



*The Dutch Network of the  
Anna Lindh Foundation*

ALFORUM 2025: PARALLEL SESSION

# UNITING CULTURES

*Dialogue Across Borders with  
the Anna Lindh Foundation*



*“A Tool for Truth, Peace  
& Understanding”*



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

***“A Tool for Truth, Peace & Mutual Understanding”***



## ***Kees Hulsman / Speaker***

*Cornelis Hulsman is a Dutch sociologist and long-time advocate for intercultural dialogue, who worked in senior roles in Dutch immigration, reported on religious issues in Egypt, and co-founded Dialogue Across Borders—a unique initiative fostering fact-based dialogue through student-led research. He serves as the current co-coordinator of the Anna Lindh Foundation Netherlands*



## ***Romana Moussa / Moderator***

*Romana Moussa is a Dutch-Egyptian professional in intercultural dialogue and the current co-coordinator of the Anna Lindh Foundation Netherlands, renowned for her impactful leadership in communication and her dedication to promoting cross-cultural understanding.*

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**Dr. Jaroslav Franc /  
Speaker**

*Head of the Department of Communication Studies at Palacký University, Olomouc, and key proponent of an EU Twinning Project proposal on digitizing and analyzing the Dialogue Across Borders database.*



**Dr. Vincent Caruana /  
Speaker**

*Full-time lecturer and researcher at Malta's University Centre for Environmental Education and Research, 35 years of activities in the Social and Development NGO scene, both locally and at a European level.*



**Saida Agrebi  
'Mama Africa' / Speaker**

*The first African woman elected Commissioner to the African Union and a pioneering Pan-African Parliamentarian, with decades of civil society work advocating for gender equality, peace, and women's empowerment, founder of multiple NGOs*



**Dr. Tarek Mansour  
/ Speaker**

*A professor of history at Ain Shams University, Egypt, and an active member of the House of the Family promoting interreligious understanding and advocates for scholarly exchanges on contested historical narratives to foster intercultural dialogue.*



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# AGENDA

- Introduction by **Kees & Romana**
- Barriers to Dialogue & Urgency of Addressing Ideological Narratives
- Dialogue Across Borders Database

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# AGENDA

- **Manual to Fight Mis/Disinformation**
- **Importance of Oral History & Migrant Narratives**
- **Call to Action: Universities & Youth Involvement**
- **Vision for a Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue Institution**

# Dialogue efforts often face barriers due to unclear concepts, lack of active listening, lack of documented memory and avoidance of disagreement.

- In this session we will explore how ideological narratives shape perceptions, fuel tensions, and obstruct dialogue



# A Transformative Approach for Dialogue

- Can be implemented across the entire Anna Lindh Foundation network
- Offers a sustainable model for uniting diverse actors in dialogue Supports a more coherent, inclusive approach to intercultural understanding
- Requires initial support from European institutions and local actors
- Aims to build momentum for a transformative and lasting dialogue strategy

*Do not let the war divide us — fight for an effective dialogue for a lasting peace.*

# Why Addressing Ideological Narratives Is Urgent

- 🚫 Fuelled massive misinformation and disinformation
- 🔊 Led to one-sided focus on suffering
- 📉 Trust erosion
- ➡ Resulted in deepening polarization
- ⚔ Root cause of conflict and civilian casualties
- 🤝 Dialogue for Peace
- 📊 Recognizing Patterns



# Dialogue Across Borders

- Founded in 2007–2008 with ALF support
- Launched by HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal
- Many initiatives since, but often fragmented
- Listening to voices from the Arab world
- Investigative reporting close to location and time
- Accuracy in presenting the views of others
- Working with student interns from all over the world
- Dialogue Across Borders Database now holds 50,000+ articles & reports
- Our method: be as close as possible in time & place

*Dialogue Across Borders: A Foundation for Sustainable Dialogue*





*Do not let the war divide us — fight for an effective dialogue for a lasting peace.*

