

# Catalogue of Interreligious Council of Albania







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## Interreligious Council of Albania

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## ABOUT THE INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA (IRCA)

The Interreligious Council of Albania was established on October 22, 2007 by the four leaders of the traditional religious communities in Albania, Haji Selim Muça (head of the Muslim community of Albania), His Beatitude Anastasios Yannoulatos (Archbishop of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania), Monsignor Rrok Mirdita (head of the Catholic Church of Albania), and Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi (leader of the Bektashi World Headquarter). At the meeting of the Board of Presidency on October 22, 2018, full membership of the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania was approved, making it the fifth religious community of IRCA.

The Interreligious Council of Albania is registered in the Tirana District Court as a non-profit, non-governmental, non-political, independent, and non-membership centre that exercises its activity independently of state bodies and interests.

The founding ceremony of the IRCA was organised in the presence of the then president of Albania, Prof Bamir Topi, who said: "It (IRCA) marks the institutionalization of

interfaith tolerance in Albania. This is our common value and our rare virtue, which we shall not only export wherever we can, but shall gladly share it with other countries and peoples around the world. That is why I am here today, not only to celebrate the opening of a Council so a necessary and useful for the progress of inter-religious relations in our country but also to assure you of my unwavering personal and institutional support for this valuable and significant undertaking in service of peace, well-being, coexistence and interfaith tolerance."

In the Council's promotional activity, clerics from all religious faiths praised the Council as an organ that will coordinate activities on problems of coexistence between religious faiths at regional level.

During the opening ceremony (2007), the head of the Muslim Community of Albania, H. Selim Muça, said that "behaviour towards faiths is not an attitude or assessment of competition or dominance, but a relationship of coexistence in service of society."

For the head of the Orthodox Church Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Everyone, Christians and Muslims, must work for coexistence as it promotes social progress. Forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be products of a political factor as religious communities are irreplaceable."





During these years, in addition to participation in several international conferences, the Interreligious Council of Albania has often released press statements on common issues in the interest of society and in defence of universal values as well for the promotion of interfaith dialogue.

On October 22, 2018, the top leaders of religious communities in Albania gathered at the headquarters of the Muslim Community of Albania, where important decisions were taken regarding the proper functioning of the Interreligious Council of Albania and some changes in its statute.

The meeting was attended by H. Skënder Bruçaj, head of the Muslim Community of Albania, His Beatitude Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, Monsignor George Frendo, president of the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Albania, H. Dede Edmond Brahimaj, leader of the Bektashi World Headquarter, and Pastor Ylli Doçi, president of the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania.

During this meeting, in addition to statutory changes, several decisions were taken with regard to some changes in the institutional governing aspect of the Interreligious Council, which is composed of the Board of Presidency, the Executive Board and the Secretary General.

The highest decision-making body of the IRCA is the Board of Presidency, which

consists of the leaders of religious communities, participants of the Centre; meanwhile, the Executive Council consists of two representative members from each community.

The Chairman of the Board of Presidency has a one-year term. Chairmanship of the Board of Presidency rotates among the heads of religious communities, which was determined for a five-year period (2019-2024) in the October 2018 meeting. Secretary General was elected Dr. Genti Kruja.

Under the statute, in the event of change of the chairman of a religious community, the new chairman is automatically a member of the Council of Presidency. After the March 2019 elections in the Muslim Community of Albania, the new head of MCA, H. Bujar Spahiu, is also a member of the Council of Presidency of IRCA, which was confirmed at the IRCA meeting of April 16, 2019.

The mission of the Interreligious Council of Albania is to promote interfaith dialogue and harmony through joint projects and activities.

On October 25, 2018, the Interreligious Council of Albania was awarded the "Sergio Vieira De Mello" prize in Krakow, Poland. In the prize-giving ceremony, the prize was awarded to the five heads of the religious communities in Albania for "Interfaith Brotherhood in Albania". The prize "Sergio Vieira De Mello" is awarded annually to individuals or personalities who represent causes for the good of the society.





IRCA is a full member of the international organisation "Religions for Peace" based in New York, USA.

## PURPOSE

**The Interreligious Council of Albania** is a voluntary association of religious communities, whose main purpose is:

1. To promote knowledge, values and principles between communities, which are related to building a peaceful and just society in Albania.
2. To promote a social, cultural and professional model for religious communities in Albania.
3. To integrate religious communities in social life discussing and giving opinions on areas of common interest and concern.
4. To plan and implement joint action programs based on common moral commitments in Albania.

5. Participation and involvement of the religious community in the decision-making on issues related to their rights, promoting respect for the unique traditions and differences in belief and action.

6. These goals shall be achieved through programs, projects and other activities, which are based on the participation and involvement of the members of traditional religious communities in Albania, decision-making and implementation of projects as an essential step for participation and equal opportunities for these communities in Albanian society.

