



**The National Forum for
Cooperation of Religions
in Finland (CORE)**

ANNUAL REPORT

2018

**THE NATIONAL FORUM FOR COOPERATION
OF RELIGIONS IN FINLAND (CORE Forum)**

Uskontojen yhteistyö Suomessa – USKOT-foorumi ry

Religionernas samarbete i Finland – RESA-forumet rf

ANNUAL REPORT 2018



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1 General information

In 2018, the CORE Forum's two main areas of concern were *consolidating its position* and *influencing*. In our action planning, a key consolidation measure was the reorganisation of our staff structure. The CORE Forum underwent major changes in 2018, when Executive Director Anja Toivola-Stambouli, who had been an integral part of the team since the CORE Forum's founding, retired in May.

We wanted to consolidate our operations by working to broaden our membership base. We met with representatives of potential member organisations and invited them to join our events. We also made internal preparations throughout the year to accept new members. In addition, we solidified our position by strengthening our networks both nationally and internationally, also in the field of NGOs. We sought new perspectives from religious collabora-

tion partners in Sweden, exchanging experiences and learning from one another. We also deepened our relationships with various NGOs through our work on hate crime reporting. As a result, we gained more visibility and established our position, particularly among organisations working with various minorities.

In our influencing work, our objectives were to improve our communications and to actively take part in the public debate. In 2018, our influencing themes were 1) a diverse society, 2) religious education and early education, and 3) human rights and equality. Another important objective was to bring forward the theme of mutual understanding by highlighting the things that unite people rather than those that divide them. All these topics were closely integrated into the themes that the CORE Forum promoted and discussed in 2018.

2 Organisation

2.1 Members and purpose

The year 2018 was the CORE Forum’s eighth operating year. The organisation was formed on 24 January 2011 and registered on 15 May 2012.

The CORE Forum’s founding member communities represent three religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The CORE Forum members are the Finnish Ecumenical Council, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Islamic Council of Finland, the Finnish Islamic Congregation, and the Central Council of Jewish Communities in Finland. The aim and purpose of the organisation is to foster peace in Finland by strengthening religious freedom and promoting interfaith dialogue, equality, mutual respect and cooperation in matters we consider important.

2.2 2018 Annual General Meeting

The CORE Forum’s eighth Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place in the Church Council’s Mikael hall on 19 April 2018. The AGM elected CORE Forum President Kaarlo Kalliala as meeting chair and Executive Director Anja Toivola-Stambouli as meeting secretary. The AGM considered the agenda items laid down in the rules.

2.3 Executive Committee

The 2017 AGM elected the CORE Forum’s fourth successive Executive Committee, which began its term after the AGM held on 5 April 2017. The Executive Committee was the same for 2018.

The Presidium

President

Kaarlo Kalliala, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Vice-presidents

Atik Ali, the Finnish Islamic Congregation
Yaron Nadbornik, the Central Council of Jewish Communities in Finland

Executive Committee members

The Finnish Ecumenical Council

Mari-Anna Pöntinen; Milena Parland, deputy
Jan Edström; Jari Portaankorva, deputy

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Elina Hellqvist; Laura Maria Latikka, deputy

The Finnish Islamic Congregation

Kadriye Bedretdin; Ferhan Bedretdin, deputy

The Islamic Council of Finland

Pia Jardi; Abdessalam Jardi, deputy
Isra Lehtinen; Anas Hajjar, deputy

The Central Council of Jewish Communities in Finland

Yvonne Westerlund.

The Executive Committee held nine meetings in 2018. The venue for all the meetings was the Islam Building (Fredrikinkatu 33 A in Helsinki).

2.4 Committees

Committees are expert advisory bodies that prepare matters to be considered by the Executive Committee. Committees can also propose motions in matters within their remit, and they can be asked to carry out tasks allocated by the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee forms committees and appoints committee members. These members must have relevant expertise and represent the Forum’s member communities in a meaningful way. Committee members are each elected for a term of one year.

