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G20 Interfaith Forum Policy Task Force Structure and Procedures

Several Policy Task Forces are being formed to develop policy analyses and recommendations as part of the G20 Interfaith Forum initiative. The chair of each task force will, in collaboration with the Forum's International and Argentine Local Organizing Committees, identify members. Ideally, each Task Force will have members from at least two countries and institutions and from differing religious (or non-religious) backgrounds, and should include at least one member nominated by the Local Organizing Committee. The aim is to include a range of expertise and approaches to the issues.

Each Task Force is to develop one or possibly two short documents that address the religious dimensions of issues relevant to the G20 process and explore their policy implications, primarily for the G20 members and process but also for religious communities. Contributions can reflect religious values, perspectives, and insights, highlighting tangible ways that religious communities can contribute to implementing recommended initiatives. The policy briefs should generally not exceed 5-6 pages. They should follow the model of two policy briefs prepared during the 2017 G20 process—one on the famine emergency and one on forced migration (attached).

The Forum Organizing Committee has identified an initial set of topics for Policy Task Forces. The list and proposed task force members will be posted on the Forum's website (www.g20interfaith.org) as arrangements are formalized.

Additional proposed topics can be submitted for consideration to the Forum secretariat at Secretariat@G20Interfaith.org. Submissions should include the name and contact information of the person proposing to chair the particular task force, a brief statement of the issue to be addressed and its relevance to G20 issues and priorities (<https://www.g20.org/en>) and an indication of the relevant expertise of the proposed chair and task force members.

Each Chair will submit the proposed policy brief for review by a Recommendations Review Committee ("RRC") consisting of designated members of the International and Local Organizing Committees. The review will aim to assure the professional quality and credibility of the analysis and recommendations and their link to the G20 process. Each Task Force will have the flexibility to develop recommendations but the goal is to harmonize approach and format. A central goal of the G20 Interfaith Forum is to provide a forum where diverse views can be espoused, but in a setting of mutual respect for differing positions that is conducive to identifying shared values as well as to highlight how religious voices and institutions contribute to policy processes. Each brief should reflect consideration of alternative views. The RRC will work with each Task Force chair to finalize documents. Ultimately, the views adopted by each Task Force will be the views of that group, and not necessarily of the G20 Interfaith Forum organization. The RRC will have discretion to determine which policy briefs can most usefully be forwarded into the formal G20 process.

An initial set of policy briefs to be submitted through the T20 process will need to be submitted for review by May 1, 2018. Other draft policy briefs will be due by August 1, 2018. Chairs will be advised how to submit their finalized documents.

Unfortunately, funding is not available from the G20 Interfaith Forum itself to fund meetings or travel of the various Task Forces. It is assumed that collaboration will be managed through internet meetings. Software for facilitating the necessary meetings and collaboration is available.

POLICY AREA:
Forced Migration

G20 policy makers should support wider religious roles in refugee resettlement

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May 09, 2017

Abstract

Religious entities play significant roles in the current refugee/ forced migration crisis. These roles include innovative and experience based ideas to address broken aspects of the humanitarian system, overall advocacy on behalf of refugees and migrants based on humanitarian and spiritual principles, direct action in refugee camps and communities, action in communities that refugees and migrants flee, and support for refugee integration in host countries, including explicit efforts to promote social cohesion and address trauma. Broadly, however, religious factors and contributions are poorly understood and insufficiently taken into account by policy makers and in think tank analyses of these (among other) issues. In each area of religious engagement measures to harmonize and enhance efforts could increase impact.

This brief focuses on the European and US resettlement challenge, which is linked in multiple ways to the broader crisis of forced migration. The G20 in its approach to the forced migration crisis and specifically to resettlement and reintegration should engage more directly with religious actors as central partners. These actors should be part of policy discussions on issues like criteria for resettlement, engagement with host communities to assure welcome, a sharp focus on the protection of unaccompanied or separated children, special measures to counter risky transit like the humanitarian corridor proposal, and post arrival reintegration including education and trauma healing. Recognition of and support for religious engagement could help to counter the fears and negative responses that affect political responses to refugee resettlement. Closer cooperation with key religious actors could substantively strengthen integration processes.

Challenge

Religious dimensions of the current forced migration crises are significant, often misunderstood, and commonly underappreciated.

UNHCR's 2015 Global Trends report notes that more than 65 million people have been forced to flee their homes, the highest number of forcibly displaced populations since the end of World War II. Just under two thirds of these are internally displaced persons (IDPs). About 86 percent of refugees under UNHCR's mandate are in low and middle income countries, including Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Uganda, Chad, and the Sudan. Jordan alone hosts at least 630,000 refugees (UNHCR 2015), ten percent of its total population (unofficial numbers are considerably higher). The multiple causes of forced migration include complex and protracted conflicts and poor governance.

