



## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Welcoming the African Union as a G20 member and in commemoration of the 2025 World Interfaith Harmony Week and the Golden Rule Day

A Conference on Africa's Faith Communities: Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union Agenda 2063, and South Africa's 2025 G20 Process

*May 13 – 14, 2025 Addis Ababa. Hilton Hotel*

African  
Union



# IF20

G20 INTERFAITH FORUM



## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS



**13-14 MAY 2025**  
HILTON HOTEL  
ADDIS ABABA ETHIOPIA



### A CONFERENCE ON AFRICA'S FAITH COMMUNITIES G-20

*On May 13, 2025, the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, in partnership with the United Religions Initiative (URI), the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, and the African Union, hosted the opening plenary of a two-day conference on “Africa’s Faith Communities: Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union Agenda 2063, and G20 South Africa’s 2025 Process.” The conference celebrated the African Union’s recent membership in the G20 and commemorated the 2025 World Interfaith Harmony Week and Golden Rule Day. Distinguished guests included H.E. Taye Atske Selassie, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssef, Chairperson of the African Union Commission; government ministers; religious leaders; and diplomatic representatives from across Africa and beyond.*

The two days conference will provide focused discussion on key issue in which religious community have deep interest. In 2023, the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia and United Religion Initiative of Africa, with the help



of G20 Interfaith Forum made an appeal for the G20 to accept the Africa Union as a member of G20. The organizers are delighted in 2024, the AU was made a permanent member of the G20 as this gives the continent an important voice on global key issues. The AU inclusion in the G20 is historic, solidifying Africa's role in addressing critical global issues, such as economic development, energy transitions, and sustainability. The Africa Union Commission has already participated in various G20 activities under the 2024 Brazilian presidency, and hopes to continue its participation in years to come.

*\*A special thank you to Ambassador Mussie Hailu for his leadership and support in organizing this event.*



### **The President of Ethiopia speaking at the G20 Interfaith Forum Africa Regional Conference OPENING CEREMONY**

The conference began with the playing of the Ethiopian and African Union anthems, followed by an interfaith prayer led by religious leaders from the Ethiopian Interreligious Council. A group of youth representatives then delivered a powerful recitation of the Golden Rule as expressed in various faith traditions:

- “Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you,” from **Hinduism**.
- “No one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself,” from **Islam**.
- “What is hateful, do not do to your neighbors. This is the whole Torah. All there is is this commentary,” from **Judaism**.

The recitation emphasized the common ethical foundation shared across religious traditions, setting the tone for the interfaith dialogue to follow.

## Presidential Address

H.E. Taye Atske Selassie, President of Ethiopia, delivered a comprehensive keynote address that highlighted the essential role of interfaith cooperation in addressing Africa’s most pressing challenges. He began by acknowledging Ethiopia’s unique position as a landmark of interfaith harmony and a symbol of freedom as a country that had never been colonized.

*“Ethiopia stands today not only as a land of origin for humanity, but as a living testament to what is possible when diverse faiths find common ground in shared values,” President Selassie stated. “Our constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion, ensuring that all religious practices and cultural expressions receive equal recognition and protection.”*



The President emphasized the crucial intersection between faith communities and sustainable development:

*“Faith communities are not peripheral to development—they are central to it. They reach the most vulnerable, they preserve cultural wisdom, and they speak to the moral imperatives that must guide our collective progress. This is why the African Union’s membership in the G20 is not merely symbolic but essential for ensuring that African priorities, including the spiritual dimensions of human development, are given their rightful place in global governance.”*

President Selassie specifically addressed the role of religious leaders in fostering peace across the continent:

*“When we speak of building peace in Africa, we must recognize that religious leaders are often the first mediators of conflict, the first responders to crisis, and the most trusted voices in many communities. The G20 Interfaith Forum provides a vital platform for these voices to be heard at the highest levels of global decision-making. As we implement Agenda 2063, we must ensure that interfaith dialogue remains at the heart of our pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous Africa.”*

He concluded with a powerful call to action:

*“The teaching of the Golden Rule—to treat others as we wish to be treated—is not merely an abstract principle but a practical foundation for policy. It demands that we address climate change with urgency, that we ensure economic systems serve human dignity, and that we protect the most vulnerable among us. As Africa takes its place at the G20 table, we bring this ethical framework as our contribution to global problem-solving.”*

## Welcome Addresses





Teguhan Tagay Tadele (Kesis), Secretary General of the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, welcomed attendees and introduced Ethiopia as “a beautiful mosaic of different cultures, faiths and traditions living together in harmony.” He highlighted Ethiopia’s constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and the separation of state and religion, noting that “all religious and religion practices, cultures, peoples, nations and nationalities are equally recognized.”