The committees established in 2017 continued to operate in 2018 with the following members:

Human Rights Committee: Atik Ali, chair

Members: Jan Edström, Janina Hasenson, Anna Hyvärinen and Pia Jardi

International Affairs Committee: Anas Hajjar, chair

Members: Kadriye Bedretdin, Mikko Heikka, Elina Hellqvist, Abdessalam Jardi, Kaarlo Kalliala, Yvonne Westerlund and Anja Toivola-Stambouli

Religious Education Committee: Mari-Anna Auvinen, chair

Members: Abbas Bahmanpour, Jyri Komulainen, Isra Lehtinen, Yaron Nadbornik, Sirpa Okulov, Suaad Onniselkä, Milena Parland, Daniel Weintraub, Tuula Vinko, Osmo Vartiainen, Tuula Sakaranaho and Pekka Iivonen

Communications Committee: Yaron Nadbornik, chair

Members: Mari Leppänen and Oussama Yousfi

Equality Committee: Laura Maria Latikka, chair

Members: Ferhan Bedretdin, Pia Jardi, Isra Lehtinen, Anja Toivola-Stambouli, Yvonne Westerlund, Katariina Väisänen and Kadriye Bedretdin

Operational activities

3 Operational activities

3.1 The 1st Indonesia-Finland Bilateral Interfaith and Intermedia Dialogue seminar

Together with the Unit for Eastern Asia and Oceania of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Helsinki, the CORE Forum organised an interfaith dialogue seminar entitled “The 1st Indonesia-Finland Bilateral Interfaith and Intermedia Dialogue”

on 17 September. This seminar followed the Indonesian delegation’s visit to Finland in December 2017.

The seminar hosted an Indonesian delegation that included heads of various religious communities, representatives of ministries and universities, and editors-in-chief. Finnish participants included representatives of ministries, religious communities, universities and the media. In total, the seminar had 36 attendees, who gathered at the Finnish Islamic

Congregation’s premises (Fredrikinkatu 33 A in Helsinki).

The seminar’s theme was “Sharing Experiences and Best Practices in Managing Cultural and Religious Diversity and Strengthening the Understanding of Religious and Cultural Diversity” from the perspective of “The Role of Women, Media and Religious Communities in Promoting Tolerance, Respect and Understanding”.







Panel discussion about the role of fasting in various religions at the World Village Festival.



3.2 Other events

3.2.1 World Village Festival: Village of Religions

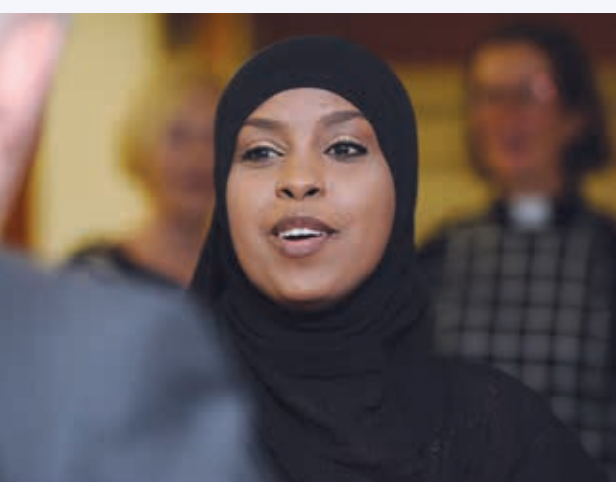
In 2018, the World Village Festival focused on Africa, and its theme was the UN’s sustainable development programme “Agenda 2030”. The CORE Forum took part in the Village of Religions stand at the World Village Festival organised in Kaisaniemi Park in Helsinki on the weekend of 26–27 May. The Parish Union of Helsinki was in charge of the practical organisation of the Village of Religions. Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto represented the CORE Forum at the stand. The Village of Religions event also had a panel discussion on the role of fasting in various religions. Panellists included CORE Forum Executive Committee member Isra Lehtinen and Religious Education Committee member Daniel Weintraub.



