



UN INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON ENGAGING FAITH-
BASED ACTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND
HUMANITARIAN WORK

“THE UN IATF ON RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT”

Highlights of FBO Engagement by United Nations Entities 2013-2015

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History

The UN IATF-FBOs, or UN Task Force on Religion and Development, first came together informally as individual members of the UN General Assembly's Tripartite Forum in 2007. In July 2007, the High-level Dialogue of the General Assembly on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace and Informal Interactive Hearing with Civil Society, including Non-Governmental Organizations and the Private Sector, took place under the auspices of the Office of the President of the General Assembly (OPGA). UNFPA, together with the UN Alliance of Civilizations, DESA, and the OPGA provided technical support and formed part of a 'Task Force' convened by the OPGA. Part of the emphasis of this effort was to ensure a broad-based and deliberate engagement of religious NGOs 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 religious NGOs (FBOs) was brought to the attention of the then powerful women 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 2008, UNFPA convened these FBO and civil society focal points from UNAIDS, UNDESA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO to its Global FBO Forum, hosted in Istanbul in October. In 2009, two policy roundtables were co-hosted by these UN offices in New York, inviting global FBO partners to discuss UN-FBO collaboration and outreach. One of the outcomes of this was the first set of 'Guidelines for Engaging FBOs as Cultural Agents of Change' which UNFPA developed.

Also in 2008-2009, UNAIDS convened some of the same UN agencies together with its FBO partners in Geneva to develop and launch a Strategy of Engagement with FBOs around prevention, treatment and care of HIV/AIDS.

On November 12, 2008, world leaders met at the UN for a Debate on the Culture of Peace wherein a draft resolution on "promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace", was introduced by the then Philippines' President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. In her presentation, the Philippines President maintained that one of the resolution's most relevant points was the affirmation that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue were important components of the culture of peace. This draft resolution was especially relevant to the United Nations as the Secretary-General had issued a report on interreligious and intercultural activities for the first time in the Organization's history. The resolution also asked that a United Nations decade be proclaimed for interreligious dialogue.

Thanks to the collaboration of the various UN agencies around the issues of faith-based engagement, and the advice and wisdom shared by the then World Bank lead on faith engagement, DESA reached out to the wider UN agencies inviting them to contribute to the 2009 (and subsequent) SG Reports on interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Today the contributors to this Report, which is now also combined with the SG Report on a Culture of Peace, from within the UN system continue to expand as the membership the UN Inter-Agency Task Force itself also expands.

In 2010, the Principals of the various UN developmental entities, with the endorsement of the Head of the UN Development Group and Administrator of UNDP, approved a UNDG Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with FBOs for Development. In 2010, representatives of the various UN offices met officially as

members of this Task Force, and developed the following Mission Statement and Terms of Reference, which continue to be modified as the learning among UN members, together with their World Bank colleagues, and the circumstances of the UN and the world of religious affairs, evolve.

Mission Statement

The IATF-FBOs supports the work of United Nations 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 resource pool on partnerships with FBOs for colleagues within the United Nations as well as other developmental counterparts.
- Strengthen the integration of FBOs partnerships within 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 convener of *multilateral* experience and expertise around engagement with religious actors, within the UN and with international intergovernmental counterparts.
- Serve as a forum to consult and engage within the UN and with non-UN international partners on the intersections of UN mandated areas with issues of religion and faith, based on diverse UN experiences, evidence and analysis.
- Convene policy dialogues with *faith-based partners* and specialists on religion, development and humanitarian assistance, and provide policy support to UN entities when requested.
- 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 a forum to internally reflect on and critically analyze experiences, lessons, challenges and best practices learned through diverse partnerships with FBOs at country, regional and global levels;
- Support 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.
- Convene regular joint UN system-wide activities and initiatives with a view to engaging faith actors in a learned and strategic manner around shared global objectives.

MEMBERS

UNAOC/ Alliance of Civilizations
UNAIDS
UNDESA
UNDP
UNDPI
UNESCO
UNEP
UNFPA
UNHCR
UNICEF
UNHabitat
UNV
WHO
WB

UN - CTEC (Security Council Counter-Terrorism Executive Committee)
UN - Office of SGSR Prevention of Genocide and Right to Protect

UNAIDS is a Joint Programme, comprised of the UNAIDS Secretariat and 11 Cosponsoring organizations with a **mandate** to end the global AIDS Epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. UNAIDS Secretariat leads the Global AIDS response through political advocacy, strategic policy advice and technical leadership, convening a wide range of partnerships, to support countries to make optimal use of domestic and international resources, including from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) and the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEFPAR). UNAIDS Secretariat work is focused on five core aspects of the response: information, investment, inclusion, integration and innovation. As convener and coordinator UNAIDS Secretariat creates new spaces for discussion and new models of collaboration that acknowledge and work within an increasingly complex environment.

UNAIDS **rationale** for engagement with religious actors and FBOs is an integral part of a robust strategy for engagement with civil society and communities in the AIDS response. Collective action for social justice has been the driving force of the AIDS response over the past 30 years. The leadership exercised by people living with and affected by HIV has revealed the power of civil society to focus and generate transformational change. HIV organizations now span all corners of the globe—and have catalyzed profound change in the way that we approach health, human rights and development. Antiretroviral treatment access in the South, the repeal of travel restrictions, TRIPS flexibilities, people living with HIV assuming service provision roles—all constitute the legacy of the efforts of myriad civil society organizations. Over the decades, civil society has induced even the most reluctant leaders to act and be accountable for their commitments on HIV. Long HIV experience has shown how and why improved interdisciplinary approaches to public health are needed- and in particular the role of religious actors as a central player in the response. Complex interrelationships of culture, tradition, stigma, and discrimination affect uptake of health services and health systems’ interface with communities. In addition faith based organizations provide a significant proportion of AIDS related health care.

Work with faith based organizations and religious actors’ is led from within the Community Mobilization Division in the department of Rights, Gender, Prevention and Community Mobilization in the Programme Branch of UNAIDS. UNAIDS has one focal point for work with faith based organizations and actors in Geneva. In addition, seven regional community mobilization advisers, and a network of over 60 rights, gender, prevention and community mobilization advisers at country level include work with faith based actors along with other civil society groups.

