



2020

**Annual Report of the United Nations
Interagency Task Force on Religion and
Sustainable Development**

Engaging with Religion and Faith-based Actors on the 2030
Sustainable Development Agenda

Membership of UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UNIATF) 2021



This Annual Report documents the activities, initiatives and efforts undertaken by diverse UN system entities, members of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development during the year 2020. None of the opinions expressed here reflect those of the United Nations system, its member entities, Governing Board(s) or territory/territories.

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Introduction of UN IATF-Religion

The UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UN IATF-R) was established in 2010, at the behest of eight UN principals, as a platform for knowledge exchange and management, capacity building, system-wide guidance and oversight regarding engagement with faith-based/-inspired civil society actors. Since 2010, the UNIATF has established a momentum and modality of collaboration with a diverse range of faith-based/-inspired civil society partners.

The UN IATF-R has grown considerably over the past years and currently brings together 27 UN entities from across the system who meet on a regular basis, and co-organize joint advocacy and capacity-building activities. It is encouraging to note the increased interest among UN-System partners in faith-related engagement, including in talking on coordination and leadership roles in support of the UN-System's work in engaging faith-based organizations and networks. *[The list of the UNIATF whole membership can be found in [Annex I](#).]*

As of 2020, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG) joined force with UNFPA - who until then had been the core convener of the IATF-R - to serve as the IATF's Co-Chairs. The new mechanism foresaw a rotation between the three entities in holding the Executive Secretariat functions, with UNFPA starting in 2020.

Throughout the years, the UN IATF-R also worked closely with the Multifaith Advisory Council (MFAC), which was established in 2018 by the UN IATF-R and composed of CEOs or designated representatives thereof from across the UN system's long-term faith-based/-inspired civil society partners. Currently, the MFAC has 38 members. *[The list of the full MFAC membership can be found in [Annex II](#).]*

Joint Activities of the UNIATF in 2020

Despite the significant challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the UN IATF-R continued to engage faith partners in knowledge sharing, system-wide guidance and oversight in the area of religion and development, and joint advocacy. Throughout the year, more entities joined the UN IATF-R, which now involves 27 UN members.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN IATF-R and MFAC have quickly shifted to a remote working modality. During the year, ten virtual meetings were held between UN IATF-R and MFAC. In addition, in early 2020, the new version of UN IATF-R and MFAC ToRs were revised and signed off to reflect rotation in Chairmanship of both entities. *[Kindly refer to the [Annex III](#) and [Annex IV](#) for the UN IATF-R ToR and MFAC ToR 2020.]*

In response to the global crisis unleashed by COVID-19 in April, the UN IATF-R issued a [Joint Statement with the Endorsement of the Multifaith Advisory Council](#), expressing deep concern about the pandemic's complex and multidimensional challenges and calling on all relevant stakeholders for unity and solidarity, both within and between communities of faith, and international cooperation in addressing the crisis based on the international human rights standards and with particular attentions to those most vulnerable and marginalized. This statement has been widely disseminated and referenced in various UN speeches.

The [UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to COVID-19](#) developed by the UN Sustainable Development Group, providing guidance for the Resident Coordinators and the UN Country Teams in the UN's efforts on the ground, specifically recognizes the importance of leveraging the UN's networks and partnerships to bring together representatives of state institutions with a wide range of non-state actors, including faith-based organizations and religious leaders, to co-create recovery strategies and strengthen social cohesions through whole-of-society approaches.

Seeing the rising global trend of stigmatization, discrimination and hate speech, on 12 May 2020, the Kingdom of Morocco organized a virtual high-level conference on the role of religious leaders to address the multiple challenges related to the Coronavirus, including the growing hate speech trends. Building on the Moroccan initiative, on 28 May three members of UN IATF-Religion - United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), UN Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG) and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - organized a virtual consultation with a wide range of religious leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations to discuss thematic areas, actions and initiatives that would provide a result-oriented framework for collective action and enhanced collaboration between the UN and FBOs. This consultation resulted in the [Global Pledge for Action by Religious Actors and Faith-based Organization to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in](#)

[Collaboration with the UN](#), which included a declaration by religious leaders and actors with assurances and commitments in response to COVID-19, and a mapping of ongoing activities and possible areas of collaboration with the UN. A series of follow up webinars have been launched to further collaboration around hate speech and discrimination in the context of COVID-19 and beyond.

To commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, the MFAC with support from the UN IATF-R, held the [Global Online Conference “Faith in the UN: Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations and looking to the future”](#). The event aimed to reflect upon the systematic support from faith-based and faith-inspired actors to the UN system in upholding the shared values of human rights and in promoting sustainable development. Participants included UN principals, goodwill ambassadors, Member States and youth representatives along with the whole membership of UN IATF-R and MFAC. This event reaffirmed the shared value of multilateral collaboration and partnership with faith-based/-inspired civil society actors, which is more pertinent than ever in the current situation.



In December 2020, the MFAC held its second Retreat in a virtual format. This two-day retreat included participation from the entire UN IATF-R membership to all discussion sessions. Prior to the retreat, the MFAC presented to the IATF-R a summary report of its work in 2020, along with the reports produced by its Working Groups on Gender, Climate Change, UN 75th Anniversary, and COVID-19. *[The reports from UN MFAC can be found [here](#)]*

The retreat provided an opportunity to assess the extent to which the UNIATF-MFAC partnership has achieved its objectives, identify good practices and lessons learned, as well as possible gaps and challenges. It also offered a space for exploring potential and concrete areas of collaboration between the UN IATF-R and MFAC going forward. During the retreat, the following decisions were made:

- Extend the mandates of UN 75th and COVID-19 Working Groups, and to continue the work of the UN 75th Working Group by renaming it Multilateral Working Group;
- Keep the momentum set by the retreat by holding small-scale Kofi Annan Faith Briefings during the year of 2021;
- Broaden the scope of participation to include the work of faith groups outside of the MFAC membership;
- Revise the MFCA ToR with a view to strengthen the section on selection of new members and on principles of partnerships.



Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has continued using the “Faith for Rights” framework in engaging with faith-based actors worldwide. This framework provides space for a cross-disciplinary reflection and action on the deep 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.



OHCHR convened faith-based actors, academics and UN human rights mechanisms to jointly articulated the [#Faith4Rights toolkit](#)¹, which translates the [Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”](#)² into practical peer-to-peer learning programmes. Its 18 modules offer concrete ideas for exercises, for example how to address incitement to hatred and violence against minorities, especially in the COVID-19 context. The whole concept is interactive, result-oriented and participatory, engaging the participants through audio-visual material and social media, with a particular focus on the needs of youth. The toolkit also proposes a dozen cases to debate, including on the role and responsibilities of faith actors in the context of a pandemic.

The toolkit builds on a wealth of comparable tools by several UN agencies that have been integrated into the #Faith4Rights toolkit. It has two main innovative features: adaptability by its users to their respective contexts (as explained in module 0) and its constant updating with new peer-to-peer learning exercises, extracted from relevant material produced by all stakeholders working in the field of human rights, development and peace-building.

In 2020, OHCHR conducted peer-to-peer learning events to pilot and refine this methodology, including with civil servants in Nigeria (with the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief), faith-based and humanitarian actors in Denmark, South Asia and globally with Religions for Peace, with academic institutions (Oxford University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and University of Pretoria) and students from more than 50 countries (with the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute as well as the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect). UN human rights mechanisms have been part and parcel of these webinars, notably the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Special Rapporteur on minority issues as well as

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/faith4rights-toolkit.pdf>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx>

several members of the Human Rights Committee and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (as part of its CEDAW Knowledge Hub).

In February 2020, OHCHR's Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa conducted a related training session during the MENA regional round of the Price moot court competition in Lebanon. Webinars on keeping the faith in times of hate and on confronting COVID-19 from the prism of [faith, gender equality and human rights](#) were conducted together with Religions for Peace and human rights mechanisms.³ The Beirut Declaration on "Faith for Rights" and [Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of incitement to hatred](#)⁴ were also included in the 2020 moot court cases of the Nelson Mandela Moot Court Competition (University of Pretoria/OHCHR), Price Media Law Moot Court Competition (University of Oxford) as well as Law and Religion Moot Court (Brazilian Center of Studies in Law and Religion).

In March 2020, Religions for Peace published its [Statement on Coronavirus Crisis](#), encouraging faith actors to promote human rights, fraternity and solidarity through the "Faith for Rights" framework as well as to use the online #Faith4Rights toolkit which "offers concrete ideas for learning, teaching, preaching and design community development projects".⁵

In May 2020, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations convened a virtual consultation which resulted in the "[Global Pledge for Action by Religious Actors and Faith-Based Organizations to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Collaboration with the United Nations](#)".⁶ Noting that religious leaders have a powerful role to play in guiding responses to the pandemic, [High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet](#) urged them to speak out firmly against the intolerance and hate speech, which is targeting multiple minority communities across the world who are stigmatised as supposed carriers of the virus and who face discrimination as well as physical and verbal attacks.⁷ The Global Pledge for Action includes a declaration by religious leaders and faith-based actors with commitments in response to COVID-19 as well as a mapping of ongoing activities and possible areas of collaboration with the United Nations.

³ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/Statements/CEDAW_statement_COVID-19_final.doc

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomOpinion/Articles19-20/Pages/Index.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.rfp.org/statement-by-religions-for-peace-on-coronavirus-crisis/>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/GlobalPledgeAction.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25909&LangID=E>

In June 2020, OHCHR issued a [guidance note on racial discrimination in the context of COVID-19 crisis](#)⁸ that addressed manifestations of religious discrimination and recommended actions to be taken by States, leaders and civil society. Furthermore, OHCHR’s [guidance on COVID-19 and Minority Rights](#) illustrates some promising practices to address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on members of minority communities and it includes specific references to the #Faith4Rights toolkit and Rabat Plan of Action. OHCHR’s guidance also recommends twelve key actions by States and other stakeholders, for example to “promote respect for diversity and human dignity, and prevent and combat human rights violations, especially violence, intolerance and hate speech, poverty, social exclusion and discrimination [and to] encourage political, civic and religious leaders, to speak out firmly and promptly against any form of intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech.”⁹



In July 2020, the Human Rights Committee adopted its [general comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly](#), which stresses that assemblies may not be used for advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. With regard to the definition of incitement to violence, the general comment refers to the threshold test in the Rabat Plan of Action as well as to the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”.¹⁰ The 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights” have also been used by [UN field presences](#) and [special procedures](#) during their engagement with States and faith-based actors, for example to address all instances of incitement to hatred,¹¹ to protect the rights of all persons belonging to minorities, and to repeal any anti-blasphemy or anti-apostasy laws.¹²

In his [report to the General Assembly](#) of October 2020, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stressed that no one will be left behind only when sustainable development efforts advance the political, social and economic inclusion of persons belonging to religious or belief minorities.¹³ Thus the Special Rapporteur encouraged States to employ [specific indicators](#)¹⁴ (including sources such as the Beirut Declaration and #Faith4Rights toolkit) to identify the impact of interventions on reducing inequalities involving religion or belief.

⁸ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/COVID-19_and_Racial_Discrimination.pdf

⁹ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/OHCHRGuidance_COVID19_MinoritiesRights.pdf

¹⁰ <https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/GC/37>, paras. 19 and 50

¹¹

https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/bcnudh_rapport_sur_les_messages_et_discours_incitatifs_a_la_haine_en_rdc.pdf

¹² <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25801>

¹³ <https://undocs.org/a/75/385>

¹⁴ www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/forbindicators.docx

In November 2020, the European Union issued its [Gender Action Plan III](#), stressing that the EU should “work in cooperation with a broad range of actors, such as local authorities and civil society organisations, women’s rights activists, human rights defenders, young people, religious and faith-based organisations” and that “the EU should support mobilisation of religious actors for gender equality in line with the Faith for Rights framework”¹⁵

The #Faith4Rights toolkit is also referred to in the checklist to strengthen UN work at country level to combat racial discrimination and advance minority rights (December 2020) which the [UN Network on Racial Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities](#) designed to assist field entities, Governments, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organisations, peoples’ and minority communities and human rights defenders in preparing UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes and COVID-19 response and recovery plans.¹⁶

Since December 2020, OHCHR, OSAPG and UNAOC have followed up on the Global Pledge for Action with an online peer-to-peer learning program on topics where the role of faith actors is particularly influential. The [methodology](#) of the series of six monthly webinars is interactive by sharing good practices and lessons learned concerning gender equality, hate speech, religious sites, minorities, atrocity crimes and interfaith dialogue.¹⁷ Aligning the efforts of these three UN entities in partnership with faith-based actors on a specific peer-to-peer learning program is a major shift from ad-hoc events to a structured process with genuine recognition of what faith-based actors have to offer and what the United Nations can learn from their action and wisdom.

