**Concept Note**

**G20 Interfaith Forum**

**Regional Consultation: Asia**

**August 5-6, 2020**

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# Introduction

The G20 Interfaith Forum offers an annual platform where networks of religiously linked and faith-inspired actors engage on global agendas, within the broad framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the host country agenda. This year’s Forum is scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia 13-16 October 2020. Its ambitious aim is to facilitate the necessary dialogue between relevant stakeholders in order to support the creation of an G20 engagement group (beyond the eight that exist now) consisting of interfaith communities, the ‘’Interfaith 20’’, which can perform a role similar to other engagement groups. The COVID-19 crisis refocuses global agendas and calls for timely analysis and policy response. With the G20 deeply involved in global crisis management, the Interfaith community, which is also actively involved in the response to the pandemic, will address urgent issues and pertinent policy recommendations, in parallel with but integrated in the continuing G20 Interfaith agenda.

The co-organizers of this year’s event—the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), and the National Committee for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (NCIID)- are planning several regional consultations, which are to take place prior to the main event. They will seek insights and proposals from religious leaders, policy makers, religious entities, and academics towards priority recommendations, building on parallel and continuing analytic work on areas of special concern to interfaith bodies. The inputs resulting from the discussions will form part of the preparatory process that will present priority recommendations to the G20 Member States before their November 2020 Summit in Saudi Arabia.

The regional consultation focusing on Asia is being organized by KAICIID and the G20 Interfaith Forum Association (I20) and will build on specific analyses on selected topics that have most direct relevance for the region. Given the COVID-19 situation, the consultation will take place online in early August 2020.

# Rationale and Objectives

The rationale for the regional consultation is two-fold: Firstly, religious actors are well-placed to convey the specific and concrete needs of believers, addressing the challenges and identifying opportunities to be taken into account by the global leadership. They hold a key role in advocating for inclusive and sustainable environments from the perspective of their religious traditions. Secondly, the regional approach caters to the very diverse, yet strong role of religious traditions in the distinct geographic areas, acknowledging different historical, cultural and social backgrounds.

The regional consultation aims to ensure consideration of regional specificities and concrete experience, taking into account similarities and important differences across national divides, to provide the necessary platform for religious actors and experts to deliberate on their contribution to social and economic changes on the regional level and to create a space for exchange with relevant policy makers. The consultation represents an integral part of the preparations for the G20 Interfaith Forum as well as a steering mechanism for the process leading to the creation of a new engagement group, the Interfaith 20, and focuses on the following objectives:

* + Provide an **agile and practical platform** for experts and religious actors to d**efine and address a set of priority topics for the region in the context of current global affairs**, building on the recommendations from previous G20 Interfaith Fora.
  + Contribute to the **development of a set of recommendations** to shape the agenda of the 2020 G20 Interfaith Forum through the **engagement of various interest groups** (including women, youth, academics, religious actors and policy makers) and the exchange of **meaningful and evidence-based interfaith experience** in the region.
  + Provide **regional feedback** on priorities of the 2020 G20 host country by addressing them through a regional and contextualised perspective.

# Methodology and Regional Themes

The agenda for the 2020 G20 meeting considers the priorities of its host country, which will be streamlined into the tracks of the Interfaith G20 Forum and have been identified as follows:

* **Women and youth**: Empowering people, by creating the conditions in which all people - especially women and youth - can live, work and thrive.
* **Climate Change**: Safeguarding the planet, by fostering collective efforts to protect our global commons.
* **Technology**: Shaping new frontiers, by adopting long-term and bold strategies to share benefits of innovation and technological advancement.

A number of consultations have been carried out with a diverse group of experts to identify the topics that, while being within the three tracks specified above, present the most interest particularly in the context of Asia. The following topics are to be addressed during the online consultation:

**Education, youth and women**

* + - Responsible use of social media; youth and women being a peace messenger;
    - Structural inequality and gender inequality.

**Governance and faith**

* + - Inclusive governance and religion;
    - The rule of law, rights and religion.

**Protecting the planet**

* + - Commitment of faith networks to disaster-risk reduction;
    - Practical partnerships to address environmental challenges (climate change, access to water, etc.).

