A Church in Dem-Koy

If you don't stand for something you will fall for anything Malcolm X Themes
• Religion and Belief
• Democracy
• Citizenship and Participation
Group size 15 - 30 Time 1-1 ½ hours
Overview This activity explores a dispute over the building of a new church in a traditionally Muslim area through the simulation of a town council meeting.
Related rights
• Freedom from discrimination
• Freedom of religion and belief
• Freedom of opinion and information
Objectives
• To experience real conflicts that can arise in meeting the needs of diverse communities
• To explore the right to freedom of religion and belief
• To develop skills of debate and analysis Materials
• Sheets of paper for name-tags
• Flip-chart paper • A watch or clock
• Small bell for the Mayor Preparation
• Photocopy the role-cards, the description of the problem and the rules of debate
• Prepare name-tags for the different parties / groups that will be represented at the meeting.
• List the different roles on a flip chart so that everyone can see them.
• Make sure you have a space for the "Council Meeting" and separate spaces for the different groups, so that they can discuss their position beforehand or meet with others.

You live in the town of DEM-Koy, a town of about 80,000 people. In the last few years the population has changed radically, because refugees and migrants from Eastern Africa who left their homes because civil war crisis.

The issue that is now dividing the town is the cultural diversity of the refugees and migrants who are mostly Christians. The majority population in DEM-Koy is Muslim.

• The meeting will be chaired by the Mayor, and his/her decision on all matters is final.

• If you wish to speak, you should raise your hand and obtain permission from the Mayor.

• Comments should be brief, and should not exceed 2 minutes.

• The meeting will close after 30 minutes, with a vote on whether or not the Church should be built.

• Anyone attending the meeting is entitled to speak in the debate and to vote at the end.

Handouts Role card:

The Mayor of DEM-Koy

You are the Chair of the assembly and it will be your role, once the meeting starts, to welcome the participants and remind them of the rules of debate. During the meeting, you should try to give everyone the opportunity to speak - and should not allow anyone to speak for too long! You are very worried about the bad publicity that this case has been attracting and you plan to try, before the meeting, to speak to some of the groups to try to persuade them to soften their position.

Role card:

Town Council member:

Traditionalist Party (3 people)

You represent the Traditionalist Party on the Town Council, and you are strongly opposed to the building Church. You do not think it is right that council land and council resources should be spent on a place of worship that does not respect the traditions of this country and this town. You feel that immigrant families are privileged to be allowed to live here and that they should not try to impose different lifestyles on a country where they are guests. You are also worried that the Church could become a meeting area for recruiting extremist.

Role card:

Town Council member:

Populist Party (3 people)

You represent the Populist Party on the Town Council. You supported the original decision to have the Church built on the land, partly because you realise that the Christians community has been very good for the economy of the town and you do not want to alienate them. But you have been very worried by complaints from residents and do not want to create an unnecessary conflict in the community. You are also

concerned about your seat in the next council elections, so you will probably support whichever option appears to be least controversial.

Role card:

Town Council member:

"In the middle" Party (2 people)

You represent the Diversity Party on the Town Council. You believe that the relatively large proportion of people from different parts of the world has added to the culture and interest of DEM-Koy and you have felt it is unfair that the town has deprived many of these people of the opportunity to practise their religion for so long. You can also see that the derelict land is causing social problems in the town and that the Council does not at the moment have the money to develop it themselves.

Role card:

Members of the Youth Action Group "Youngsteers for Human Rights!" (2 people) Your group was set up to address some of the worst problems for young people today in DEM-Koy. You see the building of the Church as a solution both to the Christians community's need for a place of worship, and as a solution to the numerous social problems which have been a result of the land being left derelict for so long. You support the building of this Church but you are concerned that other social problems may be neglected by the Council if they have to contribute to the building. In particular, the youth budget over the past 5 years has been cut to a level where it cannot begin to meet the needs in the town.

Role card:

Citizens of DEM-Koy

You are worried about the conflict that seems to have taken over the town of Dem-Koy and you want to go to the meeting of the Town Council in order to vote. At the moment you do not know what you will vote for: you need to speak to as many different groups as you can and then you plan to make up your mind

**Debriefing and evaluation Start the feedback round by greeting everybody by their real names or using another technique allowing participants to give up the roles they had assumed during the simulation. This is important to do before starting the debriefing. Ask the participants what they feel about the process they have just been through:**

• Were you surprised by the result of the vote, and did it reflect the position of the person you were playing?

• How much influence do you think you (in your role) had on the result?

• Did interaction with other people or groups make you alter your approach or your attitude towards the problem?

