



## Solidarity for Peace Multi-Religious Dialogue

**Multi-Religious Council of Leaders' Mission to Moldova  
30 and 31 January 2023**

## Acknowledgements

The Government of the Republic of Moldova, *Religions for Peace*, and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, hosted a delegation of leaders of the world's diverse faith traditions, the Multi-Religious Council of Leaders, for a two-day mission to Moldova on 30 & 31 January 2023. Religious Leaders were guests of The Monastery of St. Martha and Mary Hadjimus village, Causeni district, the Jewish Community of Moldova and Moldova for Peace. UNHCR and Religions for Peace thank the Republic of Moldova for their continued generosity in hosting over 102,000 refugees, nearly half of whom are children. The Government's decision to activate temporary protection is a concrete expression of their continued and sustained solidarity with the refugees from Ukraine. A special thanks to HIAS for their support in key aspects of the mission.

*Cover Photo: Solidarity for Peace Roundtable Discussion © UNHCR/S Abdulrahman*

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>Refugees in Moldova</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Solidarity for Peace Dialogue</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Call for Peace	8
Solidarity & Support for Refugees	10
Inter-faith dialogue and collective work	12
Closing Remarks	14
<b>The Council</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>Next Steps</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>Showing Solidarity</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

# Executive Summary

The Government of the Republic of Moldova, *Religions for Peace*, and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, hosted a delegation of leaders of the world's diverse faith traditions, the [Multi-Religious Council of Leaders](#), in a two-day mission to Moldova on 30 & 31 January 2023.

The delegation brought together refugees, local religious leaders and representatives from faith-based organizations involved in the refugee response in a 'Solidarity for Peace Dialogue', featuring a roundtable discussion to bolster multi-religious support for refugees and their host communities in Moldova.

The multi-religious delegation also had the opportunity to visit faith-based communities providing refugees with services, including a Greek Orthodox Monastery, a Jewish Community Centre, and Moldova for Peace Community Centre. This initiative, bringing together refugees, international and local faith leaders, the Government and civil society, to mobilize multi-religious support for refugees, was the first of its kind. Faith leaders encouraged their communities and faith-based organizations to continue their tireless provision of services and the promotion of inclusion and social cohesion in forced displacement contexts.

Despite challenges and limited resources of their own, Moldovans have shown remarkable humanity in welcoming almost 750,000 Ukrainian refugees since the invasion of Ukraine almost a year ago. Over 102,000 refugees currently remain, almost half of whom are children.

The Multi-Religious Council of Leaders made a financial contribution to support UNHCR's work in Moldova. The contribution is thanks to the support of the [Religions for Peace Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund](#) and its contributors, the GHR Foundation, Risho-Kosei Kai and other religious institutions.

UNHCR hopes that this initiative encourages religious leaders to promote inclusion and social cohesion and better coordinate services for people who are forcibly displaced as well as the communities who receive them, enabling refugees and host communities alike to live more dignified lives. The initiative is in line with a whole-of-society approach, as outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees, encompassing not only States and humanitarian organisations but also, religious leaders and faith-based organisations.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

## Refugees in Moldova

Despite many pressing economic challenges and limited resources, Moldovans opened their country and their homes. Refugees in Moldova have temporary protection, which provides secure legal status and help them access employment and become self-reliant. It also provides the framework for sustainable access to education and other services.

*“The Moldovan community and faith-based organisations were among the first ones to welcome us, counsel us, and help us find a place to stay. We are praying for peace in Ukraine and for all those providing us with assistance.”*

**Dmitrii Lekartsev**

*Refugee Representative, National Congress for Ukrainians in Moldova*

UNHCR has delivered more than US\$100 million worth of assistance and support in Moldova, in addition to the contributions of other humanitarian and development actors, as well as direct bilateral donor support to the Government. UNHCR continues to invest in strengthening social protection systems in Moldova for refugees and Moldovans alike.

