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## Media for Peace Peacebuilding Through Interreligious Dialogue

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## Executive Summary

This policy paper explores the critical role of media in fostering peace and social cohesion in the Arab World through the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Amid a regional shift toward peace, openness and inter-civilisational engagement, significant advancements have been made in interreligious dialogue over the past three decades. These include improved relations and mutual recognition between major religions, a stronger emphasis on the protection of religious minorities and growing awareness of common citizenship.

Despite these achievements, key challenges persist. Political tensions and the politicisation of interreligious dialogue often undermine its effectiveness, while a lack of public awareness limits the integration of dialogue outcomes and practical implementation into everyday life<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, media narratives frequently prioritise conflict and sensationalism over collaboration and understanding, missing opportunities to amplify the positive impacts of interreligious dialogue and initiatives.

Based on a thorough review of the literature, complemented by a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants and experts in the field, and a deductive analysis of the data gathered, the paper highlights three pivotal roles for media in peacebuilding: **Simplifying and Humanising Theological Concepts; Bridging Divides; and Amplifying Voices and Initiatives**. It then outlines the conditions necessary for media to fulfil these roles effectively: embracing ethical, constructive and balanced journalism; providing training for media practitioners in conflict resolution, religious diversity and sensitivity; establishing partnerships with religious and civic institutions to ensure accurate and impactful coverage; and leveraging innovative storytelling and digital tools to engage younger and wider audiences.

The paper concludes by presenting policy recommendations that aim to foster collaboration between media institutions and religious, political and civil stakeholders. By further embracing its responsibility as a key actor in shaping public opinion, the media can play a transformative role in advancing peace and mutual understanding in the Arab World.

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<sup>1</sup> In most cases in the Arab world interreligious dialogue is often driven by political interests, or the wish to present a positive image that does not always reflect reality. This leaves a negative impact on people who become reluctant to participate in such initiatives and accuse them of being folklore and PR-driven while lacking genuine change and having little impact on the daily lives of the people concerned.

## Context and Background

Religion remains a profound force shaping the Arab World, influencing governance, identity and daily life. The Middle East has maintained a deep interconnection between religion and politics, with colonial-era attempts at secularisation often met with resistance<sup>2</sup>. Religious identity in the region functions similarly to ethnicity, defining communities and shaping cultural and social structures<sup>3</sup>. Despite differences in religiosity across countries, the Arab Barometer shows that a majority of citizens remain religious, with high rates of daily prayer and active religious engagement<sup>4</sup>. Notably, younger generations show a dual trend of growing religious adherence alongside increasing liberal interpretations<sup>5</sup>. This complex religious landscape means that faith continues to shape laws, education and social norms, playing a crucial role in personal and collective identities. Young Arabs today are finding new ways to live their faith while also supporting principles like equality, diversity, coexistence, and human rights. Given its enduring significance, religion also holds immense potential for fostering peace and coexistence through interfaith dialogue and shared values of acceptance<sup>6</sup>. Understanding this influence is essential for any meaningful discussion of the media's role in peacebuilding within the region.



No other force is rooted deeper in the human collective consciousness than religion and spirituality. Religion informs the individual preferences and identities of eighty-five per cent of the world's population, which in turn impacts institutional and social norms around the world. By ignoring or underestimating the profound influence and role of religion, global leaders diminish its tremendous potential to contribute to positive economic, geopolitical, cultural and social change.

### KAICIID Transformative Dialogue: Catalysing Change for Sustainable Peace

2 Al-Azmeh A. (2020) *Secularism in the Arab World: Contexts, Ideas and Consequences*, translated by Bond, D. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press in association with the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations).

3 Abouaoun, E., and Gallagher, M. (2024) "Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding in the MENA Region: Challenges, Successes, and Future Prospects," in Glorioso, L. and Pond, S. (Eds.) (2024) *Enhancing Stabilization and Strategic Partnership in a Post-Conflict Environment. A Comprehensive Approach to Human Security* (Norfolk, VA: NATO SFA COE, 2024), pp. 111–136; Esposito, J., Muqtedar Khan, M. A. and Schwedler, J. (2004). "Religion and Politics in the Middle East," in Gerner D. J. and Schwedler J. (Ed.), (2004) *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East* (Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers).

