



ENGAGING RELIGION AND FAITH-BASED ACTORS ON AGENDA 2030/THE
SDGS
2017

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON ENGAGING FAITH-BASED
ACTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

© 2018 - The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable
Development/UN Task Force on Religion and Development

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Joint Activities of the UN Task Force Members in 2017	3
References and Additional Resources.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
IATF Chair: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	5
United Nations Office of the Secretary General’s Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect (OGPRtoP)	9
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	11
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).....	11
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)	11
United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI).....	16
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).....	17
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).....	19
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).....	21
United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)	23
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).....	24
World Bank (WB).....	25
World Food Programme (WFP).....	26
Appendix I: Mission, Objectives, Activities of the IATF	28
Appendix II: UN-System Wide Criteria of Engagement with Faith-Based Actors	29
High Level Political Forum Report of Task Force Activities.....	31
Report of the Strategic Learning Exchange (SLE) on Religion, Development and Humanitarian Work	36

INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the engagement with faith-based actors and faith-related activities by the members of the *United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development* (short: UN Task Force on Religion and Development or IATF-FBOs). Covering the year of 2016, it continues to present the annual highlights of this work as it was done for the first time in 2015 through the first UN IATF report covering the period from 2016 to 2017.

The UN Task Force on Religion and Development consists of the following members:

1. Chair: UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)
2. OGPRtoP (UN Office of the Secretary General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect)
3. OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights)
4. UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS)
5. UNAOC (United Nations Alliance of Civilizations)
6. UN CTC (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee)
7. UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs)
8. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)
9. UNDPI (United Nations Department of Public Information)
10. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)
11. UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme)
12. UN Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme)
13. UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
14. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)
15. UNV (United Nations Volunteers)
16. UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)
17. World Bank (WB)
18. WFP (World Food Programme)
19. WHO (World Health Organization)

JOINT ACTIVITIES OF THE UN TASK FORCE MEMBERS IN 2017

The UN Task Force on Religion and Development members have continued to jointly engage on key areas of advocacy, capacity building and knowledge management. The work with the over 500+ faith-based NGO partners which the diverse UN system offices have continued at national, regional and global levels. What will be shared here is a synopsis of some of the key highlights of UN Task Force joint activities which took place at the global level, with a focus on UN headquarters in New York.

For the Advocacy highlights, the Task Force chose the High Level Political Forum series of events, a report of which is attached as Annex A.

For the Capacity Building endeavors, the Task Force undertook two Strategic Learning Exchanges in a serial form. The reports are also attached as Annex B.

For more information about the history and activities of the UN Task Force on Religion and Development, please see the following documents:

- IATF Report 2013-2015: [Highlights of FBO Engagement by United Nations Entities 2013-2015](#) (UN IATF, 2015)

- [Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030](#) (UNFPA, 2016)
- [United Nations Inter-agency Consultation on Engagement with Faith-based Organizations: Proceedings Report](#) (UNFPA, 9 July 2008)
- [Global Forum of Faith-based Organisations for Population and Development](#) (UNFPA, 2009)
- Website of the [International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development](#) (PaRD)

Latest relevant Report of the Secretary-General:

- [Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/71/407, September 2016)

IATF-RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT CHAIR: THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA)

Together with and also on behalf of the UN Task Force, UNFPA convenes consultations with faith-based actors, Member States, and secular civil society partners, during key intergovernmental fora (e.g. World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Commission on Population and Development, the High Level Political Forum and the General Assembly).

For this 2017 Report, UNFPA has chosen to focus on one highlight from the global level, and mention a few key highlights from different countries.

Highlights

Global Advocacy – Side Event to 50th Commission on Population and Development – (CPD)



The side event was well attended underscoring its significance

During the Commission for Population and Development (CPD) 50th Session, UNFPA with other Co-sponsors organized the first ever side event (in the history of the CPD with a religious perspective on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)).

This side event highlights UNFPA's commitment to convene stakeholders; in this case FBOs which are in most cases at the frontlines of a vast array of community issues including SRHR. Additionally, the side event resonates UNFPA's appreciation of the double-edged nature of religion and culture to the attainment of SRHR for all and for youth in particular. UNFPA appreciates that many faith communities see their role as preserving traditions, culture and morality which can sometimes conflict with the changing world in which young people are forging their identities and making personal choices. Equally true is that UNFPA acknowledges that faith leaders are in a position of power when it comes to influencing norms, practices and human rights and dignity on the ground in their communities, as their guidance and authority has great influence on the lives of youth. The possibilities for faith communities to engage are multiple due to long history of engagement and large presence within health and education facilities and the trust that most faith leaders enjoy in communities. They can play a crucial role in contextualizing SRHR interventions, are rooted in communities and are guided by compassion and motivation to serve those that are marginalized.

Accordingly, the table below shows the theme and the objective of the side event.

UNFPA-CPD SIDE EVENT THEME AND OBJECTIVES

Protecting bodies, protecting rights – faith communities and leaders enabling Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights			
To explore policies, long-term strategies, broad-based partnerships, and actions to promote SRHR.	To explore opportunities for stronger institutional and multi-stakeholder partnerships between different actors, including Member States, the United Nations, private sector and CSOs and faith communities.	To identify challenges on CEFM, CSE, facing different actor, including Member States and the United Nations, CSOs and faith communities, as well as opportunities for normative and legal transformation in dialogue and policy-making on the international, regional and national levels.	To appreciate the positive aspect of religion and its potential contribution to the realization of gender equality and justice, and promoting SRHR. Particularly the role of faith communities and leaders in enabling change in relation to Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM), Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) and access to critical services.

CPD SIDE EVENT KEY DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

Dialogue and Engagement



Dialogue and engagement at the interfaith, intra-faith, and between UN and faith-based entities were repeatedly iterated as necessary, valuable and indispensable to securing meaningful partnerships between different sectors: faith communities, NGOs and multilateral institutions.

Listening and suspending judgement



There is need to actively listen to each other as institutions (faith & secular), and to understand why an institution is taking a particular position, while thus acknowledging the plurality of perspectives many religions and denominations contend with.

Understanding



Although the subject of religion and SRHR might be difficult, and complex, it is important to disaggregate what “SRHR” includes, so as not to obfuscate matters and to better appreciate the wide range of issues on which there are more common positions than contentious ones.

Achievements and Collaboration



The proceedings highlighted that a great deal has already been achieved in terms of partnerships around advocacy, joint capacity building and learning between the UN and faith-based partners, and compilation of evidence and knowledge. Critically, the FBOs themselves have mobilised among themselves and are now leading their own CEFM and SRHR campaigns globally with efficiency. This trend needs to be supported by governments and multilateral institutions alike.

UNFPA Country and Regional Engagement

UNFPA invests in national dialogues with stakeholders including traditional and religious communities working to harness the demographic dividend; promote human rights and empowerment of women, combat gender based violence (GBV) and child marriage; and promoting access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and family planning (FP). UNFPA country offices manage ongoing partnerships with various government departments, religious bodies and civil society to foster social cohesion.

UNFPA-*Burkina Faso* facilitated the creation of the Network of Islamic Organisations on Population and Development and an interfaith organization with the objective of implementing national plans to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). UNFPA is also facilitating South-South experience sharing among religious leaders and youth champions in *Guinea, Indonesia, Egypt and Tunisia* in the promotion of SRH, FP and combating child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). In Senegal these actions are undertaken through networks of parliamentarians, religious actors, youths, and journalists, created with support from UNFPA. On the same issues, the UNFPA in the *Arab region* took the campaign against FGM to Social Media, wherein Muslim and Christian leaders from *Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia* condemned the practice and delinked it from religion. UNFPA-*Bolivia* promoted dialogue between indigenous justices and state justices to better guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples, in particular indigenous women and their right to be protected from sexual violence.

In UNFPA-*Malawi*, such partnerships have led to the development of a National Action Plan on the Faith/Churches' response to GBV, curricula on life-skills as well as conflict resolution. In *Burundi* and Malawi the partnerships created community platforms for inclusive dialogue which, among others, developed by-laws to which chiefs and clergy are held accountable on issues of SRH. UNFPA also collaborated on the training of Muslim leaders, government officials and civil society partners on “family planning and Islam” in Nepal and Indonesia. The translation of a “FP, RH and Gender: Islamic Perspective” was also an outcome of UNFPA country office and Nepal partnerships. Similar partnerships were developed in *Ghana* with the Christian Council, the Coalition of Muslim Organisations and the Churches/ Health Associations to provide SRH services to underserved communities.

UNFPA's *Sub-Regional Office (SRO) for the English and Dutch Speaking Caribbean* has continued its engagement with faith-based and community leaders to promote and facilitate dialogue on SRH and gender equality at all levels. Technical and/or financial support is also provided to FBOs to enhance their communications' capabilities thereby promoting values of tolerance, social cohesion and gender equality. UNFPA-*Guyana*, is working to build capacity and to strengthen interfaith commitments and congregation-based interventions in development work, GBV and SRH. And in *Trinidad and Tobago*, UNFPA, together with faith-based organizations (FBOs); is collaboratively fostering social cohesion through the creation of youth-friendly spaces where values relevant to UN and UNFPA are inculcated. UNFPA-*Ecuador* advocated for gender equality and against GBV by supporting the formulation of the Health Code; Humane Delivery Law, and through training workshops on GBV with governmental officials and military personnel. Support is also provided to the Ministry of Health to secure culturally sensitive delivery facilities in the northern borders of *Ecuador* and *Colombia*.

UNFPA convenes faith-based and intercultural platforms, and supports national action plans which are instrumental in promoting human rights in a culturally sensitive and gender responsive manner. Typifying this, is UNFPA-*Mali*; whose interventions with MINUSMA and UN WOMEN relate to improving access to justice for women survivors of violence and leads a platform of information sharing among stakeholders for scaled-up commitments in GBV and FGM prevention. In Indonesia and *Myanmar*, UNFPA, the government and Islamic organisations facilitated exchange of jurisprudence on Islamic practices supportive of FP. In *Armenia*, with the support of FBOs, awareness was raised on gender equality and countering stereotypes which promote GBV and domestic violence.