UNAIDS engagement with faith based actors dates from the creation of UNAIDS in 1996 and builds on foundational partnerships in the early days of the AIDS response between WHO’s HIV department and FBOs dating back to the 1980s. UNAIDS works with religious leaders, faith based service providers, advocacy groups, theologians and religious scholars. The UNAIDS Framework for Partnerships with Faith based organizations outlines modalities, objectives, activities, roles and responsibilities for partnership with faith based actors in the response to HIV and was developed in partnership with FBOs from all geographic regions, and major world faiths, as well as UNAIDS cosponsoring organizations.

http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/20100326_jc1786_partnership_fbo_en_0.pdf

Work in 2014/5 has included joint collaboration between UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO) with religious leaders and FBOs on Ebola. UNAIDS worked together with WHO at a Global level with the World Council of Churches, World Vision, Islamic Relief and the interfaith groups in Ebola affected countries to develop and roll out a new protocol on “How to conduct safe and dignified burial of a patient who has died from suspected or confirmed Ebola virus

disease” was issued in November 2014. This new protocol had the emphasis on dignified burials that respect religious rituals in both Christian and Muslim funerals.

In addition UNAIDS worked with WHO and the above FBO partners at a regional level across Africa to develop a training of trainers course on Ebola for Islamic and Christian religious leaders, and to provide technical support to strengthen the preparedness of faith based health hospital networks to respond effectively to an Ebola outbreak: drawing on longstanding expertise and partnerships with FBOs from the AIDS response.

Other regional examples include: to jointly convene with INERELA+ a group of faith leaders in Tanzania from 18 countries across Africa to develop and launch a [call to action](#) in support of UNAIDS Fast Track agenda towards ending the AIDS epidemic in Eastern and Southern Africa.

UNAIDS has partnered with faith based organizations, academia organizations and governments to document the scope and scale of FBO led HIV health service provision launching two reports with partners in 2014. In Asia UNAIDS worked with national partners in Indonesia and Malaysia to host international consultations on health, with a focus on HIV and Islam and the development of materials on HIV and Islam. In the Middle East and North Africa UNAIDS partnered with Religious leaders in the development of the Arab Regional AIDS strategy building support for a robust regional strategy from both religious and political leaders. In Ukraine UNAIDS convened religious actors to develop an Inter-church HIV/AIDS Strategy for 2016-2018 based on new challenges in conditions of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and within the framework of the AIDS State Programme for 2014-2018. In the Caribbean UNAIDS has worked with a coalition of national faith based partners who are developing a strategic framework on HIV for faith actors especially tailored to the needs and sensitivities in their own country.

Challenges to engagement with faith actors in the HIV response reflect the increasing polarization of religious and political opinion on sexual and reproductive health and support by religious leaders in some countries for the criminalization of HIV transmission and criminalization of consensual same sex behavior. The introduction of legislation to criminalize homosexuality in two African countries for example in recent years have put faith based health staff, providing HIV counseling, testing and treatment services to men who have sex with men- and their clients at risk of arrest.

Looking Forward

UNAIDS, in partnership with other organizations in the inter-agency task force on faith, governments and faith based organizations to: i) Strengthen Leadership and advocacy for the Fast Track approach and a sustained, accelerated and more strategic AIDS response to end the global AIDS epidemic by 2030 ii) UNAIDS will continue to deepen partnerships with faith-based organizations 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 iii) to address structural barriers at the community level, such as transforming gender norms, ending gender-based violence and addressing HIV related stigma and discrimination.

UNDP

Since 2004, The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has successfully partnered with faith-based organizations 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. A few examples can be found below:

- In 2004, UNDP mobilized religious leaders through the HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States Project (HARPAS, 2004-2010) to address stigma and discrimination against people living with and affected by HIV in the region. As the Arab Region’s first interfaith network of religious leaders, HARPAS facilitated discussions in the faith-based community on responding to HIV in the region.
- In 2009, UNDP initiated collaboration with the *Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum* in Zimbabwe to build the skills of local religious leaders in conflict prevention, management, resolution, and transformation.
- In 2010, UNDP partnered with the Afghanistan Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs to raise awareness about women’s rights and train religious leaders about the rights of women from the perspective of Islam as well as national and international laws.

Looking Forward

IN 2014, UNDP developed guidelines for engaging with faith-based organizations in the future. The guidelines aim to encourage UNDP staff to streamline faith-sensitive development policy and programming that contributes to sustainable human development. Additionally, UNDP will co-host a workshop in December 2015 to explore the potential for faith based finance to support to the SDGs. The workshop will bring leaders of major faith-based fundraising and investment groups together with the heads of major development organisations.

UN--DPI

The NGO Relations & Advocacy Section of the Department of Public Information (DPI) values the importance of working with and through NGOs as an integral part of the United Nations information activities since the Department was established in 1946. With over 1,400 organizations associated with DPI, many of them faith-based groups, NGO Relations has found in the NGO community key partners in its outreach efforts to share with the international community the work of the Organization. In this light, the NGO Relations & Advocacy Section engages on a regular basis with NGOs that “undertake to support the work of the United Nations and to promote knowledge of its principles and activities, in accordance with its own aims and purposes and the nature and scope of its competence and activities” (ECOSOC Resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968).

The Department of Public Information works with key partners of civil society, including faith-based organizations, to explore areas of mutual concern and unite efforts towards achieving the common global goals.

The inherent principle underlying the Department’s association with faith-based organizations 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.”

As part of its outreach efforts, on 10 April, 2008 the NGO Relations & Advocacy Section of the Department of Public Information inaugurated the Focus on Faith Series as part of the regular DPI/NGO Briefings. This new approach to the subject of faith within the work of the NGO community in connection to the United Nations aimed at providing a broader understanding of how different belief systems shared common foundational principles such as tolerance, mutual respect for those different than oneself, and a commitment to reconciliation and peaceful resolutions to disputes. Such principles represent an important aspect of the work and values promoted by the United Nations.

The first briefing of the Focus on Faith Series began discussing the significance of His Holiness Benedict XVI’s visit to the United Nations on 18 April 2008, and its impact on global matters. During the event, the panellists shared their insights into the topic and underlined the links between the principles of the United Nations and the Catholic Church.

In the following years, the Focus on Faith Series explored the unique characteristics and contributions of several religious traditions to the work of the United Nations. These traditions included the Bahá’í Faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Mormonism. The Series provided an opportunity to take a closer look at how these denominations contributed to the overall mission of the United Nations.

