



Religions for Peace

Multi- Faith High-Level Forum:
Advancing Positive Outcomes for Children, Families and
Communities
26-27 March 2024

CONFERENCE REPORT

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Acknowledgment

The Multi-Faith High-Level Forum was convened with the partnership and support of UNICEF, under the Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities Initiative (FPCC), www.faith4positivechange.org, with the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities as a key partner. We are grateful for the wide array of faith-based organizations, UN and state agencies, and other stakeholders whose invaluable contributions enriched the forum.

Religions for Peace would like to extend special thanks to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for sponsoring the Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award. Our deep appreciation goes to the dedicated staff and members of our International Secretariat, as well as our Regional and National Interreligious Councils, who worked diligently to collect and document the voices of children shared during the forum.

Finally, we offer our sincere gratitude to all the speakers, panellists, and resource persons (listed in Annex I) whose insights, expertise, and active participation were instrumental in the success of this event.

We also wish to thank you, the readers, for taking the time to engage with the deliberations and recommendations contained in this report. We invite your insights, feedback, and collaboration in areas of mutual interest and convergence, based on the topics covered. Your contributions are essential as we continue to advance our shared mission.

Multi-Faith High-Level Forum: Advancing Positive Outcomes for Children, Families, and Communities Report

Introduction

The Multi-Faith High-Level Forum, convened by Religions for Peace, took place from 26-27 March 2024 at the Church Centre for the United Nations in New York City. Seventy-two participants attended in person, six virtually, and an additional 36 children sent video messages to the Forum. This Forum aimed to provide a platform for various stakeholders to reflect, share experiences, and develop actionable recommendations on the role of faith in advancing shared well-being and addressing emerging challenges faced by children, families, and communities worldwide.

Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General, Religions for Peace, hosted the Forum along with Dr. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram and Co-Moderator, Religions for Peace, and H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon, Co-Moderator, Religions for Peace. High-level representation included Ms. Anurita Bains, Deputy Director Programmes (a.i.), UNICEF, who attended in person; and H.E. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, WHO, and H.E. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner, UNHCR, who sent video messages.

The list of other speakers, panelists, and participants is attached in the Annex.

Background and Summary

In the face of numerous health, environmental, climate, and human-engineered crises and conflicts, there is an urgent need for collaboration between faith-based and secular stakeholders. Religions for Peace has a longstanding history of fostering partnerships with various institutions, including UNICEF, WHO, and UNHCR. These partnerships have enabled multi-faith and multi-stakeholder actions to address issues of common concern, leveraging the assets of religious leaders and their institutions.

Despite these efforts, children, young people, women, and other underserved members of our communities remain the most vulnerable to the effects of

these crises. The shared values of faith, combined with the dedicated missions of our partners, are crucial for effective intervention. In response to this need, Religions for Peace mobilized resources to convene a Multi-Faith High-Level Forum, providing a platform for faith actors, organizations, secular agencies, and institutions to reflect, share, and develop practical recommendations and actions on the role of faith in addressing these challenges.

Religions for Peace structured the agenda to address the diverse challenges and opportunities present at the intersection of faith, well-being, and community development. Each session featured esteemed moderators, panelists, and participants who contributed insights, experiences, and recommendations.

Objectives of the Multi-Faith High-Level Forum

1. **Shared Learning Platform:** Provide a platform for religious leaders, faith actors, their institutions, and technical experts to share experiences and learn from the Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities (FPCC) Initiative.
2. **Best Practices and Interventions:** Share best practices and interventions in faith engagement and collaboration by stakeholders in addressing issues faced by children, families, and communities.
3. **Honoring Women of Faith:** Highlight and learn from the efforts of women of faith in advancing multi-religious collaboration, human rights, peace, security, and sustainable development at all levels.
4. **Strengthening Partnerships:** Strengthen partnerships and collaborations to address emerging and cross-cutting areas of concern, such as primary health services, planetary crises, and conflict mitigation, leveraging faith-based engagement and evidence models.



Group photo of the participants during the Multi-Faith High Level Forum

Key Initiatives, Themes, and Participants

Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities (FPCC) Initiative

For nearly 35 years, Religions for Peace has partnered with UNICEF to mobilize the spiritual, moral, and social assets of faith communities to improve child protection and well-being. Launched in 2018, the FPCC Initiative, supported by Rissho Kosei-kai (RK), UNICEF, and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI), aims to broaden the influence of faith in development and humanitarian work. This initiative has been critical in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and has expanded to cover areas such as immunization, violence prevention, climate action, and mental health.

The Role of Evidence Generation and Learning

Within the FPCC initiative, JLI supports knowledge management and research, developing global learning tools and resources. This initiative mobilizes community, congregational, national, regional, and global faith leaders, including women and youth, to generate sustainable and credible results in ensuring positive behavioral outcomes for children. The Forum examined the role of evidence, stakeholder coordination, and community engagement in promoting sustainable interventions.

The Role of Women of Faith

The Forum recognized Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action through an award supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This award celebrates the crucial role of women of faith in advancing human rights, peace, security, and sustainable development. By documenting the initiatives led by women of faith networks globally, Religions for Peace aims to amplify their contributions to their communities and the world.

Reflections on Faith in Advancing Shared Well-Being

Throughout the Forum, reflections on the role of faith in promoting well-being emerged as a central theme. The discussions highlighted how faith-based organizations and leaders play a critical role in addressing societal challenges, leveraging their moral authority, infrastructure, and community networks to advance positive change.

Participants

Participants included senior religious leaders from the Religions for Peace World Council/Executive Committee, representatives from the Women of Faith Network, Women of Faith Awardees, the Interfaith Youth Network, and Regional and National Inter-Religious Councils (IRCs). The Forum also featured a video that captured the voices of over 30 children from around the world, with a resounding call for more engagement of children and young people within faith-led initiatives that are aimed at attending to their well-being. Also attending were Regional FPCC Implementation teams, JLI staff, faith-based organizations, UNICEF, and other partners, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and various UN Agencies (WHO, UNHCR, OHCHR, etc.).



From L to R: Mr Elias Szczytnicki, Regional Secretary General, Religions for Peace Latin America and the Caribbean; Mr. Massimiliano Sani, Senior Adviser, Social and Behaviour Change, UNICEF; Dr. Joan Hernandez Serret, Secretary General, Religions for Peace Europe; Mr. Andrés Esteban Ochoa Toasa, UNICEF SBC M&E Specialist.

Deliberations and Outcomes

Opening Session

The Forum started with opening remarks from distinguished speakers, emphasizing the critical role of faith in addressing global challenges. Keynote addresses by representatives from UNICEF, WHO, and UNHCR highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in promoting child well-being and community resilience.



Dr. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram, India; Co-Moderator, Religions for Peace

H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon, Turkey/ Greece; Co-Moderator, Religions for Peace

Ms. Anurita Bains, Deputy Director Programmes, Representing H.E. Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF

The opening remarks set the tone for the Forum, underscoring the urgent need to prioritize the well-being of children in a rapidly changing world. The speakers,

representing a spectrum of religious and philosophical perspectives, collectively emphasized that fostering peace requires a holistic approach that integrates physical, spiritual, and social dimensions.

One speaker articulated, “Our focus must not only be on the immediate physical needs of children but also on nurturing their spiritual and social well-being. Peace is not just the absence of conflict; it is the presence of friendship, safety, and harmony.” This sentiment was echoed throughout the Forum, with discussions highlighting the significance of fundamental values such as kindness, authenticity, and the importance of a supportive family environment.

The role of religious leaders and faith-based organizations was a central theme, with speakers noting their vital contribution to protecting the most vulnerable, especially during health crises. A participant acknowledged that “faith communities often serve as the first responders in times of crisis, offering not only practical support but also emotional and spiritual care.”

As the session progressed, several key action items were outlined. One called for the development of

practical recommendations to tackle the challenges faced by children head-on. Another emphasized the need to amplify the contributions of women through a multi-religious action report, recognizing their pivotal role in advancing social justice and child welfare.

Strengthening partnerships between the World Health Organization, faith communities, and health services was highlighted as essential for creating a cohesive and effective response to health crises. The session proposed a joint work plan to enhance these collaborations, aiming to forge stronger ties and more coordinated efforts.

The session also called for a robust and effective agreement on pandemic treaty negotiations, alongside a concerted effort to counter misinformation and myths that can undermine public health efforts. A participant noted that “in a world where misinformation spreads rapidly, our collective responsibility is to provide accurate information and build trust.”

Additionally, participants identified a need to deepen the partnership between UNICEF and faith organizations to drive progress on child rights. Participants stressed the importance of leveraging these partnerships to advance initiatives that protect and promote the rights and well-being of children worldwide.



H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis presenting the Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award to Dr. Vinu Aram

In conclusion, the session underscored the essential role of faith communities in advancing public health and child welfare, calling for sustained collaboration, effective agreements on global health policies, and a united effort to address the myriad challenges faced by children today.