One key take-away of these webinars and discussions has been the need to improve both the religious literacy of human rights actors and the human rights literacy of faith-based actors. This is why peer-to-peer learning is a priority. A second key challenge is the political manipulation of religions and beliefs. Here, again, education and the #Faith4Rights toolkit can empower religious actors against political manipulation through enhancing their independence and sharpening their critical thinking. States have the primary responsibility in respecting independence and unleashing the potential of faith-based actors to assume their natural role as human rights defenders.

In operational terms, we also learned to appreciate the crucial role of facilitators of peer-to-peer learning events while engaging with faith actors. Facilitators should be well versed in the multiple disciplines involved, be good listeners to link the dots between participants’ experiences and be capable of extracting learning points to achieve added value and cumulative effect.

Publications:

¹⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0017&from=EN>

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/Pages/UNNetworkRacialDiscriminationProtectionMinorities.aspx>

¹⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/GlobalPledgeActionConcept.pdf>

- Report and outlook on “Faith for Rights”:
www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/Faith4Rights.pdf
- #Faith4Rights toolkit: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/faith4rights-toolkit.pdf

Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG)

In 2020, the **Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG)** continued to prioritize implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors and the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In February/March 2020, the high-level mission of the Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention to Iraq included engagement with religious leaders to discuss their role on the accountability for the crimes committed by ISIL and in preventing future crimes jointly with UNITAD. These conversations resulted in [a joint inter-faith statement on the victims of ISIL](#). In July 2020, OSAPG/UNITAD and Religions for Peace organized a virtual event with religious actors from Iraq and the sub-region to advocate for the implementation of the joint statement.

Following the [SG's global appeal to counter and address COVID-19 hate speech](#), OSAPG released the [UN Guidance Note on COVID-19 related hate speech](#) that included recommendations for various actors, including religious leaders and FBOs, to tackle hate speech related to the pandemic.

In May 2020, OSAPG, jointly with AoC and OHCHR organized a virtual meeting with religious leaders and faith-based organizations to engage them in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting resulted in the Global Pledge for Action, a statement of commitment by religious leaders and faith-based organizations to contribute to global efforts against the pandemic. The fight against COVID-19 was identified as a priority for implementation of the Global Pledge. As a result, OSAPG, OHCHR and AoC developed a program for a series of webinars with focus on fighting COVID-19 related hate speech and its ramifications. The first webinar organized by OHCHR in December 2020 focused on gender.

Across 2020, OSAPG also continued to engage virtually with religious leaders and actors on the prevention of atrocity crimes and to provide capacity building to religious leaders and actors on addressing and countering hate speech. For instance, in November 2020, it trained the fellows of the KAICIID Dialogue Center on this matter.

Of note, the new Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention, Ms. Alice Warimu Nderitu, took office on 30 November 2020 stressing her commitment to engage grassroot actors, including religious leaders and actors, in the prevention of atrocity crimes and to implement the Fez Plan of Action.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS)

Within the Strategic Framework – Partnership with Faith-based Organizations – recognizing the key role of faith partners in the HIV response, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) continued through 2020 the fruitful collaboration with religious leaders, FBOs and faith communities at country, regional and global levels.

The September 2020 **HIV Interfaith Conference, “Resilience & Renewal: faith in the HIV response”**, constituted the main global highlight of this collaboration. With well over 1000 participants, the event provided a space for sharing, capacity building and advocacy among people of faith involved in the HIV and AIDS response. It created an opportunity to celebrate and get inspired by the many resilient people engaged in the HIV response. It also allowed for faith leaders, faith-based organizations, and communities of faith to recommit to a holistic, comprehensive response to HIV that acknowledges the innate dignity of every human person.

The Conference witnessed the launch of the 13 Million Campaign to engage faith leaders, individuals and communities to promote access to health services by the 13 million children, women and men living with HIV who are not yet on antiretroviral therapy. All people of faith were invited to sign the online Commitment to Action to end HIV and AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. It also launched the **Interfaith Health Platform**, a multi-religious collaborative space for capacity building, awareness raising and joint advocacy among faith groups, organizations and communities engaged in HIV and AIDS. The Platform offers access to best practices and to resources developed by faith groups. It is also meant to document the impact of faith models and share them for a more effective HIV response, including under the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 2021 the Platform will organize a series of regular webinars on issues prioritized by the Conference. They include among others: spirituality, mental health, and resilience during the time of dual HIV and COVID19 pandemics; the role of faith communities in strengthening adolescent peer groups; Framework for Dialogue and stigma reduction interventions; and people left behind in the context of COVID19.

The Conference served also as a key global opportunity to input in the **development of the new AIDS Global Strategy beyond 2021**. Several religious leaders made high-level statements on HIV and the faith response, influencing the content of debate and its outcomes. The Strategy, when approved by the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board, will provide main guidance to all stakeholders of the response for the following five years. It will also form a starting point of the debate at the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS scheduled for June 2021. Faith partners of the response are expected to be fully involved in the preparations and related processes.

The country level collaboration with faith partners focuses on **strengthening their role as sustainable partners of the HIV response** and includes:

- building the capacity of faith partners to adapt to new policies and innovations;
- improving collaboration and coordination with other stakeholders in the HIV response;
- addressing rampant HIV-related stigma and discrimination within faith communities and organizations; and
- leveraging influence, audience and facilities for evidence-based information sharing and advocacy.

In 2020, within the agreement with a consortium of FBOs that include African Christian Health Associations Platform, Caritas Internationalis, Inter-Faith Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Affected by HIV (INERELA+), Islamic Relief Worldwide, and the World Council of Churches, we launched an **FBO Initiative in eight African countries** (Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) where through a number of diversified activities we promote the above described principles. It is worth mentioning in this context that the **FBO action plans in support of the national AIDS strategies** developed (or under development) in those countries by faith partners in close collaboration with government and other key stakeholders of the response significantly strengthen the collaboration and ownership of those engaged. UNAIDS will continue promoting this tool in other countries and regions.

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

In 2020, UNAOC continued to lead in the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites. Progress was made in two of its main recommendations: the global communications campaign and the mapping of religious sites.

The global communications campaign was launched in September 2020 as a global call to action under the hashtag #forSafeWorship to safeguard religious sites and worshipers worldwide. The campaign invites people around the world to submit multimedia stories about their personal connections to religious sites. By late 2020, UNAOC had received and featured multimedia stories from young people in 14 different countries and had reached 315,000 people on social media.

On the mapping of religious sites, UNAOC continued to work with UNOSAT to put in place all necessary arrangements to start a phased approach in five pilot countries in early 2021.

UNAOC was the convener and/or co-organized several meetings which provided a platform for faith-based actors to build more inclusive and peaceful societies, particularly in the context of the response to COVID-19:

- World Interfaith Harmony Week: On 14 February 2020, UNAOC organized an event co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the UN on the global communications campaign recommended by the UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites.
- UNAOC, the Office of the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, organized a virtual consultation with more than 40 FBOs and religious leaders in May 2020, which led up to the Global Pledge for Action Global Pledge for Action by Religious Actors and Faith-Based Organizations to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in collaboration with the United Nations. For the implementation of the Global Pledge, seven webinars will be organized in 2021. UNAOC will lead on two webinars on the safeguard of religious sites and interfaith dialogue, respectively.
- As a co-organizer of the seventh annual G20 Interfaith Forum held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 13-16 October 2020, and in preparation for the Forum, UNAOC participated in several rounds of consultations for religious leaders and faith actors from the Arab region; on the consultation of the G20 Interfaith Forum Education Task; and it also contributed to the Expert Group focusing on inclusive learning spaces. During the Forum, UNAOC High Representative, H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos, addressed the Opening Plenary, and UNAOC also participated in a plenary session on religious actors and multilateral responses to COVID-19, and in an interactive panel on religious cultural heritage.

Throughout 2020, and since his designation by the UN Secretary-General as the United Nations Focal Point to monitor antisemitism and enhance a UN system-wide response, the High Representative for UNAOC participated in several events dedicated to combatting antisemitism, including: the 2020 Balkans Forum Against Anti-Semitism, co-organized by the Embassy of Albania in Israel and the Albanian Parliament; the high-level event on the role of the UN in combatting antisemitism organized by the World Jewish Organization and the Permanent

Mission of Germany to the UN; and the International Meeting of the Envoys and Coordinators on Combatting Antisemitism organized by the European Commission.

During the reporting period, the High Representative also engaged in consultations with representatives of major Jewish organizations, UN relevant entities and treaty bodies, as well as coordinators and envoys on combating antisemitism.

In 2020, the High Representative for UNAOC continued to engage with the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity in the implementation of the principles of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together. The document was co-authored and co-signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi. The High Representative supported and mobilized UN relevant entities and the UN Secretary-General for the “Pray for Humanity” call initiated by the Higher Committee on Human Fraternity to dedicate 14 May 2020 as a day for fasting, prayers and supplications for the good of humanity to end COVID-19.

United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

Key highlights

UNDP is a founding member of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers' Core and Advisory Group, and the Global Steering Committee for the Implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (the "Plan of Action"). Throughout 2020 UNDP continued to support these structures to realise their overall objectives, through programmes in 34 countries aiming to stem the misuse of religion to drive violence and war by protecting human rights, preventing discrimination based on religion or belief, and promoting the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief as well as by contributing to promoting peace and reconciliation, including in regions marked by religiously motivated violence.

For UNDP, Faith Based Organizations (FBO) and Religious Leaders have been pivotal in developing key concepts of peace and non-violence as they can engage a range of stakeholders in positive dialogue to identify entry points for reconciliation. Partnerships with community leaders of all kinds are critical to UNDP engagement in ending violence, and engagement with faith leaders is proving to be especially effective in realizing objectives that are essential for conflict prevention and peacebuilding—such as communicating a vision of a peaceful, cohesive society that is grounded in local norms (also known as 'terrorist counternarratives'), and in providing religious counselling to support the effective return and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters, their families and associates. In particular, through these partnerships, UNDP has worked on realizing conflict prevention and peacebuilding objectives.

UNDP's engagement with faith-based actors includes its work on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), addressing hate speech under the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, and its broader prevention and social cohesion work, including during and in response to the unprecedented challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to many societies. Among many key activities undertaken, UNDP has been promoting social cohesion and community resilience through counter narratives in Africa by mobilizing religious leaders to defend against extremist narratives in their communities and building their capacity to address youth radicalization. In **Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iraq, Lesotho, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan**, UNDP has engaged faith-based actors to promote peace by facilitating peace dialogues among different ethnicities and religions, with violent extremist affiliated families for their reintegration into society, and with former violent extremists and at-risk groups for their disengagement and rehabilitation. UNDP has also focused on capacity building of religious education actors to prevent violent extremism and promote peace in Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Additionally, religious actors have been engaged to support the early warning systems in countries like **Morocco and Sri Lanka**. Moreover, UNDP has been countering hate speech and misinformation by supporting religious leaders as trusted messengers. With the onset of COVID-19 outbreak in particular, faith-based actors in **Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Somalia** have played

a significant role in addressing the new risks and threats posed by the information pollution surrounding the pandemic.

Examples of national and regional activities in support of UNIAT on Religion and Development

i) Promoting social cohesion and community resilience through public awareness, counter narratives and peace dialogues

Africa

Through the Africa Regional PVE Project, 615 religious leaders have been mobilized for PVE. Additionally, more than 56,676 people were reached through public awareness programs; 628 at-risk youth have benefited from livelihood initiatives; and 481 women and youth have been supported as peace ambassadors. The project also supported civil-military community dialogues in 18 Chadian island communities and provided capacity building to 125 religious leaders on the effects of their interaction on youth radicalization.

