



G20 Interfaith Forum

Bringing Faith and Policy Together

G20i Regional Recommendations

Latin America

The Group of 20, also referred to as the G20, was established in 2008 as a Summit for Heads of State. It is an international forum for cooperative work in the areas of economics, finance, and policy among the member States. Its annual meetings provide a setting that, to quote from the organization, calls for “dialogue and building a consensus to promote public policies that address the challenges facing humanity”.

This year, the G20 forum is set to take place in Saudi Arabia, where the interfaith forum had been planned for October. This space was created in 2014, in the firm conviction that “religions are called upon to build peace among peoples and every human society,” as stated in the final declaration of the 5th Meeting, held in the city of Buenos Aires. This is a space where networks of actors and agents linked and inspired by faith have an opportunity to work with decision-makers on the global agenda that responds to the unique challenges facing this sector.

As part of the forum’s previous procedural work, for the first time in its history, regional consultations were held in the Arab Region, Europe, Africa, North America, South America, and Asia. Throughout this series of encounters, which were convened by the International Dialogue Center (KAICIID), the Alliance of Civilizations of the United Nations, the Interfaith Forum, and the Saudi Arabian National Committee for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue, the religious and political leaders of each region

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convened in order to examine the problems specific to each particular zone, COVID-19, access to education, women’s rights, youth, consolidation of peace, governance, and environmental justice.

To that end, hundreds of religious representatives around the world worked together in interfaith dialogues that were geared toward addressing the key issues raised at local levels. As a result of these discussions, each group formulated a document with conclusions and recommendations, which are to serve as the basis for the discussions of the next meeting of the Forum, and as a mechanism to steer the process which will lead to the creation of a new engagement group established within the framework of the G20, the Interfaith 20 (I20).

While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is obviously a concern of global scope, there are other topics that affect the different regions, each in its own way. For example, one could point to Europe, where the issue of how to handle flows of displaced persons, migrants, and refugees turned out to be one of the key problems addressed by the working groups. Likewise, the promotion of peaceful coexistence was identified as a major issue to be addressed in the Arab Region.

This document reflects the outcome of this process in Latin America, which gathered over 80 religious representatives, academics, and experts from the countries of the region. The cycle of interfaith consultation here relied on the support of several regional allies, namely, the Latin American Jewish Congress, the Latin American Consortium for Religious Freedom, Latin America and Caribbean Religions for Peace, the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom (CALIR), the National Commission for Justice and Peace of the Argentine Conference of Bishops, and the Delegation of Argentine Israeli Associations (DAIA).

The event to launch this effort took place in July of the current year, at which the organizing committee, comprised of Raúl Scialaba, Jorge Knoblovits, Katerin Marshall, Elena López Ruf, Juan Navarro Floria, Elias Szczytnicki and Claudio Epelman, presented the key objectives of the process. These included:

- a. Examine, along with representative religious organizations, the major patterns emerging from the responses of Latin American institutions to the crisis caused by COVID-19. Identify immediately applicable evidence-based policy proposals and initiatives to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and ways in which voices of faith can help strengthen the Latin American response in general, through the G20 processes specifically.
- b. Provide a streamlined practical platform to allow religious representatives to identify and highlight issues to be prioritized for dialogue among the representative religious bodies, in regard to the G20’s current global agendas.
- c. Strengthen dialogue across sectors in Latin America, through the multidisciplinary involvement in the G20 of stakeholders, and contribute to the development of a set of

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concrete recommendations based on perspectives that encompass regional contexts, from the standpoint of faith.

Within this framework, an agenda consisting of four main work areas was established, with numerous “subtopics” geared toward establishing a launching point for these discussions. Each topic was subsequently assigned to a working group, comprised of representatives from different faiths and specialties, so that it could be addressed in detail and to allow the groups to reach their respective conclusions and recommendations.

The first group worked on issues of governance and faith. Its dialogue focused on issues related to inclusivity by governments, combatting corruption, and promotion of the values of integrity and community.

The second group faced the challenge of addressing the COVID-19 crisis, from the standpoint of the religious sector. The broader aspects of the emergency were discussed within this framework, including populations’ access to basic services, international cooperation during the crisis in order to guarantee access to health inputs, and the marginalization of the elderly in the current context.

The third group worked on the environment, with a special emphasis on matters related to deforestation and the protection of Amazonia, the relationship between the environment and indigenous peoples, and aspects related to clean water.

Finally, the fourth group focused on the socioeconomic challenges of the region, with discussions on issues such as the economy of solidarity, the structural inequities in most countries of Latin American, and the inclusion of women and youth.

The organizers had expected to engage with each other through in-person meetings, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to redirect their efforts to the virtual environment. Both the launch event in July, as well as two months of work carried out subsequently during the working group dialogue round tables, were conducted 100% virtually. The efforts of these members of the organizing committee were essential to accomplishing the forum’s goals. They led the discussions each step of the way, engaging and raising questions and comments that helped the participants arrive at the conclusions set forth in this document.

The closing event and formal presentation of the findings were held on 15 September 2020, with a new virtual conference that included government, diplomatic, and religious authorities from Latin America, as well as the representatives who were an essential part of this dialogue process.

The Organizing Committee wishes to thank the organizers of the Interfaith Forum for the trust they placed in us in order to bring this project forward. This document summarizes and consolidates the documents

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presented by each of the groups after two months of intense debate and discussions. The participants gave their time and critical perspectives for the construction of these spaces, whose value lies in the visions and recommendations that each one of them has provided. We express our sincere appreciation to all who participated in these long-distance events and for making this work possible.

The following topics are covered by the recommendations:

Environment

Religion and the Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Social and Economic Challenges

Governance and Faith

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Environment

Presentation on the situation

Healthy forests, soils, and ecosystems are essential to the health of human beings. Forests, water, and soils are all interdependent and complementary to the biodiversity that inhabits them, and that includes us as human beings. The forests regulate the planet's water flows, and are its major provider of fresh water, generating 40% of rainfall and precipitation. They stabilize the planet's soils, and reduce global temperatures, by retaining 2.1 million tons of carbon dioxide every year. What is more, forests are the source of 25% of modern medications, including 60% of the medications to combat cancer. But the balance between nature and humanity has been disrupted. The system of unconstrained production and consumption is having a direct impact, evident in the over-exploitation of natural resources and the growth of inequalities. This is taking us down the path to a future that is not sustainable.

