



# **2024 Annual Report United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development**

**Engaging with Religion and Faith-based  
Actors on the 2030 Sustainable  
Development Agenda**

## Membership of

### UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development

 <b>UNAOC</b> United Nations Alliance of Civilizations	 <b>UNFPA</b>	 <b>United Nations</b> Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect	 <b>International</b> Labour Organization
 <b>UNAIDS</b>	 <b>United Nations Security Council</b> Counter-Terrorism Committee	 <b>UNITED NATIONS</b> DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS	 <b>UN</b> DP
 <b>UNITED NATIONS</b> SYSTEM STAFF COLLEGE	 <b>DEPARTMENT OF</b> GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS	 <b>DPPA</b> Preventing Conflict. Sustaining Peace	 <b>UN</b> environment programme
 <b>UNESCO</b>	 <b>United Nations</b> Climate Change	 <b>ONU-HABITAT</b>	 <b>UNHCR</b> The UN Refugee Agency
 <b>unicef</b> for every child	 <b>UNITED NATIONS</b> OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS	 <b>UNODC</b> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	 <b>UNITED NATIONS</b> HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
 <b>UN</b> WOMEN	 <b>THE</b> WORLD BANK	 <b>WFP</b> World Food Programme	 <b>World Health</b> Organization
 <b>SGSG ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN</b>	 <b>UNITAD</b>		 <b>UN</b> VOLUNTEERS

# Contents

<b>1</b>	IATF and MFAC in 2024.....	4
<b>2</b>	United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG).....	7
<b>3</b>	United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).....	10
<b>4</b>	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).....	15
<b>5</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) .....	18
<b>6</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) .....	22
<b>7</b>	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ....	25
<b>8</b>	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) .....	29
<b>9</b>	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children .....	34
<b>10</b>	UNWOMEN .....	35
<b>11</b>	World Health Organization (WHO) .....	39
<b>12</b>	Annex I - Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) .....	42
<b>13</b>	Annex II - United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development 2024 Work Plan	

## IAFT and MFAC in 2024

---

### 1. Background and Structure of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF) and the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC)

The UN Interagency Task Force (IATF) on Religion and Sustainable Development was established in 2010 as a platform for knowledge exchange and management, capacity building, system-wide guidance, and oversight regarding engagement with faith-based and faith-inspired civil society organizations and religious leaders as strategic partners. Since 2020, a system of Co-Chairship was established, with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) assuming the role of Co-Chairs, with a three-year mandate.

In March 2023 – after a process of voting handled by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) – UNFPA, OSAPG and UNAOC were re-appointed as IATF Co-Chairs for another three-year cycle (2023-25).

In 2018, the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the UN IATF (MFAC) was formed to provide strategic advice and support to the United Nations on prioritized thematic areas. The Multi-Faith Advisory Council brings together representatives of 35 UN-system's faith-based partners, reflecting the diversity of religions or beliefs, regions and national presence, and covering thematic areas that mirror the UN's mandate.

In 2024, the IATF and MFAC implemented a substantive and detailed review of the MFAC membership, as per the standing Terms of Reference (ToR) which states the following regarding the holding of a term:

*MFAC Members will be appointed by the IATF-Religion. Every three years (2024, 2027, 2030, etc), the IATF and MFAC Co-Chairs will assess the engagement of the members as defined above under "Responsibilities of the Multi-Faith Council". Based on the assessment and recommendations received by the MFAC Co-Chairs, the IATF can propose the replacement of members of the MFAC that have not engaged concretely with the Council in the previous three years as per agreed responsibilities. At the time of such assessment, faith-based organizations that are not members of the MFAC can join it once approved by the IATF, up to the limit of forty members, as defined above.*

The substantive joint assessment looked into the practical engagement of current MFAC members and based on MFAC recommendations IATF decided on six new or reappointed members (four new ones and two reappointed members who recommitted to the engagement with the MFAC).

## 2. Highlights of the IATF-MFAC work in 2024

In 2024, OSAPG held the Secretariat function among the three IATF Co-Chairs. This included planning, convening, and reporting on:

- IATF-MFAC Convening on 24 January 2024
- IATF meetings on 15 February and 18 October 2024
- IATF-MFAC *Thematic discussion on the impact of anti-blasphemy and anti-apostasy laws: Towards the alternative of protecting individuals and communities against incitement to hatred*, held on 26 March 2024
- IATF-MFAC joint assessment of the MFAC membership on 10 October 2024
- IATF Co-Chairs meeting on 15 October 2024
- MFAC In-Person Retreat on 29 – 30 January 2025

Based on the internal discussions and reflections, the IATF agreed on the 2024 priorities within a dedicated work plan (see Annex 1), focused on:

### ➤ Knowledge Management, including improving the sharing of information

To this end, the IATF Co-Chairs proposed using an [IATF-MFAC Events Board \(Trello\)](#) to share 2024 events and initiatives that can deepen partnerships between UN entities and faith-based organizations.

### ➤ MFAC retreat as a continuous opportunity for deep exchange and reflection between IATF and MFAC

The convening, organized on 24 January 2024, reflected on the advisory role of the MFAC towards the IATF and the wider UN system, highlighting it could be strengthened corresponding to the state of affairs globally. To this end, using the example of previous joint outreach such as the statement issued on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on communities, suggestions were made to consider speaking with one strong voice again to raise attention to the rising conflicts of today, and urge for peace<sup>1</sup>.

Retreat further outlined upcoming opportunities for MFAC participation at relevant UN convened or hosted events; including Summit for the Future.

Another successful highlight in 2024 came through the IATF's inputs to MFAC's [White Paper on Promoting Peace and Security through Religious Leadership](#), as produced by MFAC Peace & Security Working Group in March 2024.

### ➤ IATF-MFAC thematic dialogues

Following the successful first thematic meeting between the IATF and MFAC on UN-FBO collaboration to advance Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in November 2021, UNOSAPG, OHCHR and UNAOC proposed a thematic discussion on the impact of anti-blasphemy and anti-apostasy laws: "*Towards the alternative of protecting individuals and communities against incitement to hatred*".

---

<sup>1</sup> Whilst there was an attempt to issue a joint statement on the need for upholding human rights and peace at the time of conflicts in 2024, ahead of the Summit for the Future, such joint outreach is yet to be agreed upon.

The virtual event was held on 26 March via Microsoft Teams, with high-level remarks by OSAPG, OHCHR and UNAOC, and expert briefings by:

- *Dr. Thiago Alves-Pinto, Director of Studies in Religion and Theology at the Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford*
- *Dr. Iqtidar Cheema, Director of the Institute for Leadership and Community Development (United Kingdom) and Member of the Advisory Committee of the Fez Plan of Action.*
- *Dr. Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief*

The participants further discussed how individuals and communities could best be protected against incitement to hatred and imminent violence based on religion or belief, as an alternative to laws against blasphemy and apostasy and their negative human rights impacts.

#### ➤ **The Kofi Annan Faith Briefings**

MFAC continue with the practice of gathering key stakeholders for important discussions around key UN dates - in 2024, the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing was organized on 21 September, aligning with the International Day of Peace, the high-level UN General Assembly session and the Summit for the Future. Focused on how faith-based organizations have allied with UN agencies to further the Sustainable Development Goals, the briefing was hosted at the International Dialogue Centre.

#### ➤ **Summit for the Future**

The MFAC Multilateralism Working Group hosted a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2024 briefing in July in response to the Pact for the Future, aligned with numerous MFAC-sponsored engagements, including a High-Level Multi-faith Reception to participate in a dialogue on faith commitments for realizing the Pact of the Future, co-sponsoring a side event held by the ImPACT Coalition on Faith-Based Solutions, as well as a side event hosted by the MFAC Peace and Security Working Group during the high-level UN General Assembly, and a continuous stream of monthly working group meetings held online.

## United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG)

---

Throughout 2024, OSAPG continued to foster engagements with religious and faith-based organizations and actors, highlighting their role in prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity), and in support of their efforts in addressing and countering identity-based hate speech which could lead to incitement to violence and genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

OSAPG served as Executive Secretariat of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-R) in 2024, coordinating a substantive review of the membership of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) and reflecting on the active engagement of the current members in order to ensure impactful and meaningful contributions. The review and endorsement of the new/old members concluded in January 2025. OSAPG, in its Secretariat capacity, coordinated the IATF – MFAC engagements, including joint meetings, events, reports, as outlined in the opening section of this report.

Further to this, OSAPG continued its efforts to expand its work modeled on engagements with the religious leaders and actors, by engaging traditional leaders in consultations over a *Plan of Action for Traditional Leaders and Actos in Countering and Addressing Hate Speech and Preventing Genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity and their incitement through Peace Mediation* – a work which is ongoing.

The Office continued its public advocacy and outreach, speaking out against antisemitism, islamophobia and all forms of religious intolerance. In particular, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, as well as Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect have issued [public statements](#) pertaining to situations with ethno-religious violence, including Sudan, Myanmar and the Middle East.

In March, OSAPG supported Zambia in launching its National Committee on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and all Forms of Discrimination. During a two-day gathering, the Office provided a capacity-building workshop for the members of the Committee, coming from all relevant ministries and human rights institutions in the country. The workshop resulted in a draft plan of action for the work of the Committee. Zambia, the latest Member State to ratify the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (in 2022), has now become the ninth Member State of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGRL) to establish an institution with the specific objective of preventing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, in accordance with the relevant ICGLR Protocol.

In November 2024, OSAPG launched a dedicated [Comprehensive Training Manual on the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide \(Genocide Convention\) and its Implementation](#), aiming to strengthen universal ratification and implementation of the Convention. The training manual is designed as a tool for advancing understanding of the Convention as well as providing practical support, recommendation, and case practice of its implementation. The

focus of the training manual is a practical rather than theoretical approach, including examples and case studies from different countries regarding (a) practical steps to ratify or accede to the Convention and (b) implementation of national legislation or other measures to give effect to the obligations of the Convention.

In its advocacy and outreach in 2024, OSAPG in particular focused on young people, including with joining the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation's multi-faith Better Understanding for a Better World gathering in Maryland, USA where briefing on genocide prevention and countering hate speech was given to a new global cohort of participants; as well as thematically focusing the International Day for Countering Hate Speech on the role and agency of young people (more below).

OSAPG has further continued to coordinate implementation of the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, including leading the UN Working Group on Hate Speech and providing support to UN field entities in developing context-specific local Plans of Action (spotlight on some of the activities in the dedicated [June 2024 Newsletter](#)).

In 2024, OSAPG launched a [Comprehensive Methodology for Monitoring Social Media to Address and Counter Online Hate Speech](#). This methodology aims to be a practical tool for users who are planning to undertake hate speech monitoring and analysis in a rapidly changing environment. OSAPG also developed an [online course on the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#), which is available for all UN staff.