UNFPA-*Kosovo* played a key role in developing the National Strategy against Domestic Violence (2016-2020). During the Sixteen Days of Activism, about 50,000 people received messages of GBV prevention. In *Belize* and *Suriname*, UNFPA supported dialogue and documenting the role FBOs play in addressing GBV, and systematically advocating for the inclusion of FBOs in these dialogues. The Guyana, *Guatemala* and Ecuador country offices took a youthful approach in their activities; including establishing youth-friendly sites; comics for young people and the development of "RURANKAPAK" ("To Do It"), which is a peer-to-peer intercultural training methodology.

In *Nicaragua* and *Honduras*, UNFPA supported the establishment of round tables of youth from indigenous groups and Afro-descendants to speak up on how SRH services could be more culturally acceptable and youth and adolescent friendly, resulting in the development of national plans to prevent early pregnancy among adolescents and youth, with a focus on the situation of indigenous groups.

Resources/Publications

- [Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030](#)

- [Religion, Women's Health and Rights: Points of Contention and Paths of Opportunities](#)
- [Women, Faith and Human Rights](#)
- Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors – Overview 2015-2016 (UNFPA, available on www.UNFPA.org)
- [Culture Matters: Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-Based Organizations](#)
- [Guidelines for Engaging Faith-Based Organisations \(FBOs\) as Agents of Change](#)
- [Religion and Development Post-2015](#)

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPECIAL ADVISER ON THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (OGPRTOP)

On 14 July 2017, the United Nations Secretary General launched [the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes](#) (“the Plan of Action”). The launch was the culmination of a two-year process of consultations with religious leaders and actors, supported by Member States, United Nations partners and civil society, led by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

The project was initiated in response to concern at the increase in the dissemination of inflammatory speech and its impact. In societies under stress, one of the warning signs and powerful triggers of violence is the kind of messages in public discourse and the media that spread hatred and encourage or incite populations to commit violence against individuals or communities, often on the basis of religious or ethnic identity.

Incitement to violence is most effective when the speaker is a person of influence and the audience is receptive. Religious leaders are among those with the greatest influence. They are often responsible for hate speech and incitement, but are also often responsible for preventing and countering incitement by spreading messages of peace and tolerance. It was for this reason that the Special Adviser sought to engage with religious leaders, in particular.

The process that led to the Plan of Action included six consultations with religious leaders and actors and was supported by an expert Advisory Committee. The first, global, consultation took place in Fez, Morocco, and resulted in the Fez Declaration of Principles and the Fez Plan of Action, which served as the basis for five regional consultations. Each consultation resulted in a context-specific regional strategy for religious leaders and actors to prevent incitement to violence and contributed to the final Plan of Action.

A total of 232 religious leaders and actors from 77 countries took part in the consultations. They included Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs, as well as representatives from religious minorities, including Baha’i, Candomblé, Kakai and Yazidi, as well as humanists. At least 30 percent of participants of all consultations were women

The Plan of Action makes detailed recommendations for actions to (i) prevent and counter incitement to violence; (ii) enhance capacity, dialogue, and collaboration with other actors, including the media for the prevention of incitement and (iii) contribute to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. It is intended to be a tool for religious leaders and actors as well as for the Member States, United Nations partners, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations that will support implementation of its recommendations.

The Plan of Action and regional action plans are pioneering documents as they are the first to engage with religious leaders and actors to develop context specific strategies to prevent incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes. Their implementation, which will be discussed at a meeting in Vienna from 13-15 February, could contribute not only to the prevention of atrocity crimes but also to other key prevention agendas of the United Nations.

Looking Forward

As the next step, the Special Adviser is supporting the organization of workshops with religious leaders in countries that have experienced or are currently experiencing hate speech, hostility or incitement to violence that targets communities based on their ethno-religious identity to develop national strategies that religious leaders can implement, working in cooperation with each other across religions and in cooperation with the United Nations and national authorities. In this context, in November 2017 the Special Adviser organized a meeting in Bangkok on “Fostering Inclusive Societies in South Asia. The Role of Religious Leaders and Actors”. The meeting identified challenges and opportunities to foster inclusivity, in particular of religious minorities, as a way to prevent conflict, violence and violent extremism. It also identified specific activities religious leaders and actors can take in South Asia in this regard.

Resources/Publications

- [Upholding the Responsibility to Protect: The Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Atrocity Crimes](#)
- [Bearing Witness: Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Migration](#)

In March 2017, OHCHR launched its initiative on “[Faith for Rights](#)” with an expert workshop in Beirut. This initiative provides space for a cross-disciplinary reflection on the deep, and mutually enriching, connections between religions and human rights. The objective is to foster the development of peaceful societies, which uphold human dignity and equality for all and where diversity is not just tolerated but fully respected and celebrated.

The [High Commissioner](#) stressed that religious leaders are potentially very important human rights actors in view of their considerable influence on the hearts and minds of millions of people. The 2012 [Rabat Plan of Action](#) on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence already laid out some of religious leaders’ core responsibilities against incitement to hatred. Expanding those responsibilities to the full spectrum of human rights, the faith-based and civil society actors participating at the OHCHR workshop in March 2017 adopted the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”.

Beirut Declaration

The [Beirut Declaration](#) considers that all believers – whether theistic, non-theistic, atheistic or other – should join hands and hearts in articulating ways in which “Faith” can stand up for “Rights” more effectively so that both enhance each other. Individual and communal expression of religions or beliefs thrive and flourish in environments where human rights are protected. Similarly, human rights can benefit from deeply rooted ethical and spiritual foundations provided by religions or beliefs. The Beirut Declaration reaches out to persons belonging to religions and beliefs in all regions of the world, with a view to enhancing cohesive, peaceful and respectful societies on the basis of a common action-oriented platform which is open to all actors that share its objectives.

18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”

Linked to the Beirut Declaration are [18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”](#), with corresponding follow-up actions. These include the commitments:

- to prevent the use of the notion of “State religion” to discriminate against any individual or group;
- to revisit religious interpretations that appear to perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes or even condone gender-based violence;
- to stand up for the rights of all persons belonging to minorities;
- to publicly denounce all instances of advocacy of hatred that incites to violence, discrimination or hostility;
- to monitor interpretations, determinations or other religious views that manifestly conflict with universal human rights norms and standards;
- to refrain from oppressing critical voices and to urge States to repeal any existing anti-blasphemy or anti-apostasy laws;
- to refine curriculums, teaching materials and textbooks; and
- to engage with children and youth who are either victims of or vulnerable to incitement to violence in the name of religion.

Rabat+5 symposium

On 6-7 December 2017, more than 100 States, national human rights institutions, regional organizations, religious authorities and faith-based civil society actors participated in the [Rabat+5 symposium](#), which was held on the fifth anniversary of the Rabat Plan of Action.

In his [opening statement](#), the High Commissioner urged the various stakeholders to implement and support concrete “Faith for Rights” projects, notably at the grassroots level. During the Rabat+5 symposium, sixteen civil society organizations and OHCHR [presented their projects](#) and areas of future cooperation on combatting discrimination on the basis of religion and enhancing the role of faith-based actors in the defence of human dignity.

Furthermore, an academic initiative presented the “Faith for Rights” online platform, which will serve as an inventory of relevant actors and projects in order to disseminate the 18 commitments, collect capacity-building approaches and facilitate networking.

This should also lead to strengthening the capacities of the existing UN human rights mechanisms by providing them with accurate and up-to-date analysis on environments, dynamics and early warning signs of incidents leading to sectarian conflicts and violence committed in the name of religion.

The Rabat+5 symposium offered an opportunity for the various stakeholders to engage with several experts who had contributed to the elaboration of the Rabat Plan of Action and the Beirut Declaration and to hear experiences in the area of combatting violence in the name of religion, both by State representatives, NHRIs and civil society actors. The participation of several mandate holders of international human rights mechanisms also [enriched the discussions](#) at the Rabat+5 symposium from a human rights perspective.

The Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights” have been referred to in several thematic reports by the UN Secretary-General (concerning [minorities’ rights](#) and [combating intolerance](#)), [Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#) and Treaty Bodies. For example, the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women](#) raised the “Faith for Rights” framework in their dialogues with three States parties, which was also reflected in the Committee’s concluding observations.

Resources/Publications

- Report and outlook on “Faith for Rights”: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/Faith4Rights.pdf

JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, WHO, UNESCO and the World Bank.

Highlights

It is important to note that UNAIDS work with faith based partners is much broader than the initiatives included in this year’s report especially at country and regional level. However, given the brevity of this report and the uniqueness of this new initiative, UNAIDS has chosen this year to focus on the UNAIDS-PEPFAR FBO Initiative as a collaborative partnership from which some important lessons can be drawn.

The UNAIDS-PEPFAR Faith Initiative is a partnership that was developed in 2016 as a time limited pilot programme intended to strengthen partnerships with Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) globally and in up to six PEPFAR and UNAIDS priority countries in response to some of the challenges laid out in the Lancet special edition on faith and health care in 2015. Operational through 2016-2018, the initiative is planned in two separate phases: Phase I ran from April 2016 - September 2017 and Phase II began in November 2017.

The countries selected for Phase I were Kenya and Zambia. UNAIDS worked with five global FBO implementing partners on a series of global, regional and country level activities under this initiative in the five focus areas:

1. Strengthen FBO leadership and advocacy for the Fast-Track approach
2. Collect, analyse and disseminate data on health care services provided by faith-based health service providers (FBHS)
3. Address stigma and discrimination in communities and health care settings
4. Create demand for service uptake and retention in care
5. Strengthen HIV and AIDS related service provision

Details of some selected activities from this initiative can be found in the web-links on both UNAIDS and FBO partner websites listed at the end of this article.

Outcomes

• New data published

For the first-time national level data on health service delivery by FBOs in Kenya has been disaggregated to facility level and service data for all faith-based facilities in each county. This data has been made available on a web platform (<http://ihpemory.org/kenya-overview/>) for outside users. The findings have been written up and submitted to the peer-reviewed journal Development in Practice by the lead partners.