The tropical forests are in jeopardy. These forests are the habitat with the greatest biodiversity on the planet. They help reduce the appearance of episodes such as the current pandemic. Nevertheless, each year 3.3 million hectares are lost to deforestation. Nearly 17% of the tropical forests of the planet have vanished, in many cases irreversibly, due to the repurposing of lands, often unlawfully, for ranching, industrial agriculture, forestry, mining, and hydroelectric activities.

Faith-based communities are working together, on an inter-religious basis, to protect the tropical forests because they feel responsible for the stewardship of Creation, as a decisive part of our stewardship of Humanity itself, so as to ensure that our planet will remain a sustainable home for future generations. In protecting the tropical forests, faith-based communities are partnering with the indigenous peoples, who have been guardians of the forest from time immemorial, often in spite of having been despoiled of their lands and having seen their knowledge of the stewardship of nature cast aside.

Water is becoming less and less available. It is expected that by 2030, the world will face a 40% shortfall in the aquifers that supply drinking water to half of the world's population. This will have severe consequences, since 85% of morbidity and mortality worldwide are associated with the lack of access to drinking water and the use of polluted water. Industrial activities are frequently the cause of this pollution, due to the lack of compliance with existing regulations, or the absence of clear regulations for the equitable and sustainable management of this essential life-giving fluid.

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The G20 must show leadership, by acknowledging the urgent need for effective compliance with global environmental agreements. These alone, however, will not suffice, unless binding global public policies are adopted that set forth shared yet differentiated responsibilities for all States. Our shared religious values commit us to the stewardship of Creation. Based on those values, we remind the G20 countries of their urgent responsibility and accountability in making the decisions we must make in order to safeguard the integrity of our planet, so that all people worldwide can enjoy a good life.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen the environmental governance of local administrations, with the engagement of civil society, in order to protect and preserve our planet's forests, their surrounding ecosystems, and the indigenous peoples who are their natural guardians.**
 - a. Promote research and development into sustainable productive activities that respect ecosystems and ensure the well-being of populations.
 - b. Recognize the territorial rights of indigenous peoples and integrate their leaders in decision-making processes and the management of their territories.
 - c. Adopt effective and appropriate measures to safeguard the lives, and protect the human rights of environmental advocates and defenders, and prosecute and punish those who attack them, and put an end to impunity.
2. **Halt the deforestation caused by intensive extraction activities, and changes to land use that lead to desertification, soil degradation, and the loss of biodiversity.**
 - a. Declare a 5-year moratorium on the issuance of titles and land use changes for ranching, agroindustry, forestry, mining, and hydroelectric activities.
 - b. Implement a system for the traceability of forest products, in order to assist in cooperation for the protection of forests and compliance with environmental legislation.
 - c. Establish a global initiative for prevention, protection, and response to forest fires, and integrate local communicates into its implementation.
 - d. Encourage research and development of sustainable productive activities that respect the tropical forests, ensure the well-being of populations, and guarantee the continuity of the ecosystem and climate systems.
3. **Guarantee proper management of water systems, in ways that respond to the needs of all populations.**
 - a. Implement governmental management mechanisms that regulate the use of water for industries, and that ensure that water is used in sustainable ways, and that all populations have access to water.

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b. Strengthen government mechanisms to regulate the management of pollutants, and establish accountability for those who generate them.

4. Implement a worldwide environmental education plan to help build global environmental citizenship.

a. Design educational processes, from earliest childhood through all educational levels, with regard to rights and duties related to the environment and sustainable development.

b. Disseminate scientific knowledge and the traditional knowledge of the indigenous peoples with regard to the functions and sustainable use of tropical forests.

c. Include training on access to information and engagement in environmental issues at all educational levels, so as to foster new generations of advocates and defenders of the rights of indigenous peoples and environmental protection.

5. Environmental stewardship and promotion of food security to protect populations against future coronaviruses.

a. Distribute fertile lands in the public domain for the promotion of sustainable partnerships for food production, with technical and extension services for cooperative marketing, and such environmental reclamations as may be required.

b. Globally regulate the conservation of protected lands and indigenous territories, in order to prevent future zoonotic pandemics.

Members of the Working Group

- The Most Rev. Mons. Leonardo Steiner, Archbishop of Manaus
- Rev. Néstor Míguez, President of the Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches (FAIE - Federación Argentina de Iglesias Evangélicas)
- Rev. Jorge Gómez, Executive Director of the Christian Alliance of Evangelical Churches of the Argentine Republic (ACIERA - Alianza Cristiana de Iglesias Evangélicas de la República Argentina (ACIERA))
- Rabbi Sergio Bergman, President of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ - Unión Mundial para el Judaísmo Progresista)
- Sheikh Mohamad Al Bukai, Director of Religious Affairs of the National Islamic Union of Brazil (UNI - Unión Nacional Islámica del Brazil)
- Mauricio López, Executive Secretary of the Panamazonian Ecclesiastical Network (REPAM - Red Eclesial Panamazónica)
- Pablo Canziani, Member of the National Commission for Justice and Peace of the Argentine Conference of Bishops (CEA - Comisión Nacional de Justicia y Paz de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina)

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- Martha Arriola, National Coordinator, Cuidadores de la Casa Común
- Igor Bastos, Campaign Coordinator for Portuguese-Speaking Countries of the Global Catholic Climate Change Movement (GCCM - Movimiento Católico Mundial por el Clima)
- Benjamín Laniado, General Secretary of the Committee for Aid in Disasters and National Emergencies (CADENA - Comité de Ayuda a Desastres y Emergencias Nacionales)
- Martin Von Hildebrand, Honorary President of the Gaia Amazonas Foundation.
- Blanca Echeverry, Country Coordinator for the Interfaith Initiative for the Tropical Forests (IRI - Iniciativa Interreligiosa para los Bosques Tropicales), Colombia
- Laura Vargas, Country Coordinator for the Interfaith Initiative for the Tropical Forests (IRI - Iniciativa Interreligiosa para los Bosques Tropicales), Peru.