In July and November 2024, OSAPG in partnership with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) and Aegis Trust, organized a series of workshops in Kigali, Rwanda, to gather experts and develop three thematic policy documents: the [Plan of Action for Media Stakeholders in Addressing Hate Speech and Preventing Incitement to Violence that could lead to Genocide](#); the [Policy Guidance on Promoting Dialogue and Mediation to Prevent Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity](#); and the [Policy Guidance Note – Preventing Ethnic Genocide](#).

Furthermore, on the sidelines on the Kigali workshops and under efforts on implementing the [Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that could lead to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity](#), OSAPG gathered women - mediators, activists, lawyers, experts and practitioners in the field of peace and security from Sudan, in a committed effort to ensuring that the voices of women and communities are engaged in ending the war in their country. The [Declaration of Sudanese Women](#) deplored the proliferation of hate speech and incitement to violence preceding and accompanying heinous attacks, which bear the risk indicators for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and their impact on social fabrics amid the deeply entrenched identity-based cleavages in Sudan.

In June 2024, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Day for Countering Hate Speech on 18 June, and pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/309 on *Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech*, OSAPG organized a high-level event with the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco [focused on the role of young people](#). The event, highlighting engagement with youth leaders, listening to the voices of youth and investing in young people's efforts to counter hate speech, included remarks by young

representatives from the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, and the United Religious Initiative; as well as [video messages from young people](#) working to counter hate speech and promote dialogue and understanding in their communities across the world.



*Commemoration of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Day for Countering Hate Speech, 18 June 2024, United Nations Headquarters*

OSAPG also continued to foster multi-sectoral partnerships in support of efforts to counter hate speech and religious intolerance, including with dedicated Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with organizations such as ACT Alliance, KAICIID, Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation, Genocide Watch, AEGIS Trust and others, providing advocacy support, expert support, briefings and trainings.

## United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

---

As the United Nations entity that serves as a soft-power political tool of the United Nations Secretary-General for conflict prevention and conflict resolution, UNAOC aims to improve understanding and cooperation among nations and peoples across cultures and to reduce polarization at local and global levels. It helps develop more inclusive societies in which diversity is experienced as an asset. The special status and mandate of UNAOC have been recognized by the Member States in the United Nations General Assembly resolution 64/14 of 10 November 2009 and resolution 69/312 of 6 July 2015.

The work and areas of focus of UNAOC in 2024 were implemented in line with the UNAOC Plan for Action for 2024-2026<sup>2</sup>. Institutionally, the Plan reflects the inherent nature of UNAOC as a multi-stakeholder United Nations entity that serves as a dialogue platform across all regions. Pursuant to the Plan, the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, including dialogue among civilizations for our shared humanity, and addressing religious intolerance, bigotry and other forms of discrimination are among the five priority areas of the organization.

In addition, UNAOC continued to coordinate the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites<sup>3</sup>. The High Representative for UNAOC, following a designation by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2019, acted as the United Nations focal point to monitor antisemitism and enhance a system-wide response.

As a co-chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development, UNAOC worked closely with members of the Multifaith Advisory Council, as well as various faith-based organizations and religious leaders who are long-term strategic partners of UNAOC. Examples of partnerships aimed at fostering interfaith and interreligious dialogue included the following programming, advocacy and knowledge-management activities:

- UNAOC celebrated the International Day of Human Fraternity in February with a commemorative event, co-organized with the Permanent Missions of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations. The event highlighted the principles and values outlined in the “Document of Human Fraternity: For World Peace and Living Together”, signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in February 2019. It served as a platform to renew commitments of Member States, faith-based organizations and religious leaders from across the faith spectrum, to promote mutual respect, religious and cultural diversity, and to advance dialogue.
- UNAOC was a substantive partner and a co-sponsor for the 6<sup>th</sup> “World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue”, hosted by the Republic of Azerbaijan on 1-3 May 2024.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unaoc.org/resource/unaoc-action-plan-2024-2026/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unaoc.org/resource/united-nations-plan-of-action-to-safeguard-religious-sites/>

During the Forum, UNAOC led the preparations and moderated a plenary session on “Confidence Building through Interfaith Dialogue”, featuring religious leaders and faith-based organizations from around the globe, who exchanged best practices and positive messages of the role of faith in promoting mutual respect and understanding.

- ✚ UNAOC presentations and speaking engagements were made during high-level events, including the Second Tokyo roundtable titled “Beyond War and Toward Reconciliation: Multi-Religious Peace Roundtable”, supported by UNAOC and organized by Religions for Peace International and Religions for Peace Japan (online, February); International Dialogue of Civilisations and Tolerance Conference (Abu Dhabi, February); 9th Geneva Interfaith Dialogue at the Palais des Nations, co-organized by the Permanent Mission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and UNITAR (Geneva, February); United Nations plenary session in commemoration of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia 2024 (New York, March); coordination meeting on Combating anti-Muslim Hatred held by the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, March); panel discussion on interfaith dialogue, organized by the IPU during its 148th Assembly (Geneva, March); Multi-Faith High-Level Forum, organized by Religions for Peace and UNICEF (New York, March); “The Middle East in a Changing World: Uncertainties, Risks, and Opportunities” discussion, hosted by King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in partnership with the Nizami Ganjavi International Center and UNAOC (Riyadh, May); panel discussion entitled, “Promoting Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development through Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue”, co-organized by UNAOC and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations (New York, September); #UNGA79 side event entitled, “Faith-based Solutions for the Pact for the Future and Beyond”, co-sponsored by UNEP and MFAC (New York, September); the Global Summit of Religious Leaders on the margins of COP29 titled, “World Religions for A Green Planet” (Baku, October); and Euro-Mediterranean Civil Society Conference titled, “Reclaiming our Shared Humanity. Countering Polarization, Dehumanization and Radicalization Driven by the Middle East Conflict”, organized by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (Barcelona, October).
- ✚ UNAOC held its 10<sup>th</sup> Global Forum, in Cascais, Portugal, hosted by the Government of Portugal on 25-27 November 2024. Under the theme, “United in Peace: Restoring Trust, Reshaping the Future – Reflecting on Two Decades of Dialogue for Humanity”, UNAOC convened political leaders, representatives of international and regional organizations, religious leaders and faith actors, the private sector, civil society, academia, youth, arts and media to address global issues pertinent to peace and security and call for restoring trust and for uniting in peace. During the Forum, discussions included effective strategies for leveraging interfaith dialogue to prevent conflict and promote peace.
- ✚ Pursuant to the United Nations General Assembly resolution 75/258 on “Promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites”, in which Member States strongly deplored attacks against religious sites and condemned all acts or threats of violence, destruction, damage or endangerment directed

against religious sites, UNAOC convened the “United Nations Global Conference on Safeguarding Religious Sites: A Multistakeholder Approach” (Cascais, November 2024). The conference featured presentations and remarks by over 40 religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and local and central government officials from Asia, MENA, the Americas and Europe. Among the presentations and recommendations made to the United Nations and the international community at large were national good practices of promoting social cohesion and interfaith dialogue among diverse religious communities and followers, including minority groups; policies on tackling hate speech and misinformation; experiences of protection of religious sites during the times of conflicts; national policies to support cultural and religious diversity; educational approaches to raise awareness among young people and the community at large about the values of shared humanity, diversity, compassion and mutual respect, and more.

- ✚ UNAOC continued to be actively involved in the implementation of the United Nations Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets, led by UNOCT in partnership with the UNCTED, UNAOC and UNICRI. UNAOC senior leadership took part in the steering committee meetings, workshops and briefings. UNAOC has also led a virtual meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Compact Working Group on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism that explored “Efforts to prevent terrorist attacks against religious sites and enhance preparedness and responses to safeguard religious sites and worshippers”.
- ✚ UNAOC supported innovative grassroots initiatives led by youth and civil society at large, that contribute to interreligious and intercultural dialogue and understanding, mutual respect and cooperation across divides. Examples include:
  - Supporting seven youth-led organizations with seed funding, capacity-building and mentorship under its Youth Solidarity Fund. Projects implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Uganda empowered young people to combat hate speech and promote freedom of religion or belief through education, dialogue and awareness campaigns; challenge extremism; promote peace narratives and protect religious sites; break stereotypes and strengthen social cohesion between multi-faith communities.
  - Training 18 young peacebuilders from Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, under the Young Peacebuilders Programme (focused on Latin America and the Caribbean). Participants followed a comprehensive learning journey and developed projects to address urgent issues, from inclusion and violence prevention to combating hate speech and fostering interfaith dialogue.
  - Awarding young filmmakers – under the 2024 PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival, UNAOC and IOM conferred Special Recognition for Combating Xenophobia and Discrimination to Ms. Ana Julia Freitas de Castro and her six students from the Public School of Santa Teresinha in Brazil, for their impactful film *Deuses*

*Distintos*. Their video delved into the issue of religious intolerance, inspiring mutual respect by examining the impact of discrimination on vulnerable communities.

- Collaborating in the development and implementation of the second edition of the Tutored Online Training Course on Global Education and Intercultural/Interfaith Dialogue. Selected after a competitive application process, 45 participants, members of civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, media and education practitioners from both formal and non-formal sectors, enhanced their competencies in global education, intercultural/interfaith dialogue and human rights. This was possible under the leadership of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and in collaboration with the AKDN-Aga Khan Development Network, KAICIID-Dialogue Centre and Universidad Católica de Valencia's European Institute of Education for Democratic Culture.

✚ Building on the consultative process on root causes and good practices in combating antisemitism, held with major Jewish organizations, relevant United Nations bodies and coordinators, and envoys on combating antisemitism, UNAOC finalized and obtained the Secretary-General's approval of the "United Nations Action Plan to Enhance Monitoring and Response to Antisemitism". The official launch of the Action Plan is scheduled for January 2025.

✚ As the United Nations focal point to monitor antisemitism and enhance a system-wide response, the High Representative for UNAOC participated in official visits, commemorative events and policy forums convened by Member States, the United Nations and civil society. Examples included: an official visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland, to represent the Secretary-General and to pay tribute to the Holocaust victims (Oświęcim, January); the 2024 Observance of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust (New York, January); participation in the International Meeting of Special Envoys and Coordinators Combating Antisemitism, organized by Argentina, the World Jewish Congress and the Presidents of AMIA, DAIA and LAJC (Buenos Aires, July); participation in the "Working Together to Counter Antisemitism – A Global Human Rights Challenge" event, convened by the USA and the World Jewish Congress (Geneva, September).

