**G20 Interfaith Forum, 2020 Regional discussions and emerging proposals**

December 1, 2020

This document reflects a compilation and summary of proposals and recommendations prepared by participants in the six regional consultations held in advance of the G20 Interfaith Forum held October 13-17, 2020.

1. **Arab Region Consultation**  
   June 27, July 3

Three working groups focused on (a) how to strengthen social cohesion and promote peaceful coexistence in the Arab Region; (b) the role of religious institutions in areas of governance and faith; and (c) how faith-based organizations can better protect the environment in the wake of global warming.  
  
(a) **Social cohesion in the Arab Region**

Recommended areas for focus and action included:

(i) the importance of supporting the capacity of institutions to help vulnerable groups overcome the social and economic dimensions of conflicts that have intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic.    
(ii) Strengthening legal and policy frameworks in the Arab Region to prevent violence in the name of religion;   
(iii) enhanced communication with policy makers to counter hate speech and promote solidarity, regardless of religious, cultural or ethnic identity.   
(iv) A call on United Nations organizations to coordinate with and accept religious institutions as key partners in protecting the rights of refugees.   
  
Participants in the consultation included Masahel Shalhoub of KAICIID and Dr. Yousef Bin Al Mahdi,

2018 KAICIID Fellow from Morocco.  
  
(b) **How religious groups can strengthen the links between governance and faith**

(i)  Enhancing communication between policy makers and citizens to establish participatory decision-making at local and national levels.   
(ii) Acknowledging the power of media and social media; building long-term partnerships with media outlets to help ensure that their message is spread more evenly demographically and geographically.   
(iii) Building capacity among religious institutions to harness social media as a platform for communication and messaging.  
  
(c) **Protect the Earth from the effects of climate change**

The world has only six months to prevent a post-lockdown rebound in greenhouse gas emissions that would overwhelm efforts to stave off irreversible environmental damage. This calls for action to:  
(i)  Encourage the creation of faith-based organizations dealing with climate action and environmental sustainability  
(ii) Encourage the redirection of investments by religious-affiliated financial and other institutions to environment-related projects  
(iii) Highlighting the role religions must play in environmental stewardship.   
(iv) Encouraging Arab region inhabitants to protect and conserve available resources and enhance cooperation between ministries and government institutions to address environmental challenges, especially the pollution of air, soil, and water.  
  
Environmental working group included Dr. Iyad Abumoghli, director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Faith for Earth Initiative, and Dr. Lara Hanna-Wakim, Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the Holy Spirit University in Kaslik, Lebanon.  
  
“One of the most important challenges is raising awareness in schools so (education) is based on cultural and scientific facts and not on a religious basis. We have the climate change and greenhouse effect which is an urgent global challenge and which many define as the number one challenge globally; It needs the attention and cooperation of governments and civic society organisations to address it and fight it.”  
  
**2. European Consultation**  
June 29, July 2020.

Three working groups, each including individuals chosen for their expertise and ability to represent a diverse range of perspectives, met for in-depth discussions that were led and summarized by key experts. Outputs submitted to the Organizing Committee of the G20 Interfaith Forum on 30th July 2020.

Speakers at the opening session (June 29) included: ***H. E. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France***: highlighted issues of sustainable development, including reducing poverty and inequality; promoting health and well-being, addressing the challenges of displacement, migration and refugee inflows as well as protecting the environment. Challenges posed by the coronavirus outbreak "Our consciences have also been seared by other pandemics—the all-too-resilient strains of racism—both personal and structural; the burdens of inequality, in all their myriad forms; the suffering of people who ‘can’t breathe’; the unending flood of refugees and displaced persons; the ongoing degradation of the environment; and countless other ills that bear in upon us as we shelter and social distance in our homes.”  European Commission Vice-President for Promoting Our European Way of Life ***Margaritis Schinas*** emphasized the importance of input from European religious stakeholders on this year’s G20 priorities.

**Working Group 1**, “**Empowering People; Fostering Gender Equality”**

1. **Education on religious and cultural diversity.**

Education is crucial. Contributions of religion to this educational process has, historically, played an important role in developing educational institutions and pedagogy in many cultures and countries. They help normalize diversity within society and contribute to social integration and cohesion, helping to prevent social misrepresentations and radicalization. Proposals include:

1a. Government and religious leaders highlight the need to recognize and accept the inherent dignity of every human being everywhere, (2018 Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity)

1b. Government and religious leaders work together and put an end to racism, xenophobia, intolerance, and discrimination.

1c. Governments, in collaboration with the relevant religious leaders and communities, promote openness to religious traditions in school curricula and incentivize the curiosity of students to expand their understanding of other cultures and religious traditions. Students should learn about, and from, different religions so that they can be enriched by their teachings. Parental rights to educate their children by their religious or non-religious beliefs should also be respected. Aimed at preventing radicalization, especially in scenarios that can reach youth and give students the tools to critique and challenge content that exploits religion for violent or hateful means.

1d. Governments, religious actors and civil society are encouraged to create the necessary conditions for the free engagement of religious actors in interfaith and intra-religious dialogue, and in civic dialogue.

1e. Governments actively create opportunities and conditions for open and constructive dialogue between politicians, religious leaders, and civil society, especially about issues related to social cohesion and the well-being of all, to identify problems and create concerted solutions.

1. **Structural inequality and gender inequality**

The central theme was the need to take action to promote equality and dignity for all. Proposals:

2a. Governments implement policies to abolish discrimination against working mothers and fathers regarding access to work, including abolishing the gender pay gap after the first child.

2b. Governments implement policies to improve the balance between work and private and family life, especially for single parents.

 2c. Governments work with religious leaders and communities and civil society in addressing gender misrepresentations, discrimination and violence.

2d. Governments encourage religious leaders to interpret their religion in such a way that it does not pave the way for a possible justification of any violence against women and girls (including inhuman or degrading treatment; the so-called “forced marriage” that entails forced conversion; and other crimes such as abduction, rape and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); or the use of any type of sexual violence as a method of war).

2e. Governments are encouraged to work closely with religious leaders and communities in advocating for health workers and other essential workers’ fair salaries and working conditions.

2f. Religious institutions and FBOs are encouraged to implement gender equality strategies, while respecting the principle of autonomy of religious institutions and FBOs, and their ethos.

2g. Governments promote and implement policies that enable companies to employ young people, people with disabilities, people of different ethnic or national origins, and people over 50, who might struggle to find work in a post-pandemic economic recession.

1. **Refugees, migrants and trafficking; Migrants and minorities.**

 Collaboration between governments and faith-based institutions and organizations should be incentivized, and religious actors ought to be recognized as legitimate actors in the integration processes.

3a. Governments continue their efforts to uphold the access to international protection, including asylum, taking into special account the vulnerable situation of unaccompanied minors, women and girls and victims of human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

3b. Governments continue their efforts to respect the fundamental rights of migrants and families, including family unity.

3c. Religious leaders and religious communities continue their work around the integration of migrants and on the prevention of radicalization and extremism.

3d. Governments, religious leaders ,and religious communities work together to create mechanisms aiming to abolish the practice of so-called “forced marriage”, to combat human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

3e. Governments intensify the fight against sexual exploitation online, in particular of children. Specifically, through preventative measures addressed to families, parents and their children, and school communities. And to provide them with the skills to manage themselves properly in the digital environment.

1. **The role of religion in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation**

4a. Governments, religious leaders and civil society work together to create the conditions for respectful and fruitful dialogue that engages all communities and addresses the real challenges facing our societies.

4b. Government and religious leaders build bridges among communities, and emphasize, in their processes, and by their example, the importance of peace and reconciliation, including committing to this as a way of life for religious communities and not just a response to current challenges.

4c. Government and religious leaders acknowledge the importance of human rights and the need to teach them in the formal educational system and to promote a social knowledge and acceptance of human rights rooted in human dignity.

4d. Religious leaders continue to foster capacity building in spiritual resilience, showing and promoting openness, respect, compassion and active engagement in dialogue, whilst holding on firmly to the core of human values promoted by religious traditions.

4e. Governments and multinational institutions put more effort and resources into developing training for staff in engaging religious actors in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, considering the complex role of religious actors in the peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes.

**Working Group 2: Safeguarding the Planet**

The European Green Deal launched December 2019, aims to transform the Union into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where climate and environmental challenges are addressed and turned into opportunities, making the transition just and inclusive for all. Roadmap with actions to move towards a circular economy, stop climate change, revert biodiversity loss, and cut pollution; it outlines investments needed and financing tools available.