Kesis Tadele explained the mission of the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia: “The Intelligence Council of Ethiopia actively works in promoting peaceful coexistence, interfaith harmony and cooperation, mutual respect, preservation of the long-

standing

moral values, religion, ethics, environmental protection, social development and promoting human dignity based on the teaching of the Golden Rule which says treat others the way you want to be treated.”

Ambassador Mussie Hailu, Regional Director of URI for Africa and Representative to the African Union and UN Office in Africa, presented greetings on behalf of URI members worldwide. He described URI as “a grassroots interfaith organization which is working in promoting enduring daily interfaith cooperation to promote a culture of peace, justice and healing for the earth and all living beings.”

Ambassador Hailu congratulated H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssef on his election as the new chairperson of the African Union Commission and pledged support to advance the African Union’s vision of “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.” The organizers of this conference stand ready to support and work with His Excellency Mahmoud Ali Youssef during his tenure to move forward the vision of the African Union, an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. As we gather this morning, by the grace of God, for the opening ceremony of the 2025 Interfaith Conference, I pray for peace, harmony, trust, mutual respect, human dignity, right human relationship, compassion, understanding, healing, forgiveness, cooperation for the common good, constructive dialogue among nations, for the well-being of all humanity and Mother Earth, and for the teaching of the Golden Rule which says, treat others the way you want to be treated, and Ubuntu.

Timothy Stratford, general counsel for IF20, spoke in the opening session discussing the reasons that interfaith cooperation does, indeed, play a critical role in advancing G20 and African Union priorities:

1. Encompass vast majority of world’s population (>83% per Pew Research Center), especially in regions that are especially vulnerable.
2. Maintain deep roots in, understanding of, and credibility with local communities.
3. Maintain connections with global communities.
4. Spur insights and motivation based upon values shared for centuries that can transcend politics and other differences.
5. Often have access to considerable resources, especially in terms of volunteer manpower.
6. Spur and help lead non-government, locally-driven initiatives, often aided by international resources, which address problems more quickly, efficiently, and creatively than governments acting on their own.
7. When they work together to address problems, deepen harmony and build the sense of community at local level.

At the opening ceremony of the 2025 Interfaith Conference, we prayed for peace, harmony, trust, mutual respect, human dignity, right human relationship, compassion, understanding, healing, forgiveness, cooperation for the common good, constructive dialogue among nations, for the well-being of all humanity and Mother Earth. The theme of this

conference is based on Ubuntu and for the teaching of the Golden Rule which says, treat others the way you want to be treated.

The conference exemplified the motto displayed prominently throughout the proceedings:

**“MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH.”**







## **OVERVIEW of THEMES DISCUSSED at the CONFERENCE**

Africa's central role in the 2025 G20 and the symbolic Jubilee year opens a critical window of opportunity—an invitation to reflect deeply and act boldly. As the African Union's Agenda 2063 challenges global leaders, particularly those within the G20, the moment demands more than dialogue; it calls for committed, multi-sectoral action that includes governments, faith-based organizations, and civil society. The continent's urgent financial burdens, humanitarian needs, post-COVID inequities, and the voices of women and youth are central themes shaping a collective African vision for sustainable progress.

### **African Solidarity and the G20: Seizing an Historic Opportunity**

Dr. Gordon Simango emphasized that Africa's involvement in the G20 should be guided by a unified voice that echoes the aspirations of its 1.5 billion people. Africa is not merely participating—it is shaping global discourse. He pointed to Agenda 2063 as a bold roadmap and urged G20 leaders to recognize Africa's distinct priorities: economic resilience, climate financing, and the promotion of global public goods. This is a call for inclusive enrollment at all levels—from grassroots communities to national leadership. Faith-based actors are no longer on the margins; they are now actively shaping conversations and policies.

### **Debt, Inequality, and the Moral Imperative of Jubilee**

Father Charles Chilufya linked the 2025 Jubilee to a moral and economic reckoning. Africa's debt crisis, he argued, is not just a fiscal issue—it is a question of life and death. Many African nations are now spending more on debt repayment than on health and education. The global economic structure, which enables capital flight and entrenched inequality, must be reimagined. Chilufya called for a "reset" of the world's financial systems, anchored in justice and dignity. True

jubilee means giving nations a fresh start—cancelling debts, investing in life-giving economies, and creating systems that serve people rather than exploit them.

