



**United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Religion
and Sustainable Development
2025 Annual Report**

Engaging with Religion and Faith-based Actors on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development

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UNIATF and MFAC in 2025

Background of UNIATF and MFAC

The United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UNIATF) was established in 2010 as a platform for knowledge exchange and management, capacity building, system-wide guidance, and oversight regarding the engagement with faith-based/-inspired civil society organizations and religious leaders as strategic partners.

UNIATF brings together UN entities across the system to meet regularly and co-organize joint advocacy and capacity-building events. Since 2020, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have served together as the UNIATF Co-chairs, with the three entities rotating annually to hold the Executive Secretariat functions. UNAOC served as the Executive Secretariat of the UNIATF for 2025. *(Please refer to Annex I for the list of the UNIATF membership.)*

The Multi-faith Advisory Council (MFAC) was established in 2018 by the UNIATF as an informal, voluntary body to provide strategic advice and support to the UNIATF on key thematic areas. Its aim is to assist the United Nations system through human rights-based policy advocacy, raising public awareness, enhancing religious literacy within the UN, fostering greater partnerships and joint actions with faith-based/-inspired civil society organizations and religious leaders, and helping the broader faith community better understand the UN's mandate.

The MFAC membership includes the UN system's long-term faith-based partners, representing a variety of religious traditions, regional and national presence, thematic areas of expertise, with a focus on gender and intergenerational inclusivity. In February 2025, the MFAC completed a membership renewal process for the new three-year term (2025 – 2027), now involving 36 members, including major faith and cultural traditions and a wide geographical and religious representation. UNIATF Co-chairs then, based on the collective decision on the nominations, announced the new MFAC Co-chairs — the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, the World Jewish Congress, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Starting from April 2025,

four new MFAC Co-chairs commenced their roles. (*Please refer to Annex II for the list of the whole MFAC membership.*)

Highlights of the joint UNIATF and MFAC activities in 2025

MFAC Annual Retreat 2025

During 29-30 January 2025, the Multi-faith Advisory Council Annual Retreat was held in the Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office. The two-day hybrid event brought together MFAC members and UNIATF Co-chairs for open discussions around the overall UNIATF-MFAC partnership and potential areas of collaboration. Co-chairs of the gender, peace and security, and multilateralism working groups delivered presentations on their accomplishments in 2024 and, together, facilitated the formation of the renewed five working groups for 2025, focusing on gender, peace and security, multilateralism, climate, and youth, respectively.

Key takeaways of the MFAC Annual Retreat 2025 include:

- MFAC emphasized the need to clarify and strengthen its advisory role to the UNIATF, including improving the coordination and participation among all members.
- MFAC called for a shift toward a more proactive, multi-faith voice, emphasizing the unique value of MFAC in UN policy processes rather than responding reactively.
- Two MFAC working groups were established—the climate and youth working groups—to broaden engagement and ensure cross-cutting contributions on various thematic areas.
- MFAC noted that strengthening collaboration with the UN remains essential, particularly as many UN entities undergo restructuring. MFAC aimed to form a robust 2025 work plan to guide joint engagement.
- Preparations were underway to resume the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing 2025, with the proposed convening to be held during the High-level Political Forum, focusing on how faith actors can accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

11th Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs

The 11th Annual Symposium, under the theme “The future is upon us: what now? Amplifying the role of faith and civil society actors in multilateral solutions”, was held on 3 April 2025 in the Church Center for the United Nations. This hybrid event was co-convened by ACT Alliance, General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, Islamic Relief USA, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Soka Gakkai International, United Religions Initiative, and the World Council of Churches, in partnership with UNIATF. The programme gathered faith actors, representatives of civil society, and senior officials from UN entities, including UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, OHCHR, ITU, and DPPA, with thematic discussion topics ranging from inclusive governance, commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action and UNSCR 1325, peacebuilding amid conflict, and AI governance.

Key takeaways of the 11th Annual Symposium include:

- The Symposium underscored that FBOs and civil society are essential partners for inclusive governance under the Pact for the Future, calling for the protection of civic space and for strengthening UN-faith partnerships to fulfil the 2030 Agenda.
- Speakers urged engaging with faith actors as strategic partners to advance women’s rights, peace, and security at all levels.
- Speakers also highlighted locally-led, values-driven mediation and protection roles for faith communities, as well as the importance of leveraging faith actors for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
- Participants urged the ethical, inclusive implementation of the Global Digital Compact and its linkages to the World Summit on the Information Society: 20-year review (WSIS+20), noting AI’s risks of exacerbating inequality and the need for multi-stakeholder oversight and capacity-building.

Kofi Annan Faith Briefing 2025

The Kofi Annan Faith Briefing 2025, under the theme “*Advancing the Realization of the 2030 Agenda through Meaningful Engagement of Faith Actors*”, was held on 15 July 2025 in the Church Center for the United Nations. The event brought together representatives of the UNIATF and MFAC membership, including the Under-Secretary-General, High Representative for UNAOC and the UN Special Representative to Combat Islamophobia,

who delivered opening remarks on behalf of UNIATF. The UNAOC High Representative reaffirmed UNAOC's commitment to continue its collaboration with the MFAC and religious leaders across the entire faith spectrum to make the world safer, more peaceful, and prosperous.

Key takeaways of the 2025 Kofi Annan Faith Briefing include:

- The briefing highlighted that faith actors are already delivering measurable SDG results at scale—e.g., supporting public health outreach during COVID-19 (SDG 3), partnering on migration dialogue (SDG 10.7), mobilizing religious leaders for climate advocacy (SDG 13), and training young religious leaders and media to counter violence and strengthen social cohesion (SDG 16).
- The briefing called for institutionalized engagement, including proposals to treat faith-based organizations as formal stakeholders in governance and peace processes in multilateral settings.
- The briefing emphasized concrete partnership priorities where faith actors can add operational value: climate (mobilizing communities and advancing sustainable practices), women's leadership and inclusion (moving beyond tokenism to agenda-setting with women faith leaders), and peacebuilding in fragile settings where faith networks provide early warning, mediation, and psychosocial support.
- The briefing noted that faith engagement should be backed by evidence and clear communication, including SDG-aligned impact measurement and strategic storytelling, which explicitly elevate youth- and women-led faith initiatives, so that their contributions are documented and carried into policy and funding decisions.

The MFAC IATF UNGA High-level Multi-faith Reception

The High-level Multi-faith Reception to mark the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, under the theme “*Better together: 80 years and more for peace, development and human rights,*” was held on 25 September 2025 at the Church Center for the United Nations. This reception brought together the MFAC membership and UNIATF Co-chairs, including the Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide.

Side event on the side of the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly

On the margins of the UNGA80, MFAC and the International Dialogue Center -KAICIID, in cooperation with UNAOC, UNFPA, OSAPG, Religions for Peace, and co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Austria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Portugal to the United Nations, organized a side event, “*Keeping Faith in Dialogue: Reimagining Interreligious Cooperation for a New Agenda for Peace*”. The UNAOC High Representative delivered keynote remarks. The event also featured the first public appearance of the newly appointed Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, who highlighted the importance of engaging with religious and faith-based actors at the precarious juncture of the current global affairs.

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

In 2025, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), guided by the **UNAOC Action Plan 2024 – 2026**¹, continued to strengthen its institutional engagements with multi-stakeholders, including religious leaders, faith actors, and faith-based organizations, through its advocacy, global initiatives, and programmes, serving as a dialogue platform across all regions.

Advocacy and Public Engagement

On various high-level occasions, UNAOC leadership highlighted the importance of engaging multi-stakeholders, including religious leaders, faith actors, and faith-based organizations, as strategic partners in preventing conflict, countering discrimination, and addressing hate-driven narratives.

In 2025, UNAOC served as the **Executive Secretariat for UNIATF**, provided substantive support in maintaining connection and communication between the UNIATF membership and MFAC, through disseminating news, announcements, events information, scheduling regular meeting calls between UNIATF and MFAC Co-chairs, keeping track of collaboration proposals, attending the events organized by MFAC members at the principal level, facilitating the liaison of MFAC Working Groups with individual UNIATF entities, and supporting the organization of various advocacy activities and initiatives.

On 14-15 December, UNAOC convened its **11th Global Forum in Riyadh**, hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Under the overarching theme, “*UNAOC: Two Decades of Dialogue for Humanity – Advancing a New Era of Mutual Respect and Understanding in a Multipolar World*”, the Forum brought together political leaders, international and regional organizations, religious leaders and faith actors, as well as representatives of the private sector, civil society, academia, youth, arts, sports, and media, to reconfirm their shared commitment to dialogue as a tool for promoting mutual respect and understanding. The plenary session on interfaith dialogue further highlighted the importance of faith engagement

¹ United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Action Plan 2024-2026, see: <https://www.unaoc.org/resource/unaoc-action-plan-2024-2026/>

in building peaceful and inclusive societies. In the Final Communiqué of the Riyadh Forum, Member States and international organizations renewed and reinforced their pledge to promote a culture of peace and address all forms of religious intolerance.

On 22-23 April, UNAOC, in collaboration with Onuart Foundation, organized the third edition of the “**Global Dialogue on AI for One Humanity**” at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Leading voices from technology, government, academia, media, and civil society explored the responsible and inclusive development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the need for ethical standards and digital literacy to counter AI-driven challenges, for which multi-stakeholders, including religious leaders and faith actors, would play a critical role.

On 25-26 April, in Gernika, Spain, UNAOC, in collaboration with Religions for Peace (RfP) and the Municipality of Gernika, launched “**A Call for Peace, the End of Wars and Respect for International Law**”, an initiative aiming to amplify a condemnation against war while fostering a message of peace and upholding respect for international law. The two-day gathering featured interactive discussions and poignant interventions from political leaders, government officials, religious leaders, youth advocates, civil society representatives, sport personalities, and various stakeholders, all championing the cause of peace. The second chapter of the initiative was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 16-18 October, by UNAOC and Religions for Peace (RfP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the City of Sarajevo, and the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the support of the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Sarajevo Joint Statement: “A Call for Peace, the End of Wars and Respect for International Law”² acknowledged the vital role of religious leaders and faith actors in fostering mutual understanding, reconciliation, and respect among communities, and emphasized their capacity to serve as bridges for dialogue across divides, countering intolerance and violence, and promoting values of compassion, solidarity, and unity.

On 29 April, UNAOC hosted a roundtable on “*Countering Extremism and Radical Ideologies: A Multi-stakeholder Approach*” at the United Nations headquarters in New York, within the framework of the “**Egyptian-US Dialogue**” initiative. Leaders from the Protestant Churches of Egypt, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, the Egyptian

² United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, “Sarajevo Joint Statement: A Call for Peace, the End of Wars and Respect for International Law”, 18 October 2025, see: <https://www.unaoc.org/2025/10/sarajevo-joint-statement/>

National Council for Human Rights, and the United Church of Christ, along with Ambassadors and United Nations senior officials, explored best practices for countering extremism and radical ideologies, as well as the UN’s engagement with non-state stakeholders, including faith actors, civil society organizations, and parliamentarians.

In June, in Tirana, Albania, as an institutional partner of the Anna Lindh Foundation, UNAOC organized a high-level plenary session “*Bridging Cultures and Religions in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: Reflecting on Two Decades of Dialogue for Humanity*”. During the session, high-level panelists called for renewed partnership with civil society organizations across the Euro-Mediterranean region and for greater engagement in addressing ongoing political, social, and cultural issues.

As an active member of the **United Nations Working Group on Hate Speech**, UNAOC advanced key recommendations to counter hate speech by promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding. Throughout the year, UNAOC organized and participated in numerous public events, bringing together religious leaders, policymakers, youth, and civil society to strengthen solidarity and encourage collective action against discrimination and incitement to hatred.

Mandates and Global Initiatives

Following the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 78/264, “Measures to Combat Islamophobia,”³ the United Nations Secretary-General appointed the UNAOC High Representative as the **United Nations Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia** on 7 May. The High Representative reaffirmed his commitment to stand in solidarity with Muslim communities and to stand up against all forms of discrimination and bigotry⁴. In his dual role, the High Representative, on various occasions, laid out his vision for addressing and combating Islamophobia and held a series of consultations with Member States and international and regional organizations (including, but not limited to, OIC, OSCE, and European Union). He is developing the United Nations Action Plan to Combat Islamophobia, which will contain recommendations and a call for action for Member States, civil society, and the public at large.

³ United Nations resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 15 March 2024, A/RES/78/264, “Measures to Combat Islamophobia”, see: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/Res/78/264>

⁴ United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, “Statement by the High Representative on his appointment as United Nations Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia”, 7 May 2025, see: <https://www.unaoc.org/2025/05/appointment-special-envoy-to-combat-islamophobia/>

As the United Nations focal point for monitoring antisemitism and enhancing a system-wide response, the High Representative engaged with Member States and their national envoys and coordinators, with Jewish organizations, and with United Nations entities on the issue of growing antisemitism and on means to coordinate and enhance responses. Following consultations, the **United Nations Action Plan to Enhance Monitoring and Response to Antisemitism**⁵ was launched in January. The Plan is focused on the United Nations system and builds on the United Nations' efforts, recommending ways to further enhance and coordinate its work. A presentation of the Plan to several Member States was co-organized by UNAOC and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, seeking reflections and sharing good practices. As one of the first practical steps to implement the Action Plan, UNAOC and OSAPG co-developed and are finalizing a dedicated online learning module to be hosted by the UN System Staff College. The module will further strengthen the understanding of antisemitism and equip users with knowledge and tools to identify and respond to it.

As the focal point for implementing the **United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites**, on 16 September, in Astana, the UNAOC High Representative and the Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan-Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, co-convened the *Special Session on Safeguarding Religious Sites: Reflections and a Call for Action by the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and State Actors*. The session brought together Member States, religious leaders and faith actors, representatives of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional religions. It was officially referenced in the Astana Peace Declaration 2025, adopted at the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. UNAOC continued to spearhead the **global communications campaign #forSafeWorship**, inviting people worldwide to submit short multimedia stories about their personal connections to religious sites in order to celebrate their universality as symbols of our shared humanity, history and traditions. In 2025, the campaign generated over 6 million impressions for posts across major platforms, including Twitter (X), Facebook, Instagram, Threads, TikTok and YouTube. Throughout the year, UNAOC issued a series of press statements condemning attacks against religious sites and worshippers around the world, including. All statements may be accessed here: <https://www.unaoc.org/press-statements/>.

⁵ United Nations Action Plan to Enhance Monitoring and Response to Antisemitism, see: <https://www.unaoc.org/resource/action-plan-antisemitism/>

The UNAOC's work in promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue and in expanding its policy, advocacy, and related programming received due recognition in the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions. It is also recognized in the Secretary-General's reports covering issues within the UNAOC's scope of work. In 2025, UNAOC was a co-penholder and coordinated the preparation of the Secretary-General's report on the "Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace"⁶.

Programs and Field-level Implementation

Alongside advocacy and global initiatives, UNAOC continued to implement programmes to translate dialogue into impact, with a focus on youth, women, education, and partnerships. Through these efforts, UNAOC ensured that its work delivered tangible outcomes.

