

ENGAGING RELIGION AND FAITH-BASED ACTORS IN 2016

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON
ENGAGING FAITH-BASED ACTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

“[I]f development can be seen as enhancement of our living standards, (...) then efforts geared to development can hardly ignore the world of culture.”

Amartya Sen

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the engagement with faith-based actors and faith-related activities by the members of the *United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development* (short: UN Task Force on Religion and Development or IATF-FBOs). Covering the year of 2016, it continues to present the annual highlights of this work as it was done for the first time in 2015 through the first UN IATF report covering the period from 2013 to 2015 (link see below).

HISTORY

The history of the UN Task Force on Religion and Development reaches back to 2007, when some members first came together informally in 2007. As part of a task force convened by the Office of the President of the General Assembly (OPGA), different UN entities provided technical support in preparing the General Assembly's *High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace*, including an *Interactive Hearing with Civil Society*. Part of the emphasis of this effort was to ensure a broad-based and deliberate engagement of religious NGOs – or faith-based organizations (FBOs) – as a critical part of the civil society representation.

The success of this interactive hearing in general, and the collaboration between and among diverse UN offices in particular in engaging FBOs was brought to the attention of the Executive Directors of UNFPA and UNICEF in particular, with a suggestion to use this collaboration to gather more UN offices under a UN inter-agency format with a specific mandate to focus on engaging with FBOs.

In August 2008, a report of the Secretary-General entitled *Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace* was published for the first time, presenting the activities carried out by key UN entities and other regional and global initiatives in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In the same year, world leaders met at the UN for a high-level debate on the culture of peace, and adopted a consensus resolution on *Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace*, forging links to earlier General Assembly resolutions on religion, peace and development.

At the same time, UNFPA convened the FBO and civil society focal points from UNAIDS, DESA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO to its Global FBO Forum in Istanbul in October 2008. Subsequently, policy roundtables were co-hosted by these UN offices in New York and Geneva, inviting global FBO partners to discuss UN-FBO collaboration and outreach. Between 2008 and 2009, the first set of *Guidelines for Engaging FBOs as Cultural Agents of Change* (UNFPA) as well as a strategy of engagement with FBOs around prevention, treatment and care of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) were developed.

Thanks to the collaboration of the various UN agencies around the issues of faith-based engagement, and the advice and wisdom shared by the World Bank, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) reached out to the wider UN agencies and invited them to contribute to the 2009 (and subsequent) Secretary-General's Reports on Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue.

In June 2010, the principals of the various UN developmental entities approved the official formation of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with FBOs for Sustainable Development. Representatives of the various UN offices met officially as members of this Task Force, and developed a Mission Statement and Terms of Reference (see Appendix), which continue to be modified as the learning among UN

members and their World Bank colleagues, and the circumstances of the UN and the world of religious affairs, evolve.

To date, the UN Task Force on Religion and Development consists of the following members:

1. Chair: UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)
2. OGPRtoP (UN Office of the Secretary General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect)
3. OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights)
4. UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS)
5. UNAOC (United Nations Alliance of Civilizations)
6. UN CTC (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee)
7. UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs)
8. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)
9. UNDPI (United Nations Department of Public Information)
10. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)
11. UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme)
12. UN Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme)
13. UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
14. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)
15. UNV (United Nations Volunteers)
16. UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)
17. World Bank (WB)
18. WFP (World Food Programme)
19. WHO (World Health Organization)

JOINT ACTIVITIES OF THE UN TASK FORCE MEMBERS IN 2016

In 2016, building on the work of the previous years and according to the Task Force's objectives, the members continued to focus on knowledge and policy exchange on the intersections of religion and sustainable development, sharing experiences of and lessons learned from partnerships with FBOs within the UN, and strengthening the integration of reliable FBO partnerships within the UN system's broader civil society outreach.

During the 2016 General Assembly, eight faith-related side events were organized by UN Task Force members, in collaboration with different FBOs and/or governments. For instance, UNFPA, UNAIDS and UN Women, in collaboration with the World Council of Churches, Islamic Relief and the Wijngaards Institute, co-hosted a side event entitled "Keeping the Faith in Development – Religion, Gender and Health" on 20 September 2016. During the symposium, three reports examining the intersections and areas of contention between health, human rights and lived theology were launched and discussed. The reports address the taboo issues faith communities encounter when seeking to address sexual and reproductive health challenges, and propose theological and practical responses that simultaneously respect the tenets of faith traditions.

Also in 2016, members of the Task Force continued their support for the establishment of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), which they viewed as a

natural institutional continuation of the DUF (Donor-UN-FBO) policy roundtables initiated since 2013. PaRD is a new global platform which brings together bilateral donor countries, multilateral development agencies and civil society organizations – particularly FBOs – to harness the positive impact of religion in sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. PaRD was officially launched in February 2016 at the Berlin conference “Partners for Change – Religions and the 2030 Agenda” and is supported by an international secretariat located in the offices of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in Bonn and Berlin, Germany. To date, 8 out of the 16 PaRD members are also members of the IATF-FBO: UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, OGPRtoP, WFP and the World Bank.

In October 2016, PaRD’s first annual meeting was held in Abuja, Nigeria, where PaRD members came together with FBOs to take the next steps in solidifying the partnership, and to identify common areas of interest and engagement. 14 new faith-based partners were officially approved to join PaRD, expanding the number of partners to 24 civil society and non-governmental organizations (including faith-based NGOs, secular NGOs, community initiatives, foundations, and academic institutions). In Abuja, members and partners agreed to work closely together on specific SDGs – namely SDG 16 (peace, security and inclusive societies), SDG 5 and 10 (gender equality), SDG3 (good health and well-being, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights), all while ensuring a focus on supporting universal human rights and human dignity as cross-cutting. On the last day of the annual meeting, members and partners were invited to attend a meeting jointly hosted by UN OGPRtoP and the UN IATF to discuss upcoming areas of cooperation in March 2017, in New York City.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information about the history and activities of the UN Task Force on Religion and Development, please see the following documents:

- IATF Report 2013-2015: [Highlights of FBO Engagement by United Nations Entities 2013-2015](#) (UN IATF, 2015)
- [Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030](#) (UNFPA, 2016)
- [United Nations Inter-agency Consultation on Engagement with Faith-based Organizations: Proceedings Report](#) (UNFPA, 9 July 2008)
- [Global Forum of Faith-based Organisations for Population and Development](#) (UNFPA, 2009)
- Website of the [International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development](#) (PaRD)
- [Religion, Women’s Health and Rights: Points of Contention, Paths of Opportunities](#) (a joint UNFPA-NORAD paper, launched during a side event at the 2016 General Assembly)
- [Dignity Freedom and Grace: Christian Perspectives on HIV, AIDS and Human Rights](#) (Paterson and Long, 2016, published by the World Council of Churches, launched during a side event at the 2016 General Assembly)
- [Promoting good health and good conscience – The Ethics of Using Contraceptives](#) (Wijngaards Institute, launched during a side event at the 2016 General Assembly)

Reports of the Secretary-General on interreligious and intercultural dialogue:

- [Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/63/262, August 2008)

- [Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/70/373, September 2015)

General Assembly resolutions on religion, peace and development (selection):

- 58th Session: [Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation](#) (A/RES/58/128, adopted on 19 December 2003)
- 59th Session: [Promotion of interreligious dialogue](#) (A/RES/59/23, adopted on 11 November 2004)
- 60th Session: [Promotion of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/60/10, adopted on 3 November 2005)
- 61st Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/61/221, adopted on 20 December 2006)
- 62nd Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/62/90, adopted on 17 December 2007)
- 63rd Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/63/22, adopted on 13 November 2008)
- 64th Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/64/81, adopted on 19 February 2010)
- 65th Session: [World Interfaith Harmony Week](#) (A/RES/65/5, adopted on 20 October 2010)
- 65th Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/65/138, adopted on 16 December 2010)
- 66th Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/66/226, adopted on 23 December 2011)
- 67th Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/67/104, adopted on 17 December 2012)
- 68th Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/68/126, adopted on 18 December 2013)
- 69th Session: [Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/69/140, adopted on 15 December 2014)
- 70th Session: [Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/RES/70/19, adopted on 3 December 2015)

IATF CHAIR: UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA)

UNFPA is the lead UN agency for delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. It expands the possibilities for women and young people to lead healthy and productive lives.

