

*Andreas Bsteh (Ed.)*

# ***One World for All***

***Foundations of a Socio-Political  
and Cultural Pluralism  
from Christian and Muslim Perspectives***

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rendered by  
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## Table of Contents

Preface .....	9
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### *The Opening of the Conference*

Opening Address, Vice-Chancellor and Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Wolfgang Schüssel .....	15
“Towards New Paths into Common Responsibility”, Prof. Dr. Andreas Bsteh, Chairman .....	19

### *Addresses to the Conference*

Prof. Dr. Mahmoud Zakzouk, Minister of Awkaf (Religious Affairs), Egypt .....	25
Lena Hjelm-Wallén, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sweden .....	31
King Hassan II of Morocco .....	35
Metropolitan Georges Khodr, Archbishop of Byblos and Botrys (Mount Lebanon), Lebanon .....	43
Prof. Dr. Tahir Mahmood, Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, India .....	45
Francis Cardinal Arinze, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican .....	51
Cardinal Dr. Franz König, Former Archbishop of Vienna .....	53

### *The Plenary Sessions*

The Claims of Religious Truth and Socio-Political Pluralism, <i>Christian W. Troll</i> .....	57
Plenary Discussion .....	89

The Claims of Religious Truth and Socio-Political Pluralism, <i>Seyed Mohammad Khamene'i</i> .....	109
Plenary Discussion .....	122
Juridical Structures and Political Guarantees of a Pluralism on the National and International Level. A Discussion Paper, <i>Nasira Iqbal</i> .....	145
Plenary Discussion .....	168
Legal Structures and Political Guarantees of a Pluralism on National and International Levels, <i>Heinrich Schneider</i> .....	191
Plenary Discussion .....	259
Cultural Identity and the Problem of a World Culture, <i>Mohamed Talbi</i> .....	283
Plenary Discussion .....	310
Cultural Identity and the Problem of a Global Culture, <i>Volkmar Köhler</i> .....	327
Plenary Discussion .....	337
Words of Conclusion .....	353
Participants to the Conference .....	355

### *Appendix*

Preparatory Document .....	358
Conference Votes .....	363
Name Index .....	366
Source Index .....	380

## Preface

In May 1997, Muslims and Christians from different continents, from the Far East, from the Middle and the Near East, from countries of North Africa, from Nigeria and South Africa, from European countries and America, came to Vienna. Most of them had already participated in the First Christian-Islamic Dialogue Conference held in Vienna in 1993 on "Peace for Humanity".<sup>1</sup> The topic of this second assembly "One World for All" resulted from the preceding Conference's intensive exchange of thoughts, directed towards the problems of the present as well as towards the future development of our world already announcing itself in several respects. The multifold socio-political tensions in the various countries and on the global level, resulting from the ever more rapidly progressing world-dimensioning of all domains of life waṣ intended to "become the main topic of a follow-up Conference".<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Wolfgang Schüssel, Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice-Chancellor, took over this dialogue initiative from his predecessor in office Dr. Alois Mock and, with great personal interest, wanted to have it carried on. Rightly, the participants and the public interested in it increasingly have the impression that it developed traits of a dynamic, further developing dialogue process and meeting with many expectations in the international public.<sup>3</sup> To a high degree, this certainly is connected with the fact that the majority of the same participants from all continents could be invited for the Second Conference and that they also accepted this invitation. Thus a remarkable continuity in the choice of subjects and at the same time an all the more vivid participation in the discussions became possible, since in many

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<sup>1</sup> In the meantime published in German: A. *Bsteh* (ed.), *Friede für die Menschheit. Grundlagen, Probleme und Zukunftsperspektiven aus islamischer und christlicher Sicht* (Beiträge zur Religionstheologie; 8), Mödling 1994, as well as for English-speaking readers: A. *Bsteh* (ed.), *Peace for Humanity. Principles, Problems and Perspectives of the Future as Seen by Muslims and Christians*, [2nd reprint] New Delhi 1998; in Arabic: A. *Bsteh* – A. *Th. Khoury* (eds.), *Salām li-l-baṣhar: al-masiḥiyya wa-l-islām yanzurān ilā s-salām fī ususiḥi wa-maṣḥākiliḥi wa-ab'ādiḥi al-muqabila (al-Masiḥiyya wa-l-islām fī l-ḥiwār wa-l-ta'āwun)*; 3), *Djūniya* 1997, and in Urdu: A. *Bsteh* (ed.) – M. I. *Chughtāi* (transl.), *Aman barāe insāniyāt. Vienna men munaqida conference men peshkarda maqalāt wa mabāhiss* 30 March ta 2 April 1993, Lahore 1997.

<sup>2</sup> On this topic see also "Preparatory Document", below pp. 358–360, here: p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, in his report on the 1997 Conference, in the distinguished Journal of the "Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs", *Jan Slomp* chooses the title " 'One World for All': The Vienna Dialogue Process", in order to deal in detail with the specific contribution of this dialogue initiative within the world-wide endeavours towards the dialogue between both religious communities. In: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 (1998) 181–185.

ways the results of the first encounter could be built upon. In addition, not a single participant – irrespective of his position elsewhere – took part in the conference by virtue of a mandate or as a representative of his/her own religious community, but could contribute in the discussion his/her own persuasion and different point of view respectively – which in the course of both Conferences was always again expressly emphasized.<sup>4</sup>

Within the frame of the general topic of the Conference “One World for All”, three domains were concentrated upon, which are of special importance, if the “Foundations of a Socio-Political and Cultural Pluralism from Christian and Muslim Perspectives” are questioned. Within the multiple dimensions of the Conference topics, there is, on the one side, the question whether and in how far a socio-political pluralism is altogether possible for Christians and Muslims, on the basis of their claims of religious truth and whether accordingly a togetherness in equal rights and partnership for the common weal is allowed, not only at best in the sense of a compromise with their conscience, but founded in their religious persuasion – the topic of the First Day of the Conference. On the second Day of the Conference, the issue was the question of legal structures and political guarantees of a pluralism on the national and international levels – aspects which, similar to the other parts of the overall topic of the Conference, cannot be perceived in separation from each other, but depend on each other, a fact that was again and again emphasized in the treatment of pertinent issues in the lectures as well as in the discussions. Finally, on the third Day, the centre of interest was the topic “Cultural Identity and the Problem of a Global Culture”, another issue, deeply intertwined with the other parts of the general topic of the Conference, if only we call to mind that religion is traditionally considered to be the soul of culture and that the political relevance of culture and cultures respectively plays a major role, especially in the discussion of the present.

