



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

United Nations Secretariat, New York
Tuesday, 29 January 2019

FINANCING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT Towards an Economy of Life

Organized by:

ACT Alliance

General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church

General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists

Islamic Relief USA

United Religions Initiative

World Council of Churches

Co-sponsored by:

United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development

Live streaming: <http://webtv.un.org/>



Towards an Economy of Life

Financing for development outcomes, and for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), remains one of the critical issues facing the international community today, particularly in the context of growing debate on the role of private finance, and of the private sector in respect both to positive contributions and accountability for sustainability, human rights and developmental impact. Within this discourse, faith-based organizations (FBOs) have contributed significantly to the Financing for Sustainable Development (FFD) framework and the mutual efforts of the United Nations, member states, and civil society to finance the SDGs, drawing on the expertise, knowledge, and best practices they have accumulated during the span of their engagement. FBOs and religious institutions mobilize substantial resources, programmatic capacities, and global constituencies towards achieving effective sustainable development. Most importantly FBOs provide critical policy perspectives which are rooted in their ethical assertions in relation to sustainability, equity and justice, informing the FFD action agenda and moving us towards a true “economy of life.”

On Tuesday, 29 January 2019, the Fifth Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs will focus on financing for sustainable development and build on this vision of an economy of life as the flourishing of all life.

Building on the shared efforts, values, and partnerships among the United Nations, FBOs and broader civil society, the program will feature dialogues among faith-based experts in the field of FFD and specialists from UN agencies and member states. It will bring together the ethical positions and procedures in relation to financing sustainable development from major world religions, which too often operate in largely separate spheres, and will help forge a dialogue on financing the SDGs among both different faith perspectives and with the nations and the UN entities participating in the FFD discussions.

Panel discussions will consider the broad issues of economic justice as addressed in the course of human rights-based development, governance and accountability in the global financial architecture, the implications for environmental sustainability, gender justice and financing social protection. The Monterrey Consensus, the 2008 Doha Declaration, the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda as well as recent statements from meetings convened by ECOSOC, the Development Cooperation Forum, Islamic jurisprudence, Protestant and Catholic ecumenical statements and inter-religious perspectives will be referenced in relation to the FFD framework.

The Symposium will be a timely contribution to the 2019 UN agenda, informing the 2019 High-Level Political Forum¹ and the SDGs under review: Goal 8 (decent work and sustained economic growth), Goal 10 (reduced inequalities), Goal 13 (climate action) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), as well as ECOSOC's Forum on Financing for Development follow-up, and the High-level meeting on FFD in advance of the 2019 General Assembly.

Findings from the Symposium will be shared with the international financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, and inform the next meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum in 2020, Beijing+25 Conference, as well as a range of other side-events, workshops and preparatory meetings related to FFD. The co-organizers also hope for the findings to inform debates about

¹ For more information on the High Level Political Forum, see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

strengthening a relevant and accountable multilateral system occasioned by the 75th anniversary of the UN in 2020.

WHY THE THEME OF FINANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

In the recent 2018 report of the Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow up, it is noted that despite recent progress in financial inclusion, there are still significant and undeniable gaps in the inclusion of the most marginalized in our societies. Along with the important role of development banks, cooperatives, and other development financial institutions, FBOs also contribute in innovative ways to advancing full and equitable inclusion, upholding their roles as being a “voice for the voiceless” and contributing substantially to the FFD agenda.

The impact of faith-based organizations is often focused both on the community level, rendering them critical investment and service actors which straddle the formal and informal sectors of the economy, as well as on the national and international levels, where they make substantive policy contributions to the sustainable development agenda. Moreover, some faith-based actors are large enough to act in a manner equivalent to development banks; some of the Islamic development and finance associations, the Christian development agencies and some Vedic agencies are particularly important to note in this domain. The inclusion of FBOs as critical actors in the advancement of financial inclusion is thus undeniable.

As such, this year’s theme of Financing Sustainable Development speaks directly to the contribution of FBOs in this arena. It presents an opportunity to learn from the experiences of FBOs and religions that are both local and global, while offering a vision which goes beyond mere service provision towards multi-stakeholder partnerships and a truly just financial system for all.

In reading the signs of the times, it is clear that a collective re-envisioning of and re-commitment to multilateralism is needed. The urgent call of religions and faith-based organizations on the most pertinent issues, particularly sustainable development and economic justice, provide the moral impetus for FBOs, member states, and UN agencies to come to the table in recognition of our shared values and goals and in the spirit of dialogue and partnership.

HISTORY OF THE SYMPOSIUM

Four years ago, faith-based partners came together with the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development with the intention of organizing an annual policy dialogue around the intersections of religion and international affairs. The first Symposium in 2015 established the framework for all future symposia with a focus on human rights and human dignity. The Symposia series features a theme each year that both relates to current policy debates and intersects with the concerns and contributions of FBOs. The second Symposium focused on the prevention of atrocity crimes and violent extremism (2016), the third focused on just, inclusive and sustainable peace (2017), and the fourth focused on migration and displacement (2018). For the fifth annual Symposium in 2019, the full day event will focus on the intersections of these themes as they have been framed over the first four symposia with key aspects of economic justice and financing for sustainable development. This is drawn from long-standing engagement of faith-based organizations in addressing these issues.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Participants will be exposed to a range of perspectives and analyses around financing for sustainable development and peaceful, inclusive societies, which we hope can inform their thinking and engagement on some of the most topical issues for the year.
- Faith-based organizers will develop a brief from the proceedings, including key recommendations for the Forum on Financing for Development and the HLPF, to be used for advocacy on the issues and reform agenda across the year.
- Foster a constructive and well-developed dialogue among the UN, governmental, and civil society spheres that inspires collaboration and brings together expertise that is too often operating in parallel, but separate, arenas.
- The Symposium is a venue to inspire greater cooperation, highlight existing partnerships, propose policy solutions, share best practices across diverse stakeholders including faith-based organizations, UN System entities, member states, intergovernmental and non-governmental entities.

THE PROGRAM

The broad issues to be addressed by the panels include:

- 1. Economy of Life: Faith-based Perspectives on the Moral Imperative Economic Justice** – a faith-based framing for financing for development including the moral foundations for an Economy of Life and an economy that incorporates peace with justice.
- 2. Integrating human rights in financing for sustainable development** – creating an international financial architecture which supports the realization of human rights; finding solutions to the debt crisis that hampers the attainment of the SDGs; and sharing good practices in ensuring human rights in financing for sustainable development (e.g. considering the implications of sovereign debt on human rights).
- 3. Sustainable resourcing for sustainable development** – mobilizing domestic resources through taxation and as a means to tackle inequalities, guarantee human rights (especially ESCR), promote climate and ecological sustainability, and finance social protection; and sharing concrete examples of alternative financing for ecological protection.
- 4. Building genuine partnerships for sustainable development** – critically reviewing public-private partnerships for sustainable development and the growing role of the private sector in development finance and policy; exploring the impact of “faith-based impact investments in SDGs”; and highlighting the need for systems of accountability and transparency.

PRESENTATIONS AND STRUCTURED DISCUSSIONS

The Symposium will comprise four panels spread out over the day. Each panel will include representation of religious experts in the field of financing for sustainable development and experts from the UN and policy institutions. Each panel will have an introductory remark followed by interventions on the topic and a time for questions and answers.

Official program and invitations to follow.