

G20 INTERFAITH FORUM 2021 Summary

BOLOGNA, ITALY

Plenary Sessions

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

Prologue

Session Chair:

W. Cole Durham, Jr., President of the G20 Interfaith Forum Association

Welcome Addresses:

Stefano Bonaccini, President of the Emilia-Romagna region

Alberto Sermoneta, Chief Rabbi of Bologna

Virginio Merola, Mayor of Bologna

Prologue:

David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament

Opening Ceremony

Ceremony Chair:

Alessandro Pajno, President of FSCIRE

Welcome Addresses:

Francesco Ubertini, Rector of the University of Bologna

Vincenzo Amendola, Undersecretary of State for European Affairs

Benedetto Della Vedova, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Speakers:

Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic

Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia

Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Ronald Steven Lauder, President of the World Jewish Congress

Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome and the Holy See

Patriarch Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia

Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church

His Holiness Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of Saint Mark

Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General

Plenary Session: "Dialogue on Dialogue"

Ceremony Chair:

Tanya Hernandez, Archibald R. Murray Professor of Law at Fordham University

Speakers:

Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Jarwan, President of the

Global Council for Tolerance and Peace

Faisal bin Muaammar, Founder and Secretary General of KAICIID

Emmanuel of Chalcedon, Metropolitan Elder of Chalcedon

Jos Douma, Special Envoy for Religion and Belief of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Alberto Melloni, Secretary of FSCIRE

Open Letter to COP26: Asceticism, Justice and Energy:

Introductions:

Elizabeta Kitanovic, Executive Secretary for Human Rights and Communication of the Church and Society Commission at the CEC

Session Chair:

Monica Maggioni, President of the Italian Group at the Trilateral Commission

Speakers:

H.A.H. Bartholomeos I, Archbishop of Constantinople New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

Marco Alvera, CEO of Snam

Azza Karam, Secretary-General of Religions for Peace

Ministerial Sessions

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Foreign Policy and Religion

Session Moderator:

Filipino Andreatta, Full Professor of International Relations at the University of Bologna

Session Chair:

Luigi Di Mario, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Session Co-Chair:

Everest Bartolo, Maltese Minister for European and Foreign Affairs

Speakers:

Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager, Grand Chancellor of the Sovereign Order of Malta

Mevlut Cavusoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

Nikolaos Dendias, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic

Najla El Mangoush, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Libya

Gianni Letta, Member of the Executive Committee of the Aspen Institute Italia

Federico Mogherini, Rector of the College of Europe
G.L. Peiris, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Miroslaw S. Wachowski, Undersecretary for Relationships with States within the Holy See Secretariat for State.

Education and Religious Diversity

Session Moderator:

Francesca Cadeddu: Vice Secretary of FSCIRE

Co-Chairs:

Patricio Bianchi, Italian Minister of Education

Scherto Gill, Senior Research Fellow at Guerrand-

Hermès Foundation for Peace

Patrice Brodeur, Associate Professor at the University of Montreal and Senior Adviser at KAICIID

Speakers:

Salem AlMalik, Director General of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Noemi Di Segni, President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities

Anar Karimov, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Miguel Angel Moratinos Cuyaube, High Representative of the UNAOC

Ibrahim Ozdemir, Foreign Deputy Director General of the Department of Foreign Affairs at the Turkish Ministry of Education Representative for Catholic Education

Religious Affairs and Peaceful Coexistence

Session Moderator:

Alessandro Pajno, President of FSCIRE

Session Chair:

Luciano Lamorgese, Italian Minister of Interior

Session Co-Chair:

Christos Stylianides, Special Envoy of the European Commission for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU

Speakers:

Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments of the Kingdom of Bahrain

Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, Founder and Chairman of the World Muslim Communities Council/Chairman of the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism

Noor-ul-Haq Al Qadri, Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Inter-Faith Harmony of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Afra Al Saabri, General Director of the Ministry of

Tolerance and Coexistence

Mohammed Al-Mamari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman

Volker Berresheim, Head of the Religion and Foreign Policy Department of the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany

Yaquut Cholil Qoumas, Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia

Wang Zuo'an, Director of the Chinese State Administration for Religious Affairs

Focus Sessions

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The Theological Nature of Dialogue

Session Chair:

Alessandra Trotta, Moderator of the Tavola Valdese

Session Co-Chair:

Adalberto Mainardi, Monk at the Monastic Community of Bose

Panelists:

Khaled Akasheh, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue

Edmond Brahimaj (Mondi), World Grandfather of the Bektashi Community

Marcelo Polakoff, Commissioner for Interfaith Dialogue of the Latin American Jewish Congress

Leonid, Vice-Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate and Archbishop of Vladikavkaz and Alania

Bertram Johannes Meier, Bishop of Augsburg and Chair of the sub-commission for the interreligious dialogue of the German Bishop's Conference

Ibrahim Saleh Al Naimi, Chairman of the Doha International Center for Interreligious Dialogue in Qatar

Mohamed Nazir Ayad, Secretary General of the Islamic Research Assembly

Africa and Europe: A Barometer Against Religious Violence

Session Chair:

Stefano Manservigi, Chair of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund

Session Co-Chair:

Catherine Bossard, Secretary General and Director of Research and Analysis at Observatoire Pharos.

Panelists:

Emanuela Del Re, Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies

Daagbo Hounon Tomadjlehoukpon II Houwamenou, Supreme Spiritual Leader of Vodun Hwendo in the Republic of Benin
Bruno Frattasi, Head of Cabinet of the Italian Ministry of Interior
Innocent H. Maganya, Director of the Institute for Interreligious Dialogue and Islamic Studies at Tangaza University College
Ilaria Macconi, International Fellow at FSCIRE.

The Role of Parliamentarians in Interfaith Dialogue – Session A

Session Chair:

Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the Italian Group at the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Session Co-Chair:

Ahmed Al-Jarwan, President of the Global Council for Tolerance and Peace

Panelists:

Esperança Bias, President of the Assembly of Mozambique
Moustadroine Abdou, President of the Assembly of the Union of Comoros
Adel Abdulrahman Al Assomi, President of the Arab Parliament
Marta Lucía Ramírez, Vice President of the Congress of Colombia
Adji Mergane Kanouté, Vice President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

The Role of Parliamentarians in Interfaith Dialogue – Session B

Session Chair:

Zoran Ilievski, Head of the GCTP Office in Malta

Panelists:

Martha Mahrous Wasef, Member of the House of Representatives of Egypt
Margarita Restrepo, President of the International Parliament for Tolerance and Peace
Papa Sagna Mbaye, Member of the Parliament of Senegal and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee

Is Christian Ecumenism a Model?