1. **Promote the European approach in using the SDGs as the ultimate framework and indicator of success internationally.**

Faith groups are deeply uncomfortable with the current narrative around economic growth being the primary goal of human purpose, progress and international cooperation. They also recognize there is not yet a consensus around an alternative economic model. With developed nations needing to accept less, developing nations still requiring growth to lift millions out of poverty, and technology advances not being enough to achieve the levels of decoupling of pollution and growth required to achieve agreed international targets. European approach of recognizing the 17 SDGs, of which only one is centered around economic growth, is welcomed as a useful framework to guide national and international progress and cooperation, helps to identify the interconnection of policies and outcomes, such as gender, young people, poverty and justice. It is also an arena to develop and test new narratives and approaches about ‘’good growth’’.

1a. The SDGs replace economic growth as the ultimate framework and indicator of success internationally, as the European Union has begun to demonstrate.

1b. A widespread, accurate, and empowering spread of knowledge concerning the SDGs and the role of environmental protection become an educational priority supported by the newfound public appreciation for the scientific community and approach of evidence gathering, dealing with risk, uncertainty, and the precautionary principle.

1c. Religious institutions be encouraged to train religious leaders and educators to integrate lessons about the SDGs and sustainable living into formal and informal religious education. This includes drawing upon spiritual and philosophical values (e.g. prudence, self-discipline, equity and modesty) to help cultivate a mindset in which people can grieve for the destruction of our home, feel optimistic even in times of change, and be prepared to advocate and live sustainable lifestyles. Secular educational authorities should consider including ethical and faith-based perspectives when designing corresponding environmental modules, to heighten the relevance of lessons to people of faith.

1. **Until we can develop a better system, the current market based one is required to deliver urgent action.**

Faith groups are frustrated that the required urgency and consistency to tackle climate change is often not evident in the implementation of international agreements into national and local action. For example, there has been a varied response in how ‘’green’’ the COVID-19 economic stimulus packages have been across governments in Europe. Globally early estimates are of only 0.2% of recovery spending on climate priorities, despite there being strong correlations between job and wealth creation through housing energy efficiency retrofits, electric vehicle infrastructure, low carbon energy generation, storage, research and innovation.

 2a. The overall impact of economy recovery plans be beneficial to climate goals, the environment, and to help in a fair transition by ensuring that companies and firms which benefit from subsidies as part of the economic recovery after COVID-19 abide by principles of sustainability.

 2b. Taxes, tariffs and subsidies be adjusted to ensure that a product’s cost accurately reflects its positive or negative externalities in its production, use and disposal.

2c. Faith communities be encouraged to continue to model the right behavior through a review of their own investments and pension funds, and operations from buildings to transport and energy, food and waste. They can help educate their communities on how to be ‘‘conscious consumers’’ by aligning their values with their purchases, willingness to share, and how to campaign and put pressure on companies that are not changing fast enough.

**Working Group 3: Frontiers at the intersection of governance, faith, and technology**

1a. Encourage states to adopt measures for the restructuring of their national legal and political systems that are capable of preventing and combating **corruption** in the political, administrative and electoral sectors, privileging values such as justice, transparency, responsibility, accountability, impartiality, integrity and independence.

1b. Prevent and combat corruption through education (at all levels—primary, secondary and tertiary), adopting educational policies that, in an integrated manner, promote ethical and integrity values and actively combat the emergence of the so-called “cultures of corruption”, building a solid and genuine culture of legality and respect for human rights and freedoms.

1c. Implement and deepen international policies and programs of assistance for the integral development of the m**ost disadvantaged countries, with special emphasis on the so-called fragile states** (i.e., those which are in a situation of post-conflict or recent democratization), preventing the surge of phenomena of systemic corruption and state capture.

1d. Deepen global legal cooperation policies and measures essentially aimed at preventing cross-border corruption, the investigation of multi-localized corrupt acts and the appropriate punishment of its agents.

1e. Acknowledge the role that religious communities and religious leaders may have in combatting corruption when they are faithful to the true values of their respective traditions and refuse to cooperate, even indirectly, with corrupt regimes or practices in the public or the private sector.

1f. Promote and support interdisciplinary and interreligious research and dialogue projects that, on an international scale, seek to address and understand the phenomenon of corruption in the public and private sectors and certain recent epiphenomena, such as corruption in the political, religious, justice, financial, health, pharmaceutical, scientific or sports sectors, promoting a culture of legality and integrity.

2a. Understanding that religion or belief are often essential to the identity of many individuals, groups and institutions. This in turn implies being aware that some of the common contemporary solutions for claims of non-discrimination based on other identity characteristics may de facto result in discrimination on the ground of religious/belief identity.

2b Recognizing the specificity of freedom of religion or belief in its individual and collective dimensions, as well as its non-subordinate nature vis-à-vis other fundamental rights; and being aware that the freedom of conscience of individuals and the religious autonomy of institutions entail the right to behave in accordance with one’s own religious and moral principles insofar as no superior legal or social interest is endangered.

2c. Trying to avoid an excessive judicialization of conflicts between fundamental rights, facilitating alternative ways of solving such conflicts that are not based on the alleged moral superiority of one view over another.

2d. Encouraging courts to provide balanced judgments that take into account the need to protect the rights of both parties as much as possible, instead of affirming the absolute dominance or superiority of one over the other, in a way that ensures practical concordance and maximum effectiveness of competing rights.

2e. Allowing meaningful hearings on issues involving competing rights, interests and concerns, which can foster understanding and inclusion and help legislators, administrators and judges to devise better workable solutions. 3. Education, understood in its broadest sense, is key for a culture of social cohesion and harmony.

3a. Academic programs focused on teaching about religions and beliefs (their history, principles, values and contributions to society) can be a very helpful instrument to foster a culture of encounter, dialogue and mutual respect between citizens and groups with divergent beliefs, if they are designed and implemented in an appropriate manner and developed in accordance with recognised professional standards.

3b. Academic programs (in private or public schools) focused on specific religions, run by the relevant religious communities, and aimed at transmitting their specific doctrines, can also be a useful instrument as far as they are permeated by an attitude of tolerance and respect for people holding different views and developed in accordance with recognized professional standards.

3c. Integrating theological or divinity studies in universities (private and public), either as stand-alone degrees or within the curricula of other degrees, can be efficient means to promote religious literacy, especially if this is done within an academic atmosphere characterised by intellectual freedom and integrity, as well as by the desire to perform objective and respectful analysis of religions, their doctrines and their history. An intellectual approach to religion, both on the secular and religious sides, without denying 3 See also, in this regard, the recommendations included in section a) of the document prepared by the or undermining the faith element of religious beliefs, could facilitate a better mutual understanding between science and religion as much as an open-minded approach to science.

3d. Religious literacy comprises also an adequate education about freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental right, its significance and implications, within a conceptual framework of human rights as manifestations of respect for human dignity. Although such education is helpful in the entire academic setting, it is especially important in certain degrees such as law, political science, administration, governance, journalism and management.

4a. Full compliance with the legal implications of the right to freedom of expression is compatible with finding ways, in contemporary societies, to stimulate a culture of respect among people’s different choices in matters of religion or belief. Politicians, public officials, journalists, educators, and public figures and influencers in general, are especially responsible for the promotion and preservation of such culture, and they should shape their speech and messages accordingly.

4b. Religious leaders and representatives (of majority and minority religions) also have a very important role and responsibility when it comes to fostering a culture of respect through their teaching on the basis of their own doctrines, in a way that makes clear that their commitment to freedom of religion or belief is aimed at the protection of the freedom of all and is not used simply as a cover for self-interest or for privileging one’s own beliefs.

4c. Religious communities can make a significant contribution to educate the youth in ethical values shared in contemporary societies, many of which concern their responsibility in building a fairer and sustainable world. For instance: the equal dignity of all human beings; solidarity with particularly vulnerable persons; seeking that all people have the minimum material conditions necessary to live a truly human life; recognizing that we are part of a complex natural system and committing to its protection; responsible use of new technologies; the positive and constructive use of social media, etc.

5a. The establishment, design and proper functioning of in**stitutional channels and platforms for mutual cooperation and dialogue** between state/international organizations and religious/belief communities as part of ordinary dynamics of communication between public authorities and civil society. As the COVID-19 emergency has demonstrated, this aspect of the interaction between state and society is beneficial for all citizens.