In 2015, the Focus on Faith Briefing titled “A Future for all – The United Nations through Women and Faith” addressed the question of what it meant to be a woman in each of the different traditions represented, as well as a woman of faith outside the boundaries of religious affiliation. As the conversation moved forward, the panel addressed issues such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the key contribution of women of faith in paving the path towards their achievement.

The discussion then reviewed the importance of religious tolerance and the invaluable role of cultural and faith diversity in the implementation of the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the crucial approach to religious tradition and history from a more current and non-fundamentalist perspective. While the concept of faith is not directly listed in the SDGs, as a member of the audience pointed out during the Q&A segment of the Briefing, religious beliefs have a fundamental role in the success of the UN efforts in building a more sustainable global culture.

NGO Relations understands that engaging in interfaith dialogue provides an opportunity for greater understanding of religions, cultures and civilizations. This can inform and facilitate the work of governments, religious leaders and civil society at the same time as it fosters mutual understanding and respect.

UNESCO

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.

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.

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.

The same spirit presides over the importance of UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted in 2003. It is instrumental to the preservation of heritage with religious interest to communities, such as practices and rituals with religious or spiritual value. Inscriptions in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO such as the Samba de Roda of the Recôncavo of Bahia of Brazil (2008), the Indigenous festivity dedicated to the dead in Mexico (2008), the Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India (2009), the Xooy, a divination ceremony among the Serer of Senegal (2013) or the Commemoration feast of the finding of the True Holy Cross of Christ, Ethiopia (2013), are just few symbolic examples.

Consistent with the Organization’s function as a laboratory of ideas and generating innovative proposals and policy advice in its fields of competence, UNESCO’s aim has been, through declarations adopted at meetings convened for that purpose, to bring representatives of the various religions and spiritual traditions together in recognition of the proximity of their spiritual values and their commitment to dialogue with each other. The Organization has always sought to bring together not only eminent religious persons from the monotheistic religions and other religious and spiritual traditions, but also lay intellectuals (historians, historians of religion, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and others), recognized for their study of and research on religion, and representatives of humanist schools of thought, including atheists and agnostics.

In that context, UNESCO’s Inter-Religious Dialogue Programme launched in 1991 in the frame of its “Roads of Dialogue” initiative was instrumental, designed to show how the three religions of the book have contributed to the generation and propagation of spiritual, cultural and artistic wealth. This led to the organization of several international and regional meetings, attended by representatives of the monotheistic religions and other spiritual traditions, and which highlighted interactions between Eastern and Western religious traditions and reviewed the experiences and perspectives of interreligious dialogue worldwide. They are encapsulated in the landmark outcomes such as the [“Teaching Interreligious Dialogue Barcelona Declaration on the role of religion in the promotion of a Culture of Peace”](#) (1994) or “The Roads of Faith-Malta Declaration” (1997), but also proceedings of meeting led forward by UNESCO, namely in the context of the International Year for Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) and beyond, as well as relevant publications in this domain, as highlighted below. The establishment in 2006 of the UNESCO UNITWIN Network of Inter-Religious Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding also has a central role in this dynamic, acting as a think tank bridging academic research and policy making underground.

UNESCO is taking every relevant step to strengthening dialogue capacity, while partnering to create new platforms for reciprocal exchange of current knowledge, research and developments related to interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the “Baku Process” and its World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue initiated under the leadership of the Government of Azerbaijan. Its third edition was held in May 2015 on the theme “Sharing culture for shared security”. The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions led forward by the Republic of Kazakhstan have a similar commitment. The fifth edition was held in Astana in June 2015 and addressed the theme: ‘Dialogue of Religious Leaders and Politicians for Peace and Development’.

Indeed, too often, messages of positive action and peace are drowned by narratives of violence and breaking news about conflicts reported as being conducted in the name of religion. Empowering religious leaders and dialogue practitioners, but also media professionals is therefore of essence. UNESCO’s work through Media Information Literacy Programme is a useful resource in this regard. For example, two different training courses were developed and offered in each of two cities, Nairobi, Kenya and New Delhi, India in November 2014. One of the courses was titled, “Media Wise: Empowering Responsible Religious Leadership in the Digital Age”, based on an adaptation of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Curriculum, with an aim to enabling religious leaders to understand the news media, assess how news and information shape perceptions about religions and cultures, find quality information and address misinformation when they see it. The second course, titled, “Speak Up: Social Media and Communications Training for Interreligious Dialogue Practitioners”, aimed to help dialogue practitioners to use social media channels and to engage with journalists to tell their stories of peace.

Besides, the relevance of the Abdullah bin Abdulaziz international Programme for a Culture of peace and Dialogue, which UNESCO leads forward with the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also worth mentioning. It aims to sensitize, train and further engage different stakeholders, including religious leaders, in the development of an enabling environment for building a peaceful coexistence among peoples from different cultures, religions or beliefs. The Programme allows the new dialogue-based operational modalities and tools to be developed, bringing together experts, youth and civil society activists as well as academia through the holding of conferences, capacity building workshops, awareness raising campaigns, and other activities geared towards learning to live together.

Looking forward

Considering the increased prevalence and large scale of conflicts, extremist acts of violence often fueled by cultural or religious intolerance, a call for a renewed commitment, new approaches and actions is rather urgent.

On the proposition of UNESCO, the United Nations General Assembly in its sixty-seventh session (2012) proclaimed the period 2013 to 2022 as the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures, as adopted in its resolution 67/104 entitled “Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”. This new framework capitalizes on previous engagement of the international community during International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010).

Worth recalling in this regard, the first of the four major themes of the Action Plan for this Decade is: “Promoting reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity”. In this regard, the Decade offers an opportunity for synergized action to “sensitize governments, opinion makers, religious leaders, believers and non-believers, civil society and the private sector on the role of intercultural and interreligious dialogue to fight against manipulation of religion and to foster social sustainability and cohesion by designing new policies, modalities and tools for a harmonious living together”.