Session Co-Chairs:

Claudio Paravati, Director of Centro Studie Rivista 'Confronti Religioni, Politica, Società
Luca Ferracci, Affiliated Researcher at FSCIRE

Panelists:

Khazhak Barsamian, Pontifical Legate of the Western Europe and Representative of the Armenian Church to

the Holy See

Enzo Bianchi, Founder of the Monastic Community of Bose

Chris Ferguson, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Christian Krieger, President of the Council of European Churches

Wu Wei, President of the Christian China Council

Ioan Sauca, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

The Role of Religious Leaders in Responding to Crises in the Arab Region

Opening Remarks:

Faisal bin Muaammar, Secretary General of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)

Keynote Address:

Aram I Keshishian, Patriarch of the Catholic seat of the Great House of Cilicia

Panelists:

Pishtwan Abdullah Sadaq, Minister of Religious Affairs in Kurdistan, Iraq

Abdullah Alhomaïd, Secretary General of the National Committee for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hind Kabawat, Director of Interfaith Peacebuilding at the Centre for World Religions and Diplomacy

Nayla Tabbara, President of the Adyan Foundation
Sayyed Jawad Mohammed Taqi Al-Khoei, Secretary General of Al-Khoei Institute, Co-Founder of the Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue (ICID), and UNESCO Chair for Development of Interreligious Dialogue Studies and the University of Kufa

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The Role of Religious Studies

Session Chair:

Valentino Bulgarelli, Undersecretary of the Italian Episcopal Conference

Session Co-Chair:

Mathijs Lamberigts, Emeritus Professor at the KU Leuven

Panelists:

Yinglin Ma, President of the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China

Bujar Spahiu, Grand Mufti of Albania

Nikitas Loulias, Metropolitan Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain

Herman J. Selderhuis, Rector of the Theological University of Apeldoorn

Ambrogio Bongiovanni, Director of the Gregorian Centre for Interreligious Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University and President of MAGIS Foundation

Martino Diez, Scientific Director of the Oasis International Foundation

Mediterranean Sea: Frontier of Peace

Session Chair:

Gualtiero Bassetti, President of the Italian Episcopal Conference

Session Co-Chair:

Yahya Sergio Yahe Pallavicini, Co-Vice President of the Europe Muslim-Jewish Leadership Council and Coordinator of the European Muslim Leaders' Majlis

Panelists:

Anba Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, Papal Legate to the United Kingdom
Armando Barucco, Ambassador of Italy in Morocco
Giuseppe Betori, Cardinal Archbishop of Florence
Radwan Khawatmi, Member of the Board of Directors of the Aga Khan Foundation

Michael Driessen, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at John Cabot University
Farid Elias El-Khazen, Ambassador of the Lebanese Republic to the Holy See

Edoardo Greppi, Professor of International Law at the University of Turin

Breaking Barriers—Youth in Action Responding to Crises in the Arab Region

Moderator:

Khadija Maalej, Project Manager at BBC Media Action

Panelists:

Ameera AlNaejaim of the Theatre of Change Initiative
Marcel Moosa of Social-Media as Space for Dialogue
Soukaina Taoufik, Researcher and Youth Activist
Monica Tawdros of Promoting Human Solidarity through Inter-religious Dialogue in Countering Covid-19 Pandemic
Muath bin Nujayfan of Salam for Cultural Communication

The Religious Factor in Eurasia: Challenges and Opportunities

Session Chair:

Andrea Gionnotti, Professor of International Relations at the University of Pisa and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations

Session Co-Chair:

Patrizia Paoletti Tangheroni, Former UN Official and

Italian MP

Panelists:

Allahshukur Pashazade, Chairman of the Directorate of Muslims of the Caucasus

Otabek Akbarov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Italy

Šafiq Auesovič Pišichaev, President of the International Islamic Mission

Antonio Zanardi Landi, Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the Holy See

Thematic Sessions

SEPTEMBER 11-12, 2021

G20 Youth Interfaith Forum

Welcome Address:

Rawaad Mahyub, Director of ACWAY

Opening Remarks:

Edward Rowe, President and CEO of The Stirling Foundation

W. Cole Durham, Jr., IF20 President

Closing Remarks:

Dr. Mohammed Al Mamari, Oman's Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs

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A G20 Imperative: Support Refugees and Forced Migrants

Session Co-Chairs:

Paolo Naso, Professor of Political Science at Sapienza-Universita di Roma

Christina Tobias-Nahi, Head of the Working Group and Director of Communication and Public Affairs at Islamic Relief, USA

Panelists:

Elie Al Hindy, Director of the Adyan Foundation
Professor Marco Impagliazzo, President of the S. Egidio Community

Elias Szczytnicki, Secretary-General and Regional Director of the Latin-American and Caribbean Office of Religions for Peace

Michele Di Bari, Head of the Civil Liberties and Immigration Department at the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Italy

Religious Cultural Heritage: Conflict, Protection, Reconciliation and Sustainable Growth

Session Moderator:

Peter Petkoff, Chair of the Sacred Sites Working Group and Director of the Religion, Law and International

Relations Program at Regent's Park College, Oxford

Panelists:

Dror Eydar, Ambassador of Israel to Italy
Nikos Maghioros, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Green Theology Panel

Session Co-Chairs:

Silvia Francescon, Director of Environmental Program at Italian Buddhist Union
Valeria Termini, Professor of Political Economy at Roma Tre University

Speakers:

Mario Cucinella, Honorable FAIA International Fellow RIBA
Gael Giraud, Georgetown University
Ibrahim Ozdemir, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uskudar University
Esben Lunde Larsen, Director for Faith and Sustainability at World Resources Institute and Former Danish Minister of Environment and Food
Xiaomei Zhang, Vice Director of World Religions Resources Institute in China
İbrahim Özdemir, Director General, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Education in Turkey

Freedom of Religion and Belief: Protecting Minorities

Session Co-Chairs:

Maria D'Arienzo, Professor of Ecclesiastical and Canon Law at the University of Naples Federico II
Michael Wiener, UN Human Rights Officer, OHCHR

Panelists:

Fernand de Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues
Gady Gronich, CEO and Chief of Staff of the Conference of European Rabbis
Abdullah Massimo Cozzolino, Secretary General of the Italian Islamic Confederation
Susan F. Kerr, Senior Adviser on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
Ronald A. Rasband, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Ahmed Tabakovic, Islamic Community of Bosnians in Italy
Zhuo Xin Ping, Former Director of World Religion Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China

Healing Conflict: The Unheard Call for Global Ceasefire

Session Chair:

Marina Sereni, Former Italian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Session Co-Chair:

James Patton, President and CEO of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy

Panelists:

Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Senior Advisor at the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)
Judd Birdsall, Senior Research Fellow at Georgetown University
Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers
Ambassador Stefano Ronca, Secretary General for Foreign Affairs of the Sovereign Order of Malta and Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta to Italy
Cesare Giacomo Zucconi, Secretary General of Sant'Egidio Community
Dr. Xu Yihua, Professor at the Center for American Studies in the Department of International Politics at Fudan University in Shanghai

A Kairos Moment: Accountability to Address Inequalities

Session Co-Chairs:

Stefano Fassina, Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies
Katherine Marshall, Executive Director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue

Panelists:

Rajeev Bhargava, Director of the Parekh Institute of Indian Thought at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi
Arntraud Hartmann, Professor of Development Economics at SAIS Europe John Hopkins University in Bologna
Jonatas Machado, Universidad Autonoma de Lisbon "Luis de Camoes"
Brett G. Scharffs, Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University

Racism: Religious Leadership Towards Reconciliation

Session Co-Chairs:

Audrey Kitagawa, President and Founder of the International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation and chair of the G20 Interfaith Forum Anti-Racism Initiative

Barbara Pontecorvo, Head of the Solomon Observatory on Discrimination

Panelists:

Ganoune Diop, Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association

Zara Mohammed, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain

Michael O'Flaherty, Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights

Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches

Yassine Lafram, President of the Union of the Italian Islamic Communities

Interfaith Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence and the Technology Revolution

Session Moderators:

Marco Ventura, Director of Fondazione Bruno Kessler and Chair of the Working Group

Pasquale Annicchino, Associate Researcher at the Fondazione Bruno Kessler Centre for Religious Studies

Speakers:

Dr. James Christie, Director of the Ridd Institute for Religion and Global Policy at the University of Winnipeg

Robert Geraci, Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College in New York City

Branka Marijan, Senior Researcher at Project Ploughshares

Alessio Pecorario, Officer for Faith and Development at the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Susanna Trotta, Associate Researcher for the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI)

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Religious Commitments to SDGs: Focusing on Children, Hunger, Water, and Sanitation

