



**2023 Annual Report**  
**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)

			
			
			
			
			
			
 <p>UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children</p>			

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# IATF and MFAC

## **Background of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF) and the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC)**

The UN Interagency Task Force (IATF) on Religion and Sustainable Development was established in 2010 as a platform for knowledge exchange and management, capacity building, system-wide guidance, and oversight regarding engagement with faith-based and faith-inspired civil society organizations and religious leaders as strategic partners. Since its inception, the IATF has been chaired and convened by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as a pioneer agency within the UN system that engages faith-based and faith-inspired partners. Since 2020, a system of Co-Chairship was established. UNFPA, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) assumed the role of Co-Chairs, with a three-year mandate.

The three-year mandate of the Co-Chairship ended in December 2022. In March 2023 – after a process of voting handled by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) – UNFPA, OSAPG and UNAOC were re-appointed as IATF Co-Chairs for another three-year cycle (2023-25).

In 2018, the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the UN IATF (MFAC) was formed to provide strategic advice and support to the United Nations on prioritized thematic areas. The Multi-Faith Advisory Council brings together representatives of 35 UN-system's faith-based partners, reflecting the diversity of religions or beliefs, regions and national presence, and covering thematic areas that mirror the UN's mandate.

### **Highlights of the IATF-MFAC work in 2023**

In 2023, UNFPA held the Secretariat function among the three IATF Co-Chairs. This included the planning, convening, and reporting on:

- Three IATF meetings (12 January, 27 April, 1 November)
- Three IATF Co-Chairs meetings (16 October, 17 April, 19 February)
- Four IATF-MFAC Co-Chairs meetings (10 January, 13 June, 19 July, 20 November)
- One whole MFAC meeting (17 January)
- Two-day MFAC retreat (2-3 May)

Below is an overview of key substantive deliverables for 2023, as reflected in the IATF work plan for the year (see Annex 1). At the beginning of 2023, the IATF Co-Chairs also produced a report covering the three years of the Chairship cycle between 2020-2022 (see Annex 2).

## MFAC retreat

In May 2023, the MFAC annual retreat was convened, with the participation of the ITAF Co-Chairs and a few other IATF members. Among other issues, the MFAC members discussed:

- The need for greater administrative support to the MFAC Co-Chairs;
- The importance of greater communication exchange among the MFAC members;
- How to continue and expand on good practices such as the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing, the in-person MFAC-IATF retreat, the thematic dialogues;
- The identification of youth engagement as a new area of interest for the MFAC;
- Interest in getting more information on and participating in the Summit of the Future.

## Thematic dialogues

The importance of continuing the convening of whole IATF-MFAC thematic dialogues, building on the positive experience of the first dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment in November 2022, was agreed upon during the MFAC retreat.

During the following months, the ITAF Co-Chairs explored options for possible themes with the IATF members, and the "Intersection of Blasphemy Laws with Human Rights Standards" was selected as a theme. The Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) took the lead in organizing the meeting and, upon consultations with IATF and MFAC members on the best time for this initiative, Q1/Q2 of 2024 was identified as a suitable moment.

## Kofi Annan Faith Briefing

During the UNGA High-Level week, the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing was organized by the MFAC, with support from and participation of the IATF Co-Chairs and some IATF members. The event, titled "*The Radical Catalyst of Faith: Driving Civil Society Contributions to the SDGs*", was held on 21 September 2023, the International Day of Peace.

Over the course of the two panel discussions, speakers elaborated on the faith action for sustainable development taken by their respective institutions, including with UN support and partnership. The event was attended by about 80 people in person and 40 more online.

## Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs

Although the Symposium is not organized by the MFAC as such, many organizations traditionally involved in convening the Symposia are also MFAC members.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs took place on 24 January 2023 with the theme "Securing People's Wellbeing and Planetary Sustainability", under the aegis of UNDP, the United Nations Trust Fund for Human

Security, Islamic Relief, the World Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Soka Gakkai International, United Religions Initiative, and Religions for Peace.

During the half-day convening, panelists from the United Nations and a variety of secular and faith-based organizations reflected on the intersections of human security with sustainable development, durable peace, and gender justice, as well as showcased how human security works and is operationalized in a variety of settings through activities, events, programs, and campaigns.

### Knowledge management

To facilitate information sharing around key moments among IATF members, UNFPA, as IATF Secretariat, facilitated the compilation of a shared document containing information on UN entities' key activities during UNGA 78.

### MFAC Composition and Chairship

The ITAF Co-Chairs also worked on the MFAC ToR and MFAC Co-Chairs, to strengthen the role of the Council as a platform for collaboration, learning and action. In particular, the IATF Co-Chairs facilitated discussion among both ITAF members and MFAC Co-Chairs about the amendment of the MFAC ToR to include the following:

- Allowing for a longer period of service of MFAC members;
- More clearly spelling out expectations in terms of MFAC members' participation in the group;
- Introducing a system for at least one or two current MFAC Co-Chairs overlapping with newly appointed Co-Chairs to ensure continuity of institutional memory;
- Including LNOB among the thematic issues of focus for the MFAC's work.

At the same time, the IATF Co-Chairs undertook consultations with the MFAC Co-Chairs on the end of their mandate (December 2023) and the process for identifying new Co-Chairs. It was agreed to extend the mandate of the current MFAC Co-Chairs throughout 2024 so that the cycle of MFAC Co-Chairship overlaps with the period of service of MFAC members (based on a four-year cycle).

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

OHCHR continued engaging with religious leaders and faith-based actors in the context of the **“Faith for Rights” framework**.<sup>1</sup> It 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.

Throughout 2023, Religions for Peace, the University for Peace, the United States Institute of Peace, UN human rights mechanisms and OHCHR facilitated a series of monthly conversations on **religions, beliefs and human rights**.<sup>2</sup> Several of the hybrid meetings were held as side events during sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Human Rights Council, the Academic Council on the United Nations System and at COP28 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The series has created a community of practice and peer-to-peer learning opportunities on the theme “Faith for Rights”, with a view to promoting the universality and indivisibility of all human rights, without discrimination on any grounds.

In January 2023, more than 100 United Nations personnel participated in a webinar on **freedom of expression in the digital age** and the “Faith for Rights” framework, with speakers from the UN System Staff College, UNESCO, OHCHR and civil society.

In February 2023, the Sovereign Order of Malta organized a panel discussion during the **Munich Security Conference**, at which the speakers, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and OHCHR, encouraged the inclusion of religious leaders in the sphere of international politics in order to increase peace and security everywhere in the world with full respect for human rights.

In March 2023, OHCHR organized a **peer-to-peer learning session with staff members** in Geneva and field presences, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues as well as current and former minority fellows, who shared experiences on engaging with religious or belief minorities with a “Faith for Rights” approach.

In June 2023, OHCHR and the American University of Paris organized hybrid peer-to-peer learning sessions with a thematic focus on **addressing gender-based hate speech** and the instrumentalization of religion in politics and humanitarian aid.

In July 2023, the **Secretary-General’s report to the General Assembly** recommended that “Exchanges of lessons learned and promising practices should continue to be promoted,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usip.org/academy/catalog/religions-beliefs-and-human-rights-faith-rights-approach>

including through the Faith for Rights framework. Political and religious leaders have a particularly crucial role to play in speaking out clearly, firmly and immediately against disrespect and intolerance – not only of their own communities, but of any group subjected to attack. They should also make it clear that violence cannot be justified by prior provocation, whether real or perceived.”<sup>3</sup>

In September 2023, OHCHR held a side event during the **Human Rights Council**, noting that recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) increasingly referred to the need for engaging with faith-based actors, including through the “Faith for Rights” framework. Participants recommended countering religious hatred against minorities, and avoiding the instrumentalizing of religions and beliefs and of their followers for electoral purposes or political gains.

