



**Invitation to The Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue**

**Gender, Media and Religion –  
Contemporary Challenges to Society and Democracy**

**1 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. Therefore, if we want healthy and well-functioning democracies in Europe and in the Arab region, we need to better understand the relation between religion and society. Especially, we need to focus on how gender issues and the role of media stories and images come into play in this context.

**We hereby invite You to take part in the Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue!**

Welcome to discuss issues of great importance for the development of contemporary societies in the Arab and European regions! And welcome to the nice and beautiful venue of the Sigtuna Foundation – close to Stockholm Arlanda Airport, Sweden!

## Program

There will be speakers representing Politics, Faith-based Organizations and Civil Society Institutions from both the Arab and the European region. The Conference will be open for participants from both regions. The program will start in the early evening of May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, and end in the morning of Friday 4 May. A detailed program will be published separately, but among the speakers are:

*Aziza Karam:* Senior Advisor, UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and Coordinator, UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development

*Anders Wejryd:* President for Europe, World Council of Churches, and former Archbishop of the Church of Sweden

*Karin Wiborn:* General Secretary, Christian Council of Sweden

*Andrea Zaki:* General Director, Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, and President of the protestant churches in Egypt

## Conference themes

The general scope of this dialogue conference is on religion and society. But there will also be a specific focus on gender and media perspectives.

A United Nations report on “Realising the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security”, acknowledged that “gender justice remains a challenging set of issues, because of the difficult readings of text and the complexities of cultural practices. Given this reality, rather than walk away from the challenge, there needs to be concerted efforts to work towards the specific areas where there is a confluence of objectives – issue-based strategic alliances”. 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 the role of religion in 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.

## 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 aims 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.

## Registration and Costs

You are invited to take part in this Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue Conference! Whether you have been participating in any of the previous dialogue meetings or not, you are most welcome to take part in the Sigtuna event.

You can register by using the following link: [click here for registration](#) (or write to Karin Sallander, [karin.sallander@sigtunastiftelsen.se](mailto:karin.sallander@sigtunastiftelsen.se)). As you register, you will be asked if you want to pay with credit card or by invoice. **Please, register no later than March 15.**

The total cost for the whole conference, after subsidies, is **EUR 350:-**. This fee covers:

- Conference fee
- Single room accommodation 3 nights, from Tuesday evening to Friday morning
- All meals during the conference including Reception, Banquet Dinner, etc.

## Background and organizers

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 the start, there has been a series of consultations in Europe and in the Arab region. The last consultation was held at the *Orthodox Academy of Crete* in March 2016. The Sigtuna event will be the 6<sup>th</sup> consultation.

The Arab-Europe Citizens' Dialogue Consultation 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:

For the Arab side: *Samira Luka* ([samira.luka@ceoss.org.eg](mailto:samira.luka@ceoss.org.eg))

For the European side: *Alf Linderman* ([alf.linderman@sigtunastiftelsen.se](mailto:alf.linderman@sigtunastiftelsen.se))