4 Habtom, N., K.-T. (2020) "Is the MENA Region Becoming Less Religious? An Interview with Michael Robbins," Arab Barometer, 6 April 2020.

5 Robbins, M. (2023) "A New Dawn for Political Islam?," Arab Barometer, 8 May 2023; Robbins, M. (2023) "MENA Youth Lead Return to Religion," Arab Barometer, 23 March 2023.

6 Payind, A. and McClimans, M (2016) *Keys to Understanding the Middle East* (Ohio State University); CSW (2018) "Religious Identity and Conflict in the Middle East," ForB in Full, 8 July 2024; Lai, B. (2006) "Empirical Examination of Religion and Conflict in the Middle East, 1950–1992," 2(1) *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 21–36; Habtom, Arab Barometer (2020), op. cit. 5.

In recent years, and despite several protracted conflicts, the region has experienced a strong push toward peace and high hopes for a deeper entrenchment of openness and interaction between countries, civilisations, and religions. Correspondingly, examining the development of interreligious dialogue over the past three decades reveals significant advancements at both regional and global levels. High-level dialogues have been convened, landmark declarations on coexistence and interreligious cooperation have been issued, and relations among the major religions have improved considerably. Additionally, the concepts of freedom of religion and belief, common citizenship and the protection of religious minorities have also gained significant ground<sup>7</sup>.

However, several obstacles continue to challenge the establishment of long-term, sustainable peaceful coexistence in Arab societies:

Chief among them is the persistent political tension in the region and the politicisation of dialogue itself. This has blurred the lines between political and interreligious tracks, often leading to accusations that those engaged in interreligious dialogue are pro-Western or proponents of normalisation, serving hidden internal or external agendas<sup>8</sup>. While dialogue may be better received in times of stability, it becomes challenging to sustain during periods of political and religious tension<sup>9</sup>.

Second, although progressive declarations like the Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence<sup>10</sup> or the Human Fraternity document<sup>11</sup>, initially received wide recognition, stakeholders have generally struggled to disseminate these achievements and translate

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7 Driessen, M. D. (2023) *The Global Politics of Interreligious Dialogue: Religious Change, Citizenship, and Solidarity in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press), lists: The Alexandria Declaration on Religious Violence (Alexandria, Egypt, 2002); "A Common Word Between Us and You," open letter by 138 Muslim scholars to Christian leaders (2007); The Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities (Marrakesh, Morocco, 2016); Al Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence (Cairo: Al-Azhar, 2017); and the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, signed by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb (Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2019). Additionally, numerous high level dialogues and initiatives include but are not limited to: The inception of KAICIID upon the 2007 meeting between the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and Pope Benedict XVI with its over a decade's worth of work; the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue in 2023 and 2025; the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions; the Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue; The annual conference of King Hamad Global Center for Coexistence and Tolerance attended by Pope Francis; Pope Francis' visit to Iraq and his meeting with Ayatollah Sistani and 25 heads of religious groups; The Wilton Park Dialogues series, in partnership with The Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies and Adyan Foundation, on Inclusive Citizenship in the Arab World.

8 Interview with Rifaat Bader, Rifaat, Jordanian Catholic Priest, Director of the Catholic Centre for Studies and Media, Founder and Director of an interactive website and social media accounts, 12 December 2024 (online)

9 Interview with Hani Dawah, Deputy Advisor for Media Relations to the Mufti of Egypt, 13 December 2024 (online).

10 *The 2017 Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence*, issued by Al-Azhar and the Muslim Council of Elders, emphasises equal citizenship for all individuals, regardless of religious or ethnic background. It rejects sectarianism, promotes religious freedom, and upholds the principles of justice and coexistence within national legal frameworks. The declaration aims to counter discrimination and extremism, advocating for a society where all citizens share equal rights and responsibilities under the law (op. cit. 8).