In November 2023, OHCHR organized a **peer-to-peer learning week**, bringing together religious leaders, faith-based actors, diplomats, treaty body members, special rapporteurs, academics, regional organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society and staff of Meta’s Oversight Board. More than 100 participants shared good practices and lessons learned among the network of facilitators using the #Faith4Rights toolkit. Participants compiled a snapshot of peer-to-peer learning and action points with a view to enlarging the “Faith for Rights commUNITY of practices”.<sup>4</sup>

A round-table brainstorming at Geneva Academy focused on **addressing religious hatred**, in follow-up to the Rabat Plan of Action, the Beirut Declaration on “Faith for Rights” and Human Rights Council resolutions 16/18, 52/6 and 53/1.<sup>5</sup> Another meeting among religious leaders and faith-based actors linked the dots between the Geneva Spiritual Appeal, the Interreligious Platform of Geneva and the “Faith for Rights” network. Further workshops discussed collaboration with OHCHR minority fellows and follow-up to the guide “Protecting Minority Rights”.<sup>6</sup>

In November 2023, OHCHR and the National Human Rights Council of Morocco organized a workshop in Rabat with religious actors, women’s rights experts, academics and parliamentarians from the Middle East and North Africa region, following up to CEDAW’s use of the “Faith for Rights” framework in dialogues with States parties and in its concluding observations.<sup>7</sup> The pilot project under the **CEDAW Knowledge Hub** focused on advocacy and peer-to-peer learning in

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<sup>3</sup> [A/78/241](#), para. 59.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/Faith-for-rights-P2Pweek2023.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/Roundtable09-11-2023.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/protecting-minority-rights-practical-guide>

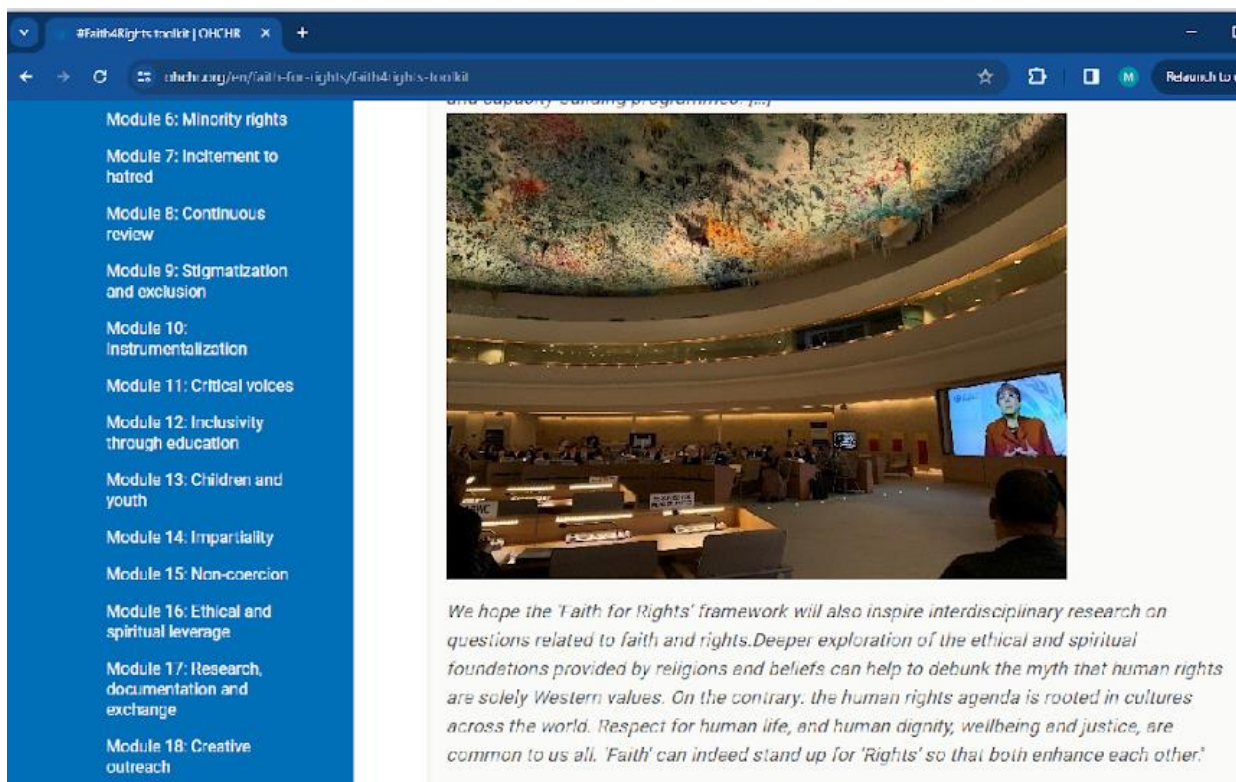
<sup>7</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/CEDAW\\_Excerpts.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/CEDAW_Excerpts.pdf)



cases where culture, tradition or certain religious interpretations might impede the realization of equal rights for women and girls in all spheres.<sup>8</sup>

### Publications:

- #Faith4Rights toolkit (March 2023):  
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Press/faith4rights-toolkit.pdf>
- Report and outlook on “Faith for Rights” (December 2023):  
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/press/Faith4Rights.pdf>



<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/activities/2023-11-CEDAW-hub-PR.pdf>

# United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

In 2023, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) continued to advance the fulfilment of its mandate to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an essential tool for conflict prevention and resolution and build more inclusive and cohesive societies.

This was achieved by working closely with faith-based and faith-inspired civil society organizations and religious leaders as strategic partners, together with all other relevant stakeholders, including United Nations entities, Member States, political leaders, youth, and media.

UNAOC and the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) served as the co-chairs of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion (UNIATF) in 2023, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) serving as the Executive Secretariat. During the year, UNAOC participated virtually and in-person and made substantial contributions at 17 meetings with co-chairs and/or members of the UNIATF and Multifaith Advisory Council (MFAC). The meetings were convened to optimize information-sharing and collaboration between the two groups around a variety of thematic topics.

On 6 February 2023, UNAOC, in partnership with the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates and the Permanent Mission of Egypt, organized a virtual event commemorating the International Day of Human Fraternity. This event was attended by representatives from Member States, religious leaders, faith actors, and civil society representatives. During the event, the Under-Secretary-General, High Representative for UNAOC, Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, shared the written remarks of the UN Secretary-General, who emphasized the importance of engaging religious leaders to prevent the instrumentalization of hatred and defusing extremism among their followers. He also noted that compassion, religious understanding, and mutual respect, as inscribed in the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” co-authored in 2019 by Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church, and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, is essential to advancing interreligious and intercultural dialogue and building a culture of peace.

On 21 September 2023, UNAOC held its Group of Friends (GoF) High-level Meeting on the margins of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Up to 70 GoF delegations, including Member States and international organizations, participated in the meeting. The delegations reaffirmed the importance of advancing the mandate of UNAOC and renewed their continued commitment to supporting the implementation of UNAOC’s mandate during the next phase of UNAOC’s action plan. With political and financial support from UNAOC GoF members, primarily Member States of the United Nations, UNAOC ensures that its strategic cooperation

with faith-based and faith-inspired civil society partners at the global level yields a concrete and positive impact on the ground.

In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention), on 8 December 2023, the UNAOC and OSAPG co-organized a joint side event with religious leaders on their roles in upholding the values and principles of the Genocide Convention. Leaders from the Multifaith Advisory Council shared anecdotes and insights about how religious communities are upholding the legacy of the Genocide Convention and how these efforts can be enhanced to protect populations from genocide. They emphasized the critical role played by religious leaders and faith actors in preventing genocide and other atrocity crimes.

UNAOC carried out a series of capacity-building activities in 2023 to strengthen the capacity of young people to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue for conflict prevention and resolution. The UNAOC Fellowship Programme aims to foster intercultural exchange and interfaith understanding by engaging with young professionals from Europe, North America, the Middle East and North Africa. UNAOC launched the 13th edition of its Fellowship Programme in 2022, with the support of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, involving 14 young professionals between 25 and 35 years of age. A series of online workshops in 2022 were designed to strengthen the participants' intercultural competencies. In 2023, the Fellowship explored issues related to the theme, "Countering racism and discrimination: the nexus to building pluralist and diverse societies," with field visits to Finland and Switzerland. During the field trips, the young professionals were encouraged to immerse themselves in different cultures and interact with a wide range of local partners. This allowed them to improve their understanding of cultural diversity and become better equipped to challenge stereotypes and various narratives of racism and discrimination.

In 2023, UNAOC continued to work with BMW Group and Accenture, important private sector partners, in promoting innovative approaches to intercultural dialogue within the framework of the Intercultural Innovation Hub (IIH), which had benefited more than 80 projects worldwide at the end of 2023. For the seventh edition of IIH, UNAOC and BMW Group, with the support of Accenture, recognized 10 organizations that work innovatively to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding, peaceful coexistence, and cultural diversity. The 10 IIH recipient organizations received financial support and tailored mentoring to strengthen their capacity to foster inclusive societies. One of the recipients, the Mediterranean Youth Foundation for Development (MYF) from Egypt, launched the world's first youth dialogue on the "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together." Youth from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds exchanged points of view and ideas on promoting the principles of the Document in their local communities and across borders. With financial support and mentorship from the IIH, the MYF held two successful workshops in March 2022 and May 2023. Participants, 60 percent of whom were women, received training in building peace, security,

and mutual understanding in their local communities. Five youth-led initiatives were launched via the project.