✚ UNAOC promoted the global call to action #forSafeWorship across its social media platforms and dedicated website, [forsafeworship.org](https://forsafeworship.org). The hashtag #forSafeWorship has generated 6.3 million in total social media reach as of the end of 2024 since its launch on all major platforms, including X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. The campaign website features stories and videos about places of worship in Afghanistan, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Italy, Iraq, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Uganda, the UK and the USA. The website [www.forsafeworship.org](https://www.forsafeworship.org) was visited by nearly 100,000 users.

The work of UNAOC in promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue and expanding its policy, advocacy work and related programming found due recognition in the United Nations General Assembly resolutions adopted by Member States during the 78<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. UNAOC also was recognized in reports released by the United Nations Secretary-General, including report A/79/284 on Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination<sup>4</sup>, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief, and report A/79/573 on the Promotion of a culture of peace<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4060252?ln=en&v=pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4068188?ln=en&v=pdf>

## United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

As a UN agency with a rich legacy of engaging with faith based leaders, actors and institutions to advance the rights and choices of women, girls and young people everywhere, in 2024, UNFPA continued to strategically engage with faith-based actors and institutions to realize the vision and implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action in its 30th year, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the global level, in its capacity as a co-chair of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development, UNFPA played an active role in supporting the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the IATF on their key activities, including the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing, the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs, and meetings of the MFAC Gender working group. Engagements and advocacy efforts continued throughout the year, including around key intergovernmental moments - the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Population and Development, the High Level political Forum among others, with UNFPA collaborating with Act Alliance and other FBO partners to convene key briefings aimed at strengthening the capacity of faith actors to engage meaningfully in these processes, with a focus on technical support around the themes for respective commissions.

Notably:

- ✚ 2024 marked the 30th year anniversary of the International Conference on Population and development (ICPD POA), and this significant global development milestone was commemorated with a global faith based advocacy event co-convened with the IATF Multi Faith Advisory Council and UN Women. The four-hour event brought together diverse multi faith actors and advocates, youth leaders, member States, UN entities, broader civil society, academia and the private sector to unpack and reflect on the role of faith based actors in advancing the commitments of the ICPD, including the rights and choices of women, young people and other marginalized groups, as well as progress across a range of population and development issues. This well attended event underscored the significant role and impact of the faith community in advancing progress towards human rights, gender equality and the rights of women and girls. It also reinforced the role of young faith leaders in shaping gender justice, and highlighted opportunities for joint advocacy across faith communities and secular actors for the advancement of global commitments on population and development.
- ✚ Working in close collaboration with the Berlin Institute for Population and Development, The German Federal Foreign Office, and Religions for Peace, UNFPA co-published the report *["The Role of Religious Actors in Population Dynamics: Insights from the African Dialogues in Faith and Demography"](#)*. This was the culmination of a two year joint project on Faith and Demography across Africa, building on six dialogues across the continent that covered themes on - demographic trends, faith actors as agents of change, advancing gender

equality and sexual and reproductive health to realize a demographic dividend, addressing the needs of young people, and challenges faced by faith actors as well as key recommendations for meaningful progress.

At the regional and country levels, UNFPA continues to prioritize its engagement with key actors across the faith, religion and culture space, with 107 UNFPA country offices reporting faith-based interventions in 2024, an uptick from 2023. Some key examples and highlights are elaborated below:

### **UNFPA Arab States Regional Office (ASRO)**

ASRO deepened its strategic partnership with **Al-Azhar University's International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR)**, a globally respected Islamic institution, to advance efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation (FGM), gender-based violence (GBV), and child marriage through the mobilization of religious leaders (RLs) as agents of change. This collaboration focused on equipping RLs with the tools, knowledge, and platforms needed to influence social norms and promote human rights across the region. A key achievement was ASRO's coordination with the UNFPA Gambia Country Office to facilitate **South-South Cooperation** between IICPSR, Egyptian parliamentarians, and members of Parliament from The Gambia on the harms of FGM, which contributed to the successful defense of the 2015 law outlawing the practice. Regionally, ASRO supported IICPSR to conduct **Training of Trainers (TOT)** workshops for Al-Azhar students from Egypt, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, and Yemen, building a cadre of gender-sensitive future religious leaders equipped to challenge harmful practices in their communities. Additionally, a **Regional Religious Leaders Network** was initiated to foster cross-country collaboration, knowledge exchange, and ongoing advocacy, with focal points established in five countries and a leadership structure set in place. Together, these efforts demonstrate the transformative impact of faith-based partnerships in advancing gender equality, protecting the rights of women and girls, and driving social norm change, with ASRO committed to expanding this strategic model across the region.

### **UNFPA El Salvador**

In El Salvador, the alliance with various national partners, including religious leaders from different denominations, has been strengthened in a collaborative effort initiated to prevent teenage pregnancy, early unions and sexual violence. Together, awareness-raising tools have been created and implemented through their community training schools. This approach has motivated families to transform the norms of communication with their adolescent children.

This group of faith-based organizations, with technical assistance from UNFPA, has developed a guide and four primers with priority content. In addition, 67 religious leaders have been trained and have committed to replicate these contents in their respective faith communities, actively promoting their dissemination among other faith groups.

## **UNFPA Uzbekistan**

UNFPA has been actively collaborating with the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, with funding from the UK Government, to challenge harmful gender norms, promote gender equality, and prevent violence against women through the engagement of religious leaders and scholars. To further strengthen awareness, UNFPA organized a visit for a high-level government delegation to Egypt's Al-Azhar University. Following the successful visit to Egypt, professors from Al-Azhar University visited Uzbekistan in September 2024. They conducted a five-day interactive workshop that strengthened the capacity of religious leaders to advocate for women's rights and integrate gender-sensitive approaches into their religious teachings.

This South-South partnership between UNFPA and Al-Azhar University (Egypt) has been instrumental in enhancing the engagement of religious and community leaders as advocates for gender equality. As a result, best practices have been exchanged, and gender-sensitive perspectives have been integrated into religious teachings, fostering more inclusive attitudes and contributing to the prevention of gender-based violence across Uzbekistan. Through structured dialogues and capacity-building efforts, over 170 religious leaders, including imams and female *otin-oyi*, have been actively involved in promoting respectful, non-violent relationships. These efforts have laid the groundwork for sustainable change, positioning religious leaders as key allies in advancing gender equality at the community level. Building on this successful collaboration with the Al-Azhar Institute, UNFPA's future efforts will focus on deepening partnerships with FBOs, expanding outreach, and ensuring that faith-based leaders continue to drive progress toward a more inclusive and equitable society.

## **UNFPA Georgia**

With the aim of strengthening the prevention of harmful practices through the involvement of religious leaders and clerics, UNFPA launched a collaboration with the Inter-religious Council in 2016. The NGO UNION "Century 21" has been leading this work, acting as the Coordinator of the Inter-religious Council. The Administration of the Muslims of All Georgia adopting a powerful statement in 2017, urging Muslim communities to abandon harmful practices (such as child marriage) against girls and adolescents, which impede the well-being of families and communities. In 2024, UNFPA Georgia CO focused on strengthening the ongoing dialogue with faith-based organizations and religious leaders by building their capacities and delivering information and awareness-raising activities. These efforts aimed to enhance knowledge and skills in preventing and responding to harmful practices and violence against women and girls.

A specialized training module for religious leaders on the harmful practices of early marriage and violence against women was developed. Eighteen Muslim religious leaders enhanced their knowledge on these topics through a training organized in cooperation with representatives from the State Care Agency and the Human Rights Secretariat. The training, conducted for selected religious leaders from the Kvemo Kartli region—where early marriage remains prevalent—was followed by discussions to encourage their involvement in prevention efforts.

Additionally, a special leaflet was designed, printed, and disseminated among four municipalities with the support of the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia. The leaflet includes a statement by the Mufti of West Georgia and covers key topics such as the risks and impacts of early marriage, legal regulations, preventive measures, hotlines, and contact information.

## Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

---

OHCHR continued engaging with religious leaders and faith-based actors in the context of the **“Faith for Rights” framework**<sup>6</sup>. It provides space for a cross-disciplinary reflection and action on the deep connections between religions and human rights. The objective is to foster the development of peaceful societies, which uphold human dignity and equality for all and where diversity is not just tolerated but fully respected and celebrated.

As a result of meetings in 2024 in Paris and Cambridge co-organized by OHCHR, several academics and civil society actors from Australia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, France, Lebanon, Maldives, Nigeria, Norway, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States created an inter-university **Faith for Rights platform**<sup>7</sup>. This new partnership provides academic support for OHCHR work on religion and human rights, discrimination on the basis of religion or belief and incitement to hatred, as well as gender equality as it intersects with freedom of religion or belief. The Faith for Rights commUNITY of practices elaborated the rules of procedure for the platform and appointed a tetrarchy, chaired by a civil society coordinator and composed of the focal points on programmes, faith leaders and education<sup>8</sup>.



*Peer-to-peer learning on the “Faith for Rights” framework. © Sam Howson*

---

<sup>6</sup> [www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights](https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights); The #Faith4Rights toolkit [available here](#); March 2025 Report [available here](#).

<sup>7</sup> [www.aup.edu/news-events/event/2024-05-02/faith-human-rights-co-existence](https://www.aup.edu/news-events/event/2024-05-02/faith-human-rights-co-existence).

<sup>8</sup> [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-annual-meeting-2024.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-annual-meeting-2024.pdf).

In January 2024, the High Commissioner noted that **intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of persons based on religion or belief** were used for political gain and that they hindered peaceful dialogue and coexistence. He called upon States and other stakeholders to redouble their efforts to implement the action plan referred to in Human Rights Council resolution 52/38, including by enacting and enforcing comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and through the Istanbul Process for Combating Intolerance, Discrimination and Incitement to Hatred and/or Violence on the Basis of Religion or Belief and strategic engagement with faith-based actors. The High Commissioner also encouraged the adoption of training initiatives for law enforcement officers and the judiciary, faith-based actors, teachers and media professionals on combating religious hatred, as part of a comprehensive approach that integrates faith literacy, better understanding and sensitivity<sup>9</sup>.

On the **International Day to Combat Islamophobia** (15 March 2024), the High Commissioner expressed his profound concern that the shocking surge in Islamophobia was occurring as part of a broader trend of the continuing rise of antisemitism, Christianophobia and prejudices against people of other religions or beliefs; of hatred that is directed at migrants, refugees and minorities, including Roma; of deep-seated racism against people of African descent and Indigenous Peoples; and of many other forms of discrimination and xenophobia. He urged States to urgently step up efforts to combat intolerance against people based on religion or belief, within the parameters of international human rights law, using the many tools they had at their disposal, including Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, the Rabat Plan of Action and the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights. The High Commissioner referred to the Practical Guide to Developing Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation, as a crucial tool to support States in protecting minority rights and addressing the root causes of religious hatred<sup>10</sup>.

