

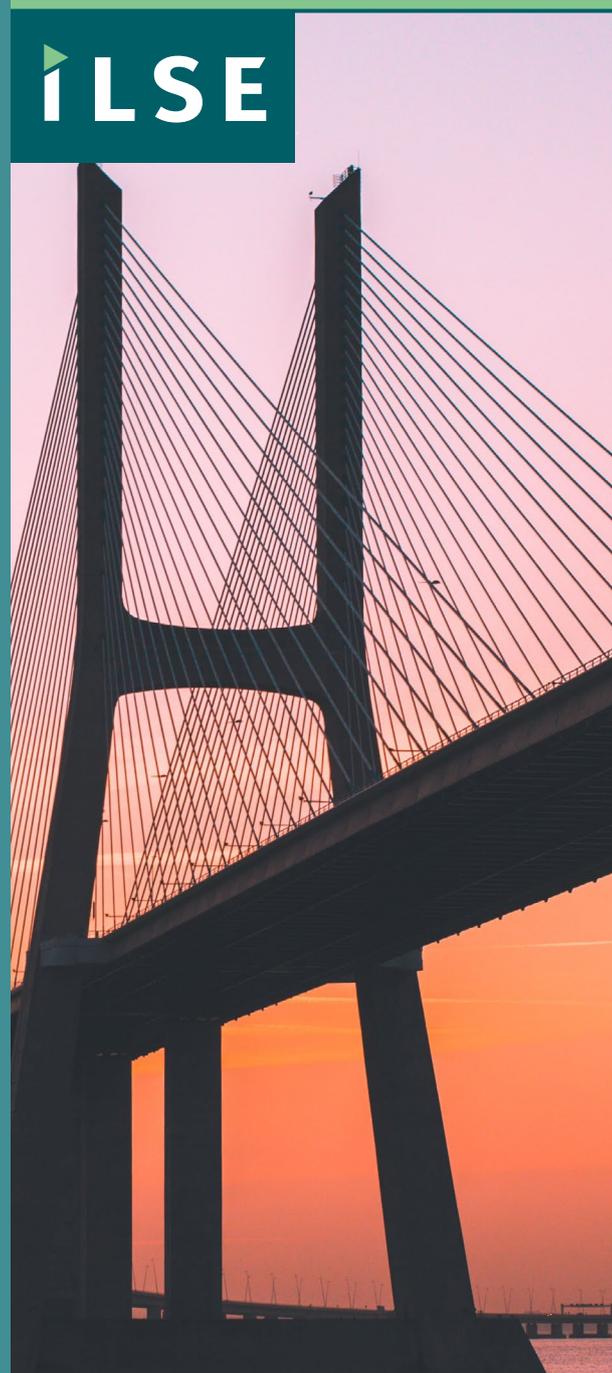
# BRIDGE-BUILDING LEADERSHIP IN A POLARIZING WORLD

**LEUVEN,  
8-9 OCTOBER 2021**

Healthy debate is nothing new, but today's polarization creates ever smaller islands of like-minded people who no longer (want to) understand the other. Politicians no longer play the center, but move towards extremes, as evidenced in the US and many European elections. The social debate surrounding Covid-19 and vaccinations hardens into camps where each mostly affirms their own beliefs. Among Christians and Muslims, as indeed within other religions, traditions and morals clash to the point of further division or even violence. Even in universities, sites of rationality and science that might be expected to lead to unifying perspectives, difference and polarization make interdisciplinary dialogue a formidable challenge.

Yet, these many voices and perspectives inhabit this world together. What kind of leadership does it take to build bridges between these disparate groups to be able to peacefully contribute to a common good life? Sometimes, leaders reinforce their particular political or religious identity by rallying followers in one common narrative, that stigmatizes all difference as dangerous. This conference seeks to contribute to a common good life by contributing insights and practices for leaders who wish to build bridges between different groups and individuals. Bridge-building leadership takes many shapes because the need for this type of leadership is urgent in so many different contexts across this world. What kind of leadership is needed in different contexts? How have some leaders built bridges and what can we learn from them? These are the questions which are central to this conference.