11 *The 2019 Human Fraternity Document*, issued jointly by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayeb, advances the concepts of coexistence and common citizenship and urges mutual respect and peace among all people in the world in recognition that we are all members of one human family (op. cit. 8).

outcomes of past dialogues into practical, societal change<sup>12</sup>. The concept of a “dialogue of daily life” encapsulates the challenge: it refers to the routine coexistence of people, sharing cities and streets, educational institutions, workplaces and even family ties – beyond the influence of social tensions and extremist ideologies which have penetrated many local contexts in the Arab World.

Third, in the Arab region, public opinion and societal convictions are predominantly shaped by family and friends, the media (both traditional and digital), and political and religious community leaders. Among these, the media plays a central role in influencing community leaders, policymakers and broader public opinion, both directly and indirectly. This influence has profound implications for society, as media narratives shape perceptions, beliefs and attitudes<sup>13</sup>. This significant impact of the media has not been utilised enough in promoting interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding.

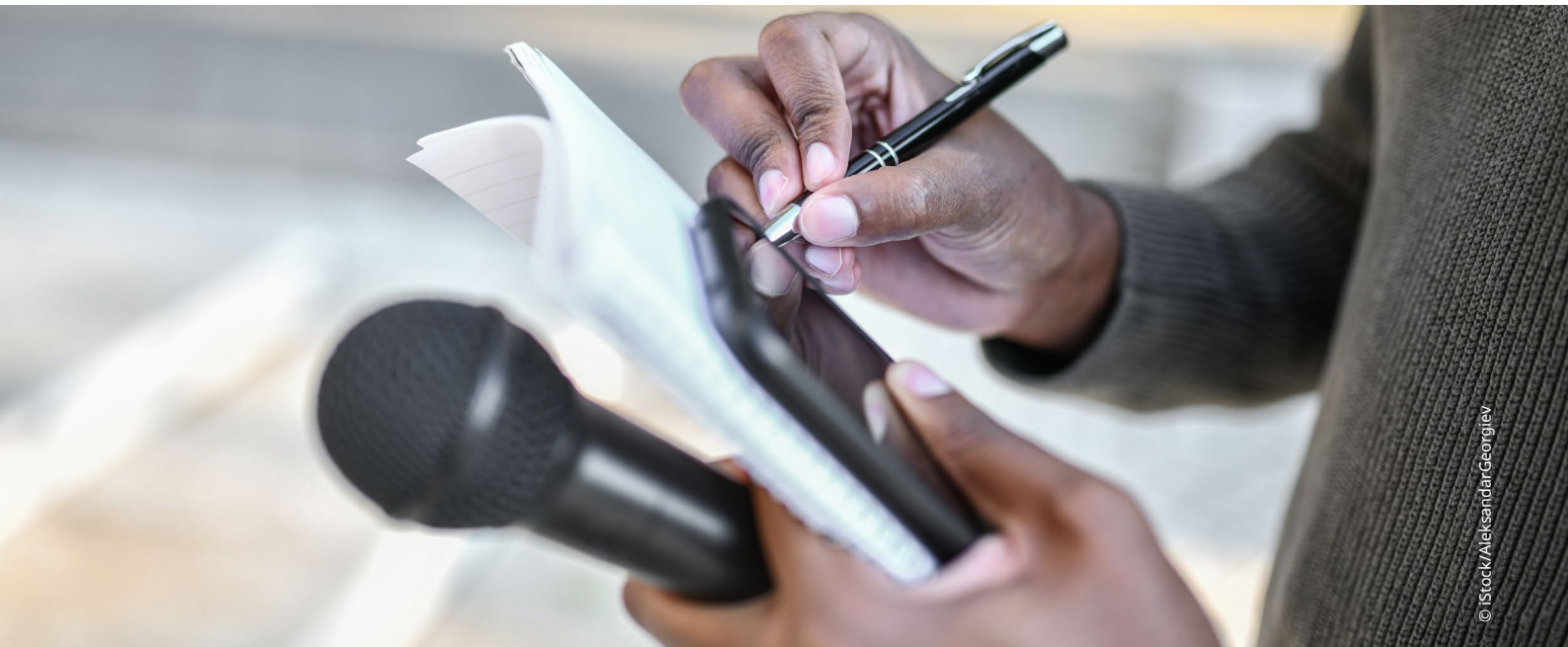
*This paper will examine the role of media in promoting peace and coexistence in the Arab region and provide recommendations to address three key challenges: (1) the politicisation of dialogue, (2) the lack of dissemination of advancements in interreligious dialogue, and (3) the lack of media investment promoting these advancements. The media has the potential to popularise the significant advancements made in political and religious spheres, particularly in the areas of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. It can also provide visibility of practical peacebuilding initiatives grounded in dialogue. In doing so, the media can shape public opinion in ways that support and reinforce the broader efforts of interreligious peacebuilding and coexistence.*