# Religion, Misinformation & Dialogue

- Many in the West have turned away from religion, but remains central in the Middle East
- Religion often claims absolute truth, used by leaders to mobilize for political objectives
- This can fuel misinformation & disinformation

**Misinformation:**

Shared by those who believe it's true

**Disinformation:**

Deliberate, partisan, intended to mislead

*Do not let the war divide us — fight for an effective dialogue for a lasting peace.*

# Religion, Misinformation & Dialogue

- Detecting intention is difficult; **accusing without evidence is counterproductive**
- Our approach: **focus on detail & context to identify probable intentions**
- Dialogue Across Borders proves **sensitive topics** can be addressed

**Misinformation:**

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**Disinformation:**

Deliberate, partisan, intended to mislead

# A Fieldwork Example: **Religion, Visibility & Misinformation** **in Egypt** 📍 **Marinab Village, 2011**

- Christians had prayed quietly for years in a simple building
- Some Muslims upset by change to the village's public image
- Anger was triggered by unauthorized construction of a public religious building
- The core issue: changing public identity of a Muslim-majority village



*Fieldwork Example: Religion, Visibility & Misinformation in Marinab Village, Egypt*



# From Village Conflict to Global Outrage

- Video of burning church went viral without context
- Coptic activists abroad framed it as persecution
- Western media amplified without verifying details
- Anger/demonstration fueled by emotion and unverified knowledge
- Army vehicle drove into crowd, likely in panic
- Global Islamophobic media ran with the images

*A Fieldwork Example: Religion, Visibility & Misinformation in Marinab Village, Egypt*