5b. Ensuring that smaller religious groups are not left out of that process of dialogue and cooperation even if their size may not justify their inclusion in institutional channels.

 instruments, such as public hearings or informal consultations, could be used to that purpose. 5c. Positive dialogue and cooperation between religious communities themselves as a way to enhance social cohesion and harmony. With full respect to religious autonomy, state and international institutions could intervene as facilitators of such interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

6. The **development of plural societie**s based on the mutual respect of different religions or worldviews requires an adequate and coordinated protection of freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief that takes into account the various competing interests. To that end, it is recommended that states:

6a. Carefully define hate speech, as a matter of media and social media regulation, in a way that prevents humiliation, dehumanization, discrimination, persecution and aggression against individuals and groups. At the same time, this should never call into question the possibility of respectfully, seriously and critically assessing and discussing political and religious ideologies and doctrines in the public sphere.

6b. Recognize the decisive role that the cooperation of religious communities may play in the active fight against hate speech, using new technologies as well as more traditional means such as sermons, teaching, public statements, etc. For instance: in disseminating adequate information about other religions; in conveying messages of respect for the beliefs and morals of others; in making joint public statements unambiguously condemning episodes of religious hatred or violence; in transmitting the proper doctrine of their own religion with regard to the need to avoid violence and to search for ways of peaceful and harmonic living together; in discrediting explicitly the position and messages of hate speakers; and/or in obtaining information about hate speakers.

6c. Distinguish **hate speech** (e.g. homophobic or xenophobic speech) from the explanation or teaching of religious moral doctrines regarding sexual relationships and practices, or especially binding moral obligations with regard to members of one’s own religious community, as well as the teaching of religious dogmas concerning what are considered essential and ultimate truths in a particular religious tradition. It is equally important to differentiate between firmness in one’s own beliefs and intolerance of the beliefs or practices of others.

7a. **Create transnational institutional and digital platforms for public discussion on ethical, legal and social challenges** arising from rapid innovation in areas such as artificial intelligence, genetics and nanotechnology; favouring a multi and interdisciplinary, transparent and participatory approach, with the strong involvement of civil society, including different religious communities. 7b. Make efforts to create and implement an internationally accepted and global legal regime on artificial intelligence, genetics and nanotechnology that protects the human person, stimulates scientific progress and meets the needs of the most vulnerable social groups. 7c. Promote international dialogue and cooperation in the development of effective, safe and sustainable technical and technological solutions, which can be realistically accessed and implemented by countries with lower levels of economic and scientific development.

8. S**acred sites and places of worship and meeting**, as they are one of the essential manifestations of freedom of religion or belief in its collective dimension. In addition to the relevant religious communities, governments also have the responsibility to ensure that these sites contribute to the smooth functioning of society instead of becoming a problem for society.

8a. To reflect carefully on which **legitimate limitations can be imposed by governments on the use of places of worship and meeting in situations of health emergency**. State action aimed at protecting public health needs to be reconciled, as much as possible, with the importance that worship, and collective prayer or meetings have for different religious communities. Governments should follow an adequate process of consultation with religious representatives before enacting rules imposing hygienic and safety conditions that restrict the use of the relevant religious places. In turn, religious communities must cooperate with governments and be flexible when it comes to adapting their rules and liturgy in the interests of public health.

8b. To consider that s**acred sites are often part of the heritage of a country and hence an integral element of its history, culture and tradition;** the same applies to religious symbols, ceremonies and other intangible heritage. The preservation of religious heritage constitutes a paramount interest not only of religious communities but also of the entire society, and it is therefore compatible with the state’s religious neutrality. It entails economic investment and cooperation with the relevant religious communities. The conservation of religious heritage also has a significant educational function and requires recognising and respecting the religious origin, purpose and meaning of sacred sites, even in the cases where those sites have lost their original religious use. The state’s action must be aimed not only at preserving the religious heritage that reflects the beliefs and tradition of the majority but also that of minority religions, to facilitate that they are properly integrated into and not excluded from social life.

8c. To remember that **places of worship and meeting without particular value as historic heritage are also an important part of the culture in a different sense**: they are manifestations of the spirituality of a society and expressions of the exercise of the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief.

8d. To keep in mind that **states have the obligation to protect sacred sites (with or without value as historic heritage) against violence, vandalism and terrorist attacks**. Firmness in such protection and, when appropriate, prosecution of those acts are an effective way to combat hate crimes and to create a culture of respect.

8e. **To deal carefully with traditional sacred sites whose history reflects the layers of various religious sensibilities**. Universal homogeneous solutions are often inadequate in such situations, which require a case-by-case analysis that pays attention to the particular history and characteristics of each site. This is especially important in those cases where inappropriate treatment may lead to social tension, or even geopolitical or armed conflicts

1. **Latin America Consultation**

**July 21 and September 15, 2020**

Keynote address (July 21) by Rebeca Grynspan. Four working groups reported their findings and recommendations at the concluding session (September 15).

Proposals and recommendations presented by the working groups are summarized below.

1**. Working Group on governance and faith**

1. **Promote institutionalizing the participation of religious organizations in the official structure of the G20,** to contribute, from ethical dimension to the discussions on recovery and resilience policies in the post-pandemic scenario.
2. I**nsist on adoption of measures aimed to eradicate human trafficking**, such as implementation of regional standards in legislation; promotion of regional coordination in criminal prosecution; promote mechanisms of transparency and evaluation of performance of judges and prosecutors; and mandatory training of judicial officials on the topic.
3. **Strengthen regional governance mechanisms to promote decision-making and coordinated action** that prioritizes inclusive global recovery, revaluing and boosts existing participation initiatives.
4. **Reestablish solidarity and international cooperation mechanisms throug**h:

***Promotion of Partnerships for Sustainable Development within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for Financing for Development****.*

\*Appeal to the G20 countries to promote a sustained increase in Official Development Assistance (ODA), in the face of reductions in financing for development; to achieve the fulfillment of the contribution of 0.7% of GDP of DAC countries; ODA plays a vital role in addressing humanitarian needs, promoting peace and stability, and building healthy and productive populations

\* Promote the participation of religious communities in regional and local crisis committees, so that they can contribute with their knowledge, ethical values, ​​and local work to mitigate risks, prevent disasters, support resilience and recovery processes. And work for fairness and sustainability following ithe pandemic.

(e) **Invite communities and religious leaders to participate in processes of design, implementation, and monitoring of public policies, to improve transparency, institutional quality, and governance, eradicating corrupt practices.**

(f) **Preserve the rule of law and human rights** by careful attention to emergency regulations that impose restrictions on rights, to ensure that they are reasonable and temporary in nature.

**(g) Promote a healthy secularism in relationships between States and religious organizations**, taking into account principles of cooperation, pluralism, and non-discrimination, thus guaranteeing the right to religious freedom in its individual and collective dimensions.

(h) **More intensive efforts to protect religious leaders and human rights defenders from attacks by criminal groups and drug traffickers,** assuring that those responsible are punished.

(i) **Promote educational systems that integrate ethics and sustainable development (ESD), to equip young people and future leaders with the tangible skills, knowledge, values, ​​and attitudes** necessary to exercise responsible leadership that promotes peace, justice, human rights, cultural diversity, and social cohesion.

1. **Working group on the impact of COVID-19**
2. **Assure access for vulnerable people to social protection**

\*Appreciate that charitable action and attention by religious communities for the poorest and most vulnerable concerns not just members of the community itself, but represents a common characteristic of religious bodies. Service to the poor and charity is an explicit mandate of all religious denominations, evident in multiple ways. During the pandemic, in many places extensive networks of volunteers and the infrastructure of religious communities have been placed at the service of health services and assistance to those who, because of restrictions imposed to care for health, have lost jobs or sources of income. In a continent where conflicts between religious communities are infrequent, in many countries religious community efforts to assist the most disadvantaged have encouraged significant interreligious collaboration. Religious institutions have helped to compensate for weaknesses in state assistance or the absence of public structures and services. States need to recognize and value this important collaboration of religious groups and be able to coordinate tasks with them to assure more effective services to the most vulnerable. Finances and capacities of religious communities, nonetheless, as well as other social actors are affected by the general economic contraction and its impact on members’ incomes. States should be aware of this situation and provide appropriate aid, so that the religious communities can continue to operate their services, especially including educational networks and charities.

1. **Address discrimination and religious freedom**.

\***Essential guidelines on restrictions of rights considered necessary for public health** should not involve any form of discrimination on the basis of religion. No reports that this has not been respected have emerged, but it is essential to ensure that it does not occur in the future. With respect to the most **vulnerable minorities**, States need to take special account of indigenous peoples and religions of African origin. Measures taken by many governments have, however, affected the full exercise of religious freedom, particularly in its collective, external and public manifestations. Religious freedom is a right that cannot be suspended, even in emergency situations, and in a democratic society any restrictions applied must comply with the principle of legality, be necessary, and, therefore be strictly proportional to meet legitimate purposes of protecting health.