- **National action plans produced**

Separately from the PEPFAR/UNAIDS FBO Initiative two countries- Kenya and Sierra Leone -developed national FBO action plans on HIV, which identify entry points for the faith community to support national AIDS responses. These plans provided a model for DRC, Nigeria and Zimbabwe to craft national action plans for FBO engagement in paediatric HIV treatment. These were developed at a regional consultation held in Abuja on strengthening the engagement of FBOs on pediatric HIV treatment. These countries are expected to host national interfaith consultations in the first quarter of 2018 to develop these further into broad national faith action plans on AIDS. Zambia also hosted a national consultation in 2017 to develop a similar national FBO action plan.

- **Faith-based health service (FBHS) providers strengthened**

A mentorship program was established across a network of FBHS providers in Africa, where younger or weaker national health associations are mentored by more established, stronger ones in the same region. Mentoring exchange visits were undertaken in networks from two countries this year.

- **1500 religious leaders and hundreds of adolescents tested for HIV**

Over 1500 religious leaders from different faith traditions have taken the HIV test and publicly encouraged their faithful to follow the example as part of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (WCC EAA) 'Leading by Example Campaign. Awareness raising activities in preparation of celebrating the Day of the African Child in Nairobi led to 550 adolescents, young people and religious leaders getting tested.

Challenges:

In late 2016 Michel Sidibé identified both opportunities and challenges to the international community, working in partnership with FBOs on the SDG's:

'The SDGs provide a range of opportunities for FBOs to engage. There are many areas of potential synergy, especially in delivering holistic health services. This growing interest from international organizations to build partnerships with FBOs has made for a crowded and growing field, but it is also a mine-field. The influence of religion in areas such as sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and in situations of conflict and crisis can be both extremely positive and profoundly negative. It is important that in the rush to leverage new faith-based partnerships, international partners draw on the wisdom and experience that already exists within the UN system —and in particular the IATF —rather than pushing ahead with naïve enthusiasm. Rushing in where angels fear to tread can make sensitive and explosive issues and situations worse'.

He urged readers of the special edition to address these three specific challenges:

- Finding a way forward together, rising above ideological differences to eliminate sexual violence and address the needs of adolescent girls so that they can take control of their own sexual and reproductive health and to be able to decide when and who they marry, when and how many children to have, and how to protect themselves from HIV infection.
- Harnessing the positive power of religious faith to turn back the tide of religious extremism that fuels violent conflict and drives stigma and discrimination.
- Finding ways to partner more effectively with the health and educational infrastructure managed by religious bodies and their vast community networks.
(Michel Sidibé Sept 2016. <http://bit.ly/2cvMzSM>)

Lessons Learned:

UNAIDS has worked in 2016/7 through the PEPFAR/UNAIDS partnership initiative in the five focus areas outlined above and has learned several important lessons that echo the words of Michel Sidibé in his editorial to the special edition.

- The principles of country ownership and leadership, respect for human rights and gender equality, working across a broad spectrum of faith traditions and the UN inter-agency task force on faith and development criteria for engagement with FBOs in the SDGs are important to guide future initiatives.
- Activities should be closely aligned with national plans and priorities. UNAIDS (both the Secretariat and its Co-sponsors) play a critical role at national level, to reflect the principals of inclusiveness and equity; lead the development of faith engagement plans and support the development of a strong interfaith networks at national level.
- Through partnership initiatives as the UNAIDS/PEPFAR FBO Initiative, funds should be directed to interfaith country-led work as an important balance to work with global partners. In addition, mechanisms such as the national FBO action plans described above, should be explored as ways to mainstream this work into existing national funding streams for HIV.

Resources/Publications:

- Sidibé, Michel. 2016. "Religion and Sustainable Development." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14 (3) <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15570274.2016.1215848>
- Olivier, Jill, and Sally Smith. 2016. "Innovative faith-community responses to HIV and AIDS: Summative lessons from over two decades of work." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14 (3):5-21. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15570274.2016.1215839?journalCode=rfia20>
- Blevins, John, Mimi Kiser, Emily Lemon, and Ahoua Kone. 2017. "The percentage of HIV treatment and prevention services in Kenya provided by faith-based health providers." *Development in Practice* 27 (5): 646-657. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09614524.2017.1327027>
- High-level discussion to scale up HIV diagnosis and treatment for children and adolescents 17 November 2017 http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2017/november/20171117_vatican Action Plan http://www.pedaids.org/page/-/Rome_Action_Plan_2017.pdf .
- *Academic Consortium web platform of health FBO service delivery in Kenya*: <http://ihpemory.org/kenya-overview/>
- Lead by Example Religious Leaders HIV Testing campaign webpage <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/religious-leaders-and-hiv-testing>
- Nairobi, Kenya Framework for Dialogue Impact Assessment 7th-8th February 2017: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/gathering-in-kenya-explores-eliminating-hiv-stigma-through-love-and-dialogue>
- Abuja, Nigeria Consultation June 2017: http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2017/june/20170619_nigeria
- Nairobi, Kenya 'Day of the African Child' event 16th June 2017: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/day-of-the-african-child-an-opportunity-to-raise-awareness-on-pediatric-aids>
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/201dit2019s-time-to-take-action201d-2013-201dlet2019s-make-this-virus-powerless201d>
- Kampala, Uganda Faith Healing Consultation 4th-8th September 2017: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/201cfacing-the-storm-of-hiv-we-can-move-together-be-agents-of-change201d>
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/four-voices-one-concern-2013-addressing-201cfaith-healing-only201d-in-context-of-hiv>
- New York, USA Interfaith Prayer Service 12th September 2017: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/it-will-take-faith-to-get-down-to-business-to-overcome-hiv-and-aids>
- New York, USA Prayer Breakfast 13th September 2017: http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2017/september/20170914_faith_fasttrack
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/faith-on-the-fast-track-for-children-living-with-hiv>
- Kigali, Rwanda consultation on HIV Treatment Adherence and Faith Healing 25th-28th September 2017: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/building-momentum-as-wcc-ehaia-addresses-faith-healing-only-practices-in-francophone-africa>

UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS (UNAOC)

The Alliance of Civilizations continues its work towards building a broad consensus across nations, cultures and religions for stability, prosperity and peaceful co-existence. This effort reflects the will of the vast majority of peoples to reject extremism and support respect for religious diversity.

Highlights

1) “Embracing the other”: the 6th Annual Interfaith Harmony Week 2017

On February 6, 2017, the UNAOC High Representative, in collaboration with the United Nations Committee of Religious NGOs, inaugurated the 6th annual Interfaith Harmony Week at the Tillman Chapel, Church Centre for the United Nations. The theme of the 2017 celebration was “Interfaith Harmony: Embracing the Other”, a goal which UNAOC holds within its mandate.

In his remarks, the high representative noted that UNAOC is continuously working on diversity while reducing the fear of “the other”. Its initiative #SpreadNoHate echoes the message of Interfaith Harmony in combatting hate speech, fostering diversity and ending radicalism. He recalled the role of religious leaders, who act as catalysts for mediation, humanitarian action, community building and prevention of violent extremism.

2) “The Role of Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding in the Middle East”

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) organized a panel discussion on “The Role of Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding in the Middle East” at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 18 July 2017.

The panel discussion featured religious leaders representing the three monotheistic religions of the Holy Land – Muslim, Jewish, and Christian. It included Sheikh Imad Al-Falouji, Chairman of the Adam Center for Dialogue of Civilizations in Gaza; Rabbi Michael Melchior, Community Rabbi in Jerusalem and President of the Mosaica Religious Peace Initiative; and Patriarch Theophilos III of the Greek Orthodox Church.

The United Nations Secretary General, Mr. António Guterres said during his opening remarks that “Sustainable peace requires not only political will from all sides, but also the collective efforts of the international community, civil society and fundamentally, religious leaders.” Mr. Guterres reiterated that the two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis live in peace, security and dignity, adding that the expansion of illegal settlements, and the violence or the incitement undermine this prospect.

On his part, the UNAOC High Representative said at the meeting “We recognized that peace cannot be attained through endeavours of politicians alone.” Adding, “we firmly believe that Religion is not the source of the problem. On the contrary, religion can be part of the solution [...] Religious leaders can and should play a role in peacebuilding in the Middle East.”

UNAOC is one of the United Nations’ leading entities promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue, with more than 30 events involving religious leaders organized or co-sponsored by UNAOC since 2013, with the goal of creating a global platform for dialogue among those essential actors.

The panel discussion served as a follow-up to the November 2016 Summit of Religious Leaders for Peace in the Middle East, held in Alicante, Spain – an initiative facilitated by the Spanish Government and sponsored by UNAOC. The Summit resulted in the adoption of the Alicante Declaration, which aims to promote the contribution of civil society to peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The event was covered live on social media with #Religions4Peace as the primary hashtag, generating a total reach of 8.3 million plus 12.4 million impressions on twitter. With sustained social media engagement, the hashtag was the second top trending topic in New York.

Mr. Al Nasser concluded the meeting by reiterating the commitment of UNAOC and the United Nations as a whole to strengthen dialogue among religious leaders and to encourage their contribution to peacebuilding.

3) The “Responsibility of Religions and Governments for Peace between Autonomy and Complementarity”

On 5 December 2017, UNAOC co-hosted with the German Federal Foreign Office and other members of the UN IATF on Religion an event entitled “Responsibility of Religions and Governments for Peace between Autonomy and Complementarity”. Earlier this year the German Federal Foreign Office launched the “Responsibility of Religions for Peace” initiative. UNAOC provided advice on their initial

activities and helped with the planning and execution of the event on 5 December. The High Representative spoke at the opening session and also read the statement of The Secretary-General on his behalf.

This conference brought together religious leaders, civil society representatives, policymakers and representatives of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion. Panel discussions described the main challenges to cooperation across different religions and the conditions for effective cooperation in the future. The final panel of the day consisted of alumni of the UNAOC Fellowship Program describing their civil society efforts in this regard.

