

Vienna conference highlights interfaith dialogue as a path to peace

Social Desk

The Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna hosted an international conference highlighted the role of interfaith dialogue in promoting peace, cultural understanding and a shared global identity while preserving religious differences, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The conference, titled 'Religious Identity and Global Identity: Perspectives for Interreligious Dialogue', was held on October 16, 2026 in Vienna, capital of Austria.

At the conference, academics and religious researchers from Iran and Austria discussed how people can maintain their religious and cultural identities while sharing responsibility for humanity's future.

Peter Haider, president of the Universal Peace Federation in Austria and moderator of the

conference, said lasting peace required religious, non-religious and cultural voices to be heard. He stressed the need for international cooperation and a global order based on mutual interdependence and shared prosperity. Mohammad Mahdi Imanipour, head of Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and its High Council for Interfaith Dialogue, said constructive engagement among religions should go beyond resolving misunderstandings and lead to identifying common challenges and working together to address them.

Referring to the Islamic concept of fitrah, or innate human nature, he described it as a basis for connecting religious identity with a shared human identity, arguing that the two were not necessarily in conflict.

During the event, Afsar Rathor, an international peace and



Iran's cultural representative in Austria, Reza Gholami (R), delivers a speech at a conference in Vienna on October 16, 2026.

● IRNA

cooperation advocate, drew on his experience in crisis-hit regions to highlight the role of religious communities in rebuilding trust and supporting reconciliation. He said peace required not only an end to war but also justice, human dignity and mutual respect.

Astrid Matz, a professor of the sociology of religion at the University of Vienna, presented research involving 41 religious young people in the city.

The findings showed how social media connected young people with religious communities worldwide and how their identities developed through social interactions and digital



communication. Speaking at the conference, Reza Gholami, Iran's cultural representative in Austria, called for dialogue among cultures and religious traditions, warning

against treating any single culture as a universal standard. He also advocated broader, accountable participation by religious institutions in developing AI ethics.

The conference concluded with the presentation of the inaugural Lotus of Dialogue Honor to Haider, recognizing contributions to interfaith and intercultural understanding.

Halal tourism at center of Iran-Malaysia cooperation

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Malaysia are seeking to expand tourism and cultural ties, with halal tourism, heritage preservation and joint cultural programs among the areas identified for cooperation, Iranian official said.

Ali Darabi, Iran's deputy minister for cultural heritage, met Malaysian Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Dato Sri Tiong King Sing on the sidelines of the fourth Asian Cultural Heritage Alliance (ACHA) summit in Hangzhou, China on October 18, 2026, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Darabi said Iran's participation in Malaysian tourism events and Malaysia's presence at Tehran's international



tourism exhibition had helped build closer relations. He said a memorandum of understanding could pave the way for further cooperation and joint programs, and invited the Malaysian minister to visit Iran. Iran ranks among the world's leading countries in tangible cultural heritage and has 27 elements inscribed

on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage lists, Darabi said. Tiong said the issues raised at the meeting would be reviewed in Malaysia and discussed with Iran's ambassador there. He also pointed to plans to hold an Iran Week in Malaysia as a way to promote cultural exchanges. The Malaysian minister said the number



Iran's Deputy Minister for Cultural Heritage Ali Darabi (R) meets Malaysian Tourism Minister Dato Sri Tiong King Sing on the sidelines of the fourth Asian Cultural Heritage Alliance summit in Hangzhou, China on October 18, 2026.

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of Malaysian tourists visiting Iran fell in 2025 and called for joint efforts to increase travel between the two countries. He identified Malaysia's experience in Islamic tourism and halal travel as an opportunity to attract more Iranian visitors. Both sides stressed the need to follow up on their discussions and turn their cultural and tourism potential into practical joint initiatives.

Ardabil, Van to pursue tourism, investment development

Arts & Culture Desk

Officials from Ardabil Province in northwestern Iran and the eastern Turkish city of Van have discussed expanding tourism cooperation and attracting investment to strengthen economic ties and promote regional attractions during a meeting.

The meeting was held at a UNESCO World Heritage site, Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili historical complex in Ardebil city on October 16, 2026.

Jalil Jabari, head of Ardabil's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department and Van's tourism director and representatives of the tourism industry attended the event.

The officials emphasized the need to develop cooperation in tourism, investment and economic exchanges. Jabari invited Turkish tourism officials and companies to visit Ardabil and explore opportunities in the province.

Van's tourism director, in turn, invited Ardabil officials to attend the city's international tourism and travel fair scheduled for November 2026.

Van, located in eastern Turkey, has become a popular shopping and travel destination for Iranians. More than one million Iranians visited the city in 2023.

Ardabil offers a range of historical, cultural and natural attractions including Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili complex, Sareyn's hot springs,



Officials and tourism industry representatives from Iran's Ardabil Province and Turkey's Van meet in Ardabil on October 16, 2026, to discuss tourism and investment opportunities.

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the Alvares ski resort, Fandoghlu Forest and suspension bridges in Meshgin Shahr, Hir and Sareyn.

Alongside efforts to attract visitors, Ardabil is pursuing investment in its tourism infrastructure.

"91 tourism projects were underway in the province, with a combined investment volume of 550 trillion rials. The projects are expected to create about 3,100 jobs," Jabari said.

Jabari added that 25 investment packages would be uploaded to Iran's National Licensing Portal within two months.

The initiative is intended to simplify the licensing process and allow investors to pursue permits through a single platform, reducing the need for repeated administrative inquiries.

Iranian children win prizes in Japan's art contest

Arts & Culture Desk

An Iranian 9-year-old has won a special UNICEF award at Japan's 25th International Environmental Children's Drawing Contest, where seven other Iranian children and teenagers also received prizes.

Aylin Javanbakht, from the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults' center in Aghajari, in southwestern Khuzestan province, received the award in the international category.

The 2025 contest, held under the theme "Let's

Listen to Earth's Voice," attracted 9,907 entries from 72 countries. Iran's institute submitted 280 drawings by children enrolled at its cultural and artistic centers. Three other Iranian participants won first prizes: Benita Aliyari, 9, from Tehran, Ali-Sadra Ghadiri,

10, from Ardabil, in northwestern Iran; and Naghmeh Mohammadnejad, 14, from Ilam Province in western Iran.

Four participants received diplomas of honor. They were Sanaz Gorji, 9, from Yazd Province in central Iran; Fatima Fathi, 14, from

Khorramabad, in western Iran's Lorestan province; and Elay Ebrahimi, 13, and Sara Shakouri, 15, both from Maku, in northwestern West Azerbaijan province.

The contest aims to raise children's awareness of environmental issues and encourage them to express



A drawing by Aylin Javanbakht won the UNICEF award in Japan's JQA contest.

their views and concerns about the Earth and environmental protection through drawing.

