaign in Europe. After launching the campaign, representatives of organizations present in Costa Rica plus the Core Group and IYC members in Europe, created together the campaign team that met a few times at Skype conferences. The call for submitting the proposals for campaign activities was launched; the Core Group coordinated this process. 3 projects, of 3 organizations were chosen, in a result, to be the activities of the campaign in Europe. Paris EIYN summit was accepted as the fourth campaign activity. The three more projects are:

1. **“Scout for Disarmament”**, organization Muslim Scouts of France. Date: 20-29 July.
2. **“Step Out & Speak Out Against”**, organized by two organizations from Georgia: Youth Network Against Intolerance and Discrimination and Union 21 Century. Date: July-September.
3. **“Dance to Disarm”**, The Art of Living Foundation in France. Date: 19 September.



Project coordinators: **Thomas Gilet** (Muslim Scouts of France), **Natia Tsintsadze** (Union 21 Century) and **Spencer Delisle** (The Art of Living Foundation) – presented each of the projects to the rest of the summit's participants.

Session III: Arms Down petition and new Campaign activities.

The third session, the last one on Saturday, was devoted to planning the additional campaign activities in Europe, mostly in the context of collecting the signatures of Arms Down petition. Arms Down petition ask all governments to make an official pledge to cut their military budgets by 10% and to re-allocate those funds toward development. The petition has its political counterpart in the form of the new United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution (also asking member states to cut military spending.) Collection of signatures is an activity shared by RfP youth on all continents. Signed petitions will be



delivered to the United Nations Secretary General, the permanent members of the Security Council, as well as to Heads of State and Members of Parliament in different countries. Daniel Barton talked about the goal of 50 million signatures and presented information on what is the situation of signature collection in different parts of the world. Until now the Global Youth Network collected almost four million signatures around the world.

Daniel spoke also about the ways of collecting signatures online, as nowadays this is the most popular way of signing the petitions. One can sign the petition on a new website of Arms Down campaign: <http://www.armsdown.net/>. There is a petition to sign on the first page there.

**Your signature CAN make a change!
Please sign the petition and join our call!**

Next, **Lama Azab** – member of the Core Group, spoke about her own experiences of collecting signatures on a paper petition; in schools, during different events, in the streets of Paris. Each of the summit's participants received the paper petition. Lama encouraged everybody to collect signatures; she said all petitions can be sent to NY on a cost of NY Religions for Peace office. Lama didn't hide her disappointment of the fact that signatures collection in Europe goes very slow, in comparing to other continents. Just to give an example – Asia collected over 3 million signatures. In Europe the number is just 11,000. Lama led the discussion with the participants of the summit, on how to change this number for higher.

Sign the petition at: www.religionsforpeace.org

GOAL 1

Abolish nuclear weapons

GOAL 2

Stop the proliferation and misuse of conventional weapons

GOAL 3

Redirect 10% of military expenditure to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015

JOIN US!

Sign the petition online!

Religions for Peace 

Reviewing the composition of Core Group

Planned to take place on Sunday, as a part of fourth session, the discussion on reviewing the composition of Core Group was moved to take place at the end of the day on Saturday, due to the fact a few participants couldn't attend the Sunday session. Daniel Barton spoke of the history of Core Group – executive body of EIYN that was elected for the first time by the General Assembly of the network in Rovereto 2008. The group's duty is to represent the wider European network and make decisions on behalf of the EIYN, as well as supervise and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan. Daniel explained that the Core Group consists of five individuals, young religious leaders, representing different religions. He informed everybody that one person elected to be a member of the Core Group – Daniela Malec, representing Judaism – held this position for two years, till May 2010, when she stepped out from the Core Group, to take a position of Program and Development Consultant. As a result of this the Core Group misses one member. There is a need for electing a new member to join the Core Group. Daniel asked the participants if there was anybody who would like to be a candidate for this position or indicate somebody else to be a candidate. Thomas Gilet proposed the candidacy of **Benjamin Zagzag**, president of European Union of Jewish Students. Both General Assembly and the candidate accepted this offer and Benjamin Zagzag was then elected as a new member of EIYN Core Group.



Core Group members 2010:
(from the left) Julia Maria Koszewska, Taoufik Hartit, Benjamin Zagzag, Nirankar Singh, Lama Azab.

Session IV: Planning the second phase of Road Map and vision for the coming year

This session started on Sunday morning and was the last session of the summit. It was devoted to planning the future development of EIYN. Daniela Malec led the discussion based on consecutive points of the second phase of the Road Map. The discussion was very fruitful and the participants shared a lot of great ideas on how to best realize the goals of the EIYN, how to build the well functioning network.

1. Continuing the work on communication and information sharing, knowledge database.

Daniela Malec started by saying that the work on creating the database was, up till now, on very basic stage. The knowledge database is one of the most important goals to achieve in the upcoming months. **Lama Shenpen Rinpoche**, Buddhist Congregation Dharmaling, said that such database is an essence of what the network should be. The whole point of the network is to share knowledge, experience and other things that one organization can assist the other organization with.



The participants discussed what kind of information should be included in such database, what kind of data should be shared. Everybody agreed that this should be information about strong points of each organization, things that can be provided as help to each other. These are some of the ideas:

- Skills, expertise (like: computer knowledge, website building, technical skills. etc)
- Contacts (in European parliament, politicians, medias)
- Experience in searching for European grants or other fundraising experience, writing the grants.
- Advocacy experience
- Projects (providing info on projects in the subject of interfaith and related for possible cooperation)

Daniela told everybody that there is a questionnaire form being prepared that will be sent out to all member organizations with a question of re-confirming the commitment to the network and providing with certain information for creating the database and a website. It will be based on all ideas given by participants during the summit.