The dimensions of the current refugee and migrant crisis are quite well known and documented, albeit with gaps in knowledge. Substantial international efforts are devoted to addressing practical dimensions of the immediate situation and to exploring long-term policy responses (for example at the May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and during UN General Assembly discussions).

A small percentage of forced migrants are resettled in G20 countries, notably in the European Union countries and the United States, with active issues in Australia also. The acceptance and integration process is an immediate topic of concern for G20 members, as are the longer term issues related to the overall humanitarian system.

Perceived and actual links to religion of aspects of the forced migration crisis are complex, involving both distorted narratives (for example associating refugees with specific religious beliefs, perceived versus actual threats to security) and practical issues (addressing cultural/religious differences pertinent for successful integration such as gender roles and application in crisis situations of human rights principles). In some situations religious tensions play a part while religious actors are involved in many dimensions of mediation and peacebuilding. Tensions around perceived religious dimensions stymie successful integration and contribute to political tensions in countries of resettlement.

Many religious institutions, including interreligious and intrafaith bodies (the Catholic Church, World Council of Churches) and faith-inspired organizations (inter alia Caritas Internationalis, Jesuit Refugee Service, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Lutheran World Relief, and World Vision) have active and long-standing programs that involve direct action to support forced migrants and global advocacy calling notably for compassionate and actionable responses to refugees.

The involvement of religious bodies in refugee resettlement issues is dynamic and often responsive both to formal religious leadership and to local community initiatives involving religious actors. Some (for example actions of the International Catholic Migration Commission – ICMC) are formal and transnational while others are more local and informal. Action overall is inspired and shaped by important religious ethical teachings. Many of these teachings – welcoming the stranger, hospitality, compassion for the most vulnerable – are shared among religious communities. Thus interreligious and ecumenical approaches are some of the most inspirational and effective among practical efforts and responses (witness the impact of Pope Francis's and the Patriarch of Constantinople's personal engagement with refugees and migrants).

A practical example of an initiative that combines exemplary and operational intervention is the Sant'Egidio Community's Humanitarian Corridors program. This pilot project, in collaboration with the Federation of Evangelical Churches and the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, aims to avoid the boat journeys in the Mediterranean that cause countless deaths, including many children; to avoid human trafficking, to prevent the exploitation of human traffickers who do business with those who

flee from wars, and to grant to people in "vulnerable conditions" (victims of persecution, torture and violence, as well as families with children, elderly people, sick people, persons with disabilities) legal entry to Italian territory with a humanitarian visa, with the possibility to apply for asylum.

The evidence basis for policy planning and implementation on refugee/forced migrant integration overall is fragmented and coordination among different actors – secular and religious and among religious groups – is insufficient. The response and organization of religious support for resettlement of forced migrants varies considerably among G20 member countries and so do the issues involved. There is an urgent need for a rigorous mapping of ongoing efforts and robust communications strategies. This is a responsibility of religious communities. Various centers are undertaking such efforts.

Religious beliefs and institutions play central roles in the everyday lives of the majority of people around the world, leading both to forces that generate conflict and to a rich potential source of motivation, strength, and resilience in the face of crises such as the forced migration and reintegration challenge. Religious roles in humanitarian agendas have received considerable recent attention, including action proposals featured during the May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. However, more systematic engagement with religious actors and cooperation with religious organizations and actors (including the large body of faith-inspired organizations), which are doing important work on the ground, is needed. The G20 can play a crucial role by devoting explicit attention to the topic.

Sharper identification and recognition of religious roles (positive and less positive) in resettlement must be at the foundation of active G20 engagement on the resettlement issues. This effort is also foundational for the broader 2030 agenda as the disruptions involved in the forced migration crises deflect energy, attention, and financial resources from pursuit of broader global goals. Religious communities with their dense local networks and long-standing and resilient local presence as well as their rich transnational networks are well positioned to see these linkages and to appreciate the challenges involved. That is why the forced migration issue is of special concern and focus for religious bodies, interreligious institutions, and faith-inspired institutions. The negative impact of distorted narratives involving religious beliefs and complex linkages among the multiple pressures that force migration and insecurity are central topics of concern for religious leaders and communities and for G20 leaders. Their positive potential should be explicitly acknowledged and acted upon.

In Europe, individual religious communities and leaders as well as interreligious groups (both established institutions and spontaneous local responses) support a wide variety of initiatives to support refugees and to facilitate their integration into the communities of resettlement. Some actions are quite well known: the leadership of Pope Francis in urging a welcome. Others have received limited attention. The Winchester Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace at Winchester University has undertaken research on responses in several European countries, identifying a range of positive efforts and indicative narratives suggesting positive impact where religious groups support refugee resettlement.