As part of its effort to develop educational tools that encourage intercultural and interfaith dialogue, UNAOC collaborated in the design and implementation of the third edition of the "**Tutored Online Training Course on Global Education and Intercultural/Interfaith Dialogue**," an initiative led by the North-South Center of the Council of Europe, in collaboration with the Aga Khan Development Network, the International Dialogue Center – KAICIID, and the Universidad Católica de Valencia – European Institute of Education for Democratic Culture. The enhanced version of the course was delivered and concluded by July 2025.

UNAOC and Fundación Mujeres por África continued to convene virtual mediation workshops of the **Women's Alliance for Peace (WA4P) initiative**, with women peacebuilders from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali. Through monthly workshops, participants exchange updates from their communities, share challenges, learn mediation techniques, and shape WA4P's priorities while connecting local initiatives to broader partnerships and resources.

UNAOC launched a call for applications for the 11th edition of its **Youth Solidarity Fund (YSF)**. In 2026-2027, selected organizations will receive capacity-building and mentorship to kickstart their initiatives, seed funding to implement impactful youth-led and youth-managed projects, and a global platform to amplify their impact. Since its inception in 2008, UNAOC has invested \$2.59 million to support youth-led projects in 43 countries, positively impacting

⁶ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace", distributed on 23 October 2025, see: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4093147?ln=en&v=pdf>

more than 3.4 million beneficiaries worldwide. The 11th edition of YSF focuses on the role of young people in promoting cultural and religious pluralism, peace and mutual respect, and preventing violent extremism.

UNAOC continued its collaboration with the municipality of La Courneuve, in France, on the “**News Generation Against Hate**” project. Now in its third edition, the project aims to strengthen youth leadership, promote intergenerational dialogue, and foster collaboration with local institutions and women leaders. In 2025, a cohort of 31 young people strengthened their intercultural competencies and enhanced their media literacy. The young participants concluded their work with a multimedia exhibit in La Courneuve, featuring visual arts and audio stories that promote intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and social inclusion. Through their works, the young creators challenged misinformation, hate speech, and harmful stereotypes, while developing essential skills in media development, communications, and critical thinking.

The latest edition of the **Young Peacebuilders programme (YPB)** was launched in early 2025, which, for the first time, focused on the South Caucasus and Central Asia region. Twenty young leaders from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan engaged in a series of online modules, followed by a week-long in-person capacity-building workshop in Muscat, Oman, and implemented their peace projects in their communities. Their projects tackled a variety of challenges, including hate speech, discrimination, and deep-seated prejudices. Since the launch of the YPB programme, participants have reached more than 6900 direct beneficiaries in their communities and networks. Over 460,000 people are now aware of their innovative and effective work. The YPB network currently comprises 156 members from 58 countries.

Within the framework of the **Intercultural Innovation Hub**, an initiative of UNAOC and the BMW Group, with the support of Accenture, UNAOC provided financial and capacity-building support to 10 civil society organizations to scale up their innovative projects, fostering intercultural dialogue. In 2025, 10 outstanding grassroots projects implemented in Austria, Botswana, Canada, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Peru, the United States of America, and Zambia received comprehensive support, including funding grants, tailored mentorship, and capacity-building training. The selected organizations participated in multiple online and in-person sessions designed to boost their organizational growth and enhance their project management capabilities, maximizing the long-term impact and

sustainability of their scaled-up interventions. The network of Intercultural Innovation Hub recipients expanded to 91 members whose projects have positively affected nearly 6.3 million beneficiaries worldwide.

United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG)

In 2025, OSAPG continued to foster engagements with religious and faith-based organizations and actors, highlighting their role in prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity) in line with the [FEZ Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes](#), and in support of their efforts in addressing and countering hate speech which could lead to incitement to violence and genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Office continued its public advocacy and outreach, speaking out against antisemitism, islamophobia and all forms of religious intolerance and discrimination. In this context, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, as well as the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, have issued [public statements](#) pertaining to situations with ethno-religious violence, including Sudan and the Middle East.

In January, with the support of the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), the Office launched the first-ever introductory course on “The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech”, as a unique educational tool made freely available to all UN personnel on the [Blue Line](#) platform, with the aim of fostering deeper understanding of the different levels and manifestations of hate speech, UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech and its implementation. Following the launch of the UN’s Action Plan to Enhance Monitoring and Response to Antisemitism, OSAPG and UNAOC also joined efforts to develop a dedicated online module for UN staff to enhance their understanding of antisemitism and ability to counter it.

During the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), in March, the Office co-sponsored the first-ever event focused on gendered islamophobia and its intersectional harm, together with the University of Essex and the Permanent Mission of Canada. The Office also supported the “Granada Declaration of Principles for Combating Islamophobia and Antisemitism” developed by Essex University and New Ground Research. This declaration was first presented during a side-event organized in the week of marking the International Day for Countering Hate Speech (18 June) at the UN Headquarters, and was

[officially launched in December 2025 in Doha](#), Qatar, on the sidelines of the Doha Forum. The Granada Declaration recognizes Islamophobia and antisemitism as "twin challenges"—two interconnected issues that must be addressed collectively as a joint effort.

OSAPG also continued cooperation with the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation (CECF)'s multi-faith Better Understanding for a Better World initiative. This includes joining the student exchange in Maryland, USA, where a snapshot training on genocide prevention and countering hate speech was given to a new global cohort of participants, as well as support for the [launch of the new School of Religious Diplomacy for Leadership Development and Global Cooperation](#), in Washington, DC, in May. The School of Religious Diplomacy, organized under CECF, aims to bring together religious and faith-based leaders for a series of dedicated capacity-building programmes, placing the focus on leveraging their influence and community outreach for prevention.

The marking of the 4th International Day for Countering Hate Speech in June saw a week of discussions focused on [building coalitions to reclaim inclusive and safe spaces free of hatred](#), with speakers from the UN, tech and social media companies, faith-based and community-based organizations, and academia. The Multi-Faith Advisory Council co-chairs contributed as speakers in the side event focused on partnership, as well as [side-event discussions](#) which included the mentioned presentation of the Granada Declaration, a thematic discussion on leveraging football to counter antisemitism and promote Holocaust remembrance, an online focus panel on the role of countering hate speech as a means of conflict prevention, and a thematic presentation by the non-governmental organization the Gardens of the Righteous Worldwide (GARIWO) on the philosophy of the Memory of Good to counter hatred.

In July, under the Srebrenica Outreach Programme, coordinated together with the Department of Global Communications under the UN General Assembly Resolution 78/282, OSAPG organized a series of events to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among these, the [high-level commemoration under the official theme "Our Story, Our Promise"](#) was held at the General Assembly, highlighting the stories of the survivors and the cross-generational impact of the genocide. A dedicated exhibit, "From Words to Violence: Lives Behind the Fields of Death", was hosted at the UNHQ in New York and was transferred into a [permanent online space](#). Framed around photographs showcasing the donation of artifacts to the Srebrenica Memorial Center's archive as part of the "Lives Behind the Fields of Death" project, the

exhibit shows the devastating power of words when they turn into hate speech, with an imperative that the humanity and identity of those individuals with first-hand experience of genocide remain at the center of our understanding of how genocides unfold.

In December, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide undertook a substantive mission relating to the deteriorating situation in Sudan, holding consultations with relevant actors hosted in Kenya, and [issuing a number of recommended measures](#) to protect the civilian population from further identity-based atrocity crimes.

The [9 December week of discussions](#) around the 10th anniversary marking of the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime sounded the alarm on the urgency to recommit global efforts to genocide prevention at a time when too many people are at risk of this crime across the world. On 9 December, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide addressed the [special session of the General Assembly](#) on the occasion, critically asking whether everything is being done to prevent the commission of the gravest of crimes. The high-level commemoration was preceded by a thematic side-event, convened on 8 December by the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the UN and the Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect, which provided space for critical reflection on the importance of strengthening partnerships for early warning and early action in genocide and atrocity prevention.

The Office organized a dedicated consultation session with the Multi-Faith Advisory Council and researchers from the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in January 2026, on the role that religious actors can play in preventing atrocity crimes. The consultation session aimed to inform thematic research on the contributions of religious and faith-based actors to atrocity prevention efforts, including the implementation of the UN Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, with concrete insights and recommendations from MFAC members.

The office also organized a meeting with representatives of persecuted minorities, including religious minorities, at risk of genocide on the sidelines of a consultation meeting organized on the Istanbul Process by the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights of the University of Oslo, and the Essex Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, in January 2026.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

In 2025, UNFPA continued to strengthen its strategic engagement with faith-based actors and institutions as part of its broader partnerships and advocacy ecosystem supporting the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Across global, regional, and country levels, UNFPA works with diverse faith actors to advance human rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), demographic resilience, and positive social norm change in communities and policy environments.

Global Engagement and Multilateral Advocacy

At the global level, UNFPA continued its engagement with the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-R) and the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC), contributing to inter-agency collaboration on religion and sustainable development. UNFPA supported key initiatives of the MFAC, including the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing, the Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs, and the substantive work of the MFAC Gender Working Group, which brings together faith actors and UN entities to advance dialogue on gender equality and human rights.

Faith-based engagement and advocacy efforts were also integrated into key multilateral processes during the year, including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) as well as the UN General Assembly during which jointly launched the MFAC Gender Working Group Side by Side Compendium: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights. In collaboration with partners such as ACT Alliance and other faith-based organizations, UNFPA supported briefings and dialogues to strengthen the capacity of faith actors to meaningfully engage in multilateral policy discussions on population dynamics, gender equality, and sustainable development.

UNFPA also contributed to global dialogue on the intersection of faith and demographic change. Following on from the partnership with the Berlin Institute for Population and Development, the German Federal Foreign Office, and Religions for Peace, UNFPA supported the dissemination of the report *The Role of Religious Actors in Population*

Dynamics: Insights from the African Dialogues in Faith and Demography. The report builds on a multi-year dialogue process across Africa and highlights the important role faith actors play in shaping social norms, advancing gender equality, supporting youth development, and promoting inclusive responses to demographic change.

Tools, Knowledge, and Strategic Approaches to Faith Engagement

Recognizing the growing importance of faith engagement within the broader development ecosystem, UNFPA has increasingly focused on developing more structured approaches to working with faith actors. In 2025, UNFPA advanced the development of a Faith-Based Engagement and Advocacy Toolkit to support colleagues and partners in navigating complex environments where religion, culture, and social norms influence policy and community engagement on key population issues, human rights, development, gender equality, and SRHR.

The toolkit provides practical guidance on stakeholder mapping, alliance-building, narrative engagement, and strategies for engaging diverse faith actors in support of the ICPD and SDG agendas. It also highlights approaches to addressing misinformation and countering harmful narratives through values-based dialogue and interfaith collaboration on the ground.

Regional and Country-Level Engagement

At the regional and country levels, UNFPA continues to prioritize engagement with actors across the faith, religion, and culture space. In 2025, over 100 UNFPA country offices reported working with faith-based organizations and religious leaders on initiatives related to gender equality, the prevention of harmful practices, and community-level social norm change.

Across regions, these partnerships have supported a range of activities to advance the ICPD agenda and the rights and well-being of women and girls. UNFPA country offices have worked with religious leaders and faith-based networks to raise awareness on issues such as gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and adolescent pregnancy, while promoting respectful relationships and gender equality within communities. These efforts have included training and capacity-building initiatives for religious leaders and scholars; collaboration with theological institutions to strengthen gender-sensitive interpretations of religious teachings; the development of community education materials and awareness campaigns; and the establishment of dialogue platforms that bring together faith actors, policymakers, and civil society organizations. In many contexts, faith-based partners

have played an important role in fostering community acceptance of health services, supporting youth engagement, and promoting positive social norms aligned with human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead, UNFPA will continue to deepen its engagement with faith-based actors as part of a broader effort to strengthen multi-stakeholder coalitions in support of gender equality, SRHR, and the ICPD agenda. In an increasingly complex global context, partnerships with faith actors remain essential for advancing human rights, shaping inclusive social norms, and ensuring that global commitments translate into meaningful change at the community level.

UNFPA will also continue to collaborate with partners across the UN system through the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development to promote coordinated approaches to engaging religion and faith-based organizations in support of sustainable development.

United Nations Department of Global Communication (DGC)

In 2025, the United Nations Department of Global Communications (DGC) collaborated with Reverend Jill Jacobs, Executive Director of T'ruah, on a video titled “The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights”. The video defines antisemitism and suggests practical steps for how anyone can stand up against antisemitism and other forms of hate speech. The video was unveiled in May 2025 as part of the #NoToHate campaign to promote empathy and kindness. It aligns with the United Nations Action Plan to Enhance Monitoring and Response to Antisemitism.

The video could be accessed via: <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/take-action/videos>

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

OHCHR continued engaging with religious leaders and faith-based actors in the context of the [“Faith for Rights” framework](#).⁷ It provides space for a cross-disciplinary reflection and action on the deep connections between religions and human rights. The objective is to foster the development of peaceful societies, which uphold human dignity and equality for all and where diversity is not just tolerated but fully respected and celebrated.

In January 2025, Albania and the University of Essex hosted in Tirana the international conference entitled “Empower talk: standing against hate and embracing rights”, which was co-sponsored by OHCHR, OSAPG and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. The resulting [Tirana Framework for Confronting Intolerance](#) stated that advocacy of hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence under international law endangered lives, entrenched inequality and suppressed the ability of victims and their communities to participate in public life.⁸ It urged Governments, private sector actors and civil society organizations to implement the action plan outlined in Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, the Rabat Plan of Action, and the guidance offered in the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. To address hate speech both online and offline, the Tirana Framework also suggested exploring the role of education, counter-speech, emerging technologies and legal mechanisms, including existing frameworks such as the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights⁹ and guidance offered by UNESCO.¹⁰ The Tirana Framework also included a call for building multi-sector alliances to collaboratively combat intolerance, including antisemitism, Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hate, and prejudice against Christian minorities and other religious or belief minorities. Moreover, it called upon technology and social media companies to establish clear, transparent mechanisms to identify and address hate speech while respecting free expression.

