



WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

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Religious Engagement: The Contributions of Faith Communities to our Shared Humanity

SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY

Core Responsibility Three of the Agenda for Humanity



“Faith leaders and faith-based organizations in humanitarian contexts are not only able to deliver critical services during a crisis but to do so with a unique wisdom of compassion and reconciliation.”

**Cardinal Antonio Tagle,
President, Caritas
Internationalis**

I. Overview

Many religious institutions and faith-based NGOs (FBOs) have a unique comparative advantage in humanitarian contexts: they have an established relationship of trust and familiarity with local communities in which they are embedded. Due to their presence before a crisis they are often the first responders and key providers of assistance and protection during crises, and they will remain after international organizations leave. Utilizing their localized networks, resource mobilization, trust and influence with local communities and commitment to peace and dignity, they provide critical and sustainable contributions to all aspects of humanitarian response as well as subsequent development needs.

More than 250 faith-based leaders and representatives of the world's largest humanitarian organizations, representing all major world faith traditions, gathered at the World Humanitarian Summit's Special Session on Religious Engagement on May 23rd. These included representatives from all regions of the world, both religious leaders as well as NGOs, actively engaged in humanitarian relief work in all corners of the globe. The speakers at this Special Session represented organizations that are already undertaking and providing at least 60% of humanitarian actions globally.

The Special Session presented concrete commitments from religious leaders and other humanitarian actors to increase the impact of faith-based actors in reducing humanitarian need and suffering, and to call for their inclusion within policy- and decision-making at all levels of humanitarian response.

These commitments are summarised in an [Outcome Document](#) which was endorsed by more than 160 faith-based actors (FBOs and religious Leaders), representing all major faith traditions and different geographical regions.

II. Key outcomes/themes

Key commitments reflected in the Outcome Document include the following:

We, faith-based organizations and religious leaders, commit to:

- Upholding the principles of compassion, humanity and impartiality in our provision of humanitarian assistance and protection in alignment with fundamental humanitarian principles.
- Upholding and expanding the significant humanitarian response of faith-based organizations and to overcome the manipulative and abusive attempts to link religion with violence, terrorism, or exclusion of others. By so doing, we aim to resolve conflicts and work to promote reconciliation.
- Working together to better contextualize humanitarian response, leveraging our added value to reach people in need of assistance and protection, and using our influence to mobilize our local communities in support of these efforts.
- Ending hunger and serving the most vulnerable in humanitarian [by] bringing our intimate knowledge of community needs, practices, fears, and hopes to humanitarian work.
- Keeping affected persons at the centre of all assistance planned and provided, maintaining robust beneficiary feedback mechanisms.
- Ensuring that women and girls' rights are protected, their needs are met, and that their ability to engage in decision making is enhanced; as this is a proven strategy for increasing the effectiveness of humanitarian action as a means of building resilience for all members of families and communities.
- Continuing to play an active role in response coordination, while we reinforce organizational systems and structures to allow us to meet growing humanitarian needs.
- In addition to material assistance and other services, we [therefore] commit to facilitating spiritual assistance which can significantly contribute to the population's sense of hope during and after a disaster, while prohibiting pressuring people into any religious practice.
- Continuing to work with national governments to recognize and affirm the role of faith and faith based organisations to provide faith-based assistance to communities in need.

In addition to the Outcome Document, several commitments were articulated by the diverse speakers, ranging from the Order of Malta's extensive work on faith



engagement and service delivery, to the global policy-oriented infrastructure announced by the German Ministry of Development Cooperation in tandem with USAID- the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

Faith-based actors called on traditional humanitarian actors:

- To recognize and affirm their significant and often unique holistic contributions to humanitarian work;
- To consider them as equal partners in humanitarian and development work;
- To scale up efforts to support their important work in communities around the globe

III. Way Forward

Follow-up action needed in order for identifiable change to occur for affected people. To do this, international actors must take action on the requests made by the faith communities above.

IV. Speakers

Moderator:

- Dr. Azza Karam, Coordinator, UN Task Force on Religion and Development

Speakers:

- Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, General Secretary, Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka
- His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, Patriarch of Istanbul
- His Excellency Mr. Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, Secretary-General, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)
- His Excellency Mr. Albrecht Boeselager, Chancellor, Sovereign Order of Malta
- Ms. Deborah Boudreaux, Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation
- Dr. Hany El-Banna, President, The Humanitarian Forum
- Mr. Benjamin Laniado, President, CADENA
- His Excellency Dr. Gerd Müller, Federal Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development, Federal Republic of Germany
- Ms. Alaa Murabit, Founder, Voice of Libyan Women
- Sheikh Ibrahim Sesay, Islamic Action Group, Sierra Leone
- Mr. John Nduna, General Secretary, ACT Alliance
- Cardinal Antonio Tagle, President, Caritas Internationalis



- Mr. Allen Ottaro, Executive Director, Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability
- Mr. Antti Pentikäinen, Executive Director, Network of Religious and Traditional Leaders and Peacemakers