

**UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 65 SIDE EVENT**

17 MARCH 2021 ~ 11:00 - 12:30 EDT ~ Sign Up Via Eventbrite

Opening Remarks, Ambassador Michael Suhr,

Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Denmark

Keynote Address, Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, Senior Advisor, Together Gender Equality

In Search of a  
**Round Table**

Gender, Religion &  
Decision-Making  
in Public Life

With Aya Chebbi, Shahin Ashraf MBE, Rhine Koloti, Dr. Saumya Uma,  
Rev. Lusmarina Campos-Garcia, Dr Nora Khalaf Elledge, and Zaida Bastos.

Moderator: Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, PaRD Steering Group



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The Network for  
Religious and  
Traditional  
Peacemakers



**JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on  
FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES**



**USPG<sup>+</sup>**



## In Search of a Round Table: Gender, Religion and Decision-Making in Public Life

**Format:** 90-minute Side Event

**When:** 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 11:00-12:30 EDT

**Co-organisers:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark, Canada, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development Germany (BMZ), Side by Side, Islamic Relief Worldwide, ACT Alliance, Lutheran World Federation, KAICIID, Global Interfaith Wash Alliance, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities, USPG, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

**Target Audience:** Member States, Policy Makers, Women's rights activists and civil society (secular and faith-based)

**Interpreters:** Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic

**Contact:** Rachel Tavernor, Side by Side, +44 7821874419

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### CONTEXT:

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, is an agenda for women's empowerment and considered the key global policy document on gender equality. It sets strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality. In 2021, the global community marks the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and six years since the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted.

With eighty-four per cent of the world's population identifying with a faith, religious actors are key stakeholders in achieving gender equality and empowerment, Sustainable Development Goal 5. At a time where there are a number of persisting challenges and structural barriers affecting the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, it is vital that strategic partnerships for gender justice are strengthened. 2021 is a critical year to measure progress towards our universal commitment to gender equality and empowerment around the world. COVID-19 is showing how interconnected our lives are and calls for intersectional approaches to tackling gender inequality.

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### FORMAT (Digital Event, 90 minutes):

A round table discussion that unpacks how Member States, intergovernmental organisations and civil society are contributing to the Beijing Platform for Action. Speakers will share experiences, lessons, challenges and potential solutions for working as / or with religious actors to progress the gender equality agenda.

### ROUND TABLE OBJECTIVES:

1. Learn from religious actors, as well as new research on how religious actors are working to advance human rights and gender justice and contributing to more inclusive societies as well as constructively address remaining challenges.
  2. Identify where faith and secular, as well as civil society and government partnerships, are enabling progress towards Sustainable Goal 5, and what is required to achieve Agenda 2030.
  3. Exchange on current best practices that can contribute to accelerate action on SDGs in the context of the Decade of Action and Delivery.
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## PROGRAMME

Moderator: **Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati**, PaRD Steering Group

**11:00 Opening Remarks**

**Ambassador Michael Suhr**, Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**11:05 Introduction**

**Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro**, Senior Advisor, Together Gender Equality

**11:15 Dialogue**

**Aya Chebbi**, former Africa Union Youth Envoy

**Rev. Lusmarina Campos Garcia**, Pastor, ACT Alliance

**Shahin Ashraf MBE**, Head of Global Advocacy, Islamic Relief Worldwide

**Rhine Koloti**, Student, Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice

**Dr. Nora Khalaf-Elledge**, Consultant, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities

**Dr. Saumya Uma**, Academic, Jindal Global University

**12:15 Respondent**

**Zaida Bastos**, Director of Development and Partnerships, The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund.

**12:25 Closing Remarks**

**Khushwant Singh**, Head of Secretary of the International Partnership of Religion and Sustainable Development

**12:30 End**

## SPEAKER BIOS:

### Opening Remarks



**Ambassador Michael Suhr**, Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Before **Ambassador Michael Suhr** took office in September 2018 he served as Ambassador of Denmark to Portugal since 2014, where he was also accredited to Guinea-Bissau, Cap Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. As Head of Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was responsible for European Policy and Treaties during the Danish EU-Presidency, as well as the Danish political, economic and foreign assistance relations towards Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

### Keynote address



**Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro**, Senior Advisor, Together Gender Equality

**Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro** is an accomplished leader with extensive experience in Women's Movements and Organizations, International Non-governmental Organizations, Global Multilateral Organizations and Ecumenical Agencies. Kanyoro is the immediate past President and CEO of the Global Fund for Women. She has also served on advisory role on Gender issues with World Bank, UN Women and various other Organizations and Initiatives. Kanyoro is published author and editor of books, articles and inspirational speeches. She holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Texas in Austin and a Doctor of Ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary; She was a visiting Scholar of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies at Harvard Divinity School. Kanyoro has received numerous awards and recognitions internationally. Over time, Kanyoro has served on many International Boards and is currently chair of the two Boards- the Women's Learning Partnerships (WLP) and the United World Colleges (UWC). Additionally, Dr. Kanyoro is a member of the Council of London School of Economics (LSE), a Board member of Care International (CI) and UN Global Compact and a trustee of Homeward Bound (HB). Dr. Kanyoro is a much sought-after speaker in International Forums



**Aya Chebbi, Outgoing African Union Youth Envoy, Chair of Africa Young Women Manifesto Group**

**Aya Chebbi** is a multi-award-winning Pan-African feminist. She served as the first ever African Union Special Envoy on Youth and the youngest diplomat at the African Union Commission Chairperson's Cabinet. She rose to prominence as a voice for democracy and shot to global fame as a political blogger during 2010/2011 Tunisia's Revolution. She served as the first ever African Union Special Envoy on Youth and the youngest diplomat at the African Union Commission Chairperson's Cabinet as well as on the board of several NGOs such as the World Refugee Council. She received the 2019 Gates Foundation Campaign Award and was named in Forbes' Africa's 50 Most Powerful Women and New African Magazine List of 100 Most Influential Africans.