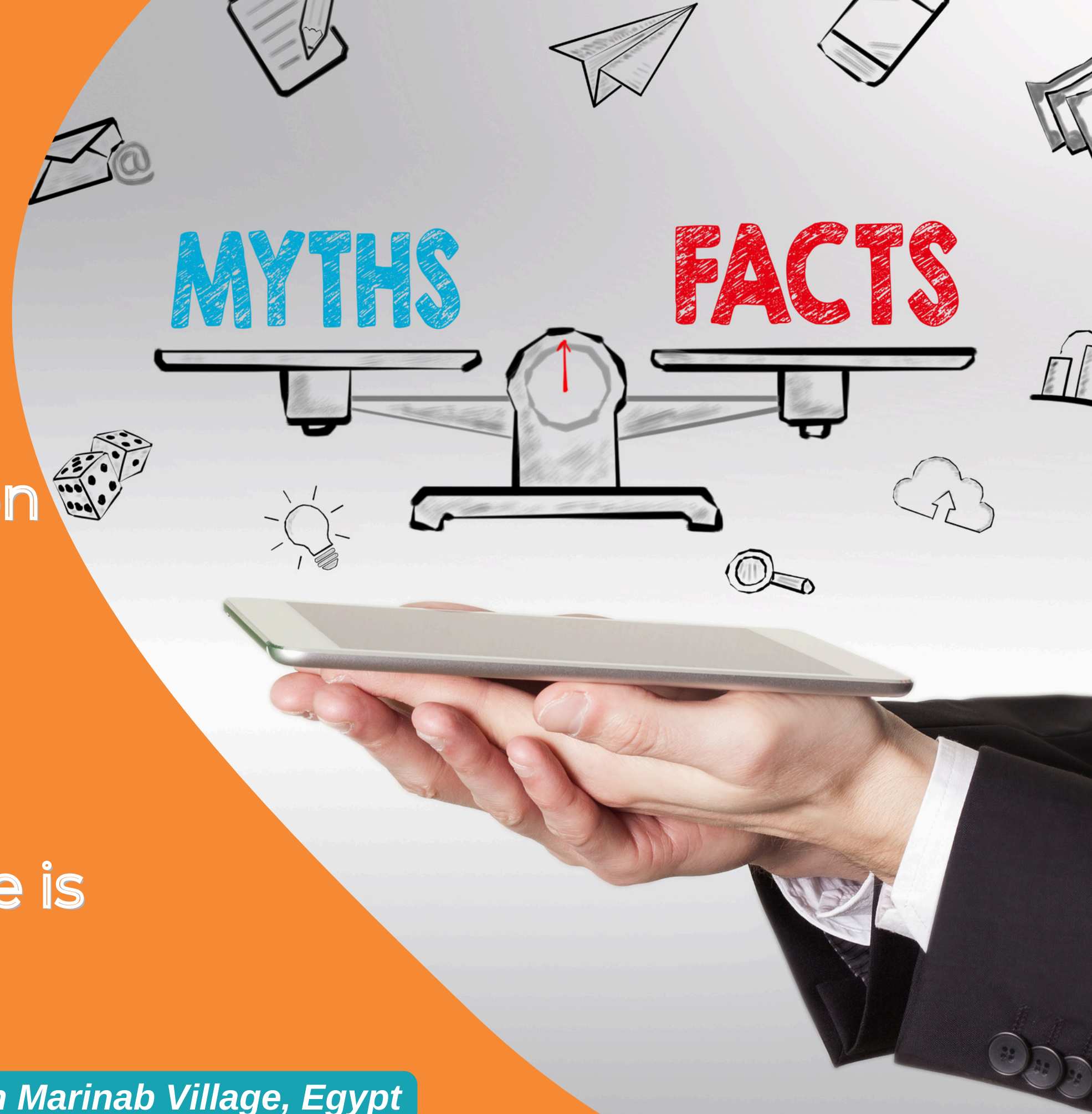


# Lessons Learned

*Key Takeaways from  
Marinab*

- Visibility and identity are sensitive issues tied to religion
- Misinformation travels faster than facts
- Emotions + media gaps = deadly consequences
- Grounded, informed dialogue is essential

