@RelDevSpeaks! Webinar on Religion and Peacebuilding
October 23rd, 1-2:30pm CET

The Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain (CRCPD) has launched a new research cluster in collaboration with the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development (KCRD) and MDF Training and Consultancy on Religion and Development. In keeping with the main goal of the cluster to contribute to theoretical and practical debates on the role of religion in development initiatives, the cluster convenors are planning a series of webinars. These webinars will bring together scholars and practitioners from around the world to discuss a variety of themes based on their own research and practical experience.

On 23 October, the cluster will host the first pilot webinar on Religion and Peacebuilding. For much of the history of the field of International Relations and related disciplines of development and peace and conflict studies, understandings of conflict resolution and peace building have been state-centered. Yet this focus on the state is becoming increasingly untenable. Hilhorst (2013) suggests that understandings of conflict, sustainable peace and human security in fragile states involve multiple institutions and actors - state, transnational, civil society and intergovernmental. Sustainable peace can only be realized through multidimensional processes, including political and juridical efforts as well as reconstruction social and cultural relationships (Amstutz 2005).

As part of this growing recognition of the role of actors beyond the state and the critique of realist approaches to conflict and peace, scholars have also acknowledged that religion has been an undervalued component of conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts (Shore 2009). This is in part also due to the dominance of secular political philosophy that excludes religion from public life and positions secularism as neutral and universal, not recognising its own embedded assumptions (Hurd 2008). However, a growing number of scholars and practitioners are acknowledging that in order to develop more nuanced analyses of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction and development, the role of religion must be more fully explored and understood.

Attention for the multiple dimensions of peace building as well as the multiple ways in which people themselves work towards peace and security necessarily includes religion. Religion's significance in the everyday lives of many people around the world means that religion is a critical part of how many people cope with insecurity and conflict and work towards sustainable peace. However, since religion has often been involved in conflict and/or in the dominant frames in which a conflict is perceived, the question arises as to how religion can be part of processes of reconciliation in efforts to create sustainable peace.

This webinar is an opportunity for scholars and practitioners to explore these issues together. Reflecting the multi-dimensional aspects of conflict and the numerous actors and institutions involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the webinar will include reflections on the variety of ways in which religious beliefs, views, actors and institutions may influence conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. This will include reflection on formal religious institutions on national and local levels and the

religious views, beliefs and ideas these institutions produce. Yet we set out explicitly to draw attention to the ways in which people practice their religion in their everyday lives and how this shapes and gives meaning to their own views and actions. This means that we include personal spirituality, the role of religious imagery and narratives and people's personal religious views and ideas.

Three speakers will draw on their own experiences to reflect on the following questions:

How does religion play a role in the ways in which people work towards stability, build relationships and create sustainable peace?

How do these efforts interact with or give rise to peace building initiatives on the level of grassroots, formal civil society (NGO) and nation state?

Frank Ubachs will reflect on how religion, security and peace-building interact at the state level. Drawing on the case of Tunisia, he will reflect on how the current political crisis in Tunisia interacts with religion in complex ways. Including strong secularist voices as well as an increasing visibility of radical Salafism in the country, challenging ways to include and address religion in striving towards security and sustainable peace. Frank will reflect on the ways religion is and is not addressed in the political discourse in Tunisia and the (potential) consequences of (not) addressing religion as part of efforts to create security and sustainable peace.

Frank Ubachs is Fellow in Religion, Violence and Security with the Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain and co-convenor of the Religion, Peace and Security Research Cluster at the CRCPD. Formerly, he was executive director for The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration and policy advisor in the human rights and good governance department at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Aleksandar Krzalovski from MCIC will provide a practitioner's perspective on the theme of the webinar, focussed on the role of NGOs in peacebuilding. MCIC has long standing experience in stimulating dialogue between Muslims and Macedonian Orthodox religious groups in Macedonia. Based on the practical experiences in the programmes Bridging Religions and Dialogue of Cultures in Macedonia, Aleksander will reflect on the influence of concrete actions in practice such as bringing rivalling religious groups together for joint visits of sacral objects, ceremonies, exchange lectures etc. In addition he will consider the impact of experiences that are less confronting, but focussing in overcoming the natural distance between people with different religions. Based on this he will reflect on the importance of explicitly or less explicitly addressing religion in peace-building efforts.

Erik Meinema will reflect on the potential power of pragmatism involved in grassroots peacebuilding initiatives by youth. Drawing on his own research in Ambon, Indonesia he shows that these practical, grassroots initiatives allow young people to work towards building relationships between Christian and Muslim youth trying to overcome the deep divisions that have been created during the violent conflicts. From this grass roots perspective, Erik will critically reflect on the more formal peacebuilding efforts focussing on 'truth' as a means of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The webinar will combine reflections of the three presenters (in short 10-minute presentations) with interactive discussions amongst webinar participants who have experience in/ knowledge about religion and peacebuilding.

As the series is still in the developmental phase, for this pilot webinar we are aiming for one hour, but ask that participants allow an hour and a half in case of technical difficulties. We anticipate that future webinars will go for the full hour and a half, with longer contributions from the key speakers.

Below is an outline of the program:

Moderator: Erin Wilson

Program

Introduction from moderator (Erin Wilson)

Presentations (7-10 minutes each – 30 minutes total)

Discussion (20 minutes)

Conclusion and summary (5 minutes)

Poll – rate webinar, make suggestions

For more information or to register, please email Brenda Bartelink b.bartelink@stichtingoikos.nl, Esther Wintraecken EWI@mdf.nl or Erin Wilson e.k.wilson@rug.nl.

References
Mark R. Amstutz, *The Healing of Nations. The Promise and Limits of Political Forgiveness* (Lanham e.a. 2005) 106- 113.

Hilhorst, T. (2013). Disaster, conflict and society in crises: Everyday politics of crisis response. London: Routledge.

Hurd, E.S. (2008). *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Shore, M. (2009). Religion and conflict resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Farnham, England: Ashgate.