

**Rapporteur's Report on the 2013 UNHCR NGO Consultations
Note on the Faith and Protection Side Event
(12 June 2013)**

*Faith and protection: follow-up to
the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges*

Panellists

James D. Thomson, Act for Peace (Moderator)
Volker Türk, Director of International Protection, UNHCR
Rachel Levitan, HIAS
Bishop Munib A. Younan, President, Lutheran World Federation
Atallah Fitzgibbon, Islamic Relief Worldwide
Rabbi Nava Hafetz, Rabbis for Human Rights–Israel
Helen Stawski, Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury

Background of the session

A special session on Faith and Protection at the June 2011 Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations explored the challenges faced by national faith-based organizations (FBOs), their unique strengths and protection potential, and how INGOs, UNHCR and national FBOs can maximize their collective field-level protection efforts. Building upon that special session, UNHCR devoted its 2012 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges to the theme of Faith and Protection. The High Commissioner closed the 2012 Dialogue with a series of actionable suggestions for follow-up. To build on the momentum around this topic, participants of the 2012 Dialogue also proposed a side event at the 2013 Annual Consultations. The side event provided an opportunity to take note of progress made in follow-up, solicit input into thinking on good practices, and invite broader NGO engagement and commitment to the follow-up initiatives.

Major points arising from speakers and discussions (trends & challenges)

- Volker Türk, Director of International Protection, affirmed that the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Faith and Protection was a 'journey of mutual discovery' for UNHCR and a group of faith leaders and FBOs from across the world. In a polarized world where religion is often a dividing force, the Dialogue on the theme of Faith and Protection reflected UNHCR's commitment not only for 'advocating together for protection' but also for engaging on faith issues and recognizing the role of FBOs, local faith communities, and religious leaders in promoting welcoming communities and protecting refugees, asylum-seekers, the internally displaced, stateless persons and other 'persons of concern' to UNHCR.
- At the conclusion of the High Commissioner's Dialogue, a coalition of FBOs embraced the recommendations to welcome refugees and other forcibly displaced persons into their communities. Together, they drafted a document entitled *Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders* ('Affirmation of Welcome') that drew upon principles and values of welcome shared by major faith groups including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- Two faith leaders representing the Christian and Jewish faiths spoke about the place of religion in the life of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, as well as their role in promoting inter-religious understanding and dialogue. Both fully endorsed the *Affirmation of Welcome*, adding that religion should be part of

the solution, has the power to shift public opinion and lay aside differences to focus on common ground. The document is meant to be a practical tool for religious leaders to encourage positive behaviour through common language to welcome the displaced and to teach those at large about the 'commandment' to treat the stranger as one would wish to be treated.

- NGO representatives explained their advocacy in relation to the Affirmation of Welcome and indicated that this document is directed at receiving communities across the world who often sacrifice much more than the international humanitarian community when they welcome the stranger. It raises issues of resource competition and limited livelihood opportunities that can be further exacerbated upon the arrival of displaced persons. For this reason, the Affirmation of Welcome was written in the first person and translated into seven languages to appeal to the personal faith of all persons and recognize the 'oneness of humanity'.
- The side event closed by highlighting the recent UNHCR-NGO initiative to better understand the contributions to protection outcomes across the world of FBOs, local faith communities and faith leaders. With over 50 good practices compiled, notable examples include: physical protection; national legislative changes; combating xenophobia and discrimination; supporting resettlement and integration; prevention of and response to SGBV and forced recruitment; deterrence of violence through presence and accompaniment; reconciliation and peace-building; legal counselling and asylum case management; and mediating ethnic and land-related tensions. The initiative demonstrated the value of thoughtful collaboration between UNHCR and faith-actors, and included innovative and strategic partnership to address specific protection issues. As UNHCR and partners continue to implement recommendations from the 2012 High Commissioner's Dialogue, the good practice examples will be used to support efforts to improve the 'faith literacy' of UNHCR staff and the broader international humanitarian community and consider operational implications of the dialogue.

Recommendations/Conclusions

- Carry out the global and country-level roll-out and endorsement of the Affirmation of Welcome, including through the Religions for Peace World Assembly, in coordination with a wide array of faith-based organizations, governments and international organizations.
- Improve the 'faith literacy' of the international humanitarian community, including through guidance for UNHCR and partner staff on how to meaningfully engage with faith actors who fall outside of the traditional humanitarian system.
- Consider the operational implications of the faith and protection dialogue, especially how UNHCR and partners can better understand and reinforce the role of faith actors in advocating for and achieving protection; for example, through faith-sensitive community-level 'protection preparedness,' developing faith-sensitive protection tools and approaches, and fostering grassroots and protection mobilization activities that appropriately utilise faith actors and networks.
- Take account of the dialogue in UNHCR and partner work on community-based protection; hold a community-based protection session at the 2014 NGO Consultations, and ensure that the session explores the faith component of community-based protection.