

**2013 UNHCR NGO Consultations**  
**Working Dinner on Faith and Protection**  
(12 June 2013)

*Conversation on INTER-FAITH AND INTRA-FAITH ENGAGEMENT  
IN ROLLING OUT THE AFFIRMATION OF WELCOME*

Summary

**Participants:**

Co-moderators

1. Rachel Levitan, HIAS
2. Ralston Deffenbaugh, Lutheran World Federation

with input from:

3. Marie-Claude Poirier, UNHCR
4. Mark Hetfield, HIAS
5. Paul Martin Lukusa Mbwebwa, Actions et Interventions pour le Développement et l'Encadrement Social (Eglise Catholique Libérée, Kinshasa)
6. Nathalie Lummert, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services

**Highlights of the conversation:**

**The Affirmation of Welcome for faith leaders is unprecedented at UNHCR. The active engagement of a wide range of faith-based organisations and local faith communities, including faith leaders, is historically significant.**

In Luke 12:45, it is written that 'much will be required from everyone to whom much has been given.' The High Commissioner himself quoted this passage of the Holy Bible in 2012, reminding observers of the personal faith and the responsibility that the chief of the UN Refugee Agency must bear.

Although it is a lesser-known fact, the post of High Commissioner for Refugees has been held by persons of religious persuasion. Among others, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, fourth High Commissioner, was deeply influenced by his family roots and claimed lineage going back to Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Eighth High Commissioner Sadako Ogata was an active member of the Catholic religious minority in Japan, starting her career as an academic at the University of the Sacred Heart and the International Christian University in Tokyo.

The High Commissioner's December 2012 Dialogue on the theme of Faith and Protection further served to highlight that the tradition of asylum is deeply rooted in all major religious value systems and firmly anchored in cultural, social, and political traditions around the world. During the drafting of the 1951 Convention for Refugees, faith-based organisations were at the forefront of advocacy efforts.

**With recognition of the contribution of faith-based organisations to UNHCR's core work of protection and durable solutions also comes the concern of generating a two-track system for those included and those excluded from the traditional humanitarian sector.**

- *Looking forward, the Affirmation of Welcome can serve as a point of departure for the work of all faith groups that is driven by shared values and principles.*
- Instead of working in silos, faith leaders, communities of faith and faith-based organisations are empowered by the Affirmation to share and discuss best practices and work more efficiently towards their common goal of protecting refugees, asylum-seekers, the stateless and the internally displaced.
- Faith leaders can utilise their moral authority to promote and amplify key messages, rolling out the Affirmation in their respective communities, thereby inviting the faithful to ‘welcome the stranger’ beyond the religious observances of a given season, but throughout the year.
- A parallel can be drawn between the arrival and the welcoming of the stranger in a community to symbolic rites of passage of members of that faith community. As such, the faithful can be actively engaged in sharing the Affirmation during religious ceremonies, and adapting and sharing the text according to the occasion.

### **Ideas for deepening work on the issue**

- Information sharing on the campaigns of leading faith-based organisations on the rolling out of the Affirmation
- Holding inter-faith and intra-faith fora and consultations

### **Ideas for rolling out the affirmation**

- **Potential criteria:** Consulting with organisations that traditionally do not have a history of partnering with UNHCR, have been excluded from the traditional humanitarian sector and would not otherwise share good/best practices and lessons learned with faith-based organisations of differing cultural and religious backgrounds.
- **Potential avenues:**
  - ✓ **Religions for Peace 9<sup>th</sup> World Assembly** in Vienna (A special session is being devoted to the Affirmations on 21 November 2013)
  - ✓ **Inter-faith fora**, such as the one planned by the Lutheran World Federation with leading Muslim organisations and charities
- **Potential partners:**
  - ✓ Faith-based organisations operating in regions and of religious backgrounds that are currently underrepresented in our ‘faith literacy’ work

*Conversation on FAITH AND HUMAN RIGHTS*  
Summary

**Participants:**

Co-moderators

1. Rabbi Nava Hafetz, Rabbis for Human Rights - Israel
2. José Riera, UNHCR

with input from:

