



INTERFAITH  
ALLIANCE  
FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES



IJM

Manila, Philippines, July 7, 2023

# G20 INTERFAITH REGIONAL MEETING PHILIPPINES



# Introduction

**The G20 Interfaith Regional Meeting for the Philippines was held in Manila in July 2022, co-hosted by the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities (IAFSC) and International Justice Mission (IJM). Over 50 diverse civil society and faith leaders gathered to discuss solutions to pressing global challenges including climate change, online child exploitation, human trafficking, disaster resilience, education of children's rights, and freedom of religion and belief.**

The forum aimed to uplift marginalized voices and perspectives within the G20 Interfaith Forum's advocacy efforts, which support India's G20 Presidency in shaping inclusive policy. Mobilizing faith communities' vast networks and moral authority was seen as vital to addressing interconnected crises impacting vulnerable populations worldwide.

In his opening remarks, IAFSC President Kamel Alawtdi emphasized "vulnerable people are most impacted by these challenges," and the vulnerable were indeed a main focus of the regional meeting's discussions. Speakers called for practical interfaith cooperation, not just dialogue, to tackle compounding crises of conflict, inequality, poverty and climate change which threaten society's most marginalized.

Panelists highlighted faith's immense power to engage followers towards social action grounded in shared moral foundations of compassion and justice. Protecting the exploited and excluded was cited as a core calling across faiths. Collaboration between religious groups and government was deemed essential to effectively translate wisdom into solutions.

The Forum, which was hosted as an interfaith event by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, offered critical insights from local faith leaders and advocates on uplifting vulnerable communities within the context of complex, intersecting global challenges. Discussions illuminated practical opportunities for cooperation between religious groups and governments to foster inclusive, ethical policies that leave no one behind.

# Opening Remarks and Panel



The opening panel brought together religious and civil society leaders to present substantive priorities for the forum focused on justice, resilience and human rights.

Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines stated, "I am glad this forum will tackle human trafficking, climate change and online child abuse – issues that all require unity across humanity if they are to be solved."

Calls were made for greater interfaith cooperation and upholding human dignity of the vulnerable, based on shared spiritual principles. Speakers emphasized the need to move from talk to accountable action and ethical policies that uplift "the least, the lost, and the left out."

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# Preventing Online Exploitation of Children

This session addressed the alarming spread of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSAEC) during COVID-19 in the Philippines and worldwide. Speakers called for multifaceted solutions centered on awareness, protections, rehabilitation and prevention.

Main takeaways and recommendations included:

- Awareness campaigns on online safety and recognizing signs of abuse
- Stronger legislative protections and penalties
- Holistic rehabilitation providing health care, counseling and education
- Incorporating child protection in school curriculums
- Partnerships with tech companies to detect and remove exploitative content

The session shed light on an often obscured issue, outlining faith groups' vital role in shifting attitudes, delivering prevention education, and supporting survivors.

***“The rights of the victims of online sexual exploitation, encompassing the ability to request content removal and seek reparations, must be recognized and prioritized.” – Ashira, Philippine Survivor Network***

***“I think the G20 Summit is a good platform for all faiths to band together and make a statement to the tech companies: That you must draw the line in protecting children.” – Atty. Noel Abayon, IJM***

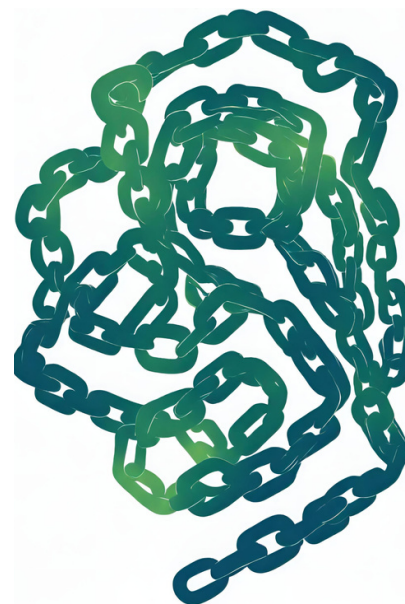
# Human Trafficking

This session examined progress combating human trafficking in the Philippines alongside persistent challenges implementing anti-trafficking laws. Speakers noted the complexities surrounding modern slavery, with key recommendations including raising community awareness, cross-border law enforcement coordination, and combatting corruption enabling trafficking.