\* **Assess specific roles of religion and religious communities.** The G20 Interfaith Forum reminds States that within the framework of international human rights treaties, and particularly, in the Americas, the American Convention on Human Rights, religious freedom is a fundamental right and religion, as a constitutive element of people's identity, deserves special protection. Thus churches, denominations, and religious communities must be valued for themselves and for what they represent as a necessary manifestation of people’s religious freedom; the scope for enjoyment of that freedom is independent and goes beyond the undoubted importance of measures during the health emergency. They should be recognized for their humanitarian and educational work.

**\* Right to religious assistance.** A necessary element of the right to religious freedom is the right of everyone to receive religious assistance from clerics of their own faith (as well as the negative freedom not to receive it against their will), and the correlative right of religious communities to provide such assistance to their faithful. These rights are especially pressing in situations of illness and in the final moments of life, and must be guaranteed in particularly to patients in hospitals, their families, the dying, relatives of the deceased, and health personnel subjected to unusual stresses and demands in the current context. ***We recommend*** that States prepare and ensure the validity of protocols necessary for the effective enjoyment of the right to religious care in both public and private health establishments; and assure that clerics can have mobility and access to people and health facilities even when there are general restrictions applying to the general population, provided that they comply with appropriate sanitary and hygiene precautions. Religious personnel need first to take care of their own health and that of the faithful they assist, and therefore should be treated by law and authorities as equivalent to health personnel.

**\* Respect for the dead and their families.** The pandemic has caused an unusual number of deaths, which in many cases occur in solitude or isolation and where close relatives cannot accompany the dying person in their last moments and then provide them in a way appropriate a final farewell that complies with the rites called for by their religion. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended respecting, as far as possible, religious traditions in handling and final destination of corpses, including their ritual washing when required, recognizing that transmission of the virus from deceased persons has not been proven; the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has called for respectful handling of corpses and due tribute to the deceased, and respect for relatives in burying them according to their beliefs and the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court. ***We recommend that States***, when preparing protocols and regulations on handling bodies of those who died as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in general those who died during the emergency caused by the pandemic, take into account the need to respect the rights of families to bury their dead in accordance with religious rituals and with the participation of their closest relatives, respecting the necessary sanitary measures

\* **Right to religious celebrations and practices**. An aspect of religious freedom most clearly affected by the health measures taken due to the pandemic has been the **right to hold religious meetings and carry out ritual celebrations that require the gathering of a certain number of peopl**e. In many countries, drastic and even total restrictions have been imposed and still remain on holding these meetings; they have lasted many months, raising doubts that such restrictions meet immediate timing and necessity requirements. which are essential for them to be fully legitimate. In different countries, the courts have ruled that while certain restrictions on the number of people attending and compliance with hygiene and sanitation measures are acceptable in order to safeguard public health, total prohibition of religious meetings is neither acceptable nor is it proportional to that end. **A sincere and mature dialogue between public authorities and religious authorities is essential**. Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID -19,[[1]](#footnote-1) make possible agreement on appropriate conditions where religious celebrations with participation of the faithful can be allowed, at least insofar as they are compatible with health needs. **The total prohibition of religious celebrations, including those to bless or celebrate marriages or initiation rites, is inadmissible and contrary to the guarantees provided by international human rights treaties**.

1. I**nternational cooperation and solidarity to guarantee access to medicines, vaccines, medical equipment, and treatment for COVID-19.**

\*Many religious denominations have a global presence that transcends national borders. They need to be part of the planning for global as well as national solidarity to mitigate the effects of a pandemic that has a global dimension and scope. A global framework is essential to face the global pandemic that requires the defense of the shared dignity of all human beings. This global policy must be informed by ethical principles that guarantee protection of the rights of all and that privilege solidarity over profit. The new world and local scenario demand particular efforts in the area of ​​education, where religious communities play important roles both in managing their own educational systems and in contributing to values more broadly.

1. **Need to take into account religious assessments and contributions to definition of ethical criteria for the pandemic and subsequent actions (vaccination, access to treatment**)

\*The pandemic raises especially sensitive ethical issues, where religious communities have something to say in dialogue with States and with the society. These include criteria and priorities for caring for patients when health systems are overwhelmed and the modes of care for those hardest hit by the economic crisis as a result of a prolonged quarantine. Debates about the cost and access to vaccines and medicines when they are available are relevant as economic considerations must be weighed against moral criteria and the priority need to respect the human dignity of all and in all matters. In a crisis situation, decisions about admission of patients to intensive care services (triage) is subject to criteria that differ from the usual ones in which only the individual situation of the patient is addressed: in the face of insufficient resources, the criterion must take into account the needs and possibilities of all patients who may require such care, which may imply not providing or stopping providing some care to certain patients in order to assign it to others. In this situation many issues are involved, and religious denominations should be able to provide their views in defining the rules to be followed. One rule clearly must be to avoid any discrimination based on people’s religion, among other criteria that should not be applied (in general, there is the right not to be discriminated against because of religion, race, nationality, age, social status, etc.).

**We believe that dialogue between political authorities, different sectors of the economy, and also religious authorities on the post-pandemic reality is fundamental**. The articulation and dialogue between religions, society, and states will be fundamental in the resumption of activities and the generation of employment and income. **Religious denominations can help prevent the “new normal” from leaving the poorest and most vulnerable people behind.**

3. **Working Group 3 on the Environment**

Areas proposed for action include the following:

1. Strengthen **environmental governance capacities** to assure sustainable systems, working with local governments, with civil society participation, to protect and conserve forests; working with indigenous communities who are the natural guardians.
2. Promote **research and development** on productive and sustainable activities that respect ecosystems and assure the welfare of people.
3. **Recognize the territorial rights of indigenous people** and integrate their leaders in decision making and management of their territories.
4. Adopt appropriate mechanisms to **assure the protection of human rights and lives of environmental activists** and punishment of those who attack them, to bring an end to impunity
5. Stop **deforestation** caused by intensive extractive activities and changes in land use for livestock, land degradation, and loss of biodiversity.
6. Declare a **five year moratorium on issuing land titles and rights to change land use** for livestock ventures, agro-industries, and forest, mining, and hydroelectric activities.
7. Implement a **tracking system for products of forest origin** io make possible cooperation to protect forests and comply with environmental legislation.
8. Launch a **global prevention, protection and response initiative against forest fires**, involving local communities in its execution.
9. Promote relevant research and the development of appropriate activities that **respect tropical forests, ensure the well-being of populations**, and assure the continuity of ecological and climate protection services
10. Guarantee **adequate management of water resources** that respond to the needs of all populations.
11. Implement government management mechanisms that regulate the use of water for industries and seek its sustainable use to reach all populations
12. Strengthen government mechanisms to **treat contaminated effluents** under the responsibility of those who generate them.
13. Implement **a global environmental education plan** that facilitates the emergence of a global environmental citizenship
14. Design **training processes** from early childhood and at all educational levels on rights and duties related to the environment and sustainable development
15. **Disseminate scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples** on the functions and sustainable use of tropical forests
16. Include training in **access to information and participation in environmental matters in the curricula of all educational levels**, to forge new generations of defenders of the rights of indigenous peoples and the protection of the environment.
17. Care for the environment and **promoting food safety** to protect populations against future coronaviruses.
18. Distribute **fertile lands and fiscal property to promote sustainable cooperative food produ**ction projects, with technical advice for cooperative marketing and environmental restorations that are required
19. Globally regulate the **conservation of protected areas and indigenous territorie**s, to prevent future zoonotic pandemics.

**4. Working Group 4: Social and Economic Challenges**

Background section highlights poverty and inequality, challenges for boys, girls, and adolescents, indigenous populations, situation of women, and youth and work. Recommended actions focus on:

1. Institutionalize at the global governance level **new cooperative mechanisms that facilitate early warning signals and promote transparency** and the exchange of information and comparative experience between the different regions to address problems that, such as the pandemic, have a **planetary impact**.
2. Greater **multilateral cooperation** in the framework of a new consensus framework that incorporates environmental sustainability and the creation of jobs, with projects that favor an entrepreneurial, creative and supportive spirit, over speculative and extractive investments.
3. Promote specific development projects for **micro-enterprises, SMEs and family farming**.
4. Favor the **renegotiation of the external debts** of the countries of the region.
5. Promote **universal basic or complementary income**.
6. In this time of pandemic, if the **COVID 19 vaccine** is achieved, it should be free availability to poor countries.
7. **Take into account civil society** as an important actor to achieve social transformations.
8. Promote **policies of awareness and inclusion of indigenous peoples**.
9. Generate protocols and campaigns for the prevention of **symbolic and material gender violence**.
10. Design **prevention programs for addictions** through academic training, without impediments to obtaining formal employment.
11. Urge States and motivate civil society in the articulation of **programs that recognize the work of religions in the prevention and social reintegration in cases of addictions**.
12. **Asia Regional Consultation**

**August 5-6, 2020**

**Proposals and recommendations on gender**

       Equal education attainment must be prioritized.

