



The role of Religious Leaders in Encouraging Reconciliation **Khartoum, Sudan, 5-7 February 2008**

This three-day meeting, organised by the Sudan Inter-Religious Council and Concordis International, brought together approximately 50 Sudanese religious leaders and members of civil society, together with international experts. The participants came from diverse religious backgrounds and represented a broad and inclusive range of Sudanese religious communities from at least 9 different Sudanese states.

Over the course of the three days, a number of presentations were given by international and Sudanese experts on promoting religious co-existence and reconciliation in Sudan. Dr Sigvard Von Sicard of Birmingham University in the UK, spoke about what **Islamic and Christian religious texts** and teachings say about peace, conflict, violence and reconciliation. Imam Sani Isah and Reverend Bitrus

Dangiwa of the **Inter-faith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, Nigeria**, shared their experiences of religious conflict and presented Nigeria as a case study where inter-religious reconciliation had worked to great effect and had facilitated religious co-existence. Peter Dixon spoke about **inter-religious experience in other countries and regions**.

Each presentation was followed by a plenary discussion that was vigorous, frank and informed, resulting in the formulation of recommendations and practical proposals which will be used to draft a set of guidelines to assist Sudanese religious leaders in promoting reconciliation.



Underlying the many discussions during the meeting was the recognition by the participants of the importance of

reconciliation as a means of ending conflict and a way of healing the physical, mental, spiritual and economic wounds inflicted by conflict. They viewed **truth-telling, remorse, commitment to change, forgiveness and restoration** as important elements of such reconciliation.

The **common ground** between the teachings of the Abrahamic religions on matters of peace, tolerance and reconciliation was stressed. The potential for religious leaders to be key players in fostering reconciliation was highlighted, through earning trust, respect, leading by example, and using the power of stories, language, education, apology and forgiveness. Rather than encouraging violence and hatred, which participants agreed was a distortion of true religion, it was felt that religious leaders should be conscious of the fact that all their power is given to them by God and therefore, that power needs to be used as God would use it.

The importance of **religious tolerance and co-existence** were also stressed, with participants feeling it important that both Christians and Muslims put aside their differences and look to the future, working together for peace in Sudan. Provisions in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim National Constitution for reconciliation efforts, while not providing great detail, form a basis for such a contribution.

The participants recognized the important role of religious leaders in encouraging reconciliation, stressing the need for them to enjoy respect in the community and the powerful symbolism and practical benefits they could achieve by working together on significant causes of violent conflict in the community.

Not wanting this work to end with this meeting they proposed that workshops in different states be organized to improve the qualifications of the religious leaderships, with participation being widened to allow local communities to share in urgent issues. A peace-building training handbook is also to be designed to provide an overview of a number of different types of activities which might be appropriate for religious leaders to pursue as peace builders.