Bangladesh

UNDP Bangladesh has completed the first phase of the Partnerships for a Tolerant, Inclusive Bangladesh (PTIB) initiative (2017-2021) aimed at understanding and preventing hate speech, violence, and extremism in Bangladesh through a research facility, citizen engagement—with a focus on youth, migrants, and religious communities—and government engagement. Under PTIB's Digital Peace Movement (DPM), the Digital Khichuri Challenge (DKC), Diversity for Peace (D4P), and Peace Talk Café (PTC) have engaged many non-traditional development partners and reached out to new audiences with messages of tolerance and diversity. By 2020, 100 religious leaders attended the interfaith workshop and 50 participated in a social media training to recognize and defend against extremist narratives in their communities. In 2020, Tahzingdong, Chittagong Hill Tracts based partner of D4P initiative has organized an inter-religious dialogue at Bandarban, where 12 religious leaders from different religions has gathered and spoke about peace and tolerance. In 2021, D4P is going to implement initiatives that promote peace and tolerance among madrasa youths (students) and Imams in and around Dhaka district.

Indonesia

UNDP Indonesia is implementing a joint initiative, GUYUB project (2019-2021) in partnership with UNODC and UN Women, funded by the UNTFHS, which aims to tackle the root causes of violent extremism in East-Java, Indonesia and strengthen human security. A large component of the project focused on capacity building, advocacy, as well as online and offline awareness raising on PVE targeting youth, religious leaders and school communities, in partnership with interfaith communication forums, civil society and governments of East Java to promote dialogue and peaceful narratives. The concerted efforts are expected to benefit 6,000 people.

Iraq

In Iraq, UNDP has led on developing a joint approach to deal with ISIL Affiliated Families which includes IOM, UNICEF, UNODC and UNHCR. UNDP is implementing a project on the

sustainable reintegration of ISIL-affiliated families and community readiness in nine pilot areas. UNDP has been able to facilitate the return of 2731 families through dialogue and peace agreements utilizing local peace mechanisms and advocating for coexistence and social cohesion among community members. This advocacy work was done by working with religious leaders, in addition to youth, women groups, and media. The project includes a full reintegration package of livelihoods, PVE, MHPSS in addition to rehabilitation of public social services spaces targeting 4000 direct beneficiaries.

Additionally, UNDP Iraq in partnership with local NGO Al Tahreer Association for Development has trained more than 280 religious leaders from across the Ninewa Plains (including Christian, Yazidi, Sunni and Shia Muslim leaders), in peer education, social cohesion and recovery pathways and strategies. More than 100 young Iraqis (44 young women) were also trained in leadership and advocacy, later undertaking 10 multi-faith community initiatives to encourage dialogue and improve understanding among more than 600 people across Hamdaniya, Bashiqa and Tel Kaif.

Lesotho

Along with the Resident Coordinator and UNDP, the Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) deployed through the Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict prevention continuously engaged the Christian Council of Lesotho and the Heads of Churches. The PDA supported their effort to mediate a range of political conflicts in the country, particularly in the period between January to May 2020 when the political situation in the country was heightened before the change of government in May 2020.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, UNDP has partnered with religious leaders as part of its Local-Level Disengagement and Rehabilitation (LLDR) programme, from 2017 to 2020. The programme implemented successively in Swat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Karachi (Sindh) and Multan (Punjab), relied on community oversight groups composed of local notables, teachers, doctors and religious leaders (both men and women). These groups form the backbone of the programme and are tasked with the selection of the beneficiaries and the oversight of the project implementation.

Sri Lanka

UNDP Sri Lanka together with Sarvodaya Shanthi Sena Sansadaya, a national civil society organization (CSO), launched a comprehensive training and sensitization TOT program for 100 selected youth religious leaders. These youth religious leaders represent 10 districts of the country who are thereafter expected to engage another 2000 community leaders and religious leaders in creating safe spaces for dialogues on social cohesion, non-violence and preventive action against spread of violent extremism in Sri Lanka. This multi-ethnic and multi-religious initiative will be sustained through civil society engagement action on promoting non-violence through interfaith dialogue. During the first wave of the pandemic, UNDP Sri Lanka and its partner CSO launched 60 online dialogues on social cohesion and the spread of hate speech which gained traction among the religious leaders who actively took part in the dialogues among other civil society and youth leaders.

Sudan

In light of the risks accompanying the political transition process in Sudan, UNDP has worked to strengthen resilience in institutions, civil society organizations, religious institutions and communities and prepare them for the implementation of the National Action Plan through socio-economic and religious empowerment, including the most vulnerable, raise awareness on risks of violent extremism and promote religious tolerance. In particular, UNDP Sudan and Sudan National Commission for Counter Terrorism (SNCCT) supported the production of a film called “Iman: when faith is at the crossroads” in 2017 and the film has been utilized in community dialogue meetings to raise awareness on violent extremism and has had millions of views in inspirational screenings for international audiences. The film was screened on national television for the first time in April 2020.

ii) Capacity building of religious education actors to prevent violent extremism and promote peace

Indonesia

In Indonesia, UNDP has undertaken initiatives that aim to build and enhance the resilience of communities against violent extremism by directly challenging the spectrum of narrative content by which extremism gains currency. To this aim, various capacity building activities coined with public outreach are conducted under the CONVEY project, including the award-winning “Millennial Islami” initiative, innovative training with BoardGames for Peace, Early-Warning-Early-Response knowledge and skill enhancement activities in education context, as well as specially-tailored programs, directly benefiting at least 5,000 stakeholders, including youth, teachers and education staff, religious leaders, government officials, former violent extremists, and communal leaders.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, UNDP under the Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP), has been supporting the Government in its efforts to mainstream and integrate 3.5 million seminary students in more than 30,000 Madrassas across the country. The support entails both institutional and downstream components, both aimed at reducing the vulnerability of Madaris to involvement in violence and conflict including violent extremism. The former includes capacity development of relevant staff from the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training on Madaris registration, cross national learning and knowledge opportunities for focal persons from the Directorate of Religious Education, and establishment of Programme Support Units (PSU) in relevant departments of the Ministry for expert technical advice and inputs into the mainstreaming process. In particular, the PSU established by UNDP will provide administrative, monitoring and evaluation, and communications support to the Ministry and streamline the mainstreaming process. The downstream component includes provision of livelihood and educational skills along with opportunities for constructive social engagement to students in selected seminaries. This component serves as a blueprint for institutional adoption by the Government of Pakistan.

Sri Lanka

UNDP Sri Lanka has also been supporting the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) to launch a virtual peace museum that memorializes the history of freedom of religious beliefs, violations and religious coexistence in Sri Lanka. A mobile e-learning platform is expected to educate young women and men on religious harmony and coexistence in Sri

Lanka. The museum is expected to be used as a mobile platform and taken outside the capital for educational purposes.

iii) Early warning of radicalization, violence and conflict

Morocco

In partnership with religious association 'Mohammadia League of Scholars', UNDP Morocco developed and applied a tool to sensitize inmates to engage in early warning of (religiously inspired) radicalization.

Sri Lanka

In addition, UNDP has been systematically monitoring freedom of religious beliefs violations in Sri Lanka, which is updated on a monthly basis and analysed together with other conflict risk datasets used to generate early warning. The data is regularly uploaded to the recently developed UNDP Sri Lanka Crisis Risk Dashboard.

iv) Countering hate speech and information pollution online and offline during COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak posed new risks and increased potential threats, and PVE programmatic interventions were adjusted to address these and new emerging issues including misinformation.

Bangladesh

UNDP has established a strong practice of engaging religious counsellors and leaders through addressing online hate speech and misinformation in Bangladesh. During the initial phase of COVID-19 in May 2020, Tahzingdong, a partner of Diversity for Peace (D4P) initiative, has developed a social media awareness content on responding to COVID-19, titled “[Story of Bandarban: responding to COVID-19 while living in a peaceful and united way](#)”.

Pakistan

UNDP Pakistan under YEP, responded to religion based dis- / mis-information campaigns against COVID-19 related precautionary measures by working with clerics from 33 mosques in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The clerics representing all mainstream sects in Islam highlighted the importance of responsible public behaviour during outbreaks by referring to religious traditions and teachings. These messages were strategically disseminated through a dedicated social media page. The worshippers were also provided with PPEs and informed about Government advisory on social distancing in mosques during the pandemic. These messages reached more than 1 million people, with more than 350,000 video plays and 1,793 shares. In remote rural areas, UNDP built awareness through networks of local mosques and religious seminaries and relied on traditional methods of communications centred around village mosques to make collective decisions about various issues including responses to COVID-19. UNDP also provided medical knowledge about COVID-19 to 750 Madaris students in 15 religious seminaries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through video messages by medical practitioners that aligned with progressive religious teachings about responsible public behaviours during pandemics.

Somalia

In Somalia, UNDP has supported religious leaders as trusted messengers in countering al-Shabaab propaganda and misinformation about COVID-19 being a divine punishment, instead sharing correct and life-saving information with the Somali people. An awareness-raising campaign, Clerics vs. COVID, successfully engaged networks of religious leaders to provide accurate health and religious information to their local communities through traditional and social media channels, as well as audio tapes played at mosques, by utilizing traditional community leaders.

UNDP resources/publications

[UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders \(2014\)](#)

[UNDP 2020 Hate Speech Report \(2021\)](#)

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

Work with the Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development (IATF):

As part of the IATF Faith Advisory Board, UN Women participated in different advocacy spaces at the UN and provided critical guidance on gender equality issues, multilateralism and the role of faith actors in upholding the human rights mandate of the UN.

1. UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore and WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus issued a statement during the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation - *Unleashing youth power: A decade of accelerating actions towards zero female genital mutilation*. The article focused on investments and translating political commitments into concrete action. The role of Faith Based Organizations was also emphasized. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/2/statement-joint-international-day-of-zero-tolerance-for-female-genital-mutilation>
2. UN Women has a long-standing partnership with the global MenEngage Alliance. MenEngage Alliance works with faith-based organizations as partners. Since 2019, UN Women has been supporting the MenEngage global 3rd “Ubuntu” Symposium, which has gathered more than 700 member organizations of the MenEngage Alliance across 70 countries worldwide. It kicked off in November 2020 and will conclude in June 2021 with the adoption of an outcome declaration.

The objectives of the Symposium include:

- a. Make ‘men and masculinities’ work more effective and impactful for gender justice through collective sharing, questioning, learning, and knowledge-strengthening.
- b. Strengthen a global community that acts responsibly, purposefully, inclusively, and in solidarity with our partners, friends, and each other – across social justice movements.
- c. Inspire, develop, and renew a common political agenda and strategy to meet the urgency of today’s existing and emerging challenges.

During the symposium, UN Women organized a Panel Discussion on “Male accountability matters to build back better from COVID-19” discussing how the role and position of men and boys can be strengthened in the fulfilment of women’s rights and gender equality in the COVID-19 context, regarding greater male accountability for addressing gender-based violence, valuing, remunerating and sharing care work, and supporting women’s voices and representation in decision-making spaces.

3. Strengthened collaboration with faith actors, feminists and social justice movements

One of UN Women's aims is to ensure a strengthened coalition of faith actors, feminists and social justice movements (religious leaders, faith communities, faith advocates, young faith advocates, academia) that systematically engage in global advocacy efforts at global, regional and country level. During 2020, it created opportunities for meaningfully engaging faith actors, feminists and social justice movements and youth in global advocacy efforts at regional and country level.

- UN Women and ACT Alliance have an institutional partnership working together with faith leaders, actors and communities in a joint goal of ensuring that gender justice is achieved globally. UN Women supports ACT Alliance working with faith-based actors in communities around the world, to transform the laws, values and behaviors that perpetuate gender inequalities, and to amplify actions and initiatives to achieve gender equality. In the run-up to the “16 days of activism”, UN Women partnered with ACT Alliance in an event that focused on the role of faith-based actors in contributing to gender equality. The event put a spotlight on the “shadow pandemic” – gender-based violence (GBV) – exacerbated by the Covid-19 as an international health crisis. UN Women supported ACT Alliance as it stood together with other faith-based actors and international leaders around the world to advocate and call for renewed responses that protect women's rights and achieve gender equality.
- UN Women held 2 curated conversations that brought different stakeholders including faith-based actors as part of the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) stakeholder engagement strategy. These curated conversations addressed topics of relevance and the recommendations and conclusions will feed directly into the GEF, including the six Action Coalitions and the Forums (Mexico and Paris). Faith actors contributed to the recommendations that are informing the substance and outcomes of the GEF to strengthen movement building for gender equality. E.g., during the curated discussion on “Transforming gender norms to achieve equality now”, faith actors contributed to the development of tangible recommendations to tackle deep-seated social norms and standards that perpetuate gender inequality in different contexts. The discussion also addressed the importance of shifting individual mindsets to achieve such change.
- The UN Women Mexico Country Office partnered with OHCHR, UNPFA and UNICEF and issued joint communiques and statements to local Congresses and the Supreme Court of Justice to address the push back on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights from conservative groups that are having increased influence in Latin America, particularly in countries such as Brazil and Paraguay. UN Women created spaces of dialogue with civil society and government representatives from other countries that faced similar issues (i.e., Argentina). They are in the process of developing a strategy on how to engage with non-progressive religious groups.

