

COMMISSION III:

Advancing *Shared Well-Being* by Promoting
Just and Harmonious Societies

Report from the 10th World Assembly



Religions for Peace 

Commission III Report: Advancing *Shared Well-Being* by Promoting Just and Harmonious Societies

The preparatory Commission report, regional consultations, discussions by women's and youth groups and Commission discussions during the Assembly were striking in their shared commitment to the vision of just, harmonious and diverse communities and the rich assets that religious communities offer, notably through inter and intra religious action. Large challenges involved each call for action but, as is the case for the Sustainable Development Goals, both problems and solutions are tightly linked. Two common threads are the impact of rapid political, economic, social and religious change and of inequality, globally and within communities. Building positive societies with the spirit of the common good calls for determined action by religious communities at global, national and local levels, inclusive action where women and youth are integral to leadership.

In exploring challenges and action responses, shared principles include the importance of dialogue in safe spaces, attention to building trust, a deep commitment to telling the truth, promoting justice, searching for peace and sincere commitment to inclusion and to hearing different voices, and thus the dignity of every person.

Each topic discussed as integral parts of the challenge of building just and harmonious societies needs response and action. Advancing good governance and religious involvement in fighting **corruption** is urgent and timely and highlights the need to work with wide ranging partners including governments. The forced **migration crisis** involves enormous suffering for those uprooted; as a disruptive force, it too often polarizes communities, calling on voices of caring and respect to build on positive experience and common teachings. **Violence in the streets and homes**, that too often affects women and children most acutely, calls for community awareness and action by religious bodies even when that calls for reflections on religious roles in stigma and discrimination. The **shared ideal of religious freedom** calls for attention to understanding of patterns of marginalization of communities and contentious issues like proselytizing, blasphemy and linking human rights and religious freedom advocacy. A unifying theme can be **education**, at levels from early childhood to adults, that focuses on shared civil values and on a true appreciation for the social diversity that is vital for just and harmonious societies.

We propose the following responses to advancing shared well-being by promoting just and harmonious societies:

1) Speaking up more forcefully and taking action, as *Religions for Peace*, against corruption and for good governance

This common scourge demands more purposeful action by religious communities, as it undermines trust and saps resources and energies. *Religions for Peace* should build on the insights and experience of its networks to advocate for bold anti-corruption measures and highlight religious commitments to action, for example through participation in the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC). Action should also address the challenge of ensuring that religious communities, that themselves can be affected by corruption, are committed to transparent action and keeping their own houses in order. Religious leaders have an urgent responsibility to see that happening. They can then with integrity use their teaching on honesty and the common good to call upon political leaders for openness in use of public resources and accountability, as part of global coalitions. Sharing practical experience is a good way to start, sharing resources within the network.

2) Acting on the migration crises

Religions for Peace

Over 70 million people are refugees or forcibly displaced people today, and every two seconds a person is forced to leave their home. Regardless the root causes (that include conflict, oppression, climate change and poverty), great suffering is involved, first and foremost for the refugees themselves. Far too many countries are closing their borders, neglecting cries from the people in need. Many religious communities show the way in welcoming refugees, in spirit and practical ways. All regions are affected and, as **Religions for Peace** has taken action in many situations, there is rich experience to share. All religious traditions have stories welcoming the other, welcoming the stranger.

Religions for Peace, as an institution, should make the global forced migration crisis a priority for action in strategy and in daily plans. They should start with an urgent effort to share practical experience in addressing both needs of force migrants and advocacy and policy responses from different world regions.

3) Focus on education

Education is a common thread linking the work of all commissions, and quality, inclusive, creative educational approaches must be the vital center of future-oriented efforts to build just and harmonious societies. At a fundamental level, the changes we seek comes about through education. The many assets of religious communities provide a solid foundation for new and bold action by **Religions for Peace**. Specific experience linked to inter- and intra-faith action includes important peace education work in different regions and these should be expanded, with experience shared among regions. The efforts should focus on effective programs that bring different communities together. A sharp focus on enhancing religious literacy, meaning both knowledge about different traditions among religious communities and among non-religious actors. Teaching about religion should highlight practical ethical principles and human understandings that followers can recognize and relate to.

Religion for Peace should also expand specific peace education work to engage with broader education systems to address specific issues (exclusion of girls from schools, biased textbooks and teaching approaches, exclusion of vulnerable groups and adult education, for example) that involve both policy and practice. Good examples and practices from each region, on how to work with the education system, both public and religious, should be shared.