Session Chair:

Adam Nicholas Phillips, Director of the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at USAID

Panelists:

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, Secretary General of ACT Alliance

Sharon Eubank, President of Latter-day Saint Charities and First Counselor of the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Kirsten Lauren Muth, CEO of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
Peter Prove, Director of International Affairs at the World Council of Churches

Post-COVID, Ethical and Practical Challenges of the Here and Now, Reconstruction

Session Chair:

Jean-François de Lavison, Founder and President of Ahimsa Fund

Panelists:

Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow at the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University

David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs at the American Jewish Committee

Lin Lee, Director of the Islamic Research Department of the World Religion Institute, China

Khushwant Singh, Head of Secretariat at the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development

David Moore, Associate Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies

Gender Equality: Religious Denial and Religious Support

Session Chair:

Susanna Mancini, Full Professor of Comparative Law at the School of Law of the University of Bologna

Panelists:

Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Baha'i International Community

Lidia Maggi, Pastor of the Baptist Church in Varese

Francesco Biagi, Senior Assistant Professor at the University of Bologna's Department of Legal Studies

Liya Makhmutova, President of the Baltic Muslim Women's Union

Nayla Tabbara, President of the Adyan Foundation

Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, Director, Princeton University's Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination

Jean Duff
Professor Wang Yujie, Vice-Director of the Renmin University of China's School of Philosophy

Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Session Moderator:

Kevin Hyland, Chair of the Working Group and Former UK Anti-Slavery Commissioner

Speakers:

Daniele Verga, Diplomatic Adviser to the Grand Chancellor of the Sovereign Order of Malta
Sister Gabriella Bottani, International Coordinator of Talitha Kum
Nello Scavo, Journalist at Avvenire

Plenary Sessions

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Closing Ceremony

Ceremony Chair:

Katherine Marshall: G20 Interfaith Forum Vice President and Executive Director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue

Addresses:

Elly Schlein, Vice President of the Emilia-Romagna Regional Government
Ricardo Di Segni, Chief Rabbi of Rome
Mohamed Abdel-Salam, Secretary-General of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity and Senior

Representative of His Eminence Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Najla Kassab Abousawan, President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches

Bernard Spitz, President of European and International Affairs at MEDEF

Antonio Tajani, Former President of the European Parliament

El Hassan bin Talal, His Royal Highness and Prince, Founder of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies
Concluding Remarks:

Romano Prodi, Former President of the European Commission

Matteo Maria Zuppi, Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna
Mario Draghi, President of the Italian Council of Ministers and President of the G20 2021

Yaquut Cholil Qoumas, Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs

Alberto Melloni, Secretary of FSCIRE, led the handover to Indonesia.



G20 INTERFAITH FORUM 2021 Summary

Introduction

Annual G20 Summits are a critical time and place where world leaders address priority global issues. A feature of each annual G20 process is the work of “engagement groups” which aim to develop and present analyses, distilled schematics on priority issues, and specific proposals to capture the attention of both public opinion and decision-makers.

The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20), which has convened annually since 2014, brings important dimensions to the G20 process. It shares some features with other engagement groups but has distinctive aspects that relate, above all, to the widely diverse landscape of world religious communities. It serves as a place for high-level encounter and dialogue where faith communities and associated organizations can interact with public officials as well as with active scholars and civil society, building on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs.

On September 11-14, over 730 religious leaders, professionals, scholars, activists, and government representatives from across the globe gathered in Bologna, Italy for the eighth annual G20 Interfaith Forum—this

year under the Italian Presidency of the G20. 231 speakers and panelists participated in 25 sessions organized throughout the four days, engaging in discussion on ideas and proposals related to a wide range of current world issues—from the refugee crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, and more—all through the lens and experience of religion and faith.

As an engagement group officially hosted by the Italian G20 Presidency, the G20 Interfaith Forum prepared proposals to the G20 leaders, based on work, discussions, and research conducted over the past years. The analysis and proposals were submitted in July. The Forum, falling closer to the G20 Leaders’ Summit, elaborated the proposals and provided the opportunity for timely discussions on critical topics.

The central theme for the 2021 IF20 was “A Time to Heal” (inspired by a biblical verse from Ecclesiastes 3:3). Today, when the COVID-19 pandemic has left so many dead and lives disrupted, these words seem easy to understand. However, they speak to far larger challenges. The inescapable reality is that this “time to heal” follows a time of sickness or of killing. We must also recognize and reckon with the pandemics of war, hatred, and enmity (the “time to kill” that Ecclesiasticus also evokes) that devour more lives than the pandemic itself, absorb more resources than any vaccine, sow despair and fear, and feed new hatreds, new enmity, and new wars.

The Bologna interreligious and cross sectoral gathering asked in countless ways: What will it take to heal? And, in an environment far removed from the indifference that Pope Francis decries, the IF20 underscored how and why religious communities, working purposefully together, and with governments, parliaments, transnational organizations, women and men, young and old, can and will engage. We must make this a Kairos moment: a time of grace, opportunity, and movement where we act together to bring change and justice, dignity and care.

We look with great hope to the Summit of G20 leaders and their partners.



Pre-Forum Sessions and Events

PROLOGUE

Prior to the official opening of the forum, several events took place, including a prologue session that set the stage for the events of the upcoming days. Speakers emphasized the growth of the G20 Interfaith Forum over the years, its predicted impact, and the many key partnerships and participants that were essential to making the Italy forum a reality.

As COVID-19 highlights the urgency of so many global issues, there was an emphasis on the new synergies between religious organizations and the public sector that must be generated, and especially dialogue between religious and public authorities, between religions, and within religions, in order to truly foster healing and mutual understanding. The pandemic has taught us that no one is truly independent or self-sufficient—everything is interconnected—with dialogue compared to a plant which cannot be taken for granted and requires constant watering. As this year’s G20 takes place in Europe, also in the Mediterranean Basin, the continent will be looked to as a model. It carries a responsibility to build on its melting pot of cultures to be a forerunner of unity, diversity and peace.

HAVDALAH; PLARABUNG: A MEMORY OF THE PEOPLE KILLED IN THE PLACES OF PRAYER

We cannot, speakers emphasized, remain in the pre-pandemic world, repeating history. We must be open to complexity, building new systems to protect a peace that is threatened and heal the planet on all levels. On Saturday, September 11th, services were convened in the Cloisters of Santo Stefano's Basilica. Prayer was offered by Alberto Sermoneta (Chief Rabbi of Bologna), and a speech was offered by Haim Baharier (Binah Center, Milan).

The solemn commemorative ceremony "In Memory of Worshipers Killed in Places of Prayer" was held in an inner sanctum courtyard with the stone structures awash in deep hues of blood-like red light. The

program began with a reading from Genesis of the story of Cain and Abel, followed by the same story from the Quran in Arabic, Italian, and English—reminding those present that killing one soul is like killing all humanity, and saving one is like saving humanity. Accounts of tragic acts in countries around the globe from the 1980s to the present were shared, each followed by a recorded song or prayer from the faith tradition targeted, and live words from a clergy member of that community. A sermon reflected on the story of Cain and Abel, concluding that God begs his believers to stop using religion to justify violence. Cardinal Zuppi (Archbishop of Bologna) closed the ceremony.



G20 YOUTH INTERFAITH FORUM

Held from September 11-12 ahead of the G20 Interfaith Forum, the G20 Youth Interfaith Forum (YIF20) welcomed 50 young people from 30 countries and 13 religions/faiths. It was organized by ACWAY in partnership with prominent intergovernmental, interfaith and youth organizations including the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, FSCIRE, The Stirling Foundation, We the World, the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), Religions for Peace, United Religions Initiative, and The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated unemployment and economic instability, the United Nations World Youth Report estimated that nearly 71 million young people are unemployed and 156 million youth in low- and middle-income countries live in poverty. One in eight young people – the

majority girls – are without access to education. These challenges have further disenfranchised young people and sidelined them from shaping the decisions which impact their daily lives.

