

INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL “WEB” OF RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION
(ADAPTED FROM TDSJ2 APPENDIX 11T)

SET-UP INSTRUCTIONS FOR THIS ACTIVITY

Facilitators ask participants to stand in a circle and take turns “calling out” a social institution (such as a summer camp, elementary schools, emergency room at a hospital) followed by a participant’s name, and toss the yarn-ball to that person. It is important that the person “called out” is across the circle from the person doing the calling, so that the yarn-ball is thrown across the circle, and that everyone continues to hold the yarn after it’s been thrown to them. In this way, the yarn-ball can be tossed back and forth across the circle, participants continue to hold their place on the yarn.

Each time, the participant whose name is called, catches the yarn-ball toss and names a *specific example of religious oppression in the institution just “called out.”* That person receiving the yarn-ball and naming an example of religious oppression, continues the process by calling out another participant’s name (across the circle), naming another social institution, and tossing the yarn ball. The new recipient catches the ball and names an example of social institution. As participants feel they are running out of names of social institutions, they can do a second turn on institutions named earlier. The process continues until everyone in the circle has caught the yarn-ball, named an example, and tossed it to someone else. Participants continue to hold their end of yarn, and the yarn-ball gets smaller and smaller with each successive toss.

By the time everyone’s name and numerous social institutions have been “called out,” there is an intricate “web” of yarn linking all of the participants in the circle and representing the “web” of all the instances of religious oppression that have been identified. The web comes to represent the interaction of all of the social institutions named in maintaining the “web” of religious oppression.

Examples for facilitator to use with this activity:

Names of Social Institutions	Examples of Religious Oppression
Family	Opposition to religious intermarriage
Schools	Holidays linked to Christian calendar. Religious food requirements may not be met in school cafeteria. School may not accommodate the wearing of religious garb (<i>hijab</i> by observant Muslim women, the <i>yarmulka</i> or <i>kippa</i> by observant Jewish men).
The media (TV, magazines, newspapers, radio)	Muslim may be presented as terrorists. Native American spirits may be commercialized as mascots or advertisements. The assumption is that all families are Christian. Major emphasis on Christmas and Easter in programming and in story-lines.
Local police	Religious and racial profiling
Local, state and federal courts	In religious freedom cases, the courts may see nonmainstream religions as “private preference” or as less important than local laws or regulations
Child adoption agencies	May not know consider it important to place adopted or foster children in same-faith families
Building code enforcers	May be designed (intentionally or unintentionally) to rule out preferred temple or mosque or minaret architecture. May enforce “same style” regulations as the prevailing neighborhood.

Names of Social Institutions	Examples of Religious Oppression
Prisons	May make no allowances for non-Christian faith practices
Drug and alcohol agencies:	May forbid religious use of peyote for members of the Native American Church
Fashion industry	Design “hip” clothes using Native American or Hindu styles and symbols
Businesses and workplaces	Make no “reasonable accommodation” for daily prayer or for holidays other than Easter and Christmas or for day of worship other than Sundays
Colleges and Universities	There may be no affirmative effort to create prayer space or religious meeting space for non-mainstream religious groups
Other social institutions:	

FACILITATOR’S NOTE

The success of this activity depends largely on the participants having sufficient information to provide examples of institutional oppression – from readings, films and videos, discussions, observation, their own experiences – to generate examples quickly. The facilitator should have examples in mind to help out if participants have no examples, and in order to keep the process going.