



G20 2022 INTERFAITH FORUM, INDONESIA

Concept Note – February 22, 2022

“...So we can generate an atmosphere of urgency to act” – Kristalina Georgieva, IMF

IF20 Roles, Purpose, and evolution

The G20 plays a distinctive and pivotal role in the international multilateral system. The G20 process focuses on priority global issues, especially those centering on economic crises, and it culminates each year in the summit of heads of state. Established in 1999, largely in response to global economic crises, the G20 represents an effort to balance the exclusive G7/G8 process and the often unwieldy United Nations General Assembly and hamstrung Security Council. Thus it comprises 19 countries and the European Union, with additional countries invited each year to participate as guests. Besides the core G20 process, directed largely by “Sherpas” from the constituent governments, concentric meetings and reflection processes involve government ministers from priority sectors and a series of “engagement groups” that draw on key global constituencies. The different groups work in parallel to echo and respond to the official agenda, which is set annually by the host government. The engagement groups have evolved over time and include in 2022 the B20 (business), C20 (civil society), L20 (labor), S20 (science), T20 (think tanks), U20 (urban), W20 (women), Y20 (youth), P20 (parliaments), and SA20 (Supreme Audit Institutions).

The world’s religious communities engage in countless ways on the issues that form the global agenda, including the urgent matters that are the focus of the G20 process and annual leader summit. The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20), operating since 2014 when a first meeting was held in Australia, is part of this growing constellation of groups centered on the G20. It is not yet considered a formal engagement group though its role is increasingly known and respected. Not unlike other engagement groups, the IF20’s work and role is linked to broader multilateral initiatives and networks that focus both on crisis management (currently the COVID-19 emergencies) and the United Nations 2030 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is run by a small core group and larger advisory council and support group that work on a continuous basis to assemble, drawing on religiously linked networks, analysis of priority issues, and to frame relevant and actionable proposals. The goal is to build on and communicate the most pertinent work by existing networks, to encourage active dialogue and engagement, and to present selectively the most compelling and pertinent ideas to G20 sherpas and through other channels to G20 leadership and those concerned with G20 initiatives

Indonesia hosts the G20 process for 2022 and is fully engaged in orchestrating the elaborate multilateral process. Indonesia’s central focus is recovery, implying both a sharp focus on public health and putting the COVID-19 emergencies behind us, and on stocktaking and actions that look forward, beyond the crisis. The ministerials (meetings of groups of sector ministries primarily from G20 members) and engagement groups both work to present proposals for action and to influence the overall process, including the resulting communiqués. The presidency rotates among the member governments. Indonesia succeeds Italy, the 2021 host, and Saudi Arabia (2020 host), with India slated as the 2023 host and Brazil in 2024. This phase in the rotating presidency thus highlights both the economic and geopolitical roles of Asia and of emerging economies and distinctive features of Indonesia as a Muslim majority nation (the world’s largest) whose constitution and political philosophy are firmly grounded in an ethos aiming at multi-religious harmony. Hosting the G20 is a first for Indonesia which has invested substantial efforts into preparations, with the Summit planned for October 30-31, in Bali.

How the G20 Interfaith Forum Operates

The work and ambitions of the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) have expanded steadily over the nine years since it first met in 2014. The aim is to engage religious actors from different sectors and religious traditions and across the world on the issues that are at the heart of the G20 process, responding and contributing to the agendas. Even though the IF20 is not yet considered an official engagement group, it essentially operates as one. Thus, the IF20 aspires to serve as a global platform drawing on the work of networks of religiously linked institutions. The IF20 works through different links to G20 countries but, with global bodies characterized by many transnational links, its scope is beyond the G20 national governments and religious communities specific to G20 countries.

The IF20's primary intellectual mettle and substantive debates draw on the growing body of policy, operational, and academic institutions that focus explicitly on global socio-economic challenges, especially those with development and humanitarian features, primarily as defined and monitored in the context of the UN SDGs. The IF20 network thus includes interfaith and intercultural organizations, religious leaders and those who shape policy within religious institutions, universities and scholars, diplomats and representatives of multilateral organizations, development and humanitarian entities, and civil society and business actors. Thus it includes a large, diverse, and complex field of players.

The IF20 builds on vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting their rich diversity of social forms, ideas, and values. While the IF20 shares some features with other engagement groups, it has distinctive features that relate to the widely diverse landscape of world religious communities. It aims not to mimic the engagement group structure but to operate within a broad interreligious, intercultural, and interdisciplinary medium. It reflects a robust and creative forum for dialogue about issues and concerns, but also a pragmatic effort whose formal proposals address in professional and constructive ways the G20 mandates and priorities.

IF20 in 2022

A core feature of the G20 is the prominent role the host government plays in directing the annual process, including the broad agenda and constituent events. This has its parallel in the IF20. Each year a nationally interreligious group from the host country has worked in partnership with the international IF20, which has a multiyear, continuing focus. The IF20 thus works to link its work closely to the host country process while maintaining continuity and building on specific analysis, dialogue, and proposals that are elaborated over time (beyond a single G20 annual cycle).