**ILSE**



## Keynote speakers

There will be three keynote speakers who are, each in their own way, involved in a context of sharp conflict and a dire need for bridge-building leadership.



**CHRISTELLE KALHOULÉ** will speak about how traditions and religion in Burkina Faso complicate conversations about child marriage, female genital mutilations, and child abuse. Despite this, it is still possible to engage in dialogue in a unifying way and come to a consensus to stop these practices.

She is Director, West Africa for Children Believe, a Canadian child-centered international organization. Christelle holds a MA in Project Management from Institut Africain de Management Senegal. She worked in the sectors of training leaders, strengthening Civil Society organizations, supporting networks development in the social sector, building government capacities in fighting child labor. Considering the impact of community conflicts and the security crisis in Burkina Faso on rural communities, Christelle is now working on various projects aiming at initiating social, community and religious dialogue to strengthen social cohesion by building bridges



**ODED ADOMI LESHEM** will speak on a situation where no sharper and unbridgeable contradiction seems possible, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His research shows differing conceptions of peace on all sides, that affect the long-standing conflict. He argues that it is necessary to examine the views on peace among those who are affected by the conflict, rather than relying on the view of experts.

He is a Research Associate at the Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Reconciliation Lab housed at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. His research is located at the nexus of political psychology and conflict resolution, specializing in protracted ethnonational conflicts. He has published numerous articles and book chapters on hope and despair during intractable conflict and on how political power shapes people's interpretation of the concept of peace.



**SIMON RIRIHENA** discusses forms of leadership needed in a poly-ethnic society like the Dutch. He explains that with the revolt of the Moluccan youth in the 1970s the Dutch Moluccan community needed a new type of leadership that was able to function as a bridge. Ririhena's contribution will focus on situational leadership and the role of leadership as a bridge-builder in a poly-ethnic society.

He is rector at the Institute for Intercontextual Theology and head of the Center for Non-Western Theologies at Foundation Academy Amsterdam. Furthermore, he is Director of the NATO program International Staff Officers Orientation Course and Coordinator of the NATO program Partnership for Peace. His work is aimed at building bridges by stimulating cooperation, ranging from cooperation between Dutch and migrant churches in the Netherlands to cooperation between NATO and former Eastern Bloc countries and between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries.

## Interdisciplinary approach

In addition to the keynote lectures, research will be presented which questions various dimensions of the topic. For example, conceptual questions will be raised about the possibility and conditions of bridge-building leadership. Various contexts and examples of such leadership will be questioned and explained in an academic manner. In addition, there are contributions that reflectively describe practical forms of bridge-building leadership. This conference highlights these approaches in an interdisciplinary way by including contributions from a diversity of disciplines, such as theology, philosophy, (social) psychology, and sociology.

## Date & Location

The conference will take place at **October 8-9, 2021**, at the Leuven Center of Christian Studies, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Sint Jansbergsesteenweg 95, 3001 Leuven, Belgium. This is, of course, conditional on how the Covid-19 pandemic develops. It will also be possible to join online. A detailed program, including a link for joining online, will be provided to all participants in due time.

## Accommodation

A limited number of rooms are available at **€45 per night** (including breakfast).

## Conference Fee

**The conference fee is €150**, including lunch, coffee breaks, and a conference dinner. Paper presenters will receive a discount of €30. The conference fee to attend online is €50. If, due to changed circumstances, it is no longer possible to participate in-person, registration can be changed to online participation up to one week in advance, the difference in cost will be refunded. Please contact us by e-mail. In case that the conference will completely be held online we will, of course, refund the difference too.

## Registration

- ✓ Registration is open until **October 1** through this link [etf-ilse.org](https://etf-ilse.org)
- 📍 **Leuven Center of Christian Studies**, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Sint Jansbergsesteenweg 95, 3001 Leuven, Belgium.
- ✉ For more information, please contact us at [cees.tulp@etf.edu](mailto:cees.tulp@etf.edu).
- 📄 [etf-ilse.org](https://etf-ilse.org)