In May 2024, OHCHR published an **information note on hate speech in the electoral context**, to provide guidance on differentiating between lawful speech, unlawful hate speech and incitement to hatred, as well as appropriate responses thereto<sup>11</sup>.

On the **International Day for Countering Hate Speech** (18 June 2024), OHCHR organized, together with UNESCO and the University for Peace, a side event during the fifty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council on the theme of “The role of youth faith actors in combating hate speech and creating more inclusive societies”. The event highlighted successful initiatives to promote digital citizenship, media and information literacy, and freedom of religion or belief and to foster intercultural and interfaith engagement, using the peer-to-peer learning methodology of the Faith for Rights toolkit<sup>12</sup>.

In June 2024, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 54/25 and linked to the UEFA European Championship, OHCHR co-organized in Berlin, together with the World Jewish Congress and the German non-governmental organization What Matters, a

---

<sup>9</sup> [A/HRC/55/74](#), paras. 58–60.

<sup>10</sup> [www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/international-day-combat-islamophobia-high-commissioner-urge](http://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/international-day-combat-islamophobia-high-commissioner-urge)

<sup>11</sup> [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/information-note-hate-speech-incident-hatred-in-electoral-context.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/information-note-hate-speech-incident-hatred-in-electoral-context.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/faith4rights-toolkit](http://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/faith4rights-toolkit)

panel discussion on **combating antisemitism in the context of football**. The panel discussion highlighted structural conditions and practical approaches by individual clubs and athletes, and the summary document outlined recommendations for actions to combat antisemitism and all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance through sport<sup>13</sup>.

In September 2024, at a workshop on the theme of “**Working together to counter antisemitism – a global human rights challenge**”, the High Commissioner deplored the sharp rise in cases of antisemitism, Islamophobia and vicious hate speech since 7 October 2023, and reiterated the need for a zero-tolerance approach to antisemitism, calling it “a scourge on our collective humanity”. He encouraged States to develop comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation based on the *Practical Guide* produced by OHCHR<sup>14</sup>.

In September and October 2024, OHCHR co-led and facilitated ten online peer-to-peer learning sessions focusing on the **prohibition of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred**. This virtual module was part of the post-graduate diploma programme on peaceful coexistence, which is accredited by the University for Peace and the Gioya Higher Education Institution and supported by the King Hamad Global Center for Peaceful Coexistence. The diploma programme was established as a follow-up to the pledge made by Bahrain in December 2023 in the context of the Human Rights 75 initiative to support the efforts of the international community in spreading a culture of peace, tolerance and coexistence<sup>15</sup>.

In October 2024, the International Association for the Defence of Religious Liberty and OHCHR co-organized the **Faith for Rights Peer-Learning Experience in Portugal**<sup>16</sup>. Interactive workshops in Coimbra and Lisbon created a space for encountering, sharing, learning and training for faith-based actors, based on the Faith for Rights framework<sup>17</sup>. Participants concluded that interfaith engagement should not remain mere dialogues but should include development of actions on the ground, which in turn would require well-prepared facilitators who could ensure that peer-to-peer learning sessions would be spaces for constructive dialogue leading to sustainable impact.

In November 2024, OHCHR organized the **fifth annual meeting of the Faith for Rights commUNITY of practices**<sup>18</sup>. This hybrid meeting with more than 200 participants facilitated ongoing dialogue and exchange of information with faith-based organizations, parliamentarians and academic communities, in line with action 55 of the Pact for the Future. The participants discussed the peer-to-peer learning methodology used by various academic institutions to enhance skills and optimize the outcomes of relevant treaty bodies and special rapporteurs. One thematic focus of the

---

<sup>13</sup> [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-berlin-panel-2024.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-berlin-panel-2024.pdf)  
[www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/09/antisemitism-scurge-our-collective-humanity-high-commissioner](http://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/09/antisemitism-scurge-our-collective-humanity-high-commissioner)

<sup>14</sup> [www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/09/antisemitism-scurge-our-collective-humanity-high-commissioner](http://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/09/antisemitism-scurge-our-collective-humanity-high-commissioner)

<sup>15</sup> [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/udhr/publishingimages/75udhr/Bahrain\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/udhr/publishingimages/75udhr/Bahrain_EN.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [www.aidlr.org/news103.php](http://www.aidlr.org/news103.php).

<sup>17</sup> [www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights/framework-action](http://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights/framework-action).

<sup>18</sup> [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-cop-2024.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/faith4rights-cop-2024.pdf).

meeting was on promoting gender equality and freedom of religion or belief, including through the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Knowledge Hub and activities with the Gandhi-King Global Academy and the ACT Alliance – Action by Churches Together<sup>19</sup>. A round table was held focusing on countering the instrumentalization of religions, beliefs or their followers to incite hatred and violence, in line with commitments on Faith for Rights<sup>20</sup> and Human Rights Council resolutions 16/18, 53/1 and 55/16. In addition, the “Geneva100” meeting brought together religious leaders and faith-based actors from the Geneva Spiritual Appeal on its twenty-fifth anniversary, the International Committee of the Red Cross on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the Inter-religious Platform of Geneva, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Faith for Rights network.

---

<sup>19</sup> [www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/10/high-commissioner-statement-act-alliance-general-assembly](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/10/high-commissioner-statement-act-alliance-general-assembly).

<sup>20</sup> [A/HRC/40/58](#), annex II, commitment X.

## United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

---

UNICEF, Religions for Peace and the Joint Learning initiative on Faith and Local Communities launched a long-standing partnership in 2020 - the Faith for Positive Change for Children Initiative, which focuses on empowering religious leaders and faith-based organisations to be agents of social change, addressing critical issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and child health. Over the past year, our collaborative efforts have yielded significant progress in fostering interfaith unity, training community leaders, and advocating for child protection policies.

Through dozens of trainings utilizing the FPCC-developed [Faith Guidance Document on Immunisation](#) and the [Mind-Heart Dialogue Facilitators' Guide](#), conceived through participatory processes and launched in 2024, FPCC practitioners trained hundreds of faith leaders and community activists across **35 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean**. Participants took their newly developed skills into their communities, reaching thousands of people and fostering a culture of shared well-being across their networks.

On 1 July 2024, *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF, with co-funding from UNICEF's Japan National Committee and the UN Joint Programme on FGM, expanded FPCC Initiative to establish faith-based mechanisms of skilled and committed stakeholders in countries facing a potential reversal in child rights, with a particular focus on the elimination of harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage. The multi-country project is being jointly implemented with the African Council of Religious Leaders–*Religions for Peace* (ACRL-RfP) in **Ethiopia, The Gambia, Mali, Somalia, and Uganda**.

This expansion is particularly important as conservative and anti-democratic trends continue to rise globally, accompanied by opposition to gender equality and threats to child rights. The hard-fought gains made in eliminating harmful practices are increasingly at risk of reversal with religious arguments frequently misused to justify anti-child rights positions. Effective engagement of faith actors and equipping them with the skills to counter the threats to child rights has therefore become an important strategy for UNICEF, especially in those countries where opposition to child rights and gender equality is already being witnessed, including in the mentioned countries. In collaboration with UNICEF, *Religions for Peace* has developed a strategic engagement plan that leverages the existing FPCC structure to support child protection outcomes, prioritising countries at greater risk of setbacks in gender equality and child rights and ensuring that faith leaders are equipped to safeguard and sustain progress in their communities.

This was particularly urgent in **the Gambia**<sup>21</sup>, where, between late 2023 and mid-2024, social turmoil was witnessed when the anti-FGM law was at risk of being repealed, with strong support from prominent faith leaders. Protests were led both by proponents in favour of the anti-FGM law and those who called for its repeal. As tensions grew, UNICEF's engagement with faith actors proved crucial in averting this significant regression of child rights. Through FPCC, Religions for Peace and the African Council of Religious Leaders, UNICEF was able to build trust and engage influential religious

---

<sup>21</sup> See also the section on UNWOMEN engagement and intersectional partnership in The Gambia on this issue

actors across the Muslim and Christian faiths, promote reflection on the holy scriptures from a child wellbeing stance and nurture dialogue between religious leaders, lawmakers and communities, and ultimately avert the repeal of the anti-FGM law. This was achieved through a combination of strategies.

Initially, between 18-22 June 2024, Religions for Peace led an exploratory visit to consult faith leaders in The Gambia on their role in protecting children and build consensus towards the formation of an Interreligious Council (IRC). A series of meetings were held, which resulted in the formation of an ad hoc committee and agreement on the constitution, structure, leadership and other mechanisms of the IRC, which will be launched in Q2 of 2025. Importantly, the exploratory visit and the consultations were instrumental in building trust among religious leaders both in the Muslim and the Christian faiths, laying down the foundations for longer term engagement. Recognizing the power of interfaith collaboration in addressing social challenges, the IRC will serve as a platform to bring together diverse religious and faith communities, mobilizing senior religious leaders, grassroots leaders, and networks of youth and women leaders to leverage the spiritual, moral, and social assets of religious and faith communities to address today's most pressing challenges. By creating a space for dialogue and cooperation, the IRC will enable religious and faith leaders to work collectively in tackling shared concerns, promoting peace, and advancing the common good. To ensure local leadership and ownership, the IRC will be led and owned by religious and faith communities in The Gambia, which, in turn, places decision-making and needed action in the hands of national and local actors, with the added solidarity and support of Religions for Peace's global, regional, and other national councils. Thanks to the trust built with religious leaders and the broader faith community, in June 2024, Religions for Peace was able to mobilize religious leaders in The Gambia to campaign against the repeal of the anti-FGM law. A series of bilateral engagements and consultations with leadership of the Muslim and Christian communities were held, which resulted in Gambian religious leaders speaking out against the repeal of the anti-FGM law. In addition, the faith communities partnered with civil society, community members and coalitions of women and young people to demand policies and laws that protect children. Not only was this meaningful, two-way faith engagement pivotal in building political and public support for maintaining the anti-FGM law, it also opened the space for increased dialogue and reflection among faith leaders and their communities to converge and nurture social cohesion and collective commitment to the wellbeing of girls. Their joint efforts, together with other processes and active engagement of various stakeholders, led to the anti-FGM law being upheld by The Gambia Parliament in July 2024. Building on the success of the faith advocacy to retain the anti-FGM law, FPCC trained 27 faith leaders in The Gambia on the Mind-Heart Dialogue journey of change on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November 2024, which resulted in the development of an action plan for the official launch of the IRC. In addition, 52 faith leaders were engaged in the SOP training and meetings with women and youth, which gave The Gambia Youth Network the opportunity to integrate child protection issues of concern to them into the action plan for the official launch of the IRC.