Key Highlights from Opening Session

- Forging Partnerships for Global Resilience: Redefining the Role of Religious Actors and Development Partners.
- The opening session emphasized the critical importance of collaboration between religious actors and development partners in addressing global crises.
- Emphasizing resilience-building and acknowledging the significance of such partnerships, participants highlighted ongoing commitment to supporting the well-being and development of children and families worldwide.

While significant progress has been made, challenges persist in ensuring the well-being of children worldwide. However, through collaboration and partnership-building, including with faith communities, there is hope for a brighter future. By leveraging the influence and reach of faith

leaders, alongside broader collective efforts, we can work towards creating more just and equitable societies that protect and uphold the rights and well-being of children. UNICEF remains committed to deepening its engagement with faith communities to advance this shared goal.

Redefining the Relationship

The partnership between Religions for Peace and UNICEF serves as a model for redefining the relationship between religious actors and development partners. It moves away from the instrumentalization of religion towards fostering genuine collaboration to address global crises, particularly those impacting vulnerable populations like children and families.

Emphasis on Resilience-Building

Speakers highlighted the importance of building resilience to confront the multitude of challenges facing humanity, referred to as a “meta-crisis.” This involves preparing communities, especially children and families, to withstand and respond effectively to crises. Partnerships should equip faith communities and other actors with the necessary tools and resilience to address these challenges.

Acknowledgment of Significance

The partnership between Religions for Peace and UNICEF is especially significant in India, which is home to one-fifth of the world’s children. Collaboration between these entities is crucial in addressing children’s needs worldwide, particularly amidst ongoing challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact of Faith Partnerships

Faith partnerships have significantly improved children’s lives globally by facilitating access to life-saving services and contributing to declines in mortality rates and child stunting.

The Importance of Collaboration

The session emphasized that collaboration is essential in addressing the complex challenges facing children. This requires the concerted efforts of governments, civil society, communities, families, young people, and faith communities.

Initiatives for Change

Initiatives like Faith for Positive Change for Children (FPCC) underscore the importance of interfaith collaboration in effecting meaningful change on a larger scale. They recognize the influential role of faith leaders in promoting children’s rights and well-being.



Session 2 Panel: From L to R: Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn J.D., Executive Director, Arigatou International, New York; Mr. James Alexander, Senior Policy Advisor, Strategic Religious Engagement J/IRF/SRE - U.S. Department of State; Dr. Vinu Aram; Ms. Deepa Risal Phokhare, Senior Adviser Social and Behaviour Change/Team Lead Immunization Demand, Health Section, Program Group UNICEF; Dr. Renz C. Argao, Moderator, Asia & the Pacific Interfaith Youth Network; Coordinator, Religions for Peace International Youth Committee and (on video) Ms. Sara Hess, Partnerships & Strategy, Epidemic & Pandemic Preparedness & Prevention Health Emergencies Programme, World Health Organization.

Session Two: Faith Communities and Primary Health Care—Advancing Immunizations for Children in Various Contexts

This session explored the importance of immunization, with a particular focus on the interventions that faith actors have taken or should take to enhance vaccine demand and uptake. It reflected on “The State of the World’s Children 2023” report, which emphasized vaccines for every child and provided recommendations on how faith actors and their partners can promote immunization. Because vaccine promotion is an entry point to other primary health care interventions, discussions focused on the role of faith actors in advancing immunizations and primary healthcare.



Dr. Kezevino Aram with a special guest

Panelists emphasized the importance of navigating religious sensitivities in vaccination efforts. Faith actors were encouraged to address religious beliefs that might impact attitudes towards vaccination by framing immunization as a life-saving intervention. Effective communication strategies that respect religious beliefs while promoting the benefits of vaccines were a key focus.

The conversation also touched on the value of multisectoral collaboration. Faith-based organizations are crucial partners in strengthening immunization programs through alliances with governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders. Faith networks and influence can bridge gaps and bolster public health infrastructure. Examples of successful collaborations during health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrated the potential impact of these partnerships.

Beyond immunization, faith actors were recognized for their ability to support broader public health initiatives, including nutrition, maternal and child health services, and disease prevention. Utilizing faith platforms to build trust in health systems and promote public health objectives was a key discussion point.

The session reflected on the challenges faced by religious leaders and communities, including the impact of global health crises on faith leaders and the difficulties in promoting health measures during conflicts. The rise of misinformation and vaccine hesitancy during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical role of faith leaders in combating misinformation and fostering trust in vaccines.

Religious leaders, as trusted figures within their communities, are pivotal in advocating for vaccination. Sharing accurate, evidence-based information and addressing religious concerns were highlighted as essential roles for faith leaders.

Speakers showcased successful examples of collaboration between faith organizations and health bodies. For instance, in Zimbabwe, Christian, Muslim, and African traditionalist organizations collaborated with the Ministry of Health, WHO, and UNICEF. Together, they engaged in pandemic communication campaigns, capacity building, and volunteer training, which helped address misinformation and improve health responses.

However, the session also acknowledged persistent challenges in multi-faith and multi-stakeholder collaboration, emphasizing the need for consistent and systematic engagement of faith communities—beyond crisis situations—by ministries of health.

Key learnings included WHO’s commitment to documenting successful collaborations and advocating for the inclusion of faith partners in health planning. WHO also seeks to promote models of engagement that could be replicated in other countries. To that end, health agencies must understand faith communities’ complex structures, including their significant infrastructure and social networks.

Participants emphasized the need to build strong partnerships based on respect for human rights, gender inclusion, evidence-informed practices, and trust. Partnerships that respect religious differences and ensure transparency and mutual trust are essential for improving health outcomes for vulnerable populations.

The panelists noted that religious beliefs significantly influenced attitudes towards vaccination, presenting challenges for faith-based advocacy efforts. Faith actors navigated these sensitivities by emphasizing the life-saving benefits of immunization while addressing and respecting religious concerns.



Group Photo during the 'Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action, Award Ceremony

Beyond immunization, faith actors support broader public health initiatives. They contribute to nutrition programs, enhance trust in health systems, improve maternal and child health services, monitor infectious hazards, and advance disease prevention efforts. Their platforms and resources are valuable assets in these efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted significant issues with vaccine hesitancy, driven in part by misinformation. This hesitancy adversely affected routine immunization rates, particularly for diseases like measles. The underlying issue extended beyond vaccine-specific concerns to a broader lack of trust in science, institutions, and health systems.

Religious leaders, due to their trusted positions within communities, were pivotal in addressing these challenges. They built and sustained confidence in vaccines by sharing accurate, evidence-based information, addressing concerns, and promoting public health goals. Their engagement helped bridge gaps in trust and enhance vaccination efforts.

The session highlighted the need to document successful collaboration models and advocate for the inclusion of faith partners in health planning and emergency preparedness. Health agencies need a deeper understanding of the complexities within faith communities, which encompass not only religious leaders but also significant infrastructure and networks. Building partnerships based on respect for human rights, evidence-informed practices, and mutual trust is essential for advancing shared well-being, particularly for vulnerable communities.



From L to R: Mr. Jimmy Obuya, Deputy Director of Programmes - Religions for Peace and Global Coordinator for the FPCC Initiative; Ms. Melissa Crutchfield, FPCC Global Manager, JLI; Massimiliano Sani, UNICEF; Mr. Andrés Esteban Ochoa Toasa, UNICEF; Dr. Olivia Wilkinson, PhD, Director of Research, JLI.

Session Three: Faith and Climate—Tackling Adverse Impact of the Planetary Crisis on Communities

This session looked at the effects of the planetary crisis, interrogating examples of interventions by faith actors in promoting mitigation and adaptation measures. Speakers presented key recommendations from two research papers, jointly developed by Religions for Peace and the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), which addressed the intersectionality of faith, gender, and planetary action, and the critical role of women of faith in protecting the world’s remaining rainforests.



From L to R: Mr. Arshan Khalid, Head, ISNA Office for Interfaith, Community Alliances, and Government Relations (IOICA), Dr. Zeinab Hijazi, Global Lead, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, UNICEF; Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative, Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations Office; Co-President, Religions for Peace.

The session also explored examples of climate-related displacement of communities, looking into the effects of floods, drought, forest fires, storms, and other climate-related emergencies. Participants learned from initiatives by faith actors and other stakeholders that incorporated the voices of frontline communities in mitigation, adaptation, and disaster response. The session explored interventions by faith actors to address the adverse impacts of climate change on communities. Presentations highlighted the crucial role of women of faith in environmental protection and community resilience.

Addressing the Triple Planetary Crisis: A Comprehensive Approach

The world is grappling with a severe triple planetary crisis characterized by climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. To tackle these pressing issues, it is essential for stakeholders to unite in advocating for policy reforms, developing climate-resilient systems, and involving communities, children, and youth in meaningful climate action.