3. Melisa Pitotti, ICVA
4. Anastasia K. Brown, US Conference of Catholic Bishops
5. Enrique Burbundi, HIAS Argentina
6. Trevor Davies, Anglican Consultative Council
7. Kazunai Fuji, Sokka Gakkai International
8. Sandy Spinner, HIAS Board Member
9. Maurice Herson, Co-Editor, Forced Migration Review

**Highlights of the conversation:**

**Contemporary human rights norms – the rights we enjoy as human beings and the rules for treating other human beings – have deep roots in the rights and values espoused by all faiths.**

In Genesis, (the first book of the Torah), chapter one indicates that humanity was created as a unique being – male and female (i.e. as compared to schools of fishes and swarms of insects). Whomever destroys a single soul – a single human being – is considered be diminishing God's presence on Earth. And whomever saves a single soul, a single human being, is considered to have saved an entire world. The very name 'Adam', according to the Torah, embraces both 'man' and 'woman', affirming gender equality as a baseline norm. **But the power men wield in society is reflected in religious power structures. Men dominate them and faith discourse.**

The UN Charter<sup>1</sup> affirms the dignity of every human being, which is in line with widely held faith principles and values. Nevertheless, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>2</sup> takes a slightly different approach, by affirming 'freedom of religion and belief'. This, of course, embraces the right to be an atheist or to convert from one religion to another.

**Faith leaders are key interpreters of both freedoms today.** How to overcome narrow, faith-driven interpretations of human rights, and calls for religious intolerance and xenophobia?

**In the humanitarian field, non-proselytization is both a key principle and a red line. FBOs are most effective when they live out in their words and deeds the**

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<sup>1</sup> **We the people of the United Nations determined to ...**

<sup>2</sup> **Preamble:** *Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people. Article 18:* *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Article 26(2)* also provides that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

**commonalities emphasized by all faiths (welcoming the other, offering hospitality and protection to those in danger and in need, looking out for the most vulnerable, non-conditionality in assistance, respect for diversity of belief). The ultimate aim is empowerment of men and women to enjoy their rights fully, irrespective of their belief.**

- *Looking forward, understanding and cooperation can only be enhanced by affirming common values. This is the strength of the Affirmations of Welcome unveiled at the NGO Consultations.*
- The conversation focused on the tension between the reality of full panoply of human rights guarantees in law, and the reality of interpretations given by faith leaders; especially the most conservative and radical.
- A key question going forward was whether to take a step-by-step approach in rolling out the Affirmation, and avoid advocacy on issues where there is no 'similarity', in the interest of winning broader-based support in the first instance.
- There was a consensus that we shall be unable to get everyone to agree on everything at once. All friends of Faith and Protection need to be clear about we are asking FBOS to do with the Affirmations, focusing on the commonalities, and taking a step-by-step approach.

#### **Ideas for deepening work on this issue**

- Developing faith literacy on Islam

#### **Ideas for rolling out the affirmation**

- **Potential criteria:** Focus on countries with the highest number of refugees and in countries where faith is playing out as part of conflict.
- **Potential avenues:**
  - ✓ The **Human Rights Council**, which is where UNHCR and FBOs can influence States most. The most important thing is to garner trust and understanding (be transparent about the organization and activities being represented; emphasize Freedom of Religion and Belief (Rapporteur Heiner Bielefeldt, who attended the HC's Dialogue); emphasize commonalities and recognize that this is not the same thing as 'similarities' (Source: Lund Principles on Inter-Faith Dialogue)
  - ✓ Using **Facebook** with personal narratives focusing on the Common Ground that brings faiths together
  - ✓ **Religions for Peace 9<sup>th</sup> World Assembly** in Vienna (A special session is being devoted to the Affirmations on 21 November 2013)
  - ✓ **10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches** (30 October – 8 November Busan, Republic of Korea)
- **Potential partners:**
  - ✓ **Muslim faith leaders:** Who are courageous enough to do the right thing, take risks and speak out against extremist voices spreading hatred, rejection and violence. We also need a spectrum of Muslim voices (Al Azhar, Sufis, Saudi King, etc.)
  - ✓ **Other faith leaders:** Pope Francis