The positive engagement with faith actors on harmful practices was also replicated with the Inter-Faith Religious Council (IRC) in **Mali**. A total of 20 members were trained

in the Mind-Heart Dialogue over the course of three days from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024. A seven-member committee was selected during this training to develop a one-year workplan, which was subsequently validated, with specific interventions on FGM and child marriage to be implemented in three regions (Kouliboro, Dio and Fame). FPCC also succeeded in revitalizing the Women in Faith Network with new leadership and commitments to lead and champion dialogues on harmful practices. This engagement will prove instrumental in shifting the norms that perpetuate harmful practices.

A notable model for multi-country engagement is emerging in **Tanzania**, where faith leaders are working across national boundaries to prevent FGM and child marriage. This initiative demonstrates the power of cross-regional cooperation in tackling deeply rooted cultural practices, reinforcing the pivotal role of faith-based advocacy in driving sustainable change. Through these efforts, faith leaders are not only mobilising communities but also shaping policies that safeguard the rights and well-being of children and women.

## United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

In 2024, UNDP advanced its commitment to inclusive governance, conflict prevention, and resilient development through sustained engagement with **faith-based organizations (FBOs), religious leaders, and cultural actors across 29 countries**. Guided by UNDP's [Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders](#), and grounded in the **Crisis Offer** and **Strategic Plan**, these efforts integrated principles of **anticipatory action, social cohesion, and rights-based development** in crisis-affected, fragile, and politically sensitive settings.

In **Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Georgia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Lesotho, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda**, and through regional initiatives involving **Guinea, Gabon, and South Africa**, UNDP partnered with FBOs and religious actors to localize interreligious and intercultural dialogue (IRD/ICD), strengthen peace infrastructures, and promote the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

**Key trends in 2024** included the **localization of inclusive dialogue platforms**, with countries like **Montenegro, Georgia, Malawi, North Macedonia, and Libya**, advancing trust-building through participatory, culturally anchored methodologies. Libya's *Artisans for Peace* project demonstrated how traditional arts, and intercultural storytelling can rebuild fractured community ties and promote reconciliation across ethnic divides in post-conflict zones.

**Faith-sensitive counter-extremism and reintegration programming** emerged in **Sudan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Iraq, and the Philippines**, where **trauma healing**, religious narratives, insider mediation, and online peacebuilding initiatives supported **psychosocial wellbeing, countered hate speech**, and contributed to community resilience. In the Philippines, UNDP's collaboration with religious leaders and social media influencers in BARMM addressed misinformation and promoted peace narratives, while interfaith networks helped sustain the Mindanao peace process.

**Gender and youth inclusion** remained at the heart of UNDP's interfaith programming. In **Iraq, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Algeria, and Mauritania**, women of faith were engaged as peacebuilders and justice advocates. Over **10,000 youth** in **Bangladesh, Georgia, North Macedonia, Cabo Verde, and Libya** led civic, cultural, and digital initiatives tackling hate speech, exclusion, and social divides. Libyan youth, through cultural production and digital storytelling, demonstrated how locally led peacebuilding can transcend traditional divides.

**Digital innovation** emerged as a tool for cultural engagement and interreligious storytelling, with platforms like **Montenegro's [www.opstedobro.me](http://www.opstedobro.me), Georgia's Google**

**Maps-enabled Islamic heritage trail**, and **Libya's Arts for Peace portal** enabling broader participation and amplifying local voices in fragile settings.

UNDP's approach maintained a careful balance between inclusion and **principled risk mitigation**, avoiding affiliations with actors linked to hate or extremism, while investing in **religious and cultural literacy** through staff training, regional exchanges, and peer learning. The 2023–2024 *Human Development Report* reinforced this direction, highlighting both the unifying and divisive power of religion when mobilized in development.

At the global level, UNDP shaped discourse through active participation in the **ACT Alliance General Assembly** (Indonesia), the **GNRC Sixth Forum** (UAE), and high-level dialogues with the **UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB**. As a core member of the **UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development (IATF)**, and a founding partner of **PaRD**, the **Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers**, and the **Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC)**, UNDP remained a leading voice in promoting inclusive, faith-informed, and community-led development.

These collective efforts reaffirm UNDP's ability to translate faith-based engagement, FoRB, and IRD/ICD into scalable, contextually grounded solutions that **build trust, strengthen institutions, and advance peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies**.

### **Global outreach**

In 2024, UNDP deepened its collaboration with **faith-based organizations (FBOs)**, **religious leaders**, and **women of faith** to promote **inclusive governance**, **freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)**, and **resilient, peaceful societies**. Programming in **29 countries** demonstrated how faith actors serve not only as **moral authorities** and **trusted messengers**, but also as critical partners in **conflict prevention, reconciliation, psychosocial support**, and **community resilience**—especially in fragile and crisis-affected contexts.

UNDP participated in the **2024 ACT Alliance General Assembly** in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where global faith actors convened under the theme “*Hope in Action: Together for Justice*.” UNDP's participation underscored the importance of **localizing the SDGs through interfaith collaboration**, while affirming the role of faith communities in advancing **climate justice, inclusion, and equity**. The Assembly's public declarations highlighted the value of sustained **community-rooted action** to counter polarization and uphold dignity for all. [Read the General Assembly 2024 public statement](#).

As a member of the [Peacemakers Network Advisory Group \(AGM\)](#), UNDP joined high-level consultations hosted by Finland's Permanent Representative to the UN, helping shape strategic priorities for the 2020–2025 Peacemakers Network strategy and identifying future opportunities to close peacebuilding gaps through faith-based engagement.

UNDP's active role in the **Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) Sixth Forum**, convened by Arigatou International in Abu Dhabi, further reflected its commitment to **intergenerational and interfaith cooperation**. Themed "*The Child is Calling*," the forum brought together over **1,000 participants**—including youth, clerics, and policymakers—from over 70 countries to co-create solutions for **child protection, education, and peacebuilding**. UNDP, as a GNRC International Organizing Committee member, helped shape the Forum's final declaration, reinforcing cross-sector, faith-aligned strategies to protect the wellbeing of future generations.[Read the Declaration](#)

In partnership with the **UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB**, UNDP co-hosted two global dialogues with UNDP staff to explore **entry points, tensions, and good practices** in integrating FoRB into development. Colleagues surfaced key challenges—such as neutrality concerns, limited government buy-in, and funding constraints—as well as adaptive approaches like embedding FoRB within broader themes of minority rights, civic space, and transitional justice.

UNDP continued its implementation of the [Tadamon Programme](#), funded by the **Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD)** and managed by the **Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)**. Tadamon supported over **3,300 verified civil society organizations (CSOs)** across **34 OIC Member States** through capacity building, crowdfunding acceleration, and visibility platforms. This innovative model strengthened civil society ecosystems, enabling **community-led responses to poverty, exclusion, and crisis**. Learn more about Tadamon.

In 2024, UNDP's faith-based programming spanned 29 countries—**Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Georgia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Lesotho, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda**—with additional regional work in **Guinea, Gabon, and South Africa**. Across these contexts, UNDP supported insider mediation, interreligious and intercultural dialogue (IRD/ICD), FoRB mainstreaming, youth and women's civic leadership, and cultural heritage preservation. These collective efforts reaffirm UNDP's unique capacity to translate faith-based engagement, FoRB, and intercultural dialogue into scalable solutions that build trust, strengthen institutions, and advance peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies.

As a core member of the **UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development (IATF)**, a founding partner of the **International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)**, and an active contributor to the **Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers** and the **Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC)**, UNDP continued to lead and shape global discourse on the role of faith in building **inclusive, anticipatory, and locally led development pathways**.

## **Regional highlights**

### **Arab States**

In the Arab States region, UNDP marked International Day of Peace 2024 by highlighting its ongoing support for insider mediators, including religious leaders, who

play a vital role in sustaining peace through localized approaches. By training faith actors in mediation and conflict prevention, UNDP strengthened community-based mechanisms for dialogue and reconciliation. This work underscores the importance of culturally rooted, trusted leadership in preventing violence and promoting social cohesion across fragile and conflict-affected settings. [Read more.](#)

## **Africa**

In 2024, UNDP deepened its engagement in supporting political transitions, governance, climate resilience, and inclusive digital transformation across the African continent—mobilizing strategic partnerships and regional cooperation mechanisms to respond to complex and interconnected challenges.

UNDP reinforced governance and peacebuilding programmes, focusing on mitigating ethnic and religious tensions in electoral processes. Support for disarmament, demobilization, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms contributed to stabilizing politically transitioning states. By fostering dialogue across ethnic, religious, and community divides, these efforts helped restore trust and lay the groundwork for long-term peace.

## United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

---

UNEP's [Faith for Earth Coalition of the UN Environment Programme](#) celebrated a year of extraordinary collaboration, deepened partnerships, and transformative action at the intersection of faith, ethics, and sustainability. The Coalition continues to demonstrate that faith-based and interfaith organizations, working alongside secular partners, play a crucial role in addressing the world's most pressing environmental challenges.

This year, by strengthening values-driven approaches to sustainability, reinforcing the moral and ethical dimensions of our responsibility toward nature, we have mobilized religious and spiritual leaders, young changemakers, scientists, and policymakers to champion solutions that integrate faith, culture, and science.

Among our many achievements, we successfully hosted another Faith Pavilion and high-level Interfaith Summit at COP 29 in Baku, further solidifying the role of faith communities in climate governance. The Faith for Earth Youth Council was revitalized, bringing renewed energy to youth-led advocacy and action. We launched groundbreaking knowledge products, including the Pollution Catalogue 'Faith-based Actions Towards a Pollution-free Planet' and new online courses, equipping communities with tools to take informed action.

Our work also reached global policy platforms, contributing to the Summit of the Future and the UNEA-6 Faith for Earth Dialogue on multilateralism and interfaith collaboration. We marked a historic milestone with the launch of Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth in eight languages, broadening access to Islamic ecological teachings. In recognition of the essential role of women in faith-led sustainability efforts, we proudly launched the Interfaith Women's Council, amplifying diverse voices in global environmental decision-making.

These achievements reflect the power of partnership, with over 7,000 faith and interfaith actors, 90+ UNEP-accredited faith-based organizations, and a growing network of multilateral allies—working towards a shared vision of a just, sustainable, and flourishing planet.

The work of the Faith for Earth Coalition is clustered around three pillars

- Faith and Climate Action;
- Faith and Nature Action;
- Faith and Pollution Action.

Faith for Earth offers its platform as a mechanism to convene and support the continuous engagement of faith actors under the Religion and Ecology Movement, and towards enhancing intergovernmental environmental processes. This approach for institutional engagement leverages good practices by faith leaders, faith institutions, organisations, and networks, including the youth, seeking to drive ambitious environmental policy and action.



## Faith & Climate Action

Faith plays a vital role in addressing the climate crisis, inspiring collective action for sustainability.

