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Concurrent session 1 panel 2: Secularism vs. resurgence of religion

Due to processes of globalisation societies in the Asia-Pacific region are becoming increasingly religiously diverse. In addition, due to the resurgence and revivalism of religion, religions are taking a more vocal role in the public sphere. Given the importance of religion in individual's lives and the increased profile of religion in society, the thesis of secularisation, which predicted that religion would disappear from modern societies, has been challenged. Consequently, states and global institutions need to better understand religion and also play a role in managing and regulating religion to protect the common good. **The UNAOC could promote and disseminate more research to better understand:**

- **religion *and* secularism in contemporary society; and**
- **the role of religion in people's lives, particularly the importance of religious identity.**

Diverse civil society actors, including religious and non-religious voices, should have access to public space and have a say in governance. The challenge confronting all religions, and even non-religious movements such as new atheism, is what they want to bring to the public space, if it is to advance their own principles and way of life over and above others they will not advance the common good. Whereas the deeper spiritual values, such as notions of justice or how to live in harmony with the environment, can help us to constructively handle global challenges, such as ecological and economic crises. Materialism is the dominant 'religion' of our current age. Materialism disturbingly puts extreme pressure on people and the earth. The earth cannot support 7 billion materialists! We need to improve the 'ecosystem of religions'.

- **Religions can help us to overcome the crisis of materialism. Religions outline ways to transcend self-seeking desires and to live more simply and altruistically. These are positive aspect of all religions that the UNAOC can highlight and draw upon at this time to respond to global crises.**

Affirmation of diversity assists us to face the future together. We are living in a global village and no one way of life or ideology can dominate over others. Exclusive ideological positions lead to conflict. Only pluralism and dialogical modes of communication can lead to sincere listening and self-reflection among diverse religions and cultures. **The UNAOC should continue to:**

- **promote religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue;**
- **prioritise the issue of religion and human rights; and**
- **further encourage and supported women and youth to play a central role in religious peacebuilding activities.**

Understanding develops from education. We need to be culturally and religiously literate in today's world. People's knowledge of their own and other religious traditions is limited. The benefits of diverse religions and beliefs, including non-religious beliefs, education (RBE) have been demonstrated by extensive research. There are some excellent RBE programs that can be used as best practice models to develop local materials. **In order to further advance RBE the UNAOC could:**

- **form an RBE research network including a curriculum working group in the Asia-Pacific region; and**
- **encourage state education systems in the region to include RBE in their core curriculum**