

PaRD: “COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges for religious/faith actors and communities? Responses from the field and global partners”

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Talking Points

I. Introduction to *Religions for Peace*:

- This is our 50th year of bringing religious institutions and their leaders together, to build peace in its broadest sense.
- *R/P*'s strength lies in its country level presence in 90 countries and 6 regions.
- This presence is in the form of inter religious councils - religious leaders representing their institutions and/or community structures coming together to form an Interreligious Council (IRC);
- In August 2018, *R/P* convened over 900 religious leaders from all regions and all parts of the world in Lindau, Germany, with the Lindau Foundation;
- From September to October 2019 we worked with our IRCs to seek their inputs about the main challenges and opportunities for Inter religious collaboration based on all their work so far, and also based on their take away from their discussions at the Lindau Assembly; In December we reconvened 250 representatives of our IRCs to draw up together, a strategic plan for the next 5 years.

The strategic plan was launched formally in early March with 6 main pillars:

- Strategic Goal I: Promote peaceful, just and inclusive society
- Strategic Goal II: Advance gender equality
- Strategic Goal III: Nurture a sustainable development
- Strategic Goal IV: Champion freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Strategic Goal V: Strengthen interreligious education
- Strategic Goal VI: Foster multi-religious collaboration and global partnership

II. Multi-religious Response to COVID-19

- When Covid struck the USA irrevocably in mid-March we began to receive requests for support from our members, as they sought to serve their communities.
- IRCs were serving the Covid crisis in different ways (Examples of IRC actions are described at the end)
- To respond to and further support the multi religious efforts of IRCs, we took the initiative to launch, mid-April.

➤ *RfP launches the Multi-religious Humanitarian Fund in response to COVID-19*

Religions for Peace (RfP) launched the “Multi-religious Humanitarian Fund” to support multi-religious collaborative efforts around COVID-19 and to stimulate creative interventions by Interreligious Councils (IRCs) and multi-religious networks to provide life-saving messages, support the most vulnerable, counter

stigma and discrimination, and offer spiritual and emotional care and support for children, the elderly, refugees and those experiencing disruption and distress.

Initial funds were contributed by GHR Foundation, Fetzer Foundation, Rissho Kosei-kai and other individual donors.

We are inviting contributions to the Fund from organizations who are keen to partner with us to support multi-religious collaboration at the national level. And as such, to expand the multi-religious space to build practically oriented alliances with other FBOs at the country level. If the FBOs or others in PaRD join, we can work together to build much needed bridges between religious leaders and religious NGOs.

➤ **Forging global multi-religious solidarity in the time of uncertainty**

- Interfaith Moment of Hope and Solidarity (senior religious leaders representing 10 major faith traditions, 11,000 people attending)
- Webinar on “Leadership: Leading in the New Normal of the pandemic world”

➤ **Religions for Peace-UNICEF-JLI Global Multifaith Campaign**

- Senior religious leaders and Executive Director of UNICEF issued a joint statement on April 7.
- Bringing together interreligious councils and UNICEF country offices on key life-saving messages communicated through religious and interreligious structures.
- Regional webinars are underway. UNICEF, WHO and others are engaged.

➤ **Examples of Interreligious Actions by Interreligious Councils (IRCs)**

- **IRC Sierra Leone:** Built on its experience in interreligious action to respond to HIV/AIDS and Ebola, including prevention, stigma reduction, and safe burials, IRC Sierra Leone is working on the preventive and life-saving messages, adaptations of practices and gatherings, countering false information, stigma, and discrimination and spiritual support. IRC Sierra Leone is running television talk shows on Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation by religious leaders and regular radio broadcasts on the adaptation of religious practices for the health and safety of believers. IRC Sierra Leone recently facilitated a training for its district coordinators in cooperation with WHO and Ministry of Health. Trainees have retrained 36 peer groups in all 16 districts of the country and now reaching every village in their respective chiefdoms with messages of safe practices and solidarity.

Similar efforts are being done in Kenya and Uganda, where systematic interreligious messages are being disseminated by interfaith youth networks.

- **IRC Peru** (helping vulnerable populations, Venezuelan refugees): In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IRC Peru is working to provide approximately 8,000 vulnerable asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants (2,000 families) with essential emergency response materials including food, hygiene kits, and rent vouchers.
- **RfP Japan:** Interfaith Chaplaincy, providing spiritual counselling and psychosocial support. A similar project is being undertaken by interreligious platforms in the **Philippines**.
- **In Brazil, IRC** has witnessed select religious communities intentionally violating isolation guidelines and spreading misinformation. Simultaneously, the government has sent mixed messages regarding COVID-19 response and guideline, adding to the challenge of the current crisis. *RfP* leaders in Brazil are calling for a strong united voice to ensure that religious communities act in accordance with safety regulations and that clear messages are sent to their constituencies regarding government and international health guidelines.