# United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF continued to engage holistically with faith organizations in 2023 and promoted meaningful exchanges at technical and leadership levels. Some examples of this engagement include:

- For World Children’s Day, UNICEF Youth Advocate Francisco Vera recorded a powerful message for Arigatou International’s [World Day of Prayer and Action for Children](#). The World Council of Churches also joined in the celebration of World’ Children’s Day.
- Throughout the year, UNICEF organized briefings for key faith partners focusing on two of its core programmatic areas and provided technical support to events and workshops organized by faith-based organizations. The first programmatic briefing took place in March 2023, discussing vaccination backslide and UNICEF’s strategy of immunization, based the findings of the latest State of the World’s Children report. The second programmatic briefing, in September 2023, introduced faith organizations to UNICEF’s Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan and promoted a dialogue on the faith community’s mobilization for COP28. UNICEF also supported regional roundtables organized by Arigatou International on Faith-Sensitive Mental Health Services to Foster Resilience in Children on the Move.
- On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, UNICEF, UNICEF USA and Islamic Relief organized a multifaith Iftar event. Bringing together community members across religions, participants reflected on the shared responsibility and call to action to support children living in emergency contexts.
- The [Faith for Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities \(FPCC\) Initiative](#) is UNICEF’s Social and Behaviour Change-led faith engagement approach, which aims to move from single sector / single denomination, instrumentalist and / or small-scale interventions to more holistic, inter-faith, systematic and at-scale approaches. Since 2018, UNICEF has been investing substantial resources to establish this collaboration with [Religions for Peace](#) and the [Joint Learning Initiative for Faith and Local Communities](#), expanding the engagement to other faith actors depending on the regions and programmatic focus. Through the implementation in 2023, FPCC is now considered mature in the Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR), it is in expansion phase in West and Central Africa region (WCAR) and in consolidation in South Asia and Latin America and Caribbean regions (SAR & LACR). The UNICEF Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa (MENARO) is also exploring faith engagement as a key approach for Social and Behaviour Change, in partnership with regional stakeholders including Al Azhar University. The FPCC initiative offers:
  - An evidence-based strategy to improve the quality of faith engagement and social and behaviour change efforts across multiple faiths and various programming priorities: immunization, climate mitigation and adaptation, prevention of violence and harmful

practices such as child marriage and FGM, promotion of positive parenting and provision of mental health and psychosocial support.

- A platform for UNICEF different programme sectors to better coordinate with faith actors in a more holistic, integrated and strategic manner, at global, regional and country level.

FPCC is currently being rolled out (with different degrees of scale) in 25 countries: 13 countries in Africa (8 in ESAR and 4 in WCAR), 8 countries in South Asia, 5 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with some regional initiatives engaging additional countries. In 2023, FPCC saw the realization of the following regional and in-country activities. Tasks included the roll out of FPCC at regional levels in SAR and LAC (with mappings, Regional Advisory Group formation, and meetings) and growth of FPCC in ESAR and WCAR with Multi-Faith Coordination Committees established at country level and capacity building on the FPCC engagement approach called Mind & Hearth Dialogue (MHD). New partnerships started to help with this implementation (e.g., JLI began a formal agreement with Christian Organizations Research and Advisory Trust of Africa- CORAT for MHD training and Sarvodaya in South Asia). Key highlights from 2023's implementation include the revision of the MHD Facilitators Guide, the roll out of a SBC survey with about 20,000 respondents from both religious and non-religious communities in 10 countries (Brazil, Egypt, Guatemala, Iraq, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Zambia) to understand the beliefs and perceptions around immunization and the level of influence of faith leaders on decisions associated to getting both COVID-19 vaccines and routine immunization for children.

A global stock-take exercise was conducted in late 2023 / early 2024 by the partners to 1) document and review the progress to date and 2) examine the current state of FPCC expansion and identify opportunities to strengthen coordination and collaboration for the initiative's next stages. The stocktaking process had two phases. First, surveys were conducted with the institutional partners (UNICEF, RfP, JLI), other FBO partners, and individuals working on FPCC. The surveys received responses from the three main institutional partners, 4 FBO partners, and 29 individuals. The second phase contemplated a stocktaking meeting in Nairobi on 16-17 January 2024, which brought together all the main FPCC stakeholders (RfP, JLI, UNICEF, Arigatou International, Islamic Relief, Episcopal Relief, among others).

At the end of March 2024 (26th and 27th), Religions for Peace, with UNICEF support, is convening a high-level learning exchange forum to enable the partners and stakeholders to consolidate, profile, share and learn from each other. FPCC's approaches and engagements on programme priorities (immunization, climate action, violence prevention, parenting and MHPSS) and specific geographies will be showcased to galvanize support from high-level faith leaders and partners to accelerate results for children. Participants will include: Senior religious leaders as represented in the Religions for Peace World Council/Executive Committee, Representatives from the Women of Faith Network, women of faith awardees,

Representatives from the Youth Interfaith Network, Representatives from Religions for Peace Regional and National Inter-faith Religious Councils (IRCs), Representatives from Regional FPCC Implementation teams, JLI Staff and partners, Representatives from FBOs, Representatives from UNICEF HQs, Other Religions for Peace partners such as the *Bill and Melinda* Gates Foundation and UN Agencies working with and for children and communities (WHO, UNHCR, UNOHCHR, etc.) and the media

The next two years (2024 to 2025) will require continued coordination and harmonization of the concerted efforts of the partners to ensure the regular, sustained, and meaningful engagement of faith leaders is mainstreamed across different goal areas, with a specific focus to address the climate crisis, engage zero-doses communities to achieve immunization targets, address violence against children and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, promote mental health and strengthen community health delivery platforms.

# United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

## Global

UNDP recognises the importance of collaborating with faith-based actors to foster mutual understanding at global, national, and local levels, thereby accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda. From our experiences across various levels, and in line with the [UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders](#), we have observed that religious leaders play a pivotal role as gatekeepers with significant influence over communities, acting as social mobilisers.

[The Human Development Report 2023-2024](#) underscores the role of religion (the belief in a higher moral deity or deities) as a key factor in humanity's cultural evolution, can serve to foster cooperation, generalized trust, altruism and fairness to unknown others. However, the report also identifies religion as a politically salient factor amongst others, that can contribute to heightened polarization of societies, that in turn coupled with a zero-sum mentality, contribute to undermining trust, stability, democracy and collective action towards joint problems.

UNDP's study "Journey to Extremism in Africa" found that the primary motive for joining violent extremist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa is the search for [better job opportunities, rather than religious ideology](#). Interviews with over 2,000 individuals, including former extremists, revealed that while job prospects were the main driver, religious reasons were mentioned by only 17% of recruits, who also acknowledged their limited knowledge of religious texts.

In 2023, UNDP continued to support **faith-sensitive** mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) within its [policy](#) and [programming](#) framework, also participating as a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings. The 2024 [IASC Guidance on Integrating MHPSS and Peacebuilding](#) highlighted the importance of culture, spirituality, and religion in addressing community hesitancy towards MHPSS and peacebuilding due to contextual, cultural relevancies, stigma, and polarizing views. Activities incorporated spirituality and religion, including mindfulness and coping techniques inspired by local prayer practices. Furthermore, educational staff were trained to integrate peace and well-being concepts into their curricula, and efforts were made to work with journalists on social media strategies to destigmatize MHPSS.

Interfaith dialogue is central to UNDP's efforts towards Sustainable Development Goal 16, focusing on peace, justice, and strong institutions. This commitment extends to promoting peace and tolerance across all faiths, with projects including journalist training on social cohesion, anti-discrimination advocacy, and enhancing clerics' digital literacy. UNDP has adopted an inclusive strategy against hate speech, aligning with the UN's action plan. For more information visit this [page](#).



UNDP is committed to fostering social cohesion and tolerance to foster peace, and to adopt preventive strategies to conflict and violent extremism through a developmental lens. In the recently published report titled "[Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement](#)," religion is highlighted as a significant source of resilience, serving as a preventive force that decelerates recruitment efforts.

