

World Interfaith Harmony Week 2026  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN PLURALISTIC SOCIETIES  
Collective Responsibility in Countering Discrimination, Hate, and Intolerance  
Journalists and Writers Foundation  
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**What role can education systems, communication platforms, and media narratives play in preventing religious polarization in pluralistic societies?**

For diversity to be our greatest strength, we must act upon the pillars that shape our perception of one another.

The first vital space is the educational system. If the family is the space of primary socialization, where we forge our initial identity, the school represents secondary socialization. It is the stage where children learn to relate to the "other" in general terms of society; there, they learn how to be and exist within a community, within a society.

A diverse school must be a faithful reflection of social reality: with neither more nor less diversity than exists outside the school. Genuine social mixing in classrooms is the most powerful tool to normalize and at the same time immunize us against prejudice; when children play and study together, reciprocity (face to face) stops being an abstract concept and becomes a daily practice that breaks down caricatures before they solidify into adult hatred.

However, this educational foundation currently faces a titanic ethical challenge: the role of the media. Due to their format based on brevity and immediacy, the media are often involuntary creators of stereotypes and prejudices. In the rush to explain complex realities in two minutes, they resort to "cognitive shortcuts" that dehumanize.

We must be aware that language is their tool, and ours, and it has the potential to change reality and at the same time our use of it tells a lot about us. A stereotype is a limited form of processing knowledge where we attribute common general traits to an entire group, nullifying the particularity of the individual with absolute expressions such as "always," "never," or "everyone." When you use these adverbs, you are making a generalization without giving

space to the genuineness of others. These expressions are a mechanism that feeds prejudice, a judgment made before knowing the other that labels them under a dichotomy: if I like them because they are like me, I open up; if I don't like them due to an a priori generalization, I close myself off to all communication and relation.

To combat this, media must adopt proactive preventive actions:

- News versus opinion: information must be based on data and verified, fact checked news, clearly distinguishing it from opinion pieces that often disguise prejudices as facts.
- Diversity of voices: media must open space for new and distinct voices, allowing communities to define themselves.
- Rejection of collective responsibility: ethical journalism must avoid language suggesting that an entire community is responsible for the individual actions of a few.

We must also differentiate between the communication spaces we inhabit as adults. On one hand, there are structured spaces, such as interfaith dialogue groups and Councils of Religions. These are true "laboratories of democracy" where a dialogic and co-responsible dialogue is practiced. This relates to what Habermas said: we need to create a free and real space for communication. In these spaces, the management of diversity brings tangible wealth through joint projects, transforming suspicion into shared responsibility and potentialities.

On the other hand, there are digital social platforms where we encounter the unknown in an unprotected manner. Here, algorithms often prioritize homogeneous groups, who like the same things, and highlight conflict and sensationalism, locking us in "echo chambers" that foster polarization and radicalization without a critical focus. In this environment, the opponent is not seen as someone who thinks differently, but as someone "foreign, outsider," eliminating any possibility of empathy.

As a conclusion, let us say that democracy and the law are not just a system of voting; it is a discipline of freedom, and education and responsible media are key to shaping the ethical choices we make every day, guiding us from prejudice to empathy in our interactions. And as the sociologist Durkheim tells us, the coherence of law needs to reflect the collective conscience that all of us are building. Research shows that doing things for others not only builds society but brings us our own happiness: it is social well-being. We must remember that how we look at the other is our personal choice. As Gandhi said: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." In a plural society, we must choose to spend energy on understanding rather than convincing. The genuine human attributes (empathy, love, warmth...) are the only beacon that we have and need.

On a daily level, being kind to others is being kind to the life we want and, ultimately, to ourselves. Let us work so that our differences are not fractures, but the foundation of a social harmony where every voice counts.

Thank you very much.