

G20 REGIONAL INTERFAITH MEETING

Partnerships in Action: towards One Earth,
One Family, One Future

ISTANBUL – 28-29 AUGUST 2023

EVENT REPORT



INTRODUCTION

The interlinked crises of violent conflict, widening inequality, the on-going climate crisis, and diminishing trust in global and local public institutions demands new partnerships and leadership that link an ethical and pragmatic vision, nuanced by global and local insights, to deepen multisectoral engagement.

Interfaith dialogue between Islam and Christianity, the world's two major religions, can serve as a powerful tool in addressing global challenges and promoting a more tolerant and compassionate world.

As part of engaging with the G20 process to ensure the inclusion of religious communities as part of the solution to the world's most pressing concerns, the *Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities* and the *G20 Interfaith Forum Association* have organized major forums in Abu Dhabi, New Delhi and Pune in support of India's G20 Presidency, and are already at work planning similar events for 2024 in Brazil (*the next G20 host country*).

These forums offer a platform for faith leaders, representatives of faith-inspired organizations, government officials, international organizations, academia and civil society to come together to share experiences and provide concrete, actionable recommendations. These recommendations will form the basis of global advocacy efforts aimed at shaping the agenda of the 2023 G20 Summit and beyond.

To ensure that regional perspectives and challenges are adequately captured in the recommendations and future advocacy efforts, a series of regional meetings are being organized in different parts of the world covering Manila, New York, Istanbul and Nairobi.



THE ISTANBUL MEETING

Regional G20 Interfaith Meeting in Istanbul was held on the 28-29th of August 2023 in Istanbul, under the patronage of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

With an aim to advance interfaith dialogue in the context of the G20 process, all discussions that took place echoed the themes of India's G20 Presidency, "*One Earth, One Family and One Future*", and looked ahead to the G20 India Summit in September 2023 and beyond.

The discussions covered climate change and food security, conflict resolution and peace building, child sexual abuse and exploitation, human trafficking, and hate crimes.

The meeting gathered 30 participants, including senior Christian and Muslim faith leaders, along with select representatives from faith-based organizations.

The meeting included participants from 15 countries including Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Greece, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Portugal, Singapore, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States and Venezuela.



**INTERFAITH
ALLIANCE**
FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES





**His All-Holiness
Ecumenical Patriarch
Bartholomew**

“ Dialogue must manifest in concrete actions. Words are but the beginning; the real testament of our commitment will be the projects we initiate, the communities we uplift, and the environment we safeguard. Through initiatives grounded in our shared values, we can inspire transformation on both individual and collective levels. To realize the vision of “One Earth, One Family, One Future,” we must transcend mere tolerance. True dialogue entails deep respect, mutual understanding, and collective action. Our scriptures offer countless narratives that champion unity, respect, and cooperation. By immersing ourselves in these narratives, we can draw inspiration for our common journey. ”



**His Eminence Elder
Metropolitan Emmanuel
of Chalcedon**

“ In an increasingly interconnected world, where the actions of one reverberate to affect all, Christians and Muslims are presented with an unparalleled opportunity. By joining hands in solidarity and recognizing our shared commitment to peace, respect, and environmental stewardship, both communities can look forward to a brighter future for all of humanity. ”



Dana Humaid
(Chief Executive,
IAFSC)

“ Interfaith dialogue between Islam and Christianity, the world’s two major religions, can serve as a powerful tool in addressing global challenges and promoting a more tolerant and compassionate world. We must create a world in which anyone can prosper, regardless of where they come from or what they believe: we must leave no one behind. Each and every one of us here is an agent of change. We must use our individual and collective strength to mobilize support for the most vulnerable in our societies. It is our duty. As we look ahead to the G20 summit in India in a few weeks, we must continue to push our shared message into the hands the leaders and decision-makers of the world. ”

THE DISCUSSIONS

The discussions at the regional meeting were structured around the **Indian G20 Presidency's theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future"**, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life on Earth and highlights the shared responsibility for the well-being of our planet and future generations.

"One Earth" underscores the fact that Earth is the only planet we have, and it is our collective home. It emphasizes the idea that all living beings, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or any other differences, share this planet and its finite resources.

It reminds us that the health of the Earth is essential for the survival and prosperity of all life forms. Under this theme, attendees in Istanbul held discussions on climate change, food security, climate change, conflict resolution and peace building.

