



Republika e Kosovës
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Ministria e Punëve të Jashtme – Ministarstvo Inostranih Poslova – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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Kosovo's interfaith initiative echoes around the globe

Prishtina, June 2015 - Kosovo's 4th International Interfaith Conference in Prishtina set new highs for global reach via social media, youth participation, gender equality and diversity.

Entitled 'Interfaith Dialogue In Time of Social Media: Enabling Agents of Change Countering Violent Extremism and Hate Speech' the three day event focused on debating topics through a multi-disciplinary approach and developing tools to improve social activism against religious extremism.

Delegates included global faith leaders, ministers and senior government officials, entrepreneurs, international representatives, and members of civil society.

Opening remarks from the President of Kosovo H. E. Atifete Jahjaga, were followed by an inspiring, well-received keynote speech by Rabbi Michael Melchior, Chief Rabbi of Norway.

Kosovo's faith leaders also addressed the audience. They included Mr. Ejup Ramadani from the Islamic Community of Kosovo; Dr. Don Lush Gjergji from the Catholic Church of Kosovo; Father Sava Janjic, Orthodox Church; Pastor Driton Krasniqi, Protestant Evangelical Church of Kosovo; Sheh Lulzim Shehu, Sufi Union of Kosovo Tarikats; Mr. Votim Demiri, Jewish Community of Kosovo; Baba Mumin Lama, Bektashi Community of Kosovo.

Facebook executive Ms. Monika Bickert, continuing high caliber conversations the following day, offered valuable insights into Facebook's policies and practices on reporting violent content, *hate speech*, and graphic content.

Speaking of her pleasure in meeting a diverse group of people from across Kosovo and the region she emphasized the power of using social media to build a better society, saying: "We need more speech and open discussion to raise awareness and promote tolerance."

Continuing talks progressed in a panel of academics, diplomats, journalists and activists: Dr. Debra Mason (USA); Sarah Snyder (USA); Andreas Sandre (Italy); Behar Xharra (Bangladesh/Kosovo); Ben Freeman (Scotland, UK); and Brian Pellot (USA). They discussed ways to disseminate counter narratives in unprecedented volumes and promoting positive role models.

Mr. Duško Marković, Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro, followed the panel and related positive examples of inter-ethnic tolerance from his own country – in order to demonstrate how good relationships benefit not only security, but society.

A panel moderated by Valerie Hopkins, of Balkans Investigative Journalist Network followed, bridging academics, activists and faith leaders in discussions around countering violent extremism, via faith-based

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groups in both digital and local communities. Ian Linden (UK); Prof. Francisco Blanco (Panama); Rabbi Joshua Stanton (USA); Mr. Georges Labreche, (USA/Kosovo); and Professor Besa Ismaili, (Kosovo) inspired thinking around grass roots community leadership and starting real conversations in families and faith spaces.

Next, workshops led by Sir Geoffrey Nice (UK); Harold Hyman (France); Petrit Selimi (Kosovo); Andreas Sandre (Italy); and Veton Nurkollari (Kosovo) took discussion down to the fine details of justice and digital diplomacy in post war reconciliation, political blogging, optimizing progressive messages, and organizing socially responsible film festivals.

A lively panel moderated by Kosovo's investigative journalist Arbana Xharra brought TV commentators and journalists from traditional media together to discuss how news agencies receive, review and report religious issues. Harold Hyman, Antoine Colonna (France) and Norbert Mappes-Niediek (Germany) explained media world realities in response to critical questioning from a highly engaged audience.

The conference was rounded off by Kosovo's Deputy Foreign Minister Selimi's moderation of a panel called, "moving forward, fast forward." H.E Maqsood Kruse (UAE); Rev Donald Reeves (UK); and Dr. Tina Kempin Reuter (USA), provided motivational thoughts and practical suggestions for the future including turning Kosovo into a global hub for interfaith conferences.

Skilled use of social media by participants magnified conversations to new records of global reach for a Kosovo conference.

Trending 7th in the USA on twitter the hashtag #faithsinkosovo, boosted the conversation to 3.5m timelines.

More than 200 Participants travelled from as far away as Bangladesh, Nigeria and Panama to share knowledge and ideas.

The conference was hosted by the Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Institute for Interfaith Dialogue (IIID) with support from the United Nations, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Embassy of United States of America, British Council, British Embassy, the European Union Office, and the German Embassy.

[PHOTOS HERE](#)

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