The G20 presidency passed from Italy to Indonesia on December 1, 2021, and plans for both substantive engagement and relevant processes among the many constituent parts are taking shape. The central 2022 theme is "Recover Together, Recover Stronger" (<https://g20.org/>). Overall responsibility, under the office of the President of Indonesia, involves the Coordinating Ministry for Economy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has been assigned primary responsibility for the relevant interfaith process.

The announced themes for the Indonesian presidency are heavily colored by the continuing COVID-19 related emergencies, which affect every aspect of society and economy, and the limited capacity of many countries to meet the crisis. The Indonesian Presidency has thus announced a focus on three main pillars:

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- Global health architecture;
- Sustainable energy transition; and
- Digital transformation.

Issues that continue from 2021 include a focus on equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, promoting sustainable and inclusive economic development through participation of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the digital economy.

IF20 Structure, process, and ongoing proposals

The continuing IF20 process involves a small non-government organization, the IF20 Forum Association and an Advisory Council composed both of individuals who have engaged in the process over time and institutions. Discussions are underway to build a support group of academic and religious institutions that can help assure high quality of engagement and proposals. The goal is to link closely to and draw on the work of a series of interreligious and intrareligious networks that focus on global agendas. Organizations which have contributed significantly to the process over the years include the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, the World Faiths Development Dialogue, Islamic Relief USA, KAICIID (King Abdallah Ben Abdulaziz Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue), Fscire (Bologna), the International Shinto Foundation, Jubilee USA, and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. Others with which IF20 is seeking to strengthen relationships include prominently Religions for Peace, the United Nations Multifaith Advisory Council, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, the ACT Alliance, and a variety of others.

IF20 work has two prongs: continuity in advancing priority action with a sharp focus on urgent matters, and efforts to enrich the broad G20 agenda, through the host's and the IF20 Association's academic, religious, and cultural resources. Continuing work of different partners on a range of G20 related topics include anti-corruption, freedom of religion or belief, cultural heritage, anti-human trafficking, education, health, and women's empowerment. The IF20 has also focused on cross-cutting issues including prominently anti-racism. Work in 2022 draws on the extensive work featured in the context of the October 2021 Bologna Forum.

IF20 2022

The 2022 IF20 agenda is under discussion both with IF20 partners and with Indonesian religious communities. With the central focus on themes of recovery, religious engagement on both COVID-19 response (vaccination, social protection measures, health sector development) and economic, social, and financial architecture have central importance. A central continuing priority for the IF20 is concern for vulnerable groups such as refugees and children.

Since it was first established in 2014, a Forum, a formal meeting organized jointly by the international IF20 and a national coordinating body, has been a focal point. Thus there have been annual summits or forums, shortly before the G20 Summit itself, in Australia (2014), Turkey (2015), China (2016), Germany (2017), Argentina (2018), Japan (2019), Saudi Arabia (2020) and Italy (2021). With the COVID-19 emergency which stymied in person meetings from 2020, recent meetings have relied far more heavily on virtual meetings, especially on specific topics but also to draw more systematically and with broadening participation on regional inputs. This shift has highlighted the important ongoing nature of the G20 engagement process, and the multiple stakeholders involved. This is reflected in 2022 plans which highlight the importance of dialogue processes focused on priority issues that extend over the year.

The IF20, working through specialized groups (working groups), is engaged in webinar-centered exchanges on topics pertinent to the Indonesia G20 agenda and the continuing work and analysis on topics that include education, cultural heritage, cross-cutting approaches to racism, and freedom of religion or belief. Specific work is also underway on priority 2022 topics as follows:

- (a) COVID-19 recovery. Religious roles in actions to address COVID-19 emergencies include a focus on advocacy and information (notably countering misinformation), support for vaccination campaigns, and contributions to future pandemic preparedness. Working with the Jubilee Initiatives IF20 will engage on critical financial issues including debt action to alleviate burdens on affected countries, social protection, and global financial architecture.
- (b) COVID-19 recovery demands for action on health systems (national, regional, and multilateral) that work to assure greater access and equity and also engage religious communities in multiple ways
- (c) Climate change and energy transitions are central global and G20 issues, with vital interreligious engagement at many levels. The IF20 works with partners including the Vatican and the World Resources Institute (WRI) to build on religious engagement in COP 26 and looking to COP 27, with a view to taking common action focused advocacy and commitments to higher levels.
- (d) The most compelling and distinctive collective contributions of religious communities to global agendas and especially those that have the greatest urgency relate to vulnerable communities and thus global humanitarian responses to the crises of forced migration and forms of abuse and mistreatment, for example of children.
- (e) Strengthening religious engagement in global governance in development and humanitarian assistance.