UNESCO will therefore give a special attention to the fostering of cultural literacy for the appreciation of capacities for promoting the diversity of cultures and catalyzing enhanced cooperation, namely with faith-based organizations. To achieve this, Member States will be invited to enter into creative and innovative collaboration foreseen in: (i) the mapping of intercultural competence tools and programmes, including e-learning modules with a view to Building a solid knowledge base to inform policy and future actions ; (ii) the development of a communication campaign to further engage youth in the conversation for the rapprochement of cultures, and; (iii) initiation of research on indicators to explore and cement linkages between intercultural dialogue and sustainable development.

Besides, UNESCO's future actions and leading role in the implementation of the IDRC is crucial in the context of the sustainable development goals, particularly as regards Goal 16: 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'.

References/Additional Resources

- [International decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures \(2013-2022\)](#)
- [Agree to Differ \(2015\)](#)
- [Summary of the Expert Meeting on the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures \(2015\)](#)
- [Brochure of the Action plan for the International decade for the rapprochement of Cultures \(2015\)](#)
- [Intercultural Competences. Conceptual and Operational Framework \(2013\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, Addressing Islamophobia through Education \(2011\)](#)
- [The Different Aspects of the Islamic Culture \(Six Volumes\)](#)
- [World religions in the context of the contemporary culture: new perspectives of dialogue and mutual understanding; Christianity and Islam in the context of contemporary culture: new prospects of dialogue and mutual understanding in the Russian Federation and Eastern Europe, in Central Asia and the Caucasus \(2011\)](#)
- [Cultural Aspects in Christian and Islamic Religions \(2011\)](#)
- [Christianity and Islam in the context of contemporary culture: perspectives of interfaith dialogue from Russia and the Middle East \(2009\)](#)
- [Declaration of Montserrat on Religions and the Building of Peace \(2008\)](#)
- [Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue for Sustainable Development \(2007\)](#)
- [Regional Summit on Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Dialogue \(2004\)](#)
- [List of Relevant UNESCO Conferences on Dialogue among Civilizations \(2001-2004\)](#)
- [Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity \(2001\)](#)
- [An International survey on education and teaching of intercultural and interreligious dialogue \(1999-2001\)](#)
- [Congrès international de l'UNESCO sur le dialogue interreligieux et une culture de paix \(2000\)](#)
- [Interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean area during a period of globalization \(1997\)](#)
- [Roads of Faith- The Malta Declaration \(1997\)](#)
- [Declaration of principles and follow-up plan of action for the United Nations Year for Tolerance \(1995\)](#)
- [Tolerance \(1996\)](#)
- [Defining Tolerance \(1995\)](#)
- [International Year of Tolerance. Worldwide Events \(1995\)](#)
- [Declaration on the role of religion in the promotion of a Culture of Peace- the Contribution by Religions to the Culture of Peace \(1994\)](#)

UNFPA, The United Nations Population Fund, currently serves as Convenor/Chair of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force for Engagement with Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) on Sustainable Development (otherwise known as the UN Task Force on Religion and Development). It also serves as Lead Facilitator for the UN system-wide staff trainings on “Religion, Development and Humanitarian Work” provided under the auspices of the UN Staff College.

UNFPA has a *Global Interfaith Network* of over 500 faith-based organizations, each of which each partners in countries, on various aspects of the population and development mandate, within which maternal health, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as well as youth development and population dynamics, are central and interconnected features. UNFPA’s work and outreach with religion and religious actors is situated within its overall work under the combined ‘culture, gender and human rights’ technical work.

In the various regions and countries, UNFPA continues its legacy of partnership with diverse cultural agents of change – including faith-based actors, civil society organizations and human rights mechanisms,– to ensure a ‘culturally sensitive’ component to its human-rights’ based approach to poverty eradication, social inclusion and youth health and welfare. This work is undertaken through advocacy, capacity-building, knowledge-management and strengthened south-south cooperation. The focus of these initiatives is to promote the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and healthy and effective participation of adolescents and youth; reduce maternal mortality, increase quality and accessibility of Family Planning (FP); combat gender-based violence (GBV) and eliminate harmful practices, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

UNFPA’s first partnership with religious organizations took place in the 1970s when it co-founded, together with al-Azhar University in Cairo, the Center for Reproductive Health Studies. Since then, UNFPA has developed programming and advocacy tools, provided analysis and partnered with and advised sister UN entities, the World Bank, NGOs and academia, on culturally-sensitive approaches to international development paradigms.

Most recently, thanks to the generous support of Norad, UNFPA and UNAIDS convened religious leaders and faith-based organizations from around the world, during the 2014 UN General Assembly, issuing a communique/call to action to the UN and Member States, decrying any harm to adolescent girls and boys, youth and women, in the name of religion or tradition. The Call to action (<http://www.unfpa.org/resources/call-action-faith-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-reproductive-rights-post-2015>) urges governments to engage with all civil society organizations (including FBOs) in efforts to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2013, UNFPA, on behalf of the UN IATF-FBOs convened the first **Donor-UN-FBO Policy Roundtable (the DUF)**, on the Post 2015, Sustainable Development Goals. A full report of the consultation, which looked critically at the intersection of issues of religion and engagement with faith-based actors on a range of SDGs, identified challenges as well as opportunities of engagement. [The Report is available here: <http://www.unfpa.org/publications/religion-and-development-post-2015>]. One of the outcomes of the discussions was an agreement to continue the DUF Series in 2015, with a follow-up to the World Bank and FBO-convened consultation in May. The DUF II policy roundtable focused on 3 SDGs: governance, peaceful and secure societies and gender equality – considered to be some of the most difficult areas for matters of religion.

Examples from UNFPA’s specific work include UNFPA-Eastern-and-Southern-Africa’s mobilization of faith-based leaders from 13 countries to strengthen interfaith commitments to SRH programming, work

with men and boys towards transforming social norms in support of gender equality and maternal health; and develop means to integrate key messages in preaching/sermons among congregations, in theological schools and in training curricula.

As a result of systematic efforts by UNFPA-Kenya, cultural and religious leaders have made public declarations/pronouncements on abandonment of FGM. Over 5,000 girls have undergone Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP) and are encouraged to go to school. A high level inter-faith dialogue took place in March 2015 to address issues of maternal health and harmful traditional practices in six counties with the highest burden of maternal mortality, culminating in a signed Call for Action by the religious leaders. Young men and women are better able to access SRH information and services, contributing to improvements in maternal health and uptake of family planning. The same fora provided opportunities for religious leaders to constructively showcase peaceful coexistence initiatives and discuss conflict resolution modalities.