       Faith inspired perspective on early marriage, equal opportunity, gender-based violence, etc to be highlighted in education and through civil society activism.

       Training on gender equality for both men and women.

       Deeper engagement of faith traditions by women must be more formally encouraged so that women can acquire religious authority and becomes spokespersons for religion

**Proposals and recommendations on education**

       Greater religious and spiritual literacy is needed, that is culturally nuanced and based in ethics, moral, and historical stories. Such religious literacy needs to be grounded in faith and inter-faith perspectives, and not solely in a “secular” humanistic one. The inter-faith angle must mean that the idea of any religion as the “best” must be discarded as a starting premise for instruction in religious studies.

       As a part of an inter-faith approach, experiential learning should be incorporated into pedagogy by way of opening up spaces that bridge the gap between religious and secular perspectives, and adherents of different faith traditions.

       Transparency and vetting around the curriculum and text book writing processes is vitally needed, to ensure that religion and ethics are taught in historically relevant, culturally sensitive and humanistically capacious ways.

       Adequate teachers and high-quality teacher training that aligns teacher preparation with desired outcomes of instruction in religious studies are needed.

**Proposals and recommendations on youth**

* Youth need to be educated towards tolerance,  beyond  religious  practice  and  towards effective non-verbal communication such as mindfulness and mindful language.
* Youth need to be familiar with global  issues and  priorities-  such  as  transnationalism, displacement, refugee concerns and citizenship rights
* Youth voices must receive center stage where their perspectives, aspirations and challenges are actively solicited by policy makers.
* Avenues for youth participation in research, activism and internships can and should be created, so that they know how to engage real life situations and negotiate challenges productively and meaningfully.

**Proposals and recommendations on care of the planet**

Proposals and recommendations focus on four areas: partnerships, policy, capacity-building, and faith-based organizations)  
  
**(a) Partnerships:**  
\* Promote partnerships between faith-based organizations and both grassroots level and policy level organizations working on environmental issues. Partnerships between FBOs and those working on the environment can ensure that religious scholars, actors, and leaders build their knowledge and capacity to be able to properly and effectively impact, influence, and advocate for the environment. Those working to promote environmental sustainability will also benefit from community support and behavior change that ensues when working more closely with faith leaders and organizations. We must not limit ourselves to ecological theology; the focus must be on results based partnerships and action.  
\* Promote collaboration between faith-based organizations  and  educational  and environmental institutions to ensure that environmental education is offered in all schools and programs. Education is paramount to tackling the issue of protecting the planet. Many organizations are already working in education but it is important to ensure that this includes an environmental education including the SDGs. Moving towards a more values based approach, including ethical thinking, feeling, and acting, can make youth more aware of and connected to the environment is essential.  
\* Promote partnerships between faith-based organizations and organizations working with marginalized communities, especially youth-based. Faith leaders and faith-based organizations educate not only in schools but in communities. The world of faith must harness their power and influence to ensure that they are properly educating our communities on how to live sustainably. Faith leaders should partner together with the appropriate grassroots organizations to ensure that FBO-led community advocacy and education reaches all groups and their families.  
\* Religious organizations must do proper due diligence and advocate for change in governments and organizations who are harming our environment. Religious organizations must use their power of advocacy to change the way that our governments are working, to change the way that business is working and to combat environmental destruction. Clear guidelines should be devised to best help faith leaders leverage their influence.  
\* Religious leaders should work hand in hand  with agricultural  organizations  and with government policy around agriculture and farming. The impact of both animal agriculture - the livestock industry - as well as other forms of non-eco-friendly agriculture are primary causes of much of the environmental destruction that is happening. FBOs must reach out and work with agricultural and farming organisations to advocate for sustainable agricultural practices.  
\* Form intergovernmental partnerships. The G20 could partner with the institutions that train religious leaders and increase the centrality of protection of the planet in their education.  
  
**(b) Policy**  
\* Policy makers should embrace the ‘green faith’ movement; partner with it, work with it and make it part of their environmental programs. All of our organizations must be courageous and empowered to speak out clearly when the planet is threatened. The ‘green faith’ campaign should become a global movement, not just of the religious organiations but from policy organizations down. The concept of theology isn’t enough; it needs to be joined with action to nspire compassionate awareness, connection and responsibility.  
\* Expand the definition of SDG-16 ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies’ to include peace towards nature (ecology of peace). All organizations working on SDG-16 must ensure that they are also working on the environment. Ecology and the environment should be included by governments in a new definition of peace and creating peaceful societies. We have been acting for too long as if we are at war with nature. The new definition of peace needs to include the right to a healthy environment (clean water, air, etc.). Societies cannot be peaceful if there is a toxic and unhealthy environment stemming from a toxic relationship with our environment. Climate change, environmental degradation and unsustainable consumption of natural resources is the cause of many conflicts and this connection should be highlighted.  
\* Ensure that FBOs advocate for greater rights for the environment in line with indigenous traditions' view of the earth as a living Mother. We must encourage governments to expand the consideration and effect of environmental impacts in their policies and programs. The environment should not be a separate  issue with  regard  to  government  policy,  but  an integrated aspect as it is the foundation which supports all lives and systems - it is interwoven with education, business, security and so much more. Giving the natural environment greater rights, such as that of a living being when approaching policy discussions will improve environmental outcomes.  
  
**(c) Capacity Building and governance**

\*Good governance can be promoted with recognition and awards. In order to promote good governance, religious institutions could give prizes or awards to governments who are doing the best in this regard of an integrated approach to the environment. This might inspire our governments to really take up the cause of the environment in a critical way.  
\*Build the capacity of faith-based organizations as much as possible. Faith-based organizations often operate under limited resources and often underinvest in the capacity building of their teams. The world of faith actors, leaders and organizations needs to partner with capacity building and training organizations to be advocating effectively.  
\*Recognize, acknowledge and learn from the work of grassroot FBOs. Many FBOs are working on the ground in sustainable, eco-friendly ways, so it is very important for them to share this with others. Guidelines for best practice should be put together, summarizing the knowledge and experience of these organizations. Lessons can be given to other religious organizations and all other stakeholders to promote the importance of faith-based approaches. An improved evidence base for behavior and perception change in communities should also assist faith leaders to follow best practice, which may include working with scientists and behavior change experts to track impact.  
\*Map our existing capacities to act on environmental problems. Capacity expert groups should be created on specific environmental issues to also lobby and advocate to the government as well as companies or factories. Through mapping out the changemakers and visionaries within the community and the populations they serve, support can be more easily mobilized when it is needed.  
  
**(d) Action of FBOs**  
\*Support environmentally conscious religious leaders at the regional level to produce a set of guidelines for religious institutions on how they can help protect the environment. Through identifying those in the religious  community  who  are  already  invested  in  passionately supporting a ‘spiritual ecology’, messaging can be effectively communicated to other leaders in their community. The religious institutions that are pioneers in promoting these values should be supported in reaching out to those who are not carrying forward this message.  
\*Raise the interfaith voice to global governments to spend more on financing developing countries in ending their deforestation. Investing in areas which have a higher payoff per dollar spend is important, especially around biodiversity hotspots in such tropical countries around the equator.  
  
**Preparing and responding to disasters (including COVID-19): religious roles**  
  
Proposals for action

Training and capacity building and resource mobilization are priority tasks, to which several institutions are committed, with promising programs. More encouragement of exchanges and active lesson learning among countries and communities would be beneficial.

(b) Action, both at interreligious and G20 levels, is needed for *better preparedness*. At various levels, whether for communities, cities, national bodies, regional, and global, there are significant gaps both in preparedness mechanisms and in faith community involvement in them, but also promising experience to share. However, with few exceptions and all these levels, religious institutions are not sufficiently at the tables and within the mechanisms that prepare for many sorts of disasters. A priority is to find meaningful ways to ensure that religious voices and experience are more systematically taken into account. That calls for better knowledge of what they do and its rationale, as well as of broader cross sectoral activities. For faith communities, there is a call for more mutual respect focused on generous action in many situations

(c On disaster response, there is substantial scope to strengthen such responses and make them more efficient, reaching more people and especially those who are most vulnerable. Information systems, use of various technologies, and openness to partnerships are in use in many settings but could be expanded. Such measures could help assure that available financing goes to where it is most needed and that it is well used, with meaningful accountability. A goal is to assure that the very separate efforts that are part of response and resilience can be better harnessed to feed into both prevention and preparedness.