## AREAS OF ACTIVITY

In accordance with the goals of the Centre, areas of activity are:

1. Identifying existing parameters of mutual social cooperation and determining ways and methods that lead to the approach and solution of problems related to it through organisation of research studies, surveys, questionnaires, and so on.
2. Investigating and identifying violations of the rights of the individual or religious groups for integration and harmonious interaction in society.





3. Preparing strategies that will enable the creation of contemporary advanced concepts in favour of the development and integration into society of the individuals and groups of traditional religious communities.
4. Providing multidisciplinary assistance: psychological, social, judicial, economic, and so on, for the support of individuals and groups of traditional religious communities, who suffer dysfunctions caused by lack of integrity, integration and social development.
5. Cooperating and exchanging experience with reliable partners: organisations, governmental and non-governmental institutions, private and legal persons, local or

foreign, as well as with such organizations from different countries of the world, for the implementation of projects to help achieve its goals and objectives.

6. Publishing auxiliary materials, alone or in cooperation with other institutions as defined in the statute.
7. Helping groups of traditional religious communities through trainings, seminars and conferences by establishing professional structures in order to develop their knowledge about all areas.

All actions of the Centre can be carried out in cooperation with relevant state agencies as well as international and intergovernmental organisations.

**Governing bodies,  
their functioning and competencies**





## COUNCIL OF PRESIDENCY

Under the statute, the highest decision-making body of the Interreligious Council of Albania Centre is the Council of Presidency, which is composed of the leaders of the religious communities, participants of the Centre. It meets no less than twice a year and in case of emergencies.

The Council of Presidency appoints the Chairman of the Board of Presidency on a one-year rotating basis. At the October 2018 meeting, the following rotation was determined:

- For year 2019, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania
- For year 2020, the Catholic Church of Albania
- For year 2021, the Bektashi Order
- For year 2022, the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania
- For year 2023, the Muslim Community of Albania

The Council of Presidency is chaired by the head of the community holding the rotating presidency. Thus, for year 2019 chairperson of IRCA was his Beatitude Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, while for year 2020, the Board of Presidency is chaired by Monsignor George Frendo, President of the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Albania.

The chairman of the Council of Presidency represents IRCA in relations with third parties, signs every act that comes out of the board's meetings, convenes meetings of the Council, hears reports from the Secretary General and executive staff, and authorizes other persons to perform procedural actions in courts or other state bodies.

The Council of Presidency elects by vote the Secretary General and the financier proposed by the Chairperson. The Board runs all the activities of the Council, determines the concrete directions of work and approves the projects of the Council and project funding priorities.

### **The Board of Presidency of the Interfaith Council of Albania is composed of the heads of the five religious communities:**

1. **H. Bujar Spahiu**, Chairman of the Muslim Community of Albania
2. **His Beatitude Anastasios Yannoulatos**, Archbishop of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania
3. **Monsignor George Frendo**, President of the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Albania
4. **H. Dede Edmond Brahimaj**, Head of Bektashi World Headquarter
5. **Pastor Ylli Doçi**, President of the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania



**H. Bujar Spahiu**

**H. Bujar Spahiu** was born on February 26, 1976 in Kukës.

After completing secondary education in school "Lidhja e Prizrenit" in Kolesjan, he joined the first contingent of students who were sent to study in Turkey in 1992 by the Muslim Community of Albania.

In 1996, he graduated from the Beykoz Madrasah in Istanbul, Turkey.

He completed his undergraduate and postgraduate theological studies at Ezher University in Cairo, Egypt, in 2003 with a degree in Tafsir (interpretation of the Qur'an).

H. Bujar Spahiu has contributed for a long time in the Muslim Community of Albania (MCA), where he served as Director of Education from 2006 to 2009, and as vice-chairman of this institution from 2009 to 2019.

H. Bujar Spahiu has participated and represented the Muslim Community in several important meetings, different organisations, conferences, and national and international symposia.

He has also been engaged in teaching at university and madrasas of the Muslim Community of Albania.

Mr. Spahiu is married and has two children, a son and a daughter.





**His Beatitude  
Anastas Yannoulatos**

**His Beatitude Anastasios Yannoulatos** - Chairman of the Council of Presidency for the period from October 01, 2018 to December 31, 2019.

His Beatitude Anastasios Yannoulatos was born on November 4, 1929, in Piraeus, Greece. He has been a Professor of History of Religions (1972-92) and Dean of the Faculty of Theology, at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (1983-1986). Currently he is Professor Emeritus of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. He has been awarded Honorary Doctor of Theology and Philosophy by 19 universities, faculties and university branches (in Greece, the USA, Cyprus, Romania, Georgia, Albania, and Italy), Corresponding Member (1993-2005) and Honorary Member (as of 2006) of the Academy of Athens, Honorary Senator of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts – Salzburg (2019-).

### Postgraduate Studies

History of Religions, Ethnology, at the universities of Hamburg and Marburg, in Germany, (with a postgraduate scholarship from the "Alexander von Humboldt" Foundation). He also studied religions of the world travelling to the places where they flourished.