3.2.2 Panel discussion in SuomiAreena

In 2018, the themes of the SuomiAreena public debate forum were safety, tolerance and responsibility. The CORE Forum participated in SuomiAreena by organising a panel discussion for 19 July entitled





“From the Maelstrom of Civil War to the Happiest Country in the World?” together with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Panellists included Tarja Halonen, former president of Finland; Kaarlo Kalliala, bishop and CORE Forum president; Teemu Keskisarja, historian; and Yaron Nadbornik, chair of the Jewish Community of Helsinki and CORE Forum vice-president. The panel was hosted by Tomi Lähdeniemi, editor-in-chief of the regional newspaper *Satakunnan Kansa*. According to SuomiAreena statistics, the panel attracted 283 listeners.

The discussion’s theme was the hundred-year-long history of the independent nation of Finland and the role religion has played in it. The audience was also shown videos about mutual understanding in which the following shared their views on the topic: Osman Abdrahim, Tatar and war veteran; Rony Smolar, Jewish journalist and author; Noor Assad, active participant in Muslim organisations; and Heidi Rautionmaa, Christian priest on interfaith dialogue. The videos were produced by the Evangelical

Lutheran Church of Finland.

3.2.3 Jewish-Muslim New Year’s dinner

In 2018, the Jewish and Islamic New Year coincided in the same week. To celebrate the beginning of the years 5779 and 1440 respectively, the CORE Forum decided to host a dinner party. The interfaith New Year’s party was celebrated on Jewish Community premises by some forty representatives of member communities as well as CORE Forum friends and collaboration partners.

The evening started with a tour of the synagogue led by Yaron Nadbornik, chair of the Jewish Community of Helsinki and vice-president of the CORE Forum. Afterwards, Ramil Belyaev, imam of the Finnish Islamic Congregation, and Mari-Anna Auvinen, general secretary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council and CORE Forum Executive Committee member, offered welcoming words. After the dinner, the kletzmer band *Freilach Mit Kneidlach* provided dinner guests with entertainment.



The World Harmony Week's movie screening attracted some 40 people despite the snowy weather conditions.



Tapani Kärkkäinen and Petra Kuivala discussing the themes of the movie *Ida*.

3.2.4 Mission in the City

The CORE Forum took part in the Mission in the City event held at St. Matthew's Church in Helsinki on 12 October. In the event, Executive Committee member Elina Hellqvist and Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto provided an introduction to the CORE Forum's operations.

3.2.5 Movie screenings

In 2018, the CORE Forum organised two film screenings with a discussion session about the movie themes held afterward.

On 1 February, the CORE Forum presented *Of Gods and Men*, directed by Xavier Beauvois, at the Kino Engel cinema in Helsinki. The screening was part of the programme for the UN's World Interfaith Harmony Week, and it attracted more than 40 people. The panellists in the discussion held after the screening were Elina Hellqvist, Pia Jardi and Yaron Nadbornik, all CORE Forum Executive Committee members. The theme of the 2018 World



Interfaith Harmony Week was hospitality, which was also part of the discussion.

On the Finnish Independence Day, 6 December, the CORE Forum showed the Polish-Danish movie *Ida* by Pawel Pawlikowski at Kino Engel in Helsinki. In the panel discussion after the movie, journalist, translator and non-fiction writer Tapani Kärkkäinen led the audience deeper into the movie's theme by

discussing its characters. Researcher of Catholic theology Petra Kuivala looked at the movie's symbolism and the relationship between Polishness and the Catholic Church. After the experts presented their views, members of the audience shared their thoughts as representatives of different religions. The event attracted 34 attendees.