As part of the G20 Interfaith Forum's commitment to fostering inclusive solutions, the Youth Forum provided space for young interfaith leaders to share perspectives and ideas, as well as establish partnerships between grassroots and international youth organizations. Sessions at the Youth Forum explored tools and best practices from the field, such as social innovation and entrepreneurship, project planning, monitoring and evaluation, financial literacy (effective budgeting and fundraising for nonprofits), and examples of successful social and intercultural activities.



Open Plenary Sessions

OPENING CEREMONY

The 2021 G20 Interfaith Forum in Bologna opened formally with a plenary session at the Palazzo Re Enzo. The event included welcoming speeches and several video messages and reading of statements, notably one from Pope Francis.

The political leaders who spoke during the plenary session highlighted the importance of dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. Italy considers the interfaith forum a vital part of its G20 Presidency, with relevant and important contributions for all three of the pillars defined for the 2021 G20: People (focusing attention on those suffering most deeply the effects of the pandemic and promoting a more just and sustainable recovery worldwide); Planet (as religious leaders have long recognized the necessity of preserving the fragile balance between men and nature); and Prosperity (as true prosperity must address inequalities).

A remarkable array of religious leaders spoke to similar themes, urging the importance of dialogue and expressing concern at the “global warming” of religious temperatures. Others spoke to the importance of interreligious dialogue at this crucial time, as religious communities must promote an ethical and spiritual dimension to European unity and beyond.

The call to heal is indeed a global issue, many emphasized, and it requires truth and courage. Dialogue amongst and between religions and political decision-makers are fundamentally important, as religious actors add their voices to the conversations surrounding the search for peace, respecting the climate, and sheltering the poor. The humanitarian tragedy in Afghanistan and the true inclusion of women in society must be priorities, along with attention to migration. Religious actors must be a ‘soul’ for Europe, using dialogue as an ethical support and promoting the rights of every human being, intervening where it is needed.

Themes evoked during the session included:

- The constructive roles that religious communities can play in building peace and cooperation.
- Growing awareness that religions are important to

creating a fairer society that respects the dignity of all.

- Potential religious roles in promoting human rights, equality between men and women, care for the environment, protection of health, etc.
- “Religions can be a precious tool if we truly want dialogue aimed at a better world.”
- Despite differences embedded in different religions, we can draw on a core of shared convictions common to all.
- Extremist ideology, and the violence associated with it, represents one of the most serious challenges of our time. We need eternal vigilance against all forms of terrorist action
- Education should be prioritized in all our agendas to develop the right attitudes and values. Policy makers and educators have a duty, through the curriculum and methods of teaching in our schools and universities, to emphasize what all religions share in common rather than the differences.
- Youth in educational institutions have the unique opportunity to build bridges rather than walls.
- Need to combat the religious illiteracy that permeates all cultures, and educate, promoting equitable, solidarity-based and integral development that increases opportunities for schooling and education, because where poverty and ignorance reign unchecked, fundamentalist violence takes hold more easily.
- Democracy is defended by healing, fighting injustice, overcoming division, and strengthening the international scale of dialogue.

The focus on healing underscored the special importance of Peace (a 4th ‘P’), and the need to halt outbreaks of violence that exploit the sacred and incite hatred. Religious leaders must serve the truth and declare what is evil when it is evil, without fear or pretense, even and especially when it is committed by those who profess to follow the same creed. “We cannot be indifferent or neutral, but must stand up for peace. Only together can we tackle problems that, in today’s interconnectedness, no longer concern “someone,” but everyone. It is no longer time for alliances of one against another, but for a common search for solutions to the problems we all face.” Believers are often the victims of discrimination in various parts of the world. People’s religious feelings are also being taken advantage of to justify violence, hatred, and enmity, affecting all. Our religions have

been a source of courage and strength for our people and become hope for the world. While our religions may at times seem to be a problem, we know they are helpful for a solution.

“Once again, religious and political leaders meet together to answer their duty to promote human life, freedom and dignity. It is the responsibility of religious leaders to encourage dialogue among members of the great human family who find themselves sometimes in disagreement or conflict. Equally important is the role of legislators and politicians in legislating laws that protect people and help in the advancement of societies.”

—Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church

“For humanity to come together as one, we need to work together as one. We need to heal — as one. We at the United Nations are proud to work with our faith-based partners to bring people together, to begin healing our world, and to shape societies in which every person is valued, and every person can thrive. Let’s walk this journey together.”

—Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE G20 INTERFAITH FORUM 2021

“ I extend a cordial greeting to the Participants in the G20 Interfaith Forum, which is being held this year in Bologna. I conserve a vivid memory of my visit to the City, characterized, among other things, by the ancient University, “which has always made it open, educating citizens of the world and recalling that the identity to which one belongs is that of the common home, of the universitas” (Meeting with students and the academic world, 1 October 2017). It is good that you have come together with the specific intention of overcoming particularisms and sharing ideas and hopes: together, religious authorities, political leaders and representatives of the world of culture, you engage in dialogue so as to promote access to fundamental rights, above all religious freedom, and to cultivate the leaven of unity and reconciliation where war and hatred have sown death and lies.

In this, the role of religions is indeed essential. I would like to reiterate that if we want to preserve fraternity

on Earth, “we cannot lose sight of Heaven”. But we must help each other to free the horizon of the sacred from the dark clouds of violence and fundamentalism, strengthening ourselves in the conviction that “the otherness of God points us towards others, towards our brothers and sisters” (Address at the Interreligious Meeting, Ur, 6 March 2021). Yes, true religiosity consists in adoring God and loving one’s neighbour. And we believers cannot exempt ourselves from these essential religious choices: rather than demonstrating something, we are called to show the paternal presence of the God of heaven through our harmony on earth.

Today, however, this unfortunately seems to be a distant dream. Rather, a deleterious “climate change” seems to be taking place in the religious sphere: in addition to the harmful changes affecting the health of the Earth, our common home, there are others that “threaten Heaven”. It is as if the “temperature” of religiosity were rising. We need only think of the outbreak of violence that exploits the sacred: in the last 40 years there have been almost 3,000 attacks and around 5,000 killings in various places of worship, in those spaces, that is, that should be protected as oases of sacredness and fraternity. It is all too easy for those who blaspheme God’s holy name by persecuting their brothers and sisters to obtain funding. Again, the inflammatory preaching of those who, in the name of a false god, incite hatred, often spreads unchecked. What can we do in the face of all this?

As religious leaders, I believe that first of all we must serve the truth and declare what is evil when it is evil, without fear or pretence, even and especially when it is committed by those who profess to follow the same creed as us. We must also help each other, all together, to combat the religious illiteracy that permeates all cultures: it is a widespread ignorance that reduces the experience of belief to rudimentary dimensions of the human and seduces vulnerable souls into adhering to fundamentalist slogans. Above all, we need to educate, promoting equitable, solidarity-based and integral development that increases opportunities for schooling and education, because where poverty and ignorance reign unchecked, fundamentalist violence takes hold more easily.

The proposal to establish a common memorial to those killed in every place of prayer is certainly to be encouraged. In the Bible, in response to the hatred

of Cain, who believed in God and yet killed his brother, causing the voice of his blood to rise from the earth, the question came from Heaven: “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9). The authentic religious response to fratricide is the search for the brother. Let us preserve together the common memory of our brothers and sisters who have suffered violence, let us help each other with concrete words and gestures to oppose the hatred that seeks to divide the human family!

