

Pre-Assembly Regional Consultation Reports

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



Religions for Peace 

AFRICA

Justice and harmony are prerequisites in order to have meaningful consistency in the pursuit of societal cohesion. It is also a right of every citizen, regardless of tribe, birthplace or race, to live in a peaceful and cohesive society as elaborated in the spirit of Ubuntu – which advocates for shared common good. The family is a fundamental foundation for advanced positive peace and the framework for harmonious societies.

Whereas Africa prides itself of a rich cultural diversity, these have sadly been used to discriminate against the same populace. We, therefore, as African religious leaders observe that a just and harmonious society is integral for the pursuit of common good to be realistic. To this end we note that there's; -

- Need for a reduction of social inequality through good governance, fair redistribution of national wealth and resources and call for policies that uplift the livelihoods of the disadvantaged and vulnerable in the society.
- Need for the Respect of the Freedom of Religion and Belief by all, promotion of religious diversity, tolerance and observance of the rule of law in dealing with all faiths and religious beliefs.
- Need for Faith leaders' increased regard as role models and guardians of ethics and morality, to address issues of corruption, rigged elections and poverty, and ensure observance of the rule of law. In addition, they will ensure space for civil society voice is maintained.
- Faith institutions MUST lead by example in ensuring the inclusion of women and youth in leadership roles within their structures and their participation in making critical decisions of the institution/faith community. This move will extend to other institutions and sectors within the society.
- Faith leaders' in Africa should commit themselves in active engagement in addressing the causes and challenges facing migrants, immigrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and victims of human trafficking and also provide assistance in humanitarian crises through spiritual, financial and material support can be integral in improving the well-being of such persons including improved migration governance and security across Africa.
- Need for Faith leaders to speak strongly against gender-based violence and address aspects of culture that promote GBV and other forms of gender-based discrimination. There is also a need for inculcation of good morals and dissemination of information through intergenerational dialogues and other religious teaching that encourage domestic harmony.

In a later session on “Just and Harmonious Societies,” the audience was guided by the Great Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia, the Most Venerable Tep Vong, who began by referencing the supporting nation of Germany as an example of a country that overcame extreme adversity to become the world leader it is today. The Great Supreme Patriarch assured all participants that Unity equals Prosperity, and this in turn equals a Long Life, noting that he himself is 88 years old and still committed to uniting humanity. “I believe in sowing unity among religious communities. That is why I am here today.”

Asia Women of Faith Network promoted the following observations and recommendations:

- Men and Women of faith need to have accurate knowledge of their scriptures in order to practice their religion. There need to be religious /ethical education in the home and in religious institutions, so children learn to care and share with others. There need to be education to raise awareness of cultural violence in order to change people’s mindsets and in so doing peace can be institutionalized. There need to be spaces and opportunities for women of different faiths /traditions to work together on issues such as promoting human rights and respecting cultural and religious diversity.
- Religious communities and religious leaders to advocate for enacting the relevant laws and policies to protect basic rights of women and children.
- *RfP* International prepare pamphlets relating to the rights guaranteed to women and children under different religious scriptures.
- After the pamphlets are completed the text is used via video clips of prominent male religious leaders giving these women’s and children’s rights. This is then to be sent and shared widely on social media.

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EUROPE

Observations

Religious leaders should play a key role in developing just and harmonious societies by advocating for social justice and equality of opportunity and supporting those who are marginalized and least well off in our societies. Religious communities of all traditions have great histories of social justice and providing welfare support to those most in need.

Religious Leaders should pledge never to demonize anyone in their teachings and sermons and take actions to ensure that doctrinal disagreements do not lead to oppression or harm to others, or physical violence. Religious Leaders should always advocate living together in peace and harmony and make every effort to prevent the appropriation of religion for political gain or the perpetuation of division and discrimination in society. It is also our responsibility as religious leaders who advocate peace to challenge those within our own religious communities who tolerate or support divisive and hostile popularism and politics for their own gain or to avoid criticism. We can see religion being co-opted and

Whilst religion has been a part of European communities and societies for centuries, today some religious communities feel under threat from aggressive secularism and secular institutions and feel their rights to practice and believe as they choose is being increasingly challenged. The oppression of religious freedom also creates disharmony within societies and can be seen as unjust.