In the United States, six of nine long established refugee resettlement agencies that support the US government refugee program have religious ties. Thus there is a lengthy experience to draw on. These groups could have a distinctive positive impact on advocacy. Learning from the resettlement experience and particularly its religious dimensions could provide pertinent knowledge to guide future policy on refugee and migrant resettlement. This could link to efforts to address popular concerns about refugee impact by linking experience to shared and individual religious community teachings.

While religious institutions and communities are actively involved in the crisis, there is a clear and shared appreciation (among religious actors) that they could do far more. Religious actors for example

provide practical support to migrants in integration into new societies (e.g. financial support by host congregations, legal or housing assistance, befriending or accompaniment services, language training, educational or employment support) National support mechanisms could draw more systematically on these resources in G20 states. Religious actors can be engaged and positive partners in addressing rising xenophobia and nationalism in G20 states.

Areas of suggested focus are the authority that influential leaders can use to promote tolerance and peace, defend humanitarian values, and offer alternative narratives to radicalization. Likewise local religious actors (including formal clerics but also women religious actors) can contribute action and insights.

Proposal

Given the critical importance of the forced migration issue, the T20 should establish an informal network of religious actors and communities to centralize and disseminate evidence based information. The network can also advocate on behalf of the needs of refugees and forced migrants and identify critical areas where intervention is needed and appropriate.

Religious actors, because of their broad transnational links and direct operational experience, should have G20 recognition as central partners in addressing the overall forced migration crisis and in any reforms to the refugee system. Actions should focus both on the broad forced migration crisis and specific resettlement programs.

G20 members should recommend the establishment of a commission to redesign the UNHCR system to make it a truly global system. This would include religious participation. Muslim engagement (Muslim majority nations and Muslim religious leaders) is vital to efforts to address the system. Among the three Muslim majority countries among the G20, only Turkey is a party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

The G20 should establish a global refugee and religion research fund to support research into the complex role religion plays in the global refugee crisis. Research topics would include, but not be limited to, religion as a driver of refugee displacement, treatment of religious minorities in refugee camps, best practices in treatment of diverse religious communities in host countries and by host governments, religion as a source of resentment of refugees, religion as a resource in the treatment of refugee trauma, and the dissemination of lessons learned across all governments involved in refugee resettlement.

The G20 Summit should acknowledge religious engagement in the resettlement process specifically in European Union countries and in the US and commit to drawing on this experience: for example ICMC's Resettlement Support Centre – covering the Middle East and Turkey – based in Istanbul and with an outreach office in Beirut, facilitates application, screening and processing of refugees (already given refugee status by UNHCR and referred by UNHCR for possible resettlement to USA) and the Humanitarian Corridors project.

Specifically, the G20 gathering can support these efforts by:

- (a) Identifying a standing interreligious advisory group to advise the G20 leaders and advisors on religious dimensions of the forced migration crisis and specifically resettlement issues and approaches. This could be the basis for explicit discussion during the 2018 G20 meetings
 - (b) Enhance systematic mechanisms to assure cooperation and joint advocacy among religiously active communities and public authorities, at G20 level as well as EU and national government.
 - (c) Support programs of religious organizations and actors that strengthen the resilience of displaced communities. Safe space exchanges between people of different religious and social groups, including migrants and host communities, could help identify innovative approaches and solutions.
 - (d) Acknowledge religious organizations and actors as key stakeholders in refugee response during negotiations and formulation of the Global Compact on Refugees, which is expected to be finalized in 2018.
 - (e) Acknowledge the important support that religious actors can provide in psycho-social interventions and overcoming trauma.
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POLICY AREA:
Toward Ending Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture

Engaging religious actors in addressing the famine emergency in South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen

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Abstract

The United Nations has declared a famine emergency in light of the imminent danger of starvation facing an estimated 20 million people in four countries, and it has appealed urgently for US\$4 billion to meet immediate needs. This crisis should be prominent in G20 discussions. Religious institutions and leaders are actively involved in the immediate and specific famine situation affecting African nations and Yemen and in efforts to end the conflicts that are the primary cause of famine. More broadly, religious leaders are acting to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, Zero Hunger, by 2030. This imperative is shared across religious divides and the common purpose that binds different religious communities portends well for peacebuilding and progress in the affected areas. Religious actors should thus be an integral part of the international response to the famine emergency as well as to the Zero Hunger challenge. G20 attention and support to religious roles would enhance responses to the famine and peacebuilding in affected areas and thus contribute to unlocking Africa's potential. Interfaith action on SDG 2, highlighted as part of the global agenda, can speed progress towards Zero Hunger.