Support needed from the international community includes investments in the country, including encouraging private sector investment that can provide sustainable opportunities for both Moldovans and refugees.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

## Solidarity for Peace Dialogue

The core feature of the two-day mission was the Peace for Solidarity Dialogue which brought together refugees, local religious leaders and representatives from faith-based organisations involved in refugee responses. *Religions for Peace*, experts in convening international religious leaders from diverse faith traditions, said that the Solidarity for Peace Dialogue was a moment of geopolitical significance. This was echoed by local faith leaders who expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to have an interfaith dialogue:

*The small Catholic Church in Moldova responded immediately to the influx of refugees from Ukraine in collaboration with the local government and many volunteers. We offer services for refugees, but we are working on our own, and only occasionally do we cross paths with each other. This meeting gives an opportunity, a bigger horizon to discover more about what other religious groups are doing."*

*Bishop Mons. Anton Cosa,  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Chisinau.*



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

Convening Religious Leaders allows them to represent their institutions' strengths and serve together. In her opening remarks, Professor Azza Karam, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, shared the message of solidarity and peace from over 100 religious institutions worldwide she represents:

*This is the first opportunity to come together to show respect for host efforts population and contribute pragmatically to the work of UNHCR to support refugees. We have come to express multi-religious solidarity.*

**Dr Azza Karam**  
Secretary General, Religions for Peace

The Minister of Culture called for peace in Ukraine and paid tribute to all Moldovan families and religious communities who continue to show solidarity with all refugees:

*The Republic of Moldova is a multi-ethnic country, and despite the many languages, regardless of which faith we follow, we all want peace. Moldova for peace.*

**Mr Sergiu Prodan**  
Minister of Culture, Moldova

The Assistant High Commissioner for Protection for UNHCR, Gillian Triggs, acknowledged the Minister's call for peace and said that we also need solidarity, which is demonstrated in the Moldova response:

*This is a global process, and today's meeting is one way we build solidarity under the Global Compact on Refugees. We are privileged to bring together this group of Religious Leaders.*

**Gillian Triggs**

*Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR*



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

## *Call for Peace*

Religious leaders' contributions to the dialogue reiterated the critical **call for peace**, outlined how they were showing **solidarity & support for refugees** and recognized the need for increased **inter-faith dialogue and collective work**.

All religious leaders called for peace and commended the welcome that Moldova continues to show to refugees. Religious leaders recognized that solidarity is important as the war in Ukraine is entering its second year. Speaking from his experience as a Syrian national, now in its 12<sup>th</sup> year of conflict, Bishop Elias Toumeh spoke about the need for people to stay the course of solidarity, as the return to peace can take longer than expected.

*We ask people to continue to open their homes. It's 12 years since the war began in Syria. Be ready for the need for this solidarity to continue. We hope that peace comes earlier. We are here with Religions for Peace to express our solidarity, emotional and physical support.*

**Bishop Elias Toumeh**

*Orthodox Church, Venezuela & Caribbean*



Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis also called for peace. He suggested that creating a peaceful world requires educating ourselves about welcoming the "other".

*We are all together, showing our solidarity and joining our hands together. We are called to show concrete examples of our sharing. This is why we are here. To show support for the locals who are showing us how to welcome the stranger by opening their arms and hearts. This is what we need for a more peaceful world.*

**Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis**  
Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon, Turkiye

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha called for peace and shared a framework to help achieve this goal, the [Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation](#). Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh shared key principles from the charter and said the process of forgiving is vital if healing and reconciliation are to take place:

*Faith brings care, compassion, and sacrifice to the table. We need justice and solidarity. We also need peace; if we want peace, we must sit around a table and find a solution.*

**Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh**  
Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Swak Jatha

Gillian Triggs emphasized the importance of telling stories, which, she said, are important for moving the hearts and minds of people. Information and data, she said, will not on their own be sufficient.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

## *Solidarity & Support for Refugees*

The Chief Rabbi of Poland, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, spoke about our obligation as human beings to come to each other's assistance, regardless of religious belief or culture. He noted that in crisis, we tend to look to big countries and overlook the role of small countries. This is why, he said, the response of Moldova to welcoming refugees is remarkable.