Media outlets that effectively highlight the religious, cultural and ethnic diversity in society have the highest impact on building long-term, sustainable peace. They can translate complex theological or Sharia interpretations into accessible language for the wider public. They can also promote positive portrayals of the “Other” articulated in documents issued by religious leaders and *marjaaiya(s)*<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the media can also illuminate the numerous personal, social and institutional initiatives that transform abstract concepts of peace and coexistence into tangible practices in daily life, thereby implementing and complementing political and theological guidelines.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Hani Dawah, op. cit. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Nakhle Elhage, Media innovator, storytelling strategist, founder of Blinx and other leading media institutions, former Director of Al Arabiya and Al Hadath broadcast stations, 11 December 2024 (Dubai, UAE).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Haitham Al Imam, Tunisian Muslim Sheikh, Director of Al Zeytouna Radio, 13 January 2025 (online).



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## Problem Analysis: Interreligious Dialogue as a Main Catalyst for Peace

Over the past twenty years, scholars have observed an unparalleled increase in interreligious dialogue initiatives worldwide. The Arab World has allocated more resources to the advancement of interreligious dialogue than any other region, establishing itself as a leading force for interreligious dialogue globally over the past few decades<sup>15</sup>.

However, the US Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Adyan Foundation agree that interreligious dialogue has been heavily influenced by – and often negatively correlated with – political tensions in the region<sup>16</sup>. Despite these ongoing tensions, discourse on tolerance and coexistence has expanded, interreligious dialogue has taken on wider grassroots and civic dimensions<sup>17</sup>. The emergence of dialogue as a policy tool leveraged

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15 Driessen, M. D. (2020) "Evaluating Interreligious Dialogue in the Middle East," 32(1) Peace Review, 1–12.

16 Wee, P. (2007) "The Crisis in Interfaith Relations in the Middle East," United States Institute of Peace, 1 March 2027; Adyan Foundation (2020) *Interreligious Dialogue Mapping of the Middle East: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq*; Brumberg, D. and Shehata, D. (2009) *Conflict, Identity, and Reform in the Muslim World: Challenges for U.S. Engagement*, (United States: U.S. Institute of Peace Press).

17 Haddad, Y. and Fischbach, R. (2015) "Interfaith dialogue in Lebanon: Between a power balancing act and theological encounters," 26(4) *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 423–442.

by States highlights a distinctive feature of the advancement of interreligious dialogue in the Arab World<sup>18</sup>. Still, interreligious dialogue in this region remains a relatively young, dynamic, and growing field. Its expansion is directly linked to social and political dynamics affecting the Middle East, including the popularity of religiously expressed violence. Yet, many of the most significant initiatives in interreligious dialogue over the past two decades have originated from the region<sup>19</sup>. These include the establishment of KAICIID in 2012, the long-standing Muslim World League (since 1962) under new leadership in 2016, the founding of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies in 2014, and various institutional declarations<sup>20</sup>. Notably, significant progress in combating hate speech in Egypt has resulted from Al Azhar's progressive initiatives and declarations<sup>21</sup>. These initiatives showcase the importance of interreligious dialogue as a tool for fostering mutual understanding between different religious groups and resolving conflict. They also emphasise the importance of religious freedom and condemn religious persecution<sup>22</sup>. They are complemented by efforts at the international level that demonstrate the contribution of interreligious dialogue to conflict resolution and peacebuilding<sup>23</sup>.