Opportunities

An important means to create more just and harmonious societies is through education. All European countries have existing education programs supported by governments, and therefore if ECRL/*RfP* could promote the importance of more values-based education this could reach and impact on an entire generation of young people, leading to significant and sustainable change.

Establishing better platforms and mechanisms whereby religious communities can advocate for religious freedom, and more just and harmonious societies, at institutional levels is imperative. ECRL/*RfP* should also advocate for the right of vulnerable people to exercise their religious rights and remind governments of their legal obligations to ensure vulnerable people have access to religious practice.

Actions

ECRL/*RfP* could take the lead in developing a forum to bring together likeminded people around the subject of the importance of education in creating more just and harmonious societies. This could be a topic for a future ECRL meeting or event.

In order to enhance platforms for religious leaders to advocate for religious freedom ECRL needs to develop relations with key partners and remind institutions such as the EU of their commitment to engage and work with religious communities. ECRL has stepped up its engagement with the EU and will continue to pursue opportunities to engage on this issue.

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Many governments have also created new roles and posts specifically to enable governments to engage with religious actors, and ECRL will continue to look for opportunities to work more closely with governments. We must however also be aware that most governments/institutions have their own agenda when engaging with religious actors.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Observations

Through religious communities, we will help to promote fair and harmonious societies by identifying pressing problems such as insufficient recognition of human dignity, lack of unity due to the lack of respect for diversity and acceptance of the other, and due the little commitment and congruence in the prevention of situations of corruption, violence, etc.

Opportunities

Given the lack of recognition of human dignity, we must move towards a culture of the integrity of the human being, dialoguing, respecting life; promoting the cultures of encounter, nonviolence, land care, family unity, and avoiding polarization, through education in compassion and empathy.

Raise awareness of a culture of peace based on an education in universal values, that are common to all religions through justice and peace.

Action Proposals

Conduct meetings, dialogues, pacts and interreligious actions without fear, to prevent and/or give solutions to the problems that prevent us to have fair and harmonious societies.

Strengthen inter-religious networks to work together towards the alleviation of pressing problems in our societies.

NORTH AMERICA

Key Concerns

- Women and youth participation must be integrated across all areas and discussions. It should not be an “afterthought”.
- It is difficult to strive for just and harmonious societies without addressing economic disparity. One example of this inequity is gentrification in North American cities, where traditional communities are being pushed out (“forced domestic migration”). Wealth distribution and better economic access is needed.
- Groups pointed to racism and the overall issue of race as one of the major concerns and impediments to promoting just and harmonious societies in the North American context.
- North American communities must re-evaluate the value systems that they share. One group pointed to the Global Peace Index, where the U.S. ranks 128th (out of 163 countries) and Canada ranks 6th. How are these countries so close yet so distant? More communication is needed.

Role of Religious Resources

- Find ways to encourage truth and reconciliation (the National African American Reparations Commission is one example). This can also take place on the local level, through promoting interfaith cooperation and tolerance.
- “In my church, there is the view that the word ‘ecumenical’ is a bad thing and talking to other faiths is a form of betrayal.”
- Create safe spaces and encourage honest, inclusive dialogue. This includes a safe space to be angry. These conversations can take place on a local level -- one group suggested a local library as a venue, for example.
- “The best healing comes from healed healers.”
- Display unity through working together to address concerns and needs in the community at-large. For example, one group suggested that joint health clinics and SAT study programs be organized by various faith organizations.

Further Capacity Building

- Religious institutions must self-reflect and evaluate how to attract people back into their spaces (e.g. addressing old hurts, including historic exclusion of minority groups such as indigenous communities, people of color, and women; ensuring checks and balances and transparency issues).
- More work can be done towards developing a forward-looking vision to empower congregants and provide them with a positive roadmap for the future.
- One group suggested the idea of an “interfaith bus” where religious representatives travel the U.S. and speak to different groups about interfaith and the values espoused by the theme of promoting just and harmonious societies.

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- Another group suggested that *RfP* spearhead a religious poll to illustrate the landscape of religions and interfaith work in the U.S. (to supplement existing polling work).