*A Case Study: Religion, Visibility & Misinformation in Marinab Village, Egypt*

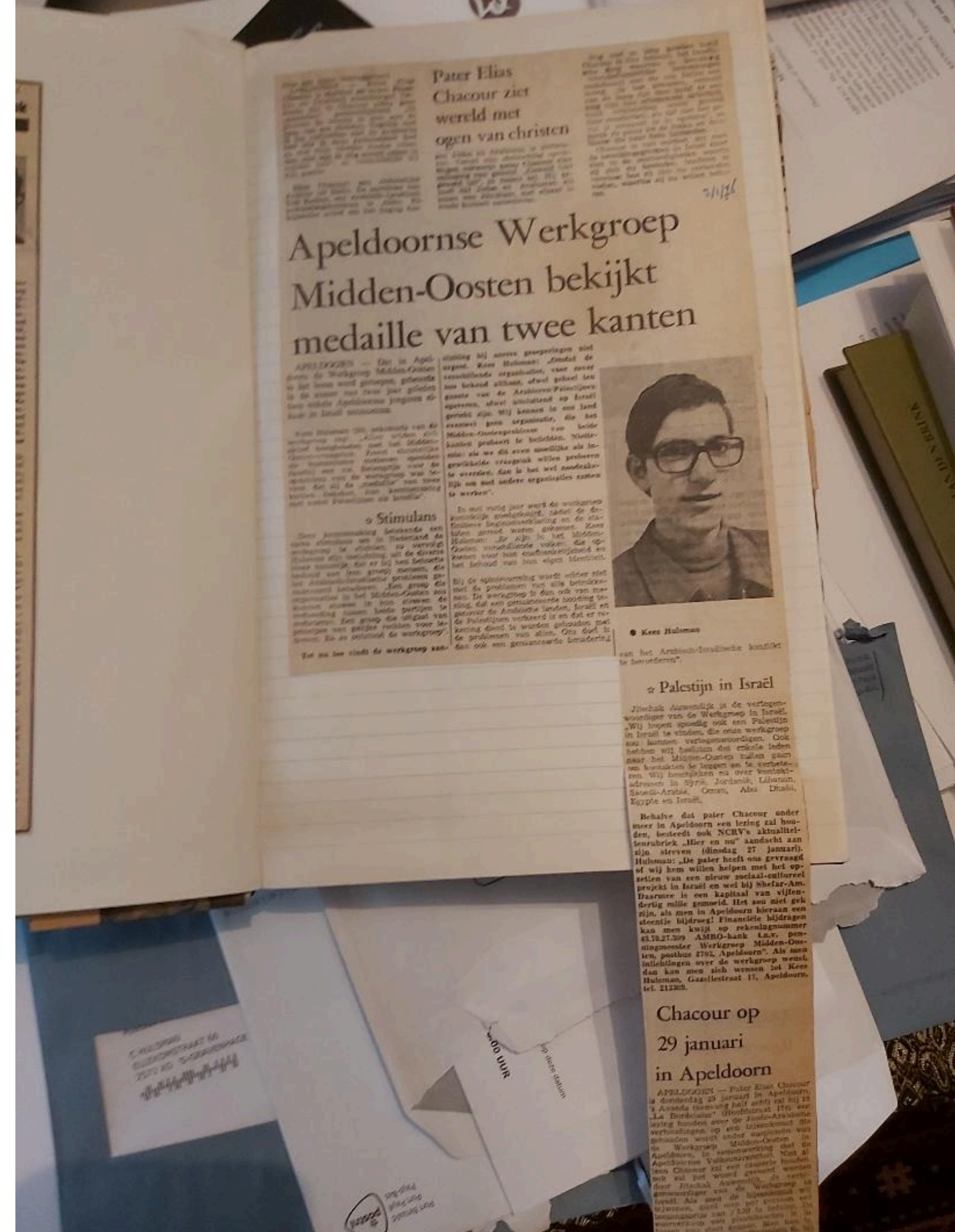




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# 50+ Years of Field-Based Dialogue & Research

- Work began in 1974 with the Werkgroep Midden-Oosten with students
- Advocated Israeli-Palestinian dialogue & two-state solution
- Involved with Christian refugees from Turkey & Syria; contrasting narratives
- Since 1994: Investigated Western media reporting on persecution of Christians
- Monitored Egyptian media on religion
- Found religious/political advocacy distorting facts
- Responded with fact-checked, multi-perspective reports





# From Method to Impact

- Face profound disagreements
- Train students using the database as a tool
  - reduce database costs
- Opportunities for youth to express different voices
- Work is not theoretical
- Producing practical results in Egypt

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DIALOGUE ACROSS BORDERS

# Abu Fana Case – Media vs. Reality

- 2008: 3 monks briefly kidnapped and beaten
- Framed internationally as a Muslim-Christian conflict
- Coverage by New York Times based on limited facts
- Monks emphasized religious framing to gain sympathy
- Few journalists visited or investigated deeply (stayed distant)
- Root cause: land conflict, not religious tension
- Our reporting led to formal land border agreement

*A Case Study: The Abu Fana Incident: A Misleading Narrative*



# Understanding and Challenging Christian Zionist Views

- Christian Zionists support West Bank & Gaza annexation on religious grounds
- Tremendous political influence in the USA
- Engaged in dialogue with Karin Anderson to understand her arguments
- Editor collected texts documenting her views with her approval, then challenged them
- Non-partisan, non-normative approach, not linked to any religious or political entity
- All impactful voices presented without censorship; critique invited
- Results available in our database

▣ God's word for all people, all nations, and all times. It calls upon Christians to stand with Israel in the coming Psalm 83 War.

