

**THE PLURALISM PROJECT
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
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[HTTP://WWW.PLURALISM.ORG](http://www.pluralism.org)

January 19, 2008

Fr. Nabil Haddad
Executive Director
Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center
P.O.Box 811633 Amman, 11181 Jordan

Dear Fr. Nabil Haddad,

I hope you will extend the greetings of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University to the participants gathered for your conference on Coexistence and Peacemaking. The topic you have set for discussion could not be more important: The Doctrine of Difference. Religious difference is, of course, a great fact of human history and of our time. When does religious difference become divisive and destructive, and why? When does religious difference strengthen a complex society and world? What examples do we have of this? How can we learn to live creatively in a world of religious difference?

As you know, the Pluralism Project is a research project dedicated to thinking about these very questions. We began fifteen years ago in order to explore and better understand the changing religious landscape of the United States, a country that has, over the past forty years, become remarkably multi-religious. We have significant Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist communities along with more long-standing Christian and Jewish communities. The U.S. is also committed to a constitutional framework that prohibits the "establishment" of a state religion and that assures the "free exercise" of religion. This has become a recipe for religious pluralism, as immigrants have come to the U.S. from throughout the world, bringing with them their religious traditions. Pluralism is not simply "diversity," but requires an engagement that goes beyond tolerance to real relationship with those of other faiths.

Studying pluralism in America has given us many insights into the dynamic religious life of the U.S. and the ways in which Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu Americans have entered into public discussion and critique. I invite your participants to visit our website at <http://www.pluralism.org> for a view of America that goes beyond the "Christian America" stereotype that is held by many.

It has long been our working assumption that we—as citizens, religious people, and scholars—know much more about the divisiveness of difference and the phenomenon of religious violence than we do about the new energies that have brought people together across lines of religious difference. We hear, read about, and study religious tensions and

their political ramifications. However, we do not know enough about the multitude of initiatives, local and regional, that even now are bringing people of different faiths together for common work. As a scholar and teacher, and as director of the Pluralism Project, I would be very interested in hearing from the participants in this conference about their experience in this regard, so this is an invitation to hear from them.

And, of course, I look forward to a report on your work together this week in Amman.

Yours sincerely,

Diana L. Eck
Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies
Director, The Pluralism Project