Resources/Publications

<https://www.unaoc.org/2017/12/remarks-responsibility-of-religions-and-governments-for-peace/>

<https://www.unaoc.org/2017/07/religious-leaders-discuss-concrete-measures-for-peacebuilding-in-the-middle-east-at-unaoc-event/>

<https://www.unaoc.org/2017/07/opening-remarks-the-role-of-religious-leaders-in-peacebuilding-in-the-middle-east/>

<https://www.unaoc.org/2017/02/al-nasser-remarks-at-the-interfaith-harmony-week-event-embracing-the-other/>

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

UNDP's strategic framework for the prevention of violent extremism reflects a growing appreciation for the unique role that religion, faith, and religious communities and leaders can play in global development efforts. Across the 130 or so countries in which UNDP works, it promotes interreligious and intercultural dialogue in order to enhance mutual respect and to create an environment conducive to peace and mutual understanding.

UNDP's released a report in 2017, entitled *The Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and Tipping Points for Recruitment*, which presents the results of a two-year study on recruitment among some extremist groups in Africa. It reveals that religion is exploited by extremist groups to justify the resort to violence, becoming a focal point for a number of other grievances. In the study, 51% of respondents identified religion as a reason for joining extremist groups. But a majority respondents also admitted to limited or no understanding of religious texts. Indeed, higher than average years of religious schooling appears to have been a source of resilience. These findings demonstrate that fostering greater understanding of religion, through methods that enable people, particularly youth, to question and engage critically with teachings, is a key resource for Preventing Violent Extremism efforts. Furthermore, the study warns that the feeling of 'religion is under threat' was found to be a common perspective among many respondents. In turn, the study cautions that recruitment by violent extremist groups, using religion as a touchstone for other context -based grievances, has the potential to increase.

At the global level, UNDP supports the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (the "Plan of Action") and shared its experience in working with Religious Leaders and Actors during a Ministerial Side-Event organized in support of the "Plan of Action".

UNDP is also a founding member of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) and have been contributing to its development along with other UN sister agencies.

In June 2017, UNDP, Rainforest Foundation Norway and Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, brought together Indigenous and religious leaders from 21 countries to hold a three-day event in Oslo/Norway that generated dialogue between NGOs, government agencies, universities, indigenous groups and with conservationists and scientists, to develop the ethical case for protecting tropical forests. The event marks the launch of *the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative*, which seeks to build on the moral case for rainforest protection with tangible metrics and goals.

In November, 2016, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the King Abdullah International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) jointly organized a meeting with more than 100 participants from 25 countries convened in Amman. The meeting, entitled "*Interreligious Dialogue on Diversity, Tolerance and Social Cohesion in the Arab Region*", addressed the instrumental role of religious leaders and religious institutions in enhancing diversity, tolerance and social cohesion to counter the roots of extremism.

UNDP has been working closely with the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. In May 2017 they jointly organized a two-day workshop in partnership with Union Theological Seminary and the Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhurst (GHR) Foundation. During the, participants review past reconciliation processes and examine the need for research and collaborative action to explore the potential of religion in enabling reconciliation and the healing of community relationships. They also examine the relationship between political processes and grass root reconciliation efforts to see if UN processes and other state actors could safeguard their impact and further their results.

In the *Philippines*, supported by the UNDP-DPA Joint Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention, a critical lobbying effort with the Philippines Congress to grant special autonomy to the Muslim-majority Moro people—as per the peace agreement signed between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2014—is being led by the Catholic Archbishop of Cotabato, the Mindanao town which has been the epicenter of the Moro insurgency. Cardinal Quevedo heads a UNDP-supported high-level group of senior intermediaries from both Manila and the Mindanao region who call themselves the Friends of Peace, and who are championing the implementation of the peace agreement, and also raising national awareness of the plight of the Moro. Interfaith dialogue between Christian and Muslim religious leaders has been a key component of their work.

A critical frontline in the prevention of violent extremism in Mindanao has been the Moro youth themselves. The *Al Qalam* Institute for Islamic Identities and Dialogue in South East Asia, based at the Philippines' top Catholic Ateneo de Davao University, has established the “Salaam” network with UNDP support, wherein young scholars are using both religious discourse as well as more secular social media to reach out to individuals and communities at the risk of radicalization, and to provide them with spaces for venting their grievances and establishing more positive narratives of peaceful struggle for social justice.

Under the Insider Mediator project UNDP currently supports the traditional leaders in the Ixil Triangle (municipalities of Nebaj, Cotzala and Chajul, with about 80% of population being Maya). In addition to land and natural resource conflicts, the region was the scene of numerous human rights violations during the armed conflict in Guatemala. According to the human rights organizations hundreds of people were killed in this region. In this particular region of country, traditional leaders and spiritual guides are socially recognized individuals with a vocation for community work that are best positioned to mediate conflicts and lead reconciliation processes in their communities. On a regular basis they mediate land disputes, business disagreements, and inter-generational or family conflicts. Also traditional leaders, specifically indigenous recognized authorities are called to lead the participation of indigenous peoples in prior consultations and dialogue processes as they relate to measures that could affect their rights and territories.

On the 11th of January 2017, UNDP *Ethiopia* organized a national conference “Enhancing role of religious leaders as messengers of peace and reconciliation” with Religious leaders from across the country on peace and reconciliation with detailed recommendations to be presented to the Ethiopian government to help address issues around recent unrest and public protests. The religious leaders, joined by representatives from the youth, women, private sector and civil society, were brought together by Ethiopia's Inter-Religious Council.

On January 27th, 2017, UNDP *South Sudan* trained a number of civil society actors to work on “*Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Healing*”. UNDP organised a Training of Trainers for the [Transitional Justice Working Group](#) together with other civil society actors and representatives of the South Sudan Human Rights Commission who are involved in different aspects of transitional justice in South Sudan, such as truth-telling and community outreach. The training aimed at equipping participants with the relevant skills to train other civil society actors as well as other actors engaging on transitional justice in South Sudan. The training intended to enhance participants' knowledge and provide them with the analytical framework and pedagogical tools that they can use to transfer their knowledge and training skills.

UNDP is enhancing church leaders' leading roles in reconciliation and peacebuilding processes in support to the implementation of the 2008 Global Peace Agreement in *Zimbabwe*. UNDP has also supported the establishment of 285 *Local Peace Committees*, comprised of key community leaders, women and youth, together with political actors who have been trained on mediation and conflict resolution to address conflict in their communities.

Resources/Publications

- [Faith in Finance: Faith-Consistent Investing and the Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders](#)
- [KAICIID, United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\) Cooperation to Promote Social Cohesion in Arab Region](#)
- [UNDP and Islamic Development Bank Sign Partnership to Support the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION (DPI)

The Department of Public Information, through the NGO Relations Unit, engages with FBOs on a regular basis. More than 60% of all active NGOs, of the more than 1,450 NGOs formally associated with the Department, are faith based organizations. This means that the

potential for outreach and engagement within faith communities, at all levels, is carefully evaluated when planning for activities and programmes. During 2017, eight new faith-based NGOs became associated with the Department representing global faith traditions and religions.

One of the main platforms where DPI engages FBOs is the *Focus on Faith* (FoF) Series, of the thematic Thursday Briefings organized by NGO Relations. In 2017 the unit broke record numbers of participation for a Thursday Briefing with the session called “The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Refugee Assistance and Refugee Resettlement Work”, with over 526 people in attendance, representing civil society organizations, academic institutions, media outlets and Member States. The briefing took place on 13 April at UNHQ in New York, and explored the work and impact that the coordinated efforts of FBOs have in the lives of millions of refugees, particularly in regard to the resettlement processes and efforts, facilitating the integration of those being assisted into their new communities, and encouraging the creation of sustainable communities built on the principles of respect, safety and dignity for all.

Looking Forward

The 2018, the Focus on Faith Briefing will explore “*Challenges to Freedom of Religion or Belief*” across the globe, with a special focus on the role of youth in the creation of safe and diverse communities.

Resources/Publications

<http://webtv.un.org/watch/finding-a-new-home-the-role-of-faith-based-organizations-in-refugee-assistance-and-refugee-resettlement-work/5397570252001>

<http://webtv.un.org/search?term=Focus+on+Faith&sort=date>

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

Highlights

UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values. It is through this dialogue that the world can achieve global visions of sustainable development encompassing observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty, all of which are at the heart of UNESCO’s activities. UNESCO’s mission is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

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. 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.

UNESCO, in close collaboration with the Secretariat and a broad range of UN entities, prepared the report “Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”, reflecting the shared responsibility involved in promoting a culture of peace and intercultural and interreligious dialogue. As well as pursuing and refining ongoing initiatives, the participating entities have explored innovative ways to work more effectively together and in partnership with national governments and other stakeholders.

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.

Nevertheless, culture can be very effectively harnessed to unite different groups. The global outcry over the destruction of World Heritage sites in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere in recent times bears witness to the unique status that cultural and natural heritage have in being both specific to a culture, reflecting the life of a community, its history and identity, and also belonging to all of humanity.

Protecting and restoring cultural heritage rekindles hope and offers fragile, conflict-and poverty-ravaged communities a constructive alternative to the violent extremist’s nihilistic agenda. In Mali, which has endured repeated violence since 2012, UNESCO has enhanced the national peace and reconciliation process that followed the signature of a peace agreement in 2015 by helping to rebuild 14 historic mausoleums in the World Heritage city of Timbuktu. The centuries-old mausoleums, sacred places for the local population, were destroyed by radical Islamists in deliberate acts that the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, has described as “cultural cleansing”. The city formally received the keys to the mausoleums, which were rebuilt by local stonemasons, at the Djingareyber Mosque in February 2016, in a traditional consecration ceremony that last took place at the site in the eleventh century. The strong involvement of local communities and religious leaders in the reconstruction project demonstrates the power of culture to unite and restore the confidence of a fragmented community.