UNFPA continues to foster dialogue and innovative partnerships with FBOs, national multi-religious mechanisms as well as religious, traditional and indigenous leaders to build respective institutional capacities to implement Agenda 2030. In 2016, the work on religion and culture has been relocated from Technical Division to the Division on Government Multilateral Affairs, in order to synergize institutional outreach efforts more systematically.

At the global level, UNFPA serves as chair of the UN IATF on Religion and Development which acts as a consultative mechanism within the United Nations to host policy dialogues and convene faith-based partners around shared developmental and humanitarian challenges. In that capacity, it continues to provide a lead facilitator for the UN system-wide staff annual training on “Religion, Development and Humanitarian Work”, provided under the auspices of the UN Staff College.

On behalf of the UN Task Force, UNFPA further convenes consultations during key intergovernmental fora – namely the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the ECOSOC Ministerial Meetings, and the General Assembly, with global faith partners. During the 2016 General Assembly, the UN Task Force convened concerned representatives of Member States, the United Nations and civil society, including FBOs as well as voices from the field, to bear witness to the impact of human trafficking, forced migration and atrocity crimes. The one-day consultation meeting had two parts, the first focusing on the phenomena of human trafficking and forced migration, the second on the role of faith-based organizations in responding to them. The consultation was designed to complement the UN General Assembly Summit for Refugees and Migrants held on 19 September 2016.

Moreover, UNFPA convened over 250 faith-based actors in a Special Session on Religious Engagement at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, in Istanbul. The Special Session resulted in an unprecedented outcome document in which the faith-based actors – many of whom constitute the largest humanitarian and development providers – called upon the international community to recognize and affirm their significant and often unique holistic contributions to humanitarian work, to consider them as equal partners in this work, and to scale up efforts to support their important contributions to communities around the globe. In turn, these major faith-based humanitarian actors committed, together, to:

- Serving the most vulnerable in humanitarian settings;
- Upholding and expanding the significant humanitarian response of FBOs;
- Overcoming the manipulative and abusive attempts to link religion with violence, terrorism, or exclusion of others;
- Keeping affected persons at the center of all assistance planned and provided; maintaining robust beneficiary feedback mechanisms;
- Ensuring that women’s and girls’ rights are protected, their needs are met, and their ability to engage in decision making is enhanced; and

- Continuing to play an active role in humanitarian response coordination.

Other activities include the compilation of a series of implementation tools that support community empowerment of key populations at risk of HIV. In total, four implementation tools have been prepared between 2012 and 2016. With community empowerment at the center of these implementation tools, they seek to defend and promote the human rights of marginalized key populations to live healthy and safe lives within society and reduce discrimination and violence experienced by them.

Finally, UNFPA has been engaged in a series of human rights “frontier dialogues” on cutting-edge human rights issues, and to ensure human rights is retained as an overarching principle and driving force within the sustainable development agenda. Frontier dialogues during 2016 included dialogues on human rights aspects of urbanization, discrimination in health care settings, prevention of violent extremism, statelessness, displacement and migration, and climate change. UNFPA is engaging in a number of these dialogues being spearheaded by the UNDG Human Rights Working Group.

On the regional and country level, UNFPA continues to partner with diverse faith-based partners in order to enhance UNFPA’s Mandate. For the 2016 annual overview report on UNFPA’s engagement with faith-based actors 33 inputs were submitted by different Regional and Country Offices from around the world. Please find the full report [here](#). Some highlights include:

- Uganda, Africa: The UNFPA Country Office, in collaboration with the Church of Uganda, organized the Marathon to End Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) on the International Day of the Girl Child in October 2016. More than 200 runners and about 5,000 visitors participated in the event, including the Archbishop of Uganda, the Minister of the Presidency, and several Members of the Parliament as well as other high-level officials.
- Egypt, Arab Region: UNFPA Egypt has collaborated with the Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR) of Al-Azhar University on the development of a manual on gender-based violence (GBV) in the context of Islam. The GBV Manual in the Context of Islam covers the various forms of GBV victims face (among them FGM), and was launched and printed in 2016. This new holistic document is now being utilized as the basis for the capacity building program for both male and female religious leaders, which began mid-2016.
- Myanmar, Asia: Supported by UNFPA, and hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with the country’s religious leaders in August 2016. The meeting aimed to promote the inclusion of both majority and minority religious groups in Myanmar’s peace and development processes, and was built on Government and UNFPA consultations with faith leaders prior to the release of census data on religion earlier in 2016.
- Armenia, Eastern Europe: Within its Gender-Transformative Programming, the UNFPA Country Office continued its close cooperation with FBOs in 2016 on prevention of GBV in Armenian families by engaging the Armenian Apostolic Church (ACC) in combating gender stereotypes and violent behaviors through educational, awareness-raising and counseling activities.
- Trinidad and Tobago, Latin America and the Caribbean: UNFPA is working with the Faith-Based Network of Trinidad and Tobago, which already has a history on working on issues of sexual and reproductive health and has signed a declaration of commitment to support the HIV response.

References and additional resources

- [Culture Matters: Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-Based Organizations](#) (UNFPA, 2008)
- [Guidelines for Engaging Faith-Based Organisations \(FBOs\) as Agents of Change](#) (UNFPA, 2009)
- [Religion and Development Post-2015](#) (UNFPA, 2014)
- [Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030](#) (UNFPA, 2016)
- [Religion, Women's Health and Rights: Points of Contention and Paths of Opportunities](#) (UNFPA, 2016)
- [Women, Faith and Human Rights](#) (UNFPA, 2016)
- [Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors – Overview 2015-2016](#) (UNFPA, 2016, final version soon available on www.UNFPA.org)

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPECIAL ADVISER ON THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (OGPRTOP)

The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide acts as a catalyst to raise awareness of the causes and dynamics of genocide, to alert relevant actors where there is a risk of genocide, and to advocate and mobilize for appropriate action. The Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect leads the conceptual, political, institutional and operational development of the Responsibility to Protect.

The mandates of the two Special Advisers are distinct but complementary. The efforts of their office include alerting relevant actors to the risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, enhancing the capacity of the UN to prevent these crimes, including their incitement, and working with Member States, regional and sub-regional arrangements, and civil society to develop more effective means of response when they do occur.

On 20 September 2016, during the General Assembly, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, together with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN held a ministerial side event entitled "Upholding the Responsibility to Protect: The Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Atrocity Crimes". Keynote speeches were delivered by religious leaders from Christian, Islamic, Jewish and other religious communities, followed by an open discussion about the action that religious leaders and organizations can take to prevent atrocity crimes, as well as ways to build inclusive and peaceful societies.