Challenge

The UN has signaled a famine emergency in parts of South Sudan and Somalia, warning that the situation in adjoining areas of the horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Burundi, Kenya, and Uganda, is fragile and very concerning. Parts of Nigeria face famine, as does Yemen. Resources to provide food aid are insufficient: immediate needs are estimated at US\$4 billion, with only a fraction raised to date.

Eradicating hunger and malnutrition is one of the great challenges of our time. Not enough – or the wrong – food causes suffering and poor health and slows progress in other areas of development like education and employment. Some 795 million people – one in nine – go to bed on an empty stomach each night and many more suffer from some form of malnutrition. Thus the aim of SDG 2 is Zero Hunger by 2030.

Religious entities are directly involved in addressing both the famine emergency and the global challenge of Zero Hunger. Religious institutions and ecumenical and interreligious bodies build on core teachings about feeding the hungry and widely varied programs address needs. Religious actors are among the most effective and prominent advocates for policy and programmatic action. Religious leaders from many traditions and the world's leading interreligious and ecumenical organizations endorse the Global 2030 agenda Zero Hunger objective. Organizations like Caritas Internationalis, World Vision, Islamic Relief Worldwide, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, and Tzu Chi provide food relief and support food security policies including nutrition and smallholder farmers programs. Bread for the World, a US faith-inspired coalition, is a powerful advocate for action against hunger. The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and the World Council of Churches (WCC) give priority to food and nutrition issues in their global action programs; they are organizing an emergency meeting in Nairobi in June 2017 specifically to identify areas for action to address the African famine crisis. May 21 will see the launch of a global Day of Prayer and Action.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is the leading global humanitarian organization fighting hunger worldwide, delivering food assistance in emergencies, and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience. WFP has identified strengthening strategic partnerships with religious institutions as a priority in the effort to achieve Zero Hunger. Pope Francis spoke to WFP's Executive Board, management, and staff in June 2016, emphasizing the importance of cooperation across secular religious boundaries. WFP has launched an interreligious initiative to further this goal, with support from religious leaders from a wide range of traditions. The strength of religious commitment is reflected in statements by 25 leaders supporting the June 2016 interreligious event at WFP and the diversity and reach of operational programs to address hunger is wide and generally well known.

Proposal

Urgent action is required by G20 leaders to (a) signal the gravity of the famine situation in Africa and Yemen with strong statements and commitments to action; (b) assure adequate and timely financing for food aid; (and c) link famine relief to resolute action to assure access to affected populations. This is in line with the 2017 G20 framework: "More than ever, joint action by the world community is needed in order to address acute global challenges: geopolitical conflicts, terrorism, famine, natural disasters, climate and health catastrophes, migration and displacement, as well as social inequality." Religious institutions (formal and informal) are critical partners in the challenge.

The planned visit of Pope Francis and other religious leaders to South Sudan, interreligious focus on the famine crisis, and local faith initiatives are indicative of actual and potential religious roles. However, the full potential for harmonized efforts is limited by weak institutional links among relevant agencies that limit communications and partnerships. G20 recognition of the priority for religious engagement can help unlock this potential.

The G20 should link their support for action to UN resolutions. A request for quarterly reporting on progress of engagement of religious institutions and leaders could help chart the future course of engagement and ensure rigor in following up on Summit commitments.

The G20 can also act to advance progress towards SDG2: Zero Hunger by 2030 through explicit support for the global agendas for food security including food production and distribution and nutrition.

Success towards these objectives requires: (i) Full engagement of religious leaders at senior levels in highlighting the ethical issues at stake in the famine emergency, building on the teachings of religious traditions, individually and collectively; (ii) specific engagement of religious leaders in efforts to negotiate access to areas acutely affected by famine; and (iii) cooperative (track two) peacemaking efforts with religious communities in famine affected areas.

Religious actors support food programs and policies in communities across the globe but play especially critical roles in countries threatened by famine. South Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria offer vivid examples of situations where religious actors are actively engaged in peace negotiations and famine relief and where interreligious cooperation has the potential to assure access to vulnerable populations and to support community resilience. This potential is only partially realized and G20 recognition of the positive potential for interreligious cooperation to address both immediate needs and long term solutions could highlight new paths for action by relevant global bodies.

The planned visit to South Sudan by Pope Francis and other religious leaders is an opportunity to highlight religious engagement in the famine crisis and, in preparing for and following up on the visit, to explore opportunities to broaden advocacy and operational engagement in areas of critical need.

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