3.2.6 Public appearances by CORE Forum representatives

- Vice-president Yaron Nadbornik represented the CORE Forum at a ProNoLa Hera research project meeting at Cultural Centre Sofia in Helsinki on 29 August. The meeting looked at questions of religion and law in the context of different eras, with Nadbornik speaking about the position of religious minorities in Finland.
- The CORE Forum was represented at the Comprehensive Security 2018 security event in Lahti on 7 September. In a workshop organised by the Finnish Ecumenical Coun-

cil and the Forum for Culture and Religion FOKUS, CORE Forum Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto discussed how hate speech disturbs the social peace.

- Executive Committee member Jan Edström explained the CORE Forum’s operations to Evangelical Lutheran Church vicars in a vicars’ conference in the Diocese of Borgå in Karjaa on 25 September.
- Vice-president Atik Ali appeared on the radio show *Horisontti* on 7 October discussing circumcision with the title “Why do Jews and Muslims circumcise their sons?”
- Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto held a presentation entitled “Religions and early education” in the Regional State Administrative Agency’s seminar “Inclusive early education: Towards a more interactive culture” on 13 December.

3.3 Publications and influencing

3.3.1 Finnish translation of the Marrakesh Declaration

The Marrakesh Declaration is a statement issued in Marrakesh, Morocco in January 2016 by more than 300 Muslim religious leaders and scholars. The Marrakesh Declaration defends the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries and finds justification for minority rights in Islamic scriptures. The Declaration seeks to protect minorities, promote peace and build common ground for interfaith dialogue and meetings. In early 2018, the CORE

Forum decided to have this important statement translated into Finnish. The declaration was translated from Arabic into Finnish by Kaarlo Yrttiaho.

3.3.2 Shadow reporting of hate crime

In 2018, the CORE Forum expanded its publishing activities. Having won a competitive tender in May, the CORE Forum began its shadow reporting of hate crime. The report was commissioned by Victim Support Finland as part of the EU-funded Against Hate project coordinated by the Ministry of Justice. For the first time on this scale in Finland, the report piloted a data collection procedure on hate crime that is based on victims’ experiences and covers all aggravating circumstances.

The CORE Forum designed and prepared the questionnaires and other materials in seven different languages. In the autumn, the CORE Forum collected victims’ experiences of hate crimes that have taken place in Finland within the past five years. The data were analysed late last year, and the report is due to be published in 2019. Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto collected the data, drew up the report and presented the project in three expert meetings in Helsinki and Tampere in the autumn.



3.3.3 Opinions sent to government authorities

In 2018, the CORE Forum provided three statements.

In January, at the request of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Human Rights Committee and the Equality Committee wrote an opinion regarding Finland’s first report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry published its proposed new animal welfare act on 21 December 2017 and requested opinions be submitted by 28 February 2018. The Human Rights Committee drafted an opinion regarding the parts of the bill related to slaughtering, which would mean that religious slaughter would no longer be possible.

In August, with the help of the Equality Committee, the CORE Forum’s Executive Committee prepared an opinion on Finland’s draft eighth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

3.3.4 Other comments

The CORE Forum expressed its shock at the shooting at the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue on 27 October 2018 by issuing a public statement offering its condolences to the victims and their loved ones.

The Finnish weekly news magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti* discussed religious education in its 36/2018 issue. The CORE Forum’s Religious Education Committee wrote a response to the article, which was published in the 41/2018 issue, but in a shorter version. The original response was published in full on the CORE Forum website.

3.3.5 Blog series on religious education

In 2018, the CORE Forum made use of the extraordinary expertise represented by its Religious Education Committee and ran a blog series on religious education. Authors included teachers of different religions and other experts from the committee. The blog posts discussed, for example, what constitutes good, equal-opportunity religious education and what the future of religious education might be. The first of the eleven Finnish-language blog posts was published on 17 January.

