

The situation today is that large numbers of adherents of diverse religions question the absoluteness and exclusiveness of their own traditions and teachings. Today a significant number of the religious and spiritual leaders see dialogue as an acceptable part of religious life.

But, at the same time, there are now growing tensions in the midst of many religious traditions between the conservative and liberal elements. We believe that dialogue is possible and necessary.

Every 3-4 years in a different part of the world (recently, India, Taiwan and the United Kingdom) IARF's (International Association for Religious Freedom) membership meet in interfaith dialogue, discussions about issues facing religious communities and cultural exchanges.

So, inter-religious Co-operation in a Global Age is possible. It must be based on:

1. Freedom from oppressive interference or discrimination by the state, government or society's institutions on the grounds of religion or belief.

2. Mutual understanding, respect and the promotion of harmony, or at least "tolerance", between communities or individuals of different religions or beliefs.

3. An essential accountability by religious communities to ensure that their own practices uphold the fundamental human rights.

In today's global world of cultures, religions and civilizations, in an emerging world community, innovative efforts and solutions are very much needed, such as solutions of International Association for Religious Freedom.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief.

Language advisor L. D. Diagilieva

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O. Yu. NOSOVA

Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs, Ukraine

AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Australia has been actively involved in peacekeeping activities for nearly 70 years providing military and police personnel to more than 50 United Nations and other peace and security operations. Since 1964, Australian police have served in Cyprus, an island wracked by conflict

between its Greek and Turkish communities. More recently, police officers from Australia have also served in places as widely separated as Cambodia, Haiti, Mozambique, Bougainville and Timor. Australian peacekeepers definitely help create a safer and more stable global environment.

It should be noted that the role of peacekeepers has grown to include a wide range of measures such as holding of elections and restructuring government institutions. The Australian Civilian Police mission embraces:

- providing a stable and secure environment;
- assisting in dismantling the old instruments of repression;
- establishing and maintaining a law enforcement and criminal investigation capability;
- selecting and training new members of an local police service, which will ultimately take over the law enforcement role from UN Civilian Police;
- undertaking investigations and collecting evidence appropriate to the prosecution of serious violations of human rights;
- assisting in re-establishing the criminal justice system and civil administration, including the court system and the jails; and
- building confidence with the civil community by operating impartially to enforce the law.

Civilian police and military personnel remain members of their home service, but serve under the operational control of the United Nations during deployments. On October 28, 1998, the UN asked countries contributing to peacekeeping operations to send no civilian police officers or military observers under the age of 25 years, and to send troops over age 21, and never under 18. The parameters were intended to ensure that only experienced, mature and well-trained people serve as peacekeepers.

The current selection criteria for Australians performing civilian police duties requires skills to work in a chaotic and complex environment as well as a broad police skills base, and a well-developed ability to be flexible and patient in trying situations.

Australian police officers are normally unarmed and in this way they contribute to confidence-building and trust as an unarmed presence has the greatest chance of success in gaining the respect of the local community. The influence and effectiveness of civilian police is based on the moral authority rather than the threat of force. Moreover, much of the work of a peacekeeping operation is known to be done at the level of interactions between individual peacekeepers and members of the local population. Australia can be proud of its contributions to peacekeeping.

Language advisor I. L. Ivanova