"One Family" encourages a sense of global unity and solidarity among all human beings. It implies that we are part of a larger human family, and our actions impact not only our immediate communities but also people around the world. It promotes empathy, compassion, and the idea that we should care for and support one another, just as we do within our own families.

Against a backdrop of the pandemic, global economic slowdown and regional conflicts, vulnerable sections of our communities are at significant risk from child sexual abuse and exploitation, human trafficking and hate crimes. Faith leaders held discussions on how they can work together to find ways to protect, support and inspire vulnerable people across the globe.

"One Future" underscores the idea that the choices and actions we make today have consequences for future generations. It calls for responsible stewardship of the Earth's resources, sustainable practices, and the recognition that we have a shared responsibility to leave a habitable and prosperous planet for our children and their descendants.

It emphasizes the importance of long-term thinking and planning. During this session, attendees held discussions on the world we want to create for future generations, and how interfaith dialogue between Islam and Christianity, the world's two major religions, can serve as a powerful tool in addressing global challenges and promoting a more tolerant and compassionate world.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND FOOD SECURITY

Context

The role of interfaith collaboration in raising awareness and driving meaningful action with respect to food security and challenges associated with climate change is paramount. While faith leaders traditionally focus on spiritual preparation for the afterlife, it is becoming evident that their influence can extend to improving earthly living conditions. The notion that faith will not alter circumstances until people take action implies a responsibility to address challenges collectively. In that regard, a transition from blaming divine forces toward proactive engagement is essential.

Religious leaders have been highlighted as pivotal figures, particularly those at the grassroots level who possess significant sway within their communities. Therefore, facilitating a transformation in conscience, incorporating scientific understanding, and promoting sustainable practices must become a shared goal. Interfaith leaders are in a position to be more involved in these matters to effectively communicate and advocate for environmental protection.

Main Takeaways and Key Recommendations



1. Environmental laws and regulations can indeed encourage responsible environmental practices. Yet, involvement of faith leaders and communities in policy-making can not only further increase pressure on governments to adopt sustainable policies, but also increase compliance within respective communities.



2. Interfaith educational programs should extend beyond religious teachings to include environmental awareness from an early age.



3. Faith leaders should leverage traditional and social media platforms in order to effectively reach broader audiences and enhance its advocacy efforts overall.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING

Context

At the heart of conflicts often lie differences and disparities, often fueled by selfish motives. Contrary to the belief that religion might contribute to the conflict, religious teachings emphasize virtues like diversity, justice, equality, and fairness. Therefore, faith leaders can act as catalysts for positive change by utilizing their religious teachings to foster solidarity for a more peaceful existence. Faith leaders hold the key to addressing conflicts on local, regional and global level, given the profound impact that each of them has on the other.

Although governments acknowledge their significance, their actions often remain symbolic, reflecting a 'tick-the-box' approach. Yet, the importance of faith and community leaders in shaping a world where conflicts are addressed through shared understanding, cooperation, and the application of enduring values cannot be overstated.

Main Takeaways and Key Recommendations



1. Stakeholders engaged in conflict resolution should engage faith leaders, who possess the closest connection to affected communities, in a systematic and continued manner. However, faith leaders should maintain their independence from government and other public stakeholders while actively participating in conflict resolution efforts.



2. Faith leaders must receive training in conflict resolution to effectively harness the potential of acting as catalysts for positive change in conflict settings (local, regional and global).



3. Ensuring inclusivity within interfaith organizations is crucial to maintain legitimacy when it comes to conflict resolution. To that end, the involvement of youth and women should be increased. Equally, to transcend conflicts, faith leaders must focus on commonalities among religions, emphasizing shared values.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Context

Interfaith leaders have a vital role to play in addressing and preventing child abuse and exploitation, but several key challenges and opportunities must be addressed to effectively tackle these issues. While legislation may exist to protect children in many places, its implementation and enforcement are often lacking. Religion can be misused and misappropriated, emphasizing the importance of educating those who preach and teach religion.

In that regard, understanding the local context is critical, as interpretations of religious texts can vary based on location. Additionally, as technology continues to evolve, so too does its potential for harm to children, especially in the spread of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the influence of faith-based communities, which presents an opportunity to harness this influence for positive change in child protection efforts.

