

GLOBAL RELIGIOUS FORUM OF THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT WORKING MEETING

Thursday, 29th October 2015, CAFOD offices London, UK

Meeting overview

Faith-based humanitarian organisations, religious institutions, FBO consortiums and secular NGOs met in London in person (and via conference calling) to discuss opportunities and challenges for the proposed Global Religious Forum of the World Humanitarian Summit. Many of those present have been actively involved in WHS regional consultations and all have experience of humanitarian partnerships with religious leaders or local faith-based organisations.

Following brief presentations outlining the GRF concept note participants broke into small groups to discuss the practical challenges and opportunities of working with local faith-based partners. From these experiences participants identified key issues for discussion at the WHS GRF, as well as highlighting challenges and risks for such an agenda. This report provides a summary of that discussion, which support the GRF Steering Committee to refine the agenda for the GRF, alongside similar meetings in across Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East in the coming months

Identification of key issues:

- Local FBOs and religious leaders often have strong links to and understanding of the local community, as well as the influence to mobilising volunteers and financial resources. These assets are poorly understood by the international humanitarian system.
- Partnership issues concern the disconnection between local FBOs/leaders and the wider humanitarian international system. FBOs often feel excluded from cluster meetings and other coordinating mechanisms. This is exemplified by the report on Ebola: <http://jiflfc.com/resources/keeping-the-faith-the-role-of-faith-leaders-in-the-ebola-response-full-report/>
- There are good examples of faith-based NGOs from different religions working together to overcome exclusionary barriers to religious values and identity (example of Christian NGO rebuilding mosques).
- Local FBOs and religious leaders can often impede adherence to humanitarian principles. There needs to be more public support for IHL from religious leadership – particularly as some states continue to undermine the human rights of displaced peoples.
- Some religious leaders have been instrumental in promoting positive change around culturally sensitive issues such as child marriage and this should be better understood.
- FBOs and religious leaders have access to ‘spiritual capital’ which can support community resilience, psychosocial work and peacebuilding.
- Concern was expressed over the instrumentalisation of religious leaders – characterised by shallow partnerships that fail to address the power dynamics of local/international partnerships (which assume humanitarianism is owned by the international humanitarian architecture).
- Anti-terrorism laws, Muslim stereotyping and Islamophobia pose specific problems for Muslim humanitarian organisations.
- Bad practices around forced conversion and proselytisation continue to be a reality in for a persistent group of religiously motivated humanitarian organisations.

- FBOs are a heterogeneous group of organisations which would benefit from a typology to disaggregate different groups with different partnership dynamics.
- Many international and local FBOs feel inhibited to speak about the religious values that guide and underpin their humanitarian work – yet these can enrich partnerships and impact.

Identification of priority areas for WHS GRF:

- Strengthening partnerships with local FBOs must be linked to the localisation agenda at the WHS. Faith groups should not be seen as a separate group to local stakeholders.
- The political and social capital of religious leaders provides a unique contribution to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This relates to the WHS priority '*servicing the needs of people in conflict*' (80% of humanitarian aid is delivered in conflict settings) and the wider security and protection agenda.
- A *Declaration* from religious leaders would be a useful output from the GRF. Such a document could be either a synthesis of the day's discussion; a formal affirmation of humanitarian principles; a code of conduct; a call to action for both religious and secular partners; or a combination of several goals.
- International religious networks engage Diaspora communities – who are also a focus for the WHS.
- FBOs often embody specific forms of partnership (such as accompaniment) which can say something useful to the partnership and power discussions at the WHS.
- Both secular and faith-based actors can benefit from greater appreciation for the religious underpinning of humanitarian principles, which links to discussions of IHL application in the WHS.
- Discussion of innovative partnership models could also usefully include support for greater coordination and learning between different FBOs and religious actors. There are many good case studies showcasing how religious language and narratives can be applied to conflict sensitivity, DRR and child protection.

Identification of risks and challenges of WHS GRF

- It is important that the GRF does not only speak within the FBO community. It must reach out into the WHS and pose challenges and solutions to greater partnership with FBOs and religious leaders. It must also engage government representatives and the wider UN system.
- It is essential that the concept of 'leadership' does not exclude women, youth and those who work on the front line of response.
- Religious participants must be empowered to speak in their own terms about their experiences – but must also be supported to speak the secular language of the WHS in order to have meaningful dialogue. Secular attendees will also require a level of faith literacy.
- Difficult issues must be given space for real debate. Participants should not all be likeminded and specific strategies for engaging more conservative religious stakeholders should be discussed.
- There is a lot of useful toolkits and case studies on FBO partnerships – this must be built upon for the GRF and easily accessible for those at the WHS.

Next Steps

Participants agreed to remain involved in the planning and execution of the GRF in the following ways:

- To complete the online survey with detailed comments <http://goo.gl/forms/HfEqcSL81R> ;
- To suggest names of local faith-based leaders and partners to attend the GRF;
- To identify relevant evidence and information on local faith-based humanitarian partnerships.

Annex 1

Meeting Participants

Janice Proud	Anglican Alliance
Rachel Carnegie	Anglican Alliance
Flora Winfield	Anglican Communion
Anne Street	CAFOD
Jane Backhurst	Christian Aid
Martin Quack	Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
Tareq Bakri	The Humanitarian Forum
Lucy V. Salek	Islamic Relief Worldwide
Muhtari Aminu-Kano	Islamic Relief Worldwide
Sarah Teather	Jesuit Refugee Service International
Fadlullah Wilmot	Muslim Aid
Mohammad Shakir	Muslim Charities Forum
Irfan Khan	Muslim Hands
Franziska Wilk	Orphans In Need
Ben Phillips	Oxfam GB
Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh	University College London
Alastair Ager	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh; Columbia University
Jean Duff	Partnership for Faith & Development
Helen Stawski	Partnership for Faith & Development
Helena Manguerra	Partnership for Faith & Development

Annex 2

Agenda & small group questions

Agenda

11:00 – Opening Remarks	Anne Street, CAFOD, Head of Humanitarian Policy
11:05 – Introduction of Global Religious Forum of the World Humanitarian Summit	Jean Duff, Partnership for Faith & Development
11:10 – Evidence base & Pre-conference Materials	Alastair Ager, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh & Columbia University
11:20 – Current Framing, Key Questions & Outcomes	Helen Stawski, Partnership for Faith & Development

11.25 - Small Group Discussion	
11:50 – Plenary discussion	Helen Stawski, Partnership for Faith & Development
12:30 – Close	

Small Group Questions

- 1) Take a few minutes to each share an example of an operational partnership your organisation has had with a local or national faith-based organisation or religious leader or religious group. Please explain where FBOs added value, or presented challenges to partnership, due to their unique identity, values and practices.
- 2) Based on the examples shared which areas are most important for strengthening understanding and partnerships between faith-based/religiously-inspired humanitarian actors and the wider humanitarian sector (prioritising areas where FBOs add value due to their unique identity, values and practices)?
- 3) How can the proposed one day Global Religious Forum at the WHS best support these practical partnership goals?

Plenary discussion

- 1) Feedback on questions 2 & 3
- 2) What kinds of outputs would be useful? For example public declarations, capacity building resources, training.
- 3) How should the GRF's priority areas and objectives connect to the WHS's priority areas?
- 4) For those involved in the WHS regional consultations – in what ways was the issue of faith and religion discussed?
- 5) Which groups of stakeholders should be prioritised as invitees to the GRF at the WHS (local FBOs, religious leaders, international FBOs, secular agencies, academics, governments)?