Interreligious and intercultural dialogue contribute to a paradigm shift away from winning arguments and controlling outcomes, towards collective and inclusive decision-making for a sustainable, common good...Dialogue extends beyond conflict mediation and resolution. It also supports communities affected by mistrust and polarisation in finding solutions to global challenges...Interreligious and intercultural dialogue does not exclude identities but rather expands trust and relationship building. In this way, transformative dialogue encompasses universal human rights principles ensuring the inclusion of frequently marginalised voices...Even if issues remain unresolved among the dialogue participants, the objective remains to build sustainable relationships between them.

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18 Adyan Foundation (2020) op. cit. 17; Driessen (2023), op. cit. 8.

19 Ibid.

20 See Driessen (2023), op.cit. 5, as well as Eastern Catholic Patriarchs'third pastoral letter, Together before God for the welfare of the individual and the society: Coexistence between Muslims and Christians in the Arab world (1994); The Arab Group for Muslim Christian Dialogue: Dialogue and living together: Towards an Arab Muslim Christian charter (2001); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Beirut Declaration and Its 18 Commitments on 'Faith for Rights' (Makkah, Saudi Arabia, 2017) and Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, The Charter of the New Alliance of Virtue (2019); listed in Driessen 2023 and Wilton Park (2021) *The Wilton Park Dialogues on Inclusive Citizenship*, Dialogue Report.

21 Interview with Hani Dawah, op. cit. 10.

22 Abouaoun and Gallagher , op. cit. 4.

23 Bock, J., Fahy, J. (2019) *The Interfaith Movement: Mobilising Religious Diversity in the 21st Century*, (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis); Haynes, J. (2017) "*The United Nations Alliance of Civilisations and Global Justice*" 14(7) *Globalizations*, 1125–1139; Brumberg and Shehata op. cit. 17.

The challenge, however, is that these advancements in interreligious dialogue are not reaching the broader public in the Arab World. If religion continues to hold significant influence in the region, and if interreligious dialogue has made notable progress in promoting peacebuilding and coexistence in recent years, why has this not permeated society and become mainstreamed in religious thought?

A key factor underlying this weakness is the limited effectiveness of religious institutions engaged in interreligious dialogue to fully leverage the potential of media<sup>24</sup>. Instead, the media often incorrectly frames the region's political conflicts as religious in nature, overlooking other root drivers<sup>25</sup>. Likewise, insufficient or overly negative media coverage contributes to misunderstanding and mistrust between religious groups<sup>26</sup>. National celebrations of interreligious dialogue days, despite receiving significant media coverage, are frequently perceived by the public as politically motivated or aimed at appeasing the international community rather than rooted in local contexts. A more effective approach is to let interreligious trust-building take its natural course, reaching each group through its own religious teachings and institutions, with support from media – especially religious media<sup>27</sup>. Although the role of media in interreligious initiatives has not been widely studied from a religious studies perspective, clear gaps remain in how it conveys advancements in interreligious dialogue<sup>28</sup>.



Hate speech is practiced by public figures, average citizens, and journalists alike. On social media, hate speech reaches wider audiences and leads to disastrous consequences. There is an urgent need for training on how to detect and counter fake news, and differentiate between freedom of expression, criticism and hate speech. Training on xenophobia, religious justification of war, dissemination of myths and glorifying violent victories is also needed.

#### **KAICIID Needs Assessment for Journalists and Media Practitioners in Arab region**

In a conflict-ridden region, breaking news, war narratives and related analysis often overshadow stories of collaboration and dialogue, reinforcing stereotypes and divisions<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Rifaat Bader, op. cit. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Abu-Nimer, M., Khoury, A. and Welty, E. (2007) *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East* (United States: United States Institute of Peace Press).