## **Youth and Peacebuilding: Centering the Next Generation**

Dr. Martha Njiiri highlighted the transformative role of youth in countering violent extremism. With 65% of Africa’s population under 35, empowering youth is not optional—it is essential. The IGAD Centre of Excellence promotes community-driven, soft approaches to peacebuilding, working with religious leaders to dismantle extremist ideologies and foster dialogue. Youth are not simply beneficiaries of policy; they are agents of change who must be included in all aspects of peace and development.

## **Women’s Leadership, Ubuntu, and Grassroots Transformation**

Mrs. Hailey Fudu called attention to the power of faith communities to bridge systemic gaps, especially around women’s inclusion. Hosting the G20 in South Africa presents a unique moment to challenge patriarchal systems and uplift indigenous knowledge. Ubuntu—the African philosophy of interconnectedness—should guide collective efforts. Women, she emphasized, hold “gentle power” and must be empowered to lead authentically, not molded to external patterns. Fudu stressed the importance of creating shared, inclusive spaces where transformation happens at the community level.

## **Churches and the Hunger Crisis: Leaving No One Behind**

Nicta Lubaale delivered a sobering account of hunger and maternal health challenges across the continent. Over half a billion people in Africa suffer from food insecurity. In parts of the continent, maternal mortality remains shockingly high compared to global standards. Churches, he argued, must recommit to serving the most vulnerable, not just through declarations, but by active investment in health, food systems, and public policy. Churches are not neutral institutions—they are called to be advocates and caretakers of the marginalized.

## **Young People and Accountability: From Talk to Transformation**

Mr. Muhsin Kaduyu Nuwagaba spoke powerfully about the role of youth in holding leadership accountable. In Uganda and beyond, young people are engaging with questions of corruption, justice, and governance. He emphasized that true engagement with youth means listening to their experiences and involving them directly in decision-making processes. Ubuntu must also apply here—addressing Africa’s challenges through self-reflection and shared responsibility.

## **Children Must Be at the Table, Not Just on the Agenda**

Mohamed Bahr reminded participants that future generations must be active participants in planning processes. Children are too often overlooked, treated as beneficiaries rather than contributors. He proposed tangible strategies, such as intergenerational forums and digital engagement platforms, to include youth voices in policy dialogue. If Africa is to build a sustainable future, it must create space for children and young people—not just symbolically, but meaningfully.

## **Conclusion: From Words to Action**

Across all speakers and sessions, one consistent theme emerged: Africa’s future depends on justice, inclusion, and solidarity. The 2025 G20 and Jubilee year are more than symbolic events—they are calls to moral action. Faith communities, governments, and civil society must come together to rewrite economic systems, empower women and youth, and address root causes of poverty and conflict. The time to act is now. Africa does not just need to be heard—it needs to lead.



## TOPICS REVIEWED

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# **GENDER JUSTICE**

## **Gender Justice and Patriarchy in Africa**

Gender justice in Africa continues to be a critical issue. Patriarchy remains deeply embedded in many societal structures, including religious institutions. However, there is a growing acknowledgment of shifts in patriarchal norms, with increasing advocacy for women's leadership roles, particularly within institutions like the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Efforts are being made to engender justice and promote inclusivity within theological teachings and faith-based principles.

## **Engaging Religious Leaders and Institutions**

Religious leaders play a significant role in either perpetuating or challenging gender injustices. There is a need to work closely with them, offering training and creating safe spaces where they can acknowledge past inaction and learn to address toxic masculinity. Many religious leaders are not equipped to respond to gender-based violence, making education and awareness essential. Encouraging dialogue and empathy within religious contexts can foster cultural transformation.

## **Grassroots Initiatives and Community Engagement**

At the grassroots level, building relationships based on trust is crucial. Legal networks such as “Speak Up South Africa” have been instrumental in promoting justice education. Interactive learning spaces allow individuals to share lived experiences and understand gender issues more deeply. Hearing women’s stories firsthand helps develop empathy and strengthens the call for systemic change.