4. Strengthened collaboration with Universities

University students are a key constituency as future leaders as well as those with the time and space to convene frequently and discuss faith and gender from a robust theoretical lens.

Universities provide unique resources and opportunities for convening scholars, activists, and young people in the process of identity formation.

- Through the Student Fellows for Faith and Gender Justice program, UN Women continues to support feminist student activism. The longstanding relationship between the UN Women and the Office of Religious Life at Princeton University provides a critical opportunity for students to learn about the role of religion in global issues and how secular agencies such as the UN can serve as effective partners with religious communities. It is in this context that UN Women continues to support a strengthened relationship with the University to examine the functioning and effects of gendered structures and norms within faith-based institutions rooted in the lived experiences of people of faith.
- Young feminist women of faith constitute an important part of this response and yet they remain a largely unnoticed and untapped constituency in this pandemic. Even though they are at the forefront of the crisis as health workers and primary caregivers delivering care and services following faith-inspired principles of solidarity and compassion, their leadership is frequently overlooked. They are setting examples of transformative leadership, within their faith communities, challenging the limited role attributed to women from centuries of strict interpretation of sacred texts. This type of leadership pushes for new frontiers of advocacy, to build back better and bring lasting and transformative change that will help safeguard future generations of young women. Recognizing the important role young women of play in the COVID crisis, especially in reimagining a better future, UN Women has been engaging with this key constituency and amplifying their leadership, as gender equality advocates in their communities and organizations. UN Women collaborated with Berkeley Center in an intergenerational conversation with young people of different faiths, understanding their insights and identifying common ground for their work, across sectors and regions. It was an opportunity for young women of faith to also discuss how their faith interacts with their identity as a driver for a more inclusive, equal and peaceful world.

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

Despite the disruptions wrought about by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, UNEP's Faith for Earth Initiative adapted to the changing circumstances and pushed ahead with its planned agenda for the year. This required harnessing the potential of technology and employing innovative approaches to maintain growing momentum in faith inspired and directed environmental action. More than 50 faith-based organizations have been accredited to UNEP, and thousands have engaged in discussing UNEP's priorities and Medium-Term Strategy, and faith leaders have engaged in policy dialogue.

The Faith for Earth Coalition: [The Faith for Earth Coalition](#) is a self-sustaining global platform to strengthen cooperation with and among faith actors at a local, regional and global level by facilitating policy dialogue and public engagement on environmental and encouraging innovative approaches to finding long-lasting solutions to environmental challenges. In October 2020, Faith for Earth co-hosted a high-level global conference to lay the foundations for greater interfaith collaboration for sustainable development. The [Faith for Nature](#) conference was co-organized with the Government of Iceland, Religions for Peace, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, United Nations Association of Iceland, Soil Conservation Service of Iceland and National Religious Partnership for the Environment. [‘Our Sacred Commitment’](#) was endorsed by all participants to communicate a commitment by faith-based organizations to take concrete, scientifically-guided action to protect and restore nature.

High-level Engagement: A primary goal of the Initiative is to institutionalise its work and embed faith engagement at high levels of environmental governance. To this end, Faith for Earth hosted, organised or participated in several high-level engagements throughout the year including:

- 1) the [Shift in Mindset: Faith-based Solutions to Climate Action Obstacles](#) held during the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2020 with Climate Working Group within the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN (CRNGO);
- 2) the global leadership of the [World Evangelical Alliance](#) (WEA) in February 2020 demonstrating WEA's increased strategic focus on the SDGs;
- 3) the Program on Religion and International Relations (PORDIR) at Princeton, [“People Religion, Policy, and the Global Environmental Crisis](#) in July 2020;
- 4) Faith for Earth presented at the [G20 Interfaith Forum](#) regional and global discussions held July – September 2020 as part of a global consultation process led by KAICIID;
- 5) In November 2020, Living Laudato Si' Philippines, and Faith for Earth organised the [Philippine Interfaith Summit on Climate Emergency](#) focusing on divestment and halting deforestation;
- 6) In November 2020, Faith for Earth was a keynote speaker at the “3rd International Forum on Religious Life” in Bandung, Indonesia Forum launched a new multi-faith urban organization, the International Council of Faiths for Urbanism (ICFU).

Faith Leaders on the Frontline of COVID-19 Response: Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Faith for Earth has continually emphasised the environmental dimension underlying the Coronavirus

outbreak to our Network. Contributing to the pillars of the [United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19](#) published in June 2020, [Faith in the Frontline of COVID19](#) highlights actions by faith-based organisations and religious institutions. In June 2020, Faith for Earth presented UNEPs strategic response to build better post-COVID ‘[Working with the Environment to Protect People](#)’ with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). With the Interfaith Liaison Committee of UNFCCC COPs, organised a webinar series in October titled ‘[Faiths Unite: Visions for Transformative Climate Action](#)’. In addition, Faith for Earth joined forces with the Islamic Medical Association of North America ([IMANA](#)) in addressing the critical issues of environmental health, impacts of climate change on the health of the people and the health of the planet in light of the pandemic.

Religious Charters: Faith for Earth’s work on religious charters seeks to bolster UNEPs approach to promoting environmental governance by leveraging existing religious governance systems that are robust and multijurisdictional to safeguard the environment and human rights. Faith for Earth initiated a global push to give a voice to the Islamic perspective on the environment. [Al-Mizan](#), Arabic for “balance”, is a covenant designed to showcase Islam’s teachings on the environment and [spur the world’s 1.8 billion Muslims](#) to embrace sustainability as part of their everyday lives in a bid to combat climate change through a set of authoritative standards. In March 2021 the draft charter will be distributed to over 300 Islamic institutions around the world, as part of a consultative process to solicit feedback.

Youth Engagement: Faith for Earth has been actively seeking members to join the Coalition’s Youth Council, with events and workshops listed below correlating to this.

- 1) Building towards establishing an interfaith Youth Council in the United Kingdom that will support the work and objective of the Coalition.
- 2) In May, along with the Green Hope Foundation, discussed the “[Relevance of Peace in the Post-Pandemic Era](#)” focusing on youth-driven efforts as the world builds back better.
- 3) In June, another event was convened to address the widening of the opportunity gap in the [Last Decade of Action for the SDGs](#), with Faith for Earth demonstrating the urgency to get on track.
- 4) In February, Faith for Earth supported a training with [Islamic Help](#) and the [Bahu Trust](#) titled “Young Khalifas of the Earth”,
- 5) Thereafter in May, a webinar hosted by the Arab Youth Climate Movement Qatar (AYCMQA) engaged young leaders.
- 6) In August 2020, [presented an address](#) to renowned young (under 35) economists, experts in SDGs, and business men and women in a continuation of the Economy of Francesco.
- 7) In September 2020, a virtual dialogue series towards the [Economy of Francesco](#), titled “[Reimagining Development: Youth Perspectives for a Better World](#)” was hosted.

Capacity Building: This year, 8 capacity building workshops took place online, including:

- 1) Working with the The Swedish International Development agency (SIDA), Faith for Earth organized the [People and Planet](#) conference in March 2020, connecting participants through six regional hubs around the world.
- 2) Faith for Earth partnered with the [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#) (FORE), in May 2020 to build on both organisations expertise on ecological issues and the world’s religions.
- 3) In September 2020, the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Humboldt University Berlin and the Water, Environment and Climate Action (WECARE) Work-Stream of PaRD, of which Faith for Earth is a co-chair, hosted a joint webinar on “Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa”.
- 4) Organised in collaboration with the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board ([MINAB](#)) of the UK in November 2020, the “Mosques, Imams and Climate Action” webinar.
- 5) To commemorate World Environment Day in June 2020, KAICIID, the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Faith for Earth organised a high-level webinar, [Faith for Earth Climate Change and Environmental Justice](#).
- 6) In October 2020, Faith for Earth took part in the release of the KAICIID’s [Faith4SDGs project](#), a free digital storytelling series that revealed the enormous and unique contributions FBOs.
- 7) In December 2020, signed a Donor’s agreement with KAICIID for funding aimed at producing an online course consisting of 9 learning modules.
- 8) The World Sustainable Development Teach-In Day 2020, on December 4th was organised by the European School of Sustainability Science. Faith for Earth showcased the work of Faith Leaders and FBOs.

[Greening Faith-Based Assets](#): FBOs with huge collective wealth, have the potential to significantly contribute towards plugging the funding gap currently facing the SDGs, push forward the global fossil fuel divestment and responsible investment movements, and green assets under their control.

Faith for Earth and WWF convened global faith leaders and experts from [FaithInvest](#) to explore the role of faith groups in advocating for a green recovery in a post-COVID world in June 2020. The discussion focused on the role of faith in supporting a green economy, ensuring financial investments from faith groups are aligned with their values and enhance positive social and/or environmental impact.

The African Nazarene University, launched a series of events in observance of [Creation Care Green Week](#) with Faith for Earth inaugurating the educational Biblical Botanical Garden at the University

In June 2020, [The Living Chapel](#) launched at the Vatican Botanical Garden, inspired by the Laudato Si' Gardens, launched in February 2020, where the Faith for Earth Initiative also delivered a keynote address. The Living Chapel subsequently joined UNEP's One Trillion Tree Movement.

Faith for Earth National Coordination Hubs:

As part of Faith for Earth's strategy to get closer to faith communities around the world by establishing professional relationships with grassroot environmental organisations, UNEP's India Country Office [launched](#) the Faith for Earth [Strategy and Action Plan](#) on World Environment Day 2020, becoming the first Faith for Earth National Coordination Hub. In August 2020, Faith for Earth also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the [United Religions Initiative](#) who will be an essential partner in assisting the India Hub to implement its strategic action plans.

Publications:

- 1) [Faith for Earth: A Call for Action](#), an accessible publication that comprehensively explores linkages between faith and environment.
- 2) The landmark progress and outlook report on [Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) that maps the contributions of FBOS to the SDGs.
- 3) [The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions](#) paper outlines what Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) are, how the UN is supporting these practices, how FBOs are already engaging with NBS and what can be done to scale up action.
- 4) [The People and Planet: Faith in the 2030 Agenda](#) policy paper summarises the outcomes of a March 2020 capacity building conference organised in conjunction with partners in Sweden.
- 5) In collaboration with the University of Connecticut, Al Akhawayn University in Morocco, and YALE FORE, a study on '[The Environmental Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa Region](#)' was published in February on how the Abrahamic faiths can counteract local environmental challenges.
- 6) In July 2020, Faith for Earth launched [Guidelines on Green Houses of Worship](#) and [Four ways to make your house of worship eco-friendly](#) contributing towards the Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction launched at COP 21.
- 7) [Faith for Earth 2020 Achievement Report](#).

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Highlights of UNFPA’s global level engagement with FBOs

UNFPA has a long history of systematically engaging faith-based/-inspired civil society organizations as strategic partners advocating for the realization of the mandate set by the International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action (ICPD PoA). Throughout 2020, UNFPA participated in the following events organized by faith-based partners:

- The webinar [“Faith-Based Organizations, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: Addressing the Urgent Challenges of our Time”](#), was the first of a series of webinars on *Spirituality and Justice Initiative*. The webinar was organized by the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations with support from UNODC’s Civil Society Team and the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). The initiative aimed to explore and understand the issues of crime and justice and the role that Faith-based Organizations could play in finding solutions. Specifically, the first webinar focused on the role FBOs could play in addressing some of the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A series of interviews were organized by Religions for Peace (RfP) in a series called, [“How Faith Matters”](#). One interview explored the role that faith actors can play in supporting UNFPA’s work through implementing important life-sustaining initiatives around COVID-19, gender equality, women’s health, and the environment.
- A virtual consultation with religious leaders and actors organized by the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (OSPAG), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in response to the call by the UN Secretary-General to religious actors to contribute to wider efforts against the pandemic and its consequences. This consultation resulted in the [Global Pledge for Action](#), which includes a declaration by religious leaders and actors with assurances and commitments in response to COVID-19, and a mapping of ongoing activities and possible areas of collaboration with the United Nations.
- UNFPA Deputy Executive Director for Program participated in a youth webinar [“An Intergenerational Conversation: the Future They Want”](#) organized by the UNAOC for the Annual High-Level Meeting of the UNAOC Group of Friends. In her introductory remarks, DED-M acknowledged the collaboration with UNAOC in the context of promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue and a culture of peace through joint leadership of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development.
- UNFPA Deputy Executive Director for Management participated in the opening ceremony of the [1st Assembly on Women, Faith and Diplomacy: Keeping Faith and Transforming Tomorrow](#), organized by Religions for Peace (RfP) in partnership with the Foundation Peace

Dialogue of the World Religions and Civil Society (Ring for Peace) with the support from the German Federal Foreign Office (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In his keynote address, Mr. Ib Petersen underlined the tremendous support from faith-based/-inspired civil society actors during the 25th anniversary of ICPD at the Nairobi Summit.