- ✓ **SRSG Heiner Bielefeldt**
- ✓ **Special Rapporteur on Minorities**
- ✓ **Special Rapporteur on International Solidarity**
- ✓ **CONGO**
- ✓ **President of NGO Committee of Religious Organizations in the UN**
- ✓ **Justice for Peace**
- ✓ **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Egypt is the new Chair)**

*Conversation on TAPPING THE POTENTIAL OF LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES:  
OPPORTUNITIES AND SENSITIVITIES*  
Summary

**Participants:**

Co-moderators

1. Helen Stawski, Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury
2. T. Alexander Aleinikoff, Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR

with input from:

3. Alice Du Verne, UNHCR
4. Thaïs Ruegg, WVI
5. Charmaine Hedding, ORAM
6. Neil Grungras, ORAM
7. Hotaeg Lee, The Pnan Refuge – South Korea
8. G. Ashok Gladston Xavier Gnanapragasam, OFERR – India
9. Elizabeth Gano, LWF

**Highlights of the conversation:**

There are many examples of how **religious narratives** (i.e. stories from the Bible or Qur'an) are used to change negative behaviour which undermines protection. Examples were given from World Vision - Channel of Hope's work on HIV or Tearfund's work on Disaster Risk Reduction. **Can these be utilised in humanitarian protection activities?**

UNHCR would be cautious of a partner using religious narratives for protection—because of a fear of proselytization—even if the implementers and persons of concern shared the same religion. For professional humanitarian agencies, it is not worth the risk of mixing protection with religious narratives even if it can encourage positive behaviour change, but **we concluded these are often based on value judgements around risk assessment versus impact that needs to be further unpacked.**

**There is even more concern surrounding the use of prayer.** If the prayer happened spontaneously by persons of concern that would be acceptable, but if the implementers encouraged it in any way, it would then be deemed unacceptable. Do we need more clarity on the parameters? **What about the evidence that prayer aids internal resilience?**

One example from a Christian-run asylum shelter showed how initial challenges concerning Muslim asylum-seekers praying in the shelter were transformed into an open and welcoming space for all faiths and none. **This example also showed how FBOs can access large networks of volunteers to assist the work of protection in urban centres.**

**Ideas for deepening work on the issue**

- Religious holidays like Ramadan are times when local faith communities tend to give more financial support for humanitarian responses. **Religious narratives around charity encourage fundraising**, but how can this be encouraged throughout the year?
- One organisation advocating for LGBTI rights had successfully worked with priests and imams in South Africa to challenge their record on supporting the

LGBTI refugee community, which resulted in a **greater mutual understanding of diverse perspectives plus a commitment to protection of LGBTI groups.** This work was small scale but could be replicated.

*Conversation on THE ROLE OF FAITH IN HUMANITARIAN AND PROTECTION  
OPERATIONS AND SOME OF THE CHALLENGES*  
Summary

**Participants:**

Co-moderators

1. Jason Knapp, CWS
2. James Thomson, Act for Peace/ACT Alliance – Australia

with input from:

3. Marion Cauldrey, Forced Migration Review
4. Mitzy Schroder, JRS
5. Ashok Gladstone Xavier, Dean, Loyola College, Chennai, Organisation for the Relief of Tamil Elam Refugees
6. Maurice Herson, Forced Migration Review

**Highlights of the conversation:**

A debate arose around the importance of supporting and working through local structures, which was seen to be in tension (at times) with unjust local structures, including deeply troubling local power dynamics. Rich personal experience was shared, including experience in Sri Lanka, to highlight this tension. **The group hoped that Table 3 would identify some solutions and reflect on participatory methods that may help to constructively engage local structures, while mitigating risks.**

**More practical work is needed to help UNHCR staff on the ground, secular INGOs, and other parts of the international system understand the faith dimension at the local level.**

