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Faith sector's lasting commitment to disaster-affected communities

Faith, in all its forms, constitutes a natural and important element in the lives of billions of people with over 84% of the world identifying with a religious group¹. Faith drives people to take action. During the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, we have heard testimonies of communities that have relied on faith and faith institutions as part of their coping mechanism in times of disasters. Faith has enabled communities to become better stewards of their environment and has enhanced social capital through communication, sharing, and compassion for others. Faith has thus offered courage, comfort and hope. Faith contributes to the coping capacities of many people. It is an integral element that needs to be taken into account in disaster risk reduction.

From our own experience, and as discussed during this WCDRR, there are numerous good examples of the added value of Local Faith Communities (LFCs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in responding to disasters all over the world, including the Ebola crisis in West Africa, conflict in South Sudan and Central African Republic, the Great East Japan Earth Quake, Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, flooding in southeast Asia, and many others.

We highlight the strengths and recommendations as included in the FBO & DRR statement that was circulated for input for the 1st Prep Com meeting in Geneva, July 2014.² It calls for acknowledgement of the role of Local Faith Communities (LFCs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in DRR, highlighting several strengths they have, including the following:

- Local faith-based networks reach every corner of our communities and nations;
- FBOs and local faith communities (LFCs) have material and social assets, useful for DRR action and emergencies including the physical structures that serve as evacuation centres and distribution sites for food and non food items;
- FBOs and LFCs are almost always first responders in emergencies; and also among those in the first line of defense in preventing avoidable disasters; and
- FBOs and LFCs also contribute to resilience strengthening by utilizing their pre-existing local networks and infrastructure especially at the local level.

¹ Pew Research Centre, 2012

² See: <http://www.sgi.org/es/assets/pdf/FBO-Statement5-orgs.pdf>, prepared as input for the Bangkok Regional Consultation, as well as for the 1st PrepCom in Geneva.

The zero-draft of the new HFA2 did refer to the role of FBOs. We are disappointed that this reference has been deleted from the draft of the new framework. This has left many FBOs and LFC feeling excluded from an area of work that is very close to their hearts and to their calling of service to communities. As LFCs and FBOs, we live, work, and support communities across the globe and bear witness to how faith in the most at-risk of communities helps prevent and reduce risks, contribute to resilience and inspire hope to rebuild better in a post-disaster context.

We therefore call governments to:

- **recognize and affirm the aforementioned unique role of LFCs and FBOs.**
- **prioritize the engagement and collaboration with FBOs and LFCs in the implementation of the post-2015 framework on DRR.**

We further call for the inclusion the following note in the new framework under paragraph 34:

34.a.(vii) Recognising Local Faith Communities (LFCs) and Faith Based Organisations (FBO) work closely with local communities and can use their unique strength—the unifying power of shared faith—to facilitate resilience and in responding to concerns arising from disasters, including post-disaster peace building and recovery processes.

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