International cooperation to salvage the archaeological heritage of the Syrian Arab Republic is also in place. A rapid assessment mission was sent to the country in April 2016, an initiative that was followed by an international conference, held in Berlin in June 2016, in partnership with the Government of Germany. Some 230 international and Syrian experts discussed priority measures and how and when work on the ground should begin.

The Unite for Heritage online media campaign continues to keep the activities in the public eye. Other actions to put culture and heritage at the center of peacebuilding and humanitarian emergency operations, most notably the signature of a recent agreement between UNESCO and the International Committee of the Red Cross to integrate culture into humanitarian operations, pave the way for further opportunities to cooperate and build peace through culture.

The promotion of intercultural dialogue for sustainable development was also enhanced by UNESCO and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the joint organization of a seminar on environment, religion and culture, promoting intercultural dialogue for sustainable development, held in April 2016, 15 years after a seminar on the same theme was held in Tehran, in 2001. At the event, representatives and specialists of different cultures and religions discussed how culture and religion contributed to sustainable development and they explored the nexus between the three concepts. A document was published urging religious leaders and FBOs to actively promote a culture of peace in their work to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It called upon Member States to put culture at the heart of their efforts to find durable solutions for environmental challenges in a spirit of dialogue, understanding and respect for diversity.

In keeping with the need to “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” as called for in Goal 13 of the SDGs, UNESCO is also fostering international dialogue to explore the ethical implications of global climate change for biological diversity, cultural diversity, global justice, international solidarity, resilience and durability through the work of its World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology, since 2005. Based on the extensive work that has been completed so far, during the thirty-eighth session of the General Conference, Member States requested UNESCO to prepare a preliminary text for a non-binding declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change for the next General Conference, to be held in 2017. Such action is meant to complement the important work being carried out on climate change through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. UNESCO will launch a broad and inclusive dialogue between Member States, experts and stakeholders to this end.

Resources/Publications

- [International decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures \(2013-2022\)](#)
- Report of the Secretary General on [Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace](#) (A/71/407)
- [Agree to Differ](#) (UNESCO, 2015)

UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. UNEP's mission is "To provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations." For UN Environment, cooperation with Faith-based Organizations dates back to 1986, when the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment (IPE) was created to initially inform North American congregations about the serious environmental problems facing life on Earth.

UN Environment has renewed its commitment to work with Faith-based organizations in 2017 by assigning a principal advisor to focus on enhancing the engagement, develop a corporate strategy and advance the implementation of an action oriented work plan to achieve the organization's three overarching goals of enhancing partnership with faith-based organization's leaders, green assets and investments of faith-based institutions and establish a knowledge system that supports the strategy.

A policy paper and a corporate strategy have been developed. To ensure buy in from faith-based organizations, and at the margins of the United Nations Environment Assembly, a global consultation meeting was held in UNEP's headquarters on 30 November 2017 in Nairobi with the participation of around 40 participants representing 20 faith-based organizations and 10 faiths. The main purpose of the meeting was to agree on the overarching goals of the strategy, share knowledge of existing efforts on caring for the environment and solicit commitments of partnerships and collaboration with and between organizations working on environmental issues.

UN Environment has also launched the Interfaith Rainforest Alliance as a new initiative designed to bring moral attention and spiritual commitment to ending tropical deforestation. It is being developed as an international, multi-faith partnership that will rally spiritual and religious communities to act for the protection of rainforests and the rights of the indigenous peoples who safeguard them. The alliance will be a shared platform for the world's religions to unite in their efforts to end deforestation and to work within their respective faith traditions, networks and institutions to make rainforest protection a moral and ethical priority. The initiative is being led by United Nations Environment, Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) and Rainforest Foundation Norway, in close partnership with GreenFaith, Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology, and the World Council of Churches. It was officially launched at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, Norway on 19 June 2017, an event that was followed by a two day planning meeting where Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist religious leaders and indigenous peoples' representatives from Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Meso-America and Peru established priority actions, activities and milestones for the initiative.

With leaders of eight world religions, representing more than \$3 trillion in assets, UN Environment participated in Zug, Switzerland, during the 500th-anniversary celebrations of the Reformation to "radically shift" the agenda of ethical investment. The three-day meeting between faith leaders, financial investors, and UN representatives, was hosted by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). Representatives of Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Daoist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Shinto traditions resolved to invest positively in environmental and sustainable companies and projects. The meeting resulted with adopting the Zug Guidelines on Faith-Consistent Investment.

Titled "Laudato Si: Interfaith and Secular Perspectives on Care for Creation", the 'Our Ocean' international conference was held in St. Julian – Malta from 5-6 October. The meeting was organized by the EU, the Church Environment Commission and Nature Trust Malta. UN Environment participated in the meeting and delivered perspectives of faiths and the role of faith-based organizations in protecting the oceans.

The Convention on Biological COP engaged with faith-based Communities on biological and cultural diversity. The Holy See participated in a CBD meeting for the first time in the history of the Convention, and presented on the panel of COP 13's interactive dialogue on "Living in harmony with Nature". Representing the Holy See, the Monsignor Ramón Macías said that the concept of 'living in harmony with nature', the vision 2050 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, was linked to the concept of 'integral ecology' outlined in the recent Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father, Pope Francis on Care For Our Common Home. The Executive Secretary met with the Foreign Affairs Minister for the Holy See, on 6 July 2017, at the Vatican, where an invitation was made for the Holy See to become a CBD Party and explored the possibility of cooperation on the Post-2020 process to develop concrete actions and initiatives.

Looking Forward

A conference on Faith-Based Investments will be held in the first quarter of 2018. Place and dates are to be agreed.

Resources/Publications

Environment, Religion and Culture in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/8696/->

[Environment, religion and culture in the context of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development-2016Environment, religion and culture in the context .pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/8696/-)

Highlights

UNHCR participated in the Adventist Development and Relief Agency's (ADRA's) Annual Council in March 2017 in the context of ADRA's commitment to developing a global refugee advocacy policy. This presented a significant opportunity to help mobilize public opinion in favor of refugees, particularly the messaging around inclusion, through the large number of people who belong to this faith-based network.

UNHCR mobilized all its partners including faith-based organizations in the roll-out of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, CRRF ("The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants"). The Annual Consultations with NGOs on the CRRF, which was very well-attended, featured an event on "Promoting a positive narrative about refugees" with social media and faith-based organizations including Facebook, Orient-Occident Foundation Morocco, the Amadeo Antonio Foundation Germany, Islamic Relief Worldwide, and the World Council of Churches.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), another of UNHCR's faith-based partners, has been especially active in the roll-out the CRRF in Eastern Africa. All of its country programs are in one way or another working with religious leaders, such as the Uganda country program collaboration with Church of Uganda on the 16 days of activism against gender based violence or the Kenyan country program's work with members of the national ACT alliance forum most of whom are religious institutions/leaders. A particularly innovative approach of LWF is to work in complementarity with the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council thereby effectively mainstreaming refugee policy into human rights policies at the national level.

Moreover, UNHCR participated in the launch of the International Faith-Consistent Investment movement in Zug, Switzerland on 30 October.

As a follow up from the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, UNHCR participated in an international Forum on Localizing Response to Humanitarian Need, responding to and reinforcing the localization of aid/Grand Bargain discussions. The Forum was designed to produce a body of evidence on questions of how to engage local faith actors, and actions to scale up their engagement as local partners. 142 people from 36 countries assembled to learn from Sri Lankan religious leaders and FBOs and from each other about local faith engagement in humanitarian response, and to discuss how to scale up engagement. The Forum was organized by a consortium of faith-based organizations, and co-coordinated by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities ([JLI-LFC](#))

UNHCR provided technical support to IRW and LWF on the Draft guidelines for Faith-sensitive mental-health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) Programming, which were completed in 2017 based on a desk review and fieldwork in Kenya, Jordan and Nepal. The will undergo peer review and pilot testing in 2018.

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of the many engagements was enhanced networking opportunities with other civil society organizations with a wide base of support and activities in areas closely related to UNHCR's work. Thus for instance, through the ADRA council, UNHCR encountered the organisation "[Purpose](#)", which has been building an ambitious new initiative focused on changing hearts and minds in Europe, and globally, around the refugee crisis. Purpose works through research collating and assessing opinions, message development, popular movement-building and campaigning to reach mainstream audiences to counter the rising tide of xenophobia and anti-immigrant populism.

Looking forward

In 2018, UNHCR and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) plan to do a follow-up on the dialogue with faith leaders in 2012 "Welcoming the stranger". For more information, please contact Ms. Tamar Joanian (JOANIAN@unhcr.org).

UNHCR will continue to participate in the Strategic Learning Exchange on Religion, Development and Humanitarian Work, whose next edition is planned to take early 2018 (postponed from January due to developments in the region).

Resources/Publications

- [Analysis of the Survey on Good Practice Examples: Faith-based Organisations and Local Faith Communities Contributing to Protection Outcomes](#) (UNHCR, 2013)
- [Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders](#) (UNHCR, 2013)
- [Partnership Note: On Faith-Based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders](#) (UNHCR, 2014)
- [Policy Brief: Local Faith Groups and Humanitarian Assistance](#) (JLI, 2015)

- [Policy Brief: Gender, Religion and Humanitarian Responses to Refugees](#) (University College London, 2016)
- The [#WithRefugees petition](#) (UNHCR)

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN’S FUND (UNICEF)

Highlights

UNICEF is the leading humanitarian and development UN agency working globally for the rights of every child. Child rights begin with safe shelter, nutrition, protection from disaster and conflict and traverse the life cycle: pre-natal care for healthy births, clean water and sanitation, health care and education. UNICEF has spent nearly 70 years working to improve the lives of children and their families, and also lobbies and partners with leaders, thinkers and policy makers to help all children realize their rights—especially the most disadvantaged.

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.