As Archbishop of Albania (from 1992 to the present), in extremely difficult circumstances, he reconstructed and further developed the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, which had been disbanded for 23 years. Along with the revitalization of the Orthodox Church, innovative programs were also implemented in the sectors of health, social care, education, rural development, culture and ecology. He has also sought to help ease tensions in the Balkans.

He has consistently been elected to leading positions in international bodies: Moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (1984-1991) and of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in San Antonio, Texas (1989); Member of the European Council of Religious Leaders (2003-2010); Vice-president of the Conference of European Churches (2003-2009); President of the World Council of Churches (2006-2013); Honorary President of the World Conference "Religions for Peace" (from 2006 to the present).

He is author of 24 books (research on African Religions, essays on Theology and History of Missions, sermons, etc.), including "Islam - a general overview" (16 editions), "A History of Religions - Footprints of the Quest for the Transcendent", "Globalization and Orthodoxy", "Mission in Christ's Way", "To the End of the Earth", "Coexistence", "In Albania - Cross and Resurrection". He has published over 200 essays and articles on theological and pastoral topics. His studies and articles have been translated into 17 languages.

He has been honoured with 30 medals and awards from many Orthodox Churches and different countries such as:

"The Grand Cross of the Order of Honour of the Hellenic Republic" (1997); "Athenagoras for Human Rights" award (New York, 2011); prize "For outstanding activities in strengthening the unity of Orthodox Christian nations" (Moscow, 2005); "Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu" decoration (Tirana, 2010); "Klaus-Hemmerle" prize (Aachen, 2020).

Archbishop Anastasios is well-versed in the History of Religions and interfaith dialogue. His significant contribution to Christian witness, theology, and peaceful coexistence between peoples and religious communities is world-renowned.



**Mons. George Frendo O.P.**

**Mons. George Anthony Frendo** was born in Malta on April 4, 1946. After graduating from secondary and high school, he joined the Order of Preachers in 1962. He then, studied philosophy and theology in *Collegium Philosophico-Theologicum Sancti Thomae Aquinatis* in Rabat, Malta. He was ordained priest on April 7, 1969.

## STUDIES AND TEACHING

He received the degree Lecturer in Theology from St. Thomas College, in Rabat-it, with his thesis *Baptism as the Sacrament of Faith in the Doctrine and Practice of the Church*. He continued his studies at *Pontificia Universitas Sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, Faculty of Canon Law, in Rome, and in 1973, he received his doctoral degree in Canon Law defending his thesis *Indissolubility and Divorce in the Theology of Thirteenth Century Scholastics*.

Upon his return to Malta, he started teaching Dogmatic Theology *Collegium Philosophico-Theologicum Sancti Thomae Aquinatis* of the Dominicans. He also taught several courses of Dogmatic Theology (Sacraments, Christology and Eschatology) at the Faculty of Theology in Malta, as well as a course on contemporary atheism in the seminar of Gozo.

In Albania, he has taught Theology of Trinity and Christology in the Inter-diocesan seminar in Shkoder.

## CHURCH OFFICES IN ALBANIA

1997-1999: Charged with the elaboration of complementary norms following the promulgation of the New Code of Canon by the Episcopal Conference of Albania

1998-1995: Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Tirana-Durres

1999-2005: President of the Conference of Major Superiors in Albania

2001-2006: Member of the Council of European Major Religious Superiors

2001- 2006: Judiciary Vicar of the Inter-diocesan Tribunal

As of 23 September 2006: Auxiliary Bishop of Tirana

In 2007, he was appointed member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

In May 2012, he was elected Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference

On December 3, 2016, he was proclaimed Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Tirana-Durres

On February 5, 2018, he was elected President of the Episcopal Conference of Albania

From January 2020 until the end of 2020, he will chair the Presidency of the Interreligious Council of Albania

Mons. Frendo has authored several books of a doctrinal and spiritual nature. He has participated in many meetings as Provincial Pastor of the Dominicans in Malta, as President of the Conference of Religious Major Superiors in Malta and Albania, as member of the General European Council of Religious Major Superiors, and as President of the Episcopal Conference of Albania.



**H. Dede Edmond Brahimaj** was born in Tirana on May 19, 1959, to a devoted Bektashi family from Brataj, Vlore. Upon completion of secondary education, he continued his studies at high school "Scanderbeg" and achieved high results, which granted him the right to pursue undergraduate military studies at the Academy of Land Forces, today "Scanderbeg".

With the revival of religions in the late 1990s, along with clergy and other Bektashi believers, he participated in the Organizing Council of the Holy See of Bektashi World Headquarters. On May 16, 1996, he was ordained "Dervish" and was immediately appointed to the Bektashi Tekke of Turan, in Korça.

On April 13, 1997, he was ordained "Baba" and was appointed first deputy by Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi.

In March 2006, he was appointed grandfather of the Bektashi Tekke in Macedonia. Following the death of H. Dede Reshat Bardhi, former leader of Bektashi Order, H. Baba Edmond Brahimaj was appointed leader of the Bektashi World Headquarter in June 2011.