<sup>26</sup> Rahma, J. (2014) *"With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility", Kuwaitis discuss the role of media in interreligious dialogue with the renowned German journalist and "Quadrigo" host Mr Ali Aslan,* Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 24 April 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Neumaier, A., and Klinkhammer, G. (2020) "Interreligious contact and media: introduction," 50(3) *Religion*, 321–335. The findings concerning religiously sensitive conflict reporting are consistent with the results of an internal needs assessment of journalists and media practitioners in Arabic-speaking countries conducted by KAICIID's Arab Region Programme in 2021. The needs assessment identified where gaps lie in covering religious and religion-related topics in these countries.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with George Makeen, Executive Director of SAT-7's Arabic channels, 14 January 2025 (online).

Furthermore, as media shifts from its original purpose – to inform and increase public awareness – toward a profit driven model, transformative interreligious dialogue stories are overlooked in favour of more sensational content that drives sales and viewership<sup>30</sup>. As a result, the public remains unaware of dialogue efforts unless they are directly involved or unless a major event attracts the attention of the mainstream media. In both cases, these efforts rarely connect meaningfully with the broader population<sup>31</sup>. Uneven access to media by religious leaders, activists and academics further limits public exposure to interreligious initiatives. The proliferation of satellite channels aligned with specific communal or sectarian interests has exacerbated tensions, often deepening divisions by advancing the agendas of particular groups and emphasising differences rather than promoting dialogue and mutual understanding<sup>32</sup>.

Consequently, the media's potential to support peacebuilding through transformative, interreligious dialogue and to shape public opinion in favour of coexistence, remains underutilised<sup>33</sup>.



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30 Abu-Nimer et. al. (2007), op. cit. 26.

31 KAICIID Arab Region (2021) Needs Assessment Report for Journalists in Arab-Speaking countries for Religiously Sensitive Conflict Reporting (internal).

32 Interview with Nakhle Elhage, op. cit. 14.

33 Interview with Rifaat Bader, op. cit. 9.

## Policy Options: The Potential Role of the Media in Building Peace and Social Cohesion

The media, as key influencer and shaper of public opinion, has a significant social responsibility to promote peace and reduce tensions. Accordingly, it plays a crucial role in promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, which are essential components of peacebuilding and social cohesion within societies and in the broader regional context. This section outlines three key roles the media can play to help support interreligious dialogue.



It is essential to transform the efforts led by religious leaders and public figures, and the declarations signed into training and educational tool kits for journalists. Media campaigns to educate both citizen journalists and the public on the efforts made by national and religious leaders towards fostering interreligious dialogue and doing justice to religious minorities in predominantly Muslim societies are also important .

**KAICIID Arab Region Needs Assessment for Journalists and Media Practitioners**

### Simplifying and Humanising Complex Concepts and Values

Complex theological and jurisprudential concepts, interpretations and declarations often remain accessible only to educated elites, limiting their reach and relevance to the public. Effective collaboration between religious institutions and media is therefore essential to produce content that simplifies these concepts, relates them to everyday life, and resonates within diverse social contexts. Impactful initiatives in Egypt<sup>34</sup>, for example, demonstrate this potential; yet, the demand for media-savvy religious leaders is high<sup>35</sup>. Storytelling, short videos, digital content, key messages for various occasions,

34 Interview with Hani Dawah, op. cit. 10 confirms that the Egyptian Fatwa institution has used media and social media extensively and has created programmes that address critical issues in a simplified way like “Two Minutes” which has gained huge popularity.

35 Interview with Nakhle Elhage, op. cit. 14. This gap is addressed by KAICIID through its programmes. In addition to the Dialogue Journalism Fellowship in the Arab Region, these include Social Media Space for Dialogue, and the KAICIID Fellows Programme, which is designed to connect and cultivate a network of leaders committed to fostering peace in their communities through interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Since its launch in 2015, the Programme has equipped more than 500 Fellows from over 90 countries with the dialogue skills needed to tackle real-world challenges – such as hate speech, communal conflict, and violent extremism.

mobile applications and similar tools have been deployed intermittently and could be further amplified.