Believers cannot fight it with the violence of arms, which only generates more violence, in an endless spiral of retaliation and revenge. Instead, what you wish to affirm in these days is fruitful: “We will not kill each other, we will help each other, we will forgive each other”. These are commitments that require conditions that are not easy - there is no disarmament without courage, no aid without giving freely, no forgiveness without truth - but which constitute the only possible path to peace. Yes, because the path to peace is found



not in weapons, but in justice. And we religious leaders must be the first to support these processes, bearing witness that the capacity to fight evil does not lie in proclamations, but in prayer; not in revenge, but in concord; not in shortcuts dictated by the use of force, but in the patient and constructive force of solidarity. Because only this is truly worthy of man. And because God is not the God of war, but of peace.

Peace, a key word in the current international scenario. A word to which “we cannot be indifferent or neutral”. I repeat: “Not neutral, but standing up for peace! That is why we invoke the *ius pacis*, as the right of all persons to settle conflicts without violence. That is why we repeat: no more war, never again against others, never again without others! May the interests and plots, often obscure, of those who fabricate

violence, feeding the arms race and trampling on peace through business deals, come to light” (Meeting, cit.). Peace: a “fourth P” that we propose to add to people, planet, prosperity, in the hope that the agenda of the next G20 will take it into account in a perspective that is as broad and shared as possible, because only together can we tackle problems that, in today’s interconnectedness, no longer concern “someone”, but everyone. I am also thinking of the climate and migration. It truly is no longer time for alliances of one against another, but for a common search for solutions to the problems we all face. Young people and history will judge us on this. And you, dear friends, have come together for this reason. So I thank you from my heart and I encourage you, accompanying you with my prayers and invoking the blessing of the Most High upon each one of you.))

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 7 September 2021

“‘We will not kill each other, we will help each other, we will forgive each other.’ These are commitments that require conditions that are not easy - there is no disarmament without courage, no aid without giving freely, no forgiveness without truth - but which constitute the only possible path to peace. Yes, because the path to peace is found not in weapons, but in justice. And we religious leaders must be the first to support these processes, bearing witness that the capacity to fight evil does not lie in proclamations, but in prayer; not in revenge, but in concord; not in shortcuts dictated by the use of force, but in the patient and constructive force of solidarity. Because only this is truly worthy of man. And because God is not the God of war, but of peace.”

—His Holiness Pope Francis

DIALOGUE ON DIALOGUE

Directly after the Opening Ceremony, a further plenary session dove deeper into the connection between dialogue and healing. Speakers included scholars, religious leaders, and global representatives for religious freedom.

From the political and human rights perspective, the balance between free speech and the protection/amplification of marginalized voices is an essential aspect of dialogue—one which too often leaves marginalized groups censored and ignored in the



“free marketplace of ideas.” Dialogue between faith leaders and political leaders has central importance, seen for example in the current “translation” problem between the language of religion and the language of policy, where the two groups often do not understand or approach each other in meaningful ways. To bridge these gaps in understanding and to avoid relationships where governments merely instrumentalize religion as a sort of cheap labor, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can serve as an effective framework around which to unite and build relationships.

Religious commentary focused on how dialogue has its roots in the divine and is deeply connected to true care for the Other. As dialogue can chase away bias, fear, prejudice, and suspicion, it unites people and supports peaceful coexistence while protecting diversity. As terrorism and inequality escalate across the globe, dialogue has become more and more imperative in the quest to unify efforts and promote cultures of respect. As part of that effort, Alberto Melloni emphasized “how important it is to move beyond the ‘first mile’” of ethical convergence, handshakes, and candles to true coordination between religions in action and policy.

“The opportunity that the IF20 offers to its guests – political leaders, religious authorities, and diligent scholars – is this. We will know in three days’ time whether we have simply added another event and another statement to the row of events and statements, or whether we have advanced a millimeter along the second mile. For those who do so, it is worth repeating an admonition from Luke 17:10: we must say, ‘we are unworthy servants.’”

—Alberto Melloni, Secretary of FSCIRE.



AN OPEN LETTER TO COP 26: ASCETICISM, JUSTICE, AND ENERGY

The Patriarch of Constantinople launched the idea in 1989 in Basel that peace and justice must include the protection of Creation. This theological position considers the environment as the place where the ascetic fight against immoderate passions and insatiable avidity must be waged. More than thirty years later, the ecological transition faces the same challenge. The central questions that this session addressed are related to the link between personal attitudes, social justice, and religious motivation in the process of ecological transition.

The address given by H.A.H. Bartholomeos I, Archbishop of Constantinople New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, summarized below, was followed by addresses from Marco Alvera, CEO of Snam, and Azza Karam, Secretary-General of Religions for Peace, thus highlighting the importance of alliances among clerical, business, and interreligious communities.

Alvera spoke to the changing definition of sustainability, and how it is now becoming a measurable science through Environmental Social Governance (ESG) ratings. Citing recent studies that solar energy can be made five times cheaper than oil or gas and four times cheaper than coal, he said our challenge looking forward is less in developing the needed technologies, as they already exist, and more in making people aware of them and their economic benefits. Religions, he said, can share this vision and provide accountability to those in government and business.

Karam emphasized the critical importance of common, well-integrated action, as no business, religious institution, or conglomerate of such can

deliver the needed results on their own. We are undermining our own institutional legitimacy through our inability to serve together and our inaction on the environment. As we already have the needed agents of transformation to make these changes happen for the planet, what we must now develop is the commitment to speak, act, and deliver as one.

ADDRESS BY HIS ALL-HOLINESS ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW AT THE G20 INTERFAITH FORUM

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's address was an urgent call for common action by religious and non-religious leaders. Set in the context of the approaching Summit of G20 leaders in Rome and the Glasgow gathering on climate issues, it offered a complement to *Laudato Si!*, Pope Francis' historic encyclical, in its focus on responsibilities and the interconnections among "the most pressing challenges of our time".

It is, he said, "the minute before midnight for humanity to go forward together towards a sustainable and resilient future that promises to heal people and our planet." We need to enhance the abundance of our best ideas and, through faith, "to succeed in the decisive race to global net zero and to a culture of solidarity." These are fundamental challenges to mitigate the risks of climate change, to preserve the wealth of nature, to prevent the ongoing extinction of species and abate the loss of precious biodiversity, to stop violence amongst ourselves and against God's creation and eliminate social injustice and the marginalization of our fellow human beings.

Bartholomew underscored the importance of community, "firmly united in the faith that we are capable of succeeding". He called for pious moderation, respect, and humility as spiritual guides to responsible and sustainable production and consumption. He urged self-restraint, simplicity and *μετάνοια* (a change

of mind), a modern asceticism, ἄσκησις, (practice), to heal ourselves and our world, countering the conspicuous increase of consumption and “deadening forgetfulness” blocking living together justly.

Mankind’s responsibility as prudent stewards of our natural environment call for commitment to green recovery and twin green and digital transformations. The upcoming COP 26 in Glasgow, led by the UK/ Italy partnership-presidency and joined by all the participating states, should result in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and climate and energy adaptation plans that can move the global environment to the level necessary for the world to reach net zero.

Paradoxically, the Covid-19 pandemic leaves us, he argued, with a historic opportunity to “build back better.” “We pray for the swift overcoming of the consequences of the ongoing health crisis and for the illumination from above of governments throughout the world, so that they do not return to or persist upon economism. He pointed to the pseudoscientific opinions on Covid-19 vaccines and on climate change that must be addressed.