Also during the 2016 General Assembly, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, together with the World Council of Churches and the KAICIID Dialogue Centre, and in cooperation with the permanent missions of Italy and Spain, convened a consultation entitled "Bearing Witness: Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Migration". During three high-level panels, the role of FBOs in combatting human trafficking and forced migration was discussed.

References and additional resources

- [Upholding the Responsibility to Protect: The Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Atrocity Crimes](#) (Archdiocese of New York, 2016)
- [Bearing Witness: Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Migration](#) (The Salvation Army, 2016)

OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (OHCHR)

OHCHR represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. It has a unique mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights. OHCHR leads global human rights efforts speaks out objectively in the face of human rights violations worldwide. Within OHCHR, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. The mandate holder has been invited to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles.

The Special Rapporteur has been mandated through Human Rights Council resolution 6/37:

- to promote the adoption of measures at the national, regional and international levels to ensure the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief;
- to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles;
- to continue her/his efforts to examine incidents and governmental actions that are incompatible with the provisions of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and to recommend remedial measures as appropriate;
- to continue to apply a gender perspective, inter alia, through the identification of gender-specific abuses, in the reporting process, including in information collection and in recommendations.

The modalities of his work are:

- transmitting **communications*** to States with regard to cases that represent infringements of or impediments to the exercise of the right to freedom of religion and belief;
- undertaking fact-finding **country visits**;
- submitting **annual reports** to the Human Rights Council, and General Assembly, on the activities, trends and methods of work.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in collaboration with Muslim for Progressive Values organized a conference on “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Sexuality” from 8 to 10 June 2016. The conference aimed to understand the resistance, obstacles and conflicts that exist in allegedly contradictory human rights issues such as the right to freedom of religion or belief and rights of LGBTI persons. The conference also identified the patterns of inter-sectional discrimination that people have been facing due to their expressions of religious identities or sexuality. Furthermore, it sought to explore the range of initiatives that have been taken to address discrimination or violence in the name of religion committed against those who express their religious identities or sexuality openly. Finally, the conference explored new synergies for better future cooperation among the participants in their work.

On 22 September 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in collaboration with the World Council of Churches and Finnish Ecumenical Council organized a workshop on “Religion and Religious Freedom in International Diplomacy”. The main objectives of the workshop were (1) to

understand the use of religion in foreign policies including in development and humanitarian aid; (2) to sensitize the need of both “literacies” on religions and religious freedom in international diplomacy and foreign policies; (3) to find ways to contribute to the advancement of religious literacy and freedom of religion or belief.

One general challenge of such partnerships with faith actors is that there are many unrecognized religious communities who are not included in interreligious/interfaith initiatives by the mainstream (or recognized) religious communities. At the same time, there is an encouraging sign of cross-boundary cooperation among the atheists, secularists, humanists and other FBOs, e.g. speaking out for each other, tackling some thematic issues jointly and cooperating/co-organizing events at the Human Rights Council.

Future plans for 2017 include country visits, thematic reports to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly, and where resources and capacity allowed, organizing (sub)regional consultations on freedom of religion or belief and violent extremism.

References and additional resources

- [Conference Summary: Freedom of Religion and Belief and Sexuality](#) (Muslim for Progressive Values and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2016)
- [Religion and Religious Freedom in International Diplomacy: Workshop Summary Brief](#) (UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2016)
- [Annual Reports to the Human Rights Council, Commission on Human Rights and General Assembly](#)
- [List of country visits undertaken, and the country visit reports by the mandate holders on freedom of religion or belief](#)
- [Communications* reports of the Human Rights Council](#)
- [Rapporteur’s Digest on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) (includes excerpts of the reports from 1986 to 2011 arranged by topics of the Special Rapporteur’s framework for communication)

JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

UNAIDS is an innovative partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. The goal of UNAIDS is ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030 and leaving no one behind in the response – Zero new HIV infections, Zero AIDS-related deaths and Zero HIV related stigma and discrimination.

At its 37th meeting in October 2015, the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board adopted a new strategy to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030. The UNAIDS 2016-2021 Strategy is one of the first in the UN system to be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals, and calls for six transformative shifts in order to fast-track the response to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030:

“Fast-Tracking the response will require six transformative shifts at the community, district, national, regional and global levels: (1) front-loading a diverse bundle of investments; (2) rights-based, laser-like focus on the locations, populations and interventions that deliver the greatest impact; (3) catalyzing innovation for people who need it most; (4) leveraging regional leadership and political institutions for more targeted, sustainable and accountable responses; (5) launching a new era of inter-sectoral partnerships that leverage the unique contributions of people living with HIV, the private sector, faith-based communities, academia and science alongside government and civil society organizations to address determinants of health.” (p. 15)

Within UNAIDS, the Senior Adviser on Faith Engagement sits within the Community Mobilization Division of the Department for Rights, Gender, Prevention and Community Mobilization. The specific areas for FBO engagement under the above umbrella of the UNAIDS Strategy include:

- Transforming unequal gender norms in the context of HIV, working with men and boys, women and girls, community, cultural and faith leaders and the private sector.
- Forging partnerships and alliances to promote and defend human rights in the context of HIV, including with civil society, faith-based actors, law enforcement, executive branches, members of parliament, the judiciary, universities and the private sector.
- Expanding service delivery options through partnerships with the private sector, civil society and FBOs to broaden strategic engagement in the AIDS response as a global public health good.
- Continuing to deepen partnerships with FBOs and their networks to expand community- and facility-based care as an essential component of rapidly scaling up service delivery. This includes support for developing best practice models of service delivery and addressing bottlenecks at the community level, such as transforming gender norms and ending gender-based violence.
- Reducing AIDS-related stigma and discrimination broadly, including among providers of health care. Engaging faith-based and indigenous community leaders to raise awareness of the link between reduced stigma and improved individual and public health outcomes

UNAIDS’ concrete activities with faith-based partners in 2016 started in spring with consultations on Early Diagnosis and Treatment for Children and Adolescents Living with HIV. In April and again in May, Caritas Internationalis brought together global partners in two meetings to discuss the role of faith-based organizations and the private sector in closing the global HIV testing and treatment gap for children living with HIV, and developed an action plan for future work. The consultations, held in Vatican City, were co-organized by UNAIDS, the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the

Vatican's Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital. His Holiness Pope Francis sent a special message to the meeting.

From 8 to 10 June, the 2016 High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS (HLM) was held at the UN Headquarters in New York. UNAIDS supported national FBO partners with advocacy messages and talking points in-run up to the event, to inform rights and evidence based approaches to HIV.

From 18 to 22 July, the 21st International AIDS Conference took place in Durban, South Africa. For many years now, FBOs have held an interfaith pre-conference, convened by the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (WCC-EAA), to share lessons learned from faith-based engagement in the HIV response, and to take a stand on the leading issues of the conference. In Durban, more than 250 people, including UNAIDS staff, participated in FBO pre-conference sessions. During the main conference, a session was held addressing "The challenges of faith responses to the AIDS epidemic", with the participation of Luiz Loures, Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS.

On the side-lines to the opening of the UN General Assembly in September, the WCC-EAA in collaboration with UNAIDS, PEPFAR and the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development organized a interfaith prayer breakfast which offered faith leaders opportunities to strengthen relationships and forge new partnerships that would enable them to accelerate the global response to HIV. Over 100 faith leaders from diverse religious traditions attended the event and agreed to support a coordinated faith-based effort – turning the new General Assembly Declaration on HIV and AIDS into action.