*By combining the credibility and knowledge of religious institutions with the creativity, innovation and technical skills of media professionals, such cooperative projects can significantly enhance public engagement with interreligious dialogue and foster coexistence.*

## Bridging Divides

The second role that media can play is to build bridges across divides by connecting peoples, cultures and civilizations. In doing so, the media can reduce tensions, helping to prevent conflict and support reconciliation and peacebuilding in post-conflict situations. Indeed, the media can serve as a vital platform for connecting individuals and creating a common space to discuss issues of public significance<sup>36</sup>. More specifically, it often provides one of the few arenas where individuals with opposing views can engage in a structured and respectful dialogue. While some media outlets may prioritise sensationalism or uncontrolled debates that draw significant attention, credible institutions typically strive for structured discussions that keep audiences informed and engaged and address topics of broad public interest.



The need for reliable sources of news is critical for sustainable peace and social cohesion. Poor journalism can fan the flames of interethnic hostility and provide a platform for hate speech, which in turn can pave the way for atrocity crimes. KAICIID supports trainings and capacity-building initiatives which equip journalists to engage in constructive dialogue and fair reporting, particularly along ethnic and religious lines. We believe that when reported with ethical integrity and factual rigor, journalism has the potential to empower citizens, enabling them to hold their leaders to account and make judicious decisions about their own lives, as well as their communities.

### **KAICIID Transformative Dialogue: Catalysing Change for Sustainable Peace**

To achieve this, there is a significant mutual need for hosting religious and political figures who advocate progressive religious interpretations, peace, coexistence, tolerance and acceptance of the “Other”. This, in turn, will help mainstream and amplify voices of moderate religious leaders and showcase interpretations grounded in shared human values<sup>37</sup>. The media should use interreligious dialogue as a tool to actively counter

<sup>36</sup> Interview with George Makeen, op. cit. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Neumaier and Klinkhammer, op. cit. 29.



negative stereotypes and foster peace between diverse religious communities<sup>38</sup>. A notable example is Sat7, a major Arabic-language Christian TV station, which avoids confrontational discourse or proselytising, and instead emphasises the societal values of the Christian faith. This has allowed Sat7 to successfully reach audiences who share these values regardless of their religion<sup>39</sup>.

Another example is the programme “Sa’at Mahabba” (An Hour of Love), presented by Dr. Amer Al-Hafi on Roya TV in Jordan. The programme addresses social, ethical, and spiritual issues that reflect people’s concerns about enlightened Islamic thought and its spiritual values. It discusses popular beliefs free from extremism, emphasising shared human values and promoting dialogue among followers of different religions and cultures.

*In this context, the media possesses both the power and the responsibility to challenge extremist narratives, stereotypes and hate speech<sup>40</sup>. Media professionals and institutions should be aware of the social responsibility they hold and should cultivate a culture of inclusivity, dialogue and acceptance.*

38 Abu-Nimer et. al. op. cit. 26; Abouaoun and Gallagher op. cit. 4.

39 Interview with George Makeen, op. cit. 31.

40 Ibid.

In today's decentralised and highly visible public discourse, journalists and editors bear a crucial duty to clarify issues, provide alternative opinions and educate their audiences locally and globally<sup>41</sup>. Through documentaries, talk shows, articles and social media campaigns, the media can spotlight progressive values and interpretations, bringing them into the mainstream. They can also discredit stereotypical hate speech with valid and credible counter-arguments. This not only promotes understanding but also normalises diversity as a societal strength, paving the way for sustainable peace and mutual respect in multicultural and multireligious societies.

In fact, this dynamic establishes media and interreligious dialogue practitioners as natural and strategic partners in promoting the core values of peace, coexistence and acceptance, and in highlighting commonalities. Together, they can combat hate speech, stereotypes, prejudice and tolerance for violence. Such partnerships need not remain rhetorical or conceptual but can translate into tangible practices with real-world impacts.

## Amplifying Voices and Highlighting Initiatives

Greater media focus should be directed toward initiatives that foster connections across religious, sectarian, ethnic and political divides. The media can play an increasingly valuable role by airing programmes that highlight local interfaith activities. Such efforts could have significant ripple effects, positively influencing the Arab region<sup>42</sup> as a tool to mitigate conflict and reduce social tensions.