During these years, H. Dede Edmond Brahimaj has worked dedicatedly, following the path of Dede Reshat Bardhi and the Bektashi tradition both at home and abroad. H. Dede Edmond Brahimaj has received honorary titles: "Ambassador of Peace", 2004; "Honour of Korça Region", 2004; "Honorary Citizen" of the Municipality of Zerqan-Bulqizë, June 10, 2014; "Honorary Citizen" of the Municipality of Martanesh-Bulqizë, June 29, 2014; "Honorary Citizen" of Municipality Bogovë-Skrapar, August 22, 2014; "Honorary Citizen" of the Municipality of Frashër, Përmet, May 25, 2014; "Prominent Personality of Labëria" awarded by "Labëria" association in June 2015; "Honorary Citizen" of Fier region, March 2015. "Honorary Citizen" of Berat region, May 2015; "Knight of the Order of Scanderbeg", September 7, 2015, awarded by the President of the Republic of Albania; "Dr. Honoris Causa" UN Mission, September 2016; "Honorary Citizen" of the commune of Bulqiza", October 2016; "Gratitude" by the US President Obama, January 2017; Gold Awards "Peace Icon" United Nations; "G.O.D Awards" October 2017; "Honorary Citizen" of Skrapar, January 2018; On June 26, 2019, vice-president of the US Congress of the Jews, Dr. Munr Kazmir, honoured H. Dede Edmond Brahimaj and the Bektashi Community with the American Flag.



**H. Dede Edmond Brahimaj**



**Pastor Ylli Doçi**

After graduation in 1995 with a masters in sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana, **Dr. Ylli H. Doçi** continued his graduate studies at the Denver Seminary in USA, receiving a Master's degree in the Philosophy of Religion Cum Laude in 2003.

He earned the degree of Doctor of Sciences in Social Anthropology from the European University in Tirana and focused on interreligious relations in Albania following a personal experience of more than two decades in this field.

In addition to writing a book and several academic articles Dr. Doçi frequently speaks on various aspects of social life in various national media platforms. Dr. Ylli Doçi has had various leading roles with Christian organizations in Albania and abroad. He is the Albanian director of the International Leadership Foundation and since 2016 also serves as the President of Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania, representing an interdenominational Evangelical community. He is founder and pastor of the evangelical church "Guri i Themelit" in Tirana, where he lives with his wife Nikki. He has two children, who are university students.







**Dr. Genti Kruja**

## SECRETARY GENERAL

Under the statute, the Secretary General chairs the Executive Board and is tasked with coordinating the implementation of policies and programs authorized by the Council of Presidency.

Secretary General of the Interreligious Council of Albania is **Dr. Genti Kruja**, elected on October 22, 2018 by the Council of Presidency of IRCA.

**Dr. Genti Kruja** graduated in Sociology from Istanbul University, Faculty of Social Sciences, in 2003. He earned his master's degree from the university of Tirana in Sociology and Philosophy with a thesis on "Interfaith Dialogue and Tolerance: progress and challenges". In 2015, he completed his doctoral studies at the University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences with a dissertation on intercultural dialogue.

In recent years, he has enabled cooperation with several local and international organisations for organizing promotional events of dialogue such as local and international symposia and conferences.

Genti Kruja is author of the book "Albanians facing challenges of interfaith understanding", co-author of several books, and editor of more than 50 other books.

From 2003-2005, he was director of Publishing House "Prizmi" and editor of the newspaper "Drita Islame", an organ of the Muslim Community of Albania.

In the years 2005-2010, he was Director of Human Resources at the Muslim Community of Albania.

In the years 2010-2016, he was Director of Culture and Interfaith Dialogue and from 2005 to 2017 a member of the Presidency of MCA.

In the years 2014-2017, he was also director of the magazine "Drita Islame", and since 2012 he has been the editor-in-chief of journal "Zani i Naltë", initially established in 1923 and re-established in 2012 on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Independence of Albania.

He is also member of the Institute of Sociology.

Dr. Genti Kruja has been the Head of the Department of Islamic Sciences since January 2017 and since 2013 lecturer of Sociology and Sociology of Religion at University College Beder, as well as external expert in the fields of: Sociology, Philosophy, Theology, Religious Studies and Interreligious Dialogue.





## EXECUTIVE BOARD

The Executive Board is composed of 11 members, who are two representatives from each religious community and the Secretary General

### The Executive Board:

1. Proposes the annual budget of IRCA
2. Proposes a budget plan for the next financial period
3. Drafts and organizes the activities of IRCA
4. Examines financial reports
5. Proposes strategic actions, the action plan of IRCA and priority objectives
6. Proposes the statute or its amendments
7. Proposes internal regulations of IRCA

The Executive Board meets no less than three times a year and in cases of emergencies. It is convened and chaired by the Secretary General.

## MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA ARE:

### SECRETARY GENERAL

Dr. Genti Kruja

### MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF ALBANIA:

1. Mr. Dorian Demetja
2. Mr. Agron Hoxha

### AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ALBANIA:

1. Bishop Asti Bakallbashi
2. Mr. Thoma Shkira

### CATHOLIC CHURCH OF ALBANIA:

1. Don Henry Velmkamp
2. BISHOP GJERGJ META

### WORLD BEKTASHI ORDER:

1. Mr. Syrja Xhelaj
2. Mrs. Sheldiana Jano (Agaraj)

### EVANGELICAL BROTHERHOOD OF ALBANIA:

1. Mr. Ergest Biti
2. Mr. Erion Prendi



## DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN

1. The Department of Women of IRCA is composed of women representatives of every religious community that is a member of the Interreligious Council of Albania, and they are nominated by the relevant community and approved by the Council of Presidency.
2. The Department of Women meets no less than twice a year. The meeting is chaired by the Head of the Department, a position held by each member on a one-year rotating basis.
3. Rotation of leadership in the Department of Women is determined by an internal decision of the Council of Presidency.
4. The head of the Department of Women reports in writing on the department's annual activities to the Council of Presidency at least once a year.
5. After each activity/meeting of the Department of Women, the head of the department informs in writing the Secretary General of the tasks and conclusions.



## DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH

1. The Department of Youth of IRCA is composed of two young representatives from each religious community, members of the Interreligious Council of Albania, who are nominated by each community and are then approved by the Council of Presidency.
  2. The Department of Youth meets no less than twice a year. The meeting is chaired by the Secretary General of IRCA.
  3. A representative of the Department of Youth reports in writing on the department's annual activities to the Council of Presidency at least once a year.
- All the board and department members exercise their duty voluntarily.







## **Activities**



## INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA AWARDED SERGIO VIEIRA DE MELLO PRIZE

On October 25, 2018, the award ceremony of "Sergio Vieira De Mello", UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, was held in Krakow, Poland, in which the leaders of our country's religious communities were awarded this prize for "Interfaith Brotherhood in Albania".

The President of the Muslim Community of Albania, H. Skender Bruçaj, received the award on behalf of the Interreligious Council of Albania.

"Sergio Vieira De Mello" UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is an award given annually to individuals or personalities who represent causes for the good of the common society.

Afterwards, representatives of Albanian religious communities paid a visit to the infamous Auschwitz camp, where they placed flowers in memory of the victims of Holocaust.







TIRANA, SEPTEMBER 2016

**REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS  
COUNCIL OF ALBANIA MEET WITH POPE FRANCIS.**



VATICAN, NOVEMBER 2018

**MEETINGS OF THE PRESIDENCY  
OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA**







## MEETINGS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF IRCA





## NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS OF THE ALBANIA INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL



**NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT  
OF WOMEN AND THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH OF IRCA**





**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN  
INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL AND CVE**







**IRCA, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITY  
WITH ORPHANED CHILDREN  
IN EARTHQUAKE HIT AREAS**





## HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES









## **Conferences and international meetings**







## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE



TIRANA, MAY 2018



**BERLIN, GERMANY, MARCH 2019**



**BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, APRIL 2019**





WARSAW, POLAND, MAY 2019



LINDAU, GERMANY, AUGUST 2019





**BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, JUNE 2019**



**NEW YORK, USA, DECEMBER 2019**



## **Statements of the Interreligious Council of Albania**





**TIRANA, NOVEMBER 14, 2013**  
**PRESS STATEMENT ON CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

The Interreligious Council of Albania (the Muslim Community of Albania, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, the Catholic Church of Albania and the Bektashi World Headquarter) as well as the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania are following with great concern the latest political and social developments, which are taking on an increasingly popular character, regarding the import and destruction of chemical weapons in Albania. Seeing the danger and the extent of such an issue, we would like to join the concerns in this regard.

God has blessed our country with many natural riches and resources, but for years, it has been suffering from indiscriminate treatment and exploitation, leading to the destruction of entire forest areas and pastures as well as the pollution of land, water and air. So far, little has been done to stop this natural disaster, while civic awareness of such issues leaves a lot to be desired. This sad situation was added the tragic event of the explosion of the military weapons dismantling factory in Gërdec, a village quite close to the country's capital.

We are of the opinion that our country is far from discussing and, let alone, accomplishing such an enterprise as disposal and destruction of chemical weapons here, where, apparently, not only does the state lack the necessary capacities for such an enterprise, but such an act could also set a precedent for turning our country into a "warehouse" of hazardous waste and garbage.

For these and other reasons articulated by civil society, we call on the Albanian state, politicians and authorities to absolutely refuse, from now on, the acceptance of chemical weapons and their destruction in our country and to engage altogether in raising awareness and preserving our common home, Albania.



## **INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA STRONGLY CONDEMNS ISIS CRIMES**

*Religious communities in Albania have released a joint statement, through the Interreligious Council of Albania, condemning the crimes being committed in Iraq by ISIS. Meanwhile, they appeal to the International Factor to find the right solutions in order to stop this phenomenon.*

We also express solidarity with those who suffer not only in Iraq but in all hot spots of conflict in the Middle East.

