

SPECIAL SESSION
RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT



Photo: Islamic Relief/Haseeb

DATE

23 May 2016

TIME

16.00 – 17.00

LOCATION

Beylerbeyi

MODERATOR

Azza Karam, Senior Advisor, Culture (UNFPA)

SPEAKERS

Mr. Vinya Ariyaratne
Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka

His All-Holiness Bartholomew I: Patriarch of Istanbul

His Excellency Mr. Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, KAICIID

His Excellency Mr. Albrecht Boeselager
Chancellor, Sovereign Order of Malta

Ms. Deborah Boudreaux
Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation

Dr. Hany El-Banna
The Humanitarian Forum

Mr. Benjamin Laniado
Cadena, Mexico

His Excellency Mr Gerd Müller
Minister, Federal Republic of Germany

Ms. Alaa Murabit
Islamic Action Group, Sierra Leone

Mr. John Nduna
Act Alliance

Mr. Allen Ottaro
Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability, Kenya

Mr. Antti Pentikäinen
Network of Religious and Traditional Leaders and Peacemakers

Her Excellency Ms. Anne Richards
US Department of State

Sheikh Ibrahim Sesay
Islamic Action Group

Cardinal Antonio Tagle
Caritas Internationalis

Many religious institutions and faith-based NGOs (FBOs) have a unique comparative advantage in humanitarian contexts: they have an established relationship of trust and familiarity with most local communities in which they are embedded. Due to their presence before a crisis they are first responders and key providers of assistance and protection during crises, and they will stay after international organizations leave. This Special Session will seek concrete commitments from religious leaders and other humanitarian actors to increase the impact of faith-based actors in reducing humanitarian need and suffering, and their inclusion within policy- and decision-making at all levels of humanitarian response.

OUTCOMES

1

Commitment to the principles of compassion, humanity and impartiality in the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection

2

Commitment to prevent and resolve conflicts, whether or not these have a religious component, and to promote peacebuilding and reconciliation

3

Building on faith assets and faith infrastructure in communities, contribute to sustainable solutions to humanitarian crises

RELATES TO CORE RESPONSIBILITIES

#1 PREVENT AND END CONFLICT



#2 RESPECT RULES OF WAR



#3 LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND



#4 WORKING DIFFERENTLY TO END NEED



#5 INVEST IN HUMANITY



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IN A NUTSHELL

Religious institutions and faith-based NGOs are often first responders in crises. Utilizing their localized networks, resource mobilization, trust and influence with local communities and commitment to peace and dignity, they provide critical and sustainable contributions to all aspects of humanitarian response as well as subsequent development needs.

More than 250 faith-based leaders and representatives of the world's largest humanitarian organizations, representing all major world faith traditions, gathered at the World Humanitarian Summit's Special Session on Religious Engagement on May 23rd. These included representatives from all regions of the world, both religious leaders as well as NGOs, actively engaged in humanitarian relief work in all corners of the globe.

The speakers 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 humanitarian and development work, and to scale up efforts to support their important work in communities around the globe.

In turn, these major faith-based humanitarian actors committed, **together**, in an unprecedented and historic fashion, to: serving the most vulnerable in humanitarian settings; upholding and expanding the significant humanitarian response of faith-based organizations; 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 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 response coordination.

Many of the faith based actors were actively engaged in producing content in line with the indications and guidelines received for the WHS social media campaign some of which can be accessed through these links:

<http://www.orderofmalta.int/>

www.walls.io/faithWHS



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SUMMARY OF SESSION PRESENTATIONS

Each of the distinguished speakers responded in their presentations, to two questions:

- 1. What does your own organization do in the humanitarian field that is unique to its faith-based identity - please answer through a concrete instance; OR, for our governmental speakers - what does your own office see as the unique or added value of faith-based engagement in humanitarian work?*
- 2. Based on this, what is the call you would make of your fellow faith-based colleagues, but also of all non-faith-based humanitarian actors?*

During the Special Session ‘Religious Engagement: The Contributions of Faith Communities to our Shared Humanity’ religious leaders and faith-based humanitarian actors discussed how to increase the impact of faith-based actors in reducing humanitarian need and suffering, and urged for the inclusion of faith-based humanitarian service deliverers within policy- and decision-making at all levels of humanitarian response. The session was moderated by Ms. Azza Karam, Coordinator of United Nations Task Force on Religion and Development.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I called upon the Members of the Orthodox faith to increase humanitarian action as an expression of their faith. The Patriarch called upon all Christians to make humanitarian action a pillar of unity for the Christian churches and upon all faith based communities to mobilize their constituencies to reach out to those in greatest need and affected by humanitarian crisis. Finally he called upon the international community to increase the synergies between FBO and the international organizations in their common goal to bringing relief to affected communities.