### **Global Initiatives and Partnerships**

Globally, UNDP's efforts underscored the integration of religious understanding and cooperation in addressing human rights and preventing violence. In collaboration with various religious and faith-based organizations, UNDP aimed to mitigate religiously motivated discrimination and violence, focusing particularly on gender-based injustices. The organization's commitment to preventing violent extremism was highlighted in its "Journey to Extremism in Africa" report, which provided insights into the socio-economic drivers behind extremism, revealing a shift from religious ideology to economic incentives as a primary recruitment factor.

UNDP also co-sponsored the [Ninth Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs](#), emphasizing human security and its intersections with sustainable development and peace. This, along with UNDP active role in support of [the Peacemakers Network](#) illustrated a comprehensive approach to leveraging cooperation for global peace and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

During the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA) consortia, in collaboration with UNDP and the Baha'i International Community, hosted a high-level event titled '[Innovative Intra- and Inter-faith Peacebuilding: Advancing Freedom of Religion or Belief for the Achievement of the SDG 2030 Agenda and Beyond](#).' This event underscored the crucial role of religious actors in promoting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals through innovative peacebuilding approaches.

Further, UNDP's partnership with the Islamic Development Bank through the [Global Islamic Finance and Impact Investing Platform](#) (GIFIIP) showcased innovative financial mechanisms to support SDG-oriented projects, demonstrating the potential of faith-aligned financial initiatives to drive sustainable development.

### **Country-Specific Interventions**

At the national level, UNDP's interventions reflected a nuanced understanding of the local socio-religious dynamics and the pivotal role of religious leaders in fostering peace, social cohesion, and economic stability.

In **Afghanistan**, following the financial sector's upheaval, UNDP's technical assistance to microfinance institutions showcased a strategic shift towards Islamic financial products, addressing both immediate economic needs and longer-term inclusivity, especially for women-led enterprises.

In **Benin**, focus on social cohesion and combating violent extremism through engagement with religious leaders and communities underscored the importance of local faith actors in peacebuilding efforts.

In **Iraq**, capacity-building workshops for religious leaders across multiple governorates aimed to promote moderate religious discourse and social cohesion, recognizing the influential role of religious figures in community peace and rebuilding efforts.

Similarly, interventions in **Kosovo** and **Kyrgyzstan** highlighted [the Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting a Shared Civic Identity](#), and restoration of religious and cultural heritage and legislative dialogues as means to foster intercommunity dialogue and prevent violent extremism, respectively, with a keen focus on inclusivity and promoting a shared civic identity.

In **Lesotho** and **Malaysia** leveraged religious councils and youth workshops to promote intra and inter-faith dialogue to create a safe space to discuss potentially sensitive topics and enhance community resilience against extremism, showcasing the adaptability of UNDP's approach to varying cultural and social contexts.

Further examples from **Mali, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Türkiye,** and **Uganda** illustrate UNDP's strategic engagement with religious and community leaders to address issues ranging from violent extremism to health crises like Ebola, through capacity building, social dialogues, and public health initiatives.

# United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

## Introduction

With the activation of its different councils, the Faith for Earth 'Initiative' transitioned into a 'Coalition' recognising the need for greater synergy amongst the network of faith actors by acknowledging the diverse needs of groups.

UNEP's [Faith for Earth Coalition](#) continues to work towards the interconnected crises with a focus on interfaith dialogue and action under the portfolios on Climate Action; Nature Action; and Pollution Action.

At the forefront of our achievements stands the inaugural [Global Faith Leaders' Summit: Confluence of Conscience: Uniting Leaders for Planetary Resurgence](#) that brought 28 faith leaders and more than 200 participants representing youth, women, scientists, academia and politicians to sign the '[The Abu Dhabi Interfaith Statement for COP28](#)'.

Central to our endeavors was holding the first [Faith Pavilion](#), a groundbreaking moment that provided a dedicated space within COP28 for faith-based organizations to converge, collaborate, and amplify their voices. The Faith Pavilion emerged as a nexus of advocacy, showcasing the rich diversity of faith-inspired initiatives driving positive change across the globe. Read the [Evaluation Report](#).

Furthermore, the remarkable increase to 87 in the number of accredited faith-based organizations to UNEP underscores the growing recognition of faith communities as indispensable allies in the pursuit of sustainable development.

## Sustainable Lifestyles

Religion, values, and ethics shape lifestyles - from what believers eat, wear, and how they interact with one another. In 2023, the Coalition has shared these perspectives to positively influence individuals, institutions, and leaders. Here are some of the ways:

- Global Tolerance & Human Fraternity Summit and the [Zayed Award for Human Fraternity](#) on 4 February 2023
- [UNEP, UCONN, the Center for Advance Learning for Mindfulness, and Mindfulness for the Earth](#) hosted "Charting a Path for Higher Education" Plenary on 6 March 2023. [Read the report](#).
- [Partnership](#) with the Global Theological Union (GTU) producing [Faith and Sustainable Lifestyles - Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) and a certificate-based [Online Course](#)
- Podcast [The Role of Faith-Inspired Giving and Faith-Based Organisations to Restore Nature](#)
- [Believing in change: Faith and the mission to protect our planet](#) by earthrise

- [Global Voices on the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development](#) by the International Partnership on Religion and Development

### **Calls to People of Faith to Protect our Planet.**

- Connecting different religious perspectives on our responsibility through the Book Launch: [Qur'anic Ecology and Resonances with Laudato Si'](#) by the Laudato Si' Research Institute (LSRI) and Faith for Earth Coalition
- In many ways, the development of [Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth](#) echoes this clear call to action drawing inspiration and perspective from a diverse range of Islamic traditions.
- Podcast [Faith-Fuelled Action for the Earth: The UNEP Initiative](#)

### **Faith & Climate Action**

In addition to the Summit and the Faith Pavilion mentioned above, a series of [10 thematic consultations](#) were held to take stock of climate-related priorities, and facilitate peer-to-peer learning.

The Coalition held a [thematic consultation on Gender Inclusive Climate Resilience at COP28](#) sharing the outcome of [The Wilton Park Dialogue](#), in partnership with [Global One](#).

### **The Moral Imperative towards Children**

Offering insights since the launch of [Climate-Responsible Finance: A Moral Imperative towards Children](#) and [appeal](#) in 2022, and the [Faith & Science](#) appeal in 2021 that included the commitment “to move away from investments in fossil fuels and toward investments in renewable energy(..)”, the [World Council of Churches](#), [UNEP](#), [Joint Learning Initiative](#), and the [Laudato Si Movement](#) invited leaders and decision-makers, Child rights specialists, Young people, Finance specialists, Faith-based actors, Secular partners to a session unlocking successful methods for climate-responsible finance.

### **Faith & Nature Action**

Committed to the implementation of the strategy document: [Mainstreaming Faith-based Engagement under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#), UNEP and WWFs Beliefs and Values Programme launched:

- [Tree Growing for Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration: A Guide for Faith-based Actors with Trillion Trees](#)
- [Case Studies of restoration efforts in Kenya and Tanzania](#)
- [Faith groups help to save disappearing forests \(Story\)](#)
- [Earth restored: joining hands with faith-based organizations to implement the KMGBF](#) organised at the CBD SBSTTA 25 including the launch of a [primer](#) on Faith and Biodiversity.

- The [Faith for Earth Youth](#) voiced the need for intergenerational equity and meaningful youth engagement at the Confluence of Conscience, convening monthly to identify priorities for engagement.
- UNEP, FAO, WHO, Agroecology Coalition, and International Land Coalition/IFAD took stock of the progress made after the Food Systems Summit in 2021 by [sharing their insights](#).
- An [Interfaith networking event ahead of the UN Water Conference 2023](#) co-hosted with WCC EWN, PaRD, and WEA presenting at least [six commitments](#) to the Water Action Agenda and focusing on [Water & Health](#).

### **Faith & Pollution Action**

70 representatives of FBOs added their voice to the statement ‘[Faith communities call on UNEA 5.2 to agree to negotiate an ambitious, legally binding Treaty to tackle plastic pollution](#)’ and published a Catalogue demonstrating global related projects.

[Beyond Formal Law: The Role of Ethics, Beliefs and Values in Amplifying Action against Plastic Pollution in Africa](#) explored the need for alternative governance in Africa.

### **Capacity Building**

UNEP, the [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#), the [Parliament of the World’s Religions](#), and [United Religions Initiative](#) maintain an [interactive database](#) called ‘[Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#),’ featuring [86 projects](#) as of 31 December 2023.

‘[Faith, Environment and Climate Change](#)’ is a free e-learning course offering faith-based approaches to the Sustainable Development Goals as an approach to engage and contribute to environmental thematic areas.

Read the full [Achievement Report](#).