- Practical steps could be to:
  - (1) Include local religious leaders in the list of initial contacts to meet when new senior staff arrive in-country;
  - (2) Ensure that faith-related questions and analysis are included in assessment tools and methodologies;
  - (3) Encourage expatriate staff to engage early upon arrival with national staff on the local faith dynamics, as they are (often) great sources of information on related issues;
  - (4) Review what faith-sensitive protection tools already exist, and if a gap exists, consider developing tools along these lines;
  - (5) Map the structure, function and protective roles of FBOs (that are not linked to the cluster system, but are part of the broader faith-based humanitarian architecture in key countries) with a view to identifying common values and goals, and areas for collaboration, and strengthening information sharing and coordination;
  - (6) Consider 'exit strategies' involving handing over projects to local faith-based actors early on; and,
  - (7) Review donor proposal selection criteria in order to stress the need for more nuanced assessments of the religious dynamics of conflict, local faith knowledge, ability to work with sensitivity and capacity to manage associated risks.

**Ideas for deepening work on the issue**

- **More work is needed to help 'translate' the language of faith actors (terms, concepts and approaches) and the language of humanitarian actors. The**



Affirmations document is a good example of this, as it is a document on religious terminology and asylum, but additional work would be helpful, particularly to better communicate with faith actors who currently have little engagement with the humanitarian system. **Similarly, a broader 'faith literacy' training effort, i.e. a strategy to train UN/INGOs on how to engage faith actors for protection ends, could be useful.**

- **It is useful to distil methodologies used by humanitarians to mobilize faith actors for protection ends.** The case studies could be reviewed for this purpose, including with an eye to seeing what could be replicable. The role(s) of faith-based organizations in facilitating or playing a liaison role toward this end is also worth further reflection, with an eye to reinforcing and further supporting this role into the future.
- The group noted that **FBOs and LFCs were well placed to undertake community level 'protection preparedness'** (helping communities prepare for, mitigate and respond to spikes in violence, exploitation and abuse). Several examples were noted, including pre-election violence prevention work in Kenya and, currently, in Zimbabwe. It was noted that the Jesuits had established early warning mechanisms to address outbreaks of xenophobic violence that utilized local religious structures in South Africa; the Henry Martin Institute had worked with Indian LFCs to develop similar community-based prevention and response mechanisms; the *Local to Global Project* had developed a methodology of action-based research that led to direct programming to strengthen local protection strategies in Kordofan; and Act for Peace had specifically adapted its Disaster Risk Reduction programming in the Pacific to help remote communities prepare and respond to protection threats during disasters. It was also noted that the All Africa Conference of Churches has an Eminent Persons Program designed specifically for intervening to prevent election violence across Africa. **It was felt this area was worth highlighting in the call for examples and should be explored further, including at the proposed 2014 Annual Consultations session on community-based protection (noted below).**
- During the discussion, several examples of theologically-informed FBO praxis and approach were discussed. It was noted that outside of the faith group concerned, little was known of these approaches, their value, their basis in theology, and their use and resonance with local populations. The long-practiced theological process of 'discernment',<sup>3</sup> for example, was noted as more usable in the local context than some humanitarian tools. Given their relevance, it was recommended that there be a further review of the working methods and tools used by FBOs. The group discussed how political actors in various countries had attempted to undermine the humanitarian work of FBOs for political ends and how this impacted on wider humanitarian access. It was noted that this issue was often neglected in discussions on humanitarian access and warranted further consideration.
- **Potential avenues:**
  - ✓ The next steps in the faith and protection dialogue could align well with UNHCR's renewed commitment to community-based protection, as described in the papers for the **June Standing Committee**. It would be useful to ensure UNHCR

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<sup>3</sup> In Christianity, **discernment** (from Latin *discernere* meaning 'separate, distinguish') is an activity by which the value and quality of a given subject or event is weighed with the aim of moving past mere perception and making critical judgments.

colleagues moving forward with that work stream are well aware of the faith and protection discussions, and consider the faith-related components of community-based protection.

- ✓ A suggestion is on the table to have a community-based protection session at the **2014 NGO Consultations**, which could include a faith component.

Prepared by Jason Knapp, Marie-Claude Poirier, José Riera, Helen Stawski and James D. Thomson