



**Pre-invitation to
The Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue
Gender, Media and Religion:
Contemporary Challenges to Society and Democracy**

**I to 4 May 2018
Sigtuna, Sweden**

In recent years, we have seen the rise of many cultural tensions and conflicts, even violent terror and war, in many parts of the world. This has not least been the case in Europe and in the Arab region. Religion has been at the core in many of these contemporary conflicts.

If we wish is to see the development of healthy and well-functioning democracies in Europe and in the Arab region, we need to discuss the relation between religion and society. In doing so, we must, among other things, specifically focus on gender issues.

When the United Nation organization *UN Women* in 2017 launched the *Global Platform on Gender Equality and Religion*, they were drawing on “the growing recognition that the role of faith-based organizations in addressing the needs of women and girls is critical”. Equality issues, specifically restrictions around the role of women in society, and issues related to the female body, have become a significant focal point of religious and cultural tensions. Thus, gender issues are central to the discussion about religion and society.

The media is a significant lens through which we see and experience religious and cultural tension, but also the scene where religious and cultural tensions are expressed and acted out. With today’s focus on “fake news,” combined with the insight that mediated stories and messages communicated through various media platforms significantly determine who we are and the way in which we look at the world, we also must reflect upon the role and functions of the media. Our identity, as well as our conception of “the other”, is formed through communication and through our reflexive mediated relations.

The Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue

The Arab-European Citizens' Dialogue was established in 2010 as an expansion of a previous Egyptian-German dialogue. The main counterparts are the *Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services* (CEOSS) in Cairo, Egypt, and *Oikosnet Europe*, an association of faith-based educational and dialogue institutions in Europe with its office in Sigtuna, Sweden. From 2010, there has been a series of consultations in Europe and in the Arab region. The last Consultation, the 5th from the initiation of this dialogue, was held at the *Orthodox Academy of Crete* in March 2016. The Sigtuna event will be the 6th consultation.

What can we achieve?

The contemporary challenges to society and democracy cannot be solved through action on only one level, or through the action of only one institution. We must work on many different levels and in and through many institutional contexts. This Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue aim to build on the interaction among civil society institutions in both regions. The ambition is to create dialogue and reflective processes through which all participants can be enriched, and that this in turn can lead to change when new ideas and ways of thinking are adopted and applied in our various local contexts.

A pre-invitation

We hereby invite You to take part in this Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue on religion and society! Whether you have been participating in any of the previous dialogue consultations or not, you are most welcome to take part in the next event. This is a pre-invitation. A more detailed invitation will follow.

The Sigtuna Consultation will start in the early evening of May 1st, 2018, and end in the morning of Friday 4 May.

Participants

During the Sigtuna Consultation, we will have speakers representing Politics, Faith-based Organizations and Civil Society Institutions from both the Arab and the European region. The Consultation will be open for interested participants from both regions. The process to seek appropriate speakers has just started, but we already know that two prominent individuals from Sweden, representing Europe and Sweden, will speak at the Consultation.

- **Anders Wejryd**, World Council of Churches President for Europe, former Archbishop for Church of Sweden
- **Karin Wiborn**, General Secretary, Christian Council of Sweden

A full program will be presented early February 2018.

Organizers

The Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue Consultation on Religion and Society in Sigtuna 2018 is organized jointly by the *Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services* (CEOSS), *Oikosnet Europe*, *Church of Sweden* and *the Sigtuna Foundation*. Feel free to contact any of the following persons if you have further questions:

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