# United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR's engagement with religious leadership, institutions and inter-religious dialogue networks is part of broader efforts to foster interfaith collaboration across regions towards addressing the root causes of conflict through joint advocacy, prevention, reconciliation, peacebuilding, and social cohesion initiatives.

UNHCR's pioneering program with [Multi-Religious Council of Leaders](#) formed in partnership with Religions for Peace in 2020, and the expanded inter-faith work with the *World Council of Churches*, *Higher Committee of Human Fraternity*, *Arigatou International*, *Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities* and *G20 Interfaith Forum* aims to galvanise the support of religious leaders in achieving the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees.

To further peacebuilding efforts, the Government of the Republic of Moldova, Religions for Peace, and UNHCR hosted a delegation of leaders of the world's diverse faith traditions for a two-day field mission to Moldova at the end of January 2023. The delegation brought together refugees, local religious leaders and representatives from faith-based organisations involved in the refugee response at a Ministerial roundtable debate on '[Solidarity for Peace Dialogue](#)' to bolster multi-religious support for social cohesion between refugees and their host communities in Moldova.

Religious leaders gathered again in solidarity with refugees and climate peace during UNHCR's Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in Geneva in December. Building on significant faith-based engagement and efforts at COP28 in the UAE, the special event was designed for high-level religious delegates and faith-based actors to share their individual and collective commitments in support of solutions for climate-related displacement. Religious leaders participated in an [inter-religious prayer](#) co-curated by the Plateforme InterReligieuse de Genève, hosted by the World Council of Churches in Geneva. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the religious leaders gathered in a ceremony to [light candles with prayers for universal peace](#), opened with a special keynote speech on the need for peace by His All Holiness Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch.

The religious leaders endorsed a [joint statement of solidarity](#) with forcibly displaced and stateless persons, announcing over 70 pledges, including 30.5 million US dollars, through Islamic philanthropy, social cohesion, training, education, and prevention of statelessness, together with faith-based organisations.





# United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG)

The reporting time, 2023, marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) (the Genocide Convention). During this timeframe, the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) engaged in activities aimed at fostering peaceful, inclusive and just societies and advance genocide prevention globally, including through implementation of its two flagship documents, the [UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#) and the [Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes](#).

During the reporting time, OSAPG, along with UNAOC and UNFPA has been (since 2020) co-chairing the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development. The IATF has consistently engaged with the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC). In May 2023, for the first time, the MFAC held its annual retreat at the UN Headquarters, bringing the discussion about the UN engagement with faith-based organizations and the protection of people from discrimination and violence based on religion or belief into the core of the multilateral system.

In June 2023, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Day for Countering Hate Speech on 18 June, and pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/309 on *Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech*, OSAPG organized a high-level event with the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco focused on national efforts in countering hate speech.

In June 2023, OSAPG also launched the [Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes](#) (also known as ***The Napoli Women in Communities Plan of Action***) as well as the policy paper [Countering and Addressing Online Hate Speech: A Guide for policy makers and practitioners](#) which builds on three years of engagement by the Office with tech and social media companies, the UN working group on hate speech, special procedure experts and civil society on tackling online hate speech.

In November 2023, with the support of the Sultanate of Oman, and jointly with the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, OSAPG held a global meeting on the role of traditional leaders and actors in countering hate speech and preventing genocide and related crimes. Traditional leaders – understood as any structure of authority within an indigenous, ethnic, tribal, or clan community that act alongside state actors – can play a pivotal role in ensuring the safeguard of the rights of the groups protected by the Genocide Convention, The meeting resulted in the Plan of Action for Traditional Leaders and Actors in Countering and Addressing Hate Speech and Preventing Genocide and related crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity) and their incitement through Peace Mediation.

Also in November 2023, OSAPG in partnership with UNAOC organized a Side Event to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Genocide Convention on “The Role of Religious Communities in Upholding and Implementing the Genocide Convention”. The side event showcased stories of religious individuals and communities that have been promoting, protecting, and implementing the principles of the Genocide Convention. Speakers shared their stories and provided insights about how the legacy of the Convention can be enhanced to protect national, ethnical, racial and religious groups from genocide.

Finally, on 8 December 2023, OSAPG celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Genocide Convention with an event entitled “A Living Force in World Society: the legacy of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”. The event featured high-level opening remarks; a panel discussion on the living legacy of the Convention, that brought together experts and practitioners in the field; and a spotlight on the global champions of prevention, whose dedicated work has contributed to the prevention and/or punishment of the crime of genocide.

# United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

In 2023, UNFPA continued to strategically engage with faith-based actors to realize the vision of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action.

At the global level, in its capacity as Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-R) Co-Chair, UNFPA played an active role in supporting the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the IATF (MFAC) in: 1) planning the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing; 2) planning the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs (to take place in January 2024); 3) meetings of the MFAC Gender working group.

Global-level advocacy efforts continued throughout the year, around key intergovernmental moments and beyond. These include:

- The 67<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women side event “A Phone of My Own: Sexual and Economic Empowerment in Times of Crisis”, co-sponsored by UNFPA and the governments of Finland and Liberia, ACT Alliance, ACT Church of Sweden, Bread for the World, Christian Aid, DanChurchAid, Finn Church Aid, Lutheran World Federation, World Renew, Norwegian Church Aid, World Council of Churches, and World Young Women’s Christian Association. The event explored the gender-transformative power of mobile phones, as well as the increased risks to sexual and gender-based violence in digital spheres.
- The 56<sup>th</sup> Commission on Population and Development side event on “Between Taboos and Freedom: Religion, Rights and Reproductive Justice”. The event, that UNFPA co-sponsored with the Governments of Norway and Argentina, as well as ACT Alliance, Norwegian Church Aid, World YWCA, Fòs Feminista, Act Church of Sweden and Faith to Action Network, brought together gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) advocates from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to share their experiences on how to engage faith actors in advocating for the SRHR and reproductive justice, with emphasis on Comprehensive Sexuality Education.
- High-level event by the Trilateral Partnership of Regional Faith-Based Networks for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “Inspiring faith, hope and transformative action to accelerate progress towards the SDGs”. In this event, panelists examined the challenges faced, lessons learned, and best practices from the Trilateral Partnership and their member organizations in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
- Kofi Annan Briefing on Faith and the SDGs “The Radical Catalyst of Faith: Driving Civil Society Contributions to the SDGs”. UNFPA moderated the first panel discussion, exploring how faith-based actors are currently coming together in partnership with the United Nations to address the common challenges of poverty alleviation, sustainability, Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) and building peaceful and inclusive societies.

- UNFPA’s Deputy Executive Directors intervened at the Nordic countries Parliamentary meeting “SRHR under pressure in Europe: Nordic stocktaking on the rising gender opposition in Europe”, a day-long discussions and knowledge sharing on the growing anti-gender trends, sharing UNFPA’s experience in engaging faith actors on gender issues.

UNFPA also continued working in partnership with the German Federal Foreign Office, the Berlin Institute for Population and Demography, and Religions for Peace on a series of online “African Dialogues on Faith and Demography”. The dialogues series, which started with 3 dialogues in 2022, was created with the intention to harness the potential of faith actors and create a space for open dialogue on how best to address demographic challenges. The 4<sup>th</sup> dialogue (in May) focused on girl’s education as key to demographic transition, the 5<sup>th</sup> dialogue (in July) explored the role of young people as actors of change, and the 6<sup>th</sup> and last dialogue (in December) showcased successful strategies that faith actors have used to bring about change on gender equality, education for girls, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), and youth empowerment.

At the country level, UNFPA mobilized and partnered with faith actors in 45 countries in 6 regions. These are a few, selected country examples:

- In **Indonesia**, UNFPA’s advocacy led to the announcement at the closing of the second Indonesian Women Ulema Congress (KUPI) of a [fatwa against Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting \(FGM/C\) in the country](#).
- In **Cote d’Ivoire**, a public declaration was signed by 2994 traditional and religious leaders (867 Christian and 1043 Muslim) from the regions of Indénié Djuablin, Sud Comoé, Moronou, Iffou, Bounkani, Cavally, Worodougou, Bélier et Lagunes. Through the declaration, the local leaders committed to strengthen their engagement in the fights against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and the promotion of SRH.
- The **Rwanda** Interfaith Council on Health (RICH) disseminated a Sermon Guide document on Maternal, Infant and Adolescent Health developed jointly with UNFPA, to facilitate dialogues on Adolescent SRHR in various religious settings. A total of 245 church leaders and 40 mentors were capacitated and thereafter facilitated dialogues on SRHR in various religious settings, reaching 10,005 adolescents and young people (5,448 girls and 4,527 boys).
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNFPA continued to strengthen collaboration with faith-based education settings (madrasah/religious schools) on integration of the “Health” toolkit that provides comprehensive education on reproductive health, family planning and gender issues. 50 teachers of madrasah benefitted from UNFPA capacity building activities, as well as shared experience on how to improve the quality of “Health” education in religious schools.