# Format

The consultation will be held on-line due to the current measures imposed globally to fight the spread of the Covid-19. The Platform selected for this purpose **is TBD**, as it grants the possibility to share virtual documents, enter into breakout rooms and is easier to use.

The consultations will be organized with the support of the G20 Interfaith Forum Organizing Committee. One to two KAICIID Fellows per thematic group also could be selected, taking into account their interest and the area of expertise, in order to stimulate the discussion within each group and support the organizing team in working on the documentation of each session.

In order to harness the opportunities and the challenges presented by the online implementation, it is suggested to conduct **a poll in order for participants to pre-allocate “seats”** in the thematic working groups based on their interest. Ideally, each of the three working groups should include a balanced mix of different categories and groups of participants from religious leaders and policy makes to youth and representatives of NGOs, for a total of **12-15 individuals per group**.

The regional Consultation is designed as a 2-day online meeting of up to 5**0 participants**, allowing for ample space to deliberate on policy recommendations to be put forward. The agenda of the Consultation will start with **welcome, key note speeches and the panel discussion** on faith based action and SDGs in the context of the Asia region segments. This session will frame the discussions by delineating objectives and priority topics and will be followed by two thematic discussions carried out in three **working groups.** These sessions will be interactive moderated discussions that will seek to result in a concrete set of conclusions and policy recommendations to be presented at the plenary. The plenary session following the working groups will provide space (20 minutes per group including Q&A) for **presenting the findings and recommendations.**

The moderators of the meeting will be chosen among the members of the G20 Interfaith Forum Organizing Committee and thematic experts. The Working Groups will follow the Chatham House rules. The moderators of the Working Groups are expected to summarise the findings and submit corresponding **policy briefs** within one month after the Consultation.

To allow space for informal exchanges and networking among the participants, they will be invited to a virtual lobby during the breaks. Opening panel discussions and plenary sessions to broader public and/ or live-streaming them on social media could be considered in order to give them further visibility.

# Participants and Language

The consultation is expected to gather up to 5**0 participants** from regional and national groups of Asia. The organizers seek to include diverse profiles, assuring religious, geographical, educational, professional, generational and gender diversity. In particular, the consultation will aim at gathering the following:

* Up to 30 religious actors representing the main religious communities / networks in the region;
* Up to 10 policy-makers, representatives of regional organizations and UN agencies;
* Up to 10 representatives of academia, researchers and regional partners.

Youth and Women Empowerment themes are considered to be cross-cutting for this consultation and particular attention will be given in the invitees’ selection process to ensure youth and women participation.

Due to high costs of virtual translation and number of languages in the Asia region, it is suggested to hold the meeting in **English** only and select the participants accordingly.

# Challenges

Due to the 5-hour time difference between Vienna and the majority of South East Asia and a shorter period of productive engagement in online meetings, it is recommended to hold the consultations over 2 days. The time specified in the agenda is CET (UTC +1).

# Agenda

**AUGUST 5 DAY 1**

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| 9:00 - 9:45 | Plenary. Welcome, Expectations, Overview of agenda & logistical notes, Key note speeches |
| 9:45-10:45 | Panel Discussion. Faith Based Action and SDGs: Asia Priorities (TBC) |
| 10:45 - 11:00 | Break. Virtual Lobby - space for participants’ engagement |
| 11:00 - 12:30 | Working group 1. Education, Youth and Women. Structural inequality and gender inequality. |
| Working group 2. Governance & Faith. Inclusive governance and religion. |
| Working group 3. Protecting the Planet. Commitment of faith networks to disaster-risk reduction. |
| 12:30 - 13:00 | Plenary. Wrap-up of Day 1 |

**AUGUST 6 DAY 2**

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| 9:00 - 9:30 | Plenary. Welcome and Reflections on Day 1 |
| 9:30 - 11:00 | Working group 1. Education, Youth and Women. Responsible use of social media; youth and women being a peace messenger. |
| Working group 2. Governance & Faith. The rule of law, rights and religion |
| Working group 3. Protecting the Planet. Practical partnerships to address environmental challenges. |
| 11:00 - 11:15 | Break. Virtual Lobby - space for participants’ engagement |
| 11:15 - 12:30 | Plenary. Reporting Back from Working Groups (25 min per group) |
| 12:30 - 13:00 | Closing Remarks and Speeches |