In January 2025, in a video message marking the [International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust](#), the High Commissioner for Human Rights

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights>

⁸ <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/kvj8a9uq/pdf>

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/press/Faith4Rights.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.unesco.org/en/countering-hate-speech>

stated that antisemitism was rampant, with Jews facing increased intimidation, threats and physical violence. He warned of the dangers posed by the manipulation of language, disinformation, incitement to hatred and identity politics.¹¹ On the same day, in an address to the European Parliament, the High Commissioner emphasized that upgrading efforts to combat antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of hate speech was an essential step towards building inclusive societies.¹²

In his statement to commemorate the [International Day to Combat Islamophobia](#), the High Commissioner stressed that Muslims continued to face prejudice and oppression that, in its most extreme forms, translated into violence, as well as socioeconomic exclusion, with unequal and unjust immigration policies, religious profiling, unwarranted surveillance and arbitrary detention. He warned that such hatred manifested itself in racism, antisemitism and religious discrimination of all kinds, including through hateful rhetoric and the deliberate misrepresentation of certain groups. He expressed alarm at how religious differences had been weaponized and manipulated for political gain. The High Commissioner urged States to develop comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and institutions and to prosecute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.¹³

In February 2025, the High Commissioner delivered a statement at the conference on the [role and responsibility of religious leaders in times of war, atrocities and polarization](#) organized by Wilton Park in partnership with the British Embassy to the Holy See and Globethics, in association with OHCHR. The High Commissioner stressed that discrimination, incitement to hatred and violence against Muslims, Jews, Christians and persons belonging to religious minorities were rising across the globe, both online and offline. Those trends, he noted, were often fueled by politicians, business leaders, media commentators and others drawing from a deep well of historic hatred, atrocity crimes, paranoia and conspiracy theories based on religious ideas. He underscored that, in such a highly charged environment, religious leaders and people of faith had a special and direct

¹¹ <https://europe.ohchr.org/index.php/resources/speeches/message-international-day-commemoration-memory-victims>

¹² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/01/hc-brussels-europe-has-opportunity-advance-human-rights-home-and>

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/03/turk-islamophobia-weakens-our-societies-and-damages-everyone>

responsibility to resist manipulation and to play a positive role by promoting mediation, fostering healing and seeking common ground.¹⁴

Religious leaders meeting at the Wilton Park conference in February 2025 jointly called for the protection of and respect for holy sites because of their powerful links to people’s identities and of their symbolic power in generating shared connections, pilgrimages and multi-faith spiritual experiences.¹⁵ Furthermore, they noted that religious leaders and faith actors should work towards more action-orientated interreligious dialogue with a new model of interfaith engagement and peer-to-peer learning rooted in honesty, self-reflection, and working towards the common good of all. Religious leaders and faith actors should challenge the political narrative of dehumanizing “the other”, including by using respectful language, offering practical assistance and supporting cross-community activity for all the victims of conflict. Furthermore, they noted that religious leaders and faith actors must engage women and encourage them to take the lead in interfaith engagement and peacebuilding to reshape authentic dialogue and contribute to facilitating an ethical leadership model based on faith and human rights. These recommendations were also shared with politicians and religious leaders gathered in Rome for the second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, in June 2025, as well as during the Global Ethics Forum held in Geneva in October 2025.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and OHCHR jointly organized a series of **hybrid exchanges between faith-based actors and parliamentarians** to identify challenges and share good practices in countering hatred based on religion or belief.¹⁶ Those exchanges had deepened United Nations engagement with national parliaments and were aimed at enhancing the human rights literacy of parliamentarians, and promoting the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as relevant United Nations resolutions and action plans. In the **Rome Communiqué** issued following the second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, participants rejected the misuse of religions or beliefs and the manipulation of their followers to incite hatred and violence, for example, for electoral purposes or political gains.¹⁷ They also encouraged parliamentary and multi-

¹⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/02/religious-leaders-must-work-together-promote-shared-principles>

¹⁵ <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/app/uploads/2025/03/WP3498-Summary-Report-.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.ipu.org/file/21749/download>

¹⁷ <https://www.ipu.org/file/21869/download>; A/HRC/40/58, annex II (commitment X)

stakeholder diplomacy, including with faith and civil society leaders and other societal actors, to promote peace and inclusion globally, as recommended in the Pact for the Future.¹⁸

In October 2025, OHCHR contributed to the [Global Ethics Forum](#) by presenting at a round table on multi-stakeholder diplomacy, where it highlighted the importance of inclusive dialogue in countering polarization and promoting human dignity.¹⁹ Members of the Faith for Rights community of practice shared experiences on leveraging the ethical and spiritual influence of religious leaders to challenge narratives of dehumanization and resist the instrumentalization of religion and belief. Building on a series of peer-to-peer learning events co-organized at Wilton Park and in Geneva and Rome, the Forum laid the groundwork for a white paper in which key lessons were consolidated and recommendations and commitments were made to foster cohesive societies through rights-based and values-driven narratives and to combat hatred against religious or belief minorities.

In partnership with the non-governmental organizations Bodhigaya Vijjalaya 980 Institute and Dharma Alliance, OHCHR convened in October 2025 the [sixth annual meeting of the Faith for Rights commUNITY of practices](#) in Siem Reap (Cambodia) and Bangkok (Thailand). The meeting spotlighted Dharmic and Indigenous perspectives on human rights and peacebuilding, with the participation of United Nations experts, including the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, and the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as well as religious leaders and Indigenous representatives from South-East Asia, West African *mourchidates* (female religious guides) and scholars from Al-Azhar in Egypt. The resulting Bangkok Declaration on Dharmic Perspectives on Faith for Rights recognized the diversity of spiritual, ethical and cultural traditions, including those of Dharmic (Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and Sikh) traditions, and of Indigenous Peoples, as a source of insight for promoting dignity, justice and compassion, as well as for contributing to reconciliation, conflict prevention and mutual understanding.²⁰ Participants also reaffirmed their shared commitment to fostering inclusive dialogue among faith communities and human rights actors, recognizing the

¹⁸ [A/RES/79/1](#), para. 83 (action 55)

¹⁹ <https://globethics.net/gef2025-changing-narrative-preparing-peace-multistakeholder-dialogue-and-plan-action>

²⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-bangkok-declaration.pdf>

importance of continuous inquiry, reflection and peer-to-peer learning in advancing both human rights and spiritual understanding.²¹

The non-governmental organization Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Center at the Campus Adventise du Salève (France) co-organized, with the Interreligious Platform of Geneva (Switzerland), [regular walks inspired by the “Faith for Rights” framework](#),²² which included visits to different places of worship as well as exchanges among participants about human rights and diversity of religions or beliefs.

The [Minorities Fellowship Programme](#), a key component of the efforts of OHCHR to mainstream minority issues and strengthen the capacity of minority rights advocates, marked its twentieth anniversary in 2025.²³ In November, the Programme welcomed 19 fellows from seventeen countries, offering them the opportunity to deepen their understanding of United Nations human rights instruments and enhance their advocacy skills to better use international human rights standards and mechanisms. The Programme included a one-week preparatory course in Bolzano/Bozen, Italy, organized jointly with the Institute for Minority Rights at Eurac Research. The fellows also participated in the Forum on Minority Issues.

Publications:

- *#Faith4Rights toolkit*:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/faith4rights-toolkit>
- *Report and outlook on “Faith for Rights”*:
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/press/Faith4Rights.pdf>
- *Peer-to-peer learning and action points from the sixth annual meeting (13-17 October 2025)*:
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-agenda-2025.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-agenda-2025.pdf>

²² [A/HRC/40/58](#), annex I, para. 12.

²³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/fellowship-programmes/minorities-fellowship-programme>



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC)

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC) engages systematically with religious communities and faith-based organizations, given their key role in tackling violence against children.

In 2025, the Special Representative continued her engagements with religious and traditional leaders and faith-based organizations at the regional, national, and local levels, who serve as key partners in promoting positive social norms and child safeguarding. She continued to document and share positive examples of efforts by religious and traditional leaders and organizations to advance the protection of children from violence, including the activities of the Adyan Foundation (Lebanon), Rabita Mohamadia des Oulémas (Morocco), the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, the Gambia Supreme Islamic Council, the Conseil National des Eglises Pentecôtistes Evangéliques et de Réveil, the Alliance Chrétienne and the Conseil Supérieur des Affaires Islamiques (Gabon), the House of Chiefs (Zambia), the Association of Wives of Traditional Rulers (Nigeria), the traditional leaders of 42 villages led by Kgosi Gaboilelwe Moroka (South Africa), the Pacific Conference of Churches (Fiji) and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (Holy See).

Within the context of the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence Against Children, under the auspices of the Office of the Special Representative, encompassing 51 countries and expanding, the Special Representative continues stressing the important role of faith communities in strengthening children's protection and wellbeing. Strengthened collaboration with and among Member States, the United Nations system, the private sector, civil society, including faith-based organizations, academia, as well as children and survivors, is one of the Alliance's key pillars. Throughout 2025, the Special Representative, together with partners, convened six regional gatherings of Pathfinding Countries to further reinforce these partnerships and collective action.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Executive Summary

This report presents UNDP's 2025 inputs to the annual report of the UN Interagency Task Force (IATF) on Religion and Sustainable Development. It documents UNDP's faith-sensitive programming across 16 country offices, highlights key global and regional initiatives, and reflects on emerging trends at the intersection of religion, peace, and sustainable development.

In 2025, UNDP's engagement with religious actors and faith-based organizations deepened across geographic and thematic dimensions. Seven cross-cutting trends define the year's country portfolio: the institutionalization of insider mediation with religious leaders; the rising leadership of women of faith in peacebuilding; the expansion of youth-centred prevention programming; the integration of religious leaders into governance and rule-of-law processes; the use of digital counter-narratives in partnership with faith actors; the integration of climate–peace–security programming with faith actors; and the use of faith-based modalities in trauma healing and psychosocial support. Together, these trends reflect a strategic shift from ad hoc faith engagement to structured, evidence-based partnerships embedded in UNDP's governance, crisis resilience, and sustainable development programming.

The 16 reporting countries — Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Iraq, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Togo, Benin, and Uzbekistan — span Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia. At the global level, UNDP consolidated its leadership through the new Strategic Plan 2026–2029, the 11th Annual Religion and Faith Symposium, the CSW69/Beijing+30 Roundtable on Women of Faith, and substantive contributions to the Secretary-General's biennial report on interreligious dialogue. The Tadamon Programme and the Uganda Ebola Response further demonstrate the breadth of UNDP's global faith-sensitive work.

This document is intended for use by UNDP's Country Offices, Regional Bureaux, and global partners as both a reporting instrument and a knowledge resource to inform programming decisions and advocacy priorities in the year ahead.

Acronyms

- ADR** – Alternative Dispute Resolution
- AJS** – Alternative Justice Systems
- CCL** – Christian Council of Lesotho
- COTAL** – Council of Traditional Authority Leaders
- CSM** – Climate Security Mechanism
- CSO** – Civil Society Organization
- DHL** – Decentralization, Human Rights and Local Governance
- EFF** – Evangelical Fellowship of Fiji
- FBO** – Faith-Based Organization
- FCDO** – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
- FoRB** – Freedom of Religion or Belief
- GFFO** – German Federal Foreign Office
- HDR** – Human Development Report
- IATF** – Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development
- ICD** – Intercultural Dialogue
- IRCU** – Inter-Religious Council of Uganda
- IRD** – Interreligious Dialogue
- IRRF** – Integrated Results and Resources Framework
- IsDB** – Islamic Development Bank
- ISFD** – Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development
- ISIL** – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
- JISRA** – Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action
- KAICIID** – King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue
- KOICA** – Korea International Cooperation Agency
- LCBC** – Lake Chad Basin Commission
- MFAC** – Multi-Faith Advisory Council
- MHPSS** – Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- MODELI** – Inclusive Local Development Model
- NSPCVE** – National Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
- OHCHR** – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- OIC** – Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
- ONSA** – Office of the National Security Advisor

PaRD – International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development
PARLER – Alternative Accountability Project to Combat Radical Extremism
PBF – Peacebuilding Fund
PERCH – Promoting Economic Resilience for the Host Community
PNLEVT – National Policy for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism
PROSMED – Support Programme for the Stabilization of Mali and the Reinforcement of the Rule of Law
PVE – Prevention of Violent Extremism
PVEC – Prevention of Violent Extremism and Countering
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
SP – Strategic Plan
UCDP – Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
USCIRF – United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
WPS – Women, Peace and Security

The Global Landscape: Faith, Peace, and Development

Religion continues to shape the lives and identities of the vast majority of the world's population. As of 2020, approximately 5.9 billion people — roughly three-quarters of the global population — identified with a religious tradition (Pew Research Center, 2025). In societies where faith institutions provide education, healthcare, social protection, and moral authority, religious leaders and faith-based organizations remain among the most trusted actors at the community level. This makes faith a foundational dimension of development, governance, and peacebuilding — not a peripheral one.

Yet the global environment in which faith actors operate has become markedly more strained. In 2024, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program recorded 61 active state-based conflicts — the highest number since systematic tracking began in 1946 — with 11 reaching the threshold of war (Source: UCDP, June 2025). Civilian deaths in conflict surged by 40 per cent, with the UN Human Rights Office documenting at least 48,384 individuals killed, most of them civilians (Source: OHCHR, June 2025). Nine of the ten countries with the lowest human development indicators remained in conflict. These figures reflect a global crisis in which development gains are being reversed by violence on a scale not seen in decades.

Simultaneously, restrictions on religious freedom have reached peak levels globally. The Pew Research Center's Government Restrictions Index stood at its highest recorded level maintaining peak levels as of 2022, the most recently available year of data, with both government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion trending upward across multiple regions (Source: Pew Research Center, December 2024). The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended 16 countries for designation as Countries of Particular Concern in its 2025 Annual Report, and documented emerging trends including increased targeting of Muslims in Europe, rising antisemitism, and the use of artificial intelligence and new technologies to limit freedom of religion or belief (Source: USCIRF, March 2025). Seven non-state actors were recommended for redesignation as Entities of Particular Concern for severe religious freedom violations, including al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and ISWAP — groups operating in several countries where UNDP has active programming.

Digital technologies are adding a new dimension to these challenges. The Human Development Report 2025 warned that artificial intelligence systems can reinforce, amplify,

and reconfigure inequalities, potentially generating new forms of discrimination across racial, ethnic, and religious lines (Source: UNDP HDR, 2025). Hate speech, disinformation, and the algorithmic amplification of polarizing content transcend geographical boundaries and create vectors for radicalization that outpace traditional prevention tools. At the same time, digital platforms offer new possibilities for counter-narrative campaigns, religious literacy, and youth-led peacebuilding, as several UNDP Country Offices have demonstrated.

The normative framework for engaging faith actors in peace and development has continued to strengthen. The Secretary-General's 2025 report on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/80/501) drew on inputs from 26 United Nations entities and identified several urgent priorities: mobilizing religious leaders as partners in conflict prevention and mediation; preventing the weaponization of religion; ensuring women's leadership in faith-based peacebuilding; strengthening religious education as a tool for building cultures of peace; and embedding intercultural perspectives in emerging technology governance (Source: A/80/501, October 2025). The Fez Plan of Action on the Role of Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence, now in its eighth year of implementation, continues to provide a framework for faith-based prevention of hate speech and atrocity crimes. The Pact for the Future, adopted at the 2024 Summit of the Future, committed Member States to promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue to strengthen social cohesion and counter religious hatred. The designation of 2025 as the International Year of Peace and Trust (A/RES/78/256) provided additional normative momentum for faith-sensitive approaches to peace.

Evidence from UNDP's own research reinforces the operational case for engaging faith actors. The Journey to Extremism in Africa study found that six or more years of quality religious schooling reduces the likelihood of an individual joining a violent extremist group by as much as 32 per cent — a powerful reminder that religious education, when supported effectively, is itself a resource for prevention (Source: UNDP, 2023). Conversely, the misuse of religious authority and the manipulation of grievances continue to serve as pathways to recruitment, particularly among young people who experience marginalization and a lack of belonging.

Within this landscape, UNDP's programming on faith, peacebuilding, and development is positioned at the intersection of the most pressing global challenges: armed conflict at historic levels, restrictions on religious freedom at their peak, digital disruption outpacing governance, and a growing body of evidence that faith actors are not peripheral to the

solution but central to it. The country-level work reported in this document demonstrates how UNDP is translating these global imperatives into concrete, context-rooted programming.

What We Are Learning: Trends Across UNDP's Country Portfolio

This section synthesizes key patterns emerging from the 16 country reports submitted for 2025. Each thematic finding below is drawn from cross-country analysis and illustrated with specific country examples. Full country-level accounts are provided in the National section.