Countries around the globe need to prioritize their efforts based on their unique economic, geographical, and environmental circumstances. Three key areas of focus are:

Mitigation: This involves efforts to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions, aiming to limit the extent and pace of long-term climate change. Effective mitigation strategies include cutting down on energy consumption, transitioning to renewable energy sources, and enhancing carbon sinks.

Adaptation: This refers to adjustments made in ecological, social, or economic systems to cope with the current or anticipated effects of climate change. The goal of adaptation is to minimize the vulnerability of communities and activities to new environmental realities. Examples of adaptation measures include constructing flood defenses, developing crops that can withstand drought, setting up early warning systems for timely evacuations, and improving water management practices.

Resilience: This is about strengthening systems, communities, and societies to withstand and recover from various hazards. Building resilience involves reducing exposure to environmental, economic, and social shocks and stresses. Key resilience strategies include enhancing infrastructure to better handle extreme weather events and reinforcing community emergency response systems.

Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping individual behaviors, social norms, and collective actions. Accordingly, UNICEF's Faith for Positive Change for Children (FPCC) Initiative aims to move beyond single-sector, small-scale interventions to adopt a more comprehensive, interfaith approach to planetary crises.

While the FPCC initiative has primarily addressed health, education, and child protection, there is a significant opportunity for faith leaders and faith-based organizations to advocate for green policies and practices. They can also promote gender equality and secure more funding for local adaptation efforts. Expanding the FPCC initiative to focus on climate issues aligns with UNEP's Faith4Earth coalition, which seeks to empower faith communities to champion environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, under the global Green Rising initiative, UNICEF and Generation Unlimited are working to mobilize youth-in-faith networks. These networks can play a crucial role in protecting ecosystems by preserving water sources, planting trees, using cleaner energy, and reducing plastic waste. By engaging in activities such as issuing climate statements, developing green curricula, and greening religious institutions, faith communities can significantly raise awareness and take direct action against climate change. UNICEF and Generation Unlimited are committed to investing in 10 million young people to drive climate action by 2025.

Call to Action for participants:

- Engage youth-in-faith networks in the Green Rising movement as volunteers.
- Integrate climate education and action plans into faith-based educational curriculums to spur community involvement.
- Collaborate with faith leaders to advocate for sustainable lifestyles and inspire others to follow suit.
- Partner with UNICEF to deliver accurate and impactful climate education.

Session Four: Presentation of Awards for Women of Excellence in Multi- Religious Action

Religions for Peace recognized the important role women play in advancing multi-religious collaborative work in service to all communities. With the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Religions for Peace launched the Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award with the intention of honoring the work of women of faith. The award will raise the profile of women of faith and their networks, enable them to find new partners and supporters, and allow others to learn from them.



Metropolitan Emmanual Adamkis presenting the Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award which is being received on behalf of Prof. Dr. Nayla Tabbara, President & Co-Founder, Adyan Foundation, Lebanon; Co-President, Religions for Peace.

The Forum recognized Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action for their significant contributions to peace, security, and sustainable development. Awards were presented to individuals who exemplified dedication and leadership in fostering multi-religious collaboration.

Religions for Peace was delighted to present the Women of Excellence in Multi- Religious Action to three distinguished women: Dr. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram and Co-Moderator, Religions for Peace won the first prize; the second runner-up was Professor Dr. Nayla Tabbara, President, Adyan Foundation and Co-President, Religions for Peace; and the third runner-up was Reverend Sister Agatha O. Chikelue, Executive Director, Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace and Chair, Religions for Peace International Women's Coordinating Committee.

The inaugural Women of Excellence Ceremony combined a vibrant celebration of women's achievements with strong advocacy for gender equality.

Throughout the event, participants shared personal stories, underscoring the importance of acknowledging the contributions women make to society, especially within the context of religious influences on humanity. The ceremony highlighted the unique experiences and perspectives of Indigenous women, emphasizing their vital role in promoting peace, security, human rights, and

development. The event also called upon religious leaders to collaborate with governments to address social crises and champion gender equality.

Personal narratives focused on journeys of healing and the empowerment that comes with disclosure, resonating deeply with the audience. The gathering was not just a celebration of individual achievements but also of the collective spirit of women in faith. In Brazil, for example, the significant contributions of Indigenous women were highlighted, alongside discussions on the intersection of technology and societal impact. Reflections on balancing work and family life in Indonesia offered a glimpse into the diverse experiences of women globally.

The ceremony celebrated women's contributions to society and religion. The moderator encouraged collaboration and embracing diverse ideas, while another speaker stressed the importance of community action. Participants discussed the role of women's rights, representation, and resources in shaping feminist foreign policy, highlighting women's crucial role in building trust, resilience, and prosperity. There was a strong call for governments to invest in society by working closely with regional leaders.

The importance of empowering women and girls through education and collaboration was a recurrent theme. One speaker reflected on her family's legacy of faith and the power of collective action. The event concluded with reflections on the importance of service to children, gratitude for the recognition received, and encouragement from the speakers to continue striving for a more equal world.



Sister Agatha, Ogochukwu Chikelue, the 2nd runner up to the Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award shares a moment with a participant.

Session Six: Faith, Communities and Conflict—Protecting Communities in Conflict Situations and Emergencies

This session focused on the role of faith actors and faith in intervening for communities in conflict and emergency situations. Participants heard the latest reports on the effects of human-generated conflict and how they are affecting continuity in service delivery, mental health and trauma, and opportunities for joint action across different sectors. Participants discussed ways that faith actors can intervene to prevent or resolve conflict. The session also addressed strategies for preventing violence against women, girls, and vulnerable populations. Panelists highlighted the importance of religious leaders in challenging harmful practices and promoting gender equality.



Session 7 Panellists, from L to R: Ms. Harriet Akullu, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF; Ms. Debra Boudreaux, Chief Executive Officer, Tzu Chi Foundation; Rabbi Yosef Blau, Director of Religious Guidance Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), Yeshiva University (YU) and Member, Board of Directors, Jewish Community Watch; Sister Agatha, Ogochukwu Chikelue, Executive Director, Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, Nigeria; Chair, Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network; Mr. Elias Szczytnicki, Regional Secretary General, Religions for Peace Latin America and the Caribbean.

Interfaith collaboration plays a vital role in preventing conflicts and fostering peace. The discussion highlighted the significance of religious leaders examining their roles and devising action plans, while underscoring the need for open dialogue and cooperation with national councils and other organizations. Compassion, empathy, and unity were emphasized as essential components for achieving peace and coexistence. Additionally, the session explored the potential benefits of faith-based approaches to mental health.

Several action items were identified, including finalizing the draft UN Plan of Action for traditional leaders aimed at countering hate speech; creating a UNICEF resource package to integrate social and behavioral change into mental health programs; and continuing to map faith dynamics to enhance recommendations within the UN Plan of Action. There is also a need to equip faith and community leaders with interpersonal skills to address mental health challenges through community engagement programs.

The Forum outlined several key areas of focus:

Empowering Young People in Conflict Zones: Young individuals in refugee camps often experience displacement and hopelessness. Participants discussed strategies for empowering children in developing countries through advocacy and skills training, along with addressing mental health challenges in various contexts. UNICEF's prioritization of mental health emergencies and the impact of conflict and climate change on mental health were noted, with the development of a resource package to support mental health interventions in various settings.



Dr. Francis Kuria, (Secretary General, African Council of Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace International) gives his remarks during the Forum.

Role of Traditional Indigenous Actors: Participants highlighted the involvement of traditional authorities and Indigenous actors in conflict prevention and resolution. In regions where state responses are inadequate, these traditional actors play a crucial role in governance and preventing violence. The UN Office on the Prevention of Genocide is working on a plan of action to support these actors, which includes capacity building and strengthening mechanisms.

Interfaith Dialogue and Mental Health: Participants stressed the importance of interfaith dialogue in addressing mental health issues, including the role of faith leaders in understanding core issues, and acting as early warning systems for conflicts. Engaging young faith leaders through partnerships with local civil society organizations and incorporating them into peacebuilding efforts was emphasized.

Addressing Gender-Based Violence: The role of faith communities in addressing mental health issues and gender-based violence, particularly in emergency situations, was discussed. Faith leaders in Lebanon, for example, have come together to address gender-based violence and promote supportive attitudes.

Supporting Faith Leaders in Conflict Zones: Trust-building and multi-faith responses are essential in conflict zones. Panelists discussed the need for mental health support for leaders in these areas and the importance of effective multi-faith responses.

Religious Freedom and Conflict Resolution: The need for legal aid to address immigration issues and the impact of misrepresentation of religion were mentioned. Discussion also touched on the challenges faced by religious leaders in maintaining integrity while engaging with different communities.

Integrating Spirituality into Mental Health Programs: There is a growing interest in incorporating spirituality into mental health programs. Participants discussed the need to develop faith-sensitive mental health programs and boost the effectiveness of religious leaders in mediating conflicts.

Empowering Women and Girls: The session emphasized the importance of women’s empowerment and addressing sexual exploitation. UNICEF committed to better serving young girls through gender-responsive approaches.