Ahead of COP29, the [Global Summit of Religious Leaders](#), organised by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the State Committee on Affairs with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Muslim Council of Elders, and the Caucasus Muslims Board, brought together 350 faith leaders from 55 countries, showcasing the power of interfaith collaboration in tackling the climate crisis. The event concluded with the [Baku Declaration](#), in which leaders called on states, international and regional organisations, religious groups, and public leaders to:

- take an active role and engage in public discussions on combatting climate change and furthering the long-term goals of the Paris Climate Agreement;
- advocate for environmental equality and justice recognising the sanctity of human life and nature; and
- support the protection of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity, respect for it, to promote the eco-ethics based on the spiritual and moral values of world religions.

Organized by the Muslim Council of Elders, the [Faith Pavilion](#) at COP29, was a thriving hub for interfaith collaboration. Over 97 organizations representing 11 religions and sects joined more than 40 sessions covering topics from sustainable lifestyles to climate finance. With an emphasis on the newly operationalized Loss and Damage Fund, [the Pavilion showcased](#) the vital role faith communities play in driving climate action and advocating for justice. Overall, it inspired hope and unity, highlighting the powerful role of faith in addressing the climate crisis.

Furthermore, two years after the release of the landmark joint appeal, [Climate-Responsible Finance - a Moral Imperative towards Children](#), signed by the World Council of Churches (WCC), UNEP, the Muslim Council of Elders, and the NY Board of Rabbis, a capacity-building webinar was held to revisit the principles outlined in the appeal. The session, featuring key contributions from Andrew David Raine, Deputy Director of UNEP's Law Division, and Dr. Iyad Moghli, Director of the Faith for Earth Coalition, aimed to inspire actionable steps for aligning financial practices with climate responsibility, with a particular focus on benefiting children and vulnerable communities.

To amplify the moral imperative for climate action under our work on [Faith and Climate Action](#), the **Interfaith Working Group on Climate Change** unites faith leaders, activists, and organisations to address the urgent climate crisis. The Working Group's activities are self-defined and together, combine spiritual guidance with environmental advocacy to promote sustainable solutions.



### Faith & Nature Action

Faith and nature are deeply connected, as spirituality often inspires a sense of responsibility towards the environment. Faith for Earth has actively engaged in this area through initiatives such as:

- [\*\*Voices for Change: Driving Advocacy through Eco-spiritualities\*\*](#) Organized by UNEP's CYMG Eco-Faith Working Group and the Faith for Earth Youth Council, this event brought together interfaith youth at the Global Youth Environment Assembly to highlight the strong link between spirituality and environmental protection, advocating for sustainable practices within faith communities to foster positive change for the planet.
- [\*\*Faith as a Catalyst for Sustainable Ecological Change and Effective Multilateralism\*\*](#) This panel discussion held at UNEA6 showcased insights from 85+ faith-based organisations, gathered through several consultations and dialogues. It emphasized the importance of accountable environmental actions shaped by diverse civil society voices.
- [\*\*Faith, Finance and Food Systems: Faith Action on Food Systems for better Human, Animal and Planetary Health\*\*](#) Organized by [Compassion in World Farming](#), [Conscious Food Systems Alliance \(UNDP\)](#), [Faith for Earth \(UNEP\)](#), and [FaithInvest](#), this webinar shared positions of faiths on food systems; and examples of practical faith projects in support of food system transformation towards regenerative, agroecological food and farming.
- [\*\*Cities, Faith, and Community Forum \(CFCF\)\*\*](#) ran a [series of online sessions](#) on [Faith and Environment](#) with an emphasis on bringing nature back to urban areas in partnership with faith communities as a catalyst of action.
- The **Interfaith Working Group on Nature** supports a united effort from diverse faith traditions to protect and restore nature, highlighting the deep connections between spirituality, biodiversity, and environmental sustainability. The work is focused on ecosystem restoration (UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021 - 2030), and biodiversity loss and species conservation (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework) complementing efforts to strengthen civil society engagement.



### Faith & Pollution Action

Crucial in tackling the pollution and waste crisis, the '[Faith-based Action Towards a Pollution-free Planet](#)' faith groups are forming a coalition that draws on spiritual values that emphasise the protection of creation, taking action to protect ecosystems and communities.

The first part of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC5.1), in Busan, Republic of Korea, marked an important step forward in the development of an instrument. The Faith for Earth Coalition convened

the **Interfaith Working Group on Pollution** that set the stage at the multistakeholder webinar on [Faith-based Advocacy ahead of INC-5](#).

It was a result of a call from the INC Secretariat to mobilise the support of faith groups for the intergovernmental process webinar focused on the INC process, highlighting the impactful role of FBOs in advocating for ethical stewardship, and joining civil society groups on the human rights implications of plastic pollution, offering a vital platform to unite in promoting a just and sustainable future.

Through moral and ethical perspectives, faith-based organisations encourage sustainable practices and values-based environmental advocacy, captured under our work on [Faith and Pollution Action](#).

The Coalition has also set up the '[Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#),' - an interactive database maintained by the Faith for Earth Coalition, the [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#), the [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), and [United Religions Initiative](#). As of December 2024, it featured 94 [projects](#).

Furthermore, the Coalition has supported KAICIID and its partners in developing several e-learning courses on faith and the environment, including:

- '[Faith, Environment and Climate Change](#)' A free e-learning course with eight modules, designed to help faith leaders, religious groups, and faith-based organisations engage with environmental issues using various methodologies, models, and tools.
- '[Engaging Faith Actors to Support the Implementation Process of the Sustainable Development Goals](#)' A free e-learning course designed to help religious leaders and faith-based organisations to better understand and engage with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Faith Leaders' Call to Action for the Earth**

Faith leaders play a key role in guiding their communities to recognize environmental care as both a moral and spiritual responsibility. By drawing on sacred texts, they can inspire a sense of duty to protect the Earth, promoting sustainability and advocating for justice, compassion, and respect for the natural world.

**[Laudato Si': Care for Our Common Home](#):** Laudato Si, the landmark encyclical by His Holiness Pope Francis, calls for global action to combat environmental degradation, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all creation and urging collective responsibility to protect the planet. In 2023, the Holy Father published [Laudato Deum](#), building on the Encyclical.

**[Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth](#):** This Islamic Covenant was developed in partnership with HBKU, ICESCO, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES), UNAS PPI, Uskudar University, and the UN Environment Programme's Faith for Earth Coalition and draws upon Islamic teachings to highlight humanity's responsibility as stewards of the Earth, promoting sustainability and ecological justice. In 2024, Faith for Earth launched the Covenant at an [inter-ministerial press conference](#) at UNEA6. Now available in [8 languages](#) and is being translated into 3 more.

In 2024, the newly [constituted Faith for Earth Coalition Youth Council](#) (2024 - 2026), comprising 35 Members representing over 16 different faith traditions, was led by Mr. Kristian Noll (Chair), with Ms. Hajar Tazi and Bhikkhu Vasu Bandhu (Co-chairs), and facilitated in close collaboration with the [Children and Youth Major Group \(CYMG\) to UNEP Eco-Faith Working Group](#).

Their notable engagement in 2024 included:

- [The Member Spotlight Series](#) This interview series spearheaded by the Chair features the Members and their work, sharing their experiences working at the intersection of faith, youth, and the environment:
- [Spiritual Ecology & Land: #Faith4Earth Youth Leadership](#) organised on World Environment Day to uplift youth leaders driven by their faith who are championing efforts on land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience.
- [Faith in Action: Empowering Youth Skills for Peace and Development](#) sought to introduce the network to the Green Jobs for Youth Pact and identify how [faith institutions and organisations support youth in skills development, entrepreneurship, and sustainable growth](#).
- [Faith, Culture, and Youth: Digital Tools for People and the Planet](#) was published to demonstrate how youth across diverse faith and cultural communities use digital tools to raise awareness, mobilize resources, and drive collective action toward the SDGs, in commemoration of International Youth Day.
- [Cultivating Regenerative Hope and Inner Resilience for Youth in Climate Action](#) sought to uncover the environmental crisis in the face of increasing complexity, division, and uncertainty, and the ways in which religion and faith institutions can regenerate hope and cultivate resilience – both individually and as communities for World Mental Health Day.
- [Faith in Action: Diverse Pathways to Environmental and Human Rights Protection](#) This webinar in celebration of Human Rights Day brought together four esteemed speakers in working in diverse ways to protect human rights and the environment through youth engagement.

**The Interfaith Women's Council**, a platform for advancing women of faith's leadership on global environmental issues, is relaunching in 2025 with a newly recruited council. This initiative aims to amplify voices at the intersection of gender, religion, and environmental governance.

## Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children

---

The Special Representative engages systematically with religious communities and faith-based organizations, given their key role in tackling violence against children.

In 2024, the Special Representative Najat Maalla M'jid continued to stress the importance of documenting and disseminating examples of action by religious leaders and faith-based organizations, particularly during preparations for the sixth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children, which was held in Abu Dhabi in November 2024. The Forum, for which the Special Representative is a member of the organizing committee, brought together over 1,200 participants from 90 countries, including children, engaged in person or virtually at the forum and the pre-forum events. In the outcome document of the forum, the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Building a Hopeful World for Children, the forum participants identified key steps to ensure a sustainable, safe and secure world for and with children, included a strong commitment to end harmful practices that are often justified in the name of religion and called for shared accountability.

The Special Representative also led a year-long campaign to generate the widest possible mobilization and to strengthen partnerships with and between Member States, the United Nations system, the private sector, civil society and faith-based organizations and academia, as well as children and survivors. That mobilization underpinned her contribution to two critical, related processes: (a) the first-ever Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, held on 7 and 8 November 2024 in Bogota and co-hosted by the Governments of Colombia and Sweden, along with the Special Representative, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and (b) the revitalization of the previous Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, with the launch of the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence against Children.

## UN WOMEN

---

In 2024, UN Women continued to deepen and broaden our engagement with faith movements, organizations, and initiatives that are challenging patriarchal norms and advancing narratives of gender equality—rooted in the ideals of faith and human rights. In 2023, nearly half of all countries – 82 out of 173 – saw democratic decline compared to 2018, while fewer than a third made progress on gender equality commitments. Some States are using misogynistic and discriminatory perspectives in pushing legal and policy prescriptions with narrow definitions of traditional families, limiting the use of the concept of gender in policy documents, legislation and academic research, and curtailing reproductive rights, the rights of sexual minorities and legal protections against domestic violence. Growing attacks against minority communities, including LGBTIQ persons and migrants, have also been a feature of democratic backsliding. The space for civic activism, where women and girls make their voices heard and hold leaders and policymakers accountable, has continued to close.

It is against this backdrop that UN Women developed two major strategies that aim to engage different stakeholders including Faith Based Organizations and Religious Leaders as critical stakeholders in the work for gender equality.