The participants talked also about the system of communication among the network members. Daniel Barton told everybody that there is an EIYN's group on google groups existing already for 3 years; it is used as a way of email communication. The participants agreed to join this group. Other helpful tools for communication were also discussed: Google calendar and newsletter.

2. Realizing the website.

It has been confirm by everybody that EIYN should have a website that would serve as a platform of sharing information on interfaith activities. There was a discussion on what kind of website it should be – more of a forum, where member organizations should log into or website run by one admin. Daniel Barton spoke about a few previous websites of EIYN that were created by different people and existed for a limited amount of time. He noticed that the problem of those websites/forums was participation – it took long time for organizations to register. It was then said that the website updated by one or two admins should be working better. The participants discussed possible different domains and site addresses.



3. Fundraising: Ensuring the sustainability of the network.

Daniela said that fundraising will be a part of her job in upcoming months. The participants shared ideas on available funds and grants.

4. Expanding membership, expansion of network.

The Consultant explained to everybody that till now the membership was based on a contact database from previous EIYN meetings. The network didn't expand, but a few new organizations were invited to the Paris summit and a few others made an attempt to join the network. EIYN is, therefore, about to expand. It has been an ongoing discussion among Core Group and IYC members as to what the criteria for membership are. The Core Group members spoke about the criteria formulated during previous meetings, which set up the general profile of an EIYN member organization:

- pan-European or international based with the office in Europe
- faith-based, interfaith or secular institutions facilitating inter-faith dialogue
- youth (meaning youth organizations or youth chapters)

Taoufik Hartit stated, though, that these general criteria don't apply to all situations, for example in Europe Muslim youth don't have many pan-European representations. For some religions or some denominations of religions it is not easy to find international youth representation. The organizations of national character can be accepted, if they are good representation of a given community in a given country. Daniel Barton spoke about the pluses and minuses of more formal membership. Katerina Ragoussi said that New York international secretariat actually discusses now the issue of membership in Religions for Peace, that it might be paid both for organizations and individuals. A few participants found this idea (of paid formal membership) as a good proposal, but everybody agreed that it is more of a future strategy, and should not be implemented in the present stage of EIYN's development. Generally everybody agreed that the criteria for membership in EIYN should be somehow defined, also the procedure of joining the network should be defined and as such this should be present on future EIYN website.

Lama Schenpen talked about advantages of registering EIYN as a formal organization, structurally independent. Most participants found also this idea too early for the network's development. Most participants agreed that there are benefits of keeping EIYN in form of a network (in fact an informal structure, but connected to the wider Religions for Peace structure).

Closing remarks

At the end of this session all participants shared with the others information on what kind of projects, activities each organization will be involved in the next year. Everybody declared also what kind of actions they will implement to support Arms Down campaign, among their organization's members. A few participants said the link to the petition and Arms Down website will be put on their organization's websites. All participants declared also that they will present the campaign to the other members of their organizations boards/secretary generals. Some participants said they will promote the campaign during their General Assemblies or will organize events for signatures collection.

All participants, members of the Core Group, IYC, New York secretariat and the Consultant expressed their satisfaction with the meeting, all declared it was a successful Assembly and left the conference room inspired for future cooperation and continuing the work for the network. It was decided by all that the best time for meeting again as an Assembly would be a year from the date of Paris summit, meaning summer 2011. Let's hope all the discussed points will be realized by then and we will meet up in a year after successful efforts for making Europe the safer and better place for all people, regardless of faith.



**European
Interfaith Youth
Participants,
Paris 2010**

Lama Azab, Muslim, WCRP France, IYC Europe, Core Group
 Nirankar Bansal, Sikh, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, Core Group
 Daniel Barton, Christian (Protestant), IYC Europe
 Jessica Brown, Christian (Catholic) Pax Christi
 Mehul Dabhi, Christian (Catholic), JECI-MIEC European Coordination
 Spencer Delisle, yoga, Arts of Living Foundation
 Noemie Favitta, Christian (Catholic) Focolare Movement
 Thomas Gilet, Muslim, Muslim Scouts of France
 Samuel Grzybowski, Christian (Catholic), Coexister
 Taoufik Hartit, Muslim (Sufi), Association Internationale Soufie Alawiya, WCRP-Germany, Core Team
 Julia Koszewska, Pax Romana, Christian (Catholic), Core Group
 Lin Lisa, Buddhist, BLIA Europe
 Farah Maiza, Muslim, Coexister, WCRP France
 Daniela Malec, Jewish, Program and Development Consultant
 Alina Marinescu, Christian (Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE)
 Lama Shenpen Rinpoche, Buddhist, Buddhist Congregation Dharmaling
 Lea Sedlmayr, Christian (Catholic), FIMCAP
 Daniele Schmidt Peter, Christian (Protestant), Lutheran World Federation
 Natia Tsintsadze, Christian (Orthodox), Union '21 Century
 Benjamin Zagzag, Jewish, European Union of Jewish Students

Leaders of Religions for Peace Europe

Revd Vebjorn Horsfjord, Secretary General, European Council of Religious Leaders
 Revd Dr. Hans Ucko, President of Religions for Peace Europe

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 Katerina Ragoussi, Associate Director, Youth & Network Coordination