*As quoted by Karin Anderson February 2025.*



# Lessons Learned

## *Key Takeaways*

- Misinformation spreads fast—must counter it using our database
- Our database provides relevant context and reveals patterns quickly
- Credibility is key—used in several PhD studies
- Dr. Elsässer: Arab-West Report (Dialogue Accross Borders) is “one of the most valuable sources”
- Scholars often rely on biased written sources—our fieldwork fills that gap

*A Case Study: Religion, Visibility & Misinformation in Marinab Village, Egypt*







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# The Need for a Manual to Fight Mis/Disinformation

- The Anna Lindh Foundation pilot "The Road to Inclusive Narratives" stresses the **need for a structured manual**
- Need for a manual = **actionable strategies & tools for organizations**
- 19 years of student dialogue training = solid foundation for this manual
- Manual can **train youth** as "Ambassadors for Peace"
- Plans are in the making — but **we require support**



*"A Tool for Truth, Peace & Mutual Understanding"*

# Importance of Oral History

- Cultural differences fuel **mis/disinformation**
  - → Arab honor/shame culture vs. Western text-focus
- Oral info is volatile, **often ignored in the West**
- We risk misinterpretation by **viewing events only through our own lens**
- Database building **needed to capture different views**
- University **students can contribute, uncovering complexities**





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# Universities Must Step In

- **Role of religion in society not just for theologians → needs social sciences too**
- **Universities should offer cross-multidisciplinary studies & collaborative research**
- **Encourage real-world projects exploring religion's place in society**
- **Foster critical thinking, empathy, & practical engagement**
- **Students can become ambassadors for peace**
- **Motivate action by offering academic credit**

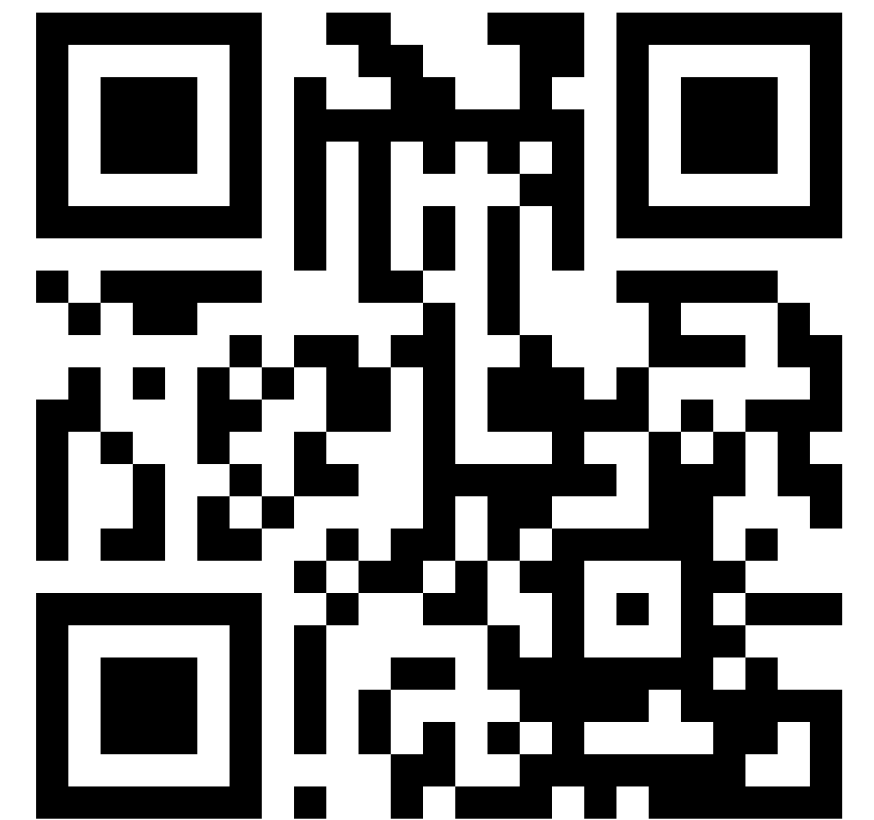




**One Humanity, One Call: Petition to  
End Violence Across the Middle East**



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#TheDialogueEffect