UNFPA-Somalia worked to empower humanitarian actors with the skills and competencies necessary to produce culturally sensitive messages to turn the tide against GBV, by providing space for public discussions and positive messages promoting harmonious relationships between women and men, founded on religious teachings. Female lawyers and religious leaders (up to 3,130) were also trained as champions on abandonment of all forms of FGM. Comparative analysis of the teachings of the *Qur'an* and CEDAW established a common understanding of the complementarity between international instruments related to gender equality, human rights and the teachings of Islam, during the capacity building sessions on the role of culture and Islam in ending GBV, including FGM.

UNFPA-Serbia supports grassroots youth activities fostering interethnic, interreligious and intercultural cooperation in 4 multicultural regions using theatre-based educational shows which were rewarded as a European Union best practice. Systematic partnership efforts with the Armenian Apostolic Church on prevention of GBV has resulted in more people approaching priests with individual and confidential questions.

UNFPA-Kyrgyzstan developed a Community Action Toolkit and trainings, to equip FBOs with practical tools to promote a culture of peace and respond effectively to local conflict situations; encouraging inter-cultural dialogues between religious and 'secular' communities, joint problem analysis and planning for behavioral change initiatives, together with local governments,

In September 2014, Arab-States-Regional-Office, in partnership with *Al-Azhar* organized a regional consultation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. 50 NGOs, journalists, population and development experts, and religious leaders from thirteen Arab countries discussed faith-based advocacy, learning, and strategic interventions to address poverty, gender equality and migration issues in the Arab region. The participants jointly issued a Declaration with critical commitments (<http://arabstates.unfpa.org/public/pid/18408>).

UNFPA-Honduras have been working with Indigenous groups (i.e. Lenca and Garifuna Afro-Descendants) on SRH and GBV with a focus on building the capacities of adolescent and youth populations through trainings and participation in establishing youth-friendly access to justice services.

Looking forward

UNFPA is continuing to engage with its FBO partners around the SDGs, most specifically on a extreme poverty, health, gender equality, urbanization and climate change. In 2015, UNFPA will be co-hosting a major international conference bringing together religious leaders and family planning actors around Family Planning; will work with UN sister agencies to engage faith actors around the World Humanitarian Summit; convene women of faith scholars and activists together with wider human rights' NGOs around normative policy frameworks, in key intergovernmental fora, including the UN Commission on the Status of Women; and will endeavor to continue to support the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

References and Additional Resources

Proceedings Report: UN Inter Agency Consultation on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations - http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/proceedings_fbo.pdf

The Global Forum of Faith-Based Organizations for Population and Development: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/global_forums_fbo.pdf

Policy Roundtable with Faith-Based Organizations - <http://www.unfpa.org/events/policy-roundtable-working-faith-based-organizations>

UNFPA's Guidelines for Engaging with FBOs as Cultural Agents of Change - http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/fbo_engagement.pdf

Culture Matters: A Legacy of Engaging with Faith-Based Actors - <http://www.unfpa.org/publications/culture-matters>

Religion and Development Post 2015 - <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/DONOR-UN-FBO%20May%202014.pdf>

UN-Habitat is the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Its mandate is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.

UN-Habitat partnered with FBOs in a bid to create a new water-use ethic in cities. This was to address the enormous pressure which rapid urbanization is placing on cities. It was recognized that improvements in water management cannot be accomplished by technical and regulatory measures alone but that advocacy, awareness and education initiatives are required. Water education is a strategic entry point for bringing about strategic attitudinal changes among both service providers and users, and as a strategic entry point in water education, human-values based model was considered. The FBOs provided key inputs and insights on ethics and values issues linked to water, sanitation and hygiene education in UN-Habitat projects. As we look forward to a “New Urban Agenda” emerging from Habitat III, UN-Habitat perceives the need for greater engagement with FBOs in realizing the benefits for all from planned urbanization.

Urban Basic Services Branch (UBSB), which is one of UN-Habitat’s seven thematic branches, responsible for water and sanitation programmes, and has been the key unit to deal with FBOs. Basic services besides water and sanitation, includes energy, mobility and waste management.

Initial dialogue was held with FBOs at an Expert Group Meeting in May 2001 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The EGM recommended pursuing a human values-based approach to introducing water education and a field trial was conducted in seven African countries between 2002 and 2003 in partnership with FBOs. In the process Human Values Based Water Sanitation and Hygiene Education (HVWSHE) was established, developed and implemented. In 2004 the programme was rolled-out to 12 African countries, and it was later introduced to 15 countries in Asia and to 5 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

HVWSHE was integrated into UN-Habitat’s Water for African and Asian Cities Programmes, and later introduced to the Water for Cities Programme in Latin America and the Caribbean (WatSan-LAC). The HVWSHE initiative has included a broad range of operational, normative and capacity building components which have been implemented in partnership with FBOs. Activities have included:

- Enhancing awareness and political will for HVWSHE
- Building capacity to conduct HVWSHE in the formal and non-formal education sector through:
 - Promoting HVWSHE through the curriculum;
 - Developing resource materials;
 - Conducting trainings in teacher training institutions;
 - Developing teacher training guides;
 - Demonstrating HVWSHE in selected pilot schools;
 - Developing resource materials and demonstrating pilots in the non-formal education sector;
 - Developing partnerships with the Water and Sanitation Service Sector for increased and sustainable water and sanitation service provision to schools;
 - Building capacity for promoting Human Values and Ethics in the workplace for policy makers, administrators and teachers;
- Building capacity in the Water and Sanitation Service Sector to conduct HVWSHE promotion and providing sustainable access to Water and Sanitation Services for schools and surrounding communities.
- Building capacity in utilities for Human Values in Water and Sanitation Classrooms
- Building capacity in Utilities to sustainably provide water and sanitation services to schools
- Building capacity for promoting Human Values and Ethics in the workplace for leaders and workers in the utility sector.

Robust partnership developed with FBOs, service providers, educational institutions and communities contributed to the success of UN-Habitat’s HVWSHE initiative.