In May 2017, the [#FaithOverFear](#) initiative was launched at the Vatican by Religions for Peace, UNICEF and partners. As part of the campaign, three original short-form documentary films were produced, highlighting families and people of faith from around the world who have opened their hearts, homes and communities to refugees (one of the three videos features Pope Francis welcoming Syrian refugees Nour Essa and her family, who were brought to Italy by him). These three documentaries were complemented by a video of interviews to 10 inspirational religious leaders of many faiths-- including Christianity; Judaism; Hinduism; Islam, Sunni and Shia; and Buddhism -- wherein religious leaders highlight their shared values and beliefs and call on people of faith to welcome refugees. The campaign engaged 320k users to choose faith over fear, generating high comment and share rates, as well as good press coverage.

Engagement with the World Council of Churches around the [Churches’ Commitments to Children](#) – focusing on child protection, child participation and climate change - continued throughout 2017. After having been approved by WCC’s highest governing body at the end of 2016, the Commitments were distributed by the General Secretary to all member churches. A network of “Ambassadors” was formed and gave presentations about the Commitments at influential global, regional and national meetings. Many church synods have started a process of consultations at grassroots level and initiated working groups on the Commitments through their congregations. A child-friendly summary of the Commitments and a guide for collaboration with children were also developed, with focus on implementation.

Resources/Publications

- [Sharing common goals: UNICEF, faith-based organizations and children](#) (UNICEF)
- [The World Council of Churches and UNICEF sign global partnership to promote children’s rights](#) (UNICEF, 2016)
- [WCC documents on children's rights](#) (WCC)
- [The Children’s Rights and Business Principles](#) (UNICEF)
- [Joint efforts to fight violence against children](#) (WCC, 18 June 2015)
- [Nigerian churches in ecumenical and multi-faith effort to fight violence against children](#) (WCC, 12 October 2015)

UNITED NATIONS ENTITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (UN WOMEN)

Highlights

Partnerships are at the heart of UN Women's strategic work, recognizing that aligning the strengths of all essential civil society actors, including women's rights groups, youth activists, religious leaders, faith-based organizations and other social justice actors, is critical to take us up the path towards gender equality.

UN Women is increasingly bringing together faith actors, feminists and social justice activists to develop the religious narrative that supports women's rights to physical integrity, autonomy, security and safety, to economic empowerment and right to decent work and productive employment, public and social participation, voice and leadership in private and public spheres. In this regard, during the reporting period, UN Women has conducted numerous initiatives with Faith-based institutions, organizations and actors at the global, regional and country level.

As part of the ongoing movement building work in support of gender equality and women's empowerment, UN Women has made of the Commission on the Status of Women a critical point of reflection, recommendations and action oriented advocacy to advance and deepen the engagement of key constituencies in the breaking of stereotypes and social norms that perpetuate and condone discrimination and inequalities. A specific focus has been given to the development of a collaboration and dialogue among feminist faith organizations and men and boys, with the objective to articulate common narrative and strategies for sustainable change. At CSW 61, for example, UN Women organized an arts and storytelling event bringing together artists, feminist faith leaders and men and boys activists on breaking stereotypes on women and work.

Moreover, UN Women is deepening collaboration among the men and boys and faith constituencies, by supporting their joint engagement in global policy dialogue, normative spaces, high level political advocacy as well as support to country based initiatives through advocacy campaigns community dialogues and more, to foster democratic and inclusive spaces.

Within the scope of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development, together with UNFPA, and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, UN Women has collaboratively organized a series of Strategic Learning Exchanges (SLE) which are designed to review and consider various means of outreach, particularly with faith actors, and joint implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. On 30-31 October 2017, UN Women hosted the second SLE on Religion, Gender & Youth Inclusion in Peace & Security which explored the current challenges and the interlinkages between religion, gender, youth, and peace and security work as well as the added value of religious and faith-based organizations and communities. Various experts as well as religious leaders engaged in the discussion, bringing unique perspectives on their work on religion and peace.

At the regional level various initiatives were undertaken aiming at strengthening our partnerships and mutual collaboration with FBOs. For example, in the Asia-Pacific region, UN Women conducts capacity building and training of women community and religious leaders, as well as women's groups to build networks aimed at developing joint agendas and advocacy strategies to influence government organizations working on counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism.

At the national level, UN Women also has engaged with faith actors and communities at large to end domestic violence, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women. In countries such as Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Mali, Senegal, and Liberia, UN Women shared ending violence against women tools with many actors, including religious leaders. In Afghanistan, UN Women engaged with the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs, as a key 'influencer' who is able to promote positive messages for women's engagement and political rights. In Indonesia, on the occasion of this year's International Day for Peace, UN Women co-hosted a landmark event with the Wahid Foundation, which facilitates dialogue and the building of understanding between Muslims and other religions and cultures. In Sumenep village, on the island of Madura in East Java, under the auspices of UN Women's "Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities" programme supported by the Government of Japan, the event brought together more than 5,000 people including women's economic groups, religious leaders, and female and male students at the Pesantren Annuqqayah, Indonesia's oldest Islamic boarding school. The day's activities included a panel discussion on how women in Madura contribute to peace, showcasing of women entrepreneurs' work in creating community resilience, theater and other artistic performances (including some seen for the first time ever by male students in a "co-ed" setting).

Looking Forward

Going forward, UN Women will continue to strengthen its engagement with faith groups in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, and at all levels of its work:

- Promoting greater collaboration between governments, faith actors and gender equality advocates in addressing the legal barriers created by religious and customary laws that perpetuate gender inequality as well as in countering 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.
- Forging the progressive and feminist engagement of FBOs in UN Women's Civil Society Advisory Groups at global, regional and national levels; The entity will also continue to promote the dialogue between feminist and faith actors, improve the feminist religious literacy while enhancing FBOs' knowledge on gender equality and the empowerment of women; disseminating the work of faith groups and promoting their distinctive role in securing gender equality and the rights of both women and men.
- Through its programming work, UN Women will continue to work with FBOs, building the capacity to create gender-responsive programmes and services for women and girls, as well as inclusive social and political mobilization.

Resources/Publications

- [Religious leaders at the forefront of ending gender-based violence in Ethiopia](#)
- [From where I stand: Haidara Djeneba Sy](#)
- [Coverage: UN Women Executive Director in the United Arab Emirates](#)
- [Religion and Gender Equality](#)

WORLD BANK (WB)

The World Bank is a vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world. It is not a bank in the ordinary sense but a unique partnership to reduce poverty and support development. It has set two goals for the world to achieve by 2030: end extreme poverty by decreasing the percentage of people living on less than \$1.90 a day to no more than 3%; and promote shared prosperity by fostering the income growth of the bottom 40% for every country.

Over the past three years, the World Bank has revitalized its engagement with faith-based and religious organizations, in recognition of the fact that its mission and goals cannot be achieved without partnering more effectively with actors across civil society, including faith-inspired ones. In April 2017, the World Bank convened a roundtable lunch with CEOs of various faith-based partners in DC and invited a number of them to engage in various World Bank consultations with civil society. In the summer of 2017, the World Bank invited a number of faith-based partners to convene regionally, for the first time, in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa – around the most effective means to collaborate around ending extreme poverty.

In September 2017, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, over 70 representatives of religious organizations and religious leaders met to review 12 months of progress of the Moral Imperative – the World Bank facilitated group of faith-based NGOs, and to hear annual progress reports from its 3 working groups (on Advocacy, Collaboration and Evidence). Clear calls for country and project specific work came from some of the participants. Speakers also called for specific action plans with clear deliverables and clear ways to relate to other initiatives such as the [Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities](#). The discussion also focused on the future of the Moral Imperative, its direction and possibilities for implementation in a manner which could more strategically serve the deliberations of the World Bank leadership and member civil society networks. Attendees at the convening affirmed the distinctive value of the Moral Imperative as a unique collective faith-based and multi-sector.

A new Moral Imperative Steering Committee has been elected and will be proposing a new programme of action around advocacy and collaboration in 2018.

References and additional resources

- [Mercy: Where religion and development can intersect](#)
- [Faith, the World Bank Group, and Ending Poverty](#)

- [Global Religious and Faith-Based Organization Leaders Issue Call and Commitment to End Extreme Poverty by 2030](#)
- [Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative](#), a “Moral Imperative” statement developed by a multi-faith drafting committee convened by the World Bank Group
- [Faith-based Action Framework to End Extreme Poverty & Realize the SDGs](#)
- [The Evidence Working Group](#) of the Faith-based Action Framework to advance the SDGs

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP)

The mission of WFP is to end global hunger. Every day, WFP works worldwide to ensure that no child goes to bed hungry and that the poorest and most vulnerable, particularly women and children, can access the nutritious food they need. WFP supports national, local and regional food security and nutrition plans. It partners with other UN agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to enable people, communities and countries to meet their own food needs.

In early 2016, WFP’s leadership sought enhanced partnerships with religious communities, acknowledging that ending hunger is possible only through meaningful collaboration at all levels of society, and that the principles of humanity and sustainable development to which WFP adheres are shared as a central pillar in all religious traditions.

The importance WFP places on the contributions of religious traditions towards ending hunger is enshrined in WFP’s “Whole of Society” approach. Whole of Society includes government, national and provincial disaster management agencies, national civil society, Red Cross, private sector and other institutions. WFP already partners with more than 1,000 community-based organizations worldwide. Many of them have a faith-inspired mission. WFP partners with faith leaders and faith-inspired organizations in more than 40 countries across different regions, hunger contexts, program activities and transfer modalities.

WFP is committed to advancing its partnership with current and potential faith-based actors in four key areas:

- Engage in joint advocacy.
- Join relevant partnerships.
- Invest in capacity strengthening.
- Country-level collaboration.

Highlights

In partnership with the main churches of the Dominican Republic – Catholic, Anglican and Evangelicals – WFP and church leaders produced a joint statement on the situation of food security in the country and supporting SDG2, the first time that the different churches came together in the Dominican Republic for such type of action. The statement (attached) was delivered on World Food Day at the UN House on 16 October and was read in churches and parishes across the country. WFP Dominican Republic is exploring further advocacy opportunities to leverage this collaboration.

