the love of God, who wished to be incomparably close to us in Jesus Christ, a reality. We can turnthis love into a reality when we are ready to recognise the person that we are talking with as our neighbour. What we need for a heart which is open to encounters like this is strength, the strength that comes through prayer and the conviction that it is the spirit of God which works with us in the pluralist society of Europe.

Religious Pluralism, Freedom of Religion, and Responsibilities of State, Society and Religious Communities

Ingeborg Gabriel

It is an honour as well as a pleasure to participate in and speak at this Austrian-Indonesian dialogue conference which – like the two previous conferences in 2009 and 2010 – is to promote mutual knowledge and better understanding between our countries and religious communities. In size as well as in religious composition our countries are rather different. Indonesia has about 237 million citizens whereas Austria counts a mere 8 millions. With regard to religious affiliation an estimated 88% of Indonesians are Muslims, 9% are Christians (of which 6% are Protestants, and only 3% are Catholics). In Austria we have about 78% of Catholics, 4% Protestants, 4% Orthodox and 5% Muslims, with the rest belonging to small religious groups or being without any denomination. But these figures also reflect similarities: in both countries there is a strong majority religion, and there are various religious minorities. What is even more important: we live in a globalized world and our official consultations as well as our personal exchanges at the side of this conference should lead us to a better understanding of which direction our societies, our states and our legal systems are to move in a more and more interconnected world.

This interconnectedness – commonly called globalization – turns out to be a formidable challenge as well as an opportunity for each and every country and indeed for every human being around this globe. In this time it affects practically everybody in one way or another. For those who are able to actively contribute to shaping developments and those of us, who can and must take decisions with regard to public policies and are multiplicators in terms of public opinion, be it as professors or as journalists – this carries a formidable responsibility before men as well as before God and I therefore consider such meetings to be of great importance.

It is no exaggeration to say that never before in human history have the stakes been so high. The world has become one single space. Technical innovations introduced during the past two to three decades such as the internet and e-mail, led to global economic integration. The globalization process, however, has far-reaching effects not only in economics, but also in all other aspects of life, including politics, culture and religion.

It is thus no longer possible to see the development in one society isolated from that in others, there is no more chance for a splendid isolation. Cutting the ties with others has become practically impossible but at the immensely high cost of grave political suppression of all those who want to communicate with the outside world. In other words isolation today can only be brought about by a form of totalitarianism, which nobody can want.

What does that mean with regard to the theme of our encounter: Religious pluralism, freedom of religion and the responsibility of the state, the society and the religious communities?

Religious pluralism is first of all a simple fact in a globalized world. It is growing in practically all societies around the globe because of migration, be it between or within or between nations, whereby internal migration (e. g., to cities) plays as great a role as international migration. Despite all the differences existing between Austria and Indonesia there is – as mentioned above – the similarity that the long-time majority religion has now to cope with religious change, which is taking place faster in Austria and more slowly in Indonesia – but also there, due to growing prosperity, new migrant groups with religions different from that of the traditional majorities will increasingly appear.

In a situation, however, where religious pluralism is a fact brought about by mobility, the right to religious freedom as a civil right constitutes the only way to legally guarantee non-discrimination for large groups of the population and to make them full citizens. It is the responsibility of the state to create the preconditions for this equality of believers of all religions or world views and thus to guarantee social peace. The basis of the modern state is not a particular religion but a constitution, which gives equal rights to all citizens.

At this point I would like to raise three questions concerning the role of religious communities in a pluralist society, which might guide our discussions during these next two days.

1. The right to religious freedom has as its aim the creation of free spaces for active engagement of the religious communities as well as individual believers in a society and thus further their civil engagement. In Austria those religious communities officially recognized by the state are actively supported, that is to say Austria has a cooperative model of the cooperation of

religious communities and the state. The basic idea behind this is that religious communities make a moral, social and public contribution to the common good of all citizens and are therefore of importance to the state. In other words: We believe that the state as well as the society depend on an active engagement of religions in the public space. Civil freedom rights are to be used responsibly by the believers of the religious communities, e. g., they are not supposed to be passive bystanders but active civil actors co-responsible for social peace and harmony.

2. This active and responsible engagement of religious communities in a multi-religious and multicultural society requires that these communities have a positive attitude vis-à-vis the pluralist state and human rights including the right to religious freedom. A glance at history as well as at the present situation shows that this is anything but obvious and easy. Individual religions have tended throughout all of history, and still tend to see their truth as absolute, identifying it with the common good and demanding that their religious view be privileged above all others. This is not the place to go into detail as to how this important theological as well as political question is to be tackled. This will be at the heart of our conference. But it is certainly one of the big challenges of our time to bring the religious traditions into a positive relationship with the modern state and its constitutional rights, among them the right to religious freedom as laid down in the international legal provisions based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is not only a key question for each particular state, but also for the religious communities themselves. Their

passive withdrawal into religious subcultures or even worse their active opposition to the pluralist state and equal rights for all religions invariably proves harmful to the society and the state, and in the long run also for the religious communities themselves. Only on the basis of a theologically well-founded acceptance of the pluralist state can their leaders also voice valid criticism at social and political shortcomings which is needed for a vibrant civil society as the safeguard of social development.

3. Therefore it is a great responsibility for all those who act and speak in public including religious leaders to actively support persons and institutions who engage themselves in promoting harmony between the religions and social peace. This can and should be done in different ways. Interreligious dialogue at the level of different institutions of a society (schools, universities, civil institutions) is a formidable means of achieving this aim and fostering a better understanding and give a living example that the believers of different other religions can live together in peace, and that encounters between them can be enriching and inspiring for one's own faith. Cooperation in the fields of social action so as to further good human life in the society is also a promising way to improve interreligious relations. Thus an intellectual dialogue, but also one of practical means has to be brought into all areas where religions carry responsibility in civil society: in schools and universities where the world view of the next generation is formed; in the humanitarian field, where cooperation may help to reduce prejudice and lead to more effectiveness; in the field of public opinion, where it should be shown that good relations between

> religious communities do not lead to a general erosion of one's religious belief but may indeed strengthen it. This has also been our experience at the Vienna Christian-Muslim Summer University during the past few years, to cite but one example. This project of Vienna University supported financially by the Ministry of Science gives students from Austria and Muslims as well as Christians from all around the world the opportunity for three weeks to live together and study their respective religions as well as international ethical and legal questions.[1]

There will be opposition to such a programme – because it is new and some people may be afraid that their faith may be diluted, some may simply prefer intolerance or even feel hatred vis-à-vis the people of other religions, and yet others will continue to make religion part of political games. In a time like this it is of great importance that wherever possible **an alliance of the moderate of all faith traditions** is promoted, which furthers dialogue in all areas. This holds particularly true of the interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims who with more than three billion believers represent more than half of the population of the globe. If the believers of these two religions do not find ways and means to improve their relationship which has been notoriously bad in history they will have failed their duty before men and also before God. On the other hand, if positive relations between them are established this will be a sign of hope for all and lead to effective cooperation in the field of social activities which can greatly improve the situation of today's world. In this sense I am looking forward to our further deliberations and thank those who organized this event.

1 For further information cf. www.vicisu.com