Religion and the Response to the Covid-19 Crisis

Presentation on the situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has been, and continues to be, an unprecedented challenge for humanity. The effects of globalization mean that it has been unleashed nearly simultaneously all around the world, and its effects and the varied responses of governments and societies have been felt everywhere almost instantaneously. The pandemic poses enormous challenges to religious faiths as well, ranging from matters as simple as how to talk about it to the preeminently practical concerns of how we deal with it.

The G20 Interfaith Forum has focused on these issues from the very beginning of the pandemic, not only because they have signified major changes in its processes for reflecting and producing its vision for the future, but because they also raise new challenges for engagement among religions, societies, and States.

This challenge presents some unique aspects in Latin America. Even before the pandemic crisis, the continent had scandalous levels of inequality, probably the sharpest in the world. While the pandemic did not create inequality, it has put inequality starkly in relief, in forms such as: unequal access to clean drinking water and sewer systems, which are indispensable in order to implement sanitary measures (the region of the world with the largest fresh water reserves has millions of people who have access to water only with difficulty, or who face extreme food insecurity); unequal access to the digital connectivity necessary for teleworking while in isolation, as well as for access to remote teaching and learning for schoolchildren; unequal levels of access to housing, which makes it impossible for large sectors of the population to comply with “stay at home” orders, without increasing their risk of contagion; and many other similar situations. The health systems of almost all the region's countries are facing grave shortcomings which have been laid bare by the pandemic.

As the months have gone by, the pandemic, which started in Asia, moved on to Europe and then went global. It affected the Latin American continent in unique ways. Both in terms of absolute as well as relative numbers (case numbers and deaths as a proportion of the population) the region's countries have been among the world's hardest hit places, to the point, in this grim competition, of overtaking many Asian and European countries that seem to have found ways curb the spread of the disease.

The health emergency, and the responses by the States, gave rise to many tradeoffs among basic rights. The concern for public health, which is a legitimate objective, led to the imposition of severe restrictions on many rights and freedoms, such as the freedom to assemble, freedom to circulate,

freedom to enter and leave countries, the right to schooling and education, and so forth. This includes religious freedom, to include restrictions on religious gatherings and acts of worship (including some of the most meaningful acts), restrictions on contacts among persons that affect the right to attend religious services, and restrictions on funerals. Up to what point are those restrictions, which sometimes are tantamount to absolute prohibitions, legitimate and justified?

Early in the pandemic, the Interamerican Court of Human Rights issued two rulings that drew the attention of States to the necessity of “ensuring that the adoption and implementation of measures within the strategies and efforts of the Member States to address and contain this situation, which concerns life and public health, take place within the framework of the Rule of Law, with full respect for the Interamerican mechanisms for the protection of human rights and the standards developed in the jurisprudence of this Tribunal.” Almost simultaneously, the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights adopted an analogous resolution.

For their part, religious faiths took on leading roles in combating the disease. This was manifested in many ways. Generally, their leaders have been effective communicators of health measures, and were among the first to adopt them internally for the sake of their own communities (although, as exceptions to the rule, there have also been irresponsible and even irrational behaviors). Churches and religious communities are on the front lines of caring for the most vulnerable sectors of society, which in Latin America are quite widespread. The social work of the faith-based communities tends to reach into places where the State itself is absent, making it is all the more necessary for there to be close coordination and collaboration between the States and the faith-based communities.

Recommendations

1. Vulnerable persons and access to social protections.

a. Valuation of the role of faith-based communities

A shared feature of religious faiths is their engagement in charitable activities and their concern for the poorest and most vulnerable among us, and not just those who are members of their own community. Service to the poor and charity are explicit mandates in all religions, and this shows in many ways. With the pandemic, the extensive networks of volunteers of the faith-based communities and their own grass-roots infrastructure have been launched into service in many places, in support of health measures and to help people who have lost their jobs or incomes due to the restrictions imposed in order to protect health.

In a continent where conflict among faith-based communities is not at all common (in fact, quite the opposite), in many countries, the efforts to help the people most in need have resulted in major efforts of interfaith collaboration.

This activity by religious faiths has made it possible, in many places, to offset the shortcomings of state-provided assistance, or the absence of public structures and services. It is necessary for

the States to acknowledge and value this major collaboration by religious faiths, and for the States to build capacity to coordinate these tasks with these entities, in order to serve the most vulnerable people more effectively.

Furthermore, religious faiths – just like many other agents in society – have seen their own finances affected, as well as their capacity to sustain their works, due to the general contraction of the economy, as well as the impact of the crisis on their members' incomes. States need to be aware of this situation, and provide timely help so that religious faiths are able to keep their services functioning, particularly their educational networks and charitable works

2. Discrimination and religious freedom.

One of the fundamental directives regarding the restrictions on rights that could be deemed necessary for safeguarding public health is that these restrictions must not entail discrimination of any kind on the basis of religion. Even though, as of yet, there have been no reports of failures to comply with this guideline, it is necessary to keep a watchful eye to ensure it does not happen in the future. As part of the special duty of States to care for their most vulnerable minorities, it is necessary for the States to take notice of indigenous peoples and religions of African origin.

On the other hand, the measures adopted by many governments have had an impact on the full exercise of religious freedom, particularly in its collective, external, and public manifestations. It must be remembered that religious liberty is a basic right: suspending this freedom is inadmissible, even in emergency situations. This means that any restrictions imposed on religious freedom must comply with the principle of legality, must be necessary in a democratic society, and must be strictly proportional as means to address the legitimate end of protecting health.