Also, UNAIDS convened multi-stakeholder interfaith country consultations in Kenya and Zambia to plan in-country work on HIV with FBO partners. From 10 to 14 October, a National HIV Interfaith Consultation was held in Nairobi, Kenya, under the auspices of the National AIDS Control Council, the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA) initiative of the World Council of Churches, PEPFAR and UNAIDS.

References and additional resources

- [Partnership with Faith-based Organizations UNAIDS Strategic Framework](#) (UNAIDS, 2009)
- [On the Fast-Track to end AIDS: UNAIDS 2016-2021 Strategy](#) (UNAIDS, 2015)
- [Invest in Advocacy: Community Participation in accountability is Key to Ending the AIDS Epidemic](#) (UNAIDS, 2016)
- [Stronger Together: From Health and Community Systems to Systems for Health](#) (UNAIDS, 2016)

Consultations on Early Diagnosis and Treatment for Children and Adolescents Living with HIV:

- Action Plan: [Early Diagnosis and Treatment for Children and Adolescents Living with HIV: Urgent Call by Religious and Faith-Inspired Organizations for Greater Commitment and Action](#) (Caritas Internationalis, 2016)
- [Vatican Meetings Urge Accelerated Access to HIV Testing and Treatment for Children](#) (UNAIDS, 19 April 2016)
- [Caritas, UNAIDS, PEPFAR and Faith Organisations Make Roadmap to End Child HIV Infection](#) (Caritas Internationalis, 15 April 2016)

21st International AIDS Conference:

- [Faith at AIDS 2016](#) (Website by WCC-EAA on faith-based engagement during the conference)
- [The Challenges of Faith Responses to the AIDS Epidemic](#) (UNAIDS, 20 July 2016)

UN General Assembly in September:

- [A Fast-Track Faith-based Response to HIV](#) (UNAIDS, 20 September 2016)
- [Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast-Track to Accelerate the Fight against HIV and to End the AIDS Epidemic by 2030](#) (UN General Assembly Declaration A/70/L.52, 7 June 2016)

UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS (UNAOC)

The Alliance of Civilizations continues its work towards building a broad consensus across nations, cultures and religions for stability, prosperity and peaceful co-existence. This effort reflects the will of the vast majority of peoples to reject extremism and support respect for religious diversity.

During the 2016 General Assembly, UNAOC organized a side event entitled “Combating xenophobic language in the media and fostering inclusive integration of migrants and refugees”. The event served as a unique platform for Member States, journalists, advocates, activists, policy-makers and other stakeholders to share experiences and good practices to counter hate speech against refugees and migrants, strengthen the collective resolve to combat xenophobia, and build partnerships with different actors that are committed to preventing discrimination and promoting peace, respect and inclusion.

Also in 2016, UNAOC sponsored the Summit of Religious Leaders for Peace in the Middle East, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, and held in Alicante, Spain from 15 to 16 November. The summit brought together more than twenty religious leaders of the most senior influential religious figures from the Middle East, particularly from the Palestinian territories and Israel, to engage in interreligious dialogue in support of tolerance and mutual respect and to voice their rejection of extremist ideologies.

References and additional resources

- [Concept Note of the UNAOC Side Event at the 2016 General Assembly](#) (UNAOC, 2016)
- [Press Statement on the Summit of Religious Leaders for Peace in the Middle East](#) (UNAOC, 17 November 2016)

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the United Nations' global development network. UNDP works in nearly 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion. It helps countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results.

Since 2004, UNDP has successfully partnered with FBOs and religious leaders on diverse initiatives in a range of regional contexts—including preventing crisis and enabling recovery; halting and reversing HIV/AIDS; protecting the environment; empowering women; and growing national capacity.

In 2016, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) published a paper on Faith-Consistent Investing (FCI), commissioned by UNDP in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The aim of the paper, written by ARC in consultation with a wide range of secular and religious groups, is to stimulate, encourage and support discussion and debate about faith consistent investing and its potential role as part of the investment quest to support sustainable development. It is hoped that the paper will enable faith groups as well as secular groups to explore potential partnerships.

Also in 2016, UNDP signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Vienna-based International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), an intergovernmental organization that promotes dialogue to build peace in conflict areas by enhancing understanding and cooperation between people of different cultures and followers of different religions. UNDP and KAICIID will cooperate to promote intercommunal peace, and to address vulnerabilities resulting from conflict and crisis in the Arab States region including Iraq and Syria. To help communities build resilience to conflict, the collaboration will connect and strengthen influencers in communities, such as women, youth, religious leaders and the media. The cooperation will also support the development of education curricula that promote values of peace, acceptance and equality. KAICIID and UNDP will also collaborate towards building platforms for dialogue to enhance the constructive role that religious leaders can play in promoting social cohesion.

Moreover, in the framework of its “United Against Violence in the Name of Religion” initiative, KAICIID is working with the UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States on a regional project to map social cohesion in the region, and to evaluate the impact of peacebuilding, resilience and conflict prevention programs. This project aims to enhance the understanding and assessment of risk factors and inter-group tensions between communities. In addition, with the UNDP office in Iraq, KAICIID is working on identifying and empowering agents for social cohesion. In particular religious leaders will be empowered to contribute to building peace in fragile societies.

Another partnership was introduced in May 2016: UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group (IDBG) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the collaboration between the two leading development institutions, to support the effective implementation and achievement of the SDGs. UNDP and IDBG will collaborate on shared priority areas such as crisis response and recovery, peacebuilding, poverty reduction, youth employment, innovation, disaster risk reduction, climate change, sustainable energy, capacity development, and knowledge sharing.

References and additional resources

- [Faith in Finance: Faith-Consistent Investing and the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (ARC in association with UNDP, 2016)

- [UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders](#) (UNDP, 2014)
- [KAICIID, United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\) Cooperation to Promote Social Cohesion in Arab Region](#) (UNDP, 9 January 2016)
- [UNDP and Islamic Development Bank Sign Partnership to Support the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UNDP, 18 May 2016)

UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION (DPI)

The UN Department of Public Information (DPI) was established in 1946, by General Assembly resolution 13 (I), to promote global awareness and understanding of the work of the United Nations. DPI undertakes this goal through radio, television, print, the internet, video-conferencing and other media tools.

The Department of Public Information, through the NGO Relations and Advocacy Section, continues to engage with FBOs on a regular basis through its outreach efforts for engagement with civil society. The inherent principle underlying the Department's association with FBOs is reflected in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

In 2016, as part of the Faith Series that takes place yearly within the Thematic Briefings Program, NGO Relations organized the session "Focus on Faith: Promoting Peace and Reconciliation to Counter Violent Extremism". The briefing discussed FBOs and their role in promoting and building peace, preventing radicalism and counter extreme violence. The session also examined counterterrorism strategies and the mechanisms that support the development of effective tools and messaging through online platforms and conventional methods. One of the main topics of discussion was the role of youth in promoting peace and reconciliation. Panelists emphasized that support through peer-to-peer mentoring and leadership programs was key to empowering youth as leaders. At the end of the session, participants in the audience, especially youth, felt empowered to act as agents of change in countering violent extremism.

