

EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY, JULY 21 AT 1 P.M. EASTERN DAYLIGHT TIME

**G20 Interfaith Forum Gathers Latin American Religious Leaders
for Consultation on COVID-19 and Society Inequalities Exposed by the Virus**

Buenos Aires – July 21, 2020 — The G20 Interfaith Forum, the world’s leading organization focused on bringing faith and policy together, hosted its Latin America regional meeting today. The virtual meeting focused on how Latin American religious leaders can support regional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic as the area becomes a new epicenter for the virus.

“The coronavirus pandemic has revealed – especially in Latin America – the enormous inequalities that exist in our society,” said Dr. Juan G. Navarro Floria, Vice-President of the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom. “But at the same time, it has motivated extraordinary gestures of solidarity. Religious communities are on the front line helping the vulnerable and have proven to be very effective allies of governments to raise awareness and prevent the spread of the virus.”

Speakers and presenters included Cardinal Pedro Barreto, Archbishop of Huancayo and First Vice-President of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference; Omar Abboud, Co-President of the Institute of Interreligious Dialogue, Pastor Ruben Proietti, President of the Latin Evangelical Alliance, and Rabbi Michel Schlesinger, Rabbi of the Israelite Paulist Congregation.

The gathering continues a series of regional meetings that will produce policy recommendations for the global G20 Interfaith Forum to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Oct. 13 to 15. The meeting brought together Latin American religious leaders, government officials, academic experts and business leaders who have been charged by G20 Interfaith Forum organizers with developing policy recommendations that will be submitted in November to world leaders at this year’s G20 Summit.

“Crises are moments of social friction so we must now stay together,” said Jorge Knoblovits, President of Delegacion de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA). “The Consultation is a great opportunity to discuss recommendations that will support world leaders to overcome the current crisis.”

Ambassador Alvaro Albacete, Deputy Secretary General of the KAICIID Dialogue Center, a key partner of the initiative, said: “The COVID-19 crisis is refocusing global agendas. This is a time for dialogue so that we can alleviate the suffering caused by the pandemic, but also so that we can address the systemic inequalities it has exposed. Religious communities are first responders in any crisis, but equally importantly, they also play an important role by reminding us of the universal principles that must form the foundations of our societies and of our shared responsibility to each other. Policy needs to take religious voices into account, and policymakers and religious leaders need to learn and listen to each other. Latin America has a long tradition of interreligious coexistence and sustained dialogue between religious communities and policymakers.”

In addition to discussions regarding COVID-19, the event kicked-off three task forces: (1) Empowering People and Fostering Gender Equality, (2) Religious Engagement with Safeguarding the Planet; and (3) Frontiers at the Intersection of Governance, Faith, and Technology. For more detail on these focus areas and related subthemes, visit www.g20interfaith.org/regional-events/.

Keynote speaker Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary General of Ibero-American said: "Latin America is a region with immense social and economic challenges where faith communities play a fundamental role in achieving coexistence, dialogue and social equality. Transferring that valuable and rich experience to the G20 leaders is vital and urgent."

Highlighting the importance of the organization, Elena López Ruf, Head of Religion and Development at the Ecumenical Regional Center (CREAS), said: "The G20 Interfaith Forum aims, first of all, to provide a space for exchange about the contribution of communities and religious leaders to sustainable development and interreligious cooperation in the region. Secondly, it promotes mechanisms for participation and coordination among religious organizations, government entities, civil society and multilateral organizations to face regional challenges such as inequalities, even more accentuated today in the region due to the pandemic of COVID-19, as also the robustness of the democratic system, the rule of law and the fight against corruption."

Key partners for this year's G20 Interfaith Forum are KAICIID, the UN Alliance of Civilizations, and the National Committee for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue in Saudi Arabia.

About the G20 Interfaith Forum

The G20 Interfaith Forum seeks for global solutions by collaborating with religious thought leaders and political representatives. It builds on vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting a rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. The membership includes interfaith and intercultural organizations, religious leaders, scholars, development and humanitarian entities, and business and civil society actors.

Convened each year in the host country of the upcoming G20 Summit, the formal G20 Interfaith Forum for 2020 will be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on Oct. 13-15. The G20 Interfaith Forum offers an annual platform where a network of religiously linked institutions and initiatives engage on global agendas. The goal of the meetings is to contribute meaningful insight and recommendations that respond to and help shape the G20 Summit and thus global policy agendas. The 2020 G20 Interfaith Forum agenda builds on the goals of social cohesion, equity, and sustainability that have been a central underlying theme for the Forum from its inception.

For more information please visit www.g20interfaith.org.