

STATEMENT OF INTENTION ON A CODE FOR HOLY SITES

On the 26th -28th of July 2008, at the invitation of the “Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights”, and the organisation “One World in Dialogue” we gathered in Stiklestad and Trondheim, the places where the patron saint of Norway, St. Olav was martyred and buried and which are regarded as the spiritual cradle for the Norwegian nation. We religious leaders, academics, politicians, and members of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities from different parts of Europe and the Middle East met together to discuss the issue “Holy Sites – Places for Conflict or Dialogue”. We would hope that this meeting will be a first step in a process which can lead to a universally shared **Code on Holy Sites**.

First and foremost, we unanimously and categorically condemn all forms of violence and bloodshed. Holy Sites are gathering places where humankind meets with the Creator, and therefore they may not be desecrated or damaged and must be preserved with dignity for subsequent generations. We have discussed conflicts and problems relating to Holy Sites, and have also attempted to identify their characteristics and how we can ensure that they are places of peace and reconciliation rather than focal points of conflict. We have found agreement on certain points: Holy Sites are part of the public sphere. They are places where individuals and communities join together in spiritual fellowship, reaffirm a historical heritage and receive spiritual replenishment for their personal and communal everyday life. Holy Sites reflect the profound religious identities of individuals and faith groups and are places where religion, history and politics converge.

We have agreed that there is a need to continue our discussions in order to clarify the common values we share with regard to Holy Sites. We hope to develop this into a jointly shared **Code on Holy Sites** which reflect common values of:

- shared respect for the sacred
- mutual acknowledgement and respect for each other’s Holy Sites
- respect for individuals and communities who manifest their faith at these Holy Sites.

In sharing these values, we wish to deal with issues relating to:

- Cooperation between religious leaders with the aim of developing a code on Holy Sites that encompasses the requirements of religious communities and is supported by political leaders
- Preservation and development of Holy Sites according to their specific needs
- A broad educational policy towards reinforcing mutual respect for Holy Sites
- Awareness of the positive role that religious leaders can play when dealing with administration of Holy Sites and the prevention of conflagrations around them
- Access to Holy Sites – which is fundamental to freedom of religion
- The abuse of Holy Sites for the purpose of manifesting one party's power over another or for political purposes
- The destruction of Holy Sites in order to deny people's attachment to their sacred places and to fundamental aspects of their history
- The right of people to worship and to feel safe in places which are part of their religious heritage
- Interpretation of history in a manner that allows us to move forward rather than be caught in our past
- The use of Holy Sites for other purposes against the will of the community with which they are associated
- Visits of tourists to Holy Sites

We intend to use the coming year to continue exchanges on these issues in an attempt to develop these aims. We wish to broaden the spectrum of participants in the recognition that Holy Sites constitute an issue to be discussed on a global level.