3.3.6 Working group and advisory board memberships

In 2016, the CORE Forum was appointed a national member organisation of the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO), as well as a deputy member of its working division. ETNO promotes dialogue between immigrants, ethnic minorities, public authorities, political parties and NGOs. The CORE Forum is represented by its executive director, with Vice-president Atik Ali as deputy. ETNO held two meetings in 2018.

The CORE Forum was also appointed to the Advisory Board for Non-Discrimination Matters in 2016. Appointed for three years, the Board began its first term on 15 October 2016. The Board is tasked with the general promotion of non-discrimination and with acting as a channel for dialogue and information exchange between various parties and public authorities. The CORE Forum's representative is Executive Committee deputy member and Equality Committee chair Laura Maria Latikka. The Board held one meeting in 2018.

In 2016, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs invited Atik Ali, CORE Forum president at the time, to join a human rights policy network consisting of 21 experts. The members of the network are key experts in foreign and social policy, renowned representatives from academia, and leaders of human rights organisations and other civil society organisations. Mr Ali, now a CORE Forum vice-president, remains a member of the network, which met five times in 2018.

In the summer of 2018, the CORE Forum was asked to appoint a representative to the board of Radinet, a project aimed at preventing violent extremism which was coordinated by Vuolle Setlementti. Radinet works to help people break free from the belief that violence is justified by politics, ideologies or religion. The project is a collaboration between the Ministry of the Interior, organisations that work with violent offenders, and other organisations and partners. Vice-president Atik Ali was appointed as the CORE Forum representative.

Radinet held two meetings in 2018 after the CORE Forum was asked to join it.

3.4 Collaboration and networks

3.4.1 *Hanasaari II follow-up*

On 19 March, the CORE Forum organised an event for invited guests from religious communities that had previously expressed an interest in the CORE Forum's operations. Invitations were extended to the following communities: the Krishna movement ISKCON in Finland, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Resalat Islamic Society, the Bahá'í Community of Finland, the Buddhist Union of Finland, and the Hindu Community of Finland. Apart from the Hindu Community of Finland, all these organisations attended the meeting.

The meeting surveyed these communities' interest in and thoughts about joining the CORE Forum. There were regular discussions within the organisation in 2018 about the practical aspects of expanding the CORE Forum's membership, also about drafting any new rules of conduct such an expansion might entail.

3.4.2 *Committee visits*

- On 5 February 2018, the CORE Forum's Religious Education Committee visited the Southern Finland Regional State Administrative Agency (AVI). AVI's representatives presented the CORE Forum with collabora-



The Religious Education Committee visiting the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) in November. Pictured here from the left: Anu Lehtikö, Osmo Vartiainen, Pekka Iivonen, Mika Huusko, Harri Peltoniemi, Daniel Weintraub, Jyri Komulainen, Sirpa Okulov, Tuula Vinko and Inka Nokso-Koivisto.

tion opportunities, for example regarding in-service teacher training and security issues.

- On 21 March, the CORE Forum's Human Rights Committee and Equality Committee visited the Finnish League for Human Rights to discuss, among other things, honour-related violence and the prevention of female genital mutilation.
- On 14 November, the CORE Forum's Religious Education Committee visited the Finn-



Archimandrite Alexi Chehadeh visiting the CORE Forum in April, hosted by the International Affairs Committee.

ish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) and discussed the challenges and opportunities in religious education. After the meeting, the CORE Forum submitted an updated evaluation initiative on religious education to FINEEC.

3.4.3 Lunch meeting with Archimandrite Alexi Chehadeh

On 26 April, the CORE Forum hosted Archimandrite Alexi Chehadeh, head of the Syrian charitable organisation Gopa Derd. The purpose of Father Alexi's visit was to increase awareness of the current situation in Syria and to promote the peaceful co-existence of religions. The CORE Forum's International Affairs Committee hosted the lunch meeting in the CORE Forum's meeting room.