*Indeed, a more active role by the media could have a significant effect on interreligious initiatives in the Arab Region, especially through supporting and mobilising collaboration and tolerance for religious differences.*

If the media is involved in advertising, shows and documentaries on interreligious initiatives, a larger portion of the public could be reached<sup>43</sup>.

Reciprocally, receiving the necessary coverage and support from media institutions will empower local peacebuilding initiatives, improve their reach and impact, while also facilitating an exchange of ideas and a mutual learning process between organisations in different regions and countries.

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41 Abu-Nimer et. al. op. cit. 26.

42 Smock, D. R. (2003) *Building Interreligious Trust in a Climate of Fear: An Abrahamic Triologue* (United States: United States Institute of Peace).

43 Interview with Rifaat Bader, op. cit. 9.

## Policy Recommendations

Based on the above research and analysis, and triangulating these findings with the available literature, several key insights emerge. These are further informed by recommendations from a joint session<sup>44</sup> between members of KAICIID's Dialogue Journalism Fellowship and the Steering Committee for the Interreligious Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation (IPDC). The following recommendations are divided by stakeholder group:



### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEDIA

1. **Raise awareness among media institutions** and professionals about their social responsibility, the influence they exert on public opinion and public policy, and the importance of using interreligious dialogue as an influential tool for promoting peacebuilding and coexistence.
2. Organise **discussion sessions for media practitioners** on advancements in interreligious dialogue, in order to sensitise them to these issues and enable them to engage with diverse networks, amplifying their voices.
3. Provide **capacity building** opportunities for media practitioners to enable them to engage effectively with interreligious dialogue, navigating debates, discussions and reporting in a purposeful and informed manner.
4. Increase **media coverage of local initiatives** that promote interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, highlighting their positive impact on local communities and everyday life.
5. Provide **a dedicated media space** for constructive dialogues and debates that uphold journalism ethics and avoid hate speech and fuelling tensions.
6. Promote **ethical journalism** by encouraging media institutions to invest in continuous training, strengthen internal accountability mechanisms and collaborate with independent fact-checkers to foster responsible reporting that counters misinformation, reduces media bias, combats hate speech and enhances public trust.
7. Provide **training on conflict resolution and mediation** for journalists and media professionals to strengthen their impartiality, prevent the escalation of tensions and enhance their ability to report ethically and constructively on sensitive issues.

<sup>44</sup> The joint session was held from 26 to 29 April 2025 in Amman, Jordan.



### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

1. Organise **regular meetings** with journalists to build mutual understanding and trust, fostering positive engagement that can be reflected in their reporting.
2. Appoint or include **media communication specialists** within religious institutions to facilitate interaction and effective communication with media professionals.
3. **Utilise storytelling and other modern media technologies**, to simplify complex interreligious dialogue concepts, making them more accessible and relevant to broader and younger audiences.
4. Provide **awareness sessions and capacity building** for religious leaders to strengthen their ability to interact with media in a more dynamic way, and to use modern media tools effectively.



### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL INVOLVED STAKEHOLDERS

1. Encourage a **multistakeholder approach** to peacebuilding – particularly by engaging religious institutions and the media – to foster informed and inclusive decision-making and public policies, strengthen public trust and advance social cohesion.
2. Foster **networking and continuous communication** among diverse stakeholders to develop innovative approaches and spaces that engage the public through mass media, joint initiatives and common action plans.
3. Advocate for media **policies, guidelines and laws** that align with the vision of fostering peacebuilding and coexistence and combating hate speech, incitement to violence and the promotion of stereotypes.

## Conclusion

The role of media in fostering peacebuilding and coexistence in the Arab region through interreligious dialogue is both essential and transformative. While significant progress has been made in advancing interfaith understanding and coexistence, challenges such as political tensions, lack of public dissemination and media sensationalism continue to hinder widespread engagement.

By embracing ethical journalism and amplifying constructive narratives that highlight religious and cultural diversity, media institutions can help normalise interreligious dialogue and foster a culture of peace. Collaboration among media professionals, religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society is essential to ensure that the values of mutual respect, coexistence and common citizenship reach the broader public, strengthening social cohesion and resilience.

