

## EVIDENCE BRIEF 1



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The Secretary General's report *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility* recognises the unprecedented challenges presented by current humanitarian crises and calls for 'accepting and acting upon our individual

and shared responsibilities [to] be the central theme of the World Humanitarian Summit'. The report identifies five core responsibilities that will be the focus of discussion and proposed action. The JLIF&LC has prepared evidence briefs linked to each of these responsibilities. Each brief summarises key evidence regarding the role of local faith communities (LFCs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) with respect to that responsibility, provides links to key research and documentation, and highlights significant issues and strategies for dialogue to secure more effective engagement with religious actors in this area.

## Engaging faith communities to meet the needs of people living in conflict

### CORE RESPONSIBILITY 1: Global leadership to prevent and end conflict

This responsibility urges that 'Preventing conflicts and finding political solutions to resolve them is our first and foremost responsibility to humanity.' Four fundamental shifts are identified as needed: **political leadership** that is timely, coherent and decisive. An end to human suffering requires political solutions and sustained leadership; **acting early** through investment in risk analysis and early response to findings, creating political unity to prevent (not just respond) and making successes visible; **staying engaged and investing in stability**, working on more than one crisis at a time and looking to engage over the long term; and **developing solutions with and for people**, including establishing platforms that enable inclusion of diverse voices, youth and promotion of faith based dialogue.

It is widely recognized that religious groups and organizations comprise a substantial proportion of civil society in settings. However, consultations leading up to the WHS summit have consistently signalled that such capacity is seldom effectively engaged by formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms. While this discussion has most frequently focused on the role of faith actors in humanitarian response and service delivery, this is also true for prevention and response to conflict. What evidence is available regarding the capacities and contribution of local faith communities, and particularly faith-based organisations, to these issues?

The connections between humanitarian response, building peace and sustainable development outcomes are increasingly recognised; as

evidenced by the inclusion of Peace, justice and strong institutions in the Sustainable Development Goals. The overwhelming majority of humanitarian crises is played out in violent conflict settings. Accordingly, the need to address the drivers of conflict – as well as the particular challenges posed by delivery of response in such environments – is at the heart of the agenda for the World Humanitarian Summit. In developing "solutions with and for people" faith communities have a crucial role to play in the successful response to the needs of people in conflict.

### Religion, peace and conflict: an ambivalent heritage and an opportunity for leadership

In many ways, perspectives that cast religion as a driver of conflict and those that see it as a driver

of peace are both correct, yet they each only give a partial account. A deeper analysis shows the need to resist simplifying the involvement of religious actors in conflict contexts. A growing body of empirical research demonstrates a worldwide increase in religiously *framed* violence. This does not necessarily mean that religion is increasingly driving levels of violence, but rather that there exist an increasing number of conflicts associated in some way with religion.

Statistics on linkages between religion, peace and conflict also testify to this complexity. Research by the *Institute for Economics and Peace*<sup>1</sup> on religion and peacefulness demonstrates that societies with high levels of religious diversity and practice can also be highly peaceful (and by contrast, those with low levels of religious practice can have low levels of peace).



Ultimately, the ‘ambivalence’ of religion makes generalisations about its implications in peace and conflict difficult. It also warns against trying to develop hard and fast rules about the contributions of faith-based actors. Each context must be judged independently.

However, this also provides opportunities. Understandings of the relationship between religion, peace and conflict can act as one of the main obstacles for timely, coherent and decisive leadership in times of conflict. While this

is currently framed as a challenge, it also poses an opportunity – for both political and religious leaders, as well as for interfaith action.

### **Acting early: What do faith communities have to offer conflict prevention?**

In recent years the term ‘social capital’ has been increasingly widely used to describe the practice and the impact of grassroots community organisations and faith groups. Research has identified three forms of social capital that are of relevance:

*Bonding capital:* The building up of ties, resilient relationships, solidarity, capacity and self-confidence within homogeneous social, ethnic or religious groups.

*Bridging capital:* The development of dialogue, greater understanding and levels of trust between different social, ethnic or religious groups.

*Linking capital:* The development of trusting relationships between different social, ethnic or religious groups in order to develop a network that is capable of bringing about political and social change.

This is in addition to their:

*Religious Capital:* The resources faith groups possess as a result of their buildings, congregations, activities and relationships in local neighbourhoods.

*Spiritual Capital:* The ethical, theological, scriptural and spiritual values that resource and motivate faith groups.

These different types of capital indicate how acting early and staying and invested could be addressed more effectively with wider and deeper participation of faith groups and FBOs.

### **Case Study: Political Leadership by the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre**

*Zanzibar Interfaith Centre’s (ZANZIC) Joint Committee of Religious Leaders for Tranquillity and Peace has worked to prevent conflict and diffuse tensions through press conferences and a network of 300 local peace committees. In 2015 ZANZIC trained religious leaders on election observation, which plays an influential role in Zanzibar life. “Within the context of the Project in Support of a Peaceful and Inclusive Electoral Process (PROPEL), a workshop on election observation for ZANZIC’s Joint Committee was conducted by the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) on 24 October 2015 in Stone Town, Zanzibar. The Joint Committee represents the major religious groups in Zanzibar and has played an influential role in previous elections by promoting dialogue and peaceful elections since 2000.”<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Peace-and-Religion-Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.propel-zanzibar.eu/posts/election-observation-workshop-for-religious-leaders>

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## Staying engaged: Faith communities responding to conflict and violence

The role of these communities and groups in welfare provision and aid also highlights the need for a multidimensional approach to conflict: provision of immediate short-term humanitarian assistance, but only as it intersects with a longer-term commitment to cultural, political and economic transformation to address deep-seated systemic and culture-driven 'structural' and 'cultural' barriers to equality, peace and trust.