Overall, the session underscored the need for continued interfaith dialogue, cooperation, and capacity building to address conflicts, promote peace, and support mental health, particularly in challenging and diverse contexts.

At the Front Lines: Multi-Stakeholder Action for Women and Girls in Conflict

The session featured a parallel forum that addressed the topic of “women and girls in conflicts” within the context of this year’s UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Speakers shared their observations and concerns rooted in their experiences as religious leaders.

Commendation of the UN’s Efforts

Panelists commended the United Nations for its efforts to address various global issues by creating structures, assigning competent personnel, and allocating substantial financial resources. Notably, the CSW focuses on the status of women worldwide, emphasizing the varying status of women across different regions and spheres such as social, political, economic, and legal rights, with a particular concern for their roles in religion.



Mr. James Alexander, (Senior Policy Advisor, Strategic Religious Engagement J/IRF/SRE - U.S. Department of State) shares some insights during the sessions.

Women’s Leadership in Religious Contexts

Globally, women and youth typically have minimal roles in religious leadership, which is predominantly reserved for men, particularly older men. Participants commended the efforts of Religions for Peace to create leadership structures like the “Women of Faith Network” and the “Interfaith Youth Network” for successfully integrating women and youth into leadership roles at various levels of the organization.



Dr. Vinu Aram shares a light moment during the sessions.

Women and Girls in Conflict

The Forum focused on the distressing situation of women and girls in conflict. Women and girls should be shielded from conflict and violence, even in war situations—a protection that extends to all civilians and non-combatants, including religious persons and spaces. However, in today’s global environment, women and girls are often targeted for ill-treatment in conflicts. When men can no longer defend their families, women and children are left vulnerable to abduction, enslavement, and sexual violence—a tragic scenario evident in many conflict zones, including Nigeria.

Nature of Contemporary Conflicts: Case Study of Nigeria

In Nigeria, contemporary conflicts are mostly unconventional, involving terrorists, bandits, and kidnappers rather than regular armed forces. These groups wreak havoc, especially in rural communities, and the government’s security forces struggle to combat these threats effectively. Terrorists employ “hit and run” tactics, blending into communities and using residents as human shields, which frustrates security efforts.

Government and Civil Society Responses

The Nigerian government speaks of “non-kinetic” approaches, including dialogue, amnesty, deradicalization, and reintegration of former terrorists. However, these efforts have met with skepticism due to a lack of transparency and doubts about the sincerity of repentant terrorists. Additionally, the threat from active terrorists remains unaddressed, with little evidence of serious dialogue with insurgency leaders.

Civil society organizations, including the Ministry for Women Affairs and the National Conference of Women Organizations, engage in advocacy but show limited concrete action. Religious women’s groups, such as the Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN) and the Christian Association of Nigeria’s women’s wing (WOWICAN), are more active but face challenges in coordination and impact.

Notable Initiatives and Contributions

Some women participate in government peace initiatives at state and national levels, such as the Kaduna State Peace Initiative and the National Security Advisor’s office, which deals with ex-terrorists. Additionally, the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP), led by Reverend Sister Agatha Chikelue, plays a crucial role in fostering peace among Christians and Muslims, often addressing issues faced by women and girls in conflict.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Security remains the most pressing concern for the Nigerian government. There is an urgent need for new approaches to achieve peace, particularly through multi-sector, multi-stakeholder collaboration. The government must take the initiative in facilitating these efforts to ensure a much-needed breakthrough for peace.



Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn shares some insights during her sessions, looking on is Mr. James Alexander.

Session Seven: Faith and Protection from Violence against Girls, Boys, and Women and Harmful Practices

This session invited stakeholders to interrogate the realities children, families, and communities face in both open and hidden practices of abuse and exploitation. Participants examined the role of religious leaders and communities in preventing violence and harmful practices that were mostly fueled by social and gender norms, misinterpretation of faith teachings, and

past, recurring, or emerging conflict situations. Participants focused specifically on the vulnerability of women and girls to conflict and harmful practices, giving attention to practical examples of how religious leaders at the frontlines of these situations are intervening or should intervene in collaboration with other stakeholders.



Rabbi Daniel Swartz shares some insights and responses during the plenary session.

The Role of Faith Leaders in Combating Violence Against Children

As highlighted by UNICEF's head of programme, the global landscape has long been rife with violence against children and women. Every year, 12 million girls are married in childhood, and over 230 million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM). Such violence often has deep roots in cultural norms and traditions. Despite the evident harm these practices cause, they remain integral to a community's identity, largely due to their association with longstanding cultural and religious beliefs.

Religious scriptures sometimes perpetuate and justify gender-discriminatory practices that uphold patriarchal norms. These scriptures can be misused to endorse various forms of violence against children and women, as seen in instances where religious texts are incorrectly linked to harmful practices such as FGM. For example, faith leaders have wrongly connected FGM with Islam or certain Christian and Jewish sects, including Coptic Christians and Ethiopian Jews.

Religious leaders in The Gambia have campaigned to repeal anti-FGM legislation based on religious and cultural arguments. Similarly, while child marriages are increasingly regulated by state laws, they remain entrenched in rituals where religion and religious authorities play a significant role. In some societies, sacred texts have been used to sustain a patriarchal social order, giving fathers unchecked control over family moral and spiritual matters. This has normalized and legitimized violence against girls, boys, and women, despite a growing number of countries adopting rights-based legislation that contradicts these harmful practices.

Nevertheless, faith leaders also promote positive changes. They have supported initiatives such as “Islamic and Christian Perspectives on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices” and issued joint statements advocating for children’s rights. Their efforts have been pivotal in combating FGM and introducing alternative rites of passage. In Sudan, for instance, UNICEF’s collaboration with faith leaders fostered community discussions on harmful practices and domestic abuse, diminishing the silence that often surrounds these issues.

Given their influential role, faith leaders and their communities can affect significant positive change. They are trusted and knowledgeable about their communities’ values and cultures. Engaging meaningfully with these leaders has led to tangible and sustainable outcomes for children. Recognizing this, UNICEF invested in the Faith for Positive Change for Children (FPCC) Initiative. This initiative, in partnership with Religions for Peace, the Joint Learning Initiative for Faith and Local Communities, and other organizations, seeks to collaborate with faith actors to drive large-scale, holistic interventions that shift harmful beliefs and norms, fostering environments that support the well-being of all children.



From L to R: Mr. Arshan Khalid, Dr. Zeinab Hijazi and Ms. Bani Dugal engage in a joint panel in session six.

The gathering reflected a shared commitment to harnessing this influence for greater impact. The aim was to co-create strategies that enable faith leaders at all levels to work together in advocating for the well-being of children. The goal was to build communities where every child can thrive, free from violence and exploitation, and where positive norms and values are upheld, allowing girls to fully participate and achieve their dreams.

Attendees were urged to reinforce their commitment to the well-being of girls, boys, and women, ensuring equitable access to opportunities and full participation in their communities. They were called to actively collaborate with UNICEF and Religions for Peace to develop tools that will support the creation of protective environments for children. And they were urged to coordinate with faith leaders within their countries to stay informed about grassroots developments and to leverage religious leaders to promote positive norms and behaviors.

Session seven delved into gender-based violence within religious institutions, with a particular focus on Africa and Nigeria. The discussion underscored the need for interfaith collaboration, education, and open communication to tackle the root causes of violence. Attendees highlighted the role of religion in perpetuating gender-based violence and stressed the importance of including religious actors in the discourse. There was a strong emphasis on adopting a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the safety and empowerment of women, girls, and families, ensuring their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Proposed action items included developing education programs aimed at changing social behaviors through community networks, creating safe spaces for survivors to discuss and receive mental health support, updating the Faith for Rights toolkit with insights from various initiatives, engaging local religious communities through collaboration and training, and addressing power imbalances and cultural factors that contribute to abuse within religious contexts.



Mr. David Ponet, Senior Adviser, Global Volunteer Initiative, UNICEF Headquarters sharing insights during the session on Faith and Climate: Tackling Adverse Impact of the Planetary Crisis on Communities.

The discussion covered gender equality and women’s rights within religious settings, and the intersectional nature of gender-based violence. One speaker highlighted harmful practices affecting children and discussed the need for prevention of sexual violence and STIs. Another speaker pointed out how patriarchal interpretations of religion have historically been used to control women and girls and identified ideological divides and intersectionality as factors delaying the role of faith actors in promoting gender equality. The “faith for rights” approach was suggested as a way for states to address religious issues without resorting to dichotomies.

The session also addressed the impact of gender-based violence on families and communities in Nigeria, noting widespread violence including child marriage and female genital mutilation, despite legislative efforts. Insecurity and high poverty rates in Nigeria exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls. Panelists acknowledged the contributions of religious bodies in Nigeria in addressing these challenges.