From 30 May to 1 June 2016, NGO Relations held the 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference in Gyeongju, in the Republic of Korea titled "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together". Over 3,700 NGO representatives discussed the role of SDG #4 in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. As part of the conference, several workshops were organized and led by FBOs covering topics from the need for harmonious societies to achieve sustainable development, to the importance of prayer and aid to achieve peace and support for indigenous peoples.

References and additional resources

- [Focus on Faith: Promoting Peace and Reconciliation to Counter Violent Extremism](#) (DPI, 4 February 2016)
- [The 66th UN/DPI Conference Webpage](#) (DPI, 2016)

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values. It is through this dialogue that the world can achieve global visions of sustainable development encompassing observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty, all of which are at the heart of UNESCO's activities. UNESCO's mission is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

The work of the organization in its different fields of competences has contributed to the promotion of interreligious dialogue, a key component of intercultural dialogue. UNESCO is convinced that, as with ignorance generally, ignorance of religion leads to misunderstanding and thus to intolerance of what is not understood. Similarly, a unidimensional culture and education, upholding only one religious "truth" to the detriment of the pluralism of ideas and beliefs, can lead to all kinds of isolationism and nationalistic or ideological excess. In such cases, religion may be used for political ends to break social cohesion, or it may even hide the deep-seated causes of political, economic or social unease.

UNESCO, in close collaboration with the Secretariat and a broad range of UN entities, prepared the report "Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace", reflecting the shared responsibility involved in promoting a culture of peace and intercultural and interreligious dialogue. As well as pursuing and refining ongoing initiatives, the participating entities have explored innovative ways to work more effectively together and in partnership with national governments and other stakeholders.

Building on the standard setting role of UNESCO, relevant instruments established in the field of culture speak to the importance of religion and value its respect as a basis for building more peaceful and inclusive societies.

For example, the World Heritage Convention (1972) offers an enabling environment for the inscription to a great variety of religious and sacred sites that are representative of the different cultures and traditions of the world. As such, understanding the continuing nature of religious and sacred heritage, having the capacity to protect its authenticity and integrity, including its particular spiritual significance, and sharing the knowledge of our common history, are the three pillars necessary for building mutual respect and dialogue between communities. Today, approximately 20 percent of the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List have some sort of religious or spiritual connection. The 2010 Seminar on the Role of Religious Communities in the Management of World Heritage Properties was a positive step forward, with the adoption of a "Statement on the Protection of Religious Properties within the Framework of the World Heritage Convention". This was a key endeavor in the context of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010). This Convention is also at the heart of UNESCO's efforts to face emerging acts of terrorism and deliberate destruction of heritage sites with religious and sacred value, as demonstrated during recent conflicts such as in Mali, Iraq or Syria, just to name a few.

Nevertheless, culture can be very effectively harnessed to unite different groups. The global outcry over the destruction of World Heritage sites in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere in recent

times bears witness to the unique status that cultural and natural heritage have in being both specific to a culture, reflecting the life of a community, its history and identity, and also belonging to all of humanity.

Protecting and restoring cultural heritage rekindles hope and offers fragile, conflict-and poverty-ravaged communities a constructive alternative to the violent extremist's nihilistic agenda. In Mali, which has endured repeated violence since 2012, UNESCO has enhanced the national peace and reconciliation process that followed the signature of a peace agreement in 2015 by helping to rebuild 14 historic mausoleums in the World Heritage city of Timbuktu. The centuries-old mausoleums, sacred places for the local population, were destroyed by radical Islamists in deliberate acts that the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, has described as "cultural cleansing". The city formally received the keys to the mausoleums, which were rebuilt by local stonemasons, at the Djingareyber Mosque in February 2016, in a traditional consecration ceremony that last took place at the site in the eleventh century. The strong involvement of local communities and religious leaders in the reconstruction project demonstrates the power of culture to unite and restore the confidence of a fragmented community.

International cooperation to salvage the archaeological heritage of the Syrian Arab Republic is also in place. A rapid assessment mission was sent to the country in April 2016, an initiative that was followed by an international conference, held in Berlin in June 2016, in partnership with the Government of Germany. Some 230 international and Syrian experts discussed priority measures and how and when work on the ground should begin.

The Unite for Heritage online media campaign continues to keep the activities in the public eye. Other actions to put culture and heritage at the center of peacebuilding and humanitarian emergency operations, most notably the signature of a recent agreement between UNESCO and the International Committee of the Red Cross to integrate culture into humanitarian operations, pave the way for further opportunities to cooperate and build peace through culture.

The promotion of intercultural dialogue for sustainable development was also enhanced by UNESCO and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the joint organization of a seminar on environment, religion and culture, promoting intercultural dialogue for sustainable development, held in April 2016, 15 years after a seminar on the same theme was held in Tehran, in 2001. At the event, representatives and specialists of different cultures and religions discussed how culture and religion contributed to sustainable development and they explored the nexus between the three concepts. A document was published urging religious leaders and FBOs to actively promote a culture of peace in their work to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It called upon Member States to put culture at the heart of their efforts to find durable solutions for environmental challenges in a spirit of dialogue, understanding and respect for diversity.

In keeping with the need to "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts" as called for in Goal 13 of the SDGs, UNESCO is also fostering international dialogue to explore the ethical implications of global climate change for biological diversity, cultural diversity, global justice, international solidarity, resilience and durability through the work of its World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology, since 2005. Based on the extensive work that has been completed so far, during the thirty-eighth session of the General Conference, Member States requested UNESCO to prepare a preliminary text for a non-binding declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change for the next General Conference, to be held in 2017. Such action is meant to complement the important work

being carried out on climate change through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. UNESCO will launch a broad and inclusive dialogue between Member States, experts and stakeholders to this end.

References and additional resources

- [International decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures \(2013-2022\)](#)
- Report of the Secretary General on [Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/71/407)
- [Agree to Differ](#) (UNESCO, 2015)

OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR)

UNHCR was created to protect and assist refugees as well as find durable solutions to refugee situations. Violent conflict and persecution have uprooted more than 65 million people at the beginning of 2016, with displacement reaching levels previously unseen since the end of the Second World War. More than half of all refugees worldwide come from just three countries: the Syrian Arab Republic (4.9 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million) and Somalia (1.1 million).

Over the past four years, UNHCR has remained committed to engaging with religious actors, supporting faith-based initiatives and partnerships, and pursuing common advocacy. Within UNHCR, the Divisions of External Relations and International Protection are the focal points.

The Office pursued a range of initiatives in four broad areas, comprising: research on lessons learned and good practice examples that came from engaging with local faith communities and faith-based organizations; advocacy to promote welcoming communities for refugees and stateless people with faith-based organizations and faith leaders; collaboration on key research and learning topics with the Joint Learning Initiative on Local and Faith Communities and other academics; and “faith literacy” training and materials for UNHCR staff and partners.

In 2016, UNHCR, together with UNAIDS, UNFPA and the UNSSC, co-organized the fifth annual strategic learning exchange on “Engaging with Faith Organizations for Sustainable Development”. The course explored the linkages between faith and the continuum of humanitarian to development work and gave UN staff, as well as representatives from faith-based organizations, the opportunity to share examples of good practice in realizing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

In 2015 and 2016, UNHCR also continued to engage with the Joint Learning Initiative on Local and Faith Communities (JLI) and plans to support its newly established Learning Hub on Refugees and Forced Migration. Previously, UNHCR collaborated with the Learning Hub on Resilience, including by co-authoring a policy brief based on JLI’s report on “Local Faith Community and Related Civil Society Engagement in Humanitarian Response with Syrian Refugees in Irbid, Jordan”. The policy brief and its recommendations were used as one of the resources at the World Bank conference on “Faith and Sustainable Development: Effective Partnerships between Public Sector and Faith Groups towards Ending Extreme Poverty” held on 7-9 July 2015 in Washington D.C.