Main Takeaways and Key Recommendations



1. There's a pressing need to raise awareness and educate faith leaders about the new crimes and forms of abuse affecting children in the modern world, particularly those facilitated by technology.



2. Challenging old cultural practices can be met with resistance from communities, and it's essential to navigate the intersection of ethnicity, culture, and religion carefully.

2.1. Religious educational institutions must revisit their clergy training content to educate the educators, ensuring that clergy members are equipped to address child abuse effectively.

2.2. In a similar vein, faith leaders must grasp the role of technology in children's lives to protect them effectively.



3. Partnerships between faith-based organizations, civil society, governments, and international organizations are key to success in protecting vulnerable children.

3.1. Developing and sharing a curriculum for interfaith education can dispel misconceptions and bridge divides, facilitating a more comprehensive and unified approach to safeguarding children.



4. Parents are a strategic partner in the prevention of children, as child safety begins at home. Faith leaders need to engage with parents in their communities to ensure that children have a sense of safety at home, and that their families are able to provide a moral compass and safe environment.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Context

While many places have laws in place to prevent human trafficking, their effectiveness depends on proper implementation. Faith leaders may not have the mandate of law enforcement, but they hold significant influence over their communities. They can help ensure that anti-trafficking laws are enforced and that children are protected from human trafficking.

Parents are strategic partners in the fight against human trafficking, as it often begins within the home. Faith leaders must also reflect on and actively combat the root causes of trafficking rather than merely addressing its symptoms.

Main Takeaways and Key Recommendations



1. Evaluating the fairness and human rights aspects of existing laws is essential. To that end, faith leaders can influence policymakers to make necessary corrections and improvements to anti-trafficking legislation.



2. Collaboration between different faith communities is important in raising awareness and enhancing relevant capacity of faith leaders. This joint effort can ensure that faith leaders are well-equipped to address human trafficking effectively.



3. Cultural norms can contribute to the problem, as families may avoid discussing victimization. Encouraging open dialogue within communities is essential to address this challenge.

HATE SPEECH AND HATE CRIMES

Context

Religious leaders must acknowledge that hate speech and hate crimes are often perpetuated by various groups, including some who use divisive rhetoric to build their religious identity by attacking other faiths. It is imperative to address hate speech through interfaith collaboration, standing united against acts of hate.

Any attack on one faith is seen as an attack on the entire community. Importantly, beyond mere promotion of tolerance and living in harmony, faith leaders can contribute significantly to healing wounds caused by hate crimes.

Main Takeaways and Key Recommendations



1. Faith leaders must address the growing spread of hate content through social media and the internet, recognizing the role of AI in amplifying hate speech.



2. To take action against hate crimes effectively, faith leaders can explore initiatives like the "Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign" (<https://www.shouldertoshouldercampaign.org/>), which promotes unity and collaboration among diverse faith communities.

2.1. In this collective effort, faith leaders can contribute significantly to mitigating hate crimes and fostering a more inclusive and peaceful society.

2.2. Similarly, faith leaders may consider launching their own initiatives and campaigns to address hate speech and hate crimes by leveraging social media.

ONE FUTURE

Context

Faith leaders should emphasize commonalities between religions, fostering the idea that they are not independent but share many fundamental values. Fear of the unknown can contribute to mistrust, so translating and explaining religious texts and educating leaders from different faiths on each other's religions can dispel misunderstandings.

Instilling optimism and a commitment to love, acceptance, and bridge-building in future generations is essential. In essence, faith leaders can play a pivotal role in shaping a future where diverse communities coexist with mutual respect and understanding.

Main Takeaways and Key Recommendations



1. Faith leaders should encourage their followers to take bold steps towards togetherness, symbolized by actions like marches or walks into the future.



2. It's important to distinguish between religious identity and fundamentalism, fostering pride in one's identity while promoting openness and learning about other faiths.



3. Institutional and political dialogue plays a critical role in bridging divides. Faith leaders should work to support existing or establish new grassroots-level structures that facilitate ongoing dialogue and convert high-level discussions between top leaders into rapid response mechanisms at the community level.



4. Effective dialogue, characterized by mutual respect and a genuine exchange of ideas, is essential.



5. Differences within the same faith should be acknowledged, with judgment left to a higher authority.

