

# Tolerance and non-discrimination

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Thank you Madam Moderator, your Excellencies, distinguished guests. My name is Sina Varaei, from the Brussels Office of the Bahá'í International Community, which represents the worldwide Bahá'í community to the European Institutions.

Racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance do not only deprive a portion of humanity of the opportunity to cultivate and express the full range of their capability, but also hinder societal progress by acting as an obstacle to its peace, development, and stability. Addressing these issues at their roots goes beyond merely implementing the necessary legal measures. It involves addressing prejudices, misconceptions, and distorted narratives.

These challenges can only be addressed, at both the individual and community levels, when people from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to engage meaningfully, beyond occasional encounters. Meaningful interactions mean regular engagement, allowing individuals and communities to experience diversity in their daily lives. Meaningful interactions involve collaboration and working on joint projects together.

Only by working together across communities can people better understand the lived experience of one another, appreciate the valuable insights each perspective and culture has to offer, and to cultivate a sense of common purpose.

How can we create more opportunities for children and youth to develop friendships across communities? How can we ensure that an increasing number of citizens, of all ages, social, ethnic or religious backgrounds, discuss common aspirations for their neighbourhoods, their families or their environment, learn to identify challenges and opportunities together, and work together on joint endeavours?

Essential to the above, is the encouraging role of institutional actors. What are the policy implications of viewing every resident as a valuable contributor with unique capabilities? How can institutional actors co-create spaces, initiatives, and projects, alongside the local population, in line with the habits and dynamics of the local community? What attitudes and approaches can they adopt to facilitate co-creation and sustained engagement?

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