Participants shared personal experiences with abuse within educational institutions, including the denial of responsibility and limited resources for hearing-impaired individuals. Participants discussed the importance of not covering up sexual misconduct allegations, along with the need for digital solutions in religious buildings and the importance of gender balance, education, and empowerment across various countries.

One speaker shared personal stories and insights on gender balance, emphasizing the importance of education and empowerment for women and children in disaster-stricken communities. Others highlighted the importance of collaboration and capacity building for addressing social issues, with a focus on education and interfaith dialogue to combat gender violence and inequality.

The session concluded with discussions on empowering women politically and economically to prevent violence, challenges in addressing child abuse, cultural beliefs, and the misuse of power in religious settings. Participants emphasized the importance of protecting women and girls in conflict zones, alongside the need for safe spaces and confronting challenging societal issues. The session underscored the importance of authentic engagement with local communities and treating religious leaders with respect and empathy.



Rev. Dionne P. Boissière, MDiv., Chaplain, The Church Centre for the United Nations invites participants for a moment of reflection at the Chapel during the Celebration of the Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award Ceremony.

Session Eight: Faith, Science and Culture—Opportunities for Dialogue and Engagement

This session explored examples of and opportunities for dialogue between faith, science, and culture on issues affecting children, families, and communities. Drawing from the experiences in the Faith, Science, and Culture Dialogues convened in Africa, attendees interrogated models for how scientists and technical experts could work with faith communities to promote and reinforce positive behaviors and norms. Attendees examined areas of contradiction between faith and science, and recommended opportunities for faith intervention, such as issuing Fatwas and religious edicts promoting vaccination. Participants explored opportunities for dialogue between faith, science, and culture. Discussions focused on leveraging evidence-based approaches to promote positive behaviors and norms within communities.



Mr. Benson Makusha, Pan African Coordinator, International Young Catholic Students; Chair, Religions for Peace African Interfaith Youth Network Moderating the Award Ceremony

Session eight delved into intersections among science, culture, and spirituality in addressing social issues. The discussion highlighted the need to integrate scientific and cultural perspectives and explore deeper connections, noting the limitations of the scientific method in tackling ultimate questions. Participants advocated a holistic approach, with examples of faith-based community initiatives illustrating the potential for interfaith dialogue and cooperation to drive social impact. The session also addressed the challenges of reconciling science, faith, and culture in Africa, emphasizing the importance of protecting religious freedom and belief.

Action items from the discussion included considering how faith can be more fully incorporated and transformative within cultures, exploring lessons from evolutionary biology on cultural forms and their role in human survival and flourishing, protecting religious freedom, and fostering intergenerational and interfaith dialogue to constructively address issues like female genital mutilation/cutting.

The session featured discussions on various topics, including:

- The integration of science and culture to promote positive behaviors and norms.
- The role of faith communities in vaccine distribution and messaging during the COVID-19 pandemic, including notable examples of philanthropic efforts.

- The challenges of balancing science and religion in Africa, with a focus on exposing commercialized fake healing practices and managing resistance to vaccination.
- The dynamic nature of culture and religion, emphasizing the importance of understanding their evolving roles and fostering intergenerational dialogue.
- The significance of cultural respect in Africa and the positive aspects of traditional religions and cultures in personal and communal growth.

Panelists explored ways to engage children, families, and communities in social and behavioral change, underscoring the crucial role of integrating faith, science, and cultural understanding. Key highlights from the presentations are shared below:

Navigating the Evolving Nexus of Faith and Science: Insights from the Seminar on Faith, Science, and Culture

The panelists addressed the evolving relationship between science and religion. Historically, science and religion have operated within distinct frameworks: science focuses on empirical data and measurable phenomena, while religion tackles existential and spiritual questions. The speaker pointed out a troubling trend they termed “Scientism,” where only data-driven realities are recognized, excluding essential concepts such as compassion, love, and spirituality. However, a significant shift is occurring, with science beginning to acknowledge the limitations of its methods and the need to incorporate a more spiritual perspective.

The discussion also delved into lessons from evolutionary biology regarding culture. Referencing Richard Dawkins’s influential 1976 work, “The Selfish Gene,” panelists highlighted the concept of conserved genes that are linked to survival and have drawn significant attention from evolutionary biologists. Building on Dawkins’s ideas, contemporary evolutionary biologists now view cultural forms as an extension of gene expression, crucial for human survival.

The panelists cautioned against the reckless alteration of these conserved cultural forms, drawing parallels to the risks associated with genetic manipulation. They noted, for instance, the importance of pair bonding and communal child-rearing practices in human development and emphasized that these practices, which have evolved over time, should be preserved and adapted thoughtfully.



Dr. Renz Argao moderating the session on Faith Communities and Primary Health Care: Advancing Immunisations for Children in Various Contexts

The principle of subsidiarity was another key topic of the session. This principle emphasizes the importance of agency at all levels of society, from individuals to international organizations. It advocates prioritizing the lowest levels of personal or social agency unless higher levels are necessary to address particular needs. The challenge, as outlined, is to harmonize these overlapping forms of agency to ensure that each person and group is recognized and empowered effectively.

Faith and Science: A Harmonious Relationship

The intersection of faith and science has often been a topic of contention, yet it is crucial to recognize that these domains are not inherently in conflict. On the contrary, both faith and science can be seen as complementary paths to understanding the world and our place within it.

The core belief held by many is that God is the source of both faith and science. This perspective suggests that the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the practice of faith are not mutually exclusive but rather, can coexist harmoniously. It is perplexing, therefore, to witness the rejection of scientific progress by those who profess to follow a divine creator. This dichotomy seems at odds with the belief that both science and faith originate from the same divine source.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) exemplifies a balanced approach to this relationship. The LDS Church acknowledges the value of scientific inquiry while maintaining its spiritual doctrines. This balanced stance is particularly evident in its approach to contemporary issues like the COVID-19 pandemic. The LDS Church's response involved embracing scientific guidance and collaborating with public health officials to manage the crisis effectively. This collaboration reflects a recognition that science plays a crucial role in addressing global health challenges.

Similarly, UNICEF's partnerships in health and education highlight the beneficial collaboration between faith-based organizations and scientific institutions. For instance, UNICEF works with various religious groups to enhance child welfare and education, demonstrating that faith and science can work together to achieve common humanitarian goals.

It is often observed that God is perceived as the ultimate source of peace. Contentiousness and division, on the other hand, are seen as antithetical to peace. Faithful individuals who understand the root causes of contention are likely to recognize that divisive strategies do not align with the divine pursuit of harmony and unity. The question arises: who stands to benefit from a divided society? The answer often points to those who exploit such divisions for personal or political gain.

In summary, the relationship between faith and science should not be viewed as adversarial. Instead, both realms can enrich our understanding of the world and contribute to the common good when embraced in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect.

The session provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on the intersections between faith, science, and culture. It underscored the necessity of integrating these perspectives to enhance support for children, families, and communities. The discussions highlighted the need for a holistic approach that respects both scientific and spiritual insights, values cultural heritage, and promotes effective agency at all societal levels.

Session Nine: Faith, Children and Evidence-Based Approaches— Engaging Children, Families and Communities for Social and Behavior Change

This session looked at the Faith and Positive Change for Children (FPCC) Initiative, including experiences, lessons learned, and the role of evidence and knowledge generation in promoting faith-based approaches to issues affecting children, families, and communities. Promoting evidence on what works was a key pillar of the faith engagement work with UNICEF. Accordingly, panelists shared examples of the survey on barriers to immunization uptake and demand, evidence generation, promotion approaches, outcomes of research conducted within the FPCC partnership, and how that research is shaping future planning on faith engagement and approaches.



Ms. Deepa Risal Phokharel, UNICEF, responding to feedback from the plenary during the session on Faith Communities and Primary Health Care: Advancing Immunisations for Children in Various Contexts

Discussions centered on the role of faith-based initiatives in enhancing children’s health and survival, and the importance of evidence-based approaches and collaboration with diverse stakeholders. Participants shared their experiences in promoting COVID-19 vaccinations and highlighted the significance of understanding religious dynamics and attitudes to guide engagement strategies. The need for evidence-driven interventions was underscored, focusing on data collection, storytelling, local ownership, and ethical research practices. Participants also addressed challenges related to bias and data analysis in service-oriented exercises.

Action items included developing a journal article on the religious drivers framework for analyzing faith dynamics, arranging meetings with interested parties in Washington D.C. to discuss evidence-based faith engagement, exploring formative research to understand community needs, and leveraging the interest of faith groups in data collection.

Key topics covered included:

Faith-Based Initiatives for Child Health: Discussions focused on evidence-based approaches for improving child health and survival. Participants evaluated implementations with faith leaders and discussed safety principles along with practical examples. Participants highlighted the use of scripture to reinforce teachings and partnerships with the religious sector.

Community Engagement and Partnerships: Panelists outlined an initiative to address COVID-19 and political challenges through evidence-based change, emphasizing physical benefits of engagement, including participatory approaches and complementary skills. Partnerships between local community centers and religious leaders were noted as crucial for addressing social issues.