## **Cultural Challenges and Migration Issues**

Cultural traditions and migration add layers of complexity to gender justice. African traditions, often seen as immovable, are sometimes influenced by Western funding and cultural narratives. The situation of stranded women in detention centers in countries like Lebanon, Libya, and the UAE highlights the vulnerability of migrant women. These stories underscore the need for nuanced conversations that consider both cultural pressures and systemic exploitation.

## **Women in Leadership and Industry**

Despite societal challenges, there is a growing presence of women in leadership and industry. However, many women remain silent due to lack of encouragement and opportunity. Religious organizations can play a supportive role by offering platforms for women to speak and thrive. Both men and women must be involved in promoting equal representation and respect within families and communities.

## **Youth Engagement and Future Leadership**

Youth engagement is critical to sustaining long-term change. Forums that bring together young people from diverse backgrounds every few months foster meaningful discussions on gender equality and societal roles. Encouraging youth to reflect on their impact and envision a better future helps shift mentalities. Their energy, time, and eagerness for change are essential for societal transformation.

## **Empowering Women and Celebrating Achievements**

There is a collective vision to empower women by supporting one another and challenging sexist norms. Women should be celebrated, not reduced to traditional roles. Recognition of existing achievements helps inspire the younger



generation to pursue their aspirations. Although men and women may have different paths, both should be equally respected and supported.

## **Spiritual and Moral Education**

Religious communities can also contribute by offering moral and ethical education to children. Sunday schools and family-based spiritual practices help instill values such as respect, kindness, and cleanliness. These values are not confined to one faith and can be shared across religious boundaries, fostering unity and mutual understanding.

## **Church Initiatives and Positive Changes**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has started making significant strides in including women in leadership roles. Women now participate in church services and teaching, demonstrating the potential for positive change. These developments reflect the Church's broader message of love, empathy, and service to others. There is a growing community in the northern part of Ethiopia where gender roles are being redefined in traditional contexts.

## **The Role of Religion in Transformation**

Religion has the power to unite and transform societies. By promoting inclusive traditions and debunking harmful cultural myths, religious organizations can influence positive change at the family and community levels. Governance systems must also evolve to reflect these shifts in culture.

## **Creating Equitable Conditions**

To promote gender equality, societies must create conditions that allow men and women to work together as equals. This involves redefining indicators used to evaluate women's contributions beyond traditional roles. Education, particularly programs that promote cultural shifts, is key to building a more just and inclusive society.



## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, PROTECTION, & LEADERSHIP in AFRICA

The session explored the multifaceted challenges facing women in Africa, especially those related to displacement, violence, economic inequality, and trafficking. The role of faith communities and women leaders was central to the discussion, with a call to translate conversations into lasting, systemic change.

Sister Francisca Ngozi Uti stepped in as a moderator and emphasized the need for cultural renewal, especially regarding women in leadership. "Women are taking up ministerial and financial leadership roles, yet still face limitations in access to networks, resources, and education," Uti said. She pointed to work-life balance, childcare, and confidence as ongoing barriers. Despite these challenges, she celebrated progress: 25% of ministers in some contexts are women, and 12 out of 25 banks are led by women. Uti advocated for faith-based partnerships and inclusive policymaking that place women at decision-making tables: "We must not only place men at the table—women's leadership is essential."



### Nicole Stirling (Stirling Foundation, USA)



Nicole Stirling emphasized the foundational role of women in the home, asserting that: "The real first political order is in the home." Drawing from personal experience and referencing the work of Dr. Ballard Hudson, she linked national health and security to the empowerment of women at home. Stirling advocated for balancing respect for traditional roles with women's broader opportunities in society. "There doesn't have to be a choice between motherhood and leadership." She called for recognition of caregiving, moral leadership in families, and property rights and protection from domestic violence as essential indicators of women's empowerment.

### Samson Tesfaye (Rotary Representative to AU and UNECA)

highlighted Rotary International's long-standing commitment to working with women and girls, especially in areas of peacebuilding, education, and sanitation. "Peacebuilding is not abstract—it's a cornerstone," he stated. He shared examples from Ethiopia, where women are deeply affected by water scarcity and hygiene issues. Rotary collaborates with religious organizations and schools to reduce burdens and empower women through education and leadership development. Tesfaye called for women to be included in global spaces like the G20, particularly in decision-making and resource allocation.