3.4.4 Collaboration with educational institutions

As a result of the interest they expressed in the CORE Forum's activities, we hosted visits from various educational institutions in 2018. On 7 May, a group of students from the Kulosaari upper secondary school visited the CORE Forum and had the Religious Education Committee introduce our activities and discuss different models of religious education.

On 3 September, the CORE Forum received a visit from a group of researchers from the University of Göttingen, led by Antti Räsänen, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto and Execu-

tive Committee members Elina Hellqvist and Yaron Nadbornik hosted the visitors.

On 11 December, religious studies students from the *Työväen Akatemia* folk high school visited the CORE Forum with their teacher Mari Rahkala-Simberg. The group, which had a dozen students, was keen to hear about the CORE Forum's activities and discuss the role of religion in society. Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto and communications trainee Miina Noroila told the students about the CORE Forum's operations and interfaith collaboration in Finland.

In 2018, the CORE Forum also sought to increase its collaboration with academia. As a result, the CORE Forum was asked to become a social dialogue partner in two research projects that were still in their initial stages. Run by researchers from Åbo Akademi University and the University of Helsinki, the first research project examines Finnish Jews and their Jewish identity in Finland using methods taken from historical and ethnographical research. The second project, "Sacred Texts and Identity Construction", is a study of sacred texts in Judaism, Christianity and Islam by researchers at the University of Helsinki.

3.5. International work

3.5.1 Circumcision seminar in Iceland

CORE Forum Vice-Presidents Yaron Nadbornik and Atik Ali attended a conference on male cir-

cumcision held in Iceland on 17 April. At the time, Iceland was drafting a bill to ban non-medical circumcision on male children, but the bill was later dropped.

3.5.2 ECRL meeting in Budapest

CORE Forum President Kaarlo Kalliala attended the meeting of the European Council for Religious Leaders (ECRL) in Budapest on 7–8 May. The meeting's key theme was the surge of secularisation witnessed across Europe and the ways in which religious communities can respond to it.

3.5.3 Responsibility of Religions for Peace conference in Berlin

CORE Forum President Kalliala also attended the Responsibility of Religions for Peace conference

organised by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin on 18–20 June. Attending the conference were more than 70 representatives from different religious communities, particularly from Asia.

3.5.4 Bridges of Peace conference in Bologna

CORE Forum President Kalliala attended the annual peace conference and prayer for peace organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio in Bologna, Italy. This also served to strengthen the CORE Forum's Indonesian connections, because Kalliala spoke on the same panel as Professor Abdul Mukti, secretary general of the Muhammadiyah. The Bridges of Peace conference held 25 panel discussions over the course of two days and concluded with denominational prayers for peace and a final celebration for all.



President Kaarlo Kalliala attending the annual peace conference and prayer for peace organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio in Bologna, Italy.



Visiting representatives from the CORE Forum's Swedish sister organisation, Sveriges interreligiösa råd in Sweden.

3.5.5 Trip to Sweden

In 2018, one of the CORE Forum's goals was to expand its international connections, particularly in the Nordic countries. A CORE Forum delegation travelled to Stockholm on 18–19 December to learn about interfaith cooperation there. The delegation consisted of President Kaarlo Kalliala, Vice-presidents Atik Ali and Yaron Nadbornik, International Affairs Committee chair Anas Hajjar and Executive Director Inka Nokso-Koivisto.

The delegation visited the Bajit Jewish training and cultural centre in the heart of Stockholm and learned about the various courses offered by Paideia, the European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden. At the Fryshuset centre, the delegation learned about the interfaith dialogue activities offered to young people and saw a sample of the storytelling method employed in the project "Together for Sweden".

On the second day of the visit, the delegation visited the CORE Forum's Swedish sister organisation, *Sveriges interreligiösa råd*, the interfaith council of Sweden whose member communities represent ten different religions. The delegation also visited *Guds hus*, a grassroots interfaith project in the suburb of Fisksätra. *Guds hus* offers various activities that bring together Muslims and Christians and plans to build a place of worship that includes both a church and a mosque.