In the present publication, adequate space is given to the intensive discussions conducted with great personal engagement, for which, within the frame of the Conference, sufficient time was provided, since, together with

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<sup>4</sup> Here reference may be made to the statements of *Professor as-Sayyid* as well as of *Professor Mahmoud Zakzouk* in the course of the first Conference (op. cit. [fn.1] New Delhi 1996, 95), as well as that of *Professor Dessouki* within the frame of the second Conference documented here: see below p. 347 f. Thus also *J. Slomp* emphasizes in his Conference report already quoted, “All participants were invited in their personal capacity. This means that the bishops, muftis, community leaders, scholars, professors and others did not, in their formal capacity, represent their respective institutions. This freedom to express oneself was strongly stressed [...]” Op. cit. (fn. 3) 183.

the lectures and the addresses at the Opening of the Conference, they constitute a focal point of the Conference proceedings. In order to present them to the public in qualified form, all contributions to the discussions were sent to the participants; on whose respective interventions they are based. Hence, in the present form, all contributions to the discussions can be taken for parts of a discourse rendered in accordance with the authorization of the respective participants, thus representing an authentic testimony of the multi-dimensional and often very moving dialogue conduct. A word of sincere gratitude to the speakers and all the other participants to the Conference may be expressed here, concerning their co-operation in successfully completing the publication of our common Conference.

As was the case concerning the preparation and realization of the Conference, Professor Adel Th. Khoury was always again, in an extraordinary way, ready to assist by word and deed, especially, once again, in finalizing the texts of the discussion, which were at first recorded in the respective vernacular (English, French and Arabic were, beside German, official conference languages), and had to be translated subsequently, before the editorial work could begin. Professor Khoury will also, as for the 1993 Conference, take care of the edition of the present book in Arabic. Last year, in appreciation of his comprehensive engagement in the interest of the Christian-Islamic dialogue, especially also within the frame of the Vienna dialogue forum, he was given a high award, the 'Große Ehrenzeichen für Verdienste um die Republik Österreich', by the Austrian Federal President.

At the occasion of publishing this Dialogue Conference, a word of sincere commemoration for Professor Victor Tania from Indonesia may be expressed, who participated in both Conferences and died last year. The participants to the Vienna dialogue forum will also keep in mind the living remembrance of Professor Shin Kl. Anzai, Professor Saâd Ghrab and Professor Abdoldjavad Falaturi, who participated in the 1993 Conference and who also passed away in the meantime.

For the time of the Conference, the Austrian National Library again provided two of its valuable manuscripts, which were displayed in the centre of 'Zeremoniensaal der Wiener Hofburg', the plenary room of the Conference: the Cod. mixt. 813, a calligraphic Qur'ân-manuscript from Iraq, from the outgoing 13th century, and the Cod. Suppl. gr. 107, a *Tetraevangelion*, which was written in the late 13th century on the Isle of Rhodes (a copy of an 11th century text). Symbolically they were, as at the first Conference, the spiritual centre of the Dialogue Forum.

The co-operation with the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Vienna, especially with Ambassador Dr. Gerhard Rainer and the Austrian Representatives abroad was once more of substantial importance for planning and realizing the Dialogue Conference. It was decisive in making possible and giving features of its own to the world-wide dimension of the project, but also to the spiritual orientation towards the great issues of the world's present development, without, in the least, impairing the academic independence of the whole project. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs also provided the funds necessary for the realization of the project. The multifold scientific work at the basis, which was necessary for the preparation and evaluation of this international dialogue project, was supported and thus made altogether possible within the frame of the general financial assistance given by the Ministry of Science and Transport to the Institute for Theology of Religions St. Gabriel, for which sincere thanks may be expressed here.

With great consideration and circumspection, Mag. Katharina Albrecht took care of adapting the manuscripts and of writing out the tape recordings of the complete conference proceedings. In the printing phase, her task was taken over by Mag. Brigitte Sonnberger, who equally did her work in the most indispensable and highly qualified manner. Mrs. Gertrude Gruber again proved her capacity in being responsible for all matters of organization and administration and was assisted by Mrs. Marion Reinberger in the extensive travel preparations for the participants to the Conference. Sincere gratitude and recognition are due to them.

Thus it had been a long way to go, for the period of three years, from the first planning and preliminary talks to the completion of the printing, towards this international symposium, which in Vienna assembled prominent personalities from the Islamic and Christian world and whose results can now be communicated to a wider international public. Whoever expects to find in it some kind of Sunday sermons, will look for them in vain. There are much rather testimonies at the threshold of a new epoch in the history of man, at which we all are today, testimonies of seeking and asking and of a responsibility to be shared with others, in a new way, beyond all existing borders, facing the great problems that have to be solved on our path into the future. They are testimonies of people bearing the burden of the hour and who, as believers, together want to contribute to the world of tomorrow truly becoming "One World for All".

Andreas Bsteh SVD

St. Gabriel, May 1999