### Mrs. Nwabuo Françoise Foute (Family Health & Development Foundation, Cameroon)



As a public health midwife and grassroots leader, Foute focused on holistic care for women and children, especially those in refugee and displaced contexts. "Healthy families create healthy nations," she emphasized. She discussed work on nutrition, education, and conflict resolution, addressing the intergenerational trauma of violence. Many women she serves had no access to formal education, so the organization teaches literacy, vegetable farming, food preservation, and maternal health. "Women love children unconditionally. Investing in children's lives starts with investing in their mothers." Foute highlighted the challenge of home births due to lack of healthcare access, which contributes to infant and maternal mortality. Her work includes nutrition training and supporting displaced families to rebuild their lives.



## **Kevin Hyland OBE (Praeveni Global, Ireland)**

Kevin Hyland, an anti-trafficking leader, stressed the ongoing global crisis of human trafficking, tying it directly to women's leadership. "Women's leadership is crucial—particularly on the frontline of fighting human trafficking."

He condemned the \$236 billion global criminal industry and linked it to organized exploitation, including organ trafficking, forced labor, and sex trafficking. Citing Pope Francis, he described trafficking as an "open wound on the body of Christ and humanity. ...Our moral compass is facing the wrong way. These crimes do not happen in a vacuum." Hyland called for legal reforms to prosecute perpetrators and recover assets for victims, investments equal to what is spent on anti-drug campaigns, and greater involvement of faith communities and IF20 in advocacy. He urged the G20 and AU to include survivors and women in leadership to shape effective responses.



### **Key Takeaways and Crosscutting Themes**

The session emphasized several foundational themes critical to advancing women's empowerment in Africa and globally. These themes emerged consistently across different speakers and perspectives, highlighting the interconnected nature of leadership, faith, development, and justice.

#### **Women's Leadership Is Essential**

Women's inclusion must go beyond symbolic participation to ensure genuine decision-making power at national, regional, and global levels—particularly within institutions like the African Union (AU) and the G20. True leadership encompasses both professional roles and influence within the home, recognizing that societal transformation begins in everyday life as well as policy forums.

#### **Faith Communities Are Vital**

Faith-based organizations play a crucial role as first responders and as trusted pillars within communities. Their presence allows them to educate, empower, and protect women and children, especially in contexts where government infrastructure may be limited. These networks offer moral guidance and practical support, anchoring many of the initiatives discussed during the session.

#### **Trafficking and Displacement Are Moral and Political Crises**

Speakers consistently emphasized that issues like human trafficking and mass displacement are not isolated or accidental—they are deeply linked to systemic problems such as poverty, poor governance, and global inequality. Addressing them requires coordinated and holistic responses that include economic support, legal protection, and strong social systems.

#### **Education, Health, and Economic Empowerment**

Access to education, vocational skills, and maternal healthcare remains a cornerstone of women's empowerment. Many women, especially those in rural or displaced communities, lack basic literacy and face barriers to self-sufficiency. Providing these tools fosters resilience and supports long-term peacebuilding within families and societies.

#### **Women's Empowerment Equals Peace and Development**

Across the board, speakers made it clear that investing in women is not just a moral imperative—it is a strategic necessity. Empowered women lead to healthier families, safer communities, and more stable nations. Their leadership in all sectors, including humanitarian work, religious life, and policymaking, is essential for lasting development and peace.

These themes underscore the urgent need for inclusive policies, sustained collaboration across sectors, and meaningful investment in women's roles as leaders, caregivers, and agents of change.

## **Conclusion**

This session powerfully reinforced the idea that Africa's future depends on empowering women—at home, in communities, and in national and international leadership. Faith-based organizations, in collaboration with the African Union and G20, have the moral obligation and strategic capability to center women in policies addressing migration, trafficking, poverty, and conflict.





## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking in Africa is deeply linked to systemic poverty, disrupted communities, and a lack of coordinated response mechanisms. Vulnerable populations, especially women and children, are often caught in cycles of forced migration and exploitation. Coordination in humanitarian response and financial support is urgently needed, particularly for refugees and internally displaced people.

Moderator **Ahmed Zanya Bugre** opened the session by identifying three central questions for faith communities:

1. How do they respond to forced displacement?
2. What are best practices?
3. How can these practices shape G20 recommendations?

Bugre emphasized, “One-third of forced migration globally happens in Africa. This is rooted in colonization, the extractive economy, and forced labor that historically benefited Europeans—with religious institutions complicit in many ways.”

### Modern Slavery: Nothing Has Changed

**Kevin Hyland OBE**, Chief Executive of *Praeveni Global*, drew parallels between the transatlantic slave trade and modern-day trafficking. “Nothing has changed. Today’s supply chains still rely on cheap and free labor, where the powerful exploit the less powerful for gratification and profit.”