Action to address the deep sufferings caused by climate refugees is a major concern, with the heaviest burdens carried by those on the margins of societies, especially women and children, Many nations have experienced recently the devastating effects of climate degradation. Extreme weather events are our foreseeable destiny, if we insist upon our enmity toward the natural environment.

New policies must venture “beyond the usual”. “We call the major economies of the world to provide leadership in all these transitions to a green economy.” We must open our hearts and minds to the ambitions voiced by young generations. “Unprecedented determination and human energy are required to free us all from enslavement to wasteful living. By devoting the power of our faith and the ingenuity of our minds to the contemplation of solutions, we can escape this bondage.”

“Here and now, individual and communal actions, brave and wise steps taken by women and men, by young and old, will empower us to make significant common decisions. We are inspired by a vision of a

world united in well-being, sustainability, resilience, responsibility, justice and peace for all. Truly, our shared commitments can heal humanity and its home, its οἶκος, our planet Planet.”

“It is the minute before midnight for humanity to go forward together towards a sustainable and resilient future that promises to heal people and our planet.”
—H.A.H. Bartholomeos I, The “Green Patriarch”

Ministerial and Parliamentary Sessions

The 2021 G20 Interfaith Forum included, for the first time, three sessions with ministers or their representatives, from both G20 nations and others. The meetings, which were not open to the public, brought together leaders from government departments responsible for Foreign Affairs, Education, and Religious affairs. The three discussions highlighted issues of shared concern and interest. Among them were humanitarian priorities, the importance of religious literacy, peacebuilding priorities, and treatment of minorities. The ministerial sessions were followed by a further innovation: two sessions of parliamentarians coming from different world regions.

Focus Sessions

Eight sessions were organized as cooperative ventures between FSCIRE and different organizations. They addressed a wide range of issues linked to interreligious responsibilities and challenges.

THE THEOLOGICAL NATURE OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue has had several meanings in the recent history of interfaith relations: sometimes it has meant gatherings of representatives of different faiths on a doctrinal or practical agenda; sometimes a stabilizing effort to restore coexistence or react to hate speech; at other times it was adopted to describe a process which resulted in one or more agreements. Speakers spoke to the need to explore their understanding, both of dialogue and priority issues, including their experience and perspective of dialogue in the future and if/ how encounters between political leaders, religious authorities, organizations, and scholars add value to the endeavor.



THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

When religious militants adopt language and behaviors anchored in discriminatory approaches, especially when these justify violence, it means that they fail to recall the complexity of their history, the richness of their hermeneutics, and their fidelity to the future of their faith. Research in the field of religious studies – namely the disciplines crossing or crossed by religious experience – may have a fundamental role in listening and building a culture of inclusion. The European Union’s acknowledgment of RESILIENCE, a European Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies proposal led by FSCIRE in Bologna and Palermo supports this view.

The central questions that the panelists addressed were how scholars can become actors of dialogue, while remaining faithful to their own disciplines and epistemologies, and how theological research can offer new understandings of diversity. There is further a central question as to whether a global alliance of academies is needed.

IS CHRISTIAN ECUMENISM A MODEL?

After centuries in which the relations between churches and Christian communities of diverse confessions were marked by conflict, hate, persecution, and violence, the ecumenical movement marks a new era: even if all have not achieved visible unity and “sharing the altar,” secular power and theological dialogue have increased the quest for communion and doctrinal understanding among Christians.

The central questions that the panelists addressed were whether and how the cooperation between a “life and work” approach and a “faith and order approach” is still effective or if it belongs to the past; if alternative approaches that see dialogue as a way to reduce areas of conflict, or as a tool to discover what there is in common can be considered a path whereby the experience of ecumenism might contribute to interreligious dialogue, while assuming responsibility for the consequences of division.

MEDITERRANEAN SEA: FRONTIER OF PEACE

Italy hosts two significant initiatives focusing on the Mediterranean area: the Institute for International Political Studies, ISPI, has been promoting for many years a MED Forum which explores a positive agenda beyond current turmoil; the Conference of Catholic Bishops is promoting a Mediterranean dialogue to foster peace and security for the displaced and victims of conflicts, disasters, and poverty.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were how the prophetic role of the churches may interact with the need for viable instruments for managing political crises and economic inequalities.

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN RESPONDING TO CRISES IN THE ARAB REGION IN COOPERATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE CENTRE (KAICIID)

This panel addressed specific crises in the Arab region, discussing promising practices and recommendations on how religious authorities can better plan for and quickly act against crises.

The forum asked the Honorable Speakers and Distinguished Experts to elaborate recommendations and promising practices to collect, collate, and outline in a recommendation document.

The central questions that the speakers addressed were how religious authorities can issue early warnings and how these lessons learned can be implemented.

BREAKING BARRIERS – YOUTH IN ACTION RESPONDING TO CRISES IN THE ARAB REGION IN COOPERATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE CENTRE (KAICIID)

The panel discussion focused on youth responses to crises, and on countering hate speech and fostering social cohesion in the Arab Region in times of crisis. This is through sharing challenges, opportunities, lessons learned, success stories and how youth can undertake early warning and tangible actions on the ground. The panel discussion also showcased successful social media campaigns and social cohesion projects from the Arab Region.

The central questions that the speakers addressed were how youth can be agents of change in building

bridges and fostering social cohesion. Best practices in designing successful social media campaigns in the Arab Region were discussed to define the role that both positive messaging and faith play in the campaigns and projects. Young representatives, engaged directly with religious leaders and policy makers, explained these challenges.

THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN EURASIA IN COOPERATION WITH ISTITUTO DI STUDI EURASIATICI

From the point of view of religious dynamics and their political and social weight, Eurasia is an extraordinarily interesting field for observation, where for almost a thousand years many of the world's major religions have coexisted, including Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Judaism, Sunni and Shia Islam, and Buddhism. Over the centuries and through the alternation of political regimes, a special relationship between the State and faith has developed in the Eurasian region, ranging from tsarist caesaropapism to Soviet atheism and then to the rebirth of religious sentiments in almost all the republics in the twilight of the USSR. Similar dynamics are common to the whole of Eurasia, from Russia to the Caucasus, from the Black Sea region to Central Asia, albeit with their own peculiarities, and constitute an important element for understanding many of the most important geopolitical events in this area and for developing an effective European approach.

AFRICA AND EUROPE: A BAROMETER AGAINST RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

GCERF is one of the most important actors in the Euro-African scene: whereas prudent and effective use of money has created cultivated disseminators of extremism and fundamentalism, a new type of investment aims to preserve the cohabitation of cultural and religious diversity, promoting sustainability, equality and immunity from corruption; such a strategy can produce improvements in social life which can be effectively monitored and measured with a form of barometer.

The central questions that the speakers addressed were how policy makers can tackle social disorders and discontent and how the different religious traditions may contribute to that; the defeat of terrorism in Europe can be achieved through security policies but also by building on trust and communication.

Thematic Sessions

The Forum held 13 Thematic Sessions centered around several of the Working Group themes, three of which were hybrid and included speakers participating via Zoom.

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENTS TO SDGs: CHILDREN, HUNGER, WATER, AND SANITATION

The COVID-19 emergencies have halted or reversed progress on global agendas, including the prominent focus on vulnerable communities. Poverty has increased and takes new forms. Looming threats of hunger and children orphaned during the crisis demand both action and reflection. As an example, hunger kills twice the number of people as COVID-19. Refugee numbers are rising and progress on basic infrastructures has stalled. Both humanitarian and development assistance of all kinds falls far short of even elementary needs.

The central questions that speakers addressed were if and how religious actors can revamp and revitalize agendas, and how the divergent interests of the different parts of the same religious community may be encouraged to overcome the “globalization of indifference” before those who suffer.

