

COMMISSION IV:

Advancing Shared Well-Being by
Fostering Sustainable and Integral
Human Development

Report from the 10th World Assembly



Religions for Peace 

Commission IV Report: Advancing *Shared Well-Being* by Fostering Sustainable and Integral Human Development

Observations

Adopted by 193 UN member states in 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals constitute a set of objects for the integrated fulfilment of economic rights, social justice and environmental sustainability. Many shared spiritual and religious values can be identified in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which, broadly speaking, outline the social, economic and environmental conditions necessary for *positive* Peace and sustainable and integral human development. As such, religious communities can understand the SDGs as a gift, insofar as they provide the technical vision of flourishing towards which spiritual values and religious resources can be applied. Given our shared religious concerns for distributive justice and human dignity, we should do our utmost to support their achievement.

Religious and multi-religious engagement should be an integral aspect of all forms of economic, social and environmental development, and thus a primary component of fulfilling the SDGs. Most faith-based organizations and religious communities have the experience, institutional infrastructure and other resources required for direct service provision and other SDG-related work. Importantly, however, the complementary work of religious communities cannot supplant the role of governments, which have material and political assets at scale unavailable to most religious groups.

Religions for Peace delegates noted special concern for the following goals:

- SDG 1. Poverty
- SDG 2. Hunger
- SDG 3. Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 4. Quality Education
- SDG 5. Gender Equality
- SDG 10. Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 13. Climate Action

Opportunities

First, religious communities have social, material and institutional infrastructure which can be leveraged for the wide dissemination of the SDGs at local, national and regional levels. Global awareness is critical for achieving the goals and religious leaders can use the SDGs to help congregants and community members better understand their rights-protected human dignity.

Our diverse traditions ground our common concern and compassion for the marginalized and vulnerable and provide us with a diverse set of spiritual and ethical tools to motivate action on the SDGs. Religious groups should incorporate the SDGs into their global education networks. Whether in primary schools, universities or seminaries and their equivalent, the SDGs (including peace education programs) should be embedded into curricula to inform laypeople and equip leaders to leverage their pastoral capacities towards achieving the SDGs. Leaders should be enabled to contextualize the SDGs and make them relevant vis-à-vis our respective sacred texts and religious traditions. Within our own religious and

extended communities, the SDG indicators should be used to assess progress on important areas of development, such as education, healthcare, inequality, employment, etc.; and religious actors can use these measures to hold governments and authorities to account.

Religious communities should advocate that governments spend less on military expenditures (among others) and more on sustainable and integral human development, both internationally and in our own countries. Indeed, the SDG financing gap means paying special attention to interpreting and communicating goals in a way that makes them resonate with audiences in the developed world. We should also encourage local and national governments to refer to the SDGs in their planning and policies.

Lastly, religious communities should take the opportunity to continue to convene key stakeholder groups needed to realize the SDGs, following in the success of the Ethics in Action initiative.

Action Proposals

I. “Interreligious Sustainable and Integral Human Development Council”

Religions for Peace should assist in the creation of an interreligious global body to coordinate education, advocacy and action on the SDGs by religious leaders and within religious communities. At the national level, the Council could organize the dissemination of SDG awareness, alignment guidelines and best practices for monitoring and evaluation, all at the congregational or communal level. The Council could also develop interreligious platforms on specific SDGs to promote training processes on common issues. Finally, a key activity of this Council would involve strengthening formal partnerships with governments and international donor agencies for improving direct service provision, especially for health care services. This would enable regional coordination between aid groups and multi-country religious denominations and other networks.

II. “Sacred Time and the State of our Planet”

Many of our religious traditions have some understanding of the sacred nature of time. **Religions for Peace** should develop a project and resources that draw on the concept of sacred time across religious traditions to emphasize the urgency of the global crisis and the timely action needed on climate change and other challenges to sustainable and integral human development. This project would include parish-level advocacy of the SDGs, in addition to the effective lobbying of political and business leaders at the national levels.

III. “Strategic and Ethical Investments to Promote the SDGs”

Many religious groups and denominations maintain large financial endowments, including pension funds. **Religions for Peace** leaders should advocate that their respective asset managers align pension funds and other assets with the 2030 agenda, all according to the ethical values of their respective religious tradition. Fossil fuel divestment should be prioritized. Guidelines could also be set for allocating tithes and congregational “giving” towards SDG-related causes (“SDG Investment”).