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THE OSLO CENTER
for Peace and Human Rights

UNIVERSAL CODE OF CONDUCT ON HOLY SITES

FAQs

(Frequently Asked Questions)

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE UNIVERSAL CODE OF CONDUCT ON HOLY SITES (UNIVERSAL CODE)?

The main purpose is to help safeguard sacred places for the use of religious adherents world-wide and to promote peace and reconciliation between people of different ethnic and religious communities.

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO ACHIEVE WITH THE UNIVERSAL CODE?

We want the United Nations to pass a resolution in the spirit of the Code's articles, that calls for the protection and safeguarding of holy sites regardless of religion, and for the support of religious leaders in implementing the Universal Code on Holy Sites. We would also like the Universal Code to be implemented in diverse locations world-wide.

We believe that the Universal Code, which benefits all religions, will improve collaboration among faiths around holy sites and is likely to prevent conflicts from erupting or escalating.

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR A UNIVERSAL CODE ON HOLY SITES?

Holy sites are often at the centre of conflict in different parts of the world. Even when a conflict is not religiously motivated, holy sites are often attacked specifically because they are sacred to people and are at the heart of their identity. We see a need for a practical and implementable system that can protect sacred sites and reduce violence around them.

HOW WAS THE UNIVERSAL CODE DEVELOPED?

In 2009, four non-profit organisations, the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, One World in Dialogue, Religions for Peace and Search for Common Ground partnered to develop the Universal Code. Based on the Trondheim Code - an Abrahamic code developed previously by a group of European and Middle East leaders and in consultations with senior religious leaders from over ten faiths - a working group representing the four organisations finalized the Universal Code in January 2011.



IS THE UNIVERSAL CODE A LEGAL DOCUMENT?

No, the Universal Code is not a legal document and therefore is not legally binding. It offers practical guidelines for implementation in diverse locations for the safeguarding of holy sites.

CAN THE UNIVERSAL CODE'S TEXT BE CHANGED?

The Universal Code's text is a work in process. Adjustments are possible after the accumulation of experiences provides justification for adaptations.

WHO ENDORSES THE UNIVERSAL CODE?

Faith based organisations and senior religious leaders worldwide endorse the Universal Code. The World Council of Religions for Peace, representing the world's major religions, has endorsed the Universal Code, among others.

IS THE UNIVERSAL CODE BEING IMPLEMENTED RIGHT NOW?

Yes, a pilot project began in 2013 in the Holy Land in partnership with the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL). Forums for building cooperation between religious leaders and other relevant bodies, educational workshops and visits to shared holy sites for students and law enforcement officers, and a systematic Registry of Attacks on Holy Sites, are key elements of this pilot. Previously, a successfully evaluated pilot was held in Bosnia Herzegovina, an ethnically and religiously divided post-war society, under the auspices of the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia Herzegovina. The Universal Code has also been used to promote cooperation between diverse indigenous tribes in the U.S. As of 2015, we have started field projects in Nigeria, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India, while we are exploring possibilities in other countries. We welcome field projects in other locations and are happy to provide further information although unfortunately we cannot provide funding.

CAN FIELD PROJECTS CHOOSE TO IMPLEMENT ONLY PARTS OF THE CODE?

Yes. Recognizing that each location has its specific concerns, we anticipate that field projects will focus on the articles in the Code that are most relevant to their needs and/or are implementable at this stage in time.

HAS THE CODE BEEN TRANSLATED INTO LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH?

The binding version is the English language text but translations of the Code are available in Arabic, Bosnian, Croatian, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish and Urdu.