The HVWSHE model, which has been strategically implemented in partnerships with FBOs, contributes directly to achieving access to water and sanitation for all as well as ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. Through access to water and sanitation, HVWSHE contributes indirectly to achievement of the following Sustainable Development areas:

- Poverty reduction
- Good health and wellbeing
- Decent work and economic growth
- Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Reduced inequalities
- Sustainable cities and communities

Looking Forward

Implementation of HVWSHE programmes is ongoing in countries participating in UN-Habitat’s water and sanitation initiatives. Although the focus to date has been on water and sanitation, there is potential to expand partnership with faith-based organizations, and the use of faith-based approaches, into the areas of energy, mobility, and wastewater management. In articulating the “New Urban Agenda” at Habitat III, we perceive the need for FBOs to engage with broader urbanization issues including urban planning, legislation and economy in order to have a greater impact in the delivery of urban basic services.

References and Additional Resources

<http://hvwshe.urbancities.org/HVWSHE/africa-publications.html>

<http://hvwshe.urbancities.org/HVWSHE/asia-publications.html>

<http://hvwshe.urbancities.org/HVWSHE/lac-publications.html>

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created to protect and assist refugees as well as find durable solutions to refugee situations. The number of people displaced by conflict and violence has reached levels unseen since the end of the Second World War, at close to 60 million at the beginning of 2015.

Over the past three years, UNHCR has remained committed to promoting dialogue and understanding of religions, particularly in follow-up to the High Commissioner's 2012 Dialogue on Protection Challenges on the theme of "Faith and Protection." Embarking on a "journey of mutual discovery" with faith-based organizations and local faith communities, UNHCR continues to explore the practical ways in which these organizations, communities and leaders help protect and assist persons of concern to the Office, including through partnership.

Within UNHCR, follow-up to the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which has been mainly knowledge production and sharing, research and policy guidance, has fallen under the purview of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. A natural home for work on engaging with religious actors is the Division of International Protection, notably the Community-based Protection Unit.

UNHCR's first initiative developed specific guidance for religious leaders. From January through April 2013, a coalition of leading faith-based organizations and UNHCR staff pursued a recommendation to produce such guidance and drafted a text that consists of 16 affirmations. The "Affirmation of Welcome" was presented to civil society representatives at UNHCR's Consultations with NGOs in June 2013. In addition, the "Affirmation of Welcome" was formally launched at a signing ceremony before an assembly of 600 faith leaders, including with the then Director of International Protection, Mr. Volker Türk, at the Religions for Peace 9th World Assembly in November 2013. It has since been signed and endorsed by over 1,700 religious leaders and members of faith communities, in large part thanks to faith-based organizations and entities, such as HIAS, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches.

A second area of work explored lessons learned and identified good practices from engagement with faith-based organizations and local faith communities in protection-related activities. From April through June 2013, UNHCR staff and faith-based organizations contributed to research on good practices, compiling over 50 examples that explored the impact of faith identities, motivations and structures, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of partnership. Submissions included examples of local faith communities advocating for safe humanitarian access due to their ability to dialogue with groups of a shared faith. It also included a number of examples of accompaniment and engagement in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, including among groups of various ethnic and religious backgrounds in conflict and post-conflict settings.

A third area of work looked inward at UNHCR. In June 2014, the Office launched new guidance for its staff entitled "Partnership Note on Faith-based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders," at the UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs. The Partnership Note encourages staff to engage with, reach out to and partner with religious actors who can support their work. The guidance also describes UNHCR's understanding of the role faith plays in humanitarian responses and identifies lessons learned from existing partnerships in the field. It also flagged challenges to partnership, which include, but are not limited, to proselytization or pressure to convert as a pre-condition for assistance, and hate speech or incitement to violence directed against individuals or communities of another religion.

In partnership with UNAIDS, UNICEF and the United Nations System Staff College, UNHCR also co-facilitated the fourth edition of the strategic learning exchange on "Engaging with Faith Organizations and Communities in Development and Humanitarian Work." The course explored the linkages between faith and health, as well as development and humanitarian work, and provided an opportunity for staff from

across the United Nations System and representatives of faith-based organizations to share their experience of working together. It was held from 17-19 November 2015 in Turin, Italy.

A fourth area of work helped identify key research and learning topics related to faith and humanitarian responses. In November 2014, the Forced Migration Review, which is housed at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, published an issue on “Faith and responses to displacement” that acknowledged the role UNHCR played in bringing researchers and practitioners into the debate on faith and humanitarian responses. The Office contributed two articles to the issue entitled “Welcoming the Stranger and UNHCR’s cooperation with faith-based organisations” and “Faith-based humanitarianism in northern Myanmar.”

UNHCR continues to engage with the Joint Learning Initiative on Local and Faith Communities and plays an active role in its Learning Hub on Resilience, alongside practitioners, academics, policy-makers and other experts, who often belong to faith communities themselves. The Office assisted the Learning Hub by co-authoring a policy brief based on the Joint Learning Initiative’s most recent 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,” which was held on 7-9 July 2015 in Washington D.C..

Looking Forward

UNHCR is supporting the planning of a one-day Global Religious Forum on the role of religion in humanitarian action, as a member of the Forum’s Steering Committee. The Global Religious Forum will bring together about 150 participants, including religious leaders, principals of faith-based organizations, representatives of national and multi-faith platforms, as well as United Nations agencies, with a view to adopting a multi-faith declaration and corresponding plan of action. It will also explore barriers to partnership. The Forum will take place the day prior to the commencement of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) on 22 May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey.

Finally, another emerging strand of work has been to encourage interfaith partnerships among UNHCR’s leading faith-based partners. One example was a workshop co-organized by the Lutheran World Federation and the Humanitarian Forum on “Working Together: Christian-Muslim Humanitarian Partnerships,” which took place in October 2013 in Amman, Jordan. Joint pilot projects between Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Lutheran World Federation were undertaken after the workshop, and in August 2014, the two organizations signed a memorandum of understanding and began undertaking joint humanitarian response, notably in the aftermath of the earthquake in Nepal in May 2015. Their partnership sends a clear and unified message to the humanitarian community that Christian and Muslim humanitarian actors can work together to bring relief and sustenance to those most in need of protection. UNHCR sees value in multiplying such interfaith partnerships in the future.

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Division of External Relations/Office of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection
30/11/2015

UNICEF is the United Nations Children's Fund, mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF mobilizes political will and material resources to help countries ensure a "first call for children" and to build their capacity to form appropriate policies and deliver services for children and their families. UNICEF is active in more than 190 countries and territories through country programmes and National Committees, and works for all children, everywhere, beginning with those who are most vulnerable, disadvantaged and excluded.