More recently, the Office took part in a Workshop on Gender, Religion and Humanitarian Responses to Forced Migration, which was organized by Dr. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Reader in Human Geography and Co-Director of the Migration Research Unit, at the University College London. In follow-up to the workshop, a number of practitioners and researchers, including UNHCR staff, produced a policy brief, which was published in early September 2016 and printed for distribution at the United Nations General Assembly’s Summit for Refugees and Migrants on 19 September 2016 in New York.

In the months leading up to the Summit, UNHCR also engaged closely with a range of faith-based partners, including the Anglican Communion, HIAS, Islamic Relief Worldwide, the Lutheran World Federation, Religions for Peace and the World Council of Churches. The collective efforts of these organizations, along with dozens of others, resulted in over 1.4 million people signing UNHCR’s #WithRefugees petition, which called on governments to secure protection and solutions for people displaced by war or persecution. The

petition was delivered to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly on 16 September 2016.

In addition, UNHCR worked closely with Religions for Peace in the context of the #WithRefugees campaign, including by supporting the organization of Religions for Peace's side event "#WithRefugees: Mobilizing Multi-Religious Leaders to Act with Solidarity and Shared Responsibility for the Wellbeing of Refugees" on the margins of the Summit. At the close of the side event, participants reiterated the commitment of religious communities to serve refugees. They also expressed their willingness to support the development of a global compact for refugees and initiatives that aim to address and resolve statelessness.

Looking forward

UNHCR will continue to work with a range of faith-based actors in providing protection and assistance to refugees and displaced persons. The New York Declaration was a milestone event and the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) will be a driver for improving the Office's response and for seeking durable solutions for the displaced worldwide with the full range of stakeholders, including FBOs.

In the context of the CRRF as well as in follow-up to the World Humanitarian Summit, UNHCR will explore how local responders, including faith-based communities, can improve and be integrated in the response to displaced populations.

Further, UNHCR will engage in the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) as well as support the JLI's Learning Hub on Refugees and Forced Migration. Looking inward, it will further explore how to balance its partnerships with the variety of FBOs and increase staff's "faith literacy".

References and additional resources

- [Analysis of the Survey on Good Practice Examples: Faith-based Organisations and Local Faith Communities Contributing to Protection Outcomes](#) (UNHCR, 2013)
- [Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders](#) (UNHCR, 2013)
- [Partnership Note on Faith-Based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders](#) (UNHCR, 2014)
- [Policy Brief: Local Faith Groups and Humanitarian Assistance](#) (JLI and UNHCR, 2015)
- [Policy Brief: Gender, Religion and Humanitarian Responses to Refugees](#) (University College London, 2016)
- The [#WithRefugees petition](#) (UNHCR)

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN’S FUND (UNICEF)

UNICEF is the leading humanitarian and development UN agency working globally for the rights of every child. Child rights begin with safe shelter, nutrition, protection from disaster and conflict and traverse the life cycle: pre-natal care for healthy births, clean water and sanitation, health care and education. UNICEF has spent nearly 70 years working to improve the lives of children and their families, and also lobbies and partners with leaders, thinkers and policy makers to help all children realize their rights—especially the most disadvantaged.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects deeply-held values embedded within religious traditions that uphold the inherent dignity of every child and the centrality of the family in building strong communities. Religious communities are uniquely positioned to promote equitable outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families. Their moral influence and extensive networks give them access to the most disenfranchised and deprived groups, those that international organizations and governments are sometimes less able to reach effectively. They are also grounded in philosophical frameworks that shape their call to community service into long-term commitments to achieving peace, justice and social equality.

UNICEF’s engagement of faith actors takes places at many different levels: from community-led plans to the global engagement strategies driven by UNICEF’s headquarters. In the New York headquarters, such engagement is led by the Civil Society Partnerships Unit (CSP), which sits in the Data, Research and Policy Division. CSP develops technical guidance and provides support within headquarters and to country and regional offices working with religious communities. A main goal of CSP is to facilitate sharing of expertise and experiences among country and regional offices as well as links to relevant global and regional external organizations and initiatives.

Faith communities represent an indispensable partner in UNICEF’s work to advance children’s rights and enhance their well-being and UNICEF has a long history of partnering with religious communities of all faiths at the global, national and local levels. UNICEF’s engagement with faith actors involves all areas of its programming: health; HIV and AIDS; water, sanitation and hygiene; nutrition; education; child protection; and social inclusion. The modalities of such widespread engagement encompass advocacy, capacity development, social mobilization, sensitization and service delivery.

One example for UNICEF’s engagement with faith-based actors is a global partnership with the World Council of Churches (WCC), signed in September 2015. In 2016, during the first year of the partnership, UNICEF and WCC achieved their objective of engaging churches on issues of children’s wellbeing through “Churches’ Commitments to Children”, an initiative built on lessons learned from the Children’s Rights and Business Principles (developed by UNICEF, the UN Global Compact and Save the Children). With strong support from UNICEF, the WCC leadership agreed to a set of “Churches’ Commitments to Children”. With a view to strengthening the capacity of churches to promote child rights in their communities, the commitments were developed through a broad consultative process involving 235 church representatives and UNICEF experts. The commitments document outlines actions that member churches can take in 3 areas: child protection, child participation, and climate justice.

Besides the development of “Churches’ Commitments to Children” and related advocacy which led to strong support from WCC governing bodies, the main results of year one of the UNICEF-WCC partnership include:

- WCC support to the “Global Partnership to End Violence against Children”, with the WCC General Secretary joining the partnership’s Executive Board;
- An extensive mapping of relevant child rights tools made available to churches for the implementation of the three commitments;
- Consultations with 144 children in six countries based on a guide adapted from the “Children’s Rights and Business Principles” initiative;
- Establishment of a theological working group on child rights;
- Child protection campaigns by churches in pilot countries Nigeria, Indonesia and Sierra Leone.

In 2017, year two of the partnership, UNICEF and the WCC will focus on implementing the “Churches’ Commitments to Children”. This will include supporting churches to use a self-assessment tool to measure results achieved and a twinning system to match requests for expertise with offers for support.

References and additional resources

- [Sharing common goals: UNICEF, faith-based organizations and children](#) (UNICEF)
- [The World Council of Churches and UNICEF sign global partnership to promote children’s rights](#) (UNICEF, 2016)
- [WCC documents on children's rights](#) (WCC)
- [The Children’s Rights and Business Principles](#) (UNICEF)
- [Joint efforts to fight violence against children](#) (WCC, 18 June 2015)
- [Nigerian churches in ecumenical and multi-faith effort to fight violence against children](#) (WCC, 12 October 2015)

UNITED NATIONS ENTITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (UN WOMEN)

In July 2010, the UN General Assembly created UN Women, and took an historic step in accelerating the organization's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The main roles of UN Women are: to support inter-governmental bodies in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms to achieve gender equality and fulfill women's rights; to help Member States to implement these standards, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society to support the achievement of gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment; to lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality as well as promote accountability.