Accountability is a priority and religious institutions have major potential roles to play in highlighting the needs of the most vulnerable and holding governments and other partners (including themselves) to account for the use of resources.

1. Multi faith multi religious action in disaster response can potentially contribute to more systematic use of accountability mechanisms, whether the old-fashioned speaking truth to power by individuals, or newer, more modern technologically based approaches. There are promising examples of multi-faith programs (Indonesia following the tsunami is an example, as well as the Philippines), that ease interreligious tensions and can actively contribute to dampening or preventing tensions.
2. Resource use and mobilization, linked explicitly to the COVID-19 disaster but with broader implications, are an immediate issue and aith actors can and should contribute to efforts to mobilize, allocate, and use the resources well.
3. On the *COVID response,* wide skepticism about the presence, nature, and risks of the disease, including among religious leaders, needs to be addressed. There is great suffering, including widespread hunger. Specific issues of scapegoating specific groups, tensions between religious communities and governments around regulations applicable to religious communities, the serious and inequitable impact of school closings, especially for poor communities, and the impact on migrants and refugees, including those forced to return home, declining remittances, and some evidence of scapegoating are central concerns.
4. Given the centrality of the COVID-19 agenda in 2020, specific recommendations appropriately center on faith roles in pandemic response, including lessons for health system preparedness, addressing issues of scapegoating and discrimination, and focusing sharply on those who are most vulnerable.

1. **North America Regional Consultation**

**August 17-21**

Discussion focused on 3 topics: Refugees, Race, COVID-19 response

Recommendations are reflected in G20 Interfaith briefs on COVID-19 response and refugees, and in the G20 Interfaith Forum Statement on Racism.

1. **Africa Regional Consultation:**

**August 24, September 14, 2020**

**Opening session August 24th, 2020**

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| --- | --- |
| Opening remarks, introducing G20 Interfaith, Rationale |  |
| H.E. Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar, Secretary General, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)  Prof. W. Cole Durham, Jr., President, G20 Interfaith Forum Association  H.E. Jalel Chelba, Head of Civil Society Division, Africa Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate  H.E. Dr. Martin Pascal Tine, Ambassador of the Republic of Senegal to the Holy See | |

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| Panel Contributions on Hunger, Environment, Debt, and COVID-19  Rev. Nicta Lubaale, General Secretary, Organisation of African Instituted Churches  Dr. Iyad Abumoghli, Director, Faith for Earth, United Nations Environment Programme  Dr. Francis Kuria Kagema, Executive Director, African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL)  H.E. Minister Pauline K. Tallen, Minister of Women and Social Affairs Nigeria  Religious Reflections  Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja, Nigeria  Dr. Agnes Abuom, Moderator of the Central Committee, World Council of Churches |

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| Breakouts on Hunger, Environment/Rainforest, Debt/Finance, COVID-19/Health |

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| **Followed by 4 Working Groups that met over the following weeks, conclusions presented on September 14.**  1. Debt/Finance, Asha Ramgobin, Executive Director, Human Rights Development Initiative, South Africa  2. Hunger/Locust, Dr. Renier Koegelenberg, Board Member, Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust, South Africa  3. Environment/Rainforest , Dr. Auwal Farouk Abdussalam, Deputy Director of Academic Planning, Kaduna State University, Nigeria  4: COVID-19/Health, Adesina Olukanni, Senior Fellow, International Center for Law and Religion Studies |

1. **Working Group on Debt**

**Proposals and recommendations**

Debt issues and overall finance will be central to the G20 deliberations and there will be further meetings of the G20 finance ministers. A number of religious groups are engaging with advocacy on the debt standstill issue, including which countries are covered, dealing with China, and the private sector. The issue of middle-income countries for Africa is important. One of the objectives is to get ideas on how to sharpen the analysis country by country and to strengthen the advocacy. Within the discussion it will be crucial to consider the interconnectedness of issues around debt, illicit financial flows, corruption, and reparations.

**General Recommendations**

Since South Africa is the only African country represented in the G20, the G20i should engage the South African Sherpa’s office to ensure recommendations that are beneficial to all of Africa, are being put forward. African Countries and Africa as whole are largely dependent on developed economies. COVID-19 has made the existing inequality among African countries more visible, particularly the gap between rich and poor. (Cf. Pope Francis speaking on interdependence during Wednesday General Audience, Sept. 2nd, 2020).

(a) Develop a **strategy for Africa to become sustainable economies** through fostering expertise and development in the countries.

(b) **Work towards equitable societies** where everyone has access to the basic necessities regardless of their background and status.

(c Work with faith-based communities to b**uild a global economy based on principles of solidarity** and thereby reduce financial inequality within and among countries.

As governments have made decisions that have been harmful to the weakest and poorest of the population, but beneficial to big business, ensure a structural separation between state and business where state consults business as any other stakeholder and is not unduly or exclusively influenced by business.

Africa loses more money through illicit financial flows than it receives in aid, investment, and loans combined and thereby creating and increasing inequality in Africa.

(a) The G20 needs to make sure that it includes strategies to **curtail illicit financial flows** from Africa and the developing world for example through combatting harmful tax competition and tax havens globally.

(b) To strengthen international standards regarding b**eneficial ownership and automatic exchange of information**.

(c) **Frozen assets** should not be kept in banks that are complicit in receiving these assets. Rather they should be kept in an ESCROW account in regional development banks, which in the case of Africa is the African Development Bank. In addition, countries where illicit financial outflows have been held secretly should not have the prerogative of stipulating the conditions for their return.

(d**) Illicit funds, when recovered, should be returned to their countries of origin**.

- Strengthen the judicial system globally to ensure accountability and transparency in tackling illicit financial flows.

(e) G20 should engage in a **global discussion on reparations** for historically incurred financial losses, stolen assets, and damaged resources and review the legitimacy of the debt of the African countries.

(f) The G20 Interfaith Forum joins in the call for a **comprehensive debt moratorium for African countries**

**2. Working group on hunger**

Position FBOs on the Issue Hunger. Governments have not sufficiently leveraged on the potentialities of faith-based organizations in their efforts to solve food crisis on the Continent. How can governments setup collaboration with faith-based organizations on fighting food insecurity and how can FBOs make themselves as critical stakeholders and position themselves in a coordinated manner?

**The G20 should support the creation of structures to allow for joint efforts of religious actors and government entities in fighting hunger.**

* FBOs should register poverty alleviation initiatives and request collaboration with relevant agencies, such as development agencies and state institutions.
* The G20 should foster and create strategic partnerships on a local level among FBOs and regional organizations fighting hunger, for example, through the implementation of agro-pastoral projects.
* Governments should leverage on the credibility of FBOs
* FBOs to partner with government/ institutions in building agriculture community centerrs to implement food security responses

**Collaborate to Mechanize Agriculture**

Most of farming activities are inefficient and not sustainable and there is a lack of training for men and women in the field of food processing, production, storage, and marketing.

* Governments should support mechanization of agriculture including food storage and processing. FBOs can provide supportive sensitization on the mechanization for their communities, whereas government should ensure monitoring of mechanization of activities.
* In partnership with FBOs, governments should foster agricultural commercialization in order to increase investment in African countries towards food sufficiency.
* FBOs/RA should speak out and advocate for regular training, that such relevant trainings and engagements should be offered and accepted by both men and women.
* Governments need to ensure infrastructure that allows sellers and buyers to circulate with their vehicles and / or their means of transport.
* Explore the potential and strengthen the role of religious networks in sustainable Agroecology: new methods of farming to be energy efficient, water efficient; protect the quality of soil; limit harmful pesticides.
* Encourage and create favorable conditions for local community sustainable food production (e.g. community gardens) – \_allocate public land for community gardens (rural and urban areas).
* There should be investment in research and manpower development. This will bring about new techniques in food production for boost in agriculture and human capital.
* Faith based organizations can influence their members/communities to generation funds for investment in agriculture to curb food insecurity eg in my community my faith group has for 5 years now become the food storehouse of the host community through its Food Processing Program. No waste of any kind, tubers and grains are preserved at the time of harvest, processed and stored in bags. For many months the community and the neighborhood continues to enjoy proximity to food supply at affordable prices.

**Conduct needs assessments and ensure up to date data on hunger and livelihood distribution**

There is a lack of evidence and data to allow for an assessment of appropriate and necessary actions in fighting hunger.

* Government should work closely with population agencies to ensure that up to date data is available on census and needs of livelihood. Faith communities should be part of this process and advocate for truthful and comprehensive research.
* There should be efforts to combine emergency food distribution with the collection of important social and health data – \_to be able to design safety nets for vulnerable families (young and old) – \_whilst strengthening health and social systems.
* Review national agricultural policies – \_to support both small and commercial farmers, as well as cooperative networks.