- UNFPA Executive Director participated in the symposium “Black Mommies and Babies: Reproductive Health, Rights & Justice” during [the Healthy Churches 2030 National Conference](#) under the theme “The Black Health Agenda for the New Decade: The Intersection of Health, Religion, Race and Politics”.
- UNFPA Executive Director also participated in the high-level segment “The World Today and After COVID-19” of the international conference “[Multi-stakeholder Action to Address COVID-19 and its consequences: The Distinctive Role of Faith-based Organizations](#)”, organized by ACT Alliance. In her keynote address, Dr. Natalia Kanem stressed the gendered impacts of the pandemic, including the spike in gender-based domestic violence in the context of pandemic-related lockdowns.

As the Executive Secretariat, UNFPA regularly communicated to both the UNIATF-R, MFAC as well as broader FBO-constituency of 400+ FBOs to inform them of upcoming initiatives.

UNFPA Engagement with FBOs at Country Level Highlights

In 2020, UNFPA Country Offices partnered with FBOs as implementing partners in 27 countries in 6 regions, focusing on sexual and reproductive health service delivery, youth and adolescents, and gender equality. Below are a few, selected country examples from different regions.

In **Syria**, UNFPA worked with Mosaic for Human Relief and Development, The Monastery of Saint James the Mutilated, establishing and supporting Women and Girls Safe Space (WGSS), launching daily vocational training and supporting mobile teams to deliver lifesaving reproductive health care services, including Emergency Obstetric Care, in eastern Ghouta. Awareness campaigns on gender-based violence, child marriage, engagement of men and boys were also conducted.

In **Nepal**, UNFPA worked with Adventist Development and Relief Agency on the delivery of family planning services in hard-to-reach areas.

In **Turkey**, UNFPA worked with World Vision to establish safe spaces for women and girls and deliver dignity kits for preventing and addressing GBV.

In **Zambia**, UNFPA worked with World YWCA to strengthen the delivery of comprehensive sexuality education for in and out of school adolescents, establishing comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services between schools and health facilities. Awareness raising activities were also conducted through multimedia (radio, community dialogue meetings; community drama; church gatherings; traditional gatherings, sports events), on prevention and identification of cases of GBV and other forms of abuse, available services, legal provisions, and reporting mechanisms.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Over the years, UNHCR has continuously collaborated with faith-based organizations to join forces to better protect and assist forcibly displaced populations, ascertaining to the added value of these partnerships. To improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian responses, UNHCR is committed to strengthening the partnership with faith-based organizations, given the important and key role they play at local level countless times as first responders, and how actively they are engaged in meeting the needs of forcibly displaced populations. Additionally, FBOs and their organizations can leverage significant social, physical and spiritual assets for the benefit of those UNHCR serves.

In April 2020, UNHCR High Commissioner, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner with Directors met at a Principal level with twelve FBOs and FBO networks of different faith, to discuss collaboration on the pandemic response. This meeting resulted in the recommendations; to revitalize the 2012 Dialogue on Faith and Protection, collaborate stronger on advocacy and protection, as well as on advancing localization and to develop an interfaith campaign, addressing some of the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. To that effect, UNHCR established a Task Force with FBOs and FBO networks as well as UNHCR colleagues from Headquarters and Regional Bureaus, to take these recommendations forward. For World Mental Health Day in 2020, [a video was released](#) on good practices of collaboration of FBOs and UNHCR, and similar joint advocacy will be developed throughout 2021.

United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD)

Engagement with religious leaders

In 2020, UNITAD continued to prioritize the engagement of religious communities as partners in its activities. Doing so is particularly important in the light of the historical and cultural stigma attached to some of the crimes being investigated by the Team. Through effective communication and outreach, the Team has sought to harness the role that religious leaders and actors can play in helping survivors of crimes committed by ISIL to come forward with their accounts and reducing the risk of their being stigmatized because of the crimes they have suffered.

In line with that approach, the Special Adviser, building on his outreach to religious communities outlined in previous reports, met with a wide range of religious leaders during the year including the Head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Representative of the Shia religious authority in Karbala, the Chairman of the Sunni Iraqi Jurisprudence Council, the Yazidi Supreme Spiritual Leader and the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Mosul.

Adoption of the landmark Interfaith Statement on the Survivors and Victims of ISIL

Following that extensive engagement, and following the consultations held with religious communities during the visit to Iraq of the then Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, the Special Adviser and Head of the Investigative Team was delighted to support the adoption on 6 March 2020 by the religious leadership of the Christian, Kaka'i, Shia, Sunni and Yazidi communities of a document entitled "Interfaith statement on the victims of Da'esh".

The Statement provides a strong collective repudiation by all faith communities of ISIL ideology, and emphasizes the need to take concerted action to hold members of ISIL responsible for their crimes in accordance with the rule of law, building on the work of the Investigative Team. The Statement also places emphasis on giving effective support to survivors of crimes committed by ISIL in Iraq, in particular those that have suffered from sexual and gender-based violence.

Launch of the Interfaith Dialogue Series

Coinciding with the historic visit of Pope Francis to Iraq, the Investigative Team and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect announced the upcoming launch of the Interfaith Dialogue Series, which is planned to start in May 2021, in a number of cities in Iraq. The Series will commence through a high-level Interfaith Meeting in Baghdad of the leaders of the Chaldean Catholic, Kaka'i, Shia, Sunni and Yazidi faith and will provide a forum for Iraqi religious communities to come together and identify ways in which the collective response to the legacy of sectarian violence and ISIL crimes in Iraq may be strengthened.

Reflecting the core principles of the Interfaith Statement, the Dialogue Series will focus in particular on: (i) the barriers faced by members of religious communities to participating in accountability processes; (ii) the challenges faced by survivors in receiving the necessary support to retake their lives within their communities; (iii) how further dialogue can assist in re-building trust and understanding between religious communities in Iraq, in areas most impacted by ISIL crimes; and (iv) how collective messaging from Iraqi religious communities can address and counter hate speech and prevent incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence.

At the conclusion of the Series, a Protocol of Action will be adopted, drawing on the input from members of all participating communities and providing a framework for concrete steps to be taken by religious authorities in the realization of the principles of the Interfaith Statement.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC)

UNODC partners with FBO Coalition on Crime Prevention and Justice

As the UN has long realized the importance of engaging with faith-based actors and organizations in joint efforts to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, UNODC joined the UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on Religion and Sustainable Development in early 2019, a network of UN entities tasked to coordinate work with faith-based actors. Since then, UNODC has collaborated with the Coalition of Faith-based Organizations (FBOs)¹⁸ to expand its interactions with faith-based organizations in the prevention and fight against crime and promoting justice. The Coalition of FBOs, established in the margins of the 28th Commission of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2019, is an informal global network of faith-based actors, academics and NGOs. Since May 2020, UNODC has supported the Coalition of FBOs in a series of ten webinars highlighting, *inter alia*, the involvement of faith-based actors in crime prevention, humane treatment of prisoners, environmental crime, anti-corruption, restorative justice and victims' assistance, attracting over 1,000 participants. A special Report on the 2020 webinar series was published in early 2021. Members of the Coalition of FBOs actively participated in and contributed to several UNODC related conferences, including the Conference of Parties of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) in October 2020, the 29th Commission of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in December 2021 and the 14th UN Crime Congress in March 2021.

Recognising the need for systemic engagement with faith-based actors, UNODC is looking to enhance these partnerships in more segments of its work, including those that have been accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic such as gender-based violence and urban crime.

¹⁸ The FBO Coalition is co-sponsored by the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, an umbrella network which UNODC has worked closely with over many years.

World Bank Group (WBG)

The World Bank Group (WBG) has collaborated with faith-based actors over the years to join forces in the fight against extreme poverty. In 2020, the Bank fostered collaboration with a broad range of faith actors to advance shared development priorities, notably around the Human Capital Project (HCP), Women & Youth, Adaptation & Resilience, Fragility, Conflict & Violence and the COVID-19 pandemic response.

The World Bank's revamped faith engagement strategy focuses on deepening engagement with a diverse group of faith-based organizations and religious leaders that share in the Bank's mission of eradicating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. Highlights of the Bank's 2020 engagement with faith actors include the following initiatives:

COVID-19 Response: The WBG has assisted over 100 countries - home to 70% of the global population - so that they can tackle the health, economic and social impacts of the current global health emergency, contain the damage to their economies and plan for long-term recovery. FBOs have been key partners in the Bank's efforts of implementing a fast, flexible and broad-based response to the COVID-19 crisis through the following initiatives:

Global and Country-Level Engagement: In 2020, more than 140 FBOs were consulted as part of the Bank's mapping of the role of FBOs in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The stakeholder mapping - which highlighted the substantial role FBOs play in the provision of services that support interventions around prevention, mitigation and sustainability post-COVID-19 - was used to inform potential areas for faith collaboration with WBG client country offices around pandemic response.

Policy Dialogue with FBOs: During the 2020 Annual/Spring Meetings and the Civil Society Policy Forum (CSPF) of the WBG and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Bank's management conducted high-level dialogues with faith leaders to discuss the role of faith in development. The meetings - and subsequent policy engagements - provided a platform for knowledge sharing on the impact of faith-based organization work on the COVID-19 response and related sectors.

Strengthened Collaboration: The Bank continued to strengthen relations with faith actors and fostered an increased understanding of the role of FBOs in development by facilitating 35 meetings with new faith stakeholders in 2020 to explore potential opportunities to engage around shared priorities. In parallel, the Bank continued its engagement with FBOs and faith actors through the following key platforms:

Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty: The Bank facilitated monthly meetings with the Moral Imperative Steering Committee that informed faith engagement plans. This

group was initially convened by the Bank in April 2015 to launch an initiative of more than 40 diverse faith leaders to support the Bank's goals.

UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development (IATF-Religion): As a member of the IATF-Religion, the Bank met regularly with FBOs affiliated with the UN to advance the SDGs.

International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD): The Bank plays an active role as a member of the Steering Group of PaRD, an organization that brings together more than 100 governmental and intergovernmental entities to engage with CSOs and FBOs on the SDGs.

Increased Knowledge Sharing: The World Bank continued to strengthen knowledge sharing with faith actors through collaborating with partners to build a body of evidence around shared priorities. To this end, the Bank convened and facilitated regular meetings of the WBG Research Agenda Working Group (RAWG) on how faith's unique reach and trust influences critical social values for lasting impact in development. The RAWG - consisting of senior representatives from the UN system, the WBG, FBOs, faith leaders and academia – is developing a Terms of Reference that will inform data collection and evidence building about the role of faith and faith-based organizations in the delivery of the Bank's goals and priorities.

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Health Organization partnerships with faith communities during the COVID-19 pandemic

WHO recognizes that faith communities are an integral part of emergency preparedness and response. Past health emergencies have demonstrated the important role faith partners, as trusted community interlocutors, play in mobilizing community led action to protect, care for and advocate for marginalized or vulnerable people; sharing critical accurate and tailored health information; and providing spiritual care, guidance and support during times of crisis and uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified this role, especially given the importance of contextualizing guidance and recommendations for different faiths in real time to limit transmission and save lives.

Early in the pandemic response WHO issued practical considerations and recommendations co-developed with and for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19. This [document](#) and [risk assessment tool](#) provided practical guidance and recommendations to support the special role of religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and faith communities in COVID-19 education, preparedness, and response. The inputs and collaboration with faith leaders was instrumental to the feasibility and applicability of this guidance.