A. Appraisal of the specific role of religion and faith-based communities

The G20 Interfaith Forum deems it necessary to remind States that religious freedom is a basic right within the framework of international treaties on human rights, and that, in the Americas specifically, the Interamerican Convention on Human Rights affirms that religion warrants special protections as a constituent element of a person's identity. In that regard, churches, communities, and religious faiths should be valued for their intrinsic merit and for what they stand for, as a necessary manifestation of people's religious freedoms and as a space for the enjoyment of those freedoms, above and beyond any recognition afforded them due to the indisputable value of their teaching and humanitarian work both within and outside the scope of the current health emergency.

B. Right to worship

A necessary corollary of the right to freedom of religion is the right of every person to worship freely, attended by clergy from that person's own faith (as well as the negative freedom of not being forced to worship), and the corollary right of faith-based communities to provide said ministries to their faithful. These rights are especially compelling in situations involving illness and the last moments of a person's life. These rights must be especially guaranteed to the sick

in hospitals, their families, the dying, the bereaved, as well as to health personnel who are subject to extraordinary pressures and demands while the current situation continues.

We recommend that States prepare the necessary protocols for the enjoyment of the right to religious worship, and ensure that they are current and in force, both in public and private health establishments; and that they ensure that the persons in charge of ministering to their faithful be granted freedom of movement, even in cases when restrictions have been placed on the general population, as well as access to health facilities, while duly complying with health and hygiene precautions. It should be remembered that the clergy are themselves interested parties in protecting their own health and that of the faithful to whom they minister, and accordingly they should be subject to treatment under the law and by the authorities that is equal to that provided to health workers.

C. Respect for the dead and their families

The pandemic is causing an extraordinary number of deaths. These deaths occur in isolation or in loneliness, with no close relatives able to be at the dying person's side during their final moments, or to provide for a proper last farewell and observe the funeral rites called for by their faith. The World Health Organization has recommended that religious traditions be respected, insofar as possible, with regard to the treatment and final resting place of the dead, to include ritual washing when so required, and it has acknowledged that the transmissibility of the virus from dead persons has not been demonstrated. Furthermore, the Interamerican Court of Human Rights has called for the respectful treatment of bodies, and proper honoring of the dead, as well as respect for the right of the bereaved to bury their dead in accordance with their beliefs, pursuant to the jurisprudence of the Interamerican Court.

We recommend that the States, in developing their protocols and norms for the final destination of the bodies of the dead due to COVID-19 and generally, take special heed of those who have died during the emergency caused by the pandemic, and that they respect the right of families to bury their dead in accordance with their religious rites, and with the participation of their closest bereaved, while respecting necessary health measures.

D. The right to religious ceremonies and practices

One aspect of religious freedom arising during the pandemic is the right to hold religious assemblies, and to engage in worship and rites that require the gathering of a certain number of persons. Many countries have imposed drastic and even absolute restrictions on such gatherings, some of which have continued for many months. This raises concerns as to whether such restrictions comply with the requirement, which is indispensable to their substantive legitimacy, of being strictly necessary and of a temporary nature. In several countries, the courts have ruled that while certain restrictions are acceptable, such as on the number of persons who attend these services and requirements for compliance with health and hygiene measures, as a function of the stated purpose of safeguarding public health, total bans on religious assemblies are neither acceptable nor proportional to that purpose.

We believe that it is indispensable to hold a sincere dialogue on this subject between civil and religious authorities, to come to an agreement on those conditions that allow for religious

worship with the participation of the faithful, at least in so far as is compatible with safeguarding health. Accordingly, we believe it is inadmissible, and an infringement of the guarantees provided by international human rights treaties, to impose total bans on religious ceremonies, to include those necessary for initiation rites and the blessing and celebration of marriages.

3. International cooperation and solidarity in practice to guarantee access to medications, vaccines, medical equipment, and treatment for COVID-19.

Many religious faiths have a global presence that crosses national borders. They cannot be excluded from the planning for global solidarity measures to palliate the effects of a pandemic that likewise is on a global scale.

It is necessary to create a global framework to deal with a global pandemic, based on the defense of the common dignity of all human beings. It is necessary that this global policy be informed by ethical principles that safeguard the rights of all people, and that it place solidarity over profits.

The new global and local scenario will require specific efforts in the area of education, in which religious faiths play an extremely important role, not merely by managing their own educational systems but also by contributing their values to society.

4. Necessity of considering religious values and contributions in defining ethical criteria to face the pandemic and follow-up actions (vaccination, access to treatment).

The pandemic has shed a spotlight on especially delicate ethical questions, about which religious faiths have something to say in the dialogue among the States and with society. These concerns range from the criteria and priorities for caring of the sick when health systems get overwhelmed, to the ways to care for the people hardest hit by the economic crisis arising from extended quarantines. There is also an ongoing debate with regard to the costs of, and access to, the available vaccines and medications, in which economic concerns must be weighed against moral criteria and the necessity of ensuring that respect for the human dignity of all people everywhere remains front and center as a concern.

In a crisis situation, the decision on the admission of patients to intensive care services (i.e. triage) is subject to criteria that differ from the usual situations, in which only the situation of the individual patient is considered. In the face of insufficient resources, these criteria must consider the needs and possibilities of the whole set of patients who might require such care. In practice, this means not providing or ceasing to provide certain kinds of care to some patients, in order to provide them to others. Many issues are involved in this situation, and religious faiths should be able to provide their points of view in defining the rules that are to be followed. Certainly, one of the rules must be the avoidance of any kind of discrimination based on a person's religion, among other criteria that should not be applied (generally speaking, people have the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion, race, nationality, age, social condition, etc.)

We also believe that it is essential to foster a dialogue on the post-pandemic reality, among political authorities, the different sectors of the economy, and religious authorities. Linkages and dialogue among religions, societies, and states will be fundamental in the reopening of activity and the creation of jobs and income. Religious denominations can help ensure that the “new normal” does not leave the poorest and most vulnerable people behind.