Representatives from the Guds hus project sharing their experiences of interfaith collaboration in the suburb of Fisksätra in Stockholm.



Paideia, the European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden, offers various courses in the Bajit Jewish training and cultural centre in the heart of Stockholm.

Operational conditions and development

4 Operational conditions and development

4.1 Operational development

The CORE Forum launched various development projects in 2018. To streamline internal operations, we created meeting guidelines to clarify meeting practices. In late 2018, we also began a process of examining whether the Rules of Procedure could be amended to better support our current activities and initiated strategy work to clarify the CORE Forum's objectives and operations and crystallise our key message. This work will continue in 2019 in collaboration with the Rud Pedersen Public Relations agency.

The Equality Committee drew up an equality strategy for the CORE Forum in 2018. Due to its small size, the CORE Forum is legally not required to have an equality strategy, but we consider having one important because equality is one of our key values; the principle of equality is also stated in our rules. Creating an equality strategy and overseeing its implementation is, we believe, the best way to achieve equality in all CORE Forum work.

4.2 Communications

In 2018, the CORE Forum continued to communicate on its website, via its social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and through traditional media. We received media exposure for our hate crime reporting, a topic that was picked up by newspapers, radio and the online media. Our 2017 Annual Report was published in print in Finnish,

Swedish and English, and it was delivered, among others, to all members of parliament.

On social media, we addressed various issues. One event we took part in was the #WeRemember campaign in remembrance of Holocaust victims on 10 January. In August, we launched an interactive CORE quiz with questions about various religious scriptures on social media. For each question, one lucky respondent won the book containing the quote in question. The books were donated by Gaudeamus and Kirjapaja.

On World Refugee Day, 20 June, we published a podcast hosted by Matias Uusisilta, a student at Uppsala University, with Abbas Bahmanpour, Martta Pietarinen and Rony Smolar as guests discussing refugees with whom they shared a religion. The podcast was published on the CORE Forum website and via our social media channels.

In 2018, we identified a need to renew the CORE Forum website and visual identity to better serve our work. In November, we began the redesign of our graphic identity and website together with Grapevine Media. Our new website will be published in early 2019.

Since December, we have had an extra pair of hands to handle our communications: our communications trainee, Miina Noroila. Noroila has a BD in theology and religious study from the University of Glasgow and during her studies acquired an interest in interfaith dialogue and the role of religion in

society. In December, Noroila not only handled the CORE Forum's day-to-day communications, but also developed our communications practices and begun drafting a communications strategy.

4.3 Finances

In 2018, the CORE Forum continued to be very much dependent on funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture for promoting interfaith dialogue. The CORE Forum received €60,000 from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

In addition to government funding, the CORE Forum received €8,000 in membership fees. The sum was based on the membership fees from each of the five membership organisations, with the four smallest communities (in terms of member numbers) paying €1,000 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland paying €4,000.

The CORE Forum also received €10,900 for its hate crime reporting project.

4.4 Staff and facilities

Anja Toivola-Stambouli continued as the paid executive director until her retirement at the end of

May 2018. Saara Kuoppala continued as communications officer until her employment ended at the end of April.

On the retirement of long-standing Executive Director Toivola-Stambouli, the position was filled by Inka Nokso-Koivisto, who has a PhD in Arabic and Islamic studies and has worked both as a researcher and a communications officer. Nokso-Koivisto was on 75% employment from 7 May to 30 August and on 90% employment from 1 September.

Finnish Ecumenical Council treasurer Perry Johansson continued to act as the CORE Forum’s treasurer in 2018. Johansson first continued to work pro bono, but in late 2018, he began to receive a small fee for his work. Miina Noroila started as communications trainee on 1 December thanks to a TE Office work trial.