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 place 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.

In 2011 UNICEF and Religions for Peace (RfP) started a global partnership with the aim to strengthen the engagement of religious communities and child protection actors to work in partnership to enhance protection of children affected by violence and conflict. Three country level projects in Kenya, Liberia and the Philippines were developed and global advocacy activities for the promotion of child protection through inter-religious collaborations were carried out.

While the country projects in Kenya and the Philippines came to an end in 2013, in 2014 the project in Liberia expanded to integrate a specific focus on interventions to combat the spread of the deadly Ebola Virus Disease. UNICEF worked with the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL) to mobilize religious leaders from the Christian and Muslim faiths in the Ebola national response. The main activities included: the training of 100 religious leaders from across Liberia, the production of 3 awareness videos with key messaging from Christian and Muslim leaders, the setting up of data collection centers, and the creation of the IRCL's first comprehensive database of religious leaders across Liberia. In Sierra Leone, throughout 2015 UNICEF engaged the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone in the planning of a community engagement project focusing on essential family practices to be promoted in the post-Ebola recovery phase. The project's workplan is currently being finalized implementation is foreseen to start during the first quarter of 2016.

In September 2015, UNICEF signed a partnership with the World Council of Churches (WCC) to work together to support children's rights, with special initial focus on two major issues: violence against children and climate change. In Nigeria, the partnership inspired the Council of Churches of Nigeria's strong engagement in the UNICEF-initiated campaign Year of Action to End Violence Against Children, launched on 15th September 2015 in response to the shocking findings from the Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey, the population-based study that provides the first nationally representative data on the prevalence of sexual, physical, and emotional violence among female and male children in Nigeria. Collaboration between UNICEF and WCC on campaigns to end violence against children in Indonesia also resulted from the partnership. At the global level, UNICEF and WCC are jointly working on the development of *Principles and Tools for Child-friendly Churches*, in close consultation with a broad range of advisors and experts from WCC, UNICEF and key partners. The *Principles* aim to guide and support WCC member churches in their efforts for the wellbeing of all children by outlining actions that each member church can undertake to support children's rights within their own domains, and also to be advocates for children's rights within the wider community, both in terms of individual behavior and public policies.

In April 2015, Pope Francis and UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake met in Rome to launch a new partnership between Scholas - an educational organization founded by the Pope - and UNICEF, aiming to provide more disadvantaged adolescents with the skills, information and understanding they need to become fully participating citizens of their societies. The five-year collaboration will focus on expanding the access of more adolescents, especially the most disadvantaged, to technology, sports and the arts -- platforms for education, participation and peacebuilding where young people can come together to learn about themselves, each other, and the world around them. In September 2015, UNICEF and Scholas organized and facilitated the participation of a group of young people from NYC and La Havana in a video-discussion with Pope Francis, ahead of his trip to the two countries. In the discussion, the young people interacted with the Pope, touching upon their life experiences, and the topics and issues that are important to them.

In early 2015, UNICEF HQ conducted a global mapping of its engagement with religious communities, which shed light on the substantive volume of engagement UNICEF and faith-based groups happening at the country level. 2/3 of UNICEF country offices are, or have recently been engaged with clergy, faith-based organizations and religious institutions. Most of them also have partnered with representatives of three or more faith traditions and on three or more of UNICEF's core outcome areas.

The challenge of engaging faith leaders and communities at the global level in order to achieve change within local communities is one that UNICEF continues to address in much of its work. For lasting and productive engagement to be achieved at the country level, the planning process by the partners must entail constant, in-depth and often time-consuming consultation around opportunities for collaboration, in order to identify not only the most urgent areas of common interest and need for action, but also the most appropriate intervention strategy.

Looking Forward

A major new area of engagement for UNICEF in the faith arena is the intersection between faith, climate change and children. Based on the recognition that climate change and environmental degradation undermine children's rights to survive, grow and thrive and that religious leaders can play a decisive role in both urging governments to take the hard but necessary steps to reduce carbon emissions and honour their climate-related obligations to living children and future generations, as well as in helping communities prepare for the severe climate events expected to continue and proliferate, in 2016 the Civil Society Partnerships Unit plans to support religious groups' advocacy and related work on climate change mitigation and adaptation by helping build multi-faith consensus around the need for immediate action as the only way not to deprive the next generations of their future.

References/additional resources

- On WCC:
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 - <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-and-unicef-start-implementing-agreement-giving-a-201cvoice-for-children2019s-rights201d>
- On Scholas:
 - http://www.unicef.org/media/media_81638.html
 - <http://cnnespanol.cnn.com/video/cnnee-special-papa-juventud-part-4/>
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- On RfP (in Liberia):
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j8JhuS1Hkg&list=PL0IdFP4TsMOjZIpUW_7OtHNep21vK3QGo&index=9
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnds_SMC5s&list=PL0IdFP4TsMOjZIpUW_7OtHNep21vK3QGo&index=10
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJjVdBT31wI&list=PL0IdFP4TsMOjZIpUW_7OtHNep21vK3QGo&index=14
- [A global mapping of UNICEF engagement with religious communities](#)

Seeking to expand the dialogue on faith and gender equality, The United Nations Entity for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (UN Women) participated in the *Ecumenical Consultation on Advocacy for Just Peace* from 1-5 December 2014 in Sigtuna, Sweden and the *Inaugural Symposium on the Role of Religion & Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs, Human Rights and Human Dignity* on 21 January 2015 in New York. At the *Ecumenical Consultation on Advocacy for Just Peace*, UN Women provided a normative gender perspective in peacebuilding processes and assessed the opportunity to engage in more substantive partnerships with faith-based organizations in advocacy for Beijing +20, post 2015 and gender equality more broadly. Furthermore, UN Women, in partnership with the Baha'i International Community (BIC), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and World YWCA hosted a series of meetings on the "*intersection of gender equality and religion*" that engaged Member State Delegates, UN officials and civil society representatives in New York, in the run up to the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59) in March 2015.