- ✚ In the current global context of pushback against gender equality and women's rights UN Women's **Push Forward for Rights, Equality and Justice**, strategy is a framework and engine for change to drive progress where it is most needed. The Strategy aims to amplify the ways communities and actors including FBOs are working together in multistakeholder coalitions and alliances, to address and realize the principles of non-discrimination and universal equality for all and redressing inequalities. By amplifying impactful practices at the community and national levels, the Push Forward Strategy aims to empower diverse stakeholders with the evidence and the voice to fight for gender equality, even in the most politically challenging environments.
- ✚ In commemoration of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and based on evidence from the thirtieth anniversary review of progress on the Beijing Platform in countries and regions, and consultation with partners, UN-Women defined a Beijing+30 Action Agenda with six priority actions to deliver tangible results for all women and girls and drive large-scale progress. The action areas include: A Digital Revolution, Freedom from Poverty, Zero Violence, Full and Equal Decision-Making Power, Peace and Security, and Climate Justice. The Beijing+30 Action Agenda puts adolescent girls and youth at the heart of all its efforts as the best way to guarantee success. Advancing the Beijing+30 Action Agenda calls for a unified push from all of society including Faith Based Actors.

Importantly, through UN Women's [collaboration with Princeton's Office of Religious Life and the Faith and Gender Justice Fellowship](#), young leaders have effectively integrated social justice with spiritual ethics, energizing advocacy at local and global levels. Expanding such initiatives can significantly strengthen efforts to combat violence against women in political and community spaces.

Important examples of country level engagements include:

### **The Gambia**

From May to July 2024, Generation Equality Action Coalition Leaders and Commitment Makers rallied to safeguard women and girls in **the Gambia** by advocating against the repeal of the 2015 Women's Amendment Act banning female genital mutilation (FGM). In response to the advancement of a Private Members Bill proposing to revoke the Act, the Generation Equality Action Coalitions on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Bodily Autonomy and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, including the Feminist Movements and Leadership (FML) organised a series of virtual cross-coalition meetings involving 49 leaders and over 600 commitment makers, and identified collaboration opportunities including providing direct support to The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO) in the Gambia.

As part of the ongoing efforts to resist the repeal of the FGM ban in The Gambia, significant attention was put on engaging faith, religious, and traditional leaders as powerful actors in shaping public attitudes and influencing decision-makers. UN Women also supported high-level roundtables including a Generation Equality partner mission to Egypt with members of The Gambia's National Assembly to have meetings with Al-Azhar, one of the most prominent Islamic authorities, to discuss the religious framing of FGM. The Gambia's decision to uphold ban on FGM was a critical win for girls' and women's rights.

### **Ethiopia**

UN Women Ethiopia continued to work with faith actors through its implementing partner Norwegian Church Aid and other local faith-based organizations focusing on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) prevention and creating safe public spaces.

UN Women continued to strengthen and engage faith-based institutions, in integrating VAWG prevention in their spiritual teachings, curriculums, and in churches, mosques, faith-based schools, youth circles and theology colleges. Through the support of UN Women, religious leaders were engaged to dialogue, debate and foster dialogue on the importance of theological interpretations of gender equality based on a human-rights based approach. Faith-based media organizations were also used to reach the community and messages on positive masculinity and prevention of VAWG were amplified using the faith-based media outlets.

### **Mali**

UN Women Mali produced a documentary on the role of Religious Leaders (Imams) in transforming social norms: watch the "UNSILENCED" documentary.

## Fiji

UN Women provided technical and financial support to implementing partner, “House of Sarah” to work on transforming gender norms using the SASA! Faith Strategy and community mobilization methodology alongside innovative sports-based initiatives, reaching a combined total of 737 participants to drive community-based change. The House of Sarah, through the SASA! Faith Strategy actively challenged harmful social norms in informal settlements in Fiji. These include norms that reinforce male authority and control over women, restrict women's autonomy in marriage, and discourage reporting and intervention in cases of domestic violence. During Phase I of the project, the SASA! Faith methodology demonstrated significant effectiveness in shifting these social norms, leading to a 61% increase in the belief that sex between spouses should be consensual and a 40% rise in bystander intervention to support women experiencing violence at home.

## Nigeria

UN Women Nigeria, through the the Leadership, Empowerment, Access, and Protection in Crisis Response (LEAP) Project and the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Phase II Project strengthened gender-responsive governance by engaging over 700 traditional and religious leaders from all 36 states to challenge harmful norms and prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG). As a result, religious and traditional institutions integrated gender-responsive messaging into sermons, public declarations, and community dialogues, driving stronger advocacy for eliminating harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). The involvement of faith-based organizations and the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), expanded outreach, leading to increased GBV reporting and survivor support through faith institutions. Additionally, traditional leaders mobilized their councils within the WPS Project to advance women’s leadership in decision-making, resulting in women’s representation in traditional dispute resolution councils increasing from less than 20 in 2022 to over 120 in 2024.

At the regional level, supported by the **Multi Country Office Caribbean**, Christ Church Anglican Church with the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative [hosted the International Human Rights Day Worship Service and Brunch Forum](#) to encourage Faith-based Organizations to prevent and respond to Violence against women and girls (VAWG). The church service featured messages from key stakeholders from civil society, academia and human rights advocates like Father Sean Major-Campbell, Anglican priest. More than 70 members of the congregation attended the learning brunch forum to discuss the role of faith-based communities in VAWG prevention and response, which included solutions to address the challenges faced by victims/survivors of gender-based violence

In **East and Southern Africa**, UN Women, African Union Commission, and the Government of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) convened the Traditional and Religious Leaders (TRLs) Consultative Meeting on the Africa Union Convention to End Violence Against Women and Girls (AU CEVAWG) highlighted the importance of TRLs in the fight against VAWG. The consultation explored how the draft AU CEVAWG can accommodate Africa’s diverse cultural contexts while maintaining core principles to

address gender-based violence. Sixty-one TRLs from across Africa, representing a diverse array of cultural and religious groups, primarily from West Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa. Participants included prominent figures from faith-based organizations, traditional councils such as the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA), and youth leaders. The consultation yielded significant insights into the challenges and opportunities surrounding VAWG across various African contexts. Participants emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need for tailored strategies that account for the unique socio-cultural landscapes of different African nations.

## World Health Organization (WHO)

Faith partners play important roles in health emergency, epidemic and pandemic preparedness, and response. Since 2020 WHO has partnered with members of the [WHO Faith network for Health Emergency Preparedness and Response](#); (formally established in 2022) to increase access to accurate and relevant information and build a community of collaborative sharing on topics related to health emergency preparedness and response and the intersection between faith and public health.

The network, comprising different faith partners representing a diversity of faiths including service providers, faith leaders, FBOs, and academic institutions, engage in a forum to align on shared objectives, share information, access technical briefings and co-develop tools and products, such as the [World Health Organization strategy for engaging religious leaders, faith-based organizations and faith communities in health emergencies](#).

Objectives for this collaboration include to:

- Engage and strengthen collaboration with global networks for emergency preparedness and response;
- Convene networks so that community leaders and decision-makers can access trustworthy information and share best practices for pandemic preparedness and response;
- Engage communities to share accurate information and build resilience to misinformation, thereby empowering their role in health emergency preparedness and response;
- Co-create tailored products, webinars and solutions with key communities that address the Infodemic and are guided by evidence;
- Recognize and promote a whole-of-society approach that ensures a diverse representation emphasizing unity, equity and solidarity.

In January 2024 the team relocated to a new division within the WHO health emergencies programme focusing on Epidemic and Pandemic Threat Management (EPM). This provides an exciting opportunity to support countries and regions to develop and 'stress test' their epidemic and pandemic plans through national pandemic planning workshops and simulation exercises. Partners from the WHO Faith Network are engaging in national pandemic planning simulation exercises (SIMEX) and running their own.

Members of the WHO Faith Network present their work during monthly Network meetings, and increasingly in consultations hosted by other teams in WHO. The WHO WPRO office is establishing a faith network in the region which is an exciting new development.

In March the [WHO Director General addressed Religious Leaders Multi-Religious and Multi-Stakeholder High-Level Forum: The Role of Faith in Advancing Positive Outcomes for Children, Families, and Communities](#).

The monthly Network meetings included a brief overview of the preparedness landscape. These include:

1. [Preparedness and Resilience for Emerging Threats \(PRET\)](#)
2. [The International Health Regulations \(IHR\)](#)- updated in 2005 is an instrument of international law it includes the criteria required to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).
3. [WHO framework for Strengthening the global architecture for health emergency prevention, preparedness and response and resilience \(HEPR\)](#).

In April the monthly meeting focused on a briefing on the negotiations towards the Pandemic Accord. Members of the WHO Faith Network drafted an advocacy [Statement in support of a strong International Pandemic Accord](#) being negotiated by Member States.

In the second part of 2024, a hospital-based table-top simulation exercise took place through a collaboration between WHO and the Good Samaritan University Hospital in West Islip New York. USA. [Enhancing hospital preparedness for respiratory pathogen epidemics and pandemics Good Samaritan University Hospital conducts a tabletop simulation exercise](#), facilitated by a member of IMAN (the Islamic Medical Association of America).

This exercise is part of WHO's work to strengthen epidemic and pandemic preparedness, based on the PRET approach. The exercise, which is an adaptation of [Exercise PanPRET-1](#), presented an opportunity to evaluate the hospital's preparedness and response capabilities in managing a respiratory pathogen outbreak.

Technical Presentations and updates were provided by WHO Technical teams and FBO partners over subsequent months on the following subjects:

1. Influenza H5N1 preparedness work at WHO, and the current global monitoring and preparation work. Updated information on H5 N1 can be found [here](#), and the Q&A page [here](#).
2. Mpox. Technical information on the Mpox outbreak can be found [here](#).
3. African Christian Health Associations Platform: 'ACHAP'S approach to Pandemic Preparedness and Response.'
4. The Ecumenical Pharmaceutical network partnered with WHO technical colleagues to host a webinar on Preventing Anti-microbial resistance.

In August *Lancet Global Health* published a comment entitled: [Faith as a complex system: engaging with the faith sector for strengthened health emergency preparedness and response](#).

The WHO Faith network, and World of Work networks, together hosted a dialogue on Trust with the Global Preparedness and Monitoring Board (GPMB) Team. Following this, a report from the dialogue was included in the [Annex to the 2025 GMPB Report released in October](#).