POST-COVID, ETHICAL AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF THE HERE AND NOW, RECONSTRUCTION

Urgent action to vaccinate populations equitably across the world against COVID-19, a global and G20 absolute priority, can be supported by religious communities, through advocacy and direct action. This can enhance a more universalist approach to vaccine productions and distribution. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlights the need to strengthen public and basic health systems and to prepare for future pandemics, both areas where religious communities are intensely involved with profit and non-profit initiatives. Cross sectoral partnerships need to engage actively, harnessing lessons of experience.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were if and how in a post-COVID-19 world, health systems and technology can more broadly reinforce human-centered and inclusive approaches.

A G20 IMPERATIVE: SUPPORT REFUGEES AND FORCED MIGRANTS

The plight of those forced by war and natural catastrophes to leave their homes is an ancient and central religious concern, and welcoming strangers is a shared obligation. With over 40 million forced migrants in today’s world, many spending close to two decades in uncertainty, religious communities share in the global need for better solutions. With the COVID-19 emergencies pushing humanitarian action to the side, it falls to religious actors to demand attention and action. That action needs to draw on spiritual and practical resources to define better multilateral responses. The task has still greater urgency in the face of surely rising numbers of climate refugees in a not-far-distant future.

The Forum sought to elaborate calls to action but also fresh ideas for meaningful response, drawing on experience and prophetic inspiration.

HOLY SITES: CONFLICT, PROTECTION, AND RECONCILIATION

Religious cultural heritage plays significant roles in both social and political tensions and prospects for peace and harmony. Successful management can advance several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting their broad implications. Sacred sites serve as meeting points to develop civic spaces for exchange and dialogue. Work in this area has become more complex because shared and contested sites are too often weaponized as focal points for acts of religious or ethnic hatred and state-sponsored geopolitical agendas. Many sacred places have multiple identities, both as sites of living religious activity and as cultural heritage and memory. Challenges for managing complex custodianship relationships loom large, with dangers of infringing on religious autonomy and freedom of religion or belief, along with wider civic and cultural expectations. Holy Sites have accumulated during the ages the religious experience of different cultures and traditions; they can be conquered, be lost, and re-conquered; they can reveal the capacity of respect for the other or the impotence in this challenge. They can fuel conflicts or become a shared home.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were to compare legal systems of protection of the

Holy places and political measures which, at local or international level, can be taken to set forth their role and respect their historical complexity.

PROTECTING THE PLANET: SHARING A GREEN THEOLOGY

The theme of healing calls for a sharp increase in the number of actions to take care of the earth, whether their focus is forests and biodiversity, the quality of human life, or a change in daily behaviors. Prophetic religious leaders issue compelling calls for actions led by shared ethics, grounded in theology and lived experience, exemplified in the vital Papal Encyclical, *Laudato Si*. Accountability of religious organizations for actions points both to their engagement in global summits, like the Glasgow COP26 or the Papal summit in Rome, and in the example they set for actions based on verifiable commitments.

Environmental agendas today are less disputed than in the past, but the path to action remains shrouded in dispute and indifference: Climate Change doubters are noisy, even if they represent a minority. Countries which are less prepared to face a de-carbonized future defend their hope for faster growth as an ideological position. Religious actors are increasingly involved, articulating sound theologies behind their support for a green agenda, and they are discovering that protecting the earth is a common aim whose roots they can trace to each of their own traditions.

The central questions that speakers addressed were if and how this can be encouraged, and where to find experiences which appreciate a “liberation theology” that considers environmental exploitation as an intolerable injustice.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF: PROTECTING MINORITIES

When somebody perceives himself or herself as a part of a “minority,” it means that a majority claims a different set of rights and, in this case, the law must come forward to preserve the rights of those in danger or to assert an equality that is threatened.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were how/if the very concept of minorities is appropriate to guarantee equal rights, and if citizenship is still a viable concept in the Big Data world, where other entities own sensitive information on the private and social

life of every person, frequently feeding indifference or negative feelings against one or the other group.

HEALING CONFLICT: THE UNHEARD CALL FOR GLOBAL CEASEFIRE

The search for peace is a topic too often removed or dampened in public discourse: the conquest of Kabul by the Taliban is, however, opening a great debate as to why the 20-years war began and why other civil and “classic” wars are tolerated, because the number of victims is limited and because of their strategic economic impact.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were how religious authorities can raise their voice for the voiceless, and how they can encourage ceasefires and a process of reconciliation, which is the consequence of war that most urgently needs to be addressed.

A KAIROS MOMENT: ACCOUNTABILITY TO ADDRESS INEQUALITIES

Divergent paths and inequalities are a stark reality that mark the COVID-19 era. The global emergencies affect different individuals very differently. Everyone shares in uncertainties, well aware of deaths, illness, and economic disruptions, but some have actually seen their wealth increase and savored time for reflection and new ventures. For others, however, grief, hunger, and disrupted relationships dominate life. The situation for nations also ranges widely. All face setbacks and need to adjust hopes and plans, but many are looking catastrophe in the face, with decades of progress wiped out.

A challenging question was put by the co-chairs of this session: is this a time that some give the name “Kairos”, meaning a special, rare moment in time of opportunity and grace? Could and should the global leaders who meet October 30-31 in Rome as the G20 Summit confront the divides in bold and effective ways? And what actions would that imply?

The session explored several quite different dimensions of the immediate challenges and opportunities for global governance that the COVID-19 crisis presents, all pertinent to the central Forum theme of healing. Deep economic and financial crises for states are the most immediate challenge for the G20 summit, and attention was called especially to Africa and to especially vulnerable communities. An invited panelist,

Eric LeCompte, Jubilee USA, could not participate in person but the discussion highlighted that faith-linked network's active and continuing engagement with the G20 process and leaders on precisely these challenges. Fairness and justice are the central tenets of policy and financing for debt relief and restructuring and financial mobilization to assure basic services. Accountability, including active measures to combat corruption, engaging religious communities, is even more important now, during the crisis, than before. The G20 needs to take on issues around inequality, reflecting, as the case of India shows so dramatically, its complex and deeply human dimensions. And urgent, immediate action is needed and is feasible, with vaccine equity the prime example.

Arntraud Hartmann, Professor of Development Economics at SAIS Europe John Hopkins University in Bologna, underscored the dramatic reversals that the COVID-19 crises have caused and especially how sharply paths among regions and countries have diverged. This accentuates the multiple inequalities that are so harmful to social welfare. Of great concern are the increases in poverty and especially increases in hunger. We do not have reliable poverty numbers but there are clearly large increases in extreme poverty and rises in food prices with food accounting for 50-60% of household expenditures. The growth impacts on advanced economies are much more significant than on Sub Saharan African countries, because they are less integrated in the global economy. The harsh reality is that it will be years before Africa can recover. This is tragic in the light of remarkable headway in reducing poverty over the past 20 years. Two examples of the human tragedy involved are unused maternal health facilities and empty schools. We run the risk of undoing much foundational work to protect future generations.

Among the multiple faces of accountability, curtailing corruption has special resonance. Jonatas Machado, Universidad Autonoma de Lisbon "Luis de Camoes", elaborated on both why and how. The essential challenge is to get resources to the right people in the right way. Faith communities must lead in calling attention to the cruel fact that corruption, the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development, and further exacerbates inequality, tax evasion, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis. Corruption causes more harm to poor communities

than any others. It encourages radicalism, populism, terrorism, and war. During the pandemic, corruption has limited the world's capacity to respond and it has, ironically, served as a catalyst for more corruption. Religious communities can and should do more to denounce and fight corruption, sharing ethical teachings to bolster effective action, pinpointing and documenting the daily corrosive effects of corruption, mobilizing communities to demand public integrity, and serving as watchdogs to expose and denounce corrupt actors and practices. Key sectors like health and pharmaceutical industries (supply chain, service delivery, and crisis administration) merit special attention.