**Dr. Nora Khalaf-Elledge, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities Consultant**

**Dr. Nora Khalaf-Elledge** is a freelance Gender and Development practitioner and a Post-doctoral Fellow at the Faith & Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has worked with organizations including the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), as well as the gender offices of multiple UN agencies. Nora holds a doctoral degree in Gender, Religion and Development from the University of London, a master's degree in Gender and Development from IDS and a bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Development Studies from the University of Sussex.



**Dr. Saumya Uma, Associate Professor, Jindal Global Law School, O.P.Jindal Global University, India**

**Dr. Saumya Uma** currently works as an Associate Professor at Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University, India. She has over 27 years' combined work experience as an academic, law researcher, lawyer, trainer, writer and campaigner on gender, law and human rights. One of her areas of specialization lies in examining freedom of religion as a human right and its intersection with women's equality rights. She has written, spoken and conducted trainings on the same at national, regional and international forums.



**Rev. Lusmarina Campos Garcia, Pastor, ACT Alliance**

**Rev. Lusmarina Campos Garcia** is a Lutheran pastor and a researcher in Law at the Post-Graduate Program of the National Faculty of Law at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. She was the Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva from 2003 to 2012. She has been active in the Ecumenical Movement since the 1980s and in Interreligious Dialogue since the 1990s. A defender of human rights, with an emphasis on gender, she spoke at the Federal Supreme Court public hearing in the context of Arguition of Non-Compliance with Fundamental Precept n° 442 in defence of decriminalization of abortion in Brazil.



**Rhine Toby Koloti, United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG)**

**Rhine ‘Toby’ Koloti** is a final year Masters (M.Th) student at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town South Africa. Rhine’s research interests are in the field of feminist theology and his thesis focuses on pastoral care responses to clergy sexual abuse. Rhine is a member of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice and currently serves as the centres’ research assistant, and tutors Religion and Social Justice, a module offered by the centre. Rhine has written and presented a paper at the Association of Practical Theology Biennial Conference 2020 in Houston, Texas. He is also currently serving as the Anglican Students Federation’s Gender, Education and Transformation officer in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. As a gender activist, Rhine represents the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG) as a delegate at the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). Rhine serves as a member of the Board of Directors for HOPE Africa - a social development programme of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

**Shahin Ashraf MBE**  
Islamic Relief Worldwide



**Shahin Ashraf** is the Head of the Global Advocacy for Islamic Relief Worldwide, she leads the organisations pioneering work on faith, gender, research, thought leadership and advocacy. Shahin is a senior leader in her field and has over 25 years’ experience, in addressing issues of injustice and inequality from an intersectional perspective. Prior to this Shahin worked at senior level at a number of global humanitarian, women’s rights and civil society organisations. Her recently published work highlights the convergence of gender development and Islam. Shahin is the current co-chair of the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development gender working group and she also sits on various gender, development and faith networks. She holds political office within the Green Party UK and was recently elected as a non-portfolio holder for Green Party Women with a special focus on women’s political access to leadership.

**Respondent**



**Zaida Bastos, Director of Development Partnerships, The Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund**

**Zaida Bastos** worked as the Development Partnerships Program Director at The Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund for which she served in several capacities, including as Africa Program Coordinator and External Funding Program Manager. She has worked to support effective training and the integration of PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) policies and procedures at PWRDF and with PWRDF partners. Prior to her work at PWRDF she has worked several years within UN structures. She was awarded the 2020 Karen Takacs Award by Cooperation Canada for Women’s Leadership in International Development for she her invaluable contribution to Women’s Rights and Social and Economic Justice.

**Moderator**



**Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, President of Divine Shakti Foundation and Secretary-General of GIWA.**

**Professor Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati** is a renowned spiritual leader based in Rishikesh, India. Sadhvi has received numerous national and international awards and recognition for her work in the sector of WASH as well as women’s upliftment and empowerment. Sadhvi has lived on the banks of the sacred Ganga river, in the lap of the Himalayas for nearly 25 years engaged in spiritual service, wisdom teaching,

sacred action, and deep spiritual practice. Today she serves as Secretary general of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance and as the President of the Divine Shakti Foundation as well as in the United Nations Faith Advisory Council on Religion and in the Steering Group for PaRD. She is also the author of *By God's Grace*, a biography of her Guru His Holiness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji and *Come Home to Yourself*, a book of wisdom teachings published by Penguin Random House.

## Closing Remarks



### **Khushwant Singh, Head of Secretariat of the International Partnership of Religion and Sustainable Development**

**Khushwant Singh** brings along 15 years of experience in international development cooperation. In addition to this, he has long-standing expertise in fostering results-oriented dialogue between actors from religion, society and policymaking. He is a founding member of the renowned Interreligious Council of Religions Frankfurt (Rat der Religionen) and had the honour to serve as its president from 2014 to 2017. He has been recently appointed as the new Head of Secretariat of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). Khushwant Singh was born in India and has lived in Germany since childhood. He studied ethnology, education and social anthropology with a focus on migration, intercultural communication, youth and religion. Singh completed his MA at Heidelberg University and his MRes at Goldsmiths College in London both with distinction. Since 2006, he has been working GIZ. From 2015 until 2017, Singh served as an advisor on values, religion and development on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Among others he coordinated the multilingual publication "Voices from Religions on Sustainable Development". He was also instrumental in the creation of PaRD in 2016.