Faith communities and organisations are well-positioned to engage effectively with 'direct conflict' in conflict zones in the form of focused but limited conflict prevention, with 'structural violence' through long-term commitments

to systemic conflict transformation and with 'cultural violence' as a result of commitment to holistic peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes, which move beyond humanitarian assistance to active engagement in civil society politics. Local faith communities are ideally placed in this regard as they will be there before, during and after crisis.



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### Case Study: The Sudan Council of Churches and the Jonglei Peace Process Project

*In South Sudan, the UK's Department for International Development supported the Sudan Council of Churches to run the Jonglei Peace Process Project on the basis that the churches' involvement would be sustained: "We need to learn more about how to partner with the church for peace and development in South Sudan – as unlike most international actors it will see South Sudan reach its maturity as a state".<sup>3</sup> Religious networks are particularly important where trust in governments is low, or where the state is incapable of providing security, healthcare and education.*

## Developing responses and solutions with and for people

The response of local faith communities and faith based organisations to conflict and civil strife can be seen to take two formats:

1. The 'caring' model - reflecting an ethic of social responsibility
2. The 'campaigning' model - inspired by a theological stance which prioritises the struggle for social justice above welfare provision

Religion has influenced the theory and practice of peacebuilding at a fundamental level, and religious teachings significantly pre-date modern secularist thinking about peace, conflict and reconciliation.

Today faith-based actors are becoming ever more engaged in efforts to resolve conflict, and at their best they have the moral capital, grassroots network and functioning institutional

framework to provide a local response to local problems.

The range of peacebuilding activities that faith-based actors engage in is extensive and includes initiatives that address both the proximate (short-term) and structural (long-term) causes of conflict such as:

- offering sanctuary and safe passage
- mediation
- calling for action or restraint from the public
- providing humanitarian aid and development assistance
- reconciliation and healing the wounds of conflict
- challenging social injustice
- political engagement through civil society
- promoting dialogue
- breaking down prejudice
- promoting faith literacy
- bridge-building and social cohesion, including inter- or multi- faith engagement

<sup>3</sup> DFID. *Jonglei Peace Process Project. Intervention Summary.* n.d.

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## Core Commitments and Key Actions

WHS Core Commitments<sup>4</sup> relevant to aspects of the core responsibility 'Global leadership to prevent and end conflict' considered in this brief include:

**Core Commitment 2:** Commit to improve prevention and peaceful resolution capacities at the national, regional and international level improving the ability to work on multiple crises simultaneously.

**Core Commitment 3:** Commit to sustain political leadership and engagement through all stages of a crisis to prevent the emergence or relapse into conflict.

**Core Commitment 4:** Commit to address root causes of conflict and work to reduce fragility by investing in the development of inclusive, peaceful societies.

The evidence reviewed regarding local faith communities and faith-based organisations suggests the following Key Actions in support of these commitments:

1. International actors to **seek a fuller, more nuanced understanding of the holistic and multidimensional nature of conflict.**
2. Humanitarian agencies to **develop a fuller understanding of the nature, role and use of**

**religious and spiritual capital** to inform their approaches to social cohesion.

3. All to seek to **develop inclusive, accessible language regarding religion, peace and conflict** that engages with 'lived religion', academic discourse and the language of religious leaders.

4. Faith communities to **document their impact** on questions of discrimination, poverty, inequality, etc.

5. Acknowledging the mistrust of faith-based groups and organizations by some actors within the wider NGO and state sector, **work to further partnerships that utilise the strengths of both.**

6. **Promote understanding of faith communities in terms recognised by the communities themselves** rather than external accounts

7. **Increase religious literacy** and the depth of discussion on theological, ethical and scriptural themes amongst all actors involved in humanitarian action.

8. Use the lessons learnt on the benefits of multi-faith and interfaith approaches to **support engagement across religious and community divisions.**

## Key Sources

This brief is based on a scoping paper produced by the Peace & Conflict Hub of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities. The full paper is available at: <http://www.jliflc.com/peace-and-conflict-scoping-report>

The JLIF&LC has collated all submissions related to religion and faith made during the course of WHS consultation at: <http://jliflc.com/world-humanitarian-summit-resources/>

A fuller annotated bibliography on sources relevant to the engagement of local faith communities in humanitarian response is available at: <http://jliflc.com/resources/the-evidence-base-faith-religion-and-humanitarian-action-annotated-bibliography/>

This evidence brief was drafted on behalf of the JLIF&LC Peace and Conflict Hub by Lucy Salek (Islamic Relief Worldwide), Sarah Pickwick (World Vision), Chris Shannahan and Alpaslan Ozerdem (Coventry University) and reviewed by Helen Stawski (Islamic Relief Worldwide) and Kathryn Kraft (University of East London). The views expressed are those of the drafting team alone and do not represent the formal position of the JLIF&LC or any of its affiliated organisations.

<sup>4</sup> Full, updated details are available on the WHS site at <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/summit/roundtables>

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