



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

**FACULTÉ AUTONOME DE
THÉOLOGIE PROTESTANTE**

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Religious Engagement in Global Affairs

A New Interreligious Dynamic for the Good of Humanity

Geneva, 9-10 June 2022

Facing major current challenges, international institutions have progressively realized the important role of religious actors and communities, and recognized the contribution they are able to bring for the good not only of their followers, but for the whole of humanity.¹ This specific capacity is due, among other factors, to their force in awareness and mobilization among their large popular networks, to the trust their followers often have in institutional discourse², as well as to the central place given to human dignity and solidarity in religious teaching, in addition to the experience of religious institutions in the humanitarian and development fields. However, this recognition of the positive contribution of religions in global affairs does not eliminate the critical distance that should be maintained in the relation between religions and public and political issues.

Therefore, one can notice the recent development of many initiatives of religious engagement in global affairs, such as: the [“Faith for Rights”](#) program at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations; the [“Plan of Action of Religious Leaders and Actors to prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes”](#); the initiative [“Faith for Earth”](#) at the United Nations Program for Environment, with the recent [“Joint Interfaith Appeal”](#) for the COP26 for the protection of the Planet, as well as the Geneva Interfaith Forum about Climate Change, Environment, et Human Rights (GIF); the [“Multi-Religious Council of Leaders”](#) created by the UN Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), and its [collaboration with Sant-Egidio Community](#) to address refugee challenges globally; and more recently, in response to the Covid19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) showed interest in collaborating with religious communities as [Partners in the prevention campaign](#). On the other hand, many international organizations created together the PaRD platform for [International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development](#).

Finally, a growing interest in the engagement with international politics and diplomatic relations in multilateral platforms has led to the creation of the [G20 Interfaith Forum](#), to reach the decision-makers of G20 with interreligious voices and experiences.³ [Religions for Peace](#) represents another prominent example of multireligious engagement in global affairs. We should also note the joint

¹ “Strategic Religious Engagement in International Relief and Development”, *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 19 (2021) ; see also : Fabio Petito, Fadi Daou, and Michael D. Driessen ed., *Human Fraternity and Inclusive Citizenship: Interreligious Engagement in the Mediterranean*, ISPI-Adyan, 2021.

² A recent survey by [Pew Research Center](#) shows that most Americans who go to religious services say they would trust their clergy’s advice on COVID-19 vaccines.

³ P. Ferrara and F. Petito, “An Italian Foreign Policy of Religious Engagement: Challenges and Prospects”, *The International Spectator* 51/1 (2016), 28-43.

initiative of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayeb, who cosigned and published in 2019 the Document on "[Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together](#)".

Consequently, the concept of "Religious Engagement"⁴ became present in political and religious studies and affairs, meaning the approach adopted by public, political and international institutions towards religious actors and communities, and vice-versa, to collaborate for the common good.

One should notice that, in most cases, this religious engagement in global affairs, being based on an invitation from the public organizations, or by initiative of religious actors, is a multilateral engagement, creating a new dynamic within interreligious relations. The novelty consists in the fact that religious traditions are not found – as in other classic forms of interreligious relations – one vis-à-vis the other, but rather united together in the relationship with a non-religious interlocutor, such as international organizations. Hence religious engagement in global affairs has generated a new form of dialogue and interreligious relations that we call "interreligious engagement", which urges different religious traditions to have a common voice in their engagement with other institutions for the common good of humanity.

This new role of religions in the public sphere, whether in the fields of development or international affairs, raises several theological questions. One wonders what are the theological foundations of such a commitment; and what impact may it have on the theological relationship of religions to the world? Does interreligious engagement for common causes represent a result or a new form of interfaith dialogue? What impact would this engagement have on the theological perception of the other, when the actors work together in the name of their respective beliefs? What are the reciprocal expectations on the part of political and religious organizations? And what are the principles, limits, and risks of this partnership? Finally, what might be the role of theology in this commitment? Can it be a resource in interpreting human causes and global affairs?

The Faculty of Theology of the University of Geneva is at the heart of a city that lives with the allure of the world, through the presence of international organizations and various global initiatives on its territory. Research and teaching within the Faculty are anchored in its open identity and turned towards the city and the world. In order to support the development of theological reflection and teaching, in particular in the global pluralist context, the Faculty project "Theology in the Encounter of Religions" was set up, in the framework of which this international conference is organized, in order to contribute to the dialogue and the study of this new dynamic of multilateral dialogue, engaging both religious actors of different traditions, with actors from the international public scene. The academic discussion we are aiming for, and the proceedings which will be published for the benefit of academic and public knowledge in this field, wish to contribute to the conceptual and practical development of interfaith engagement for the good of humanity.

⁴ Katherine Marshall, "Religious Engagement in Development Work: A Continuing Journey", in: *Does Religion Make a Difference?*, in *Millenium. Journal of International Studies* 29/3 (2020), 41-62.

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PROGRAM

Thursday 9 June 2022

16:00 Introduction to the conference

16:15 First Session: The theological and political foundations of interreligious engagement in global affairs

- Beate Bengard, Associate Professor in Systematic Theology – University of Geneva.
- *Michael Driessen, Associate Professor in Political Science – University John Cabot, Rome.

18:00 Coffee break

18:30 Second session – guest speaker lecture: What is the contribution of interreligious engagement in global affairs to religions and the world?

- *Azza Karam, Secretary General of “Religions for Peace” - New York, and Professor of Religion and Development.

Friday 10 June 2022

9:00 Third Session: From dialogue to common engagement: theological and methodological specificities of a new interreligious dynamic.

- Fadi Daou, Scientific collaborator in Interreligious Studies – University of Geneva.
- *Lejla Demiri, Professor of Islamic Doctrine – University of Tübingen.

10:45 Coffee break

11:00 Four Session: Experiences, principles and conditions of success of civil-religious multilateral engagement in global affairs:

- *Faith for Rights: Ibrahim Salama, Chief of Human Rights Treaties Branch - United Nations.
- *Religious engagement at WHO: Fabian Winiger, Senior Research Fellow at the Professorship of Spiritual Care, University of Zürich.
- *Humanitarian corridors and religious collaboration with UNHCR
- *Geneva Interreligious Forum on Climate Change, Environment, and Human Rights (GIF)
- *PaRD (International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development): Khushwant Singh, Secretary General

13:00 Lunch Break

14:15 Roundtable: Resources for religious engagement in global affairs: the role of theology.

16:00 End of the conference

*To be confirmed.