# UN Women

UN Women joined the Multi-Faith Advisory Council, in different advocacy spaces that they convened at the UN, sharing insights on issues of gender equality, multilateralism, and the role of faith actors in upholding the human rights mandates of the United Nations.

CSW67 noted the converging crises of climate change, the costs of living, conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic that continued to threaten to reverse progress, magnifying the unequal pace of digital transformation within and across countries, amplifying structural and systemic barriers for women and girls. It provided FBOs with a unique opportunity to contribute to discussions on transforming social norms, amplifying women's voices, highlighting the push back against online and offline harassment, including the prevention of the perpetuation of algorithmic biases.

## **Strengthening partnerships and collaborations**

UN Women also participated in different networking events including the Ecumenical Orientation Day during CSW67, and the High-Level Meeting at the 2023 SDG Summit on "Inspiring Faith, Hope and Transformative Action to Accelerate Progress towards the SDGs". UN Women emphasized the importance of securing the fundamental human rights of all, including women and young girls especially SRHR and bodily autonomy. It also shared how digital technologies are rapidly transforming society, allowing for unprecedented advances to improve social, economic, and political outcomes for women and girls, but also giving rise to profound new challenges that may perpetuate and deepen existing patterns of gender inequalities.

## **Strengthened collaboration with faith actors, feminists, and social justice movements**

UN-Women continued to strengthen its coalition of faith actors, feminists, and social justice movements (religious leaders, faith communities, faith advocates, young faith advocates, academia) in global advocacy efforts at global, regional, and country level.

## **UN Women Africa**

UN Women strategically engaged faith-based organizations and traditional leaders as crucial allies in the fight against VAW, thereby strengthening their collaboration with the African Union. This endeavor culminated in the inception and endorsement of the first Regional Action Plan for Africa on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls.

The UN Women Multi-Country Office for Southern Africa joined forces with We Will Speak Out South Africa, a coalition comprising faith communities and partners dedicated to eradicating gender-based violence throughout the region. Their collaboration resulted in the launch of an interfaith declaration committing to the cessation of GBV.

- [Traditional Leaders and Clergies Renew Commitment to Curb Violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria](#)
- [Engagement of Faith-Based Organizations to Support Faith and Cultural Leaders by Advancing Advocacy, Policy and Social Change in Nigeria and West Africa - LEAP Project | UN Women](#)
- [Interfaith Action to end GBV – Statement and Campaign – WWSO SA](#)

### **UN Women Americas and the Caribbean**

UN Women Caribbean collaborated with the Christ Church Anglican Church in Jamaica as a part of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to eradicate violence against women and girls. The organizations hosted an International Human Rights Day worship service and brunch forum with a primary objective of urging faith-based organizations to actively engage in preventing and addressing VAGW.

- [Faith-based community convene on Human Rights Day to address Gender-based Violence, Human Rights, and the Scriptures | UN Women – Multi-Country Office – Caribbean](#)

### **UN Women Asia and the Pacific**

UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office published a policy paper aimed at faith-based organizations, to mitigate violence against women and girls within religious settings across Fiji and the broader Pacific region. This collaborative effort involved the House of Sarah, a prominent faith-based civil society organization in Fiji known for its engagement in faith-based prevention initiatives.

- [We are all Created Equal: Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Fiji’s Faith Settings](#)
- [We Are All Created Equal - Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Fiji’s Faith Settings - House of Sarah](#)

### **UN Women Europe and Central Asia**

In collaboration with Sweden, the Institute for Population and Development from Sarajevo, and the Center for Peacebuilding from Sanski Most, UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina initiated the project, "Community Involvement in Reducing Gender Stereotypes and Eliminating Violence against Women. The project was oriented towards establishing faith-based organizations as a part of the coordinated strategy to compact VAWG.

- [How can religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina help in the fight against violence against women? | UN Women – Europe and Central Asia](#)

### **UN Women - Arab Region in 2023**

UN Women published strategic knowledge products and established key partnerships to promote a gender-equitable interpretation of religious texts and teachings through a partnership with Musawah -international CSO advocating for women's rights in Islam. UN Women published seven policy briefs to promote gender equitable legal reforms of family laws that are influenced or based on Islam. These policy briefs were focused on key topics such as equality in marriage, equality upon divorce, custody and guardianship of children, and ending child marriage and polygamy, among others. These seven policy briefs can be downloaded [here](#).

In summary, UN Women continues to work with faith-based leaders in different parts of the world to address issues such as gender-based violence, peace and plurality, HIV service access, among others.

# World Health Organization (WHO)

Faith partners play important roles in health emergency and pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response (PPPR). Since 2020 WHO has partnered with members of the [WHO Faith network for Health Emergency Preparedness and Response](#); (formally established in 2022) to increase access to accurate and relevant information and build a community of collaborative sharing on topics related to health emergency preparedness and response and the intersection between faith and public health.

The network, comprising different faith partners representing a diversity of faiths including service providers, faith leaders, FBOs, and academic institutions, engage in a forum to align on shared objectives, share information, access technical briefings and co-develop tools and products, such as the [World Health Organization strategy for engaging religious leaders, faith-based organizations and faith communities in health emergencies](#).

Objectives for this collaboration include the following, to:

1. Engage and strengthen collaboration with global networks for emergency preparedness and response;
2. Convene networks so that community leaders and decision-makers can access trustworthy information and share best practices for pandemic preparedness and response;
3. Engage communities to share accurate information and build resiliency to misinformation, thereby empowering their role in health emergency preparedness and response;
4. Co-create tailored products, webinars and solutions with key communities that address the Infodemic and are guided by evidence ;
5. Recognize and promote a whole-of-society approach that ensures a diverse representation emphasizing unity, equity and solidarity.

This year the focus has been on broadening the network to include new partners, to strengthen the engagement of partners from different faith traditions. In addition, providing opportunities for faith partners to speak and bring faith perspectives to WHO's work in Pandemic Preparedness: for example, Professor. Dr. Azza Karam, then Secretary General of Religions for Peace took part in the [PRET \(Preparedness and Resilience for Emerging Threats\) global meeting](#). This ongoing work includes to host technical briefings on health emergency topics of interest to the network and building partnerships with networks of faith-based health service providers from different faith traditions. This often leads to opportunities to present on the work of the WHO Faith Network, and its communities of practice, such as at a global consultation at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.

Three Communities of Practice have continued to share examples of work on specific topics where inclusion of faith perspectives is important. For example:

- 1) The development of checklist for faith partners in PPPR
- 2) Mental health and psychosocial support, and



3) The WHO [Geolocated Health Facilities Data Initiative](#). (GHFD).

During the interpandemic period, WHO is continuing to nurture the relationships with faith partners and is increasing efforts to advocate for a multisectoral approach to pandemic planning – an approach that acknowledges the crucial role of faith partners in both preparedness and response.

# Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC)

## Introduction

The second year of the MFAC 2022-2023 term saw a continuation of the co-chairs' commitments to strengthening the MFAC's ability to facilitate communication, accountability, and collaboration between members and the IATF while also building on the MFAC's commitment to serve as an interfaith body of wisdom, insight and knowledge to the United Nations.

Continuing the process of designing gatherings in a post-COVID era, building on 2022's hybrid MFAC Retreat (figure 1) which generated the MFAC 2023 Rhythm of work (figure 2), MFAC co-chairs organized an all members meeting via zoom in January, an in person gathering on the sidelines of the Commission on the Status of Women (figure 3), followed by an in-person MFAC retreat in May inside the United Nations HQ (figure 4), a hybrid Kofi Annan briefing held on the sidelines of UNGA high level week in September, aligned with SDG Summit 2023 (figure 5), and a continuous stream of monthly working group meetings held online.

Working to amplify member collaboration and information sharing, the MFAC co-chairs created new consensus around transparency of contact information and set new norms on sharing events and opportunities with each other.

The MFAC co-chairs also began the process of hiring an administrative specialist to specifically support the co-chairs and its members in various initiatives, including coordinating general office/ administrative operations, handling event logistics, travel planning, and invoice processing. To ensure transparency and ownership of this position, MFAC members were consulted twice on the job description and financial means of supporting the position. There was consensus amongst the members that such a position is needed and would be beneficial to the work of MFAC. The co-chairs plan to have this position filled in early 2024.