Main takeaways included:

- Raising community awareness of trafficking tactics and assistance available
- Improving cross-border law enforcement coordination
- Developing survivor support systems for rehabilitation and reintegration
- Addressing corruption enabling trafficking such as complicit officials
- Engaging faith networks and local governments as key partners

The discussion illuminated practical ways forward, stressing collaboration as vital to deterring trafficking and empowering survivors.



***“Cooperation domestically as well as regionally and globally is key...No one agency has the resources to really curb this scourge.”***  
***- Dennis Gonzales, Department of Interior and Local Government***

# Climate Change

Participants exchanged insights on pressing environmental challenges facing the Philippines and Southeast Asia, emphasizing climate justice, sustainable solutions and mobilizing faith communities.

Main takeaways and recommendations included:

- Shifting high-consumption lifestyles and establishing sustainability practices
- Educating communities on climate impacts and solutions
- Empowering vulnerable groups through economic alternatives
- Pressuring governments and corporations that are driving environmental damage
- Drawing on spiritual values calling us to environmental stewardship

The dialogue demonstrated how faith groups' moral authority and networks make them essential partners in shifting mindsets and policies to mitigate climate change.



***“Cooperation domestically as well as regionally and globally is key...No one agency has the resources to really curb this scourge.”***  
***- Dennis Gonzales, Department of Interior and Local Government***

# Education of Children Concerning Their Rights

This session explored approaches to educate children on their rights and build awareness from an early age. Speakers discussed integrating human rights education into school curriculums using creative, interactive methods tailored for children.

Key recommendations included:

- Starting human rights education early at the primary school level using songs, stories and experiential learning.
- Developing peace education programs that are age-appropriate and engage artistic expression.
- Educating parents and communities alongside children for greater impact.
- Creating a database of human rights education resources that can be shared across schools and organizations.

The discussion highlighted the need for greater investment in human rights education for children, delivered in engaging ways that instill values of dignity, equality and peace. The session benefited from nearly complete efforts to formalize a Memorandum of Agreement between the Philippine Department of Education and the Geneva Office for Human Rights Education (GO-HRE) to implement the **Colega Curriculum developed by GO-HRE**, which is expected to affect 28,000,000 Philippine Students nationwide in roughly 60,000 public schools.

***“Peace education must be holistic so the focus of our program is the child but we also consider the actors or the environment around the learners.”***

***- Sheena Carmel Opuencia,  
Philippine Council for Peace  
and Global Education***



# Freedom of Religion or Belief

This session involved a thought-provoking exchange on religious freedom issues and interfaith relations in the Philippines and globally. Speakers emphasized understanding different faith traditions through cross-religious education and dialogue.

Recommendations included:

- Fostering interfaith spaces for open, respectful exchange between religious groups.
- Increasing religious literacy through comparative studies and joint scripture reading.
- Ensuring legislation upholds international standards on freedom of religion.
- Protecting minority groups and indigenous rights.
- Addressing poverty and economic exclusion underlying tensions.

The open discussion revealed opportunities and challenges for strengthening interfaith relations and upholding freedom of religion as a fundamental human right.



***"We have to go back to the original idea...of what does it mean to have freedom of religion or belief - everyone should be able to claim, whether you're a Muslim or a Christian or Jewish or Baha'i...without interference from politics or government."***

***- Dr. Noel Estrella,  
Armed Forces of the  
Philippines***





The G20 Interfaith Philippines Regional Meeting offered critical insights from diverse local faith leaders on tackling global challenges and uplifting marginalized communities. Discussions illuminated practical opportunities for cooperation between religious groups and governments to foster inclusive, ethical policies that leave no one behind.

Recommendations compiled can help inform faith-inclusive policymaking to build a more just, resilient and sustainable future, in addition to contributing to the recommendations that the G20 Interfaith Forum submitted to G20 India sherpas prior to September's G20 Summit.



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