His Excellency Gerd Muller, Minister of Development Cooperation, Federal Republic of Germany pointed to the unifying factor of Religion and the vast and deep reach of FBOs into the communities. He noted that the large majority of people are affiliated to a religion. FBOs are among the first responders and have the ability to attend to the needs of people where and when the State is unable to do so. While the Minister highlighted the importance of religions are partners for the effective change, and the consecutive need for the UN to include them in the implementation of the agenda 2030, he also stressed FBOs' obligation to combat violent extremism in their own



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ranks. "FBOs need to hold themselves accountable to internationally agreed humanitarian standards" he said. Finally the Minister stressed the importance of safeguarding the freedom of religion as fundamental human right. He renewed Germany's commitment to support and help locally faith based organizations to build their capacity in humanitarian action.

Cardinal Antonio Tagle, President of Caritas Internationalis, also started his intervention by highlighting how deeply rooted his organization is in the local communities. "Caritas strives for a world that does not inflict fear", he said. The Cardinal noted that the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has doubled. Genuine international cooperation must engage local communities. "Yet the UN", he noted "may often fail to recognize and engage with faith based institutions". FBOs, noted the Cardinal, are in the communities before, during and after the crisis. Caritas is convinced that an essential responsibility of the humanitarian system is to put people the center and involve them in the response. But one size does not fit all. The WHS is an opportunity to transform the humanitarian system and needs to include FBO's as trusted partners. Only in so doing, stressed the Cardinal, can we seize "a wisdom of compassion and reconciliation".

Ms. Anne Richards, from the United States Department of State, affirmed the US government's view of the important role FBOs play in humanitarian action. FBOs have been at the forefront of developing and innovating humanitarian action. The US is recognizing the professionalism, commitment and effectiveness of FBO saving lives around of the world. She noted that many Americans are supporting humanitarian action by giving charity contribution to FBOs. She listed the added values which the FBOs bring to the table: - vast resources and capacities, powerful local presence from the onset of the emergencies and a unique relationships with communities. FBOs are well placed to bridge the gap between humanitarian response and longer term development.

The Order of Malta commended the fact that the WHS it dedicating a special session on religious engagement. The speaker indicated three elements which translate faith into a real asset for humanitarian action.

- FBOs are prepared to stay in the field for a longer period and hence are well accepted by the communities.



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- Humanitarian needs are also spiritual needs – lifting the assistance beyond the material needs of the population and creating a sense of purpose can alleviate much suffering.
- The religious background of the relief workers makes them trusted partners in difficult times.

The Chancellor of the Order of Malta stressed the importance for the FBOs to respect humanitarian law and establish inter-religious links on the ground. He urged the international community to make better use of FBOs in relief efforts, and, in turn, urged the international community to direct more humanitarian funding to local partners.

Dr. Hany El-Banna, Secretary General of The Humanitarian Forum, reminded the audience that “all prophets are calling us to save humanity”. He stressed the importance of partnership and genuine cooperation. “Saving humanity is partnership in action” he said.

Mr. Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muammar, the General Secretary of KAICIID, highlighted the importance of religion and of religious leaders. “Religion is part of the solution” he said. KAICIID also expressed their support to the outcome document of the session.

Mr. John Nduna from the ACT Alliance reminded the audience that his organization represents 140 churches and FBOs working in humanitarian action. 70% of the member organizations are local responders based in the global south. As part of the WHS process ACT Alliance submitted a report in which it made among others following observations: 1) when states experience fragility people identify increasingly with traditional and spiritual structures 2) when the State collapses – the FBOs often fill the gap and are at the sides of the communities .

Moving forward the Alliance is committing to

- using their influence with their constituencies to promote stability and strengthen social cohesion
- Using their reach to design the response with the inclusion of the local communities
- Implementing humanitarian relief in the full respect for humanitarian principles



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Sheikh Ibrahim Sesay of the Islamic Action Group from Sierra Leone, recalled that his country is emerging of a long civil work and the Ebola epidemic. He called upon FBOs and the international community to support the FBO-led humanitarian work.

Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, General Secretary of Sarvodaya based in Sri Lanka, advocated for a holistic and integrated approach- based on compassion, love and kindness. The uniqueness of this approach is that it's principles work across all faith as it is focusing on spirituality and not on the specific religious nomination. "We can only affect the population on the ground effectively if spirituality is part of our daily life", he said.

Mr. Benjamin Laniado, from Cadena, based in Mexico, called upon all FBO's to work a single unit – the work in the field needs to be geared to prevention and development of resilience. He cited the three philosophical pillars his organization is observing– help those who need it, educate youth and give more than you receive. Mr. Laniado hoped for an increasing understanding of the premise that God cannot be served if the believers do not support our neighbors who need our help. "We need to use all our fora to develop an army of defendants of humanitarian principle" he said. There is a need to unite the different cultures and overcome institutional interests for which the World Humanitarian Summit is a great opportunity, he concluded.

Ms. Deborah Boudreaux from the Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation offered her support to the WHS focus on religious engagement "we are only one voice, only one humanity" she said.

Mr. Allen Ottaro from the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability spoke about young people as the future also in FBOs. He characterized faith as a [German] "Gabe"- a gift but also a [German] "Aufgabe"- a task. For him young people are the greatest assets of FBOs in the prevention and resolution of conflicts as young people are effective peacebuilders and can be part of the solution if involved effectively in the response.

Mr. Antti Pentikäinen from the Network of Religious and Traditional Leaders and Peacemaker reiterated the point made by previous speaker of the deep connection of the FBO with the communities they serve. This aspect is of vital importance as in future the success of humanitarian action will depend on how well we can work with the local communities, he deducted. "Even when the bravest NGOs leave, the FBOs stay, because they are part of the community" he said while calling upon all to not only do what is in their interest but to do what is right. He expressed hope that in each and



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every conflict there are people rooted in the community who know how to fix it, the challenge of the international community and the UN is to find them and involve them effectively in the response.

The moderator Dr. Azza Karam from UNFPA ended the session by summing up the diverse presentations in one simple key message from the faith communities to the international gathering at the WHS "see us, hear us, know us and work with us".

COMITTMENTS MADE at the WHS

In addition to the historic Outcome Document, several commitments were articulated by the diverse speakers, ranging from the Order of Malta's ongoing extensive work on faith engagement and actual service delivery, to the global policy-oriented infrastructure announced (and realized) by the German Ministry of Development Cooperation in tandem with USAID - the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

[Commitments Extracted from the Outcome Document]

We, faith-based organizations and religious leaders, commit to:

...Upholding the principles of compassion, humanity and impartiality in our provision of humanitarian assistance and protection in alignment with fundamental humanitarian principles.

...Upholding and expanding the significant humanitarian response of faith-based organizations and to overcome the manipulative and abusive attempts to link religion with violence, terrorism, or exclusion of others. By so doing, we aim to resolve conflicts and work to promote reconciliation.

...Working together to better contextualize humanitarian response, leveraging our added value to reach people in need of assistance and protection, and using our influence to mobilize our local communities in support of these efforts.

...Ending hunger and serving the most vulnerable in humanitarian [by] bringing our intimate knowledge of community needs, practices, fears, and hopes to humanitarian work.



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...Keeping affected persons at the center of all assistance planned and provided, maintaining robust beneficiary feedback mechanisms.

...Ensuring that women and girls rights are protected, their needs are met, and that their ability to engage in decision making is enhanced; as this is a proven strategy for increasing the effectiveness of humanitarian action as a means of building resilience for all members of families and communities.

...Continuing to play an active role in response coordination, while we reinforce organizational systems and structures to allow us to meet growing humanitarian needs.

...In addition to material assistance and other services, we [therefore] commit to facilitating spiritual assistance which can significantly contribute to the population's sense of hope during and after a disaster, while prohibiting pressuring people into any religious practice.

... Continuing to work with national governments to recognize and affirm the role of faith and faith based organisations to provide faith-based assistance to communities in need.

See Annex of the full OUTCOME DOCUMENT **which was referenced and duly endorsed at the Special Session.**