

Religious liberty experts call for increased understanding among faith groups

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Addressing the perception that religion can chisel away at good relations among faith groups, members of the International Religious Liberty Association's Board of Experts agreed at a September 9 to 13 meeting that religion must be recast as a means of reconciliation.

"The principles that emerge from all the major faiths suggest an enduring solution that comes from religion, [one that] is needed as never before," Ambassador Robert Seiple, board chair, said.

To that end, board members explored topics ranging from justice to peace from the perspectives of the three Abrahamic faith traditions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. They concluded each must understand the others' grasp on such issues if faith groups want to eliminate hostilities and build strong relations.



International Religious Liberty Association board members met last week to find ways religion -- traditionally viewed by many as a source of division among faith groups -- can inspire reconciliation. [photo: courtesy IRLA]

The board also agreed that governments alone cannot mandate religious freedom. "There needs to be a heart-change within various [religious] communities, and peace based on mutual respect," said John Graz, IRLA secretary general and director of the world Seventh-day Adventist Church's department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty.

"Reconciliation is an essential part of true and lasting religious freedom. Simply having laws to prevent religious persecution and discrimination is not sufficient," Graz said.

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