



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

"Fostering a culture of peace among ethnic and religious groups"

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U.S. 501 (c) (3) tax exempt public charity, nonprofit and non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

MEDIATION ACADEMY

Specialized Mediation Training The Mediation of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

Mediation Project

Mediation Case Study (Sample case developed by Erika Schuh, Spring 2017)

Proposed Case Study: The Ramadan Conflict in a Christian Area of Vienna

What Happened? Historical Background to the Conflict

The Ramadan Conflict is an intergroup conflict and occurred in a calm residential neighborhood in Austria's capital, Vienna. It is a conflict between the residents (who are - like most Austrians - Christians) of an apartment building and a cultural organization of Bosnian Muslims ("Bosniakischer Kulturverein") who had rented a room in the ground floor of the named residential neighborhood to practice their religious rituals.

Before the Islamic cultural organization moved in, an entrepreneur had occupied the place. This change of tenants in 2014 caused some severe changes in intercultural co-existence, especially in the month of Ramadan.

Due to their strict rituals during that month in which Muslims come together after sunset to celebrate the closing of fasting with prayers, songs, and meals which can extend to midnight, the increase of noise at night was considerably problematic. The Muslims chatted outdoors and smoked a lot (since these were obviously allowed as soon as the crescent moon rose in the sky). This was very annoying to the surrounding residents who wanted to have a calm night and who were non-smoking. At the end of Ramadan which was the highlight of this period, the Muslims celebrated even more noisily in front of the house, and neighbors finally began to complain.

Some of the residents gathered, confronted and told the Muslims that their behavior at night was not tolerable since others wanted to sleep. The Muslims felt offended and started to discuss about their right to express their holy rituals and their joy at the end of this important time in Islamic religion.

Each Other's Stories – How Each Person Understands the Situation and Why

The Muslim's Story – *They are the problem.*

Position: *We are good Muslims. We want to honor our religion and serve Allah as he told us to do. Others should respect our rights and our conscientiousness vis-à-vis our religion.*

Interests:

Safety / Security: We respect our tradition and we feel safe in cultivating our rituals as we are showing Allah that we are good people who honor him and his words that he gave to us through our prophet Mohammed. Allah protects those who devote themselves to him. In practicing our rituals which are as old as the Koran, we demonstrate our honesty and loyalty. This makes us feel safe, worthy and protected by Allah.

Physiological Needs: In our tradition, it is our right to celebrate loudly at the end of Ramadan. We are supposed to eat and drink, and express our joy. If we cannot practice and uphold our religious beliefs as we are meant to, we do not worship Allah adequately.

Belongingness / We / Team Spirit: We want to feel accepted in our tradition as Muslims. We are ordinary Muslims who respect our religion and who want to keep the values with which we have grown up. Coming together to celebrate as a community gives us the feeling of connectedness.

Self-Esteem / Respect: We need you to respect our right to practice our religion. And we want you to respect our duty to celebrate Ramadan as described in the Koran. When doing so we feel happy and comfortable as we serve and worship Allah through our acts and our joy.

Self-Actualization: We have always been faithful to our religion and we want to continue to please Allah as it is our goal to be devout Muslims throughout our lives.

The (Christian) Resident's Story – *They are the problem by not respecting the codes and rules of Austrian culture.*

Position: *We want to be respected in our own country in which there are cultural and social norms and rules that allow a harmonious co-existence.*

Interests:

Safety / Security: We have chosen this area to reside as it is a calm and safe area in Vienna. In Austria, there is a law that states that after 10:00 PM we are not allowed to disturb or annoy anybody through noise making. If somebody deliberately acts against the law, the police will be called to enforce law and order.

Physiological Needs: We need to get adequate sleep at night. And due to the warm temperature, we prefer to open our windows. But in doing so, we hear all the noise and inhale the smoke emanating from the gathering of Muslims in the area in front of our apartments. Besides, we are non-smoking residents and appreciate having healthy air around us. All the smell coming from the Muslim gathering is massively annoying us.

Belongingness / Family Values: We want to feel comfortable in our own country with our values, habits and rights. And we want others to respect those rights. The disturbance affects our community in general.

Self-Esteem / Respect: We are living in a peaceful area and everybody is contributing to this untroubled ambiance. We also feel responsible to provide harmony for living together in this residential neighborhood. It is our duty to care for a healthy and peaceful environment.

Self-Actualization: We are Austrians and we honor our culture and our Christian values. And we would want to continue to live peacefully together. Our traditions, habits and codes are important to us as they allow us to express our identity and help us to grow as individuals.