**Provide training and capacity building to ensure equal participation**

How can faith communities be engaged in crafting curricula to increase equal participation, just distribution of goods and sharing or livelihoods?

* Promote the concept of participatory engagement in the educational and pedagogical curricula and realizing the principle that wealth’s enough for everyone and it exists to be shared with justice
* FBOs/Religious Actors should engage in advocacy with bodies concerned with curriculum development in order to add aspect of just livelihood distribution.
* The G20 should identify and support FBOs with training and resources to engage in sustainable endeavors toward food availability and sufficiency for the less privileged, the unemployed and victims of violence and natural occurrences.
* Trade policy model by the nations to increase food supply at lower prices especially where the poverty rate is high. On the other hand, government can increase the cost of food supply produced by the poor to increase their earnings.
* Preaching of Peace and Stability as indispensable keys to policies and programs formulation that affect food security at all levels.

**Address the sources of conflict that lead to hunger, poverty and scarcity of livelihood**

Conflicts are often resource based. Thus:

1. Governments should engage religious actors as mediators between parties of resources-based conflicts.
2. The G20 should encourage national governments to emphasize interreligious/interfaith education as an important long-term strategy to fight conditions that produce poverty and hunger.
3. Ensure structured dialogue (formal agreements) between faith communities and national governments, multilateral organisations – to ensure effective implementation and collaboration; and to curb fraud in distribution of food and procurement of services.
4. **Working Group on Environment**

The followings are recommendations to the G20:

1. a) Promote the **participation of African Faith Based Organizations (FBO) in international dialogue on global environmental issues.**
2. b) Establish a **Fund that will enable FBOs in Africa to sensitize and train religious leaders** and their congregations on environmental protection and climate change in Africa.
3. c) Request the **establishment of a Faith for Earth Africa Chapter** and adoption of strategy for interfaith collaboration for the environment.
4. d) Request the **empowerment of youth and women**, representing more than 70 to 80% of the population in Africa as drivers of change, and the leaders of today and tomorrow.
5. e) Establish **resource mobilization drives** to take action on environmental issues from global and regional faith-based solutions to environmental challenges.
6. f) Recommend to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and Ministries of education to introduce **climate change education**, **environment club** **and renewable energy** as disciplines in the education systems, from early stages of education to institutions of higher learning.
7. g) Recommend policy frameworks by the G20 to **recognize indigenous peoples and empower them in establishing and managing biodiversity and ecosystem restoration** in their territories and for their livelihoods and resources.
8. h) Facilitate the establishment of a *regional African hub for the Green Climate Fund*; and strengthen the implementation of African Union 2063 Agenda, by providing capacity building support and financing from the G20 to be able to deliver on its aspirations.
9. i) Establish an African independent body (**African Working Group on Environmental Conservation**) as a major regional step towards monitoring the commitments of various African states in focusing on Climate Change within the structure of the African Union.
10. j) Recommend the **inclusion of interfaith voice, demonstrated via the introduction of Interfaith Roundtables in the Global and Regional Heads of States Assemblies**; as a policy, effected through a UN declaration and ratification by the various Member States, or via any other viable means. This could ensure that the vital voices of the Faith sector are captured at the highest level of decision making.
11. k) Recommend **reviews to the selection criteria for accessing the GCF** for local projects by Countries under the Paris Agreement to make it more accessible for Countries that have not previously had the capacity to win grants. Secondly, they could also amend the criteria to allow NGOs and Faith-led Institutions to equally qualify for the awards.

l) Adopt and enforce **legislations against all that constitutes hazard to the environment** affecting both man and nature; and implement policies to halt illegal wildlife trade, poaching, land, marine and ecosystem degradation.

1. m) Adopt by the African Union and national governments **practical strategies to engage faith actors in conservation** as an important implementation arm for the SDGs and the 2063 African Agenda.
   1. n) Maintain and support **traditional techniques of water management for agriculture** by rural households that preserve water, the ecosystem, and ensure food security. Some traditional water management techniques, such as the *noria* (water wheel) and *khottara* (traditional underground water channels) are resilient and can be maintained by local families and communities. a. Strengthen education and awareness of the linkages between religious values and environmental stewardship knowing that around 65% of educational institutions are owned by religious institutions.

**FBOs:** Acknowledging that dozens of faith-based organizations are already providing the needed socio-economic and environmental support; and commending the current practices of connecting faith and conservation in Africa, these organizations need to focus on some distinct strategic approaches including:

1. \* To provide sustainable and nature-based solutions to socio-economic challenges, through their aid work, such as cooking stoves, etc.
2. \*Enhance interfaith collaboration to fight illegal trade in wildlife as God’s creations.
3. \* Establish Religious botanical gardens to protect biodiversity and contribute to sustainable biodiversity economy.
4. \*Facilitate the creation of networks to promote ecosystem stewardship that improves livelihoods, boosts economic growth and maintains environmental sustainability.
5. \* Ensure that institutions owned by religious institutions adopt green buildings standards including switching to renewable energy in the planning, construction and running of these institutions.
6. \*Facilitate setting up and running local nature reserves to control farming, grazing of domestic animals, hunting, tree cutting or other destructive practices.
7. \* Establish national and continental project for tree planting, organic farming, environmental cleaning, and sustainable waste management.

Faith actors in Africa and around the world have been providing important socio-economic support at global, regional, and national levels. Environmental stewardship, however, has not taken the center stage in ensuring the sustainability of the continent and there is a major role for faith actors to play. While faith leaders and faith communities are ready for a systemic and transformational change, they require support, capacity building, and empowerment not only through the much-needed financial assistance, but through the adoption of the required institutional mechanisms regulations, and policies to strengthen their role in environmental sustainability.

Our commitments are strong and our aspirations are high. The recommendations we are providing are all possible and can be implemented through our commitment to intra and inter-faith collaboration and national and global support through mechanisms provided by the G20.

1. **Working Group on COVID**

A major recommendation coming from most participants in the working group was that government and international agencies need to ***find more effective ways to work with*** ecumenical councils, separate faith actors and communities and cooperative societies, councils of traditional rulers, captains of industries, community leaders, media, and humanitarian agencies in fashioning and implementing policies in areas of:

1. Training on the nature, prevention and management of the disease and the general conduct

of the populace in responding to it;

1. Developing sound messaging and information dissemination on all issues such as control, therapeutics, vaccines and other measures within each of their constituencies;
2. Helping public officials to understand the distinctive needs within different religious traditions with respect to religious worship and observance, and performances;
3. Structuring public gathering and cultural celebrations and performances in ways that are maximally protective of good health practices while maintaining sensitivity to religious needs and differences;
4. Supporting media to reserve prime time and otherwise effective slots for religious leaders of faiths to deliver lectures and lead prayers and to let believers pray from their homes and to reduce the need for religious gathering;
5. Support religious leaders, faith-based organizations and faith communities so that they may educate communities about various impacts of COVID-19, including violence against women and children, and assisting them in encouraging healthy hygiene and safe burial practices among participants in faith services.

***Health Impacts***

(a). Challenges of mental and psycho-social health

(b) Inadequacies of a weak or fragile health system

(c) Effect on routine activities like immunization and antenatal/maternity services

(d) Challenges of malnutrition as a result of starvation during isolations and lockdowns

(e) Family Health

(f) Problems of spouse and child abuse

(g) Vaccine Issues

The pandemic has forced families to be in-door each day of the many weeks of the restrictions unlike during the pre-pandemic time. Resultantly, parents and children/wards became idle which in turn created lots of unpleasant frictions in the family. Many breadwinners lost their jobs and could no longer afford three square meals per day. Also, some parents could not keep their children/wards busy as schools were closed which coalesced to exacerbate family and mental health problems. As if that was not enough, many with underlying health issues, pregnant women and nursing mothers could not access medical care with attendant complications and death.

The pandemic has exposed the fragility of the health systems in many African counties. Non Covid-19 cases were denied care due to shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) as many of these could not be imported during global lockdown. One is wont to have admiration for medical professionals, scientist and all who are working round the clock to stop the spread of COVID-19.

During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, ***a marked increase in Gender-Based Violence (GBV***) was recorded. The many measures and controls put in place to mitigate against GBV proved to be ineffective because victims could not distance themselves from their abusers or access external support designed to prevent and protect them leading to further health problems.