Child Development Initiatives: Collaborative efforts aimed to improve child health outcomes through multi-sectoral initiatives. Participants highlighted the importance of engaging faith actors as equal partners in development and presented examples of methodologies like the “mind-heart dialogue.” This framework for monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning is being piloted in various countries.

Capturing Change in Faith Communities: Attendees discussed the importance of measuring the value of community-based approaches, along with the need for collaboration and multi-country surveys to study religious community dynamics. Insights from these surveys can be used to analyze behaviors and attitudes, compare different levels of analysis, and to develop rapid research models.

Role of Religious Leaders in Vaccination: The endorsement of vaccination by religious leaders significantly increased vaccination rates, especially among children. Participants emphasized the need for qualitative research to understand faith communities’ contributions to development.

Strategic Religious Engagement: Long-term collaborations between organizations aimed at improving faith-based engagement were discussed, with a focus on strategic and evidence-based approaches. Participants also highlighted challenges related to the instrumentalization of faith in development work.



Rev. Dr. Yoshinori Shinohara, Secretary General, Religions for Peace Asia giving his opening remarks at the start of day two.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Panelists stressed the need for effective monitoring and evaluation of development projects, with a focus on data collection, analysis, and addressing biases. The importance of consistent data collection and local ownership was emphasized, along with the need for regular updates on attitudes and beliefs.

Climate Change Communication and Data Collection: Challenges in climate change communication and the need for accurate, accessible data were discussed. Attendees noted efforts to build capacity in monitoring and visualization and advocated for a mixed methods approach to studying religion.

Engaging Health Workers and Community Motivation: Discussions included strategies for engaging health workers in fragile states and understanding community motivations for participating in health initiatives. Non-traditional methods of data collection were suggested to gain deeper insights. Two significant resources from the FPCC Initiative were discussed:

Mind-Heart Dialogue: This core methodology promotes social and behavioral change by merging faith-based values (‘Heart’) with factual knowledge (‘Mind’). It creates a reflective space for faith actors and development partners to find common ground on empowering children and families. The methodology has been applied to various community issues, including increasing immunization rates and addressing violence and early marriage. Its flexibility allows adaptation to different sectors and local priorities.

FPCC Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) Framework: Currently in the pilot phase, the MEAL Framework is designed to track and evaluate the impact of the FPCC Initiative. It focuses on three primary outcomes:

- **Improved Capacity of Faith Actors:** Enhancing the ability of faith-based and development partners to apply the Mind-Heart Dialogue approach.
- **Enhanced Coordination and Collaboration:** Improving cooperation among stakeholders on child rights issues.
- **Secured Positive Practices and Actions:** Achieving behavioral changes that benefit children, based on locally identified priorities.



Dr. Francis Kuria, participating as a panelist on the session on Faith, Science and Culture: Opportunities for Dialogue and Engagement

The session addressed several key points and challenges:

Evidence Base: The FPCC Initiative is grounded in substantial evidence, including mappings from 2014 and 2018 that revealed widespread but informal faith engagement within UNICEF operations. This highlighted the need for more strategic engagement. Formative research in 2018, including case studies and literature reviews, laid the groundwork for the FPCC’s principles and journey of change, drawing on established faith-based organization mobilization approaches.

Complexity of Religious Engagement: The initiative acknowledges that religious engagement is complex and must be contextually specific. Evidence suggests that faith actors have diverse roles and assets, and their engagement in development must be handled with sensitivity to avoid instrumentalization.

Challenges in Measurement and Evaluation: Measuring the impact of religious engagement presents difficulties, particularly in obtaining quantitative data and addressing the mismatch between M&E questions and faith communities’ interests. The session highlighted the importance of mixed methods approaches and qualitative research in understanding religious dynamics. The MEAL Framework aims to address these challenges through diverse data collection methods, including focus groups, surveys, and storytelling.

Local Ownership and Adaptation: Emphasizing the need for local ownership, the session discussed how different regions and communities must tailor the MEAL Framework to their specific contexts. Effective M&E requires consistency, accountability, and genuine interest from local stakeholders. The initiative’s success depends on integrating M&E from the start and maintaining regular feedback loops.



Panelists during the session on Multi-Stakeholder and Multi-Faith Partnerships & Initiatives. From L to R: Ms. Şafak Pavey, Senior Adviser, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Dr. Ryan D. Smith, Programme Executive, Ecumenical Office to the UN, Representative to UN Headquarters, World Council of Churches; Ms. Vera Leal Ferreira, Head of Regional Programmes and Oversight, The International Dialogue Centre – KAICIID; Rabbi Diana Gerson, Senior Advisor for Partnerships and External Relationships, Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities; Ms. Nihal Saad, Director, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and on video, Rev. Andrew Morley, President and CEO, World Vision International .

In conclusion, the Forum highlighted the FPCC Initiative’s progress from theoretical development to practical implementation. With ongoing efforts to refine and adapt approaches based on local needs and feedback, the initiative continues to expand globally, with the MEAL Framework poised to provide valuable insights into its impact and effectiveness.

The FPCC approach emphasizes the transition from theory to practice after years of reflecting on evidence, building and testing tools, and developing implementation frameworks. The FPCC initiative, drawing on rich experiences from East and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa, is expanding into South Asia and Latin America. Regional and national meetings and Mind-Heart Dialogue trainings are currently taking place, and with the official rollout of the MEAL Framework, more evidence will soon be available on the impact of this work.

The session also explored the collection and analysis of data to inform FPCC strategies. It highlighted efforts to understand barriers to immunization uptake and develop evidence-based interventions. The MEAL Framework helps track progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure initiatives effectively shift knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and norms.

Participants provided additional insights into the comprehensive studies on the role of faith engagement in development that underpin the FPCC Initiative. Panelists highlighted the complexity and importance of religious engagement and the need for effective partnerships with diverse faith actors while avoiding instrumentalization.

Finally, Religions for Peace shared experiences in mobilizing faith leaders and communities to support children’s rights and well-being. The Mind-Heart Dialogue methodology was highlighted as a way to create safe spaces for reflection and collaboration, address local priorities, and leverage the unique assets of faith communities.



Dr. Francis Kuria giving the closing remarks during the closing session.

Session Ten: Multi-Stakeholder and Multi-Faith Partnerships

This session invited stakeholders and partners to share their experiences in faith engagement and opportunities for collaboration, considering the multiple and cross-cutting areas of intervention and needs of children, families, and communities. Attendees looked at opportunities for scaling initiatives, resource mapping, mobilization strategies, and building partnerships grounded in evidence and shared outcome pathways.



H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel giving his closing reflections.

Participants discussed the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and the role of faith communities in addressing global challenges. Panelists presented a critique of current financial systems, calling for greater moral accountability in environmental stewardship. The final session concentrated on building partnerships and mobilizing resources to address diverse community needs.

In session ten, the conversation centered on the essential role of collaboration among diverse stakeholders—religious actors, civil society organizations, and governments—in addressing global challenges and enhancing children’s well-being. Participants emphasized the need to build trust, foster authentic relationships, and ensure meaningful engagement across various groups. The role of faith-based organizations in empowering children and improving their futures was highlighted, especially in the context of displacement and conflict.

Speakers underscored the importance of efficient resource utilization and preventive measures in global development and highlighted the significant role of senior advisors and commissioners from the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Participants identified action items such as scheduling follow-up meetings to further discuss partnerships, sharing documentation of faith-based programs to avoid duplicating efforts, connecting representatives from different organizations for collaborative initiatives, and promoting upcoming UN events.

Trust-building was a key theme, with discussions focusing on expanding community engagement and bridging divides through meaningful dialogue on challenging topics. Participants shared personal experiences, such as efforts to connect people across diverse backgrounds and the importance of creating safe spaces for open discussions.

The session also touched on the growth of faith worldwide and the challenge of holding industries accountable for their impact on future generations. Faith-based organizations were acknowledged for their contributions to child welfare and refugee support, and their role in addressing HIV/AIDS and violence against children.

Attendees addressed the importance of genuine community involvement, advocating for authentic engagement even with those holding differing views. Speakers stressed the need for long-term commitment and collaboration to advance peace and social justice, as well as the importance of civil society in global governance.

A discussion of refugee and migration issues highlighted the need for comprehensive, long-term solutions, including addressing trauma and exploitation of children. The session concluded with a call for increased collaboration among faith leaders and a focus on preventing harm through educational and grassroots initiatives.



Dr. Francis Kuria posing for a photo with the Award winners; Sr. Agatha Chikelue and Dr. Vinu Aram, they are joined by Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis and Dr. Renz Argao.

Conclusion:

The Multi-Faith High-Level Forum provided a valuable platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, collective action towards shared well-being and discussion of emerging challenges. By fostering partnerships, honoring women's leadership, and leveraging the assets of faith communities, participants reaffirmed their commitment to promoting positive outcomes for children, families, and communities worldwide. The Forum left a resonating message of hope and determination to continue working together for a better and more inclusive future.