Hyland stressed the importance of reparations not only for historical injustices but for modern victims of trafficking. He recalled the global outrage following the death of Alan Kurdi in 2015 but lamented the shift from empathy to criminalization in migration policy. “We need compassion and practical solutions. Migrant workers contribute to sectors like health and agriculture. Their economic contributions through remittances build nations, yet they’re often unwelcome.” He added that governments and people of faith have a responsibility to act and influence G20-level policy.

### Faith-Based Approaches to Prevention and Support

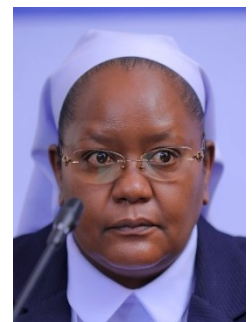


Winnie Mutevu from *HAART Kenya* highlighted the central role of faith leaders in prevention and support initiatives. “For over 15 years, we’ve worked with communities to educate and amplify their voices. Shelters are being used for victims, and there is growing public awareness, especially within Muslim communities.” She praised the Church’s role in offering holistic healing and emphasized the need for legal support, capacity-building, and victim empowerment. “We must ensure we do no further harm. It’s about resilience, empowerment, and creating safe spaces for recovery.” Mutevu also called attention to the importance of community engagement and using places of worship as platforms for outreach.

### Grassroots Action and Survivor Reintegration

**Sister Agnes Njeri SSJ**, representing the *Conrad N. Hilton Foundation*, spoke about practical efforts by Catholic Sisters to combat trafficking. “We’ve built networks to fight human trafficking. Many trafficked youth are lured with promises of jobs in the Middle East. When they arrive, their passports are taken, and they’re treated like commodities.” She explained

how Sisters work with village elders and community leaders to empower youth through skills training and legal awareness. “We ask survivors, ‘What do you want to do for a living?’ and we help them return home with dignity and opportunity.” Njeri underscored that education is key and noted that many victims lack basic knowledge about the risks they face.



## Governance, Corruption, and Legal Failures

Participants raised concerns about systemic governance issues contributing to trafficking and forced migration. “People leave because they don’t see hope. There’s a lack of integral human development,” one speaker noted. Faith leaders were urged to speak out on moral and political issues, not in isolation, but in collective responsibility for humanity. They criticized the African Union (AU) for its limited power and the cumbersome political processes that slow down meaningful action. “We have the policies, but no implementation. It’s often easier for a European to travel across Africa than for an African.” There was a call for stronger engagement between the AU and faith-based communities, especially through platforms like the IF20 (G20 Interfaith Forum).

## Moral Responsibility and International Action

Faith leaders stressed the urgent need to raise the moral voice at international forums. “The IF20 must influence the G20. The voices of survivors, religious sisters, and faith leaders need to be heard.” There was also a warning about the normalization of exploitation in global systems—from trafficking to organ sales—where even terror networks are being sanctioned while human slavery is allowed to persist. “We must question corruption, address laws that allow people to be owned, and reclaim the dignity of trafficked persons,” one speaker said. **The Call to Action**

The session concluded with a call to interfaith collaboration and proactive engagement with governments. The AU’s Chaplaincy echoed the need for faith communities to be involved in every step—from prayer breakfasts to policy formation. The resounding plea was for inclusion, compassion, and practical change.



## **ROLE of FAITH COMMUNITIES in AFRICA to PROMOTE G20 PRIORITIES G20 Interfaith Forum: Africa's Vital Role in Global Dialogue and Development**

Rodrigo Vitorino Souza Alves, Chair of the Local Organizing Committee for the G20 Interfaith Forum Brazil 2024, emphasized the significance of Africa's contributions to the G20 Interfaith process. Speaking during World Interfaith Harmony Week, he highlighted how interfaith and religious communities play a crucial role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the G20's broader objectives.

With Brazil holding the 2024 G20 presidency, Alves outlined its priorities—social inclusion, energy transition, and governance reform—emphasizing the G20's responsibility in addressing global challenges. He detailed how interfaith actors in Brazil worked alongside policymakers, culminating in a major success: the adoption of a recommendation on combating human trafficking and modern slavery.