In 2025, sixteen UNDP Country Offices reported on their engagement with faith-based organizations, religious leaders, and women of faith across Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia. Drawing exclusively from these reports — from Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Iraq, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uzbekistan — several cross-cutting trends emerge that reflect both the maturation of UNDP's approach and the evolving demands of the contexts in which it operates.

Insider mediation is consolidating as a signature UNDP methodology. Across six reporting countries, UNDP has invested in training trusted community members — particularly religious leaders and elders — as insider mediators who resolve disputes and prevent escalation from within their own societies. In Pakistan, 32 insider mediators were deployed following communal violence in Punjab. In Lesotho, the Christian Council of Lesotho trained community mediators with intentional gender balance (50 per cent women, 30 per cent youth). In Somalia, a network of religious scholars operates across 16 districts and has facilitated the reintegration of former members of violent extremist groups. In Kenya, 41 institutions including 15 faith-based organizations were strengthened as insider mediators. In Iraq, 52 religious leaders from multiple faith traditions engaged in dialogue on countering radicalization. In South Sudan, the Conference of the Council of Traditional Authority Leaders (COTAL) brought together traditional and religious leaders for community-driven peacebuilding. This consistent pattern across diverse settings suggests that insider mediation is not a one-off intervention but an emerging model — one that recognizes that legitimacy and trust are built from within, and that religious institutions possess social capital that development actors can catalyze but cannot replicate. This aligns directly with UNDP's Strategic Plan 2026–2029, Outcome 2 (Effective Governance) and Outcome 3 (Crisis Resilience).

Women of faith are moving from participants to leaders in peacebuilding. One of the most significant patterns across the 2025 portfolio is the strategic positioning of women from faith communities as primary actors in conflict prevention and reconciliation. In Iraq, 26 women religious leaders from eight faith traditions — including Yazidi, Sunni, Shia, Christian, Kakai, Turkmen, Assyrian, and Mandaean — designed and independently implemented five women-led interfaith dialogue initiatives reaching over 200 community members. In Ghana, 645 women drawn from religious organizations, including Queen Mothers, the Christian Mothers' Association, the Catholic Women's Association, Ahmadiyya Muslim Women, the Coalition of Muslim Ladies, Fulbe Women, and the Dressmakers Association, were trained in mediation, early warning, and conflict resolution. In Kenya, 765 women of faith were positioned as trusted mediators through Alternative Justice Systems, and women's participation in peacebuilding and PVE increased from 29 per cent to 45 per cent over the reporting period. In Pakistan, programming explicitly embedded the Women, Peace and Security agenda (UNSCR 1325) into interfaith work. In Mali, a podcast on the role of religious women's associations in preventing extremism reached 43,999 views. These initiatives demonstrate that gender-responsive faith engagement is not an add-on but a strategic accelerator, consistent with the Gender Equality accelerator in the IRRF 2026–2029.

Youth engagement is taking increasingly diversified forms. Youth programming in 2025 ranged from digital literacy to institutional prevention and direct peacebuilding participation. In Mali, 1,436 young people were reached through madrasa and Christian school sessions on preventing violent extremism, supported by 105 teachers trained as trainers of trainers. In Kenya, a National Interfaith Youth Summit convened 150 youth participants who produced a youth manifesto and policy brief, established a national interfaith youth working group, and proposed a digital hub for youth engagement. Amani (Peace) Clubs were set up in secondary schools, training 30 teachers and engaging 130 students in dialogue on conflict resolution. In Uzbekistan, training sessions implemented with the International Islamic Academy focused on critical thinking, media literacy, and countering extremist narratives. In Ghana, 30 journalists, bloggers, and religious leaders were trained on hate speech, disinformation, and the misuse of artificial intelligence. These approaches reflect a strategic understanding that effective youth engagement must address both the push factors (marginalization, lack of belonging) and pull factors (radical narratives, digital manipulation) of violent extremism, aligned with UNDP's emphasis on meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding under the Strategic Plan.

Religious leaders are being embedded in local governance and development — not just dialogue. Several Country Offices in 2025 moved beyond convening dialogue events to structurally integrating religious leaders and faith institutions into development governance. In Côte d'Ivoire, the MODELI approach positioned religious leaders and traditional chiefs as co-managers of 36 community infrastructure projects — schools, health centers, markets, and solar-powered pumps — across four northern regions, transforming their role from consultees into co-responsible development actors. In Ethiopia, a multi-religious strategic visioning platform convened diverse faith institutions to shape long-term peacebuilding priorities. In Fiji, a four-day interfaith conference brought together over 70 faith leaders — including 50 from Evangelical Fellowship of Fiji (EFF) member churches across 14 provinces and over 20 from other faith communities, including the Archdiocese of Suva, the Anglican Church of Fiji, the Sanatan Dharam Pratinidhi Sabha, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, and the Fiji Muslim League. In Chad, the Climate Security Mechanism engaged religious and traditional authorities in the Lake Chad Basin to recommend establishing a cross-border Traditional and Religious Leaders Forum across five Member States. These examples signal a shift from episodic engagement to institutional integration — treating faith actors as part of the governance architecture, not parallel to it. This aligns with Outcome 2 (Effective Governance) and the Integrated Output C.1 on strengthening inclusive institutions.

Religious literacy and counter-narrative programming are gaining operational depth. Moving beyond awareness-raising, several offices developed structured tools and curricula to build religious literacy as a prevention strategy. Mali distributed 1,000 copies of a preaching guide designed to counter extremist narratives and trained 135 religious leaders on adapting sermons for PVE. Uzbekistan's PVE-2 programme partnered with the International Islamic Academy to strengthen theological foundations for coexistence. Pakistan conducted evidence-based research on hate speech and digital polarization to inform policy dialogue. Ghana's programming addressed the intersection of faith, media literacy, and artificial intelligence — a frontier issue highlighted in both the Human Development Report 2025 and the Secretary-General's report (A/80/501). These initiatives recognize that religious knowledge, properly understood and communicated, is itself a resource for peace, and that the digital information environment requires new forms of counter-narrative literacy.

The climate–peace–security–faith nexus is emerging as a new frontier. Chad's engagement with the Climate Security Mechanism represents an important development: the deliberate integration of religious and traditional authorities into climate-related conflict

prevention. Through consultations in the Lake Chad Basin, the programme confirmed the continued effectiveness of customary dispute resolution mechanisms in managing intercommunal tensions linked to climate pressures and natural resource competition and recommended a structured regional forum for cross-border preventive diplomacy. While only one country reported on this intersection, the underlying logic — that faith leaders' moral authority and community reach make them natural partners for climate adaptation and resource-sharing governance — has potential applications across the portfolio and aligns with Outcome 4 (Healthy Planet) and Outcome 3 (Crisis Resilience) of the Strategic Plan.

Trauma healing through faith-based modalities is recognized as a complement to clinical approaches. In conflict-affected and post-conflict settings, two offices explicitly deployed healing approaches that combine clinical and spiritual frameworks. In Lesotho, the Christian Council led prayer-based trauma healing sessions reaching 320 people, followed by individual counselling. In Pakistan, psychosocial support reached 1,003 survivors of communal violence in Punjab. These programmes recognize that in deeply religious societies, healings that honour spiritual frameworks are more culturally resonant and sustainable than purely clinical models — a critical insight for UNDP's growing work on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) across crisis and post-crisis settings.

Looking ahead: patterns, gaps, and emerging questions. Across the 16 reporting countries, the data reveals several structural patterns. The most commonly reported theme is insider mediation, appearing in six countries, followed by women-of-faith engagement (five countries), youth and PVE (four countries), and religious leaders in governance (four countries). Geographically, the portfolio is concentrated in Africa (seven countries) and includes representation from the Arab States (Iraq), Asia and the Pacific (Fiji, Pakistan), and Europe and Central Asia (Uzbekistan). Gaps remain: no dedicated reporting on FoRB mainstreaming emerged from country-level inputs, and the intersections of faith engagement with Islamic finance, digital governance, and climate adaptation remain at an early stage. As UNDP implements its Strategic Plan 2026–2029, which frames development as foresight, prevention, and responsibility, the 2025 country portfolio suggests that faith-based engagement is moving from a niche programming area to a cross-cutting dimension of UNDP's work on governance, crisis resilience, prosperity, and environmental sustainability.

UNDP's Global Work

In 2025, UNDP consolidated its position as a convener, thought leader, and operational partner on faith, inclusion, and peacebuilding at the global level. The following highlights reflect headquarters-level achievements in policy, partnerships, and strategic positioning.

New Strategic Plan 2026–2029. The UNDP Strategic Plan 2026–2029, approved by the Executive Board, positions UNDP's development offer around four strategic outcomes — prosperity for all, effective governance, crisis resilience, and healthy planet — powered by three accelerators: digital and artificial intelligence transformation, gender equality, and sustainable finance. Engagement with faith-based organizations and religious leaders is woven across these objectives, particularly under effective governance (through insider mediation, intercultural dialogue, and ForB mainstreaming), crisis resilience (through PVE, social cohesion, and MHPSS), and prosperity for all (through Islamic finance and community-level service delivery). The Plan's framing of development as "foresight, not hindsight; prevention, not repair; responsibility, not reaction" provides a strategic rationale for deepening faith-based engagement as an integral part of UNDP's prevention mandate.

11th Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs (April 2025). Under the theme "The Future is Upon Us: What Now?", the 11th Annual Symposium brought together senior UN leaders, faith-based organizations, religious leaders, civil society, and Member States. Panel discussions focused on building peace in the midst of conflict, amplifying the role of faith and civil society actors in multilateral solutions, and the implications of artificial intelligence for equity and exclusion. UNDP was represented by Nika Saeedi, UNDP Global Lead on MHPSS and Focal Point on Religion and Development.

CSW69/Beijing+30 Roundtable (March 2025). UNDP co-organized a roundtable on "Women of Faith Advancing the Beijing Declaration," in partnership with JISRA. ASG Shoko Noda delivered opening remarks. The event highlighted best practices from UNDP's programming and elevated the voices of women religious leaders as agents of development and peace, contributing to the broader Beijing+30 agenda on women's leadership.

Contribution to the Secretary-General's Report (A/80/501). UNDP submitted substantive inputs to the Secretary-General's biennial report on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. The report, issued in October 2025 and

drawing on contributions from 26 United Nations entities, noted that UNDP integrated interreligious and intercultural dialogue into its programming across 29 countries, equipping women religious leaders to act as mediators, justice advocates and interfaith conveners. It highlighted UNDP's support for insider mediators, clerics and interfaith networks in countering hate speech, misinformation and radicalization across multiple countries. It also recognized UNDP-supported youth-led initiatives engaging over 10,000 young people in artistic, civic and digital activities to challenge polarization.

IATF Leadership and Global Partnerships. UNDP maintained its active role within the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development, co-chaired by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the Office on Genocide Prevention (OSAPG), and UNFPA. UNDP continued to contribute to strategic reflection through partnerships with the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, and the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC), which convenes 36 faith-based organizations representing a broad spectrum of religious traditions.

Tadamon Programme. UNDP continued its implementation of the Tadamon Programme, funded by the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development and managed by the Islamic Development Bank, which has supported over 3,500 registered civil society organizations across 57 OIC Member States through capacity building, crowdfunding acceleration, and visibility platforms.

Uganda Ebola Response (January 2025). UNDP Uganda partnered with the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) and the Buganda Kingdom to mobilize communities for the prevention and control of the Sudan Ebola Virus Disease outbreak. The outbreak was contained within 86 days, demonstrating the effectiveness of faith-based partnerships in health emergencies and the potential for faith-based engagement to extend beyond peacebuilding into health, resilience, and crisis response.

The global initiatives described above are implemented and localized through UNDP's regional hubs, which provide coordination, evidence generation, and capacity support to country offices. The following section presents highlights from the Africa and Arab States regional programmes.

Regional

Africa and Arab States

UNDP continued to invest in faith-sensitive peacebuilding and PVE, insider mediation, and social cohesion programming across fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Learning exchange, knowledge sharing and regional policy coherence were strengthened through structured regional dialogues and evidence exchange, with the sub-regional PVE Community of Practice remaining operational as a platform for sustained engagement among civil society, research institutions, religious leaders and faith-based organizations, youth and women networks and academic actors.

In East Africa, under the Peacebuilding and PVE Programme, Sub-regional analysis of violent extremism (VE), hate speech, and misinformation/disinformation with digital mapping activities is initiated and the final report is expected in the 1st quarter of 2026. This assessment will guide the development of both local and national communication strategies, including the creation of alternative narratives and peace messaging in partnership with religious leaders and faith-based organizations/institutions. Additionally, it will help enhance and inform conflict Early Warning Early Response (EWER) mechanisms at local, national, and regional levels, improving their ability to anticipate, detect, and counter VE narratives, hate speech, and misinformation/disinformation. Religious leaders have been key members of the sub-regional PVE Community of Practice in East Africa and contributed to online and in-person facilitated sessions and workshops by sharing knowledge and exchanging lessons learned for creating common messages to promote peace and tolerance. A Sub-regional Religious Leaders Platforms establishment was initiated in partnership with IGAD ICEPCVE and Global Peace Foundation. The Platform will provide a safe space for exchange and dialogue on peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism.

The following national entries provide detailed accounts of UNDP's faith-sensitive programming in each of the 16 reporting countries, illustrating the diversity of approaches, partnerships, and outcomes achieved at the country level in 2025.

Portfolio at a Glance: 16 Reporting Countries (2025)

Country	Primary Themes	Key Numbers / Highlights
Benin	PVE / Counter-narratives	59 leaders trained; 1,708 reached directly; 850,000 indirectly via radio
Chad	Climate–Peace–Security	Religious and traditional leaders engaged across LCBC member states
Côte d'Ivoire	Social cohesion / Governance / ER	50+ religious leaders in dialogue; 1,645 in political dialogue; 36 social infrastructures built
Ethiopia	Peacebuilding / Social cohesion	Strategic visioning platform with religious institutions and media
Fiji	Interfaith dialogue	4-day interfaith dialogue (Feb 2025); EFF, UN Women, OHCHR
Ghana	Women's empowerment / PVE	645 individuals engaged (579 female); religious and FBO networks
Iraq	Women of faith / IRD / Governance	26 women in workshop; 5 women-led dialogue initiatives; 200+ participants
Kenya	PVE / Women of faith / Youth	23,506 beneficiaries; 765 women as mediators; 150-person youth summit
Lesotho	Insider mediation / Trauma healing	320 people in healing sessions; community insider mediators trained
Mali	PVE / Religious literacy / Youth	1,436 youth reached; 135 religious leaders trained; 50 radio programs; 43,999 podcast views
Pakistan	PVE / Interfaith / Minority rights	244 stakeholders engaged; 1,003 psychosocial support; 1,400+ job fair participants
Somalia	Insider mediation / PVE	36 former VE members reintegrated; 200+ Islamic scholars as mediators; 16 districts
South Sudan	Traditional/religious leaders / DDR	National COTAL conference, Juba (Nov 2025); traditional and religious leaders nationwide
Syria	Interfaith dialogue / Social cohesion	800+ participants; 7 community peace initiatives; 'Dialogue for Peace', Homs

Togo	PVE / Local governance	72 traditional chiefs; ~100 religious leaders active in CLPLEV committees
Uzbekistan	PVE / Religious literacy / Youth	Training on critical thinking, spiritual resilience, and media literacy

National

Benin

In Benin, 59 community and religious leaders, including 10 women, had their capacities strengthened to promote positive narratives aimed at preventing radicalization and violent extremism in four at-risk municipalities in northern Benin. A community action plan and a roadmap for raising awareness among worshippers and communities were developed, and a mechanism to monitor implementation was established. In addition, four groups of “peace messengers,” composed of women, youth, community leaders, religious leaders, and journalists, were established and reached 1,708 people directly through awareness-raising activities (including 508 women) and, according to estimates, 850,000 people indirectly through community radio stations and digital platforms. Finally, four community radio stations were equipped to produce and broadcast positive stories rooted in local reality, aimed at countering hate speech and misinformation.