### **Full statement of the Interreligious Council of Albania**

The Interreligious Council of Albania and its members, the Muslim Community of Albania, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, the Catholic Church of Albania and the Bektashi World Headquarter, supported by the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania, are following with great concern the situation in the Middle East, in particular, the criminal persecution of the local Christian population by ISIS terrorists, and, even the Muslim and other minorities, as well as the cruel displacement of Iraqi Christians and Iraqis of other religions. We strongly condemn such criminal acts, which have nothing in common with the essential principles of our beliefs.

We pray to God, who created us all, to return peace and dignity to those regions. In the name of God, we call for weapons to be put down and for peace and coexistence to be sought.

We also appeal to the International Factor to find the right solutions in order to stop the phenomenon of forced displacement of the people of Mosul and its environs because of their faiths. We firmly believe that the right to religion is a fundamental human right. We rejoice at this right in Albania, a reality that religious beliefs have built and continue to build with great effort in our country. We want to tell everyone that it is possible to live together helping each other and respecting each other regardless of religion, ethnicity or race.

In the meantime, we express our solidarity with those who suffer not only in Iraq but in all hot spots of conflict in the Middle East and assure them of our prayer and spiritual closeness.

**2014**



## JOINT STATEMENT ON COORDINATED ACTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND YOUTH**, in the capacity of the authority responsible for coordinating actions for gender equality and against violence against women and domestic violence, and representatives of **RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES** in Albania,

- Recognizing and accepting the obligation of the state to promote and protect fundamental human rights and freedoms, in accordance with all international acts and applicable law;
- Believing and appreciating religious coexistence and tolerance not only as a historical but also as a current value of our society and as one of the key elements to jointly opposing violence;
- Considering violence against women and domestic violence as serious human rights violations, to which everyone must respond responsibly, seriously and professionally;
- Appreciating the effectiveness of joint and well-coordinated efforts, as well as the important contribution of all actors to a society living in peace, tolerance and non-violence;

### UNITE AND ARE COMMITTED TO:

- Planning coordinated actions in the fight against violence against women and domestic violence,
- Supporting and facilitating national educational activities for the importance of creating healthy families, in which peace, respect, love, appreciation and equal opportunities for each member prevail,
- Organizing joint activities between the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and religious communities, to encourage the participation of as many young men and women believers in the organization and implementation of such activities,
- Organizing special activities with the communities of Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, Bektashi and Evangelical believers, with the aim of communicating common messages against violence against women and girls and domestic violence,
- Identifying believing boys and men who support the purpose of this statement and are committed to bringing about change in the community,
- Planning a national week (or one day a month) of prayers for victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence against women and domestic violence, as part of the annual public awareness campaigns organized for this purpose,



- Organizing "Men's Prayer" movement, through which men of different religious affiliations can gather in mosques, churches and other religious spaces to pray for an end to violence, to find the strength to maintain peace in the family and to express their commitment to women's safety and empowerment,
- Encouraging religious leaders to support and promote the education of believers throughout the country with the values of tolerance, respect, and against violence and discrimination, by publicly engaging in the "HeforShe" campaign,
- Harmonizing the organization of the above-mentioned activities (as well as other activities that can be further planned) with activities planned for religious holidays (Eid, Easter, Christmas, Nevruz, etc.),
- Evaluating the steps already taken and strengthening cooperation through exchange of experience in joint annual activities,
- Providing the necessary human and financial resources to be highly committed to achieving the goals of this statement,
- Exchanging information on services already established or that can be established by religious communities in support of women and girls or people in need, and applying appropriate standards in the provision of these services.

We believe in and promote the values of a healthy family, in which the mother, the daughter, the sister and the wife are respected and not raped, in which children are brought up with love and devotion, in which the elderly or the sick feel surrounded by support and care, in which gratitude, acceptance, harmony, appreciation, tolerance, dignity and equality are conveyed.

Therefore, convinced that action against violence against women and domestic violence is the path towards peace in society, we are committed to accomplishing our joint efforts NOW!

**Tirana, November 25, 2015**

**H. SKENDER BRUÇAJ,**  
Muslim Community of Albania

**HIS BEATITUDE ANASTASIOS YANNULATOUS,**  
Archbishop of Tirana, Durres and Albania

**MONS. RROK MIRDITA,**  
Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Tirana-Durres

**H. DEDE EDMOND BRAHIMAJ,**  
Bektashi World Leader

**MR. BLENDI KLOSI,**  
Minister of Social Welfare and Youth





## RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CALL FOR CALM: DIALOGUE, NOT VIOLENCE

We, the religious communities in Albania, the Muslim Community, The Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Bektashi World Headquarters and the Evangelical Brotherhood, in accordance with the spiritual nature of our activity, feel the moral and spiritual responsibility we have for our believers and for the Albanian society in general.

Through this statement, based on the situation created lately, as in any case in the past, we would like to address the political class and everyone who has institutional responsibility for the good of the country.

It is not our duty to find or show concrete solutions to the created situation. It is the duty of politics and its field of action; it has been mandated to do this by the people.