Alves underscored the unique position of African and Latin American voices in shaping global priorities. He praised the contributions from Africa, particularly through the Ubuntu-centered efforts in South Africa, calling them essential to building a just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

### **The Vital Role of Faith-Inspired Organizations in Global and Local Affairs**

Professor Maniraj Sukdaven, Co-Chair of South Africa's Local Organizing Committee for the G20 Interfaith Forum and a professor at the University of Pretoria, emphasized the indispensable role of faith-inspired organizations in shaping both global and national development agendas. As moderator of the session, he reflected on key messages from the South African President, who highlighted the importance of human flourishing, resilience, and the essential contributions of religious leaders in promoting peace and prosperity.

Prof. Sukdaven also referenced Pope Francis's urgent call to care for the environment and address the suffering of the marginalized, urging faith communities to take a leading role in fostering a better future. He introduced the panelists, noting their role in addressing how faith organizations can influence policy and development at multiple levels, particularly in preparation for South Africa hosting the G20 Interfaith Forum.

### **Faith, Justice, and Development: SECAM's Role in Africa's Future**

Rev. Dr. Stephen Okello, AU Liaison Officer of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) emphasized the importance of 2025 as a pivotal year for Africa. Marking the 60th anniversary of Vatican II and the "Gaudium et Spes" constitution, this year calls for addressing historical injustices and building respectful reparations. SECAM, representing the Catholic Church across Africa, has actively contributed to social cohesion, inclusive development, and grassroots mobilization on health, education, and livelihood projects. The organization advocates for ethical governance and environmental responsibility, aligning with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite ongoing economic growth, Africa still faces deep challenges—conflict, displacement, and debt—exacerbated by foreign interests, often linked to G20 nations. Dr. Okello called for equitable development, fair resource valuation, and Africa's stronger voice in global forums. He urged South Africa to use its G20 presidency to champion the continent's priorities effectively.



## **The Transformative Power of Faith in Peacebuilding: Insights from Sister Agatha O. Chikelue**

Sister Agatha O. Chikelue, Executive Director of the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace and Chair of Religions for Peace-International Women's Coordinating Committee, emphasized the critical role of faith communities in fostering peace, justice, and sustainable development across Africa. She described peace not simply as the absence of violence, but as the presence of justice, dignity, and shared values.

She highlighted the *Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace Fellowship Program* (CFP) as a visionary initiative that equips grassroots faith leaders—especially women and youth—with skills in mediation, leadership, and conflict transformation. Over the course of a year, fellows receive intensive training and implement community-based peace projects addressing challenges such as trauma recovery, radicalization, and interfaith tensions. The CFP fosters a growing network of peacebuilders across the continent.

Sister Agatha concluded by affirming that peace is a daily choice and that faith, when empowered with the right tools, can be a powerful force for healing and change.

## **Reflections from Dr. Gorden Simango**

Dr. Gorden Simango, from the All Africa Conference of Churches' African Union Office and Advocacy, highlighted the critical role that faith-based organizations (FBOs) play in Africa's health, education, and peacebuilding sectors. Speaking in the context of the 2025 G20 Summit in South Africa, he underscored the importance of solidarity, equity, and sustainability, noting that faith communities are deeply embedded in African societies and often operate where government institutions cannot reach.

Dr. Simango emphasized the substantial contribution of FBOs in healthcare, with statistics showing that faith-based institutions provide between 40% to 70% of health services in countries like Nigeria, Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania. He stressed the need to recognize FBOs as key stakeholders in sustainable development and conflict resolution. These organizations frequently serve as first responders during crises and are trusted mediators in community-level disputes, capable of engaging in pre-conflict and post-conflict mediation.

He also called attention to the often-overlooked role of FBOs in Track 2 diplomacy, helping communities voice their concerns to decision-makers and influencing policy from the grassroots level. Dr. Simango advocated for the importance of *insider mediation*, where religious actors intervene before conflict erupts, addressing root causes like hate speech and societal polarization.

Concluding his remarks, he urged faith communities to embrace their responsibility not just as moral compasses, but as proactive agents of peace and development. He emphasized the African proverb "Africa is my home, Africa is my future," calling for unity and cooperation across borders to address the continent's pressing challenges.

## **Building Peace Through Faith and Compassion: Remarks by Elder K. Thierry Mutombo**

Elder K. Thierry Mutombo of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President of Africa West Area, delivered a heartfelt address underscoring the essential role of faith communities in promoting peace and humanitarian upliftment across Africa. He began by thanking the Ethiopian government and other represented nations for supporting religious freedom and allowing people to worship according to their conscience.