Chad

Climate, Peace, and Security: Engagement with Religious and Traditional Authorities. The Climate Security Mechanism (CSM), through the Climate Peace and Security Adviser supporting UNDP Chad and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), engaged religious and traditional authorities to identify sustainable solutions to climate-related conflicts and strengthen social cohesion across vulnerable communities in the Lake Chad Basin.

Recognizing the influence and legitimacy of these leaders within local governance systems, the consultations emphasized the strategic value of indigenous knowledge and faith-based approaches in conflict prevention, mediation, and peaceful resource-sharing. Customary dispute resolution mechanisms were confirmed as remaining effective in managing intercommunal tensions, particularly those linked to climate pressures and natural resource competition.

A key outcome was the recommendation to establish a Lake Chad Basin Traditional and Religious Leaders Forum as a structured regional platform with Traditional Leaders from the LCBC Member States (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Central African Republic). The Forum would enhance coordination, promote preventive diplomacy, support community-level early warning, and facilitate cross-border dialogue, while ensuring that locally grounded perspectives inform regional climate–peace–security processes.

Côte d’Ivoire

In 2025, the UNDP Country Office in **Côte d’Ivoire** intensified its support to the Government in mobilizing and engaging religious actors alongside youth and women, to strengthen sustainable development through social cohesion, peace, and stability initiatives.

Social Cohesion, Peace, and Stability. Over a three-month period, interactive dialogues organized through six community media outlets in the Bounkani and Tchologo regions in northern Côte d’Ivoire mobilized more than 50 religious leaders and 352 youth and women. These exchanges on land disputes, herder–farmer conflicts, water management, and traditional chieftaincy strengthened mutual understanding and helped ease local tensions. In parallel, support for political dialogues in 14 localities across ten regions and the district of Abidjan brought together 1,645 participants, including 72 religious leaders. These meetings contributed to building a climate of trust and supporting more peaceful elections.

Strengthening Basic Social Infrastructure. Through the MODEL I approach (Inclusive Local Development Model), supported by Japan, religious leaders and traditional chiefs were systematically involved in identifying needs, selecting sites, and managing infrastructure. Thirty-six social infrastructure projects were constructed — including schools, health centers, youth centers, markets, traditional chieftaincies, and solar-powered pumps — across four northern regions. This participatory approach consolidated social cohesion and improved accountability at the community level, transforming religious leaders from consultees into co-managers of local development.

Socio-Economic Resilience. Under the PERCH project (Promoting Economic Resilience for the Host Community), funded by the United States, religious leaders played a decisive role in identifying and monitoring beneficiaries in Bounkani and Tchologo. Sixty youth received training in technical trades (plumbing, carpentry, electricity, and metalwork) and 12 women’s groups established cassava and shea butter processing units. Nearly 80 per cent of

beneficiaries reported a direct improvement in their economic resilience, demonstrating the central role of religious communities in preventing extremism risks and promoting inclusive local development.

Contribution to the SDGs. These initiatives contributed significantly to SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 16, consolidating the foundations for lasting peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire.

Ethiopia

UNDP Ethiopia Country Office facilitated a platform bringing together representatives of various religious institutions along with the media for a strategic visioning exercise on peace. The platform aimed to stimulate future-oriented dialogue and promote tangible actions for peacebuilding in Ethiopia.



Discussions focused on key peace and social cohesion challenges in Ethiopia and the role of religious narratives in either easing or aggravating tensions. The Religious representatives also reflected on signs of hope, identified shared spiritual values to guide a collective peace vision, and highlighted unifying historical and religious traditions that should inspire future actions.

Looking ahead, the religious representatives discussed their vision of a peaceful Ethiopia in the short, medium, and long term, the joint role of religious institutions in shaping a culture of peace, lessons drawn from each other's experiences, and practical recommendations for peacebuilding. They also identified relevant local actors, capacities, and networks necessary to advance this vision.

The deliberations shaped a common strategic direction and identified priority areas that will inform the design of future interventions aimed at strengthening collaborative, preventive, and values-based peacebuilding efforts in Ethiopia, with active engagement of religious institutions. It also revealed that when provided with opportunities, diverse

constituencies and citizens, despite differences in background, culture, religion, and values, can identify unifying principles and shared visions for lasting peace in Ethiopia.

Fiji

Interfaith Dialogue for Social Cohesion. From 11 to 14 February 2025, the UNDP Pacific Office, in partnership with the Evangelical Fellowship of Fiji (EFF), UN Women, and OHCHR, hosted a four-day interfaith dialogue conference and retreat in Narewa, Nadi, under the UN Social Cohesion Project. The event brought together over 70 faith leaders, including 50 from EFF member churches across Fiji's 14 provinces and over 20 from other faith communities, including representatives from the Archdiocese of Suva, the Anglican Church of Fiji, the Sanatan Dharam Pratinidhi Sabha, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, and the Fiji Muslim League. The newly appointed Chairperson of the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission attended the opening ceremony. Thematic discussions covered social cohesion, social development, family unity, and the role of women in peacebuilding, with UN Women leading sessions on women's leadership in reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts.

Ghana

Under the FW Women project, 645 individuals (579 females and 66 males) drawn from religious and faith – based organizations, including Queen Mothers, the Christian Mothers' Association, the Catholic Women's Association, Ahmadiyya Muslim Women, the Coalition of Muslim Ladies, Fulbe Women, the Dressmakers Association across West Gonja and Lambussie districts received training in mediation, early warning, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and mentorship, to boost their confidence and encourage participation in local governance, decision-making, and peacebuilding initiatives at the community level. Following the capacity enhancement, beneficiary women's groups further engaged chiefs and opinion leaders across targeted communities (Chebogo, Hiinteng, Keleguang, and Chonuor) in Lambussie-Kani district, and (Larabanga, Busunu, Nabori, Tailorpe, Yipala, Mempeasem, Bonyanto, and Damongo) in West Gonja municipality, to address ethnic and land-related disputes while strengthening collaboration for sustainable peace.

UNDP Ghana, with funding from the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), enhanced the knowledge of journalists, online bloggers, and religious leaders across Northern Ghana on hate speech, dis/misinformation, fact – checking and conflict – sensitive reporting to promote peace. The 30 (18 male and 12 female) journalists, online bloggers,

religious leaders, community influencers across the Northern were taken through various topics including: conflict – sensitivity, peace journalism, Preventing violent extremism, triggers of violence, early warning signs, information disorder, the misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to disinform public, and approaches to fact – checking. Through the training, beneficiary journalists and religious leaders developed action plans to sensitize their peers to promote peacebuilding and social cohesion in communities. For instance, Radio Grin and religious clerics, in consultation with the Chief of Nyankpala in Tamale, have successfully organized a durbar to sensitize community members on violent extremism and information disorders.

These activities were complemented by radio discussions, where the panellists, including religious leaders, advised youth and students in tertiary institutions not to resort to force or violence to achieve their aspirations or channel their grievances; adding that the fight against violent extremism is a collective responsibility. The panellists also highlighted behavioural change, sudden isolation, converting to new religion, feeling persecuted, sudden hatred, exposure to extremist ideology, as warning signs that may suggest that an individual or group of individuals are possibly in the process of being radicalized by extremists. **Sheikh Sulemana**, one of the panellists and an Islamic cleric, clarified that Islam promotes peace and condemns violence, correcting misconceptions associating Islam with terrorism.

Iraq

In 2025, **UNDP Iraq** continued to embed faith-based engagement across its flagship Iraq Social Cohesion Programme (2021–2025), supported by the Governments of Denmark and Germany (GFFO). This initiative holistically promotes social cohesion through intercommunal dialogue, peacebuilding leadership, and inclusive engagement across ethnic and religious groups—particularly in areas most impacted by the conflict with ISIL.

UNDP advanced its engagement with women faith-based peacebuilders across Iraq through a dedicated second phase of the Women Religious Peacebuilding Workshop, convening 26 Iraqi women from diverse religious backgrounds (including Yazidi, Sunni, Shia, Christian, Kakai, Turkmen, Assyrian, and Mandaean backgrounds), alongside women civil society activists and faith actors from multiple locations across the country. The workshop aimed to strengthen women’s leadership in interfaith dialogue and peace processes, recognizing the critical role women play in promoting social cohesion and preventing community-level tensions.

Sessions focused on enhancing participants’ capacities to lead dialogue initiatives, promote a culture of peace, and foster mutual understanding across religious and social divides. Emphasis was placed on women’s contributions to community mediation, countering harmful narratives, and expanding inclusive participation in peacebuilding spaces.

As a direct outcome, participants collectively designed five women-led interfaith dialogue initiatives, which they independently planned and implemented. These initiatives reached over 200 participants, including 109 women, and were rolled out across Sulaimaniyah, Duhok, Kirkuk, Hamdaniya (Ninewa), and Baquba (Diyala). The dialogues, facilitated by the women faith-based peacebuilders addressed themes of peaceful coexistence, countering hate speech, and strengthening engagement between women, youth, and religious leaders.

Complementing these activities, the workshop facilitated the establishment of new communication and collaboration channels between women, youth actors, and religious leaders. It also generated practical recommendations aimed at enhancing women’s role in local decision-making processes and strengthening partnerships between faith actors and community peacebuilding structures.

UNDP Iraq also continued its engagement with the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA) on promoting national-level dialogue between religious leaders. In partnership with ONSA’s National Committee on the Implementation of the Strategy to Combat Violent Extremism, UNDP Iraq brought together 52 religious leaders from across Iraq and representing multiple faiths, together with government representatives, for a dialogue on identifying good practices and actionable entry points to mobilize religious leadership in countering radicalization and promoting community cohesion.



Kenya

UNDP Kenya advanced the leadership of 765 women of faith across Kisumu, Marsabit,

and Kilifi counties, positioning them as trusted mediators in community-level dispute resolution through Alternative Justice Systems (AJS).

In partnership with KOICA, UNDP enhanced capacities of 23,506 beneficiaries (13,429 male; 10,077 female), including 8,111 youth (4,136 male, 3,975 female) and 8 persons with disabilities (4 male, 4 female) towards promoting peace messaging and alternative narratives against violent extremism, establishing "*Amani*" (Peace) Clubs in three secondary schools in Taita Taveta County. A total of 30 teachers (12 female, 18 male) were trained in peace education and violent extremism awareness, while 130 students (71 male, 59 female, including 7 students with disabilities) benefited from dialogues on conflict resolution and civic responsibility.

UNDP Kenya also convened a National Interfaith Youth Summit²⁴ in Nairobi with 150 youth participants (88 female, 62 male) from Nairobi, Kilifi, Kisumu, and Marsabit. The summit produced a youth manifesto and policy brief with actionable recommendations for policymakers and religious leaders. It also led to the establishment of a national interfaith youth working group on peace and security to monitor implementation, the initiation of county-level action plans, and the proposal of a digital hub to institutionalize youth engagement nationwide.

Under the UNDP–KOICA partnership on Peacebuilding and Preventing Violent Extremism in East Africa, UNDP Kenya strengthened the capacity of 41 institutions (15 faith-based organizations, 11 state actors, 15 civil society organizations) to provide alternative counter-narratives and act as insider mediators. As a result, women's participation in peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism increased from 29% in April 2025 to 45% in December 2025, reflecting improved gender inclusion in faith-based peacebuilding efforts. In partnership with the KOICA, UNDP strengthened the capacity and coordination of faith-based organizations in Nairobi, Marsabit, Kilifi, and Kisumu counties through four high-impact consultative meetings. A total of 985 beneficiaries (462 female, 523 male), including 363 youth (170 female, 213 male), also participated in interfaith and intergenerational peace dialogues. Participants validated inclusive counter-narratives aligned with the updated National Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NSPCVE) and facilitated peace education in conflict-prone areas, such as the Sondu boundary, North Horr, and IDP camps in Marsabit.

²⁴ https://x.com/irck_info/status/1963682918561087847.

Lesotho

UNDP's long-standing support to the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL) continues to thrive under the current peacebuilding project on Supporting Community-driven Violence Reduction and Sustainable Peace in Lesotho. In 2025, CCL led the implementation of community-wide system trauma healing and psychosocial support to victims of violence, especially women and youth in the districts of Maseru, Mafeteng, and Mokhotlong. This activity was introduced through joint prayer sessions that targeted the communities, especially the victims of violence, and law enforcement agencies. The prayer sessions were also a precursor to the one-on-one counselling sessions intended to provide intimate healing mechanism to the victims. About 320 people, comprising women and youth, were reached through the prayer sessions helping the participants to be receptive to the preached reconciliation message leading to counselling sessions. Positive messages of peace shared by CCL, the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS), and District Administrators (DAs) reassured the participants of their joint commitment to overcome violence and crime (see: Report on Mafeteng Prayer Services, 2025)

With support from UNDP, CCL also led the identification of community members to be capacitated as insider mediators, dialogue facilitators, and community-level negotiators. The target population was 50% women, 30% youth, and 20% men. Their deployment is a vital measure towards arresting conflicts in their infancy, before they blow out of proportion. It also helps to build trust within communities through the provision of safe mediation platforms, leading to reduced acts of violence.

Mali

In 2025, the Program of Mali Stabilization Support through Strengthening the Rule of Law (PROSMED) supported activities to build community resilience to the risks of radicalization.

At the institutional level, it supported the monitoring of the implementation of the action plan of the National Policy for the Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism -PNLEVT by the ministerial departments involved in the issue, through the holding of one (1) coordination meeting organized under the leadership of the Permanent Secretariat responsible for the implementation of the PNLEVT.

Two dissemination workshops on the PNLEVT facilitated discussions on violent extremism and terrorism. In addition, 1,000 copies of a preaching guide were distributed to

serve as an essential reference for reinforcing messages of peace and tolerance through religious sermons, educational sessions, and conferences.

PROSMED also supported the implementation of the national communication strategy through the creation of regional forums for exchange among diverse stakeholders, including institutions, security forces, communities, civil society, and religious leaders. These forums strengthened institutional, operational, and community-level measures to counter violent extremism and build community resilience against radical discourse and terrorist threats.

At the community level, the following activities were organized as part of the Alternative Accountability Project to Combat Radical Extremism (PARLER):

A citizen meet-up with young people and women from religious groups brought together 95 participants, including 58 young people, 37 women from religious groups, digital influencers, and community leaders for an inclusive dialogue on the prevention of violent extremism.

Fifty radio programs were produced and broadcast to share experiences of community initiatives on the prevention of violent extremism in five localities (Bla, Ségou, Nara, Koutiala, Yorosso), bringing together 190 participants (163 men, 27 women). These programs identified 30 initiatives and raised awareness among a wide audience about the prevention of violent extremism.