Mr. Massimiliano Sani, UNICEF moderating the session on Faith, Children and Evidence-Based Approaches: Engaging Children, Families and Communities for Social and Behaviour Change

At the Forum's closing session, the central message was the urgent need for religious communities to work together on pressing social issues. The discussion highlighted the importance of forging stronger collaborations between faith-based and secular organizations, underscoring the value of evaluating and enhancing these partnerships.

The speakers collectively emphasized the crucial need to align institutions and religions to address global challenges. They advocated for a more profound engagement among religious communities and secular entities, aiming to bridge gaps and foster closer proximity between them. The dialogue also stressed the need for improved storytelling to illuminate the impactful work being carried out and to inspire others.

As the Forum concluded, participants agreed to carry the insights and inspiration from the meeting back to their organizations and communities. The action items proposed included deepening engagement, having open conversations to foster closeness among faith-based organizations, and continuing discussions at the upcoming UN Summit of the Future to tackle unresolved questions.

The overarching call to action was for all participants to unite towards a common goal: harnessing the power of faith-based partnerships to drive positive change in critical areas such as climate change, migration, and human rights. The Forum concluded with an invitation to pursue these goals through gentle and collaborative efforts, carrying forward the learnings and commitment to shape a better world.

Next Steps

- **Implementation:** Apply discussed methodologies and frameworks in ongoing and future projects.
- **Collaboration:** Continue collaboration between faith-based organizations, international bodies, and local communities.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly assess the impact of initiatives and refine strategies as necessary.

Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to all speakers, participants, and organizers for their contributions and commitment to advancing positive outcomes for children, families, and communities worldwide.



Ms. Safak Pavey sharing her insights, looking on is Dr Ryan Smith and Ms. Vera L. Ferreira.

Annex

1. Participants List
2. Meeting Concept Note
3. Meeting Programme
4. Photo Gallery
 - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/197114501@N04/albums/72177720315796989/>
 - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/197114501@N04/albums/72177720315871336/with/53624669542>
 - <https://www.flickr.com/download/20240914596568c335faa60b889114e3390bc6200e99f881495433c03e0235108eddcddf>

Annex I Program for MultiFaith High Level Forum

Day 1: Tuesday, 26 March 2024

9.00 am – 9.30 – Arrival and Registration of All Invitees

Session One: 9.30 am – 10.30 am.

Opening Session

Moderator

- Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace*

Moment of Silence

Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Dr. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram; Co-Moderator, Religions for Peace
- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace*

Keynote Addresses

- Ms. Anurita Bains, Deputy Director Programmes (a.i.), Representing H.E. Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).
- H.E. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organisation (WHO) - Video Message.
- H.E. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Video Message.
- Remarks by Children from Around the World - Video.



Group Photo at the Chapel during the Award

10.30 am – 11.00 am: Tea/Coffee

Session Two: 11.00 am – 12.30 pm.

Faith Communities and Primary Health Care: Advancing Immunisations for Children in Various Contexts

This session looks at the importance of immunisation with particular focus on interventions faith actors are taking or should take in advancing vaccine demand and uptake. We will reflect on The State of the World's Children 2023 report that focuses on vaccines for every child and looks into recommendations on how faith actors and partners can play a role in promoting immunisation uptake as an entry point to other primary health care interventions.

Moderator

- Dr. Renz C. Argao, President & Chief Executive Officer, Argao Health Inc.; Moderator, *Religions for Peace* Asia & the Pacific Interfaith Youth Network; Coordinator, Religions for Peace International Youth Committee

Panellists

- Ms. Deepa Risal Pokharel, Senior Adviser Social and Behaviour Change/Team Lead Immunisation Demand, Health Section, Programme Group, UNICEF.
- Ms. Sara Hess, Partnerships & Strategy, Epidemic & Pandemic Preparedness & Prevention Health Emergencies Programme, WHO – Virtual.
- Dr. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace*.
- Mr. James Alexander, Senior Policy Advisor, Strategic Religious Engagement J/IRF/SRE - U.S. Department of State.
- Ms. Rebeca Rios-Kohn J.D., Executive Director, Arigatou International.

Q&A

12.30 pm – 1.30 pm: Lunch Break

Session Three: 1.30 pm – 3.00 pm.

Faith and Climate: Tackling Adverse Impact of the Planetary Crisis on Communities

The session looks at the effects of the planetary crisis, interrogating examples of interventions by faith actors in promoting mitigation and adaptation measures. Key recommendations from two research papers, jointly developed by Religions for Peace and the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), that address the intersectionality of faith, gender, and planetary action, and the critical role of women of faith in protecting the world's remaining rainforests will also be presented. Furthermore, the session will explore examples of climate-related displacement of communities and the link between climate change and displacement, looking into effects of floods, drought, forest fires, storms and other climate related emergencies and explore or learn from initiatives from faith actors and other stakeholders that are incorporating the voices of communities in the frontlines in mitigation, adaptation and response.

Moderator

- Prof. Katherine Marshall, Executive Director, World Faiths Development Dialogue and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs

Screening of the Faiths for Earth Video

Panellists

- H.E. Rev. Dr. Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja, Archdiocese of Abuja; Honorary President, Religions for Peace – Virtual.
- Rabbi Daniel Swartz, Spiritual Leader, Temple Hesed; Executive Director, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.
- Mr. David Ponet, Senior Adviser, Global Volunteer Initiative, UNICEF Headquarters.

Q&A

Session Four: 3.15 pm – 5.15 pm at the Chapel

- Presentation of Awards for Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action
- *Religions for Peace* will recognise Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action through the presentation of an award that celebrates the imperative role women play in advancing multi-religious collaborative work, in service to all communities. With the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *Religions for Peace* launched the Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award with the intention of honouring the work of women of faith, as we seek to raise the profile of women of faith and their networks, enable them to find new partners and supporters, and allow others to learn from them.

Master of Ceremony

- Mr. Benson Makusha, Pan African Coordinator, International Young Catholic Students; Chair, African Interfaith Youth Network; Member, Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award Selection Committee

Welcome Remarks

- Rev. Dionne P. Boissière, M.Div., Chaplain, The Church Centre for the United Nations

Screening of Guardians of the Rainforest

Opening Remarks

- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace*.
- Mr. David Gill, Consul General, Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany in New York; Member, Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action Award Selection Committee.
- Musical Rendition of “Melodie from Orpheo ed Euridice,” Composed by Christoph Willibald Gluck.
- Prof. Kory Katseanes playing the violin, accompanied by Ryan John Koch, Director, The New York Office of Public and International Affairs, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on the piano.

Presentation of the Awards by H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel

- Remarks from the Three Recipients of the Award
- Sister Agatha Ogochukwu Chikelue, Executive Director, Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace; Chair, Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network.
- Prof. Dr. Nayla Tabbara, President & Co-Founder, Adyan Foundation; Co-President, *Religions for Peace* - Video Message.
- Received by Ms. Farah Zahra

- Dr. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace*

6.00 pm – 8.00 pm: Dinner Reception, Second Floor

Day 2, Wednesday, 27 March 2024

Opening Session - Five: 8.30 am – 9.00 am.

Moderator

- Rev. Dr. Yoshinori Shinohara, Secretary General, Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace* (ACRP) and Religions for Peace Japan

Welcome and Moment of Silence

- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace*

Session Six: 9.00 am – 10.45 am.

Faith, Communities and Conflict: Protecting Communities in Conflict Situations and Emergencies

This session focuses on the role of faith actors and faith in intervening for communities in conflict and emergency situations. We will share latest reports on the effects of human-generated conflict and how they are affecting continuity in service delivery, mental health and trauma, and opportunities for joint action across different sectors. In addition, the recommendations for faith actors in intervening will be discussed.

Moderator

- Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative, Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office

Panellists.

- Mr. Benson Makusha, Pan African Coordinator, International Young Catholic Students; Chair, Religions for Peace African Interfaith Youth Network
- Dr. Zeinab Hijazi, Global Lead, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, UNICEF
- Mr. Siam Tooran, UN Representative and Adviser on Religion and Development, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers
- Mr. Arshan Khalid, Head, ISNA Office for Interfaith, Community Alliances, and Government Relations (IOICA)

Q&A

10.45 am – 11.00 am: Tea/Coffee

Session Seven: 11.00 am – 12.15 pm.