We thank God for the good work that has been done and continues to be done, as well as for the seriousness of many people, who work tirelessly, although very often they remain unknown, in accordance with the law for the good of society.

However, we are also concerned about the climate created in the country and in particular:

- about the lack of dialogue and the willingness to dialogue on the resolution of stalemates, in particular the issue of elections, which are a necessary instrument for the social welfare of Albanians;
- about the violent and contemptuous rhetoric which is transmitted through public information channels and social networks by those who hold public posts or important positions in the life of the country;
- about the phenomena of corruption and production of narcotics, which harm the lives of citizens and their well-being in the present and in the future;

All of the above can jeopardize the country's stability, which for us is a great good for the whole society and for every individual and which we must preserve at all costs. Therefore, we strongly and firmly call on all the political factors in Albania, on the side of the opposition and the government, large and small parties:

- To build bridges not walls. This takes a sincere dialogue, on many levels, including as many actors and factors as possible. You are responsible to the people and have to think about this on the very first day you decide to go into politics. The good of the people is your major goal.
- To reduce the tones of violent and contemptuous rhetoric towards the political opponent. This only increases tensions and promotes violent action.



- To guarantee a transparent and all-inclusive pre-election and election process. In particular, we call on all citizens not to fall prey to the temptation of buying and selling their votes or of voting under the threat of losing their job, which is their children's daily bread. We also call on all the institutions responsible for elections to fight all the phenomena of vote-buying and threatening with job loss.

- To create conditions for the rule of law in the social life of Albanians and Albania. We also call on every civic or political initiative to express their views and wishes, to serve the common good and to avoid any kind of violence against people, objects or institutions.

Convinced that through this statement we are making a contribution to the well-being of the country, we will continue to pray for the future and well-being of our country.

**12/05/2017**





## **LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES APPEAL TO GERMANY AND FRANCE TO OPEN NEGOTIATIONS**

In a joint letter to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, heads of religious communities of Albania, head of the Muslim Community of Albania, H. Skender Bruçaj, Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës and Albania, Anastasios Yannulatous, the Secretary General of the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Albania and Archbishop of Rrëshen, Dom Gjergj Meta, the Bektashi World Leader, Haxhi Dede Edmond Brahimaj, and the President of the Evangelical Brotherhood, Pastor Ylli Doçi, appeal for a positive decision on opening of accession talks on Albania's EU membership.

The letter was delivered to Minister Ditmir Bushati on June 18, 2018 by the leaders of these communities, in a meeting at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.

"At this moment of great historical significance, we wish to once again underscore what we recently articulated in our joint statement of April 21, 2018: we, Albanians, are part of Europe. We are part of a history that stretches back to the origins of Europe. It is a history that goes back thousands of years. Our common cultural and social roots bind us together. We believe that our path to the European Union represents the long-standing desire of our people and the values of a free society where everyone can exercise their rights, among which the right to freedom of religion and belief is essential. We are grateful to God that the history of the Albanian people has revealed a consistent longevity of the value of respect for religious difference living together in harmony as one family.

The road to the European Union is particularly critical for our youth. Albanian young people are among the most Euro-enthusiastic, and yet they are also among the most frustrated as although they live in close proximity to their European peers, they are excluded from the same opportunities. We call upon you to recognise the earnest desire of all Albanians and to support us in our irreversible commitment to an Albania, as part of Europe.

With fervent prayer we reaffirm our commitment to remain steadfast supporters of European values of a society with freedom, prosperity and justice for all.” reads the letter drafted and signed by the leaders of religious communities.

“You have given the most meaningful example that we are Europeans and now it is the right time for each of us follow this example” – Minister Bushati stated.





## STATEMENT OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN ALBANIA JOINT COMMITMENT TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

We, **The Muslim Community of Albania, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, the Catholic Church of Albania, the Bektashi World Headquarters and the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania** are proud of the history of interfaith coexistence and harmony in Albania over centuries.

Religious understanding and coexistence within our nation has over the years created a beautiful mosaic of diversity. We believe that this mosaic should not be taken for granted and we are committed to taking care of it, by keeping its parts together in order to preserve and present with dignity this asset of our nation at home and abroad.

We are aware and accept that our religious communities have their own identities and everyone remains faithful to the principles of his/her faith. However, our religious differences do not prevent us from engaging in mutual respect, cooperation in social areas and active dialogue between communities and society as a whole in order to preserve and promote moral, ethical and cultural values.

We value communication as a means of getting to know one another better, building mutual respect and avoiding prejudice. For this reason, we are committed to the following:

- **To developing a dialogue of life**, encouraging members of our communities and the society in general, to live in peace and good neighbourliness, sharing the joy and sadness, challenges and hopes with one another.

• **To organising joint activities for the good of society**, engaging in initiatives, undertakings and projects for the enhancement of the quality of life and the progress of Albanian society and through these commitments to also nurture harmony, tolerance, justice and peace in our communities.