135 religious leaders and 20 local authorities were trained on the guide to adapting sermons and speeches for the prevention of violent extremism (PVE).

105 teachers (85 men, 20 women) were trained as trainers of trainers (TOT) in madrasas and Christian schools on the PVE guide.

45 sessions on the preaching guide were organized by teachers from madrasas and Christian schools in five locations, reaching 1,436 young people (813 boys and 623 girls).

One podcast entitled “The role of religious women's associations in preventing extremism” was produced and broadcast in local languages. It recorded 43,999 views. This capsule highlighted the crucial role that religious women's associations play in prevention, promoting a gender-sensitive approach to conflict resolution.

Pakistan

In 2025, UNDP continued advancing peacebuilding and social cohesion in Pakistan by working closely with religious leaders to prevent violent extremism, promote interfaith harmony, and strengthen women's participation in insider mediation.

Despite a recent phase of relative stability and reduction in violent conflict, Pakistan remains vulnerable to both national instabilities and sub-regional conflicts. Overall, the Global Peace Index 2025 ranks Pakistan 144 out of 163 countries in terms of its level of peacefulness and security.

Historically, the religious minority communities in Punjab including Christians, Sikhs, and others, have borne the brunt of violence stemming from intolerance. The religious minority community in Pakistan, particularly in Punjab is vulnerable to persecution and violence that is often exacerbated by the prevalence of misinformation and hate speech that is propagated, including through social media. On 26 August 2023, violence against the Christian community in Jaranwala (District Faisalabad) led to the damage of Christian places of worship and residential spaces. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) conducted an official incident investigation into the Jaranwala attacks, documenting serious violations of minority rights when violent mob action targeted the Christian community in Punjab. The report found that false blasphemy allegations against two Christian residents triggered widespread destruction of at least 12 registered and unregistered churches and around 80 Christian homes, with 30 to 40 houses fully burnt, underscoring the disastrous consequences of misinformation and hate speech. Link to the report <https://www.nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Jaranwala-Report.pdf>

In Punjab, UNDP's "*Preventing Violent Extremism and Faith-Based Conflict in Punjab*" initiative was launched through the Decentralization, Human Rights and Local Governance (DHL) Project following a wave of communal violence in Jaranwala. The initiative focused on strengthening minority rights protection and community resilience in Jaranwala, Faisalabad, Multan, and Sargodha. The initiative was designed by drawing on its established Community Stabilization model and methodology implemented since 2017 across Pakistan.

Working in partnership with the Human Rights and Minority Affairs Department Punjab, District Administrations, Chambers of Commerce and Industries, and religious leaders from Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and Sikh communities, alongside civil society, academia, media, and national human rights institutions, UNDP addressed the root causes of communal

tensions and hate speech. The programme strengthened early warning mechanisms, promoted dialogue, and reinforced inclusive and nonviolent responses at community and institutional levels.

Institutional capacity was strengthened through targeted engagements with 244 stakeholders from provincial and district authorities, civil society, private sector platforms, and religious institutions. Participants improved their understanding of communal violence drivers and minority vulnerabilities, particularly affecting women and girls, enabling more coordinated, gender responsive, and rights-based responses.

Complementary interventions included psychosocial support for 1,003 community members, legal awareness for 556 individuals, and inclusive job fairs engaging more than 1,400 participants to promote non-discriminatory employment. Evidence-based research on hate speech and digital polarization informed policy dialogue and strengthened institutional readiness to protect minority rights and promote interfaith harmony.

To institutionalize collaboration, four Multi-Stakeholder Support Networks were established, bringing together government, law enforcement, faith leaders, academia, civil society, and the private sector. Supported by 32 trained Insider Mediators, these networks strengthened early warning, facilitated dialogue, and enabled rapid responses to emerging tensions. Trained insider mediators, particularly women, played a vital role in preventing conflict and promoting dialogue at the community level. Their engagement reflected the principles of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. UNDP Pakistan recognizes and promotes this approach as a sustainable model for inclusive, locally driven peacebuilding.

At the community level, 616 leaders and members, including women and transgender persons, were engaged through consultative meetings, focus group discussions, and awareness sessions. These activities enhanced interfaith understanding, countered discriminatory narratives, and empowered trusted community actors to prevent conflict and promote peaceful coexistence.

Interfaith solidarity was further strengthened through a knowledge exchange visit to Lahore, documented in a video showcasing shared values and peaceful coexistence. For further insight into the interfaith knowledge exchange visit and community dialogue, the video documentary can be accessed at:[[Knowledge Exchange Visit to Lahore.mp4](#)].

Somalia

UNDP Somalia, through the UN Peacebuilding Fund-supported project "Religious Scholars as Insider Mediators" (PBF/SOM/B-5) and its Prevention of Violent Extremism and Countering (PVEC) programme, continued to support the Ministry of Religious Affairs in sustaining a nationwide network of religious scholars across 16 districts. The network leverages the trust and credibility of religious leaders in peacebuilding, mediating local conflicts, and promoting the peaceful message of Islam. In 2025, the network facilitated the disengagement and reintegration of 36 former members of violent extremist groups through consensus-building, trust-building, and inclusive dialogue across political divides. The programme also supported over 200 Islamic scholars as insider mediators, equipping them with skills to counter radicalization narratives and support community-level reconciliation. This approach recognizes that religious scholars occupy a unique position of moral authority in Somali society and that their sustained engagement is essential for both immediate conflict resolution and long-term prevention.

South Sudan

Under the UNDP–KOICA partnership on Peacebuilding and Preventing Violent Extremism in East Africa, and through the BRACE4PEACE programme, the National Ministry of Peacebuilding in collaboration with UNDP organized a Conference of the Council of Traditional Authority Leaders (COTAL) in Juba on 18–19 November 2025. The conference brought together traditional and religious leaders from across South Sudan to strengthen community-driven peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism. Participants discussed the role of customary governance and faith-based authority in mediating inter-communal conflicts, promoting social cohesion, and supporting the reintegration of former combatants. The COTAL conference reinforced the strategic value of traditional and religious leadership structures as a complement to formal governance and security institutions in South Sudan's ongoing peace process.

Syria

Faith-Based Dialogue Platforms Supporting Social Cohesion in Homs, Syria

After more than fourteen years of conflict, Syria continues to face deep social fragmentation, economic hardship, and weakened trust between communities and institutions. In the city of Homs, one of the areas most affected by the conflict, civil society actors and

faith-based institutions have played a critical role in reopening spaces for dialogue and rebuilding social cohesion.

Within this context, the **Jesuit Fathers' Monastery in Homs** (دير الآباء اليسوعيين) emerged as a key faith-based partner and convener of dialogue through the UNDP-supported “*Dialogue for Peace*” initiative. The monastery served not only as a venue but also as a trusted and neutral space where civil society actors from diverse backgrounds could engage in dialogue on coexistence, reconciliation, and shared recovery.

Faith-Based Institutions as Neutral Conveners: The Jesuit Fathers' Monastery facilitated collaboration among a **consortium of civil society organizations representing diverse ethnic, social, and religious communities**, including long-term residents of Homs and newly arrived civil society actors from Idleb. This collaboration itself became an important step toward rebuilding trust across communities that had been divided by years of conflict, displacement, and competing narratives.

The inclusion of civil society organizations from the north-west of Syria—areas that had previously been outside the control of the former government and shaped by different political realities—created a rare opportunity for engagement between actors who had long operated in separate and often opposing environments. As the broader national context began to shift, this interaction provided an opening for dialogue across previously polarized political perspectives.

Within the safe and inclusive environment of the Jesuit Fathers' Monastery in Homs (دير الآباء اليسوعيين), civil society organizations, religious leaders, youth groups, women's organizations, and community representatives from areas associated with different political positions—including both communities that had lived under government control and those linked to opposition-held regions—were able to meet, exchange perspectives, and engage in constructive dialogue. This setting enabled participants to move beyond entrenched narratives and geographic divides, creating a civic space where mutual understanding and more peaceful forms of engagement could begin to emerge.

Dialogue as a Pathway to Social Cohesion: The initiative followed a structured pathway that combined dialogue, knowledge-building, and community action. Through a series of facilitated sessions held at the monastery, more than 800 participants from diverse social groups—including youth, women, displaced persons, returnees, persons with disabilities,

community leaders, and religious figures—discussed social, economic, and institutional challenges.

Participants consistently emphasized that **the breakdown of dialogue during the conflict had been one of its most damaging consequences**. The project helped reopen these communication channels, enabling participants to challenge stereotypes, recognize shared concerns, and begin shaping a more inclusive narrative of local identity and coexistence.

Strengthening Trust Between Communities and Institutions: Beyond strengthening relationships among communities, the dialogue process also contributed to rebuilding **vertical social cohesion, trust, and constructive engagement between citizens and local authorities**.

Local authorities engaged in and observed several stages of the dialogue process and recognized the initiative as an important foundation for rebuilding communication between communities and institutions. The participatory dialogue model demonstrated how civil society and faith-based actors can support constructive engagement with local governance structures. As a result, local authorities expressed strong interest in **replicating and expanding this dialogue approach to other localities**, recognizing its potential to reduce tensions, improve communication with communities, and support more inclusive decision-making processes.

The initiative, therefore, helped establish **a practical model for locally anchored dialogue platforms** in which faith-based institutions, civil society, and public authorities can jointly contribute to peacebuilding and recovery.

From Dialogue to Community Action: The dialogue process also translated into **community-led initiatives that promote peace and inclusion**. Seven initiatives were implemented, ranging from cultural and artistic engagement to economic empowerment and youth activities.

These included a **“Chorale for Peace” initiative** bringing youth and women together through music, a **sports initiative (“Homs Clásico”)** promoting positive interaction between neighbourhoods, and **women’s oral history activities** that helped document lived experiences of conflict and recovery. Another initiative, **“Harmony Kitchen,”** supported persons with disabilities through vocational culinary training and social inclusion.

These initiatives demonstrated how dialogue, when combined with capacity-building and community ownership, can lead to **practical actions that strengthen social cohesion and support local recovery**

In a context marked by deep divisions and fragile institutions, the experience in Homs demonstrates how **faith-based actors can contribute to rebuilding trust, supporting civic participation, and enabling locally driven pathways toward sustainable peace and development.**

Togo

In total, 72 traditional chiefs and around one hundred religious leaders are actively involved in local committees for the prevention and fight against violent extremism (CLPLEV), supported by UNDP. Each prefectural and cantonal committee includes a traditional chief as well as three religious representatives from the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim communities. The commitment of these leaders significantly strengthens the effectiveness of CLPLEV's actions to prevent violent extremism at the local level.

Uzbekistan

UNDP in Uzbekistan, under the regional project “Promoting Resilient Communities to Prevent Violent Extremism in Central Asia (PVE-2)” funded by the Government of Japan, organized specialized training sessions for government officials and community representatives in selected regions of the country on preventing extremism and radicalization.

The initiative was implemented in partnership with the International Islamic Academy under the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The training program covered a range of key topics, including: the foundations of critical thinking and spiritual resilience as safeguards against radical and extremist ideologies among youth; threats in the media environment and youth information security (including fake news); media literacy skills such as information selection and analysis, risk awareness, and cybersecurity; migrant security, including recruitment tactics used by extremist groups, manipulation techniques, and protective measures; the preventive role of civil servants in countering extremism and radicalization through social cooperation and legal mechanisms; and addressing extremist narratives disguised as religious teachings, while promoting

tolerance and peace within the framework of Islamic peace values through enhanced religious literacy and countering manipulation.

About the Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF)

Founded in 2010, the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development (IATF) supports the work of the United Nations entities towards the shared objective of learned, strategic, and sustained engagement with key partners in the faith-based world, to support respective and collective efforts to realize international development goals. It aims to foster knowledge exchange on the intersections of religion and faith-based actors with the UN system's mandate in fields that include development, human rights, and peace and security. The IATF currently includes more than 20 different UN agencies and has established the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC).

Annex: Original Country Office Inputs in Non-English Languages

The following section preserves the original Country Office inputs submitted in languages other than English, for reference and verification purposes.

Côte d’Ivoire (Version française originale)

En 2025, le Bureau pays du PNUD en Côte d’Ivoire a intensifié son soutien au gouvernement dans la mobilisation et l’engagement des acteurs religieux aux côtés des jeunes et des femmes, afin de renforcer le développement durable à travers des initiatives de cohésion sociale, de paix et de stabilité.

Cohésion sociale, paix et stabilité

- Pendant trois mois, les dialogues interactifs organisés via six médias communautaires dans les régions du Bounkani et du Tchologo, au Nord de l Côte d’Ivoire ont mobilisé plus de 50 leaders religieux et 352 jeunes et femmes. Ces échanges autour du foncier, des conflits éleveurs-agriculteurs, de la gestion de l’eau et de la chefferie traditionnelle ont renforcé la compréhension mutuelle et favorisé l’apaisement des tensions locales.
- En parallèle, l’appui aux dialogues politiques dans 14 localités couvrant dix régions et le district d’Abidjan a réuni 1 645 participants, dont 72 leaders religieux. Ces rencontres ont contribué à instaurer un climat de confiance et à soutenir la tenue d’élections plus sereines.

Renforcement des infrastructures sociales de base

- Mise en œuvre de l’approche **MODELI (Modèle de développement local inclusif)**, avec l’appui du Japon.
- Implication des leaders religieux et chefs traditionnels dans l’identification des besoins, le choix des sites, le suivi et la gestion des infrastructures.
- Construction de **36 infrastructures sociales** (écoles, centres de santé, maisons des jeunes, marchés, chefferies traditionnelles, pompes solaires) dans **quatre régions du nord**. La mise en œuvre de l’approche MODELI, appuyée par le Japon, a profondément renforcé le leadership communautaire des organisations religieuses et confessionnelles dans quatre régions du nord. En intégrant systématiquement les leaders religieux et les chefs traditionnels à l’identification des besoins, à la sélection

des sites et à la gestion des ouvrages, le programme a transformé leur rôle : d'acteurs consultés, ils sont devenus des coresponsables du développement local. Cette dynamique participative a consolidé la cohésion sociale et amélioré la redevabilité au niveau communautaire. La construction de 36 infrastructures sociales — incluant écoles, centres de santé, maisons des jeunes, marchés, chefferies et pompes solaires — a non seulement répondu à des besoins critiques, mais a aussi renforcé la légitimité et la capacité des leaders religieux à mobiliser leurs communautés, à prévenir les tensions et à garantir la durabilité des investissements. Ces résultats témoignent d'un changement structurel : les communautés religieuses jouent désormais un rôle moteur dans la gouvernance locale et l'amélioration des conditions de vie.

Résilience socio-économique

- Contribution des leaders religieux à l'identification et au suivi des bénéficiaires dans le cadre du projet **PERCH (Promoting Economic Resilience for the Host Community)** financé par les États-Unis.
 - Formation de **60 jeunes** aux métiers techniques (plomberie, menuiserie, électricité, ferronnerie) dans le Bounkani et le Tchologo.
 - Appui à **12 groupements féminins** pour la mise en place d'unités de transformation de manioc et de karité.
 - Objectif : renforcer la résilience des communautés, en particulier des femmes et des jeunes, face aux risques d'extrémisme et promouvoir un développement local inclusif.