To further develop ongoing partnership WHO's Information Network for Epidemics (EPI-WIN) towards the end of 2020 team launched three 'communities of practice' (COPs) to help shape future work in three areas relevant to faith communities. The COP membership represents a diversity of faiths, regions across the globe, and a wealth of experience working in and with communities. These COPs work remotely, meeting on-line once per month. The three COPs are focused on:

i. Communication

Developing a communications strategy and communications materials for engagement with faith actors and other partners in the roll out of the COVID-19 Vaccine; including to address areas of vaccine hesitancy.

ii. Research, training and/or capacity building

Identify and develop a discrete set of 3-5 areas of joint research projects and/or learning initiatives, relevant to FBOs working at this stage of the Covid-19 pandemic. These will be targeted to meet specific gaps, based on understanding and assessment of the scope and reach of existing faith work in the area.

iii. Development of a **framework for engagement** between the WHO team and FBOs in the COVID-19 response and other health emergencies.

Looking forward to 2021

World Health Organization Director General and Religions for Peace, Secretary General convened a roundtable dialogue on COVID-19

On the 19th March 2021, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Prof. Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace, met with senior global faith leaders in a closed dialogue discussion. The discussion acknowledged the critical role of faith leaders and faith communities in the COVID-19 response, with a specific focus on vaccine access, equity and acceptance. This dialogue culminated in renewed commitments to continue and strengthen the partnerships between WHO and the faith community.

In addition to strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones, the work of the EPI-WIN team with Faith communities will continue through the COPs, advancing where possible the following objectives:

1. Demonstrate practical examples of partnerships between national governments, WHO and faith communities
2. Advocate for equity and access to vaccines
3. Highlight the role & impact of faith communities in health emergencies
4. Expose challenges and barriers for faith communities during the pandemic
5. Strengthen partnerships/linkages particularly between WHO headquarters, regional and country offices and faith communities

This work will be done in close collaboration with other UN partners, in particular UNICEF.

WHO work with faith communities in countries

Given the far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in all countries, WHO works to provide accurate and accessible health information and recommendations for everyone. The below examples are only a snapshot of the numerous partnerships fostered between WHO, governments and faith communities around the world.

Laos PDR

The Ministry of Health, the Lao Front for National Development and the Central Buddhist Fellowship have worked together since early on in the COVID-19 pandemic on issues such as safe and dignified funerals and safe ceremonies. In addition, 200 Chief Monks, who lead temples in Vientiane Capital, met with health officials in July 2020 to discuss community level action to prevent COVID-19 and combat the fear, stigma and discrimination outbreaks can bring. Summarising the importance of the Buddhist community to the health sector, Acting WHO Representative Dr Howard Sobel said: “Chief Monks are ideally placed to mobilize community-level action – not just against COVID-19, but also against new and deadly disease that may emerge in the future. Their support and collaboration right now is hugely important in Lao PDR.”

Papua New Guinea

With the support of the WHO PNG country office the PNG Council of Churches and the National Broadcasting Corporation launched in early 2020 a radio and TV program – The PNG Hour of Hope – to provide daily COVID-19 information and spiritual guidance. The program, featuring a faith leader and a WHO expert, provided up-to-date protective health and hygiene practices, sought to answer frequently asked questions and concerns collected from the community, and addressed issues surrounding stigma and discrimination. In a country where the vast majority of health

services are serviced by the faith community, the program successfully harnessed the trust and reach of the national FBOs and churches to provide vital health information and education to the country at large.

Afghanistan and Pakistan

During its seventh annual meeting in December 2020 the Islamic Advisory Group for Polio Eradication (IAG) acknowledged the unprecedented challenges to polio eradication posed by the disruptions to health care delivery, including to routine immunization and polio vaccination campaigns, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The IAG supports the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, of which WHO is a key implementing partner, to achieve the goal of polio eradication. Noting that Afghanistan and Pakistan are now the only remaining countries globally with endemic wild poliovirus transmission, the IAG urged the governments of both countries to fast-track efforts to eradicate polio and called upon religious leaders to fully support ongoing polio eradication efforts and mobilize caregivers to regularly vaccinate their children against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases. Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, expressed his appreciation of the partnership with IAG, stating that “We need to learn from the COVID-19 response, which has demonstrated yet again the important role played by the IAG, religious scholars and faith-based organizations in dealing with global health emergencies. The COVID-19 response has shown the value of collaboration among countries and stakeholders in sharing information and technology to mitigate the global ramifications of this health crisis.”

Kenya

The World Health Organization (WHO) in Kenya collaborated with faith organizations through the Ministry of Health to bolster outreach to communities on health education and safety about COVID-19. Working with health experts, the Muslim community has established guidelines on safe burials as well as closed places of worship as appropriate to limit transmission. In a similar vein one of the oldest churches in Nairobi, Christ Is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), produced television, radio and online broadcasts reaching around 200 000 people safely in their homes on Sundays. As Dr Rudi Eggers, WHO representative in Kenya, shared “We encourage and support the efforts of the faith communities in the fight against coronavirus. We work with their leaders because they are major stakeholders with credible links and influence among communities.”

India

Throughout 2020 WHO India and partners have held sessions with faith-based organizations and government officials in a number of states. In May, stakeholders came together to organize a virtual meet in Mumbai under the ambit of the larger risk communications and community engagement strategy. The religious leaders present unanimously echoed that the pandemic has united everyone and that compassion and cooperation are important virtues that every human must emulate. The faith-based organizations committed to engaging with communities to promote safety measures, advocate for the well-being of the population at-risk and sensitize the communities to not discriminate against the health workers and people infected with COVID-19.

United Kingdom

In November 2020 WHO Directors provided a technical briefing on the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccine development to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who convened senior Archbishops and Bishops from the world-wide Anglican Communion for the briefing. Following this, these senior religious leaders issued [a communique](#) calling for equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines. Subsequently, he convened faith leaders from different faith traditions, along with representatives from UK government and NGOs to plan a UK-wide fund-raising campaign in support of vaccine purchase and roll out through the COVAX facility.

Publications and communications

WHO has published several faith specific guidance, including:

[Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19](#), which includes a [risk assessment tool](#), and [decision tree for assessing transmission risks religious mass gatherings](#). In addition, a specific interim guidance for Ramadan was published in April 2020: [Safe Ramadan practices in the context of COVID-19](#).

In addition, WHO shared public messaging specifically regarding faith at global, regional and country levels throughout the pandemic response. These messages included communications about faith celebrations (examples from [WHO WPRO](#) and [WHO EMRO](#)) and the role of faith leaders (examples from [WHO EMRO](#) and [WHO SEARO](#)).

Annex I: List of the UN Interagency Task Force Members 2020

UN Agencies

International Labor Organization (ILO)

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

United Nations Counter Terrorism Executive Secretariat (UNCTED)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

United Nations Department of Global Communications (UNDPI NGO)

United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPPA)

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

United Nations Office of Legal Affairs (UN Office of Legal Affairs)

United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG)

United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (SRSG on Violence Against Children)

United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC)

United Nations Volunteers Program (UNV)

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN)

World Bank Group (WBG)

World Food Program (WFP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

Annex II: Multifaith Advisory Council Membership

Organization	Representative
ACT Alliance	Mr. Rudelmar Bueno de Faria
Adventist Development and Relief Agency	Mr. Jonathan Duffy
Al-Azhar University: Centre for Population Studies	Prof. Dr. Gamal I. Serour
Arigatou	Mr. Mustafa Ali
Baha'i International Community	Ms. Bani Dugal
Bhumi Global	Mr. Gopal Patel
Caritas Internationalis	Mr. Joseph Donnelly
Church of Latter Day Saints	Mr. Ryan Koch
Finn Church Aid/FCA	Ms. Tarja Kantola
Global Interfaith WASH Alliance	Sadhviji Bhagvati Saraswati
Global One	Dr. Husna Ahmed
GreenFaith	Fr. Fletcher Harper
INERELA - International Network of Religious Leaders Living With and Impacted by HIV and AIDS	Rev. Phumzile Mabizela
Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science	Dr. Fazlun Khaled
Jewish Theological Seminary, USA	Rabbi Burton Vizotsky
Joint Learning Initiative	Ms. Kirsten Laursen Muth
KAICIID Dialogue Centre	Mr. Faisal Bin Muammar
Musawah	Ms. Zaynah Anwar
Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV)	Ms. Ani Zonneveld
Nahdatul Ulama	Ms. Alisa Wahid
Parliament of the World's Religions	Ms. Audrey Kitagawa
Religions for Peace	Rev. Kyoichi Sugino
Sant Egidio	Prof. Andrea Bartoli
Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society	Imam Sayed Razawi
Tanenbaum	Rev. Mark Fowler
The Archbishop of Canterbury	Mr. Jack Palmer-White
The Focolare Movement	Ms. Maddalena (Maddie) Maltese
The Interfaith Center of Sustainable Development	Rabbi Yonatan Neril
The International Center for Religion and Diplomacy	Mr. James Patton
The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers	Dr. Mohamed El Sanousi
Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation	Ms. Debra Boudreax
United Religions Initiative	Mr. Mussie Hailu

World Council of Churches

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca

World Evangelical Alliance

Commissioner Christine
MacMillan

World Evangelical Alliance Sustainability Center

Mr. Matthias Boehning

World Jewish Congress

Dr. Maram Stern

World YWCA

Ms. Casey Harden

World Vision International

Rev. Christo Greyling

Church of Sweden¹⁹

Islamic Relief Worldwide²⁰

¹⁹ Membership of the Church of Sweden is currently put on hold, in pursuant to Ms. Margareta Grape withdrew from MFAC as the representative of the Church of Sweden.

²⁰ Membership of Islamic Relief World to the MFAC is currently put on hold, in pursuant to its leadership Mr. Naser Hagmad stepped down from his role as CEO of IRW.

Annex III: UNIATF ToR

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR COORDINATION/CONVENING OF THE UN INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE ON RELIGION/IATF-REL

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development was set up in 2010 as part of the UN Development Group UNDG, at the behest of 8 UN Principals and the then WB President.

The functions of the Interagency Task Force on Religion, in accordance with its own Terms of Reference, are to:

- *Institutional Memory/Knowledge Management*: Cull and share guidance on activities/initiatives, as well as lessons learned around UN system engagement with religion and faith-based actors;
- *Capacity Building*: Build UN system staff capacities on/around intersections of religion with development, human rights and peace and security dynamics;
- *Guidance and Oversight*: Maintain a system-wide database of vetted faith-based NGO partners,
- *Policy Advice*: Provide strategic policy guidance to respective UN entities and leadership thereof, upon request.
- *Coordination and collaboration*: Provide a forum for promoting and strengthening interagency cooperation, including through joint initiatives, programming and advocacy.

UN IATF CO-CHAIRS AND EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT. TERMS OF SERVICE.

- For the period 2020-2022, two UN entities will co-chair the UN IATF. A third UN entity will serve as executive secretariat:
 - In 2020, the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) will serve as co-Chairs. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) will provide support as executive secretariat.
 - In 2021, UNAOC and UNFPA will serve as co-Chairs. OSAPG will provide support as executive secretariat.
 - In 2022, UNFPA and OSAPG will serve as co-Chairs. UNAOC will provide support as executive secretariat.

DUTIES and RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CO-CHAIRS

- The co-Chairs convene the meetings of the IATF (at minimum 3 times per year), propose the IATF meeting agendas, co-lead on conducting the meetings and draft meeting notes for circulation and feedback by the members.

- The co-Chairs of the Task Force effectively serve to support Task Force Members towards some form of coherence in outreach with FBOs, in line with strategic advisement consonant with the Task Force’s Guidelines of engagement with FBOs.
- In that regard, the co-Chairs will liaise not only internally with the UN system members, but also with partner faith-based NGOs and religious actors.
- For any given engagement by the IATF in all different modalities including side-events, convening of meetings, strategic learning, and any other engagements, as appropriate, the co-Chairs and the executive secretariat will agree on their respective roles and responsibilities regarding the organization thereof, including which entity will be in the lead. The lead will reach out to the two other two entities for their required support.

DUTIES and RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT:

The executive secretariat will provide support to the co-Chairs by:

- Ensure effective coordination and communication within the Task Force, between the Task Force and the MFAC, and the wider faith-based community, including by:
 - Disseminating news, announcements, publications (by UN entities, FBO partners and other related/relevant institutions).
 - Receiving communications from UN IATF partners and external partners and sharing them with the co-Chairs.
- Providing updates and oversight for the global Directory of FBO partners to the UN system.
- Providing formal representational functions if and when required.