Elder Mutombo emphasized that religious leaders are not elected by the people but divinely appointed to serve as instruments of peace, moral guidance, and community resilience. He reiterated the words of his Church's global president, Russell M. Nelson, who teaches that love and compassion must transcend differences—we do not have to look alike or think alike to love one another. True peace and progress, he stated, begin with individuals choosing kindness and goodwill, one person at a time. He quoted both President Nelson and the Church's founding prophet,

Joseph Smith, to highlight that anger and contention never produce meaningful solutions, and that love is a defining trait of godliness.

### **Collaboration Across Borders and Religions**

Elder Mutombo affirmed that religion transcends national boundaries and that interfaith collaboration is already making a positive difference across the continent. He praised the many faith-inspired organizations working for peace, social cohesion, and development, noting that this forum offers a chance to deepen cooperation for greater good.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he explained, has had a presence in Africa since 1853, with increased focus in the last 40 years. It actively partners with interreligious councils across Ethiopia, Uganda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to address key issues including:

- Humanitarian relief
- Conflict resolution
- Strengthening families and marriages
- Promoting peace and reconciliation

In closing, Elder Mutombo issued a powerful reminder of shared moral responsibility. As people of faith, he said, we are called to care for the poor, the broken, the hungry, the imprisoned, the orphaned, and the widowed, while working collectively to build peace and justice. He affirmed the Church's unwavering commitment to walk hand-in-hand with all who seek to bless Africa and its people. "May God bless us all," he concluded, leaving listeners with a renewed sense of purpose and unity.

### **Moral Leadership for Human Flourishing: Address by Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General, Religions for Peace – Africa**

Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General of Religions for Peace Africa, delivered a powerful speech highlighting the important role of Africa's diverse religious communities in promoting peace, justice, and sustainable development. He emphasized the unity and diversity of faith traditions across the continent, including African traditional religions, Muslim communities, various Christian denominations, and other spiritual groups. According to Dr. Kuria, these faith communities share a common vision centered on dignity, peace, sustainable development, and human flourishing.

He pointed out that faith actors have historically been involved in humanitarian and development work long before governments and international organizations stepped in. Their deep connection with local communities grants them a unique moral authority and ability to build trust, particularly in regions affected by conflict or instability. Dr. Kuria stressed the importance of recognizing faith communities as active partners in implementing global development and peace agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa-focused G20 priorities. He framed this involvement as a moral responsibility rooted in the religious values of compassion, justice, and solidarity.

Dr. Kuria also acknowledged Ethiopia as a symbol of spiritual richness and resilience, noting its significance as a host for the summit. He urged participants to draw on Africa's collective spiritual heritage to heal divisions, rebuild social trust, and anchor development efforts in African values and beliefs.

In closing, Dr. Kuria called for peace and development efforts to be deeply rooted in Africa's faith traditions and to involve religious actors fully. He stressed that such inclusive, faith-based collaboration is essential for achieving lasting transformation on the continent. His vision emphasized cross-faith and cross-border cooperation aimed at healing wounds, promoting justice, fostering solidarity, and ensuring inclusive progress toward a peaceful and flourishing Africa.

## **The Role of Faith Communities in Advancing Peace, Unity, and Sustainable Development in Africa: Address by Mohamed Bahr**

Mohamed Bahr, Head of Strategic Planning at the Muslim Council of Elders, emphasized the critical role faith communities play in addressing Africa's complex challenges, including global conflicts, environmental crises, and social inequalities. He highlighted that faith communities are trusted institutions capable of driving transformative change by promoting peace, unity, and healing. Bahr stressed the importance of religious freedom, noting that societies respecting this principle tend to attract economic growth and foreign investment.

He spoke about the Council's longstanding commitment to peace, dialogue, coexistence, truth, and conflict resolution, referencing a multi-year project that worked to integrate Muslim communities into broader society through education and mediation in various African regions. Bahr described faith-based peaceful dialogue as essential to fostering justice and not merely the absence of conflict.

Additionally, he noted the Council's role in amplifying the voices of faith communities on global platforms and their focus on research, citing a successful initiative that engaged hundreds of organizations, many from Africa. Bahr concluded with a call to action for greater collaboration among faith-based organizations and other institutions to work together in addressing Africa's urgent needs, emphasizing that faith communities serve as moral authorities and first responders in the continent's pursuit of peace and development.