The Christian Health Asset Mapping Consortium (CCH) published a new concept paper "[Mapping Faith-Based Public-Private Partnerships with National Ministries of Health: Context, Gaps, & Strategies](#)". The concept paper examines the role of faith-based organizations in national health systems through public-private partnerships with governments. CCH Thanked the WHO Faith Network Mapping Sub-Group in collaboration with the WHO Geolocated Health Facilities Initiative Technical Working Group for their contributions to this work

Work on Mental Health Psychosocial and Spiritual Support continues with the engagement of a consultant to develop a technical document to accompany the WHO [IASC Guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings](#) (2007). Faith based representatives from the WHO MHPSS Community of Practice joined the [Inter Agency Steering Group on Mental Health and psychosocial Support in Emergency settings](#) meeting. A report of this meeting appeared in [L'Osservatore Romano](#), the Vatican Newspaper on 21 Nov, including testimonials from representatives of the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, to highlight the criticality of this work to a much wider audience.

Network members have been working on case studies to be published in 2025 highlighting faith-based organizations' innovative approaches to Pandemic Preparedness and Response.

## ANNEX I

### Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the UN IATF (MFAC)

---

During the 2023-2024 term, MFAC advanced the co-chairs' objectives to enhance dialogue, transparency, and cooperation among members and the IATF. The organization continued to maintain its role as a diverse interfaith body, providing guidance, compassion, and valuable expertise to the United Nations.

Continuing the process of strengthening MFAC engagement and presence, building on 2023's MFAC Retreat, which generated key goals for 2024, it has been a year for significant planning and increased involvement by the MFAC body and its Working Groups. The MFAC Multilateralism Working Group hosted a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2024 briefing in July in response to the Pact for the Future (figure 1), aligned with numerous MFAC-sponsored engagements, including a High-Level Multi-faith Reception to participate in a dialogue on faith commitments for realizing the Pact of the Future (figure 2), co-sponsoring a Side Event to the Summit of the Future held by the IMPACT Coalition on Faith-Based Solutions (figure 3), as well as a side event hosted by the MFAC Peace and Security Working Group during the 2024 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September (figure 4), and a continuous stream of monthly working group meetings held online.

To enhance collaboration among members and improve transparency, the MFAC co-chairs will distribute an official membership list for 2025, including primary contacts. Additionally, ongoing communication will be facilitated through MFAC's administrative assistant to support members in sharing important information with the co-chairs and the MFAC community.

The MFAC co-chairs have hired an administrative specialist to support them and their members in various initiatives, including coordinating general office/ administrative operations, handling event logistics, travel planning, and invoice processing. The MFAC co-chairs are grateful to the members who have come forward to finance this position and are committed to finding resources from MFAC members for the long-term sustainability of this position. MFAC members were consulted twice on the job description and financial means of supporting the position to ensure transparency and ownership of this position. There was consensus amongst the members that such a position was needed and would be beneficial to the work of MFAC. Ms. Lucy Sobol assumed the position in June 2024 and will continue as an administrative specialist for MFAC in 2025.

In collaboration with the IATF, the MFAC co-chairs are facilitating the election for the next term of MFAC co-chairs for 2025-2027. They worked alongside the IATF co-chairs to conduct a membership review, which supported the inclusion of new members and

the recommitment of existing members. This process aimed to align with the MFAC All Members Retreat scheduled for January 2025. Highlights from the Retreat include the beginning of the Kofi Annan Faith Briefing Planning Committee for 2025, as well as the creation of the Youth Engagement Working

Group and reinstatement of the Climate Working Group. These collective efforts enhanced active collaboration between MFAC and IATF while promoting increased engagement and representation from UN Agencies affiliated with the IATF in the future.

Previously, the IATF-MFAC co-chairs held a virtual meeting, requesting an extension of the current co-chairmanship for an additional year. The extension was intended to cover the new cycle of MFAC membership and included Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi and Ms. Debra Boudreaux as co-chairs. The new MFAC co-chairs will be announced in Spring 2025, aligning with a virtual all-member meeting to welcome new members.



***MFAC Members Present at the 2025 Annual Retreat, January 2025***

## Updates from the Working Groups

### **Peace and Security Working Group:**

The MFAC Peace & Security Working Group (P&S WG) played a crucial role in 2024, addressing pressing peace and security issues through a multi-faith approach. The WG focused on advocating for justice, inclusion, and interfaith collaboration, engaging with key UN agencies and global stakeholders to enhance the role of religious actors in peacebuilding and security frameworks.

Key Activities and Achievements include:

- [White Paper on Religious Leadership in Peace and Security](#) (March 2024): The MFAC P&S WG produced this publication, which emphasizes the impact of religious values on peacebuilding, the prevention of genocide, and the necessity of decolonizing security frameworks. It urged UN leaders to integrate faith-based perspectives in conflict resolution.
- **Advocacy and UN Engagement:** Throughout the year, the WG actively engaged with UN agencies, including UN Women, UNFPA, the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), and the Office on Genocide Prevention. Members participated in high-level discussions, providing faith-based insights into global security challenges.

Members of the P&S WG attended and contributed to several major international events, reinforcing interfaith collaboration and advancing policy discussions while strengthening partnerships with UN agencies and global stakeholders. See the entire Peace and Security Working Group 2024 Report [linked here](#).

### **Gender Working Group:**

The Gender Working Group (GWG) continued to meet monthly, co-chaired by Ani Zonneveld (Muslims for Progressive Values) and Alison Kelly (ACTAlliance), with the engagement of eleven MFAC members and UNFPA and UN Women.

A key activity for the GWG was supporting the planning and organization of the UNFPA Faith Associated event, entitled *From Many, One: Multi-Faith Actors Celebrate ICPD Achievements, Build Bridges, and Shape the Future for Gender Justice* held virtually in June, as part of the global activities to mark the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development. It included a session designed and led by youth and produced a set of recommendations for UNFPA and faith actors to take forward (report available on request).

A second key activity was producing a brochure (please see [here](#)) to raise the visibility of faith voices in work for gender justice and expand awareness of what the GWG can provide to both UN entities and MFAC. The GWG is now rolling it out.

In addition, GWG members, individually and collectively, also contributed to promoting MFAC's gender justice work at various events and meetings held around UN processes and conferences.



***Panelists During the 'Faith, Ethics and AI: Shaping a Future for Global Peace' UNGA Side Event Hosted by the MFAC Peace and Security Working Group***

MFAC continues to serve as a unique and valuable platform for a diverse and growing community of the United Nations faith partners, fostering multidimensional, compassionate, and innovative debates and collaborations on critical global issues facing the UN. 2024 marked a pivotal period for both the UN system and MFAC, highlighted by efforts to strengthen the connections between MFAC and the IATF and enhance the administrative, planning, and communication capacities of MFAC by establishing a new administrative assistant role. This role aims to centralize communications and support greater collaboration across MFAC.

As we embark on 2025, the newly appointed and existing co-chairs of MFAC are dedicated to fostering a results-driven and relationship-centered approach that minimizes duplication within the multilateral landscape, ensuring a meaningful contribution to MFAC and the wider UN community.

## ANNEX II

### United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development

#### (IATF-Religion)

#### WORK PLAN: January-December 2024

### Introduction

The UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UN IATF-R) was established in 2010, as a system-wide guidance platform for UN engagement with faith-based/-inspired civil society actors. Over the course of the first 3 years of the Chairmanship mandate (2020-22) of UNAOC, UNFPA and UNOSAPG, the IATF-R saw a more systematic collaboration with the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC), as exemplified by, inter alia, the issuing of a [Joint Statement with the Endorsement of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council](#) at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the [Global Online Conference “Faith in the UN: Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations and looking to the future”](#). The current 3-year cycle (2023-25) of the Chairmanship of UNAOC, UNFPA and UNOSAPG represents an opportunity to further scale up the strategic engagement with faith actors by the UN system.

### Priorities

This Work Plan aims to illustrate specific areas where the IATF-R will concentrate its efforts over the course of 2024, with the understanding that flexibility should be granted, in order to swiftly adapt to emerging issues and opportunities.

The following priority areas have been identified:

#### 1. Knowledge Management

A coordinated approach to partnering with faith actors requires good information exchange by IATF members. Aiming at improving the sharing of information, the IATF Co-Chairs propose using this [IATF-MFAC Events Board](#) (Trello) to share 2024 events and initiatives that can deepen partnerships between UN entities and faith-based organizations. The Board will display IATF and MFAC events planned for 2024, organized by month (each list corresponds to a month of the year).

-

#### 2. MFAC retreat

The annual retreat of the whole MFAC membership represents an opportunity for deep exchange and reflection between this important body and the IATF (represented by the Co-Chairs and other IATF members, to the extent possible). It is important to ensure appropriate participation and contribution by the IATF to the strategic reflection on future priorities that takes place during the retreat.

### 3. Whole IATF-MFAC thematic dialogues

Following the successful first thematic meeting between the IATF and MFAC on UN-FBO collaboration to advance Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in November 2021, the IATF will continue exploring opportunities for strategic dialogues. For the first quarter of 2024, UNOSAPG, OHCHR and UNAOC propose a thematic discussion on the impact of anti-blasphemy and anti-apostasy laws: *"Towards the alternative of protecting individuals and communities against incitement to hatred"*. This event is intended to be virtual. For the last quarter of the year, the IATF Co-Chairs, invite IATF members to propose topics of interest that can foster greater engagement between UN entities and faith-based organizations in advancing human rights, development and peace and security.

### 4. Kofi Annan Briefings

After years of pause, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2023 the IATF resumed collaboration with the MFAC around the organization of a Kofi Annan Faith Briefing. The IATF Co-Chairs will continue engaging with the MFAC (which has established an ad-hoc working group), on the IATF's behalf, to plan this event. Possible strategic moments for alignment with UN system-wide priorities are the SDGs moment and the Summit of the Future.

### 5. Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs

The annual Symposium is a key opportunity to showcase the importance and effectiveness of partnership between the UN and faith actors. While the Symposium traditionally takes place in January of each year, the preparation takes place over the course of the prior months, thus the relevance for this Work Plan. Depending on the specific theme chosen by the planning committee of FBOs, the most relevant IATF member(s) will be identified as lead(s).

### 6. Joint IATF- MFAC activities

It is proposed the issuing of a joint IATF-MFAC statement on upholding human rights in times of peace and conflict around the world.

## Timeline

January 2024	10 <sup>th</sup> Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs: "Human Rights and Dignity: Towards a Just, Peaceable and Inclusive Future"
January 2024	IATF and MFAC Retreat
March 2024	IATF-MFAC Thematic Discussion on the impact of anti-blasphemy and anti-apostasy laws: <i>"Towards the alternative of protecting individuals and communities against incitement to hatred"</i>
April 2024	IATF-MFAC Joint Statement on upholding human rights in times of peace and conflict
Summer 2024	Start planning meetings for the 11 <sup>th</sup> Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs
September 2024	Kofi Annan Faith Briefing

October 2024	IATF-MFAC Second Thematic Discussion of 2024
January 2025	11 <sup>th</sup> Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs

