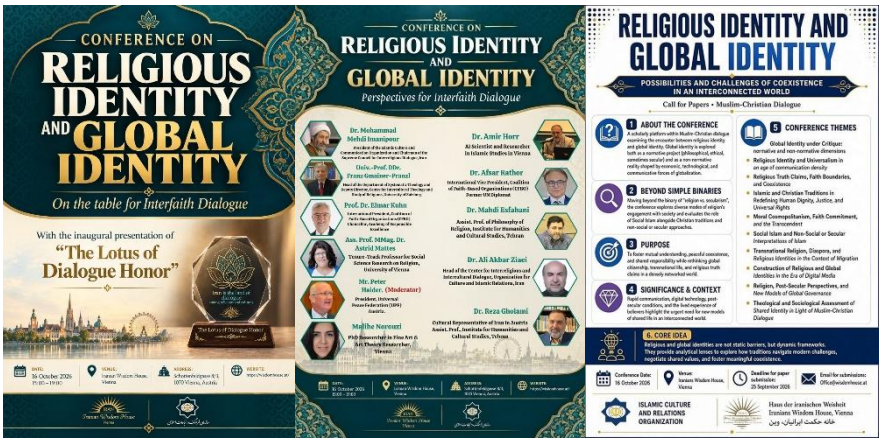
Interfaith Dialogue Global Identity at a Conference in Vienna; First "Lotus of Dialogue" Statue Awarded to Peter Haider



Vienna, 16 October 2026 — The conference "Religious Identity and Global Identity: Perspectives for Interfaith Dialogue" was held with the participation of university professors, religion researchers, and interfaith dialogue activists from Iran and Austria, organized by the Iranian Wisdom House, Vienna. At the conclusion of the gathering, the first honorary "Lotus of Dialogue" statue was presented to Peter Haider, President of the Universal Peace Federation in Austria.

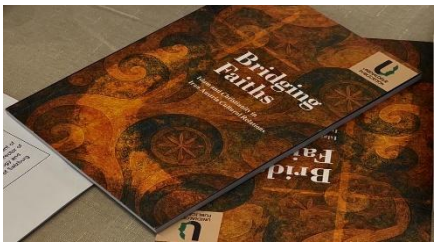
This conference, regarded as one of the most significant Iranian interfaith dialogue conferences in Europe over the past two decades, was dedicated to examining one of the important questions of contemporary societies: How can one, while preserving religious and cultural identity, achieve a shared responsibility toward the world and the future of humanity in the face of the conditions created by new technologies—conditions that will gradually become more complex?

The speakers at the event examined various dimensions of the relationship between religious identity and globalization, cultural and religious coexistence, and the role of dialogue in strengthening mutual understanding among societies. The main emphasis was that interfaith dialogue does not necessarily mean abandoning doctrinal differences; rather, it can provide a ground for mutual recognition and cooperation among followers of different religions.

Mohammad-Mahdi Imani-Pour, Head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and Chairman of Iran's Supreme Council for Interfaith Dialogue, delivered a speech online at the conference. Mahdi Esfahani, a faculty member of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies in Tehran, also participated from Iran.

Other speakers included Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, Head of the Department of Systematic Theology at the University of Salzburg; Astrid Mattes, Professor of Social Studies of Religion at the University of Vienna; Elmar Kuhn, International President of the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations; Afsar Rathore, Deputy Director of the United Nations Studies Office in Vienna;

Amir Horr, researcher in artificial intelligence and Islamic studies; and Maliheh Norouzi, art researcher in Vienna. Reza Gholami, Iran's Cultural Representative in Austria and a faculty member of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies in Tehran, also spoke at the gathering.



The program was accompanied by the performance of musical pieces themed around the coexistence of religions. A film introducing the book *Bridging Religions: Cultural Relations between Islam and Christianity in Iran and Austria* was also screened; the work addresses cultural relations between the two religious traditions within the context of Iran–Austria relations.

Religious and Global Identity: From Human Innate Disposition to the Challenge of Artificial Intelligence

The conference speakers addressed the relationship between religious identity and global identity from philosophical, religious, social, and technological perspectives. While some emphasized common human foundations and the necessity of dialogue based on the acceptance of plurality among cultures and religious traditions, others focused on the challenges arising from globalization and new technologies, especially artificial intelligence.

Peter Haider: Achieving Global Peace Requires the Voices of Religions and Cultures to Be Heard



Peter Haider, President of the Universal Peace Federation in Austria and moderator of the conference, in his opening remarks expressed appreciation to the Iranian Wisdom House, Vienna

for organizing this highly important conference and stressed the necessity of examining the relationship between religious identity and global identity. Referring to the complexities of today's world and the role of religious dimensions in certain conflicts, he raised the question of whether adherence to religious identity is compatible with the formation of a shared identity at the global level, or whether tension exists between the two.

Haider, emphasizing humanity's need for a global order based on lasting peace, mutual interdependence, and shared prosperity, stated that achieving such an order requires the voices of religious, non-religious, and cultural communities to be heard. Citing Henry Kissinger's views in the book *World Order*, he addressed the role of religious beliefs in shaping civilizations' perceptions of legitimacy and governance. Haider also noted that the United Nations, despite its fundamental role in promoting peace and international cooperation, faces crises; nevertheless, the efforts of the United Nations in this field—shaped by the sacrifices of certain compassionate global figures—must be valued and supported.

Mohammad-Mahdi Imani-Pour: Human Innate Disposition Can Serve as the Link Between Religious Identity and Global Identity



Hojjatoleslam Dr. Mohammad-Mahdi Imani-Pour, Head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and Chairman of the Supreme Council for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue, emphasized that constructive interfaith dialogue must go beyond removing misunderstandings and lead to the identification of common issues and cooperation in resolving them. Referring to the profound and enlightening concept of *fitrah* (innate disposition) in Islamic thought, he regarded it as a foundation for connecting religious identity with shared human identity. According to him, these two identities are not necessarily in conflict unless one seeks to eliminate the other. Dr. Imani-Pour stated that genuine dialogue does not begin from a state of identitylessness; rather, it

requires a conscious identity that is open to the other. This Shiite scholar also, criticizing the contradiction between slogans of peace and aggressive, destructive behaviors in today's world, called upon academic assemblies to choose between the logic of power and the power of logic.

Maliheh Norouzi: Protecting the Sacred in Art Requires Conscious Agreement



Dr. Maliheh Norouzi, a researcher in theoretical art in Vienna, emphasized that protecting the sacred in religious art is not achieved by removing images or distancing oneself from media, but requires "shared agreements among individuals" regarding the manner of its representation and display. Referring to historical examples such as Ottoman miniature paintings, she showed that it was these societies themselves that determined the boundaries of displaying or concealing the sacred. She warned that with the expansion of globalization, these agreements have weakened and religious art is exposed to dangers such as commodification, while art alone is incapable of reconstructing these lost agreements. Emphasizing the multi-dimensional nature of human identity, Dr. Norouzi ultimately called for "free art"—art in which limitations and the choice of whether or not to display are selected transparently and consciously rather than imposed, so that individuals can relate to religious traditions without coercion.

Mahdi Esfahani: Knowledge of God and of the Self Is the Common Foundation of Human Religious and Global Identity



Dr. Mahdi Esfahani, university professor and member of the Center for Interfaith Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, another speaker at the conference, emphasized that religious identity and global identity are not in opposition to each other but are interwoven. He argued that beneath all particular and social identities lies a common foundation: the human being's unmediated knowledge of the self in the light of knowledge of God. This divine root, independent of any surrounding or educational influences, forms the primary basis of the shared identity of human beings. Therefore, global solidarity is not merely an external contract but a reflection of a fundamental oneness that binds all human beings to one another beyond cultural and ritual boundaries.

Afsar Rathore: Interfaith Dialogue Is a Practical Tool for Establishing Peace in the World



Dr. Afsar Rathore, one of the international directors of the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations and a staff member of the United Nations Office in Vienna, drawing on 27 years of experience working in crisis-stricken regions, stated that religious identity and global identity are not in opposition but complementary. Referring to her experiences in countries such as Bosnia, Rwanda,

and Somalia, she emphasized the role of faith and cooperation among religious communities in healing the wounds of war and rebuilding trust.

Rathore, citing United Nations initiatives in the field of interfaith dialogue and examples of cooperation between Muslims and Christians in conflict zones, said that religious leaders can play a fundamental role in creating peace and reconciliation. According to her, peace is not merely the end of war but requires the restoration of trust, justice, human dignity, and mutual respect.

In her conclusion, she stressed that interfaith dialogue does not mean abandoning differences but is a path to building a global identity that can encompass religious and cultural diversity. Referring to the slogan “Many Cultures, One Humanity,” Rathore said that lasting peace becomes possible when cooperation and solidarity replace confrontation.

Astrid Mattes: Young People’s Religious Identity Is Formed in the Interaction Between Virtual Space and Everyday Life



Professor Astrid Mattes, Professor of Social Science Research on Religion at the University of Vienna, presenting research findings on 41 religiously committed young people in the city, examined how religious identity is formed in virtual space and everyday life. She stated that the research shows that social networks, while expanding young people’s connections with religious communities around the world, sometimes blur differences within religious traditions.

Mattes added that many of the participating young people felt themselves in a minority position and adopted different strategies for adapting to the social environment, ranging from concealing their religious beliefs to introducing and explaining them to others. In her conclusion, she emphasized that religious identity is not a fixed phenomenon but is continuously redefined in interaction with the social environment and digital communications; in this process, global identity for many young people is not an abstract concept but part of the everyday experience of life.

Franz Gmainer-Pranzl: A Post-Secular Society Is Formed on the Basis of Mutual Learning and Dialogue



Professor Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, Head of the Department of Systematic Theology and Deputy Director of the Center for Intercultural Theology and Study of Religions at the University of Salzburg in Austria, introduced the concept of the "post-secular" as a way to move beyond common confrontations regarding secularism. Drawing on the views of Jürgen Habermas, he explained that in such a society, religious and secular (this-worldly) citizens must enter a process of "mutual learning," such that secular individuals accept religion as a source of ethics and religious individuals adapt to the cognitive challenges of the contemporary world. He concluded by emphasizing that, learning from history, it is appropriate that for the possibility of confronting the newly smaller world, the realm of belief—whether religious or secular—remain protected from immediate entanglement with institutions of power and reduction to instruments of political hegemony. Instead, the activism of both groups should be based on the "force of the better argument," with the main criterion being progress toward humanity, justice, solidarity, and peace.

Elmar Kuhn: Religions Must Become a Shared Ship of Peace Instead of Weapons of Hatred



Professor Elmar Kuhn, International President of the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations, in his speech entitled “Religions as a Ship,” stated that religions can be a source of hope and stability in a world filled with war and insecurity; yet their political misuse may lead to hatred and violence. Using the metaphor of a ship, he emphasized that no individual or religion alone encompasses the entirety of truth, and coexistence requires the acceptance of differences and mutual cooperation.

Kuhn, referring to teachings from the Quran and the Bible, stressed the avoidance of imposing faith and the necessity of dialogue among religions and non-religious communities. He regarded education and precise knowledge of sacred texts as ways to counter extremism and called for cooperation among followers of religions to guide humanity toward peace, freedom, and coexistence.

Amir Horr: What Distinguishes the Human Being from the Machine in the Age of Artificial Intelligence?



Dr. Amir Horr, a scientist and artificial intelligence researcher based in Vienna, in his speech entitled “The Age of Artificial Intelligence and the Virtual World,” warned about the impact of technological developments on human identity. Referring to the intertwining of the real and virtual worlds, he raised the possibility of reduced human control over decision-making and the formation of dual identities, especially among adolescents.

Horr emphasized that artificial intelligence’s ability to process data is not the same as the human understanding of concepts such as faith, love, sacrifice, and spirituality. He regarded the strengthening of family and social education, the preservation of human experiences, and human oversight of technology as essential, and concluded by asking: What characteristics distinguish the human being, and which aspects of life should not be entrusted to machines?

Reza Gholami: Global Identity Must Be Built Through Dialogue and the Acceptance of Differences, Not by Eliminating Differences and Homogenization



Dr. Reza Gholami, Cultural Representative of Iran in Austria, as the final speaker, referring to the expansion of artificial intelligence and rapid technological developments, stated that global identity is no longer merely a theoretical subject but is taking shape in the context of digital communications and social networks; nevertheless, globalization should not lead to the expansion of a particular culture and its transformation into a global standard. Drawing on intercultural philosophy, whose cradle is Austria, he emphasized the necessity of constructing the global through mutual dialogue among cultures and religious traditions and listed two simultaneous dangers: cultural homogenization and the transformation of religious identities into closed fortresses against the other.

Gholami regarded “creative transformation” as a path for the continuity of religious traditions—a transformation that, while preserving the fundamental commitments of each tradition, enables reinterpretation and responsiveness to new issues. He also warned that artificial intelligence can, through biased data and algorithms, shape or distort public perceptions of religions; therefore, the participation of religious institutions in formulating the ethics of artificial intelligence must be plural, independent, measurable, and accountable.

This university professor, emphasizing the value of religious and cultural diversity, recalled that values such as human dignity, honesty, assisting the vulnerable, and responsibility can form the basis for cooperation among different traditions without replacing their particular identities. A faculty member of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, he concluded by referring to the concept of awakening the intellect in *Nahj al-Balagha*, regarding the role of religions as going beyond merely reacting to technological developments, and emphasized the necessity of strengthening the human capacity for conscious judgment about technology, identity, and one’s own future. According to him, a true global identity is formed not by eliminating differences but by the ability to live alongside differences and create shared meaning.

The First “Lotus of Dialogue” Statue



One of the main parts of the conference was the awarding of the first honorary “Lotus (Niloufar) of Dialogue” statue to Peter Haider. This award was established by the Iranian Wisdom House, Vienna with the aim of honoring individuals who have played an effective role in expanding interfaith and intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation among societies.

Reza Gholami, scientific secretary of the conference, while presenting the statue, referred to the historical background of interaction among religions and cultures in Iranian civilization and cited examples ranging from the Cyrus Cylinder in the sixth century BCE to the dialogues of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) and Imam Reza (a.s.) with followers of various religions and viewpoints as instances of this tradition. On this basis, he described Iran as the “land of dialogue.”



Gholami also expressed appreciation for Haider's efforts to expand dialogue among religions, especially Islam and Christianity, and regarded the Lotus (Niloufar) statue as a symbol of commitment to interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

The choice of the lotus as the symbol of this statue is also based on the symbolic meaning of blossoming and moving toward the light—an image of the possibility of reaching mutual recognition and understanding even in conditions of difference and misunderstanding.

The conference "Religious Identity and Global Identity" concluded with a summary of the discussions by the participants.