The case of India, described by Rajeev Bhargava, who directs the Parekh Institute of Indian Thought at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi, underscores both the importance and the complexity of addressing inequality through a faith lens. For Hinduism, theological teachings can be problematic. Hindu India is founded on hierarchies, so a common approach is that to achieve equality one must set aside Hinduism completely. This overly simplistic view distorts action, undermining the core principle that everyone deserves equal dignity and respect. The best versions of Hinduism offer a valid approach for treating people as equals. Hindu ethics maintains the starting premise that we are all human and this cultural tradition can promote equality.

The urgency of action by the G20 and its various engagement groups was a central theme running through the discussion. Brett G. Scharffs, Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University, highlighted vaccination against COVID-19 as the prime example. We must seek to vaccinate the world in a way that respects the human dignity of all people in all places. No crisis was more custom-made for the G20 than this one; if the pandemic is ended, it will be because of the collective effort of the G20 countries but if not, they deserve the lion's share of blame for that failure. As vaccination is critical to moving forward, the G20 must address problems in the way, in this Kairos moment. We must vaccinate all categories of people in each country, everywhere, especially those left behind. Religious actors have a key role, building systems in reliable and trustworthy ways, and holding governments accountable for keeping their promises.

RACISM: RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

A central ethical challenge that colors all issues is the pervasive impact of racist ideologies and behaviors: racism had and still has support in supremacist religious ideologies, which are not less dangerous than other types of terrorism and which need to be isolated in new forms of discourse and disputes.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were how the G20 might formulate a message with architects of religious public discourse (local authorities, bodies, theologians, actors) that urge new and meaningful commitments to effective action.

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

The predictive society based on Big Data analysis will deliver to actors operating outside public control the power to feed those who are using online capacity: similar to mechanisms that induce needs (products, entertainment, etc.), this process is already in place and offers new enticements in the field of spiritual attitudes and needs.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were how religious communities might protect themselves from this manipulation, which can feed violence or passivity and transform whatever type of attitude into a “tradition”: taxation and accountability of the social media thus becomes also a canonical and juridical issue.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF: FROM RIGHTS TO ACTION

The COVID-19 emergencies have highlighted tensions around the significance of religious freedom, among them the challenges faced by religious minority communities in different settings. Seeking different forms of protection is a disputed matter, and enforcement of commitment can increase conflicts.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were how to address the worrying global trends on violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief and measures that the G20 and the IF20 might advance to address both underlying and immediate problems and opportunities.



GENDER EQUALITY: RELIGIOUS DENIAL AND RELIGIOUS SUPPORT

Women theologians from different religious traditions are propelling a questioning of patriarchal traditions, but political and social tensions still surround gender and sexuality in many settings, with a focus on reproductive health and peacebuilding. New light and challenges have emerged during the COVID-19 emergencies, exemplified in rising levels of domestic violence and varying religious responses to it.

The central questions that speakers addressed were how gender issues might offer common ground for their dialogue and how scholarship on rights can produce effective actions to tackle the issue.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY

Human trafficking belongs high on the G20 agenda, and involves priority areas of need and potential cross-sector collaboration. The horrors of human trafficking and different forms of modern slavery call for concerted focus and action by G20 leaders together with religious allies.

The central questions that the Forum addressed were the ethical arguments for action and the nature of promising partnerships to be reinforced, including those with business and public authorities.

Closing Plenary

The closing events of the Bologna G20 Interfaith Forum took place Tuesday afternoon, September 14, in the Palazzo Re Enzo. It fell into three parts: the first, chaired by Katherine Marshall, was a series of diverse closing remarks, the second a session chaired by Prodi featuring a speech by Italy's Prime Minister, Mario Draghi, with concluding comments also by Professor Alberto Melloni and Cardinal Zuppi, and the third recorded remarks by Prince Hassan of Jordan. Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, looked towards Italy's handover of the G20 Presidency for 2022 to Indonesia.

Marshall highlighted briefly the continuing policy analysis by the G20 Interfaith Forum and themes that emerged from Bologna discussions turning on what it will take to heal? Four priorities emerged: the critical importance of rapid progress on vaccination against COVID-19 and engaging religious communities, urgent needs to address rising hunger, the central concern of religious communities for those at the margins, the vulnerable, and common calls for action on climate change.

Six leaders from different communities spoke. Elly Schlein, Vice President of the Emilia-Romagna Regional Government, highlighted shared responsibilities for the wellbeing of others, with understanding for interreligious and intercultural differences and similarities. Riccardo de Segni, Chief Rabbi of Rome, acknowledged the difficult path that lies ahead. Keeping justice in mind, with commitment to dialogue and to serving the prophetic roles to which religious leaders are called, "we recognize that healing is our duty, recognizing that the only healer is our God." Mohamed Abdel-Salam, Secretary General of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, urged clear recognition that the sharing of cultures has a global face. "Our goal is to have a better and safe and secure world for all." Najla Kassab Abousawan, The World Communion of Reformed Churches, contrasted the need for bridges with the tendency to build fences, linking justice and faith and the equal roles of women. "We don't gather with the hope of gaining power, but for the empowerment of the powerless." Bernard Spitz, President of International and European

Affairs, MEDEF, Paris, spoke as an optimist that sees opportunity in every difficulty. The Bologna gathering with people of different faiths can convince G20 leaders to act for a better world. Antonio Tajani, Former President of the European Parliament, argued that what is important is that we become instruments of dialogue instead of war. "Because I believe in my faith, I am open to listening and understanding others.... Respecting each other and our beliefs and understanding each other is the answer."

Romano Prodi, Former President of the European Commission, opened the next segment of the session, highlighting peace as a gift, but one that must be achieved day by day with patience and love. This is the lesson of these meetings in Bologna. Alberto Melloni, Secretary of FSCIRE, echoed the concern with the world facing both global and religious warming, and the principles of a "Parva Carta": We will not kill each other, we will support each other, we will forgive each other. Matteo Maria Zuppi, Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna, echoed the central theme that this must be a time to heal and shared commitments to build peace and to fight against the many viruses that afflict us. All today are vulnerable, and we will not be safe until everyone is safe. This applies to everything from climate change to investments in SDGs. Only together can we succeed.

Mario Draghi, President of the Italian Council of Ministers and President of the G20 2021, stressed the importance of the core values of peace and tolerance. Highlighting the important social and political roles of religion, he pointed to the dangers of instrumentalization and of those who incite or accept violence. The principles of religion, which are fundamentally about love, must be defended with firmness and charity.

Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, returned to the contemporary world's dangerous junctures, which threaten all communities and the future of our world. Religion, he argued, should no longer be a part of the problem, but part of the solution.



“Religion ... has the potential to help block the political weaponization of identity; curtail the spread of communal hatred; promote solidarity and respect among the diverse people, cultures and nations of the world; and foster the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.”

—Yaquut Cholil Qoumas, Indonesia’s Minister of Religious Affairs

“You religious authorities have a fundamental role. Awaken the sensitivities that slumber in indifference or by calculations of convenience. Call policy to action consistent with your message. ... The proposals that you have presented in this forum, and which the G20 intends to examine, reaffirm the depth of your commitment. And they reaffirm the importance of knowledge and listening, without which there cannot be an authentic culture of diversity, for the full recognition of the values that are the basis of our humanity.”

—Mario Draghi, President of the G20 2021