Members of the Working Group

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- Juan G. Navarro Floria (Argentina), Argentine Council for Religious Freedom (CALIR - Consejo Argentino para la Libertad Religiosa) – Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina

Social and Economic Challenges

Presentation on the situation

The document that follows was prepared with the recommendations of the Interfaith Forum within the framework of the G20, in order to guide a review and evaluation of the current situation, from the specific viewpoint of religions, and in view of the instruments available to them for taking notice of and preventing the realities of inequality and conflict.

We shall focus specifically on the economic and social challenges faced by Latin America. These have been laid bare by the Coronavirus pandemic, which exposed endemic inequalities that had been disregarded for far too long in our region.

In the face of this unique situation, the G20 Interfaith Forum is an ideal platform to think through the initiatives and proposals of public policies, and to provide early warnings and transparency, while promoting good democratic practices, in order to address some of the social imbalances that already existed in the region and which have been exacerbated over the last two months.

These are associated with economic and political challenges that could be exacerbated within a global context of retreat to factional nationalism and economic autarky that curtails opportunities for global trade and investment. This is why these decisions must also be global in scope.

This is an opportunity for those of us in civil society and faith-based institutions to be heard, so that our vision and recommendations can help address social issues and ensure that they are considered in the discussions and decisions of the G20, and accordingly, be included in the policy agendas of global leaders.

By definition, the role of religions, from their standpoint of faith, is to provide an invitation to dialogue and an empathetic encounter with the other. In Latin America, this phenomenon takes the form of peaceful coexistence, and in the “new reality” after the pandemic, it will be crucial to help life go on and recover the lost horizon of hope, through shared projects and peaceful accomplishments.

What follows is an overview of some of the issues to be worked on and discussed in this group, and that we believe should be most urgently included in the agenda of world leaders.

Inequality and Poverty

According to the 2019 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Latin America is the region of the world with the highest levels of income inequality.

The report indicated that the richest 10% of Latin America concentrates the highest share of income (37%), while the poorest 40% receives the lowest share (13%) of any other region.

There is also severe inequality in access to services related to health, education, transportation, and neighborhood security.

The key forecasts of the CEPAL (The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), in its COVID 19 Special Report - 15-07-20) for 2020 are as follows:

- GDP to fall by 9.1% from 2019.
- Poverty to increase by 7.1 percentage points (45.4 million more people than in 2019); the total number of persons living in poverty to rise to 230.9 million (37.3% of the region's population).
- Extreme poverty to increase by 4.5 percentage points (28.5 million more people), affecting a total of 96.2 million (15.5% of the population) people, who will be unable to meet their basic food needs. This means 14 years of progress lost.
- Inequality (our continent is the most unequal region) to rise by 4.7%, and the informal sector to 54%, with women, at 60%, being the most affected.
- Unemployment to reach 13.5%, with 44 million unemployed, 18 million more than in 2019.
- 2.7 million formal businesses to be lost due to the pandemic, representing 19% of the entrepreneurial fabric of the region.
- The region's exports to fall by 23%. We are in the midst of the worst supply and demand crisis in our history.
- Per capita incomes to retreat to 2010 levels

On 13 July 2020, the executive secretary of CEPAL, Alicia Bárcena, stated: "we face an unprecedented crisis, one that will require a transformation of the development model of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the promotion of social policies based on universality, redistribution, and solidarity."

Latin America became one of the epicenters of coronavirus contagion, as its high levels of urbanization empowered the spread of COVID-19. Over one-third of the population lives in cities of one million people or more, with high rates of overcrowding; these were the result of the rapid transitions from rural societies that took place chaotically over the last half century. The State is absent in many outlying areas where cities are expanding, and is failing to provide basic services such as education or health.

These inequalities express themselves in rising social tensions.

The majority of people, regardless of whether they are very rich or very poor, are men and women of religious faith. From this it can be inferred that we have not yet been able to make our beliefs lead to the outcome of a more equitable society.

Children and Teenagers

“The poorest homes are the ones that bear the brunt of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, across many dimensions”, stated Luisa Brumana, the representative of UNICEF Argentina. She warned that the secondary effects of COVID-19, including the loss of income, food insecurity, and the lack of access to the internet and computers for remote learning, affect the most vulnerable children and youth. They are “the hidden victims of the coronavirus.”

Children and teenagers not only have specific needs that differ from those of the adult population, but in the first years of life especially, they are dependent on being cared for and susceptible to the things that happen in their family and the surrounding environment. Furthermore, it has been widely demonstrated that even brief periods of deprivation and poverty can have irreversible long-term consequences affecting the cognitive, traditional, physical, social, and emotional development of children.

Original Peoples

The report on “Indigenous Peoples in the Face of the COVID 19 Pandemic” of the Fund for Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC - Fondo para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina y el Caribe) also alerts us to the impact of this situation on the original peoples of our region, which places their very survival at risk in certain areas, as has been noted by the Interamerican Court of Human Rights (CIDH - Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos).

We must not overlook the vulnerability of the original peoples of the region, who must bear a heavy burden of stigma and prejudice, and have not yet achieved full integration. The discourse and ideology of the logic of conquest linger on, with hardly any solution in sight, denying them their basic substantive and identity rights.

Women’s social issues

Women’s social problems, across the various countries of Latin America, are something they share not only across the region, but worldwide. According to the United Nations, 35% of women worldwide have suffered some kind of physical or sexual violence, as well as gender-based psychological violence and discrimination, which is far more difficult to identify.

This mistreatment is largely based on views that arise from ancient anthropological patterns, deeply rooted in culture, that set men above women in all aspects.

A few data points from Latin America will confirm this statement.

Women are paid between 15% and 20% less than men for doing the same work. Furthermore, management or high-level jobs that could lead to change in public or private institutions are largely reserved for men, even though in some countries of the region mandatory minimum quotas for women have already been established for legislative representation.

The most serious kinds of violence suffered by Latin American women include violations and rape on the streets, kidnapping and rape, forced prostitution, and sexual abuse by partners. The pandemic, with its mandatory quarantines, has led to an exponential increase in cases of gender violence associated with cohabitation with the aggressor, and the impossibility of filing complaints.