The co-Chairs and executive secretariat support UN system members of the Task Force to deliver, jointly, on each of the following responsibilities of the Task Force:

Knowledge Management:

- Ensure regular updates/briefings by the different members are held, and minutes thereof prepared, such that the Task Force is convened at least 3 times a year (including virtually).
- Facilitate and advise UN members as to opportunities for joint advocacy events taking place under respective UN auspices and suggest synergies and FBO speakers/partners where appropriate/requested.
- Prepare an Annual Report showcasing highlights of UN members’ efforts to deal with religious dynamics and engage with religious actors and disseminate among governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.
- Provide yearly inputs on behalf of UN Task Force into SG Report on Intercultural and Interreligious activities for Peace.

Capacity Building:

- Hosting, organizing and facilitating a Strategic Learning Exchange for and with IATF and FBO partners at least once a year.
- Organize specific training sessions for UN colleagues and FBO partners upon request.
- Seek to instigate and to support (including logistically) joint initiatives undertaken by several UN IATF members at different moments of the year (see FAQ).

Guidance/Oversight over Database:

- The co-Chairs and the executive secretariat will undertake regular updates of the Database.

Policy Advice:

- Upon request, the co-Chairs respond to requests for policy guidance which can include inputs to briefing notes or speeches, answering questions about UN system-wide engagement from sister UN system entities, and/or advice and answer questions from and about FBO partners.

Support for the Multi-Faith Advisory Council

- The co-Chairs and the Executive Secretariat will provide support to the Multi Faith Advisory Council and facilitate the interactions between the MFAC and the Task Force.
- Keep the Council connected with regular communications and information sharing.
- Co-organize with Council members a yearly Kofi Annan Faith Briefing at a mutually agreed time.

Annex IV: MFAC ToR 2020

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR MULTI-FAITH ADVISORY COUNCIL

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-Religion) was set up in 2010, to provide policy guidance around engaging with faith-based actors, deepen UN system staff capacities on/around intersections of religion with the UN pillars of development, human rights and peace and security dynamics, as well as provide strategic policy guidance on the above.

The Multi-faith Advisory Council (MFAC) was convened by the UN IATF-Religion in September 2018 as an informal and voluntary entity, composed of the UN system's faith-based partners, reflecting the diversity of religions, regional and national presence, and covering thematic areas which mirror the UN's mandate.

Thematic areas of focus agreed shared strategic priorities between UN and faith-based and faith-inspired partners²¹ for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace Agenda. The major themes are prioritized by the MFAC in its bi-annual work plan:

- Environment (including forests, climate change and resource efficiency)
- Migration (including children, trafficking, education)
- Gender Justice
- Financing for Development
- Peacemaking and Security (including food security, peacebuilding and reconciliation, and humanitarian engagement)
- Health

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MULTI-FAITH ADVISORY COUNCIL

The MFAC will provide strategic advice and support to the IATF-Religion on the prioritized thematic areas in order to:

- Assist the United Nations system through strengthened human rights-based policy advocacy within and outside of the UN system.
- Assist in coordinating direct and systematic outreach, interaction and engagement with faith-based and faith-inspired entities, and between faith-based NGOs and UN entities.
- Enhance focus on and knowledge around religious literacy, representation and dynamics at and within the United Nations.
- Encourage greater partnership and joint actions between UN entities and faith-based/inspired actors; and
- Serve the greater faith-based community to understand the UN mandate and engagement.

The MFAC shall abide by the rules, regulations and principles of the United Nations, and be composed according to the common guidelines for NGO engagement in the UN system.

To that end, the DUTIES/ RESPONSIBILITIES of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council shall include:

- Taking the lead to co-design and implement (at least) one annual joint IATF-Religion and Faith-based Organization Strategic Review of Partnerships, as well as contribute to the Annual

²¹ As agreed during the UN-FBO "Strategic Retreat on Engaging with religious actors for the Realization of the SDGs" April 5, 2017

Symposium on the Role of Religion and International Affairs.

- Promoting and raising awareness on the work of the United Nations within their respective networks and constituencies globally through advocacy and outreach initiatives - using both traditional and new media.
- Serving as, and advising as regards to, speakers at United Nations meetings, workshops and conferences on the above agreed upon themed areas, as and when required by the IATF-Religion members.
- Providing a short Report annually on its activities, assessment of impact, and recommendations to enhance policy coordination and collaboration, to be included in the IATF-Religion Annual Report, which is shared with the UN System and diverse partner entities.

MEMBERSHIP AND ELIGIBILITY

- The Multi-faith Advisory Council shall be composed of faith-based and/or faith-inspired legally registered NGOs (at least in one member state) that have partnered (or are partnering) with the UN on advocacy, and/or are implementing partners of/with UN system entity members of the IATF-Religion, with a preference for those with, or in the process of seeking ECOSOC accreditation.
- Members will act within the capacity as Multi-faith Advisory Council members, and officially represent such, as and when requested or approved by the IATF-Religion.

SELECTION OF MEMBERS

Multi-faith Advisory Council Members will be selected by UN system members of the IATF-Religion according to the “Criteria for Religious Engagement” developed by the UN Task Force. Each UN member of the IATF-Religion will be asked to nominate between 3-5 faith-based/inspired partners. The organization nominated by more than one entity will be prioritized for the short list. The MFAC may also suggest to the IATF-Religion potential faith-based/inspired organizations to become members of the MFAC, which meet or not the eligibility criteria above and that bring an added- value to the purpose of the partnership.

In addition to an established track record of acting in conformity with UN values and principles, and giving preference to those with UN-ECOSOC accreditation, the criteria for selection of which organizations serve as Multi-faith Advisory Council members require a balance of the following:

- Religious organizational representation (i.e. covering diverse religions/faiths/denominations, ecumenical and interfaith).
- Thematic area(s) of expertise and interventions (development, humanitarian, human rights and peace and security).
- Gender.
- Youth; and
- Presence (global, regional and local).

STRUCTURE

The Advisory Council should not exceed forty faith-based/inspired Representatives.

The Members may choose up to four Co-Chairs if deemed helpful to communication among each other. The Co-Chairs should represent diverse faith-based entities.

TERM

MFAC members will be appointed for a two-year term, renewable for two additional years. It is desirable to replace only a subset of the membership every two years in order to keep the institutional memory forward.

DECISION-MAKING

The deliberations of the MFAC are based on mutual respect and recognize the diversity of the work and the discernment of faith actors, as UN member states also do. Decision as MFAC will be made primarily on a consensual basis, and if and when necessary, each member of the Council shall have one equal vote. Any externally appointed advisors/observers will have observer status and no voting power.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UN IATF-RELIGION TOWARDS THE MULTI FAITH ADVISORY GROUP

- Make available materials and information on the work of the United Nations and emerging issues related to religion, religious engagement, and each UN Task Force relevant report, data or analysis.
- Encourage the inclusion of Multi-faith Advisory Council members in activities and initiatives of the United Nations' members of IATF-Religion.
- Disseminate the relevant publications and program materials and outcomes of the Multi-faith Advisory Council members among the UN entities and operational offices.
- Provide policy, strategic, tactical advice and facilitation/mediation and connectivity with and within UN entities, to Multi-Faith Advisory Council members if/when requested.
- When available, UN Task Force members may provide resources to support the implementation of Multi-Faith Advisory Council Members' activities based on mutual consent between the organization and the UN entity/entities. However, members of the Multi-faith Advisory Council will not receive any remuneration from the IATF-Religion.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE UN IATF-RELIGION

The Multi-Faith Advisory Council members will communicate with all members of the IATF-Religion and can do so either individually (keeping all members copied/informed), or choose to do so via the IATF-Religion Conveners/Chairs.

TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

Members of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council will be removed by the IATF-Religion members, if the UN entity/entities deem a misuse the UN logo, flag or engagement in activities contrary to the Organization's principles.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE CHAIRS OF THE MULTI-FAITH ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE UN INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE ON RELIGION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

The Multi-faith Advisory Council to the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-Religion) is an informal and voluntary entity, composed of the UN system's faith-based partners, reflecting the diversity of religions, regional and national presence, and covering thematic areas which mirror the UN's mandate. The role of the Multi-faith Advisory Council is, inter alia, to provide strategic advice and support to the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development.

The following Terms of Reference define the duties and responsibilities of the Multi-faith Advisory Council's Chairs who constitute the Council's leadership.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHAIRS

The Chairs serve as the focal point for communication and collaboration with the IATF-Religion.

The Chairs are responsible for resourcing, and/or coordinating resourcing efforts, to fund activities and operations undertaken by the Council.

The Chairs are responsible for the facilitation of the Council's meetings and must ensure that the Council meets, in person or via conference calls, on a regular basis.

The Chairs are responsible for facilitating, coordinating, and ensuring the initiation of activities undertaken by the Council to fulfill the Council's Terms of Reference.

The Chairs are responsible for coordinating the Council's outreach, communications, and mediation to ensure the Council acts as one and speaks as one collective in its mission to advise the IATF-Religion and advance sustainable development.

The Chairs are accountable to the Multi-faith Advisory Council members and, as they are nominated by them, they are also responsible to honor their collective wish and speak only in their collective voice.

ELIGIBILITY AND NOMINATION

A total of four Chairs, with equal rights and responsibilities, shall be appointed from among the members of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council.

Any Chair must always be a member of the Multi-faith Advisory Council. If, for any reason, a Chair ceases to be a member of the Advisory Council per the Terms of Reference for the Multi-faith Advisory Council, the Chair will cease to serve in that function and a new one will be nominated by the Council's members.

Members of the Multi-faith Advisory Council nominate candidates for Council's Chairs to IATF-Religion representatives. Of these nominations, IATF-Religion representatives choose and appoint four Chairs based on the IATF's Terms/Criteria of Engagement.

These Criteria require that the Chairs come from a diverse array of faith traditions and geographical regions and maintain a gender balance in line with the Council’s overall goal of diversity and representativity.

TERM LENGTH

Chairs will serve for a period of two years effective from their appointment at the request of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development member organizations.

REFERENCES

Terms of Reference for the Multi-Faith Advisory Council

Annex V: MFAC Report 2020



**Multifaith Advisory Council to the IATF on Faith and
Development Yearly report of the co-chairs of the MFAC**

December 2020

**Prepared by Dr Husna Ahmad OBE on behalf of the co-
chairs**



1. Introduction and background

Following the inception of the Multi faith Advisory Council to the Interagency Taskforce on Religion and Development in October 2019, the Co-chairs of the Multifaith Advisory Council were in post for one year. The foundational work of the Chair of the IATF Professor Azza Karam and the co-chairs Dr Faisal Muammar, Ms Sadhvi Saraswati, Ms Jean Duff and Ms Tarja Kantola set the tone for the development and effectiveness of the MFAC. In October 2019 the original co- chairs stepped down and four members of the MFAC were elected to the role of Co-chairs of the MFAC by the IATF. They are Mr. Rudelmar Bueno de Faria of Act Alliance, Ms. Bani Dugal of the Baha'i International Communities' UN Office, Mr. Gopal Patel of Bhumi Global and Dr. Husna Ahmad of Global One. Our term as Co-chairs of the MFAC is for two years until 2021. The purpose of this annual report is to give an outline of the activities and methodology of working as a Multi faith Advisory Council since our appointment. We will also explore the complexities of working with the UN and how the MFAC is navigating that space.

2. MFAC Secretariat

The MFAC Co-chairs understand and take very seriously the responsibility placed upon us and it is indeed an honour to serve. We know that our duty is to represent the thoughts and concerns of our 40 strong MFAC members; and to be enablers for our advice to be given when requested by the UN IATF. Our interaction with the UNIATF is as the elected representatives of our membership.

We initiated some housekeeping norms in order to ensure the smooth running of our duties as per the TORs. We realized that the TORs had to be revisited and so they were a priority for the first MFAC retreat in December 2019. The members and the UN IATF members were able to spend some time on reflecting on the relationship between the two entities during the retreat. It was agreed that the MFAC members would have some time to reflect and provide their input into the TORs and they would be revised and amended through a joint effort. This set a very good tone to the working relationship between the two entities. At the beginning of 2020 this task was completed and both the MFAC members and the UNIATF were able to revise the TORs to reflect the commitment of both entities and enable the MFAC to advise the UN effectively.

Soon after the election of the four Co-chairs we set up a common email which we are able to access and utilize for emails to the full MFAC; it is un.mfac@gmail.com. We also developed a working logo with the UN IATF co -chairs. We would like to receive feedback from the MFAC members about the logo and if acceptable we will make it the official logo of MFAC.