Together, with the IATF, the co-chairs of MFAC prepared for the election of the next term of MFAC co-chairs 2024 - 2026 and worked together with IATF co-chairs to ensure that for the 2024 January MFAC All Members Retreat that there was deeper engagement and representation from UN Agencies belonging to the IATF.

On November 20th, the IATF-MFAC Co-Chairs held a virtual meeting during which the IATF Co-Chairs requested an extension of the current Co-Chairmanship for an additional year. This extension is intended to cover the new cycle of MFAC membership, which will include Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi and Ms. Debra Boudreaux as Co-Chairs, while Ms. Casey Harden and Mr. Gopal Patel will not continue in this role.

The IATF have recently made several changes to the MFAC ToR. These changes include:

1. Allowing for a longer period of service of MFAC members;
2. More clearly spelling out expectations in terms of MFAC members' participation in the group;
3. Introducing a system for at least 1 or 2 MFAC Co-Chairs overlapping with newly appointed Co-Chairs to ensure continuity;
4. Including LNOB among the thematic issues of focus for the MFAC's work.

### **Working Group Updates**

- **Peace and Security Working Group:** Throughout 2023, the Working Group held four productive meetings, fostering dialogue and collaboration on various peace and security issues. The Working Group diligently drafted and successfully gained approval for the Terms of Reference, providing a solid framework for our future endeavors. Additionally, the working group held discussions with key stakeholders including: Dr. Samuel Rizk, Head of Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding & Responsive Institutions at the UNDP Crisis Bureau in NYC and with Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. The Working Group also participated in a crucial UN Verification trip to Brazil, focusing on verifying allegations of genocide against indigenous people in the Amazon Forest and hate speeches and violence against black people in the slums of Rio de Janeiro. This initiative, in collaboration with the UN Office on Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect, underscored our commitment to addressing human rights violations and promoting peace and security globally. The Working Group also organized a significant side event during UN Counterterrorism Week, held at the Bahai International Community Offices. The event, focusing on preventing genocide, highlighted our dedication to combating extremism and fostering inclusive and peaceful societies. The MFAC Working Group on Peace and Security remains committed to advancing peacebuilding efforts, preventing conflict, and promoting human rights and security worldwide. We look forward to continuing our impactful work in the coming year.
- **Multilateralism Working Group:** The major accomplishment of the multilateralism working group this year was to lead the planning and the execution of the Kofi Annan Briefing during the High Level Week of the General Assembly in September. This briefing, titled "*The Radical Catalyst of Faith: Driving Civil Society Contributions to the SDGs*", was held on 21 September 2023, the International Day of Peace. The briefing was an occasion to showcase how faith-based actors and organizations are actively contributing to global change and the importance of strategic partnerships with faith-inspired actors around the world. Over the course of the two panel discussions, speakers elaborated on the faith action for sustainable development taken by their respective institutions, including with UN support and partnership.

- **Gender Working Group:** In 2023, the Gender Working Group held regular monthly meetings with the inclusion of two IATF members. Key actions during the year included organizing a parallel event at CSW on the perspectives of empowering women, coordinating MFAC members at the Women Deliver conference in Kigali, and developing a gender working group brochure, which showcased the perspectives and work of the Gender Working Group.
- **Climate Working Group:** At the beginning of the reporting period there was ample momentum for the Climate Working Group to take action. The co-chairs ventured to establish two lines of action: the first was to serve as a hub for information sharing (including with UN colleagues) and the second as a hub to unify common positions. However, in trying to achieve the first, we noticed a lack of receptivity from the wider group to our efforts to meet together. Doodle polls resulted in just one or two responses, and the meetings were made up of the co-chairs and one or two others. This lack of receptivity is likely not due to lack of desire but, rather, an abundance of pre-existing spaces. The co-chairs then re-grouped and also noticed that the second hub was being addressed with efforts to unify positions at COP28 through the Faith Pavilion. We determined that, because of lack of interest, the faith and climate space is likely saturated and there is little value-add from MFAC.

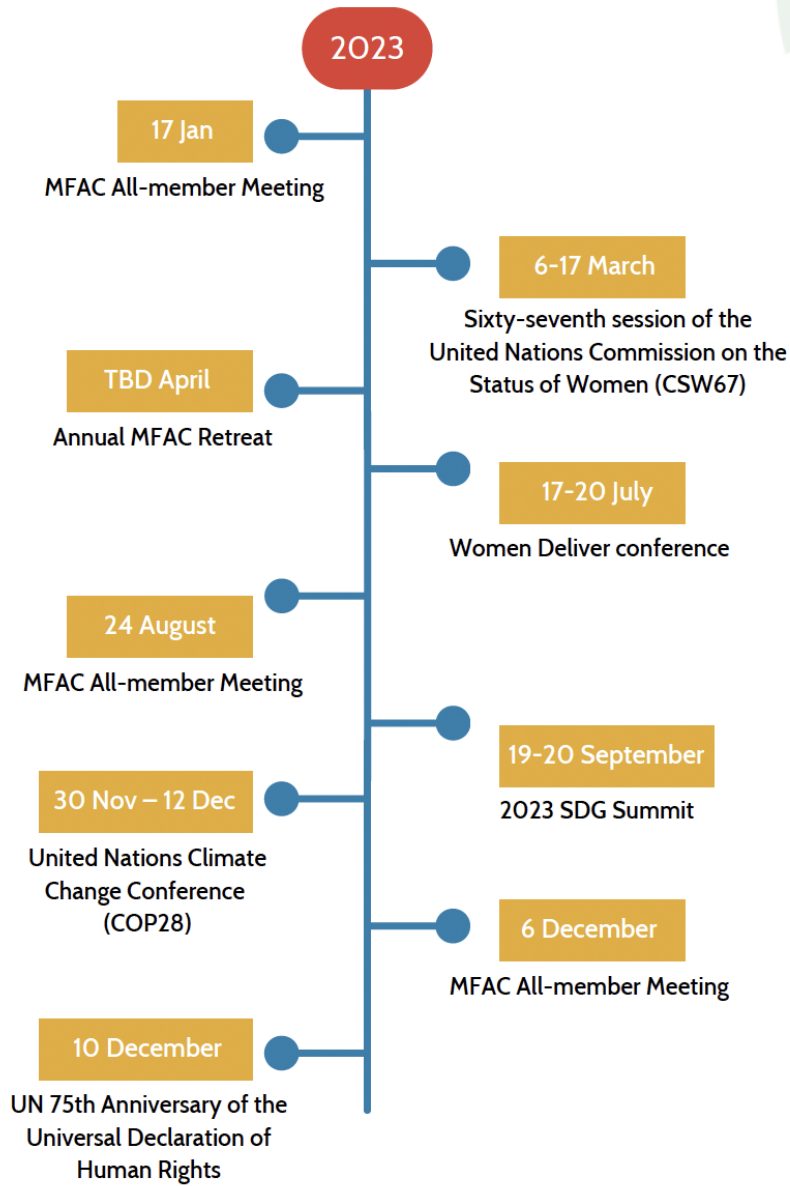
## **Conclusion**

The MFAC continues to be a space for diverse faith partners of the United Nations to come together as a group to have unique, candid and forward-thinking debates, discussions and collaborations on the most pressing issues being addressed at the United Nations. 2023 marked a year of increased transparency, strengthened connections between the MFAC and IATF, and a deepening of the administrative, planning, and communications capacities of MFAC through the creation of new working norms. Moving forward towards 2024, the co-chairs of MFAC remain committed to a vision of an outcome-based, relationship-driven, and non-redundant contribution to MFAC and the UN, a multilateral ecosystem.



**(Figure 1 2022 MFAC Retreat at the Tzu Chi Center for Compassionate Relief)**

MFAC 2023 Rhythm of Work – a working document  
 updated on 16 December, 2022



(Figure 2: the MFAC 2023 Proposed Rhythm of Work)



**(Figure 3. MFAC CSW In person gathering)**



**(Figure 4: MFAC Retreat inside UN HQ)**



**(Figure 5: Kofi Annan Briefing at the Church Center of the United Nations)**



# Annex 1 - United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development Workplan (May-December 2023)

## Introduction

The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UN IATF-R) was established in 2010, as a platform for knowledge exchange and management, capacity building, system-wide guidance and oversight regarding engagement with faith-based/-inspired civil society actors. Over the course of the first 3 years of their Chairship mandate (2020-22), the IATF-R saw a more systematic collaboration with the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC), as exemplified by, inter alia, the issuing of a Joint Statement with the Endorsement of the Multifaith Advisory Council at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Global Online Conference “Faith in the UN: Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations and looking to the future”. The next 3-year cycle (2023-25) represents an opportunity to further scale up the strategic engagement with faith actors by the UN system.