There is a clear course of action that international bodies should follow: more economic independence for women, protections from abuse, and education for the new generations. Even so, any laws intended to fulfill these aspirations will have to be coupled with the desire of women themselves to change the situation.

The region is infested by parastatal organized crime networks. This is made possible by impunity in the face of the law, and often even with the complicity of the State. Women's bodies are the target of extraordinary and sometimes bizarre violence, torture, and murder, related to trafficking in persons, as a result of rivalries between criminal gangs. Ninety percent of the victims are young women and teenagers.

Youth and Employment

The complex situation of youth is described by the International Labor Organization (ILO): "All that can be done to encourage decent and productive jobs for young people will have a positive impact on the future of democracy, economic growth, social safety networks, and development that would deserve to be described as humane, in the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean in the first half of the 21st century."

Many young people in developing countries have grown up in a context of structural poverty and lack any education that would grant them access to job opportunities. This is the case, even as unemployment makes them vulnerable to ever-increasing risks. Many of these young people go on to become captives of the political patronage linked to drug-trafficking mafias.

Education, training, and opportunities for formal employment, through State programs and campaigns by the States, are essential, in order to keep young people from dropping out, while at the same time facilitating the inclusion of the most vulnerable sectors.

The large numbers of young people in developing countries afford many opportunities even as they present many risks. Education is a key theme, and programs and campaigns by the States are essential,

in order to keep our youth from dropping out, while at the same time facilitating the inclusion of the most vulnerable sectors.

Fair access to information and communication technologies, which prepares hearts and minds for innovation, represents another socioeconomic shortcoming. The absence of a straight line from education to employment means there is a continuing failure to meet the demand from the productive and service sectors.

We believe it is of vital importance to create policies that directly link academic education and work. Both of these promote a culture of effort and education, while dissipating frustrations and the need to join informal systems that afford no legal protections.

The ILO's data shows that two out of every three young people in Latin America work in the informal sector, where their compensation is usually below the minimum wage; they lack social security coverage and have lower levels of health and pension coverage than adults, and lower unionization levels.

This reality leads to a vicious cycle, since the lack of access to decent jobs for young people contributes to deepening inequality and poverty. The ILO points out that if our goal is to reduce poverty while spreading the benefits of globalization more broadly and endowing our young people with the opportunity to turn their hopes and dreams into realities, it is necessary to create ways to transform global opportunities into productive jobs that young people can freely choose.

These dysfunctional contexts increase the likelihood of addictions, driven by hopelessness and the de-legitimization of effort and work. Not only are the drugs themselves lethal, but the places where they are trafficked are plagued by violence and a lack of respect for the right to life.

COVID-19, which worsens all the social indicators, is aggravating the scourge and menace of street-level drug-trafficking among children and youth throughout all Latin America. Drug consumption, in this context, has increased by 30%.

From empirical evidence, we know that there is only a two-year interval from when a young person or teenager starts using drugs, to when they drop out of school and commit their first crime.

We therefore deem this a multidimensional problem that cuts across every aspect of society.

Faith-based therapeutic communities have an immediate holistic effect on youth, causing them to quit slacking and get to work, to achieve a personal identity based on self-esteem, and to harness their talents. This is faith in action. It means caring for one's own body, rediscovering the family, and achieving rehabilitation in society.

The current social, economic, and cultural situation degrades the potential energy of our young people as engines for social change.

The middle classes are also suffering under the relentless assault of this crisis. Their opportunities are also being cut off, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to support family and economic structures that allow for a life with dignity.

These problems also imperil people's hope to raise a family and own their own home. The first home of a young couple tends to be in the house of, or on land owned by, the nuclear family of one of the young spouses. This in turn can lead to overcrowding and the risk of sexual abuse.

Recommendations

- 1. At the level of global governance, implement new cooperative mechanisms to provide early warning signals, while promoting transparency and comparative exchanges of information and experiences among the different regions, in order to address issues with a global impact, such as the pandemic.**
- 2. Increase multilateral cooperation within the framework of a new consensus that includes environmental sustainability and job creation, with projects that favor the entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and solidarity, as opposed to extractive and speculative investment.**
- 3. Promote development projects specifically geared to small and medium-sized businesses and family farms.**
- 4. Encourage the renegotiation of the external debt of the countries of the region.**
- 5. Promote a universal basic or supplementary income.**
- 6. During the pandemic, if a vaccine against COVID-19 is achieved, it should be available for free in poor countries.**
- 7. Recognize the importance of civil society as a major actor in achieving social transformation.**
- 8. Promote policies of inclusion and sensitivity toward indigenous peoples.**
- 9. Create protocols and implement campaigns to prevent gender violence, whether symbolic or substantive.**

10. **Design programs to prevent addiction, through education that leads directly to formal employment.**
11. **Urge States and motivate civil society to coordinate programs that recognize the work of religions in addiction prevention and reinsertion into society.**

Conclusions

Our world is rapidly changing, and our region is doing so with its own unique features. “Progress” in science, technology, modern methods of communication and transportation are drawing us ever closer, while at the same time dividing us and widening the gap between those who have access and those who are excluded. Structural poverty and inequality of opportunity are leading to increasing hatred and violence, and are destabilizing world peace.

The establishment of a genuine interfaith dialogue is a constructive response to world peace. Dialogue among religious faiths is indispensable, because peace in this world will not be achievable without peace among faith communities. Dialogue and understanding will reduce hate and nurture the acceptance of the traditions and values of all faiths.

Latin America, in this regard, serves as an example, by transmitting and exporting the message of diverse communities that are able to live together in harmony.

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Governance and Faith

Presentation on the situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of governance systems at every level (global, regional, national, and local) and has deepened global inequalities, particularly in our own countries in Latin America.

Faith-based communities and organizations are first responders to the emergency caused by this crisis. They are creating new forms and modalities for solidarity, through their emergency committees, grassroots communities, and varied initiatives to address food security, support and companionship for persons at risk and the lonely, and many other actions.