*We must help everyone we can. We don't first ask questions about faith, political affiliation, or nationality. What do the refugees need right now? We've saved people from death and need to give them life. That includes providing mental health counselling, jobs, and education. And sitting around the table together, God willing, we can do even more for refugees.*

**Rabbi Michael Schudrich**  
Chief Rabbi of Poland



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

Fr. Cons. Ciprian Ion Ionito joining the discussion from the Orthodox Church of Romania said that the response of Moldova reflects the response in Romania:

*We are with the Moldovan and refugee communities through solidarity and compassion. We are helping those in need. We have organized shelters for refugees, and this work will continue. We are close and united, and with God's help, we hope this crisis will end in the shortest possible time.*

**Fr. Cons. Ciprian Ion Ionita**  
Orthodox Church of Romania

Rev. Kosho Niwano thanked the Moldovan religious leaders for inviting her to the historical meeting and acknowledged the solidarity of the Moldovan people:

*We have learned from Moldova how to live together with refugees from a neighboring country, and we will never forget the efforts of the Moldova people.*

**Rev. Kosho Niwano**

*President- Designate, Risscho Kosei-Kai*

Ms Valentina Vihrist representing the Faith-based Organization Adventist Development and Relief Agency, spoke about the power of sharing, especially when those sharing have few resources.

*The people of Moldova opened practically every house to donate and to receive refugees. The Moldovan people are rich in religious principles. They did not have enough to share, but shared what they have.*

**Valentina Vihrist**

*Adventist Development and Relief Agency*

Yiftach Millo from HIAS spoke about the work of the many faith-based organizations working in Moldova and expressed appreciation for the local communities' response:

*We are entering another phase. Integration and cohesion where the religious communities are even more engaged. We need to work together to make so that social cohesion and inclusion can continue in a sustainable way.*

**Yiftach Millo**

*Country Director HIAS Moldova & Romania*

The exchange of international and local religious leaders touched on the key principle of the importance of faith in action. The faith traditions represented around the table shared the value of helping others in need, regardless of culture or religious denomination. They agreed that the response of the Moldovan people should be shared to inspire others to solidarity and increase support for refugees.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

### *Inter-faith dialogue and collective work*

A key theme that emerged from the Solidarity for Peace dialogue is recognising what different faith traditions offer to each other and refugees when they work together. The local religious leaders welcomed the inter-faith element of the dialogue and expressed the wish and interest to work more closely together:



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

*We are actively supporting and looking for interfaith connections. We hope this is not the only meeting but that there will be others where we can speak to other religious communities to support each other.*

**Mr Petter Cherry**

*Jewish Community of the Republic of Moldova*

Imam Sayed Razawi referred to the gathering with its many international and local religious leaders coming together as historic:

*This gathering is so unique because we have religions coming together from different sectors to begin to speak about reconciliation. It is a historic moment.*

**Imam Sayed Razawi**

*Director-General and Chief Imam, Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society*

Ms Olga Iniuotichina from the Salvation Army spoke of the importance of unity within Moldova and Ukraine. This is important, she said, especially as the religious groups are working towards the same goal:

*I appreciate the possibility of being together. To encourage each other. Let's build a bridge between Moldova and Ukraine economically and socially, and we can unite these communities. It would be good to create social projects supporting the elderly.*

**Olga Iniutocichina**  
Salvation Army

Each religious community has a unique perspective and resources, and while the Salvation Army identifies a need for supporting the elderly, other communities can complement that perspective. Edward Lucaci from Caritas Moldova, for example, emphasizes the importance of investing in local communities:

*I'm glad to be here because I see many friends and partners doing good things together. Caritas works directly with UNHCR to offer an integrated service throughout the country. Let's continue to do it, real integration is important to invest in local communities. Let's go together to help those in need. We will not stop!*

**Edward Lucaci**  
Caritas Moldova

Practically and from a resource perspective, working inter-religiously makes good sense. Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, and temples have different expertise and may be able to refer refugees to each other's services. Religious communities reflect on how their responses are complementary, but they also share a common principle of faith-based action and can provide spiritual support to refugees, as well as material support.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

### Closing Remarks

Multi-religious platforms enable faith leaders and societies to come together, which then can become a matter of normal practice. Such platforms, or spaces, in the experience of *Religions for Peace*, can be key to longer term reconciliation. That is the hope of the Moldovan Government, who by inviting the local and international religious leaders to come together, has opened the space for such convenings to continue. Metropolitan Petru, Archbishop of Chisinau says doing so is a matter of love:

*Love brings us closer. Ukrainians are our brothers, and we are neighbours. We are still cooking hot meals for refugees who are coming to the border frozen. Anyone who comes to us in need will receive what they need with open arms.*