## Priorities

This workplan aims to illustrate specific areas where the IATF will concentrate its efforts over the course of the first year, with the understanding that flexibility should be granted, in order to swiftly adapt to emerging issues and opportunities.

The following priority areas have been identified as areas for investment:

### 1. Whole IATF-MFAC thematic dialogues

Following the successful first thematic meeting between IATF and MFAC on UN-FBO collaboration to advance Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in November 2021, the IATF will explore opportunities to continue this series of strategic dialogues. In consultation with MFAC, the IATF will identify an issue area that is of relevance to the UN, on which a thematic dialogue will focus. One IATF Co-Chair will lead this effort on the IATF’s behalf (with possibility of more IATF members to join)..

### 2. Kofi Annan Briefings

After years of pause, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2023 the IATF will resume collaboration with the MFAC around the organization of a Kofi Annan Faith Briefing. The IATF Co-Chairs will engage with the MFAC (which has established an ad-hoc working group), on the IATF’s behalf, to plan this event. Possible strategic moments for alignment with UN system-wide priorities are the SDGs moment and the Summit of the Future.

### 3. Knowledge management

A coordinated approach to partnering with faith actors requires good information exchange by IATF members. To this aim, the ITAF will work to strengthen internal capacity to collect and share information. A shared calendar of main intergovernmental moments and

initiatives with faith actors by all members, for example, would be instrumental in finding opportunities for collaboration and avoid duplications.

4. Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs

The annual Symposium is a key opportunity for joint advocacy and to showcase the importance and effectiveness of partnership between the UN and faith actors. While the Symposium traditionally takes place in January of each year, the preparation takes place over the course of the prior months, thus the relevance for this workplan. Depending on the specific theme chosen by the planning committee of FBOs, the most relevant IATF member(s) will be identified as lead(s).

5. OPGA event (TBC)

The Office of the President of the General Assembly is planning an event titled “FBOs : A game-changer of social conduct on the road to fulfil the 2030 Agenda?”. The event will bring together FBOs engaged in work on the ground to have their perspective on how their work contributes to achieving the SDGs. MFAC members will be invited. The proposed date of the event is the end of June.

6. MFAC retreat

The annual retreat of the whole MFAC membership represents an opportunity for deep exchange and reflection between this important body and the IATF (represented by the Co-Chairs and other IATF members, to the extent possible). This year, in particular, the retreat will be 100% in person, for the first time after the break due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to ensure appropriate participation and contribution by the IATF to the strategic reflection on future priorities that takes place during the retreat.

**Timeline**

May 2023	MFAC retreat
June 2023	OPGA event
July 2023	
August 2023	
September 2023	Kofi Annan Faith Briefing
October 2023	
November 2023	Second IATF-MFAC thematic dialogue
December 2023	
January 2024	Symposium

# Annex 2 - Report by the Co-Chairs of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development upon completion of the 3-year Chairship cycle 2020-22

The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UN IATF-R) was established in 2010, as a platform for knowledge exchange and management, capacity building, system-wide guidance and oversight regarding engagement with faith-based/-inspired civil society actors. While since its inception the IATF-R has been convened and steered by UNFPA, at the end of 2019 a shared 3-Chairship system was established, for a first cycle of 3 years (2020-2022). This report provides an overview of the first 3-year cycle, upon completion of the 3 Chairs role by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG), and UNFPA<sup>9</sup>.

## **Ensuring IATF and MFAC coordination and continuation of institutional arrangements**

- **IATF**: the Co-Chairs convened regular IATF meetings for exchange of information, inter-agency coordination and joint projects (2 in 2020, 3 in 2021).
- **MFAC Co-Chairs**: the IATF Co-Chairs held regular meetings with the MFAC Co-Chairs (10 in 2020, 11 in 2021 and 4 in 2022).
- **Whole MFAC**: the IATF Co-Chairs supported the organization of and participated in regular meetings with the whole MFAC (1 in 2020, 3 in 2021, 1 in 2022)
- **MFAC ToR**: 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.
- **MFAC membership and Co-Chairship**: the renewal of MFAC membership was successfully managed. In 2021, the IATF proceeded with the renewal of approximately one third of the MFAC members, as per the MFAC ToRs. The Bahu Trust, the Center for Earth Ethics, the Lutheran World Federation and Soka Gakkai International joined the MFAC in 2021. Subsequently, and also in accordance with the MFAC ToRs, new four co-Chairs for 2022 were elected by MFAC members in 2021: Bhumi Global, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and World YWCA.

## **Scaling up MFAC engagement**

- In response to the global COVID-19 crisis, the Co-Chairs coordinated the issuing by the UN IATF-R of a [Joint Statement with the Endorsement of the Multifaith Advisory Council](#). The statement expressed deep concern about the pandemic's complex and multidimensional

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<sup>9</sup> In 2020 UNFPA served as Executive Secretariat, while in 2021 this function was held by OSAPG and in 2022 by AOC.

challenges and called on all relevant stakeholders for unity and solidarity, both within and between faith communities. This statement has been widely disseminated and referenced in various UN speeches.

- In May 2020 UNAOC, OSAPG and OHCHR - organized a virtual consultation with a wide range of religious leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations to discuss initiatives 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 Co-Chairs supported the MFAC in the organization of, and coordinated overall IATF contribution to 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.
- 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.
- In April 2022, the MFAC held its first in-person retreat since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The work, composition and thematic focus of the MFAC working group was discussed during the retreat, as well as priorities for the future (both for MFAC and in terms of IATF-MFAC collaboration).
- During the three years of their mandate, the Co-Chairs supported a group of FBOs in the organization of Annual Symposia on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs. In January 2021, the Symposium was titled “2021: a defining year for accelerating gender equality, equity and justice” and saw the participation of OSAPG, UNFPA and UN Women. In January 2022, the Symposium addressed “Mobilizing moral influence and governance to end the systematic injustices of racism, the legacy of colonialism and slavery” and OSAPG, UNAOC and UNFPA intervened. UNDP represented the IATF in the last symposium for this 3-year cycle, which took place in January 2023 with the title “Securing people’s wellbeing and planetary sustainability”.

## **Innovating/ best practices**

- In November 2021, the Co-Chairs, in collaboration with the MFAC Gender Working Group, organized the first of a series of substantive meetings between IATF and MFAC to address key topics for collaboration between IATF and MFAC. The meeting focused on UN-FBO collaboration to advance Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, with the objective to identify challenges to the advancement of gender equality and women empowerment in faith settings, the needs for support to this workstream, and to solicit recommendations to address these needs. The meeting was attended by over 40 representatives. Participants identified several challenges related to working on the issue of gender equality and in engaging with UN and FBOs, and strategies to improve collaboration were proposed.
- In 2021, responding to the need to foster information-sharing and cooperation between IATF members, the Co-Chairs facilitated the development of a shared database of FBO partners. The database is intended to be a live document, where the contact details of key FBO partners of IATF members are collected, and all IATF members have access to the document.
- In July 2021 the MFAC, with support from the IATF Co-Chairs, organized the side event “The F Words: Faith, Feminisms and Freedom to chose” at the Generation Equality Forum’s launch in Paris. The interactive event demonstrated the role of faith-based organizations in driving change for gender equality, showcasing how feminism/rights and faith discourse and action not only are not mutually exclusive but can achieve transformative change. The session also helped showcase the commitments made by FBOs through the GEF Action Coalitions.
- In July 2022 the MFAC, with support from the IATF Co-Chairs, organized the side event “Dispelling Misconceptions and Myths: Faith Actors Advancing Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls” on the margins of the 2022 High-Level Political Forum. The event’s focus was to demonstrate the role of faith actors in driving change for gender equality, share faith-based methodologies in advancing gender equality, and highlight key opportunities for synergies, learning and cooperation among all stakeholders engaged in the promotion of pluralistic societies and gender equality.

## **Co-Chairs’ recommendations for the 2023-25 cycle**

- Continue and scale up the series of thematic dialogues with whole IATF and whole MFAC.
- Revive the Kofi Annan Briefings.
- Invest in learning-exchange opportunities, within IATF and with MFAC.

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END OF REPORT