Even before the pandemic, many countries in Latin America already suffered from various degrees of political instability and violence, which in themselves were symptomatic of an ongoing crisis of representation and of our democratic systems. At the same time, our countries exhibit an alarming pervasiveness of corruption across their various jurisdictions (local, national, regional, and global), which cuts across all sectors of society, even to the point of allowing the spread of dehumanizing activities such as human trafficking and new, modern forms of slavery. In the face of these practices, the vulnerability of immigrants, refugees, and itinerant persons has been especially exacerbated; along with the loss of their roots, they must now also cope with homelessness, racism, and the loss of their rights.

As faith-based communities, we work both within our own communities, and in partnership with other organizations and entities, in order to help bear the burden of suffering, and to provide actual relief and hope.

Within this context, it is essential to preserve the Rule of Law, with a balanced application of the principles of pluralism and non-discrimination, in order to guarantee that human rights and the exercise thereof are respected, along with transparency in government actions and the right to information access, to participation, and justice.

We draw attention to the need to promote partnerships and mechanisms for inclusive participation and engagement, and for coordination among faith-based organizations, government entities, the private sector, and organizations, in order to provide effective responses that guarantee human integrity and sustainable development, through the implementation of policies based on ethical

values and service on behalf of the general welfare of our society. To that end, it is also essential to provide education and accountable leadership that promote peace, justice, cultural diversity, and social cohesion.

The complex scenario of the pandemic provides us with an opportunity to rethink how we want to live together in our societies: the principles that will govern how we live together and how we create systems of governance that effectively harness renewed regional and international solidarity and cooperation for the promotion of human dignity.

Challenges

Within the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed the fragility of government systems at all levels (global, regional, national, and local), we draw attention to the following challenges to the Rule of Law and to democracies:

- 1. The scandalous gaps and inequalities that are growing ever wider and deeper. The downturn due to the pandemic and the rise in poverty represent grave challenges to the sustainability of governance systems. CEPAL's forecasts, for the region as a whole, point to a drop of 9.1% of GDP in 2020, and it is estimated that the number of people living in poverty will increase by 45.4 million in 2020. This means that the total number of persons living in poverty would rise from 185.5 million in 2019 to 230.9 million in 2020, a figure that represents 37.3% of the population. Within this group, the number of persons living in extreme poverty would rise by 28.5 million, from 67.7 million persons in 2019 to 96.2 million in 2020, a figure equivalent to 15.5 percent of the total population.**

This increase in poverty levels goes hand-in-hand with an existential crisis and with people's need to secure a basic living. If these cannot be met, then conditions could arise which could encourage increasing violence and fundamentalist outlooks across our societies.

- 2. Corruption is a complex phenomenon that corrodes the social, ethical, economic, and cultural fabric of our societies, and that undermines the trust, transparency, and reliability of the entire democratic system.**

a. The sudden and general impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the measures to suspend activities that were adopted to contain it have caused a drastic contraction of the world economy, which according to the estimates of the World Bank, will shrink by 5.2% this year. At the same time, the World Bank estimates that a trillion dollars in bribes are handed out every year, and over \$2.6 trillion are stolen through corruption, an amount equivalent to over 5% of the global Gross National Product. It estimates that 10 times the amount of money dedicated to official development aid is lost due to corruption.

b. The Latin American region has high levels of perception of societal corruption, ranging from public works contracting, to information management, to an overall lack of political integrity that threatens to undermine the democratic foundations of many countries in the region, with activities such as the abuse of election processes, vote buying, and fake news.

3. **Human Trafficking and new modalities of slavery that denigrate people's dignity.**

a. Corruption cannot be disassociated from complex crimes such as human trafficking and exploitation, and environmental crimes. The architecture of criminality is often based on the corrupt practices of public officials, such as the failure to investigate large scale money-laundering of the proceeds from human trafficking, drug trafficking, and illegal arms sales.

b. Corruption is a recurring and even systemic component of human trafficking, just as in other offenses in which organized crime is involved. Corrupt practices make it possible to carry out and sustain other similar activities, to which the law remains blind. Patterns of corruption can be seen in the failure to perform official duties, cover-ups, counterfeiting and falsification of documents, influence trafficking, and direct engagement in human trafficking.

c. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the usual patterns of trafficking and exploitation, intensifying the use of online manipulation and communications. This reality makes it necessary to intensify efforts in prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships, in order to detect the new dynamics and banish this dehumanizing practice.

d. The populations most vulnerable to cooptation by criminal networks include migrants, refugees, and itinerant persons. On top of being uprooted from their homelands, during the pandemic, these persons must also cope with the hardship of precarious health conditions and homelessness, given that the countries they might have hoped to reach will no longer receive them, even while they are no longer able to return to their countries of origin, due to the humanitarian crisis there and the closure of borders in response to the health emergencies of COVID-19.

4. **The necessity of preserving the Rule of Law and human rights.**

a. Restrictions on rights and freedoms in the face of the pandemic.

In the face of the pandemic, restrictions of unprecedented scope are being placed on rights and freedoms, both individually and collectively, as governments have implemented emergency legislation. We note with concern that the checks and balances of the three branches of government of the States are not working in a coordinated manner, and that this is having a negative impact on basic guarantees, human rights, and democratic systems. It is necessary to monitor and control these restrictions based on the principle of reasonableness, while also evaluating the timing and proportionality of the means adopted, as well as their scope, and guaranteeing that any restrictions are of an explicitly temporary nature.

b. Emergence of regional populist movements.

Throughout the region, populist movements are on the rise. Such movements may seek to impose unilateral rule over legislatures, judiciaries, and freedom of speech, with scant regard

for minorities and independent checks and balances, twisting the very notion of democracy itself.

Faith-based communities note with concern the misappropriation of religious discourse by political sectors, whether for electoral purposes, or to legitimize authoritarian regimes, as well as the offensive treatment of religious leaders who have been critical of governments, and the preferential treatment of others at the expense of inclusive policies.

c. Rights of minorities and vulnerable populations.