Faith and Protection from Violence against Girls, Boys and Women and Harmful Practices

This session invites stakeholders to interrogate the realities children, families and communities face in both open and hidden practices of abuse and exploitation. We will examine the role of religious leaders and communities in preventing violence and harmful practices that are mostly fuelled by social and gender norms, misinterpretation of faith teachings and past, recurring or emerging conflict

situations. Particularly, the vulnerability of women and girls to conflict and harmful practices will be a focus, with attention given to practical examples of how religious leaders at the frontlines or face of these situations are intervening or should intervene in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Moderator

- Mr. Elias Szczytnicki, Secretary General and Regional Director, Religions for Peace Latin America and the Caribbean

Panellists

- Dr. Ibrahim Salama, Chief of the Human Rights Treaties Branch, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) – Virtual.
- Sister Agatha Ogochukwu Chikelue, Executive Director, Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace; Chair, Religions for Peace International Women’s Coordinating Committee (IWCC).
- Rabbi Yosef Blau, Director of Religious Guidance, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), Yeshiva University; Member, Board of Directors, Jewish Community Watch.
- Ms. Debra Boudreaux, Chief Executive Officer, Tzu Chi Foundation.
- Ms. Harriet Akullu, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF.

Q&A

12.15 pm – 1.00 pm: Lunch Break

Session Eight: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm.

Faith, Science and Culture: Opportunities for Dialogue and Engagement

This session will explore examples and opportunities for dialogue between faith, science and culture on the issues affecting children, families and communities. Drawing from the experiences in the Faith, Science & Culture Dialogues convened in Africa, we will interrogate models on how scientists/technical experts can work with faith to promote and reinforce positive behaviours and norms using evidence and research. Areas of contradiction between faith and science will be examined and opportunities for faith intervention will be recommended, e.g., issuing of Fatwas and religious edicts promoting vaccination, etc.

Moderator

- Dr. Joan Hernandez Serret, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* Europe

Panellists

- Dr. William Vendley, Vice President, World Religions and Spirituality, Fetzer Institute; Secretary General Emeritus, *Religions for Peace*.
- Commissioner Christine MacMillan, Senior Advisor, World Evangelical Alliance UN Mission; Chair, Micah Global.
- Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace*.
- Brother Rob Howell, Interfaith Relations, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Q&A

Session Nine: 2.30 pm – 4.00 pm.

Faith, Children and Evidence-Based Approaches: Engaging Children, Families and Communities for Social and Behaviour Change

This session looks at the Faith and Positive Change for Children (FPCC) Initiative including experiences, lessons learned, the role of evidence and knowledge generation in promoting faith-based approaches and responses to issues affecting children, families and communities. Promoting evidence on what works is a key pillar of the faith engagement work with UNICEF and we will share examples of the Survey on barriers to immunisation uptake and demand, evidence generation, and promotion approaches and outcomes of the research conducted within the FPCC partnership, and how this is shaping future planning on faith engagement and approaches.

Moderator

- Mr. Massimiliano Sani, Senior Adviser, Social and Behaviour Change, UNICEF

Panellists

- Mr. Andrés Esteban Ochoa Toasa, SBC M&E Specialist, UNICEF
- Dr. Olivia Wilkinson, Director of Research, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities
- Mr. Jimmy Obuya, Deputy Director of Programmes and Global FPCC Coordinator, Religions for Peace
- Ms. Melissa Crutchfield, FPCC Global Manager, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities

Q&A

Session Ten: 4.00 pm – 5.15 pm.

Multi-Stakeholder and Multi-Faith Partnerships & Initiatives

This session invites other stakeholders and partners to share their experiences in faith engagement and opportunities for collaboration, taking into account the multiple and cross-cutting areas of intervention and needs for children, families and communities. We look at opportunities for scale and potential resource mapping and mobilisation strategies and partnerships building on evidence and similarities and outcome pathways explored by partners.

Moderator

- Ms. Nihal Saad, Director, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

Panellists

- Ms. Şafak Pavey, Senior Adviser, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Rev. Andrew Morley, President and CEO, World Vision International – Virtual
- Ms. Vera Leal Ferreira, Head of Regional Programmes and Oversight, The International Dialogue Centre – KAICIID
- Dr. Ryan D. Smith, Programme Executive, Ecumenical Office to the UN, Representative to UN Headquarters, World Council of Churches
- Rabbi Diana Gerson, Senior Advisor for Partnerships and External Relationships, Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities

Q&A

Session Eleven: 5.15 pm – 5.30 pm.

Closing Remarks

- Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace*
- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace*
- Dr. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace*

Annex II

Concept Note_Multi-Faith High-Level Forum Advancing Positive Outcomes for Children, Fa

1.0 Background

With multiple health, environmental, climate/planetary, and human-engineered crises and conflicts in the world today, there is a great need for both faith-based and secular stakeholders to collaborate and coordinate their ideas, actions, lessons, and resources in response to the emerging needs. *Religions for Peace* has nurtured and sustained partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders for more than 50 years, particularly in response to humanitarian and other crises affecting communities at global, regional, national, and local levels.

Our longstanding partnerships with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other United Nations agencies, and faith-based and secular partners have enabled joint multi-faith and multi-stakeholder actions to address issues of common concern, leveraging and mobilising the assets of religious leaders and their institutions.

However, children, young people, women, and other underserved members of our communities remain most vulnerable to the daunting effects of these crises. Therefore, the shared values of faith, coupled with the dedicated mandate and missions of our partners and stakeholders, become critical to jointly engage in intervening for our children, families and communities.

In response to this critical need, *Religions for Peace* has mobilised resources among its existing and new partnerships and stakeholders to convene a Multi-Faith High-Level Forum. This Forum will provide a platform and shared space for different faith actors, organisations, secular agencies, and institutions to reflect, share, and develop practical and tangible recommendations and actions on how the role and import of faith can and will continue to be used to intervene in these trying times.

2.0 Objectives of the Multi-Faith High-Level Forum

1. Provide a platform for shared learning by religious leaders/faith actors, their institutions, and technical experts on children’s issues, using experiences from the Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities (FPCC) Initiative
2. Share best practices and interventions in faith engagement and collaboration by stakeholders and partners in responding to cross-cutting issues faced by children, families, and communities
3. Honour, highlight, and learn from the vital efforts of women of faith in advancing multi-religious collaboration, human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development at all levels
4. Strengthen partnerships and collaborations toward intervening in emerging and cross-cutting areas of common concern, e.g., resumption and uptake of primary health services, multiple effects of planetary crises, conflict mitigation and response, leveraging faith-based engagement and evidence models

The Multi-Faith High-Level Forum will use the lessons and experiences to invite other partners and stakeholders to share experiences and recommendations in the areas of: planetary crisis mitigation and adaptation; conflict response interventions; health and humanitarian emergencies and crises, including displaced populations; recognising and strengthening the role of women of faith in frontline and global response actions; and the role of research and evidence in shaping faith-based interventions. More details on some of these initiatives and partnerships are shared below.

2.1 Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities (FPCC) Initiative

Religions for Peace has been partnering with UNICEF for nearly 35 years to advance collaborations for children by mobilising the spiritual, moral and social assets, and infrastructure of faith to improve child protection and well-being. In 2018, inspired by this partnership and with support from Rissho Kosei-kai (RK), UNICEF, *Religions for Peace* and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI), launched the FPCC Initiative as a faith engagement approach with an aim to broaden the scope and influence of faith in development and humanitarian work beyond small-scale, ad-hoc, single-sector, single-faith, and occasionally instrumentalist approaches. FPCC has three pillars of faith-centred research and evidence generation for contextually appropriate approaches. The FPCC partnership was critical to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and it has expanded to cover multiple programming areas for children, including immunisation, violence and harmful practices, climate and mental health.

2.2 The Role of Evidence Generation and Learning

Within the FPCC initiative, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) supports knowledge management and research, including leading and coordinating the development of global learning tools and resources. The initiative is based on principles of good practice in faith engagement emerging from the evidence based on religions and development. The three partners – *Religions for Peace*, UNICEF and JLI – have implemented and resourced activities aimed at mobilising community, congregational, national, regional, and global faith leaders, including women of faith and youth, to generate results that are replicable, sustainable and credible in ensuring positive behavioural outcomes for children. The Multi-Faith High-Level Forum will also examine the role of evidence, stakeholder coordination, and community-level engagement and action in promoting lasting and sustainable interventions, leveraging lessons from the FPCC Initiative, implemented jointly with UNICEF.

2.3 Celebrating Community and Congregational Action and Engagement

This Multi-Faith High-Level Forum will also recognise Women of Excellence in Multi-Religious Action through the presentation of an award that celebrates the imperative role women play in this space. With support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *Religions for Peace* aims to amplify the vital service efforts spearheaded by women of faith addressing human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development - all of which advance the dignity, rights and well-being of children, families, and communities. By collating the initiatives stewarded by women of faith networks across the globe, *Religions for Peace* aims to document the rich contributions of women of faith to their communities and the world.

3.0 Participants

The participants will include: senior religious leaders representing the *Religions for Peace* World Council/Executive Committee, representatives from the Women of Faith Network, Women of Faith Awardees, the Interfaith Youth Network, and the Regional and National Inter-Religious Councils (IRCs); Regional FPCC Implementation teams, JLI Staff, faith-based organisations, UNICEF, and other partners, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and various UN Agencies (WHO, UNHCR, OHCHR, etc.)



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