• How easy was it to identify with your role? Why or why not?

• Do you think that this situation could arise in real life? Can you think of any similar cases?

• How would you react if this case arose in your town / place of residence? Did the activity alter your attitude at all?

• What do you understand by the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion? Do you know of any cases in history (or today) when this right has been denied?

• Why do you think that religious freedom is a fundamental human right?

• To what extent do you think this right is observed in your community? Tips for facilitators If possible, you should run this activity together with a co-facilitator in order to be able to answer questions and co-ordinate each step of the activity at the same time. The activity could benefit from having more time available, particularly during the actual meeting, in order that people have the chance to respond to comments made by others. You may also allocate the roles beforehand or allocate roles randomly in order to save time during the session. During the preparation phase, it may be useful to check that people are using the time to meet others or to plan what they are going to say during the meeting. When assigning the roles, note that the role of the mayor is a very demanding one, and that the person playing it will need to feel confident about facilitating the meeting and – if necessary – cutting people short in order to allow everyone to speak. You will need to go through the task with the participant playing the mayor before the actual simulation. It is highly desirable that after that, you try to leave facilitation entirely to the person playing the Mayor, both in order that he/she feels your trust and in order that other participants respect his/her decisions rather than looking to you. Of course, if difficulties arise, you may find it necessary to intervene in the course of the simulation. You should, however, try to do this without undermining the authority

of the participant playing the Mayor. If the simulation gets out of control – for example, because people stray off the topic or new pieces of information are invented – or if the Council gets caught in a deadlock and cannot come

to an agreement, point out that this can reflect a result in real life, and does not indicate that the activity has failed. You can use this in the debriefing at the end to discuss the difficulty of reaching agreement on issues such as these. During the debriefing, it is very important to try to avoid repeating the simulation. People need to try to detach themselves from the role they played in the activity in order to be able to reflect properly on what they have been through. You should help them to look back on the simulation with their normal “hats” on rather than in their assumed roles. In order to prepare for the debriefing and evaluation you may want to read the background information on Religion and Belief. Variations Depending on the context you are working in, it may be more appropriate to build the activity around “A Church in Sleepyville”, or “A Temple in Sleepyville” and to situate it, for example, in a predominantly Muslim area. Or you may prefer some other combination. You can add news reporters to the activity in order to get a view on the process which is slightly detached; this, however, can add to the time, if you are to discuss the reports with the group (see below for suggestions). Suggestions for follow-up Discuss aspects of the freedom to religion and belief and tensions that have occurred in your country. Critical incidents (case stories) in the news can provide good starters, especially for discussion in small groups. You may also want to follow up this discussion with a deeper exploration of participants’ perceptions of religion and its influence on young people’s lives through the activity “Believers” on page 105. If you have news reporters taking part, you could use their analysis of the process in a separate session. In particular, it would be useful to look at any differences between the reports in order to raise questions about the role and impact of the media. The activity “Front Page” on page 181 explores how opinions are formed or changed, especially by the media. You can focus on developing skills of debate, analysis or persuasion by taking some controversial or polarising statements that came up during the debriefing and running the activity “Electioneering” on page 164 using these statements as a basis. Ideas for action Encourage participants to look at their own surroundings and explore the extent to which different religious communities have their rights respected. Try to arrange meetings with representatives of some of these communities and get them to speak about whether they feel their rights are being respected. Depending on the context where you and the participants live or work and the current issues being debated within the Council, it may be interesting to visit a Council meeting in order to become involved in local political discussions that affect the human rights of everyone in the community. Further information The Right to Religion in International Human Rights Law: You may want to copy the information below for people in the Muslim Association of Sleepyville and in the group Young Sleepies for Human Rights!

European Convention on Human Rights, Article 9: 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. 2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance... Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 30: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language. Although this simulation activity is of a fictitious event, there are many similar disputes concerning the building of places of worship for religious minorities across Europe and beyond. In November 2009, a national referendum endorsed a constitutional amendment to ban the future construction of minarets in Switzerland. The result of this referendum could violate the right for Muslims to manifest their religion in public, through worship, teaching, practise and observance, which is an integral part of the right to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Additionally, there is a growing trend across a number of European and other states which have recently adopted laws or are considering legislative proposals banning the wearing of Islamic veils (whether the burqa, niqab or hijab) in public, which also forms a basis for discrimination on the grounds of religion. Article 19 – Global Campaign for Free Expression is a human rights organisation which has published a legal comment on the bans on the full face veil and human rights (www.article19.org). You may also wish to do research on issues other religious minorities are facing presently in Europe