We note with concern the panorama of recurring infringements of religious freedom, by raising awareness of the increasing extortion, threats, and violent attacks by criminal groups against religious leaders and human rights advocates, especially in regions where drug traffickers exercise control over a territory. States have a duty to intensify their actions to prosecute and punish those responsible for these offenses, and to protect vulnerable populations and their community leaders.

Likewise, indigenous communities and incarcerated persons find themselves in increasingly vulnerable situations, in which they face a higher risk of contagion and which severely affect their protections and rights.

5. The crisis of regional and global governance entities has made it more difficult to implement effective responses to emergencies.

a. Regional governance mechanisms are weakening. Along with the global governance crisis, the rise of populist movements, and the crisis of multilateralism, there is a crisis in the regional governance systems of Latin America and the Southern Cone, where a lack of effective mechanisms is to be noted.

b. It is necessary to strengthen international development cooperation: such cooperation has the potential to serve as a transformative force, to support and guide the sustainable recovery of developing countries. The OECD has stated that various sources of development financing have already been severely affected by this crisis, which is aggravating the pre-pandemic financial deficits of these countries and increasing their debt levels. Official Development Aid (ODA) has played a key role in building the health and social safety networks of the developing countries, which are essential to their resilience and response capacity in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. Official development aid is a crucial catalyst during times of crisis. Although ODA increased in 2019, in terms of subsidies, the current ODA levels for countries have not reached the collective goal of 0.7% of Gross National Income for development financing, to which they committed in the Addis Ababa Action Plan in 2015. Now, with the number of persons facing food insecurity doubling to 265 million in 2020, governments must also greatly expand their social safety programs, with the support of their development partners, and in partnership with civil society and the private sector. These programs operate as countercyclical measures, by stimulating consumption and investment. There is nevertheless a large margin to broaden and deepen social safety protections and make progress in areas such as streamlining administrative requirements.

The contribution of faith-based communities and organizations

Religious communities and leaders, as well as faith-based organizations (FBOs), around the world are making major contributions in the areas of health and education. They quietly carry out valuable and risky work in conflict zones and in situations of extreme violence and poverty, during disasters, and in advocacy and human rights campaigns. Throughout all these situations, faith-based communities are making major contributions to relief efforts, while driving creative processes for community development, resilience, and involvement in peace-building processes, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and transitional justice. By way of example, Caritas Internationalis, Visión Mundial (World Vision), Islamic Relief, and ACT Alliance are just a few of the organizations that make up the backbone of the global humanitarian system.

Various studies show that over 80% of the world's population are believers, and it has been noted that the number of the faithful is growing not only in countries that have broad religious pluralism, but also across countries with differing levels of development. This shows that the religious dimension is a constant in the life and identity of individual persons and whole societies. The ongoing service work and aid of faith-based communities and organizations are reflected in a high perception of trust in religious institutions.

In recent years, there has been a multiplication of inter-institutional initiatives for international development cooperation among faith-based actors and FBOs. Many development agencies, both at the national and international levels, as well as the agencies of the United Nations, have formalized cooperation agreements with faith-based actors for joint efforts, especially with regard to development. Furthermore, faith-based actors, just like the other actors in society, engage with and interact in a variety of forums and different venues, such as UN-IATF-FBO, the Multifaith Advisory Council, the various channels within the United Nations system, the International Partnership of Religion and Development (PARD), and the World Bank's "Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics".

In view of the religious communities' capacity for building resilience, their advocacy, and their presence on the ground, as well as the ethical influence of religious leaders among their communities and in the public square, we make the following recommendations:

Recommendations

1. **Encourage institutional approaches to the participation and engagement of religious organizations within the official structure of the G20, to contribute an ethical perspective on discussions of recovery and resilience in post-pandemic scenarios.**

- 2. Insist on the adoption of measures, from a comparative standpoint, promoting the eradication of human trafficking, such as the implementation of regional standards in legislation; the promotion of regional spaces for coordination of criminal prosecutions; the promotion of mechanisms for transparency and performance evaluations of judges and prosecutors; and mandatory training in this matter for officials of the judiciary.**
- 3. Strengthen mechanisms for regional coordination and governance, in order to promote entities for coordinated decision-making and actions that prioritize more inclusive approaches to global recovery, reappraising and empowering the existing venues for engagement.**
- 4. Rebuild mechanisms for international cooperation and solidarity through:**
 - a. Encouragement of Alliances for Sustainable Development, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for Financing of Development.
 - b. Calling on the G20 countries to promote a sustained increase in Official Development Aid, with a view to achieving the goal of CAD countries to contribute 0.7% of their Gross National Income, in view of the specific role of the ODA in helping to meet basic human needs, promoting peace and stability, and building productive and healthy populations in the face of decreased development financing.
 - c. Promoting the participation of faith-based communities in regional and local crisis committees, to contribute with their know-how, ethical values, and work in the field to processes involving risk mitigation, disaster prevention, resilience, and a fair and sustainable recovery after the pandemic.
- 5. Invite faith-based communities and religious leaders to participate in processes to design and monitor public policies to increase transparency, raise the quality of institutions and governance, and eradicate corruption.**
- 6. Preserve the Rule of Law and human rights by asserting active oversight and control of emergency measures that have imposed restrictions on rights, so as to ensure that they are reasonable and of a temporary nature.**
- 7. Promote a healthy secular approach in the relations of the States with faith-based organizations, with due regard to the principles of cooperation, pluralism, and non-discrimination, while guaranteeing the right to religious freedom, in both its individual and collective aspects.**

8. **Intensify actions to protect religious leaders and human rights advocates from attacks by criminal groups and narcotraffickers, in order to prosecute and punish the persons responsible for such attacks.**
9. **Promote educational systems that incorporate ethics and sustainable development (ESD), in order to equip young people and future leaders with the tangible skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary to exercise responsible and accountable leadership that promotes peace, justice, human rights, cultural diversity, and social cohesion.**

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