**Metropolitan Petru**  
Archbishop of Chisinau

UNHCR Representative Francesca Bonelli explained the value of hospitality: "Moldova is a little country with a big heart" she said. "Despite limited resources, Moldovans opened their country and homes without hesitation." She called on the international community to continue their solidarity and support for Moldova. Prof. Azza Karam highlighted that regular meetings can have implications in the medium- and long-term humanitarian service provision and can be conducive to building a multi religious service-oriented platform:



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

*Religions for Peace is committed to sharing the light of wisdom and compassion coming from each and all faith traditions. The strong belief is that when religions work together, no one is left behind.*

**Prof. Azza Karam**  
Secretary General of Religions for Peace

Gillian Triggs, closed by referring to the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, referencing the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, where Moldova's remarkable solidarity would be held up as an example for the rest of the world:

*We need a new commitment to solidarity with all refugees, no matter where they are coming from. The solidarity in Moldova is an important example for the rest of the world.*

**Gillian Triggs**  
Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR

In the coming months and years, love and solidarity will be needed for those forcibly displaced and for the Moldovan communities that continue to make space for refugees in their homes, schools, and places of work.

## The Council

The Multi-Religious Council of Leaders (MRCL) was formed to foster greater collaboration with religious leaders in the build-up to the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 and to strengthen the efforts of religious leaders across regions and faiths to address the root causes of the refugee crisis by supporting global advocacy, conflict prevention, reconciliation, peacebuilding, and social cohesion initiatives for forcibly displaced persons. As the war in



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

Ukraine approaches its first full year, Moldova was identified as a suitable location to host the first-ever mission of the Multi-Religious Council of Leaders

Religious communities have a long history of assisting those fleeing war, poverty, and persecution. The [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#) recognises religious leaders' contributions and long-standing experience in supporting refugees. Faith-based organisations have made [27 pledges related to the GCR](#) since 2019, all of which are fulfilled or in progress.

## Next Steps

1. **Religions for Peace** will support UNHCR Moldova in further developing multi-religious platform and diplomacy to build a local interreligious consortium. Inter-religious Councils are platforms for diverse faith actors to work together, build knowledge and share lessons and skills.
2. **UNHCR** will ensure representation of religious leadership and institutions at the Global Refugee Forum, 13-15 December 2023. Religious leaders will be encouraged to pledge and join a global cohort of publicly recognized stakeholders engaged in refugee responses and solutions.
3. **UNHCR** will support strategic partnerships with faith and humanitarian actors in Moldova, including church networks, to reinforce and advance shared priorities in protection and assistance, in alignment with faith communities and organizations' operational capacities.

### *Useful Links*

UNHCR Press Release [In Moldova, Religious Leaders call for increased support for refugees and host communities – UNHCR Moldova](#)

Religions for Peace Press Release [Religions for Peace and UNHCR Host Field Mission to Moldova by Multi-Religious Council of Leaders - Religions for Peace \(rfp.org\)](#)

UNHCR Web story [Religious Leaders call for increased support for refugees and host communities | The Global Compact on Refugees | UNHCR \(globalcompactrefugees.org\)](#)

Local Media <https://moldova1.md/p/3771/in-republica-moldova-a-avut-loc-un-forum-de-promovare-a-pacii-si-solidaritatiei-cu-ucraina>

Jewish Community of Moldova <https://jcm.md/en/news/jewish-community-of-moldova-and-humanitarian-aid-center-take-part-in-religions-for-peace-and-unhcr-interfaith-dialogue-meeting/>



# Showing Solidarity

Religious Leaders visited the following religious communities to bring visibility to the situation of refugees, the welcoming spirit of the host community, and mobilise solidarity by their faith constituencies.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

## MONASTERY OF ST. MARTHA & MARY

The Monastery of St. Martha and Mary Hadjimius village, Causeni district has been providing support to refugees since the beginning of the crisis.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

## THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTRE

Moldova's Jewish Community Centre provides refugees with housing, hot food and essential supplies.



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman

## MOLDOVA FOR PEACE

Moldova for Peace is a consortium of Moldovan NGOs that came together to support refugees from Ukraine in addition to their support to vulnerable Moldovans. They welcomed us at their Community Centre 151.

# MULTI-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF LEADERS

## Mission to Moldova

30 & 31 January 2023



© UNHCR/ S. Abdulrahman



UNHCR  
P.O. Box 2500  
1211 Geneva 2

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)