Seeking to expand the dialogue on faith and gender equality, UN Women has been strategically increasing its engagement with faith-based organizations, institutions and actors, given their crucial role in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. UN Women has also been part of the interagency coordination mechanism within the UN system that aims to strengthening coherence and leveraging existing efforts among sister agencies. The Commission on the Status of Women, in the Agreed Conclusions adopted at its sixtieth session, invited among many others, faith-based organizations to take a series of actions for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In addition, numerous initiatives and activities have been conducted by UN Women with FBOs at regional and country level. These include engaging faith actors and communities at large to end domestic violence, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women through trainings and sensitization campaigns (South Africa, Fiji, Barbados, Ethiopia, Egypt, Timor Leste, Albania, Tajikistan); the promotion of women's political leadership and participation (Tanzania, Cote d'Ivoire, Myanmar); increasing knowledge, understanding and use of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and engaging religious scholars in the formulation and development of strategies to eliminate discriminatory laws and practices.

Through the UN Women three year program "Implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women through gender-equitable interpretations and expressions of culture in Singapore, Indonesia and beyond", advocacy and capacity building resulted in increased knowledge of religious scholars, the media and grassroots leaders in Indonesia on the Convention.

In the Philippines, several female and male Muslim religious scholars participated in UN Women's activities on the Regional Human Rights Commission; and in legislative advocacy on the Convention, and women's access to justice in plural legal systems. These activities resulted in increased awareness of the Convention and need to advocate for women's rights. They created space for dialogue around sensitive topics where religious belief is sometimes perceived to be in conflict with international norms on women's rights; and for formulating strategies for changing norms and cultures that discriminate against women.

In Mali, UN Women continued to reach out to Islamic religious communities, with a focus on religious women and their understanding of gender issues. Religious women leaders were invited to all public activities with civil society leaders, resulting in further collaboration on the development of approaches and strategies to counter extremism, especially for youth.

In Myanmar, UN Women-led consultations on women's political participation in the 2015 elections provided access to influential monks, resulting in increased awareness on the need for women's political leadership. The monks committed to mobilize other monks or share information within their monastery and network and influence communities by encouraging voting for women candidates in their respective villages.

Looking Forward

Going forward, UN Women is in the process of developing a framework of engagement with faith, religion and other forms of spirituality in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment to streamline and scale up the organization's engagement with FBOs at normative, coordination, and operational levels:

- At the normative level, UN Women seeks to work with faith constituencies with the goal of strengthening their contributions to gender responsive normative frameworks and employ their influence in advocating with Member States to fulfill their gender equality commitments. UN Women supports faith leadership in developing a vision grounded in humanity, rights and gender equality to counter the proliferation of increasingly extremist political ideologies and movements that seek to use religion as a political, cultural and social force to legitimize discrimination against women and girls.
- At the coordination level, UN Women is working towards the progressive and feminist engagement of FBOs in UN Women's Civil Society Advisory Groups at global, regional and national levels; their representation in intergovernmental global, regional and national processes (FFD, post 2015, CSW); the strengthening of faith-based constituencies as an accountable interlocutor of government/sectoral ministries/gender machineries, trade unions, and other key stakeholders in the political advancement of the gender equality agenda; and the positioning of faith constituencies at the core of leveraged partnerships (e.g. interfaith and intergenerational dialogue; faith-based universities; South-South cooperation)
- At the operational level, UN Women aims to foster partnerships with FBOs through development of policy and programmatic guidance on the engagement of faith-based constituencies in gender equality; strengthening of capacity building for inclusive social and political mobilization; establishment of sustainable mechanisms for strengthened accountability on gender equality within FBOs; development and/or strengthening of community based sectoral initiatives with FBOs that promote gender equality; and by leveraging existing country level initiatives with faith-based constituencies.

References and additional resources

- [Religious leaders at the forefront of ending gender-based violence in Ethiopia](#) (UN Women, 31 August 2016)
- [From where I stand: Haidara Djeneba Sy](#) (UN Women, 23 August 2016)
- [Coverage: UN Women Executive Director in the United Arab Emirates](#), signing a MoU with Islamic Relief Worldwide (UN Women, 20 October 2016)
- [Religion and Gender Equality](#) (UN Women, 2016)

WORLD BANK (WB)

The World Bank is a vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world. It is not a bank in the ordinary sense but a unique partnership to reduce poverty and support development. It has set two goals for the world to achieve by 2030: end extreme poverty by decreasing the percentage of people living on less than \$1.90 a day to no more than 3%; and promote shared prosperity by fostering the income growth of the bottom 40% for every country.

Over the past two years, the World Bank has revitalized its engagement with faith-based and religious organizations, in recognition of the fact that its mission and goals cannot be achieved without partnering more effectively with actors across civil society, including faith-inspired ones. In April 2015, the World Bank convened a multi-faith drafting committee to develop and launch a “Moral Imperative” statement entitled “Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative”, which was supported by more than 40 FBOs and religious leaders from around the world. Building on this, a Faith-based Action Framework was developed and announced by more than 70 FBOs and religious leaders in September 2015. The framework is organized around 3 pillars: strengthening the evidence base around the contribution and impact of FBOs in helping to end extreme poverty; engaging in advocacy efforts to hold governments and other stakeholder accountable for the successful implementation of the SDGs; and enhancing effective collaboration between FBOs and the World Bank, the UN, and governments. Three working groups were established around these 3 pillars of actions: Evidence, Advocacy and Collaboration.

On 22 September 2016, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, over 60 religious and faith-based organizations leaders met to review 12 month progress of the Moral Imperative around the 2015 Faith-based Action Framework and to hear annual progress reports from the 3 working groups. The Evidence Working Group presented the first iteration of its “Guide to Excellence in Evidence for Local Faith Communities.” Clear calls for country and project specific work came from the other working groups. Speakers from the floor called for specific action plans with clear deliverables. The discussion also focused on the future of the Moral Imperative, its direction and possibilities for implementation, and on the practical aspects of how it might be sustained.

Attendees at the convening affirmed the distinctive value of the Moral Imperative as a unique collective faith-based and multi-sector platform for collaboration and advocacy among diverse international religious and faith-inspired networks. Participants pointed out that although there are many faith-based networks and collaborations working at various levels on SDG related goals, there is no one initiative like the Moral Imperative that convenes and encompasses all faiths and all goals. Speakers indicated that they thought a collective platform would be valuable for evidence-based action and advocacy. Participants recognized that while this past year focused a great deal on process and developing more concrete deliverables for each working group, greater capacity was needed for the future success and sustainability of the Moral Imperative, particularly as it seeks to translate global engagement to the country level. The group called for the formalization of a small secretariat to support the work of the working groups, and many committed in principle to contribute financial support. The Moral Imperative Steering Committee was charged with proposing a way forward, which is now in the process of being finalized.

References and additional resources

- [Mercy: Where religion and development can intersect](#) (WB, 5 April 2016)
- [Faith, the World Bank Group, and Ending Poverty](#) (WB, 9 April 2015)

- [Global Religious and Faith-Based Organization Leaders Issue Call and Commitment to End Extreme Poverty by 2030](#) (WB, 9 April 2015)
- [Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative](#), a “Moral Imperative” statement developed by a multi-faith drafting committee convened by the World Bank Group (8 April 2015)
- [Faith-based Action Framework to End Extreme Poverty & Realize the SDGs](#) (2015)
- [The Evidence Working Group](#) of the Faith-based Action Framework to advance the SDGs

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP)

The mission of WFP is to end global hunger. Every day, WFP works worldwide to ensure that no child goes to bed hungry and that the poorest and most vulnerable, particularly women and children, can access the nutritious food they need. WFP supports national, local and regional food security and nutrition plans. It partners with other UN agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to enable people, communities and countries to meet their own food needs.