Although discussions have taken place about the development of an MFAC website and developing a yearly budget for the MFAC these have still not come into fruition.

3. MFAC Retreat 2019

The retreat took place in New York City from 5-6 December 2019. Two of our MFAC members graciously provided the venues and lunch and refreshments for the retreat.

On the first day the venue was the Baha'i International Community's UN office, 866 UN Plaza, New York, NY and the second day of the retreat took place at the LDS Church's Office - 125 Columbus Avenue, New York.

The day commenced with a moment of silence followed by introductions. A report on the previous years' activities by the previous MFAC Chairs was presented. The new Co- chairs thanked the outgoing chairs for their wonderful contribution to MFAC.

The first day was an opportunity for discussion and reflection. It was spent exploring the role of the MFAC vis a vis the UN IATF and how we saw ourselves supporting the UN. It was spent defining our priorities and preparing our draft Plan of Action for 2020-2021.

The second day was a joint conversation with the UN IATF and revising the draft Plan of Action for 2020 -2021 with their input.

The expected outcomes from the retreat were:

- Participants have a chance to interact and get to know each other
- Participants are aware of the work done by the Council since its creation and understand the major issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve MFAC's goals
- Participants are aware of the MFAC mandate and have identified potential issues that need to be clarified or changed in the ToRs.
- Participants have a common understanding on the mission and role of the MFAC vis-à-vis the global context and the expectations from the UN and agree on a strategic approach to perform its role. Participants also know the issues and approaches to speak with one voice or in harmony as Council and those issues that require further reflection and dialogue to work on as Council
- Consented priorities for thematic areas and issues are identified and strategies are in place for each one of them
- A draft Plan of Action is in place. MFAC members know how the Council will work in the next two years
- Participants have a common understanding on the major issues that require attention from both the MFAC and UN-IATF. Participants also understand the issues and approaches needed from the Council to support the UN.

Please find the agenda and the minutes of the MFAC retreat 2019 in appendix two



4. Engagement with UN IATF

This past year has seen a COVID- 19 pandemic which has been at a level unprecedented in living memory. It has impacted the whole world and not only taken the lives of loved ones but has affected the financial and social fabric of every part of the earth. It has made us more reflective and thoughtful and we do not know how it will impact the achievement of the UN Sustainable development Goals but many of us are pushing for a green reset.

With the restrictions on travel and maintaining social distancing, the MFAC has been to work through the available technologies such as zoom and although it has limited our physical interaction, we believe that we have been more busy than ever in the virtual meeting spaces.

There are four UN -IATF Co -chairs and the three entities that they represent have a rotational responsibility for the UN IATF Secretariat. For 2019 the Coordinator for the Executive Secretariat of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development was Saskia Schellekens, Senior Culture Adviser UNFPA; the three other co- chairs are Ms. Nihal Saad Chief of Cabinet and Spokesperson for the High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; Ms. Ana Jimenez Political Advisor United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; and Ms. Simona Cruciani, Political Affairs officer UN Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect. The UN-IATF Secretariat has been supported by Ms. Chuqiu Peng, Consultant, Policy and Strategy Division (PSD) at UNFPA.

The UN-IATF Co-chairs initiated monthly meetings with the MFAC Co-chairs to review and discuss the work of the MFAC. On several occasions the UN IATF have requested the Co-chairs to share information with the MFAC which we have done. We as the co-chairs have tried our best to ensure the full MFAC are kept fully updated about our meetings with the UN -IATF co-chairs either via email updates or during our full MFAC meetings.

We have also had the opportunity for the MFAC Co-chairs to meet the wider UN IATF to give them an update. In the same spirit the UN- IATF co-chairs also had the opportunity to join a full MFAC and introduce themselves and answer any questions from the membership.

We have worked collaboratively with the UN-IATF on our TORs; issuing a joint statement on COVID; writing to the UN Secretary General about the UN 75th Anniversary event; the actual virtual UN 75th event; the video celebrating Faith in the UN; and developing the agenda and programme for the 2020 MFAC/UN-IATF Retreat.

It has not been easy and there have been some misunderstandings and miscommunication but on the whole it has been a very good experience through which we as Co-chairs we have learnt a lot. We have found the key to our engagement with the UN-IATF has been our mutual respect and good will towards each other as well as understanding that this is a new relationship which needs time to be nurtured and developed.

We are sorry to see Ms. Saskia Schellekens leave her role as Co-chair and coordinator and we wish her much luck and success in her future role within the UN system.

5. Activities

ï Joint statement by UN/MFAC on COVID-19

The UN -IATF co-chairs drafted a joint statement and requested the MFAC to kindly become signatories to the statement. The draft statement was circulated to the fullMFAC and within 24 hours all members signed up to the statement. Please find the Joint statement on COVID-19 in Appendix three.

ï Letter to the Secretary General

On 7th July 2020 a letter to the UN Secretary General Mr Antonio Guterres was sent through the UN-IATF on behalf of the MFAC. It was a letter of appreciation and congratulations on the 75th Anniversary of the UN. It was also an invitation to join the UN 75th anniversary event in September 2020. Unfortunately, the Secretary General was unable to attend the event due to prior commitments but sent a response through his office on 31st August 2020 commending the initiative and sending his appreciation for the invitation and his best wishes for a successful event through individual letters to each of the MFAC Co-chairs.

ï Working groups

The MFAC membership decided to set up Working groups to take forward the work of the MFAC throughout the year. Initially three working groups were set up:- Gender, Environment and UN 75. However with the global crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic there was a consensus among the MFAC membership to set up a COVID-19 working group too. Below is a brief summary of each of the 4 working groups.

ï Gender Working group

The Gender Working Group initiated work together in May 2020 and holds monthly meetings. There are two co-chairs Ani Zonneveld, Muslims for Progressive Values, and Casey Harden, World YWCA

The focus of 2020 work to date:

- ï Getting to know other members and their unique perspective on the opportunity for the working group to address the nexus of gender and faith.
- ï The development of a gender focused tool for MFAC to use individual and collectively as MFAC work is done.
- ï Expanding the membership of the group to include gender diversity.
- ï To identify and formally establish (i.e. publish) a purpose statement and goals/opportunities for the working group and or the MFAC to pursue related to gender.
- ï And, to build a community of sharing for the members of the group, on issue of gender and faith.

Additionally, the GWG continued to track and, as warranted, discuss the progress of the Generation Equality Forum, and other United Nations efforts related to for example Beijing +25, to determine opportunities to get involved.

For 2020, one specific goal was adopted by the GWG - to create a tool for the MFAC to use related to gender, to help ensure that discussion and work of the MFAC always includes a gender lens. The tool was created with the intention to have the full MFAC endorse not only the tool, but the purpose and intent of the tool as a utility.

The guiding questions are a mechanism to focus on gender inclusiveness, to enhance gender-responsive dialogue, programming and activities, and management/leadership by the individuals that represent their respective organizations on MFAC, when working together. The guiding questions have been endorsed by the MFAC Gender Working Group and awaits full endorsement from the MFAC.

ï **COVID-19 Working group**

This working group has been meeting monthly since June 2020. The co-chairs of the COVID -19 Working group are Ms Alison Kelly of Act Alliance, Ms Debra Boudreaux of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation and Ms Kirsten Laursen Muth of the Joint Learning Initiative.

The Goal statement for the COVID WG is:

Working within the overall guidelines of the MFAC, be a resource to MFAC and UNIATF on collective response of FBOs to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to express a faith perspective, and support faith engagement and potential partnerships and sharing of good practices among FBOs and the UN.

Objectives of the COVID WG:

1. To collect, collate and share data and information on Faith and COVID-19 to reflect the collective response of the MFAC membership

To interact with the different MFAC working groups to ensure common understanding, approaches and coherence around Faith and COVID-19 and explore the intersections with a broad range of human rights issues, including the MFAC thematic priorities

Make values and evidence-based statements about the role and contribution of FBOs to the COVID response

To contribute to multi-faith pandemic recovery strategies to promote a new paradigm for humanity, based on solidarity, inclusion and equality.

From June to August, the WG focused on Objective 1: to collect and collate information about MFAC members' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The WG was clear that it did not want to duplicate existing efforts, but that it was also important to know what the MFAC membership itself was doing.

Time and capacity shaped the parameters and scope of the data collection. Under the research supervision of Dr Olivia Wilkinson, Director of Research, JLI, and with the assistance of staff and interns from Religions for Peace and the ACT/WCC EUNO office, a database was developed, documenting all the COVID-19 related activities and resources of MFAC members, as drawn from their publicly available websites and publications.

With the collection of the raw data, the WG worked to develop and fine tune the categorization of work, both by sector and by type of activity, including designation of activities by primary/secondary/tertiary focus. This data was analysed and then summarized in a report circulated to the entire MFAC membership.

i Environment Working group

The Chairs of the Environment working group are Jack Palmer White, UN representative, Anglican Communion and Gopal Patel of Bhumi Global. Mr Matthias Boehning of WEA Sustainability Centre had initially indicated an interest to lead this Working group but unfortunately was unable to continue in that role.

The WG was formed initially to engage with UN FCCC Conference of Parties 26 planned for November 2020. Due to its postponement because of the COVID-19 pandemic the Environment Working group has had to rethink its work plan this past year as the COP 26 which should have taken place in Glasgow in November 2020 has now been postponed until November 2021.

The group has been monitoring developments of COP 26 and has had a couple of meetings with the UNEP lead Dr Iyad Abumoghli and the UNFCCC lead Mr Santosh Thanjavur Prakasam. This is now being seen as an opportunity to make more detailed preparations for the event and the Group has developed activities and plans for the next 12 months.

ii **UN 75th Working group**



This year 2020 was a significant milestone for the UN as the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. The co-chairs of this working group are Ms Audrey Kitagawa, Parliament of World's Religions and Ms Rebeca Rios-Kohn, Arigatou International. This WG did an amazing job in organizing and convening a global event for the UN 75th Anniversary. We are most grateful to Ms Kitagawa for her contribution to the production of the video. The UN 75th Working group were able to engage the full MFAC in delivering both an event and a video which we can be proud of as a legacy of the MFAC.

The virtual global conference on September 8, 2020 which included the screening of the video “Together for Humanity - Faith in the United Nations” produced by in collaboration with the UN Interagency Task Force held on 8 September 2020 It was a mammoth task in a new world of COVID-19 restrictions where people could not meet but they circumvented all the obstacles to organize a seamless and incredible event which was watched by 5000 viewers worldwide. The commemoration was live streamed and included musical interludes and videos from key stakeholders.

ii **4.4.1 Together for Humanity: Faith in the United Nations**

This was the title of the video that was produced by members of MFAC for the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the UN which tells the story for the first time of the significant engagement and contributions by faith-based organizations and faith leaders over the 75 years of the United Nations. This ten-minute inspirational video was produced documents the important role religious and faith communities and spiritual traditions have played over the last 75 years with the UN. The video presents the importance of peace, the sanctity of life, the need to uphold human rights and justice for all. All major faith and spiritual traditions were represented in the video. It also highlights the important work and services, which often go unnoticed or ignored, that faith-based and inspired organizations and communities have carried out in keeping with the UN's Charter. We are most grateful to Ms Kitagawa for her contribution to the production of the video.

ii **Challenges and opportunities faced by MFAC**

The key challenges faced by the MFAC this year has been the time commitment to contributing and supporting the efforts of this Advisory Council. All the members are giving their time as volunteers and for those representatives from smaller organisations this has an impact on capacity. Other challenges include the relationship with MFAC and other similar initiatives such as PaRD and the Moral Imperative and how to navigate the overlap and cooperation between these different entities. Funding is also an issue which has not come to the fore this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic as so much has been done virtually with little expenditure but in preparation for post COVID-19 this is an issue that needs to be focused on for the future development of the MFAC.

There have been many opportunities for the MFAC as this has been a very productive year with a strong focus on building our Working groups and a strong working relationship developing within the MFAC. We are now engaging much more with the UN -IATF members thanks to the leadership shown by the Co-chairs of the UN-IATF.

ii **Moving forward**

We are confident that the coming year will be one of hope and joy. Our vision is becoming synthesized as the forward plans of all the working groups are being prepared and will be confirmed during the 2020 MFAC retreat. We look forward to supporting the UN-IATF to serve humanity and build a peaceful and just world which leaves no one behind.

