

**Council of Europe 2016 Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue  
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The role of education in the prevention of radicalization leading to terrorism and violent extremism

**Sub-Theme II. Empowering women and the role of the family  
in countering radicalisation and violent extremism.**

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**EDUCATION MATTERS!**

**67 % of the 875 million illiterates are women**

**60 % of all the children worldwide not going to school are girls**

**67 % of all the work hours are done by women, but they earn only 10 % of the income\***

Seeing these figures, I wanted to clarify if we sincerely look for genuine implementation of equal rights and access to qualified education for women as enshrined in the European Charter of Human Rights?

The discrimination and refusal to grant equal opportunities to women, often justified as “god given”, are directly linked to the unceasing conflict of values, a trial of strength that goes through all cultures, religions, and culminates today in a strong raise of religious and strongly misogynist fundamentalism.

There is more than ever a strong need to convert Human Rights into reality and action in our daily life for women and by this consequently for families, so that they can benefit from them and despite a growing relativism towards religious beliefs, philosophical or atheistic convictions.

The persistent lack of equal access to qualified education reduces the knowledge of women and impoverishes the transmission of knowledge to the next generation. As women are still mainly in charge of bringing up the children (often alone), they unwillingly have less to teach to their children (boys and girls).

Confronted with a fast changing world, this can lead to a growing inferiority complex and an unspecific or unconscious fear of the unknown. And fear is known to be the root cause for aggressive behaviour.

How can we expect peaceful non-violent attitudes from those who drift off into violent extremism if we are reluctant to see that the equal chances for women are still not yet a reality in our societies and continue to be the most controversial universal value?

To bring some light in this field, **gender studies** are carried out by different sectors of our society and the matter has been dealt with in religions, but so far they often remain in a specific “tunnel view”. There is a need to become aware of a lack of genuine exchange on so-called gender questions.

Many teachings and practices of religions and schools of thought, especially scriptural statements, beliefs, institutional offices, and authority structures are closely intertwined with and patterned by gender differences, even when gender remains officially unacknowledged and is deemed invisible (to untrained eyes). Most existing social and religious arrangements are considered “natural” or normatively prescribed by religious teachings and thus unalterable.

In our daily life we are often inconsistent and do not live up to the values we aim to enshrine in our legislations. This can lead to a deep disappointment and loss of faith of young people not only in religions but also in the basic ethical rules of our society. Therefore a work for greater gender justice, however understood, requires profound social, political, economic, religious and cultural transformation for **both** sexes.

**In the Human Rights Committee of the conference of INGO** delegates of different religions and schools of thought have started in 2011 to work on a **Report on Human rights and religion**.

**This report became quite long (around 130 pages), and has led finally to a condensed version in form a booklet with recommendations to governments, religious leaders & civil society. (CONF/PLE(2013)REC4) & (CONF/PLE(2014DEC2) & (CONF/PLE(2014)APPI).**

\* c.f. : Maria von Welser, ‘Wo Frauen nichts Wert sind’, page 12-13, ISBN 978-3-453-28060-1

One of the **chapters** of this report deals with the **Human Rights of women within Religions**. We have realised that this subject is so vast and comprehensive that we could only touch it on the surface and that it definitely needs to be explored much more in depths.

During the summer session of the CoE this year (2016) together with Mrs. Anne Negre (Gender Expert of the Conference of INGO) we have therefore proposed and organised a side event entitled **“Are religions a place for the emancipation of women? Progress and setbacks”**.

In order to prepare this side event we have elaborated an (anonymous) questionnaire entitled **“Women-Religion-Human Rights: On the traces of discrimination”** in German, French and English and sent out via the channels of the Conference of INGOs.

We have been surprised by the high interest and number of the responses to the questionnaire and finally by the great number of participants at the side event. The given time was too short, the enthusiasm to continue to discuss was such that we had to spontaneously schedule another meeting the next day and even one more the day after.

Already during the first meeting we composed a **list of practical actions**, and quickly realised that this subject needs to be dealt with on a long term basis and it we definitely need to create a **working group** to be able to continue in our researches.

**The platform for permanent dialogue** amongst all convictions that are gathered here, **proposed by the report of Anne Brasseur in 2011 and recalled yesterday by the current chair of the PACE**, could be a very relevant framework. We hope that it will be set up as soon as possible.

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