



JUBILO

## *Tea for Peace*

A PROGRAMME OF THE JUBILO PROJECT

### FIRST *TEA FOR PEACE* LAUNCHED

The first *Tea for Peace* was launched at the Nutshuis in The Hague, the Netherlands on 3 September 2007. The *Tea for Peace* programme consists of a series of screenings of documentaries followed by discussions of current problems and issues related to the Abrahamic faiths. Its ultimate goal is to improve the quality of intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

During the first *Tea for Peace*, we tackled *Fundamentalism*. The evening started with a film screening of selected scenes dealing with Fundamentalism from the ‘perspectives’ of the three religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Afterwards, there was a discussion with the invited speakers Pastor Sjaak de Boer, Pastor of the Church of Our Saviour; Minister Jacob Korf, Chairman of the Hague Council of Philosophies and Religions (HRLR); and Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp from the Congregation of the Hague and Utrecht.

A number of questions were raised during the discussion. How to counter fundamentalism within the religions was one of the questions raised in the discussion. Minister Korf pointed out that religion is a means of communication and that often it is approached with anxiety. He suggested that the only thing people can do is meet, look each other in the eye and say, «You are a human being, I am a human being. We don’t agree but can we shake hands?» Pastor de Boer agreed with Minister Korf. He elaborated on the point, stating that religion is not a goal in itself but an instrument. It is difficult to counter fundamentalism within the religion because it is difficult to connect and reconnect. He said there is often a lot of presumption, emotion and lack of reason involved in fundamentalism. Change should begin from within and to him this entails making the religion incarnate, real, in essence presenting a human face of God. Rabbi Soetendorp also underlined the differences that exist within Judaism, but urged everyone to work harder for peace.

A related question was also raised on what can be done to create opportunities to meet and interact with people from different religions. Minister Korf suggested we should meet each other and greet each other. He also discouraged the audience to believe the media, as they tend to label people and pinpoint people by their religion, thus, creating that distinction or division. Pastor de Boer gave a similar suggestion. He stated that people should create relationships with other people – listen and learn about their everyday life and get to know each other. He stressed that humility is a starting point. He explained that people can share political treasures, different stories, customs and feasts. By knowing where they come from this can pave the way for inter-religious understanding. Rabbi Soetendorp puts his hope in the new generation and believes that every deed we do can help make a change, so he encourages everyone to promote peace and understanding in their own little way.

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#### SURVEY SAYS...

As part of the program, the participants were asked to fill out questionnaires examining their level of tolerance, preconceived views and stereotypes affecting the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities and whether these preconceptions changed as a result of participating in this event.

On this first occasion we had relatively small sample. Participants' age ranged from 21 to over 60 years old, mostly Dutch, educated and Christian. Not having a representative crowd we cannot speak about concrete results, though some trends could be observed which later, after analyzing greater number of data, may be proven. The following are some survey results:

- \* Negative correlation can be observed between the variables: age – practicing any organized religion or frequency of practicing religion. This means that younger participants tend to be less religious. This trend is also supported by the fact that only respondents above 51 claimed that they were member of any religious organization (e.g. prayer group, fundraising committee, and so forth).
- \* However, according to the study younger people were more likely to consider themselves spiritual. 50% of the sample claimed to believe in any sort of spirituality. 57% of this group was between 21-30 years. Spirituality also shows slight positive correlation with level of education.
- \* The majority of the respondents (70%) are mostly tolerant. This does not vary much from the respondent's personal view of their level of tolerance. Close to half (40%) of the respondents considered themselves mostly tolerant when asked to rate their level of tolerance.
- \* A significant correlation between interaction with other religions and cumulative tolerance scores. This means that the more interaction you have with other religions the more tolerant you are.
- \* Comparing the viewpoints on violence among the three religions, results indicate that Islam is perceived to be more related to violence than the other two religions. When asked if the religion can lead to violence, there was a higher percentage (almost half) of people agreeing to the statement when referring to Islam. For Christianity and Judaism, only about 30 percent of the respondents associate the two religions to violence.

It is also worth noting that almost all of the participants agreed that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have some common values, which could form a basis for interfaith understanding. This provides a good starting position for achievement of interfaith understanding, the main goal of *Tea for Peace*.

This general attitude towards seeking connection, understanding and peace was felt during the entire evening. The guest speakers pointed out that differences and polarities exist. There are usually presumptions, stereotypes and labels involved when we deal with people who have a different set of beliefs, but all these can be addressed if we start to build relationships, get to know one another, and go beyond the differences that exist. We should start from within and be humble.