The CORE Forum continued to run its operations from the Finnish Islamic Congregation office hotel at Fredrikinkatu 33 A in Helsinki.

SIX YEARS IN THE CORE

March 2019 marked the end of my two-year presidency, which was preceded by a four-year vice-presidency. A lot happened in the six years while the CORE Forum was establishing its position as Finland’s main collaboration forum for religions and as a leading expert in interfaith dialogue.

Although the CORE Forum is only eight years old, the 9/11 attacks in New York eighteen years ago ignited a spark that later led to the Forum’s foundation. It was the initiative of Tarja Halonen, president of Finland at the time, that was a significant driving force behind this development.

The CORE Forum’s role in and relevance to Finnish society is well illustrated by the peace walks that have been attended by leading politicians and other prominent figures in Finnish society, including our Prime Minister.

It is with pleasure that I recount the CORE

Forum’s advancements in the past six years.

In that time, our public authorities have grown increasingly aware of the important role that interfaith collaboration plays and how it promotes peace in society. One result of this recognition is the annual funding the CORE Forum receives from the Ministry of Education and Culture for promoting interfaith dialogue. Without this funding, the CORE Forum would not have been able to hire a full-time executive director, which is an absolute necessity for creating closer collaborations and expanding operations.

The CORE Forum has also kept in close contact with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice. Our opinions and statements have been drawn upon both nationally and internationally, and in 2018, we took it upon ourselves to provide shadow reporting of hate crime.

The European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL), of which I am a member, held its council meeting in Turku in Spring 2017. The ECRL is the European representative of the global network Religions for Peace, and the CORE Forum is the ECRL's representative in Finland. The CORE Forum thus has a solid foundation for international influencing and participating.

The interaction between the Abrahamic religions that constitute CORE Forum's three founding member communities has grown easier and increasingly natural over the years. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all concerned about positive freedom of religion: religion is never simply a belief system with no social relevance.

But work remains to be done.

The CORE Forum has discussed religious education, especially with the relevant public authorities, and highlighted the role of minorities. The model of Finnish religious

education is extraordinary and works well. In the future, however, children and young people will need better religious literacy and understanding, both in Finland and in Europe. It is therefore vital that the religious education provided is improved even further and that the viewpoints of minority religions are represented in this work.

Although Finland's religious policy relies on a multiculturalism that acknowledges group identities, Finland has simultaneously – and conflictingly – also applied a model of closed secularism in which religion is confined to the private space and almost kept secret. In social and political debate about the circumcision of boys and the rules of religious slaughter, religious identities seem to be held in low regard and freedom of religion seems to rank at the bottom of list of basic rights.

The Finnish Act on the Freedom of Religion acknowledges that religion is fundamentally communal and public in nature. In fact, it

states that “the purpose of a registered religious community is to organise and support individual, communal and public activities relating to the profession and practise of religion”. However, it seems that religious communities still have their hands full in making the double meaning of “public” understood. The public realm is not the same as public space. The former does not have a religion; the latter has multiple. Religions are not seeking to challenge the consensus widely held in Western societies about the notion that religious grounds should not be used when wielding public authority. But while the public realm is non-denominational, citizens must be allowed to make their religions and religious traditions seen and heard in their everyday life and celebrations.

The CORE Forum's challenge is to cover this religious ground in an even better way. The amendment to the rules adopted by the 2019 Annual General Meeting offers the CORE Forum better opportunities for expansion. In 2018, the ramping up of operations made

possible by the recruitment of a full-time executive director was still underway. Thanks to this, it is to be expected that the CORE Forum's communications and visibility – and as a result, also its social influence – will reach a higher level in the future. I hope soon to see the day when the CORE Forum also has a full-time communications officer. As public debate is escalating, especially on social media, there is a very real and dire need for the CORE Forum's work to promote social and religious peace.

Kaarlo Kalliala
CORE Forum President in 2017–2019
and Vice-President in 2013–2017