In early 2016, WFP's leadership decided to seek enhanced partnerships with religious communities, acknowledging that ending hunger is possible only through meaningful collaboration at all levels of society, and that the principles of humanity and sustainable development to which WFP adheres are shared as a central pillar in all religious traditions. WFP launched its religious initiative with an address delivered by His Holiness Pope Francis to its Executive Board in June 2016. In the margins of the Board, WFP invited a group of religious scholars and leaders – representing all major faiths – to discuss how best to join forces to achieve Zero Hunger, and to explore levels of interest in the initiative.

The starting point for the dialogue with the WFP Membership on inter-religious engagement was clear: the realization that in today's world of unprecedented need and inadequate solutions, ending hunger is possible only with stronger partnerships between governments, religious communities, global food agencies such as WFP, and other stakeholders.

WFP already partners with more than 1,000 community-based organizations worldwide. Many of them have a faith-inspired mission. WFP partners with faith leaders and faith-inspired organizations in more than 40 countries across different regions, hunger contexts, program activities and transfer modalities.

The mutual benefits of collaboration are many and the range of partnerships diverse. Faith leaders and organizations have deep roots in communities and intimate knowledge of local needs and vulnerabilities. WFP, for its part, has the expertise and the capacity to work at scale, and each year WFP reaches more than 80 million people affected by conflict, disasters, climate change and chronic hunger with food assistance. By working together, we have the chance to broaden our collective reach and amplify public support for the common goal of a world without hunger. Such partnerships and complementarities enable us to jointly mobilize the necessary attention and resources to save lives and build the resilience of people and communities.

WFP is committed to advancing its partnership with current and potential faith-based actors in four key areas:

1. **Engage in joint advocacy.** WFP's commitment to its faith partners was reaffirmed at the "Breaking Bread" event in New York on 21 September 2016 during the UN General Assembly's High Level Week. It was co-hosted by WFP, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Caritas Internationalis, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Religions for Peace and the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). The event gathered representatives from different faith-based organizations to celebrate the inspirational role of faith communities in alleviating hunger and to join together to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger. WFP is seeking to amplify its voice further in 2017, through an SDG2 Advocacy Hub, which will seek to build on the excellent advocacy and campaigning work of key players from the UN, civil society and private sector around SDG2, providing a focus for greater coordination and collaboration as we work towards

achieving Zero Hunger by 2030. The Hub will provide a web-based platform to share campaigning and advocacy tools, examples of best practice and guidance on key campaign moments on the global political calendar.

2. **Join relevant partnerships.** WFP is committed to seeking new and enhanced partnerships with faith leaders and faith-based organizations worldwide. WFP joined the Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations for Sustainable Development in June 2016 and the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) in July 2016.
3. **Invest in capacity strengthening.** WFP welcomes the call – amplified at the World Humanitarian Summit – for greater investment in capacity and allocation of resources to first responders. In many cases, first responders are faith-inspired organizations that accompany people before, during and after humanitarian crises. WFP is soliciting the experience and interest of partners in order to make tailored investments in the capacity of national and local faith-based organizations.
4. **Country-level collaboration.** In support of the 2030 Agenda, WFP adopted its new Strategic Plan and Policy on Country Strategic Planning in November 2016. WFP is inviting faith-based partners to take part in the Country Strategic Reviews and inform WFP’s Country Strategic Plans.

References and additional resources

- [Inter-religious Engagement for Zero Hunger](#), a brochure with brief examples of WFP’s partnerships with faith-inspired organizations (WFP, 2016)
- [Summary Report: Inter-religious engagement for Zero Hunger](#) (WFP, 2016)
- [Voices of Faith: Statements from religious leaders and actors](#) (WFP, 2016)

APPENDIX I: MISSION, OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES OF THE IATF

Mission Statement

The IATF-FBOs supports the work of UN staff, towards the shared objective of learned, strategic and sustained engagement with key partners in the faith-based world, to support respective and collective efforts to realize international development goals.

Objectives

- Provide a knowledge exchange on the intersections of religion and religious actors with the UN system's mandate on human rights, sustainable development and peace and security;
- Provide an internal resource pool on experiences of and lessons from partnerships with FBOs within the UN, as well as with other governmental counterparts;
- Strengthen the integration of reliable FBO partnerships within the UN systems' broader civil society outreach and provide informed policy guidance upon request.

Activities: To that end, the Inter-Agency Task Force members shall endeavour to:

- Serve as a convenor of multilateral experience and expertise around engagement with religious actors, within the UN and with international intergovernmental counterparts, on the intersections of UN mandated areas with issues of religion and faith, based on diverse UN experiences, evidence and analysis;
- Host policy dialogues with faith-based partners and specialists on religion, development and humanitarian assistance;
- Share tools, guidelines, information and other capacity building resources including strategies of engagement, around ongoing outreach and engagement between diverse UN offices and faith-based NGOs, religious leaders as well as diverse religious institutions;
- Provide quarterly fora ('safe spaces') for the UN system members, to internally reflect on and critically analyze experiences, lessons, challenges and best practices gleaned through diverse initiatives with religion and faith-based actors at country, regional and global levels;
- Support and advise UN system members in developing and/or ensuring clarity and consistency in outreach to/with faith-based partners, to systematize and strategically inform the modalities of engagement around different development, peace and security, as well as human rights endeavors;
- Seek to catalyze regular UN system-wide activities and initiatives with a view to engaging faith actors in a learned and strategic manner around shared global objectives.

APPENDIX II: UN-SYSTEM WIDE CRITERIA OF ENGAGEMENT WITH FAITH-BASED ACTORS

UN Task Force Criteria of Engagement with Faith-Based Actors

The following criteria are culled from the record of respective UN offices' and agencies' own engagements and outreach with faith actors for any event, initiative, (joint) programming and/or project-based deliverable, and are required to guide the outreach to faith actors across the UN system around efforts taking place at the global level. These criteria are in line with UN values and principles and support the realization of its mandates in human rights, sustainable development and peace and security.

General criteria: Balance must be sought as regards:

1. Representation of all faiths and denominations: This references religious representation – using the UN framework lines – i.e. per number of global adherents; inclusive of all faith traditions, including diversity within the largest faith traditions and also inclusive of traditional and indigenous faiths.
2. Regional representation: All geographic regions of the world, in addition to a balance between those who work at global, regional and national levels.
3. Gender representation: Genders present at the meetings and initiatives, as well as sensitivity to the specific gendered needs and expertise of the beneficiaries of the intended project.
4. All aspects of the thematic area(s) entailed and cross-cutting concerns covered: inclusiveness as regards the range of thematic expertise brought to the specific agenda.
5. Non-governmental religious actors should be legally registered in at least one Member State of the UN.
6. Preference can be given to organizations actively working to provide the services and/or advocacy and/or capacity under discussion (i.e. to complement the representation of religious or faith leaders).
7. No objection has been raised by relevant UN country offices regarding a possible criminal case against the organization or individual where active.
8. Actors should have a track record of acting in conformity with UN values and principles.
9. NGOs should not be listed as a terrorist organization according to UN terrorist list(s).