Country-level Collaboration

In 2017, faith communities and leaders played an important role in WFP’s new Zero Hunger Strategic Review process. WFP’s new approach to country-level strategic planning relies on a country-led review, outlining the contributions of all stakeholders, including WFP’s distinct value proposition, for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 on ending hunger. WFP offices engages faith communities/leaders in this strategic country review process to inform country priorities, acknowledging their invaluable access and trust at the community-level.

As examples, in Timor Leste, the Strategic Review was co-led by the Bishop of Dili and in Sri Lanka Dr. Sanath Mahawithanage led the civil society group of the strategic review, representing Sarvodaya, one of Sri Lanka’s most broadly embedded community-based development organizations. Rooted in ancient Sri Lankan traditions, Sarvodaya’s philosophy is based on the teachings of Buddhism and celebrates the involvement of Sri Lanka’s monks and other religious leaders, who play an active role in village life. Sanath brought together a diverse group of civil society representatives, including various religious groups working at grass roots level. These stakeholders were selected for their knowledge of food security and nutrition issues. Faith-based organizations representing all the major religions in Sri Lanka were involved, providing a unique understanding of local vulnerabilities and needs.

Resources/Publications

- Joint press release: Comunicado con Motivo del Día Mundial de la Alimentación; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEn430hny5o&feature=youtu.be>
- Brochure with brief examples of WFP's partnerships with faith-inspired organizations: [Inter-religious Engagement for Zero Hunger](#)
- [Voices of Faith: Statements from religious leaders and actors](#)
- [Inter-religious engagement for Zero Hunger](#)

APPENDIX I: MISSION, OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES OF THE UN-IATF-RELIGION

Mission Statement

The IATF-FBOs supports the work of UN 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 knowledge exchange on the intersections of religion and religious actors with the UN system's mandate on human rights, sustainable development and peace and security;
- Provide an internal resource pool on experiences of and lessons from partnerships with FBOs within the UN, as well as with other governmental counterparts;
- Strengthen the integration of reliable FBO partnerships within the UN systems' 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 convenor of multilateral experience and expertise around engagement with religious actors, within the UN and with international intergovernmental counterparts, on the intersections of UN mandated areas with issues of religion and faith, based on diverse UN experiences, evidence and analysis;
- Host policy dialogues with faith-based partners and specialists on religion, development and humanitarian assistance;
- 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 quarterly fora ('safe spaces') for the UN system members, to internally reflect on and critically analyze experiences, lessons, challenges and best practices gleaned through diverse initiatives with religion and faith-based actors at country, regional and global levels;
- Support and advise UN system 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;
- Seek to catalyze regular UN system-wide activities and initiatives with a view to engaging faith actors in a learned and strategic manner around shared global objectives.

UN Task Force Criteria of Engagement with Faith-Based Actors

The following criteria are culled from the record of respective UN offices' and agencies' own engagements and outreach with faith actors for any event, initiative, (joint) programming and/or project-based deliverable, and are required to guide the outreach to faith actors across the UN system around efforts taking place at the global level. These criteria are in line with UN values and principles and support the realization of its mandates in human rights, sustainable development and peace and security.

General criteria: Balance must be sought as regards:

1. Representation of all faiths and denominations: This references religious representation – using the UN framework lines – i.e. per number of global adherents; inclusive of all faith traditions, including diversity within the largest faith traditions and also inclusive of traditional and indigenous faiths.
2. Regional representation: All geographic regions of the world, in addition to a balance between those who work at global, regional and national levels.
3. Gender representation: Genders present at the meetings and initiatives, as well as sensitivity to the specific gendered needs and expertise of the beneficiaries of the intended project.
4. All aspects of the thematic area(s) entailed and cross-cutting concerns covered: inclusiveness as regards the range of thematic expertise brought to the specific agenda.
5. Non-governmental religious actors should be legally registered in at least one Member State of the UN.
6. Preference can be given to organizations actively working to provide the services and/or advocacy and/or capacity under discussion (i.e. to complement the representation of religious or faith leaders).
7. No objection has been raised by relevant UN country offices regarding a possible criminal case against the organization or individual where active.
8. Actors should have a track record of acting in conformity with UN values and principles.
9. NGOs should not be listed as a terrorist organization according to UN terrorist list(s).

2017 HLPF

Faith-Based Side
Events -
Highlights



UN Secretary-General António Guterres speaks at the launch of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.
Photo: UN Photo/ Eskinder Debebe

2,558 
Participants

159
Side Events

23 

Faith-Based

INTRODUCTION

Having been attended by over 2,558 individuals, the 2017 **High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** was highly participatory. The HLPF was an opportunity to highlight on the progress made towards the 2030 development agenda from governmental and non-governmental perspectives. 147 side events were held during this

Forum - compared to 106 in 2016. Out of the 147 side events, 23 were on/with faith-based issues and organizations (FBOs), as communicated to the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development, which is co-convened by UNFPA. This report is not an overview of all the faith-related events, but will briefly highlight a select few which involved the UN Interagency Task Force Members.

LAUNCH OF THE PLAN OF ACTION FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND ACTORS TO PREVENT INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE THAT COULD LEAD TO ATROCITY CRIMES

“

I firmly believe in the power of faith leaders to shape our world for good

I have been struck by the consonance of key precepts and core values between the different faiths.

Indeed, faith is central to hope and resilience.

António Guterres – UN Secretary-General

In societies that are fragile as a result of political or other forms of instability, hate speech can be a key trigger to violence that can lead to atrocity crimes. As the UN Secretary-General Antonio rightly puts it “hate speech sows the seeds of suspicion, mistrust and intolerance”.

Hate speech and incitement are most effective when the speaker is a person of influence. And Religious leaders and actors have been responsible for hate speech and incitement - but have also been responsible for preventing and countering incitement by spreading alternative messages of peace and tolerance. For this reason, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (the “Office”) has decided to engage these eminent personalities as part of its wider atrocity prevention efforts. To this effect, a series of broad consultations and constructive discussions with religious leader around the world, known as the Fez Process, took place between April 2017 and December 2016. These discussions subsequently culminated with the development of the “Fez Declaration” and the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that

Watch the entire event
on UNTV:

[Fez Plan of Action launch](#)

Read [SG’s Remarks](#) as
delivered or [watch here](#)

Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (thereafter Plan of Action).

► Members of the advisory team that contributed to the crystallisation of the Fez Plan of Action pose for a photo with the UN Deputy Secretary General Ms. Amina Mohammed.

From right to left is:

Azza Karam, Peter Prove, Agness Callarnard, Mohammed ElSanoussi, Faisal Bin Muaammar Amina J. Mohammed, Adama Dieng, Simona Cruciani, Gillian Kitley, Ibrahim Cheema.



Photo: UNFPA/Leeroy Mapulangwa

The Plan of Action is the first to focus on the role of religious leaders and actors in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. The Fez Process has been led by United Nations Under Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and it involved religious leaders and actors representing different faiths and religious minorities groups, as well as faith-based organizations around the world. UNFPA was part of the advisory team that contributed to the development of the Plan of Action.

In launching the Plan of Action, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed concern at the alarming rise of offline and online hate speech. He nonetheless was hopeful that “the Plan of Action sets out a broad range of ways in which religious leaders can prevent incitement to violence and contribute to peace and stability.” In this context, he “urge[d] the widest possible dissemination and implementation of [the] Plan of Action.”

In its capacity as Convenor of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development, UNFPA supported the UN Office of the Special Advisor on Prevention of Genocide, as part of a Steering Group of UN and faith-based partners.

ENGAGING YOUTH ON SRHR IN FRAGILE SETTINGS



This side event was convened by the JEUNE S3 Alliance; whose members include Cordaid, Population Services International (PSI) Europe, Swiss Tropical Public Health (TPH) Institute, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA). As an alliance, JEUNE S3 aims to

achieve that young people from 10- 24 years old (especially girls from 10 to 14 years old) and key populations are able, motivated and have the opportunity to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and that their sexual and reproductive rights are respected. In line with this, the side event – convened in close collaboration with UNFPA – sought to:

- Raise awareness of the specific SRHR issues for young people in fragile settings
- Share recommendations and best practices on creating an enabling environment for youth in fragile settings
- Call for action and commitment of resources to youth SRHR in fragility

At the end of it all; it was expected by the conveners that the participants and the audience members will take forward advocacy messages and action points.

BAN HUNGER AND POVERTY, NOT PEOPLE: LEVERAGING COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND GENDER-FOCUSED STRATEGIES IN A WORLD OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The Church World Service and the Hunger Project business men. What is important is to know how



Ms. Rosario del Pilar Diaz Gravito, the founder of Millennials Movement making her intervention at the side event – “Ban Hunger and Poverty, Not People” – as other panellists follow her presentation. Photo: UNFPA/Leeroy Mapulanga

co-hosted this side event. The discussions focused on the need for integrated, gender-focused community led solutions that economically empower persons on the brink of displacement and migration. Unlike most of the side events, the discussants took a micro approach by looking at communities in Latin America. Following the theme of the event, the UNFPA representative noted that people should not always look outside their communities for resources needed to eradicate poverty. She observed that each country or community (whether developed or not) has people who are wealthy and can greatly contribute to the fight against hunger. These people are not only political leaders but also local

to leverage from them so that they can commit their resources. Other panellists at this event included Ms. Rosario del Pilar Diaz Gravito, the founder of Millennials Movement; who particularly emphasized on the importance of taking infrastructure development to hard-to reach places if the problem of forced migration/displacement is to be reduced. Meanwhile, Mr. Ravi Karkara; the deputy executive director of UN Women added a gender perspective to this discussion by highlighting on the works of UN Women mostly in the Middle East. Among the panellist was also Andrew Fuys and Maurice Bloem both from Church World Service.