Dans le cadre du projet PERCH financé par les États-Unis, l'implication active des leaders religieux dans l'identification et le suivi des bénéficiaires a permis de cibler efficacement les jeunes et les femmes vulnérables du Bounkani et du Tchologo, renforçant la confiance communautaire et la pertinence des actions menées. Grâce à leur engagement, 60 jeunes ont été formés à des métiers techniques (plomberie, menuiserie, électricité et ferronnerie) et 12 groupements féminins ont créé des unités de transformation de manioc et de karité, améliorant significativement leurs revenus. Cette dynamique a produit un effet transformationnel notable : près de 80 % des bénéficiaires déclarent une amélioration directe de leur résilience économique, témoignant du rôle central des communautés religieuses dans la prévention des risques d'extrémisme et la promotion d'un développement local inclusif.

Contribution aux Objectifs de Développement Durable

Ces initiatives ont contribué de manière significative à l'avancement des **ODD 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 et 16**, consolidant ainsi les bases d'une paix et d'une stabilité durables en Côte d'Ivoire.

Les différentes initiatives mises en œuvre dans les régions du nord et dans plusieurs localités du pays ont généré des transformations profondes au sein des communautés religieuses et confessionnelles, tout en contribuant de manière significative aux ODD. Les dialogues communautaires et politiques organisés à travers plusieurs médias, mobilisant des leaders religieux, des femmes et des jeunes, ont consolidé la prévention des conflits, renforcé la cohésion sociale et favorisé un climat électoral apaisé, contribuant directement à l'ODD 16 sur la paix et la gouvernance inclusive. La mise en œuvre de l'approche MODEL, avec la participation active des chefs traditionnels et des leaders religieux à l'identification des besoins, au choix des sites et à la gestion des infrastructures, a renforcé la gouvernance locale participative et l'appropriation communautaire, soutenant à la fois l'ODD 11 (communautés durables) et l'ODD 16. Les 36 infrastructures sociales construites (écoles, centres de santé, marchés, maisons des jeunes, pompes solaires) ont amélioré l'accès aux services essentiels, appuyant l'ODD 3 (santé), l'ODD 4 (éducation), l'ODD 6 (eau) et l'ODD 9 (infrastructures résilientes).

Dans le cadre du projet PERCH financé par les États-Unis, l'implication déterminante des leaders religieux dans la sélection et le suivi des bénéficiaires a permis de renforcer la protection sociale des ménages vulnérables et de cibler efficacement les femmes et les jeunes. Les 60 jeunes formés à des métiers techniques et les 12 groupements féminins appuyés pour créer des unités de transformation de manioc et de karité ont significativement amélioré les revenus locaux, contribuant à l'ODD 1 (lutte contre la pauvreté), l'ODD 5 (autonomisation des femmes) et l'ODD 8 (travail décent et croissance économique). Ces efforts combinés ont renforcé la résilience socioéconomique des populations face aux risques d'extrémisme, tout en valorisant le leadership religieux comme vecteur de stabilité et de développement. L'impact global est notable : dans certaines interventions, près de 80 % des bénéficiaires déclarent une amélioration directe de leurs moyens de subsistance, illustrant la portée transformationnelle des actions menées et leur contribution multidimensionnelle aux ODD.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Faith for Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities Global Initiative 2025 Report

Introduction & Summary

Conceived in 2018, the **Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities (FPCC) initiative** moves beyond single-sector, single-faith, small-scale, ad-hoc and sometimes instrumentalist approaches of faith engagement in development and humanitarian work. FPCC is an initiative with three main partners and multiple collaborating partners around the world.

FPCC was first piloted in the East and Southern Africa (ESAR) and West and Central Africa (WCAR) regions; it has been replicated in South Asia (ROSA); and the Latin America and the Caribbean (LACR) regions.

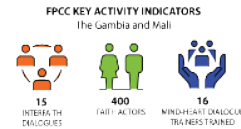
FPCC empowers faith leaders to be agents of socio-behavioural change in addressing issues like child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), children's healthcare, and children's rights. This report outlines key achievements, challenges, and future directions of the FPCC initiative from December 2024 to December 2025.

Over the past year, diverse efforts at the grassroots, national, regional and global levels have had significant impacts in fostering interfaith unity, training community leaders, and advocating for child protection policies. As outlined in the initiative's journey of change, activities are implemented at three distinct yet interdependent levels of action – global, national and local. This three-tiered approach ensures that policy is not just written in high-level summits – but is lived in communities and sustained by the laws of nations. The report is, accordingly, organized around these tiers of action – where FPCC activities are achieving social and behaviour change through the influence of faith actors and their interaction with the wider community, across 4 regions and over 30 countries.

If 2024 also saw the expansion of FPCC to address harmful practices, namely FGM and Child Marriage, with co-funding secured through the UN Joint Programme on FGM, 2025 was the year in which this expansion proved critical in upholding the anti-FGM law in The Gambia. Considering that the threat to repeal the anti-FGM law was led by faith leaders and

justified on religious grounds, the intervention of Religions for Peace was instrumental in unifying faith leaders around child protection messaging and advocating for the retention of laws that protect girls.

Since mid-2024 *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF, with co-funding from RK and the UN Joint Programme on FGM, expanded FPCC Initiative to establish faith-based mechanisms of skilled and committed stakeholders in countries facing a potential reversal in child rights, with a particular focus on the elimination of harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage. The multi-country project is being jointly implemented with the African Council of Religious Leaders–*Religions for Peace* (ACRL-RfP) in Ethiopia, The Gambia, Mali, Somalia, and Uganda.



Formation and support of interreligious councils in Gambia and Mali

In the Sahel region of West Africa, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage are deeply entrenched practices, though their prevalence and the legal efforts to curb them vary significantly between countries like Mali and The Gambia. FPCC initiative focused on these two countries during the reporting period given the extent of these harmful practices – and the significant potential for faith actors to address them effectively.

Over the course of the reporting period, more than 400 participants were engaged through 15 inter-faith dialogues held in The Gambia and Mali. Additionally, 16 Mind-Heart Dialogue (MHD) trainers were trained and have been instrumental in guiding country-level implementation, particularly in advancing gender inclusion and interfaith collaboration. In The Gambia, six trained facilitators have been engaged in roll-out activities using MHD on issues of priority. The rollout of the MHD approach in Mali was successfully led by four trained facilitators who had previously completed MHD capacity-building sessions.

The Interreligious Committee in The Gambia was launched on 4 August 2025 in Banjul, Gambia, as The Gambia Interreligious Committee (GIRC) following an intensive effort to rejuvenate and build the capacity of this critical body. The new GIRC marks a significant milestone in the Gambia’s journey toward religious peacebuilding, national unity, and sustainable development. The GIRC endorsed a set of priorities for 2025, with a strong focus on climate change, child protection and child rights, breast and cervical cancer awareness, and the continued rollout of the MHD approach across the country. For the past year, dozens of religious leaders in The Gambia have been trained in the MHD method, going on to reach

thousands in their communities.

The Gambia launch engaged 94 faith leaders and delegates (72 male and 22 female). Participants included senior religious leaders representing the Christian and Muslim Councils, UNICEF, CARITAS, women's rights organizations, diplomatic representatives, ECOWAS, and government ministries representatives. A statement issued by faith leaders reaffirmed the GIRC's steadfast commitment to advancing interfaith cooperation, promoting peace and harmony, and championing the rights and well-being of the most vulnerable.

The Mind Heart Dialogue Training Approach in The Gambia

The Mind-Heart Dialogue (MHD) approach is a reflective and experiential learning process, exploring faith convictions, lived experiences and knowledge to influence positive social and behaviour change. It supports faith groups and development partners to work together to protect and empower children, families, and communities.

On 24 February 2025, 23 religious leaders from The Gambia Interreligious Council participated in an orientation session facilitated by UNICEF Gambia. The session contributed to a deepened understanding of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national child protection frameworks. The expansion resulted in increased awareness and a shift in attitudes among communities regarding the negative impacts of harmful practices. Through this dialogue, participants reached a consensus on the vital role of religious leaders in upholding the rights and dignity of children in both national and international commitments. The session also marked a critical step towards equipping religious leaders with the knowledge to become trusted advocates for child rights within their communities.

The formation of the Gambia Interreligious Committee (GIRC) at the national level provided the structures for regional outreach to spread out the MHD approach. After a successful training in Banjul (12 to 13 November 2024), Mind-Heart Dialogue trainings were expanded beginning in January 2025. Training workshops were implemented in eight regions of The Gambia—Kanifing, Banjul, Kerewan, Kuntaur, Basse, Janjanbureh, Mansakonko and Brikima. As a result of these trainings and dialogues, over 200 faith leaders, women, and youth were trained in using the Mind-Heart Dialogue approach to address harmful practices.

Faith Engagement in Mali

On 16 February 2025, the Women of Faith Network of the Interreligious Council for Peace Mali (CIP- Mali) held a public advocacy and awareness forum at the Chamber of Commerce

and Industry in Ségou under the theme “The Commitment of Women in Favor of Freedom of Religion and Belief for Peace and Social Cohesion in Ségou.” The event brought together key religious leaders, local authorities, civil society actors, and members of the community to reflect on the pivotal role of women in fostering peace and interreligious harmony.

The interfaith forum in Ségou successfully catalysed a high-level dialogue that positioned women of faith as central architects of peace in Mali. By uniting leaders from Islamic, Evangelical, and Catholic traditions, the event moved beyond theoretical discourse to identify specific barriers to peace, such as marginalisation and gender-based violence. The mission’s impact is best reflected in the transition from doctrinal reflection to a collective roadmap for the future, which advocates for inclusive religious language and the active integration of women into leadership and conflict resolution structures.

On 5 August 2025, the IRCs of Mali and The Gambia held an Exchange Learning Dialogue in Banjul, bringing together 27 participants. The meeting focused on child protection, women and girls’ protection, and promotion of interfaith dialogue and harmony. Faith leaders shared best practices, identified common challenges, and explored opportunities for joint advocacy. The dialogue concluded with a commitment to strengthen interfaith cooperation on protection and peacebuilding.

Mind-Heart Dialogue Trainings in Mali

In Mali, the Mind-Heart dialogue methodology allowed individuals to draw from their experiences and reflections on issues and relate those to present day challenges facing children. It used social and behaviour change approaches to analyse social, cultural and religious beliefs, practices and norms and compare these with the recommended scientific, technical information, with a view to reinforce positive norms and practices for the wellbeing of children, families and communities. The rollout of the approach in Mali was successfully led by four trained MHD facilitators who had previously completed MHD capacity-building sessions. Their leadership has



been instrumental in guiding country-level implementation, particularly in advancing gender inclusion and interfaith collaboration. With the support of these facilitators, the IRC of Mali and the Women of Faith Network convened a series of three interfaith dialogues in March in Bamako. The four facilitators played a key role in moderating discussions, ensuring faith-sensitive engagement, and guiding reflections rooted in both lived realities and religious values. Their efforts fostered a safe and participatory environment that encouraged women to speak out on issues that directly impact their lives and communities – especially during times of conflict.

Advocacy in Ethiopia

A coordinated advocacy mission to Ethiopia was undertaken to build consensus among faith leaders on the issue of medicalised FGM, following a controversial fatwa issued by the Ethiopia Islamic Affairs Supreme Council. The mission was organised jointly by ACRL-RfP, UNICEF Regional Office, and UNICEF Ethiopia, with support from Samuel Hall. It included courtesy visits to major religious coordinating bodies and faith communities, and engagement with the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, its development wing (EIFDDA), and government and human rights entities, including the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and Norwegian Church Aid. During the mission, Ethiopian Islamic scholars clarified that their fatwa denounced Type III FGM and was not intended to endorse the practice. They expressed openness to revoking the fatwa if supported through theological engagement and dialogue with medical professionals. Participants emphasised the need for religiously tailored advocacy resources, noting that tools such as the FPCC Programme Guide and the newly launched *Religions for Peace* toolkit would be instrumental in supporting this process.

Generating insights for Countering Pushbacks to Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage

Female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage continue to violate girls' rights and limit their futures. Despite decades of progress, a new wave of resistance is emerging—more organized, more politicized, and harder to counter. In several contexts, bans on FGM and child marriage are being challenged, health-care professionals are increasingly performing FGM in violation of girls' fundamental rights, bodily integrity, and the medical ethic to do no harm, and both practices are often defended through selective religious interpretations. Online

harmful narratives cross borders instantly, amplified by diaspora voices and political actors. Poverty, conflict, and climate impacts further entrench these practices as coping mechanisms. This evolving landscape makes the need for evidence more urgent. The arguments used to promote FGM and child marriage are not new, but their delivery is more organized, more politicized and more complex to counter. Understanding who is driving the pushback, how narratives evolve, and where influence lies is critical. Faith actors remain among the most trusted voices in communities, uniquely positioned to champion dignity, protection, and the abandonment of harmful practices. To support this work, UNICEF Child Protection and Social and Behaviour Change HQ teams, in collaboration with the research agency Samuel Hall, as well as Religions for Peace, ACRL and JLI, conducted a 15-country scoping study under the Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM, to map pushback efforts against ending harmful practices, with particular attention to the role of faith actors.

Within the research package published in December 2025, the following products can be accessed:

a) Synthesis Paper: Risks and likelihood of pushback against the abandonment of harmful practices and the role of faith actors.

A synthesis paper providing a cross-country overview of:

- emerging narratives and resistance strategies
- key actors driving or countering pushback
- where pushback operates—from parliaments to pulpits to online spaces
- effective faith-engagement approaches to strengthen child protection

b) Country Briefs

Concise snapshots of trends, discourses, and expectations across: Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen.

c) Review of Effective Faith Engagement Strategies for Addressing Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation



This review examines how faith-based interventions can drive social change by reframing traditions through protection and empowerment. Grounded in social and behaviour change theory and the mind–heart dialogue, it synthesizes global and local insights to distill challenges, lessons, and best practices to leverage faith-engagement as a catalyst for change. It also outlines key dimensions and actionable guidance for engaging faith actors to address FGM and child marriage.

FPCC Programme Guide to address the 10 Core Challenges in Faith Engagement on Harmful Practices

Based on the findings of the review conducted by UNICEF and partners, a programme guide was co-designed and released, with the aim to equip UNICEF country offices and partners to maximise faith engagement to address the main challenges identified.

These include backlash against faith leaders, exclusion of underrepresented voices, and the risk of externally imposed narratives. Each phase of this guide includes strategies to **anticipate and mitigate these risks**, including trust-building, co-creation, gradual rollout, peer support, and adaptive learning. Users are encouraged to revisit risk considerations throughout the implementation process using tools such as the Real-Time Feedback Guide and Community Monitoring Toolkit.

Advocacy and Public Engagement

International Human Rights Day Executive Committee Statement: On 10 December 2024, the Religions for Peace Executive Committee issued a statement condemning the alarming prevalence of violence against women and girls. The statement was issued at the conclusion of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign.

Committed to upholding human rights, the FPCC initiative continuously aims to eliminate female genital mutilation (FGM) and other harmful practices in different regions of the world. It advances the shared moral and spiritual commitment of religious leaders to protect and promote child rights. By framing the elimination of harmful practices as a moral imperative grounded in religious values, the statement contributed to strengthening the legitimacy and urgency of the FPCC initiative within and beyond faith-based networks.