UN Women promoted faith based dialogues at the *Intergenerational Dialogue Day* also held during CSW59 in March 2015. During the *Intergenerational Dialogue Day*, participants highlighted the need to reclaim faith-based organizations as advocates for social justice and non-discrimination, rather than forces of conservatism. Participants called for women of faith to be able to claim their human rights and not have to choose between their rights or their faith. Male representatives of faith-based organizations also called for increased support for sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily integrity, including support for the LGBT community.

UN Women has been part of an interagency cooperation with UN system entities that have been playing a role in the work with faith constituencies, and will continue to work with sister agencies to strengthen coherence and leverage existing efforts. UN Women's senior management, including the Executive Director, the Deputy Executive Director, the Chief of the Civil Society Section and other senior officials, routinely participate as speakers in events and forums organized by faith-based organizations such as Religions for Peace, World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Women et.al.

At the country-level, in South Sudan, UN Women supported the establishment and launch of the South Sudan Civil Society Advisory group to increase the visibility and voices of civil society organizations in intergovernmental processes. The group, consisting of key stakeholders from academia, faith-based organizations, the women's movement, and peace activists, is expected to play a significant role in mobilizing society for peace and for the post-2015 development agenda. UN Women also supported the Ministry of Gender in facilitating the second phase of the transformational leadership training for women leaders of South Sudan, many of whom are engaged in advocating for a peaceful resolution of the current conflict.

In Zimbabwe, UN Women engaged World Vision, a faith-based organization that is working with church leaders to change religious perceptions and doctrines that perpetuate VAW through a project called Transforming and Empowering Faith Communities to Prevent Violence against Adolescent Girls and Young Women. UN Women is also supporting a civil society organization that is working with traditional leaders to strengthen their capacity to implement strategies that address negative social norms such as early marriage and forced marriages and engage them in their roles and responsibilities to promote women's rights and prevent VAW in their communities.

In the Pacific region, UN Women has been providing technical and financial support to strengthen partnerships between Governments, faith-based organizations and civil society to advance the development, adoption and implementation of laws and policies to end VAW. In Fiji, the Anglican Church implemented the Church's Zero Tolerance to VAW policy with strong leadership by the House of Sarah, a UN Women-Pacific Fund grantee. As a result, support services are made available; church leaders and clergy are

sensitized on gender equality, VAW response and prevention by the church pulpit; and gender equality is being integrated into Anglican school curriculum.

In Guatemala, where UN Women supported consultations among diverse civil society groups for the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, indigenous women participated for the first time in the national and regional review process, providing visibility for indigenous women's demands and an intercultural dialogue with feminist's movements. Transcending the historical polarization, both movements agreed on common standings for the review to advance the women's rights agenda from an indigenous and feminist perspective.

Looking Forward

Going forward, UN Women's civil society strategy aims to scale up the organization's engagement with faith-based institutions/organizations/movements at normative, coordination, and operational levels:

- At the normative level, UN Women seeks to strengthen faith constituencies' contributions to dismantle structures and practices that promote inequality, by interrogating and challenging the roots and structures of patriarchy within faith constructs, discourses and practices in institutions, society and communities. 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 engagement of faith-based institutions/organizations/movements as progressive constituency represented 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 alliances with faith-based institutions/organizations/movements through development of policy/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/strengthening of community based sectoral initiatives with FBOs that promote gender equality; and by leveraging existing country level initiatives with faith based constituencies.

The UN Secretary General's 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 United Nations 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.

Recent years have seen a significant escalation in tensions among groups of different religions or beliefs in many regions, which has often resulted in violence. Incidents of politically motivated violence and sectarian violence have been preceded or accompanied by hate speech and the abuse of religion to fuel hatred that in some cases constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Hate speech and incitement are considered precursors of atrocity crimes.

Religious leaders have taken action to counter hate speech and incitement to violence, which is especially important in divided societies at risk of large scale violence. However, in some instances, religious figures have been responsible for inciting violence.

In light of this situation, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect considers necessary engaging with religious leaders from different regions on their role to prevent and counter incitement to hatred, hostility and violence as a way to prevent and counter atrocity crimes worldwide.

The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect's engagement with religious leaders on their role to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, focuses on policy guidance as a key output. The engagement goes back to 23-24 April 2015, when the first brainstorming meeting with religious leaders took place in Fez, Morocco, with the support of the King Abdullah Center on Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue, the Moroccan Inter-ministerial Delegation for Human Rights and the Moroccan Rabitas of Ulemas. The meeting resulted in the Fez Declaration and Plan of Action, a document including principles and options for actions for religious leaders to consider to prevent and counter incitement to atrocity crimes. Both Plan of Action and Declaration are supposed to be reviewed at five regional meetings with religious leaders, before being launched at a global meeting of religious leaders to be held at the end of 2016. Each regional meeting also serves to draw up a regional strategy for implementing the Fez Plan of Action.

As follow up to the meeting in Fez, the UN Office has so far organized two regional meetings, one for Europe (hosted in Treviso by the Italian government on 13 and 14 September 2015) and one for the Middle East and North Africa region (Amman, 11 and 12 September 2015). Both regional meetings have resulted in a series of recommendations for regional plans of actions for religious leaders to prevent and counter incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.

Some of the main challenges encountered so far in organizing the meetings with religious leaders include ensuring that the faith-based participants involved can combine diverse religious representational backgrounds with experience in negotiations, in media outreach, knowledge of human rights; a balanced understanding and support for freedom of expression and opinion and freedom of religion and belief – all while simultaneously ensuring a gender balanced representation. Moreover, raising resources for this area of work remains relatively underfunded in intergovernmental contexts, particularly given the political sensitivities and concerns which can be raised in and through the discussions.

Looking Forward

In 2016 the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect plans to organize regional meeting for the Americas, for Africa and for Asia and the Pacific, as well as the final meeting to launch the Fez Declaration and Plan of Action. The Office will then focus on the implementation of the Fez Declaration and Plan of Action in the different world regions.

References and additional resources

Rabat Plan of Action:

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf

OGPRtoP Policy Options to prevent incitement to atrocity crimes:

<http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/Prevention%20of%20incitement.Policy%20options.Nov2013.pdf>

2015 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Preventing Violence Committed in the Name of Religion:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/Annual.aspx>

KAICIID's Vienna Declaration, United Against Violence in the Name of Religion:

<http://www.kaiciid.org/vienna-declaration-united-against-violence-name-religion>