• **To building a platform of theological dialogue at the academic level**, getting acquainted with one another's spiritual values, the mutual history and common points in order to promote a spirit of dialogue and brotherhood within our communities avoiding everything that may incite interfaith hatred or misunderstandings.

• **To developing joint educational strategies** to promote and nurture the young generation values of coexistence and to prevent any form of manipulation and instrumentalization of religion in the service of non-religious interests.

• **To promoting in the international arena**, by all means, the value of interfaith coexistence and harmony as a necessary model for the whole world society, which constantly faces the challenges of intolerance and various forms of conflict.

With our good will and hope that God will give us the energy and perseverance to continue on our path of coexistence, harmony, tolerance and dialogue, we, representatives of Albanian religious communities, sign today (03.05.2018) this statement.

**Muslim Community of Albania  
H. SKENDER BRUÇAJ**

**Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania  
HIS BEATITUDE, ANASTASIOS YANNULATOUS**

**Catholic Church of Albania - Episcopal Conference  
MONS. GEORGE FRENDO**

**The Bektashi World Headquarters  
H. DEDE EDMOND BRAHIMAJ**

**Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania  
PASTOR YLLI DOÇI**

**May 3, 2018**



## **INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA: WE STRONGLY CONDEMN ANY FORM OF TERRORISM AGAINST HUMANITY**

The Interreligious Council of Albania condemns the latest terrorist attack in the New Zealand town of Christchurch, in which 49 Muslims were killed during the prayer and 50 others were seriously injured.

This barbaric act against innocent people once again shows that terrorism has no religion, nation, colour or homeland, but its cruelty strikes everyone, everywhere, not only in areas of war and conflict but also where peace and welfare prevail, because terror has only one purpose, to plant hatred and fear of the other.

We once again strongly condemn such criminal acts that have hurt every human heart wherever it is.

We pray that peace, harmony, coexistence and understanding prevail everywhere in the world. May God not allow anyone to triumph over humanity, the life that God alone gives or the universal values, which are so necessary in today's world!

The Interreligious Council of Albania also expresses its full solidarity with all those who today suffer in wars and conflicts in different countries, offering prayers and spiritual closeness.

IRCA sends the most sincere condolences to New Zealand and families of victims and their community, and wishes a speedy recovery to everyone injured in this terror act in New Zealand.

May God help and guide mankind to the good! Amen!

**March 15, 2019**



## **INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF ALBANIA: SORROW AND PRAYER FOR SRI LANKA**

The Interreligious Council of Albania expresses its deep sorrow for hundreds of people who lost their lives in the terrorist acts that took place in Sri Lanka on the Easter day.

We, as an institution, on behalf of the five religious communities in Albania, (the Muslim Community of Albania, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, the Catholic Church of Albania, the Bektashi World Headquarter, and the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania), once again strongly condemn all forms of terror, violence and extremism, and unite our prayers with the whole world, and especially with the believers of every faith, who pray for peace and coexistence, regardless of religion, colour or race.

In these moments of sadness, we express our most sincere condolences to the victims' families and pray God to heal the wounded and injured.

These acts, which have no country, religion or nation, sound the alarm that the world is in urgent need of international policies that offer healing solutions to worldwide wounds such as wars, terrorism, conflicts, ignorance, and poverty, as well as social and humanitarian crises, which have been the cause for endless suffering for generations.

May God help and guide the world, and especially those who are responsible for the fate of peoples and nations.

Amen! Amin!

**April 23, 2019**





## **PRESS STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION**

The Interreligious Council of Albania (the Muslim Community of Albania, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, the Catholic Church of Albania, the Bektashi World Headquarter, and the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania) are following with concern the current political situation in the country, which directly affects social and economic aspects and the future of our youth, creating an insecure situation and undermining the hopes of a suffering but strong and vital people in face of the trials it has historically encountered.

The Interreligious Council of Albania call upon Albanian politics to dialogue and self-restrain and to resolve the protracted conflict, which is further deepening Albanians' poverty, their flight from the country and the weakening of the country's democratic institutions, and is seriously damaging the image of Albania in the world.

All of us together must firmly insist on the virtue of hope, which is being wounded day by day, calling upon all political factors to leave aside verbal and physical violence and contempt for the political opponent and to find solutions to the benefit of the entire Albanian society, to the benefit of noble mothers and fathers who have nurtured generations with the sacred love for this land, and in particular, to the benefit of our youth, who deserve a country with e hopeful future.

We pray to God for more love, understanding and cooperation.

May God bless Albania and our people!

Sincerely,

**Interreligious Council of Albania**

**Muslim Community of Albania**

**H. SKENDER BRUÇAJ**

**Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania**

**HIS BEATITUDE, ANASTASIOS YANNULATOUS**

**Catholic Church of Albania - Episcopal Conference**

**MONS. GEORGE FRENO**

**The Bektashi World Headquarters**

**H. DEDE EDMOND BRAHIMAJ**

**Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania**

**PASTOR YLLI DOÇI**

**Tirana, February 27, 2019**





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