

CALL FOR PAPERS AND PANELS

8th ICLARS Conference

University of Palermo, Italy

1 – 3 September 2026

State Neutrality and Cooperation with Religion: Protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief without Discrimination

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The President and the Steering Committee of ICLARS are pleased to announce that the 8th ICLARS Biennial Conference will be held, from Tuesday 1 to Thursday 3 September 2026, at University of Palermo, Italy, which will be the co-organizer of the conference. This call can be freely circulated among all persons and institutions that may be interested in it.

The general theme of the conference is: *State Neutrality and Cooperation with Religion: Protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief without Discrimination*. The notion of the State's religious neutrality, in its different forms, has been discussed for a long time. In the international community and institutions, there is a consensus that the various national systems of relations between of State and religion must in principle be respected, as they respond to specific historic, social, cultural and political circumstances. However, some jurisdictions, as the European Court of Human Rights, have held that a certain religious neutrality of the State is necessary to preserve the reciprocal autonomy of the secular and the religious spheres, and also as a condition for the guarantee of freedom of religion or belief on equal conditions for all individuals and communities. This poses the challenge of defining the characteristics of such neutrality and how to reconcile it with the State's cooperation with religion that is common in most countries. Indeed, all over the world, States cooperate with religious communities as a matter of praxis — and in some cases as a consequence of a constitutional principle — on the basis that public authorities must create the circumstances that facilitate the exercise of fundamental rights. Neutrality, cooperation and equality thus appear as three essential coordinates that define how freedom of religion or belief should be protected in contemporary legal systems. The aim of this conference is to explore the meaning of these three notions as well as their interactions and the mutual limitations they can impose on each other.

Proposals for papers and panels

Members of ICLARS and scholars from all over the world are cordially invited to submit proposals for individual papers or for panels co-ordinated by specific institutions or research groups. Proposals for panels are especially welcomed. The selection of participants and the ordering of speakers will be at the discretion of the Organizing Committee. Proposing institutions or research groups will be mentioned as conference sponsors, provided that they take care of the registration fees and attendance of the speakers.

The **deadline** for responses to this call for papers and panels is **30 November 2025**. Proposals should be made using this form: [Form for proposals](#). They must include the desired language of the panel or paper, title and abstract, and the institutional position and affiliation of the proponent (in the case of panels, of all the speakers). Accepted languages are English, Italian and Spanish.

Specific subjects for papers or panels proposals

Proposals for panels or individual papers must refer, in principle, to some of the following specific subjects:

1. The law governing relations between the State and religion: majorities and minorities
2. International jurisdictions and national systems of relations between State and religion
3. Legal personality of religious or belief groups
4. Legal pluralism and jurisdictional boundaries between State and religion
5. Rights of religious minorities in cooperationist States
6. The role of the State in inter-religious dialogue
7. The design of public spaces
8. Conflicts between conscience and law
9. Religious marriage and family relationships
10. Religious symbols in the public space
11. Ministers of worship
12. Places of worship and meeting
13. Preservation of religious heritage
14. Freedom of religion or belief at the working place and the public service
15. Education and teaching
16. The right to religious assistance in public institutions
17. Offensive public speech against religions or beliefs
18. Freedom of expression of religious leaders
19. Freedom of religion or belief and the right to the respect for private and family life
20. The role of the State vis-à-vis women's rights in religious communities
21. Freedom of religion or belief and security
22. Religious freedom and the protection of public health
23. Freedom of religion or belief and minors
24. Religion and sustainable development

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

Structure of the conference

Distinguished keynote speakers will be invited to address the theme of the conference. The papers and panels selected for inclusion will be allocated to plenary or parallel sessions at the organisers' discretion.

Venue, travel, accommodation and registration fees

The venue for the conference will be the Law School of the University of Palermo, located at the city centre. Palermo is the capital city of Sicily. It is a beautiful and vibrant city, with an ancient and rich history. Palermo has an international airport, connected with the most important European capitals. Palermo can also be reached by bus from Catania international airport.

The organizers will try to facilitate finding hotel accommodation within walking distance of the Law School. Further practical information about travel and accommodation will be circulated at a later stage.

All participants are expected to pay for their travel and accommodation expenses as well as for registration fees, which will be announced at a later date.

Information and contact

For any inquiries or doubts, please write to: iclars@unimi.it.