Rev. Welinton Pereira from World Vision, Brazil speaks at the event 'Linking reducing inequalities to eradicating poverty'. From left to right is: Mr. Elias Szczytnicki, Ms. Marcela Suazo, Rev. Carlos Temez, Rev. Welinton Pereira, Carlos Rauda, Elena Cedillo, Ms. Adriana Opromolla and Ms. Azza Karam. Photo: UNFPA/Leeroy Mapulanga

LINKING REDUCING INEQUALITIES TO ERADICATING POVERTY IN THE CHANGING REGION OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: THE PERSPECTIVES OF FAITH COMMUNITIES

This event was co-convened by UNFPA and 9 other organizations including Caritas, ACT Alliance, World Vision, among others. The event, which was moderated by UNFPA, traversed the resultant impact – on poverty levels – of reducing inequality. And Ms. Adriana Opromolla pointed out that Caritas is concerned for a just dimension which the market does not guarantee because it is wasteful and consumeristic. She proposed that there is need to install mechanisms for collaboration, information access and mobilization of resources that will govern implementation structures for SDGs at both national and local government levels.

Reverend Carlos Tamez observed that “it’s a great challenge and unforgivable sin” to have 66 million people living in extreme poverty. To this effect, he

shared tools that CLAI has developed in order to position and mobilise churches to counter this ordeal. He also observed that the interlinkage characterizing SDGs may also constitute vulnerabilities because not one single institutions can tackle all SDGs, additionally poverty is not only defined in economically but constitute other dimensions like access to school, credits, among other things; therefore there is need to for alliances and building a framework of regional action which should include: political commitment with governments, world alliance for sustainable development; heeding voices of the churches and of the poor; participation of FBOs in national action plans and roll out; and dealing with grassroot causes of inequalities.

PARTNERSHIPS: VEHICLE FOR ACHIEVING THE SDGS

The side event on Faith-based partnerships: vehicles for achieving the SDGs was co-convened by the permanent mission of Ireland to the United Nations and UN-Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development in partnership with the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local communities (JLI) The event theme echoed the

tenets of SDG #17; while also focusing on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5 and 14. And leading the discussions was a panel drawn from UN entities, FBOs and permanent missions to the UN.

In line with the HLPF theme, the event panelists and participants explored and discussed notable milestones scored by FBOs towards the SDGs.

Including mobilisation and implementation of social services. JLI highlighted, using practical examples, how they are responding to individual SDGs. In their presentation, they pointed out that they helped transform 150,000 people and helped them out of poverty. And a further 32,999 people were helped in more than 5 countries. And there programming also responds to SDGs #3; for

example, in Zambia alone, they provide health related services to 9,936 young girls. It was observed by the panelists that FBOs and faith leaders have a moral imperative to actively participate in the 2030 development agenda because the goals are in line with basic tenets of all religions.

MOBILIZING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO ACT WITH SOLIDARITY AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY TO END POVERTY

The side event which ran under the theme “mobilizing religious communities to act with solidarity and shared responsibility to end poverty” brought together a diverse team of panelist that explored the ethical dimension of the 2030 development agenda while giving practical approaches to its realisation.

The panelists with a religious background noted that while development discourse should be approached in a pragmatic way using the tools of science and technology; it is equally important to establish strong ethical underpinnings to this approach.

Archbishop Bernardito Auza, the Holy See’s Permanent Observer to the United Nations, noted that “we are living at a time in which many, especially in developed nations and here at the United Nations, like to bracket the most important questions, like those about who we are, where we come from, where we’re going, how we should treat each other, and what is good, true, and genuinely beautiful... [but] within the specific context of the sustainable development agenda, if we lose sight of these fundamental human coordinates [questions], there’s the serious risk that the SDGs may be understood in only partial ways, through excessively economic, environmental, or sociological lenses, while missing their deeper ethical and anthropological context and purposes.”

Meanwhile, UNFPA representative delivered an intervention from the UN system perspective by way of giving an account on how the UN partners with faith leaders and religious institutions. And went on to briefly share key lessons learnt from the partnerships; which included the Instrumentalisation of religion; and the need to amplify moral voices from all angles.

Speaking at the same event, Professor Jeffrey Sachs the director of UN Sustainable Development Solutions noted that there are a lot of individuals in the private sector with a lot of money to help in the implementation of the SDGs, however, they lack a moral imperative to do so and hence do not spend the money. He thus, implored the faith leaders to reach out to these people and help them help people through the 2030 development agenda.



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Cordaid, PSI Europe, Swiss TPH and World YWCA invite you to participate in a session on

ENGAGING YOUTH ON SRHR IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

Join our Jeune S3 Youth Ambassadors and others for a frank discussion on the role Youths play in calling for their Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights in fragile settings



A flyer for one of the event co-convended by Jeune S3 (a consortium of Cordaid, PSI Europe, Swiss TPH, YWCA) UNFPA, Choice Norwegian Church Aid in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

CONCLUSION

“I firmly believe in the power of faith leaders to shape our world for good”. Sentiments such as this from the UN leadership coupled with the number of faith-related side events convened by civil society organizations, the private sector and the UN agencies, underscores the relevance of faith dynamics in the 2030 Development Agenda. This particular form of outreach to FBOs is part of the UN System’s commitment to ‘leaving no one behind’, particularly given the reach of most religious organizations anywhere in the world. Nonetheless, this outreach, and the partnerships formed around it, are not without challenges. Deliberate efforts remain required to ensure that the outreach with FBOs is at once inclusive of all religions, all civil society actors, and is country-driven, while remaining consistent with globally agreed policy decisions and priorities. As Anwar Khan noted, the United Nations system remains

the world’s largest convening entity. As such, it has a unique role in bringing together the moral, political, social, cultural and economic capital and capacities of the global community, to help ensure human rights and human dignity, as part of Agenda 2030. The deliberations and presentations made during the faith related side events belied the fact that religious institutions, faith-based NGOs/FBOs, religious leaders and communities of faith are all an integral – and often major parts – of civil society and political landscapes all over the world. They form part of the infrastructure, and human heritage, which delivers on development and humanitarian needs. As Rev. Wellington noted; “religion is part of the community; it has a place and a face”.

“Religion is part of the community; it has a place and a face”
Rev. Welinton

“The United Nations System remains the world’s largest convening entity”
Mr. Anwar Khan

ANNEX 1: SCHEDULE FOR RELIGIOUS RELATED SIDE EVENTS
DURING THE 2017 HLPF

Organization(s)	Event Title	Date	Time	Venue
World Vision, ACDI-VOCA, Mercy Corps, Plan, Land O'Lakes	Gender Minimum Standards: strengthening organizational practices to achieve SDG 5	Tuesday July 11, 2017	1:15 – 2:30 pm	Church Center of the UN. 10th floor
Ciranda 2030, Plan, ChildFund, World Vision, Fundacion Abrinq, SOS Children's Villages from Brazil.	Tackling child poverty in Brazil: a multifactor agenda to leave no one behind.	Tuesday July 11	8:15 – 9:30 am	UN Secretariat, Conference Room B
Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN, and the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development	Faith-Based Partnerships: Vehicles for Achieving the SDGs".	Wednesday July 12	1:15 pm- 2:45	UN Secretariat, Conference Room 11
Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the UN & CARITAS	Achieve Goal 2 and Goal 14: Implementing the Agenda 2030 in Kenya and Oceania	Wednesday July 12	1:15 – 2:30 pm.	UN Secretariat, Conference Room E
World Vision	What are countries' Voluntary National Reviews telling us?: Constituencies' & Children's Voices	Wednesday July 12	1:15 – 2:30 pm.	The Church Center of the UN 12th floor
World Vision and Global Coalition to End Child Poverty	Ending Child Poverty and SDGs interactions for the	Wednesday July 12	8:15 – 9:30 am	UN Secretariat, Conference Room 7

	Best Interest of the Child			
Permanent Mission of Chile to the UN, Save the Children, World Vision, Plan International, SOS Children's Villages, Child Fund.	Bringing Children to the Table: Children's Contribution to the Implementation of the SDGs.	Wednesday July 12	3:00 – 4:30 pm	UNICEF House Dannye Kaye Centre
Bread for the World	Informal Dinner for Partner Organizations	Friday, July 14		
UN Office for the Prevention of Genocide, UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development KAICIID, Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers	Launch of a Global Action Plan for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes	Friday, July 14	3:00 pm	ECOSOC Chamber
Religions for Peace	Mobilizing Religious Communities to Act with Solidarity and Shared Responsibility to End Poverty and Promote Peace	Monday, July 17	1:30-3:00 pm	866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120, New York, NY 10017.
World YWCA	Sexuality, Access, Rights and Respect for Youth in Fragile Settings	Monday, July 17	06:00 pm – 8:00 pm	UNHLPF Ministerial Meeting 17-19 July
Union Theological Seminary with Sukyo Mahikari NY Center	Spirituality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Monday, July 17	1.00 – 5:00 pm	Sukyo Mahikari NY Center at 124 E31st New York

<p>Sightsavers, World Vision, Together 2030, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Save Matabeleland, CEPEI, New Castle University, Justice, Development and Peace Commission, Philippine Social Enterprise Network.</p>	<p>Open, inclusive, participatory and transparent: How can voluntary national reviews support the pledge to “leave no one behind” in implementing the 2030 Agenda.</p>	<p>Monday, July 17</p>		<p>ONE UN Plaza Hotel</p>
<p>Religions for Peace Latin America and the Caribbean</p>	<p>Linking Reducing Inequalities to eradicating poverty in the changing region of Latin America and the Caribbean: Perspectives of Faith communities</p>	<p>Tuesday July 18</p>	<p>1:30-3:00 pm</p>	<p>Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN), 777 United Nations Plaza 2nd Floor</p>
<p>Church World Service</p>	<p>Ban Hunger and Poverty, Not People</p>	<p>Wednesday July 19</p>	<p>1:15 pm–2:45 pm</p>	<p>Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN)</p>
<p>Religions for Peace Latin America and the Caribbean</p>	<p>Regional Committee Meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Inter-Religious Alliance for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</p>	<p>Thursday July 20</p>	<p>09:00 am – 05:00 pm</p>	<p>World Vision International New York and United Nations’ Liaison Office, 919 2nd Ave. 2nd</p>

APPENDIX B: Strategic Learning Exchanges on Religion, Development and Humanitarian Work