

Third Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs

United Nations Secretariat, New York

*Thematic Focus:
Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Peace*

Concept Note

On 23 January 2017, the World Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church will organize the Third Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs, in partnership with the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force for Engagement with Faith-based Organizations and the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations.

1. Objectives of the Third Annual Symposium

The Symposium will address cooperation among faith-based organizations, Member States, civil society and international and regional organizations, including the United Nations, in fostering just, inclusive and sustainable peace. The Symposium will highlight different perspectives on this topic and examine issues that can contribute to promoting just and sustainable peace, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or inhibiting just and sustainable peace, including in settings where there are lingering conflicts and endemic poverty. Two case studies will be also presented, namely Colombia and the Philippines, with an assessment of how their respective peace processes have addressed the promotion of a just peace, the cessation of hostilities and steps towards achieving sustainable peace.

2. Rationale

Faith-based organizations and religions have “peace” inscribed in their very *raison d'être*. These organizations would say that the promotion of peace is at the core of their sacred teachings and therefore a condition they endeavor to achieve. The three faith based organizations co-organizing this event have a track record of fostering just, inclusive and sustainable peace.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), a Christian ecumenical organization, focuses on bringing Christians together - a mandate that, in itself, is key to the work of peacemaking and peacebuilding. In this context, WCC has developed the *Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* initiative, aimed at renewing the true vocation of the church through collaborative engagement with common objectives, including on the most important issues of justice and peace to heal a world filled with conflict, injustice and pain. In addition, WCC's New York office conducts advocacy for peace at the international level.

The cooperation of two Wesleyan churches—the British Methodist Church and The United Methodist Church (UMC)—with the United Nations is well documented. The first United Nations General Assembly was hosted at a British Methodist property in London. In 1963, the Church Center for the United Nations was built by a predecessor of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church (UMC-GBCS). As a worldwide church with some 11 million members in Asia, Africa, Europe and the United States, its peacebuilding, development and humanitarian work is recognized across these regions but also ecumenically, including in the peace process in the Philippines and in the search for just and sustainable peace in the Korean Peninsula, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere in Africa. The work of United Methodist Women and the worldwide reach of their resources, and that of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), illustrate the commitment of the UMC to the search for durable and just peace.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church provides a range of services that align with the values that the United Nations promotes, including education, the promotion of human rights - especially the right to freedom of religion or belief – and the right to health. With 20 million adult members worldwide, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church operates 174 hospitals and 326 clinics. The SDA church also operates 7,992 educational institutions worldwide. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) partners with the United Nations on many projects that are relevant to the theme of this Symposium. Every year, ADRA assists 20 million people in need. These multifaceted services all contribute to fostering the various dimensions of peace, whether physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or social.

As the promotion of peace is the desired outcome of most faith based organizations' partnership with the United Nations, the event will bring together a number of organizations that partner with diverse entities of the United Nations, both at the global and grassroots level. These organizations will be given an opportunity to speak about the work they are doing to promote peace and security, human rights and sustainable development, with the ultimate purpose of improving people's lives.

3. The Primacy of Peace as a Universal Value

The Charter established three founding pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, human rights and development. The three pillars are closely related and mutually supportive; peace and security are necessary conditions for human rights to thrive and for societies to develop socially and economically. Peaceful societies in which human rights are respected and development thrives are also more resilient to atrocity crimes. These societies are those in which respect for “the other” is more developed and therefore resilience to identity based violence is stronger.

4. Background of Institutional Partnerships

This Symposium is the third in a series. In January 2015, the co-organizers organized the First Annual Symposium, on “Human Dignity and Human Rights.” In February 2016, the co-organizers organized the Second Annual Symposium, on “Religion, Violence and Extremism”, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Finland, the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the Committee of Religious NGOs. These first two symposiums were followed by a number of events that focused on related issues, including on prospects for peace in the Korean Peninsula and in the Philippines, human trafficking and the refugee and migrant crisis. In relation to the latter, WCC in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, KAICIID Dialogue Center, Malta Institute of Security and Democracy and the Governments of Spain and Italy organized a

high level side event in September 2016 in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly on forced migration and human trafficking.

The journey of consultations between these faith-based organizations and the United Nations underlines a continuity of partnership, informs cumulative knowledge, builds the trust required to influence critical policy decisions, and secures important conceptual and practical linkages between the diverse facets of peace and the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. Symposium output

The proceedings of this Third Symposium will be documented and disseminated through a publication aimed at guiding religious institutions, faith-based organizations, Member States, civil society and United Nations entities in fostering sustainable peace.

6. Participants

Some 120 participants from Member States, United Nations agencies, faith-based organizations and wider civil society.

7. Organizers and Sponsors

Organizers

- General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church
- General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists
- World Council of Churches

Co-sponsors

- The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
- United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force for Engagement with Faith-based Organizations
- The Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations

8. Date and Venue

- 23 January 2017, from 9:00 am to 6:30 pm (including a reception)
- United Nations Secretariat – Conference Room 11