World Health Day Executive Committee Statement: On 7 April 2025, the Religions for Peace Executive Committee issued a global statement in observance of World Health Day.

Under the theme Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Futures, the statement affirmed Religions for Peace’s steadfast commitment to advancing maternal and newborn health and prioritizing women’s long-term health and well-being. The statement highlighted FPCC as a cornerstone initiative in advancing faith-based advocacy to end harmful practices like FGM and child marriage. FPCC exemplifies the importance of engaging faith actors to deliver people-centered, values-driven programming.

UNGA 80 Side Event: The Role of Faith in Protecting Children from Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage

On 24 September 2025, at the 80th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Religions for Peace, UNICEF, and the Government of Canada convened “The Role of Faith in Protecting Children from Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage.” The gathering highlighted effective strategies for engaging faith and religious leaders in prevention and response efforts to end FGM and child marriage (photos left).



The event emphasized the transformative power of faith leaders in shaping community beliefs and behaviours. It also successfully shed light on grassroots and context-specific initiatives that have transformed harmful social norms through faith-based engagement.

Multi-faith Advisory Council Annual Report 2025



MFAC and UNIATF Members Present at the 2025 Kofi Annan Faith Briefing

Introduction

During the 2024-2025 term, the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) advanced the co-chairs' objectives to strengthen engagement, collaboration, and coordination among its members and the UNIATF. The organization enhanced its role as a growing and diverse interfaith body, providing strategic support, compassion, and valuable expertise to the United Nations.

Advancing the process of strengthening MFAC's visibility and cooperation, building on 2024's MFAC Retreat, which generated key goals for 2025, it has been a year for innovation, restructuring, and dedicated involvement from the MFAC body and its Working Groups. During CSW69, the Gender Working Group organized a [High-Level Multi-Faith Reception](#) marking 30 years since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing+30) (figure 1), and collaborated with the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) to convene a roundtable on best practices in engaging faith actors to uphold women's and girls' human rights. In July, the MFAC hosted the 2025 Kofi Annan Faith Briefing (figure 2), titled "Advancing the Realization of the 2030 Agenda through Meaningful Engagement of Faith Actors," aligned with the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), which led to the [Kofi Annan Faith Briefing 2025 Report](#) capturing key insights and recommendations.

The MFAC and its Working Groups were highly engaged during the 80th UN General Assembly, including the Gender Working Group's launch of the advocacy brief [Side by Side: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights](#) through a [hybrid roundtable](#) featuring MFAC Co-Chairs and high-level UNIATF representatives. Additional MFAC-led engagements included a High-Level Multi-Faith Reception (figure 3) marking the UN's 80th anniversary under the theme "Better together: 80 years and more for peace, development and human rights," and a high-level event co-organized with the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and Religions for Peace, titled "Keeping Faith in Dialogue: Reimagining Interreligious Cooperation for a New Agenda for Peace." To mark the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the MFAC, together with members of the UNIATF, co-hosted a [high-level virtual event](#), "A Common Pledge: Advancing the Unique Role of Women and Young Women of Faith Mediators," co-organized by the Gender Working Group and the Peace and Security Working Group.

To enhance collaboration, transparency, and engagement across the network, the MFAC established and circulated an official membership list with updated contact details, ensuring clarity on focal points across member organizations. Ongoing communication has been strengthened through the Administrative Specialist, creating a more consistent and accessible pathway for information sharing, coordination with co-chairs, and engagement across the broader MFAC community.

Building on these efforts, the Administrative Specialist has further supported operational effectiveness across the MFAC by facilitating planning processes and strengthening day-to-day engagement. This has extended to supporting the establishment and organization of the Youth Engagement Working Group and the newly reinstated Climate and Nature Working Group, contributing to more structured collaboration and sustained participation across the MFAC.

In collaboration with the UNIATF, the MFAC elected new Co-Chairs for the 2025 to 2027 term, including Ivy Koek (Soka Gakkai International), Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi (The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers), Ryan J. Koch (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), and Yfat Barak-Cheney (World Jewish Congress). The Council also welcomed new members, increasing MFAC's membership to 36 and bringing in the United Religions Initiative, the Parliament of the World's Religions, LM International, and The Faith Center of the London School of Economics. This new Co-Chair and membership cycle provided an opportunity to strengthen communication and engagement across all members, including a full relaunch of the working groups for the new term. Highlights from the annual retreat (figure 4) included discussions on enhancing MFAC's multilateralism and advocacy efforts, expanding focus on technology and artificial intelligence, and reviewing a [calendar](#) of upcoming MFAC events, including all-member meetings and a United Nations General Assembly reception, with plans to develop a comprehensive collaborative calendar incorporating MFAC, working group, and key UNIATF dates and events. These efforts continue to enhance coordination and alignment with the UNIATF, increasing effectiveness and supporting the successful fulfillment of MFAC's mandate.

Working Group Updates

Peace and Security Working Group

- In 2025, the MFAC Peace & Security Working Group focused on practical coordination and joint initiatives across the multi-faith community. A central

priority was collaboration with the Gender Working Group to mark the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, including an October event showcasing women of faith mediators and the compilation of case studies highlighting their contributions. The group also reviewed and updated its 2025–2026 work plan, coordinated participation in global events such as COP30 and Geneva Peace Week, and emphasized collaboration, advocacy campaigns, and engagement on emerging peace challenges.

- Throughout the year, members also worked on collective outputs and positioning within multilateral processes. Meetings addressed preparations for Peace Day statements, symposiums on the role of faith actors in peace and security, and coordination of engagements with UN forums and other platforms. The group highlighted the need for stronger data sharing, alignment across working groups, and clearer articulation of the WG’s role amid growing geopolitical tensions, while continuing to produce briefings, statements, and contributions to MFAC reporting processes.

Gender Working Group

Executive Summary

- New Co-Chairs appointed for 2025–2027, with regular monthly meetings engaging 16 MFAC members, supported by UNFPA and UN Women.
- Delivered three high-level convenings aligned with key UN moments (Beijing+30, UNGA, WPS 25th anniversary), amplifying faith-based leadership for gender equality and peacebuilding.
- Assumed an expanded mandate to monitor and analyze narratives on gender equality and women’s rights in multilateral spaces, particularly around CSW and other high-level UN processes.
- Launched the advocacy brief “Side by Side”, translating narrative analysis into practical guidance for faith-based engagement to counter pushback on women’s rights.
- Initiated development of a compendium of narratives (to be launched in 2026) to support informed advocacy, narrative framing, and coalition-building in defence of gender equality norms.

Overview of Gender Working Group Achievements in 2025

- In March of 2025, the new co-chairs, Jessica Roland (Peacemakers Network) and Dimitra Missira (KAICIID) were elected for the Gender Working Group for 2 years-term. The Gender Working Group met monthly, with the engagement of 16 MFAC members, along with the active participation and support from UNFPA and UN Women.
- The Gender Working Group led the implementation of three key events.
 - First in March, the Gender Working Group of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC), alongside the Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA) program with partners Mensen met een Missie, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, Tearfund and the Faith to Action Network, ACT Alliance and the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), held a [High-Level Multi-Faith Reception](#) to mark 30 years since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30) (see figure 5).
 - In 2025, the Gender Working Group was entrusted with an expanded mandate to serve as a monitoring and analytical mechanism on narratives related to gender equality and women’s rights in multilateral spaces, particularly around the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and other high-level UN moments. This mandate marked an important evolution of the Group’s role, enabling it to systematically track emerging trends, identify regressive and progressive narratives, and support evidence-based advocacy by faith-based actors. The monitoring function directly informed the development of targeted advocacy tools and knowledge products, strengthening the Group’s capacity to respond to shrinking civic space and increasing contestation around gender equality norms. In this context, at the UN General Assembly in September, the Gender Working Group held [a roundtable](#) (figure 6) to launch and explore the advocacy brief, “[Side by Side: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights](#).” The advocacy brief was based on research analyzing Member State rhetoric, non-governmental organizations’ submissions, and civil society discourse during CSW69 to equip faith-based organizations with insights, language,

and strategies to respond to the pushback on women’s rights. The advocacy brief was used to initiate dialogue among faith-based and multilateral actors on how to collectively use positive faith-based examples to counter groups challenging rights-based approaches.

- The final event was held in October, alongside the 25th Anniversary of the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security. The Gender Working Group, in partnership with the MFAC Peace and Security Working Group, co-hosted [a high-level event](#) exploring innovative solutions and recommendations for the UN, Member States, and other actors involved in peace efforts to support and amplify the role of women and young women faith-based mediators in promoting sustainable and long-term peace processes. The event showcased [case studies](#) of women and young women of faith mediators to share good practices, challenges, and unique contributions. involved in peace mediation at different levels.
- The Gender Working Group also held its first joint [16 Days Campaign to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls](#) in November, “Faith in Action: Reclaiming Sacred Texts for Equality,” focusing on the intersection of religion, digital violence, and gender justice (see figure X).

Advocacy tools and Next steps

- Building on its monitoring mandate and the Advocacy brief, the Gender Working Group initiated the development of a compendium of narratives observed in multilateral spaces, including during CSW and other key UN moments. The compendium documents patterns of discourse, emerging trends, and illustrative examples of both regressive and constructive faith-based narratives related to gender equality and human rights. Scheduled for launch in 2026, the compendium aims to serve as a practical resource for faith-based organizations, policymakers, and multilateral actors, supporting more informed engagement, narrative framing, and coalition-building in defence of gender equality norms.

Youth Engagement Working Group

The Youth Engagement Working Group was officially launched on September 17, 2025, with the primary goal of enhancing intergenerational engagement and centering youth leadership within MFAC. The group established a dual-leadership structure consisting of one

youth chair and one senior ally. Halima Wanjiku (Arigatou International–GNRC) was elected as the Youth Chair, and Casey Harden (World YWCA) is serving as the interim Senior Ally Chair.

During its initial meetings, the working group focused on establishing its mandate and its priorities. Members reviewed the Terms of Reference, confirmed a monthly meeting structure, and launched a scoping survey to identify shared priorities for the working group.

Members shared a strong interest in the following areas:

- Advancing meaningful youth participation and leadership within MFAC
- Strengthening intergenerational collaboration across MFAC structures and working groups
- Contributing to policy advocacy and engagement related to the UN processes
- The group reached a consensus to not engage children as members, but rather through specific consultations, citing the need for specialized safeguarding and protection

Based on these findings, the working group proposed the following focus areas:

- Strengthen youth participation in MFAC decision-making spaces
- Collaborate with other MFAC working groups to integrate youth engagement across thematic areas
- Develop guidance and tools to support intergenerational approaches within member organizations
- Propose to include the UN Youth Office in the working group and/or the IATF members
- Map out key annual dates, such as the International Youth Day, to coordinate joint activities and advocacy moments

Additionally, the working group members discussed developing a youth engagement audit to map existing youth participation and intergenerational leadership across other working groups, and to identify gaps and opportunities for strengthening youth leadership.

The working group will continue to build on these initial steps, focusing on practical mechanisms to enhance youth engagement and amplify youth perspectives across MFAC working groups and UN-related processes.

Climate and Nature Working Group

The MFAC Climate and Nature working group has been reinstated and has been meeting regularly once per month since August 2025. The working group has about 15 members from

across the MFAC member organizations. The first order of business for the working group was to draft terms of reference and a collective decision to rename the group "Climate and Nature" working group from "Climate" working group. This updated name reflects the group's intention to address the triple planetary crisis of climate, biodiversity, and pollution more broadly. A first project for the group was to put together a "Green Guide to Sustainable Spiritual Practices" across different faith traditions, which will be shared with the larger MFAC and IATF community.

This year, the Climate and Nature working group also intends to collaborate with other MFAC working groups and consult with relevant IATF focal points to align its work with the greatest needs and impact. There are also a number of high-level convenings this year, such as the climate, biodiversity, and desertification COPs, that the group will seek to engage with and serve as a resource-sharing hub for faith, spirituality, and Indigenous work.

Additional initiatives of the Climate and Nature working group may include:

- A quarterly newsletter that will highlight the work being done and act as a source of information on initiatives and advances in climate activities and the intersectionality of climate justice with comparative justice issues like migration, poverty, and security, to connect and collaborate with other working groups.
- Starting a research mapping project of the work being done in the faith-based climate and nature space.
- Creating a database for the various environmental networks that the group partners with, as well as UN-related issues and collaborations.
- Calendar of events to amplify elements of climate justice, build capacity with interagency partners, and form new partnerships with climate work.

Conclusion

MFAC remains a distinctive and impactful forum for a diverse network of United Nations faith partners, supporting nuanced, collaborative, and forward-looking engagement on pressing global issues facing the UN. In 2025, MFAC experienced strategic growth and strengthened governance, including the election of new Co-Chairs, the expansion of membership, and the relaunch of all working groups, alongside the new Youth Engagement Working Group and the Climate and Nature Working Group. Administrative and coordination capacities were further reinforced through the Administrative Specialist, ensuring more effective information sharing, streamlined communication, and sustained engagement across the MFAC community. As the MFAC enters 2026, the Co-Chairs focus

on fostering targeted, collaborative efforts that enhance coordination with UNIATF, reduce duplication across initiatives, and amplify the meaningful contributions of faith actors to the United Nations' work.



(Figure 1: MFAC Gender Working Group CSW69 High-Level Multi-Faith Reception)



(Figure 2: UNIATF Co-Chair Dr. Nkeiruka Didigu, Senior Strategic Partnerships Specialist for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Moderating a Panel at the 2025 Kofi Annan Faith Briefing)



(Figure 3: MFAC Co-Chairs and Mr. Chaloka Beyani, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide for the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG), at the UNGA80 High-Level Multi-faith Reception)



(Figure 4: MFAC Members Present at the 2026 Annual Retreat)



(Figure 5: Debra Boudreaux, CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation and Former MFAC Co-Chair, Welcoming Attendees of the High-Level Multi-Faith Reception)



(Figure 6: Panelists During the ‘Side by Side: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights’ UNGA Roundtable Hosted by the MFAC Gender Working Group)

Annex I

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

- United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG)
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
- Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)
- United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC)
- United Nations Department of Global Communications (DGC)
- United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Office of Legal Affairs (OLA)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
- World Bank Group (WB)
- United Nations World Food Program (WFP)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (SRSG-VAC)

Annex II

Multi-faith Advisory Council to the UNIATF

- ACT Alliance
- Al-Azhar University: Centre for Population Studies
- Arigatou International
- Baha'i International Community
- Bahu Trust
- Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
- Caritas Internationalis
- Center for Earth Ethics
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Finn Church Aid
- The Focolare Movement
- Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA)
- Global One
- Islamic Relief Worldwide
- Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
- International Dialogue Center -- KAICIID
- LM International
- Lutheran World Federation
- Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue-Jewish Theological Seminary
- Muslims for Progressive Values
- Nahdlatul Ulama
- Parliament of the World's Religions
- Religions for Peace
- The Sant' Egidio Foundation for Peace and Dialogue
- Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society
- Soka Gakkai International
- Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding
- The Archbishop of Canterbury
- Faith Center of the London School of Economics (LSE)
- The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers
- United Religions Initiative (URI)
- World Council of Churches
- World Evangelical Alliance
- World Jewish Congress
- World Vision International
- World YWCA