1. Mechanisms are needed for reporting and monitoring of abuses during possible lockdowns, especially in cases where there have been known prior abuse occurrences.
2. Countries must invest in the healthcare system, to cater for the citizens
3. Local production of PPE should be encouraged
4. Vaccines should be made available to all as rapidly as possible at low or no cost, as need warrants.
5. Messaging should be developed drawing on trusted leaders (e.g. religious, traditional, community, gender based, etc.) to enhance public willingness to accept reliable vaccines.
6. There is a need to set up support for women’s and children’s rights groups and community leaders to effectively engage in awareness raising and hygiene promotion and domestic violence prevention activities.
7. There is need for the integration of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and COVID-19 information in text message campaigns, radio, and other mass communication modalities and to involve women and youth (especially girls) in the development of Information, Communication and Education (ICE) materials on COVID-19 and domestic violence.
8. There is need to set up the machinery and support to ensure that pandemic-safe surge housing is available for women and children at high risk of violence in their homes.

***Sharing understanding concerning worries about vaccines***

There is fear, misinformation, general misconception and a lack of knowledge about vaccines for COVID-19. Given that a cure or vaccine is not expected in the short term, success in reducing the spread of the disease and managing the fallouts depend on ordinary citizens trusting public authorities

and changing their behavior in accordance with official advice.

* Support to strengthen public trust and cooperation by inclusively communicating technocratic policy.

***Role of religious communities in dealing with these issues***

Religious leaders were excluded from the management of all issues pertaining to the

pandemic

* Ecumenical councils as well as distinct religious communities and faith actors should work with government and other leadership in executing common policies.

***Food, Shelter and Security Challenges:***

a. Homeless people (may reside in churches, get food there)

b. Access to food during lockdown and isolation

c. Security and enforcing compliance to lockdowns and curfews

Food distribution has been almost at a halt thereby creating shortages of food and widespread hunger that led to scattered and sporadic violence and death. In addition, agricultural products were not deemed as essential; hence food transportation was preferentially allowed but farming was not, thereby creating potential low harvest and a resultant food shortage in the nearest future.

The economy could face a much bigger problem if the crisis disrupts the timely and proper purchase, supply and distribution of agricultural inputs like fertilizer, enhanced seeds and pesticides, which would have a devastating impact on food production.

COVID-19 is putting security under serious threat in areas of rising job loss and employment, domestic and gender-based violence, food security, human trafficking, terrorism, social unrest and domestic and international conflicts in all fronts of human endeavor.

* There is an absolute need to implement policies developed by public officials on the role of religious opinion leaders in identifying, monitoring and ensuring the distribution of food, essential drugs and palliatives to the people particularly the aged, widows, vulnerable children, and the ill (e.g. AIDS, Cancer, and other chronic diseases) with a view to avoiding unnecessary deaths.
* There is need to develop practical recommendations on how to secure lives and properties during lockdowns with associated preventive and punitive measures. This should be clearly identified, documented and disseminated; at the least, the policy should empower community security apparatus in helping law enforcement agencies of government in its execution.
* Support vulnerable populations to be identified in a non-stigmatizing manner and efforts should be tailored to reach hard to reach populations (for example, in rural areas) and provide care.
* Support existing infrastructures in churches/mosques and mobilize community–based response to COVID 19 and to provide support to vulnerable groups.
* Support agricultural systems and provide much needed support to farmers that have been heavily affected by recent locust infestations through a communal or cooperative based organized system which has been known to be more effective than individual outreaches. Support containment of the spread of the virus among internally displaced people (IDPs) and prisoners.
* Support regional agreement and mechanisms in dealing with migrant workers and refugees at this time of crisis and ensure a secure network for movement of people.

***Economic impact***

Unemployment, Loss of business opportunities especially hospitality and travel industry, Impact on businesses, Debt relief, The effect of the New Normal in business, Expected effect of possible population growth in the nearest future

The pandemic caused a lot of damages to the economy of every nation in the world. It affected industries, commerce, trade, transportation, agriculture, tourism, marine, airline, education, etc., all of which were shut down, and many have since closed down permanently resulting in the loss of jobs thereby compounding already troublesome unemployment issues in almost all nations and more especially in African nations

* Support a sustainable and accessible safety net and provide comprehensive financial support program along with a scheme to distribute basic food stuffs and a market stabilization program via community and cooperative organizations.
* Take advantage of existing support and distributions systems within religious communities and cooperatives to streamline and supplement delivery of vital goods and services.

***Responding to stigmatization and discrimination***

Discrimination against and stigmatization of COVID-19 patients and those that test positive creates a fear of contact with them. There is **misinformation in diagnosis and the nature of the way COVID-19 is spread.** There is a general confusion about the **very nature of the virus** creating additional mistrust among the populace.

Social distancing in **crowded schools, housing conditions, prisons, and public transportation** may lead to stigmatization of already marginalized groups. Misinformation arising from various sources in society causes confusion in assessing the risk level from the pandemic and what individuals should do.

**Several groups may experience stigma** during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include health workers; people who tested positive for or have recovered from COVID-19; those who have been released from COVID-19 quarantine; emergency responders or healthcare workers; people who have underlying health conditions that cause coughing; and people living in congregate (group) settings, such as people experiencing homelessness.

**Support provision of the right information about COVID-19.** Address misinformation and rumors and find other ways to build trust within communities. Take care to **assure that messaging defuses and does not contribute to stigmatizing and stereotyping**. In addition, communicating with empathy to patients of COVID-19 while at the same time engaging with community, religious leaders and other influencers to relay the right information and help reduce fear and misperceptions concerning those who are ill with the virus.

Encourage **media channels**, including both traditional news media and social media, to speak out against stereotyping groups of people who experience stigma because of COVID-19.

Support **social support services for people who have experienced stigma or discrimination.**

***Impact on Education***

Role of Technology and New Normal in Education; New Learning (online and internet-based learning, homeschooling and self-education); Flare up of infection in schools due to crowding.

COVID-19 pandemic has profound negative impact on education as it affected learning in public places like schools and centers. Institutions of learning were closed, and students of all ages were unable to go to schools and have been left with nothing to do. On the other hand, most private institutions were able to continue using e-learning while poor students and those living in rural and those attending public schools were left out. Many were exposed to unnecessary child labor and abuse among other things and many may never be able to go back to school, especially girls.

There is need to develop **new ways of learning** using the many available technologies such as radio, television, internet etc.

There is need to develop **policies on educational technology** that will make the internet and means of using it available to schools and students for e-learning at all levels of education.

The third necessary policy development is the need for a **new or integrated curriculum, study materials, and guidelines for homeschooling or learning**, or self-education (that is autodidactism) including religious organization owned/run primary and high schools. This may be wholly informal (an alternative to formal) or may complement formal education. The important point is that new methods need to be found to minimize interruptions of education it times of pandemics and the like so that no children will be left without access to education and needed materials.

There is an urgent need to **set up procedures to prevent, contain and manage possible flare up of infection in schools due to crowding.**

***Government Responsibilities***

Bridging confidence gaps: **Ensuring dissemination of authentic information about the pandemic**; Establishment of **non-religious, non-tribal and non-partisan working relationship** with religious opinion leaders; **Promoting due process and the rule of law**

The **level of preparedness of government authorities** to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in providing valid information and taking urgent measures to adequately save lives is still not adequate in reaching and resonating within the African society. This is as a result of inadequate existing structures and systems to address the menace in communities. Numerous vulnerabilities and inequalities exist, where millions in the communities lack access to basic necessities of life such as potable water, health care, housing etc.

Lock down measures, coupled with lack of palliatives in many places and obnoxious policies in easing the lockdown led to **trust deficiency** and became a divisive factor between the government and the citizens. There is also a trust deficit between the leaders and the citizens leading to disbelief and disregard for preventive measures.

To bridge the **confidence gap** that attends the pandemic, there is need for periodic systemic public briefings associated with the various recommendations cited above, especially on training, message and information dissemination.

Government should set up and ensure a well-defined **‘one stop go to platform’ for the dissemination of reliable information** about the pandemic Establishment of non-sectarian, non-tribal and non-partisan working relationship with religious and other opinion leaders in connection with 8.2.

Provide **stimulus packages to various segments of the society**

Government should ensure that all **emergency regulations are legalized or made constitutional** and that it constitutes the **minimum curtailment on human rights** provisions consistent with health and well-being of the public.

**G20 Interfaith Regional Consultation, Africa August 24th**

**Iyad Abumoghli, Faith for Earth - UNEP**

Allow me first to express my appreciation to KAICIID under the leadership of H.E. Dr. Faisal Bin Moammar and his team for their continued mobilization of the global faith and interfaith community around important issues especially in preparing for the G20 summit.

Africa is rich in natural resources ranging from arable land, water, oil, natural gas, minerals, forests and wildlife. The continent holds a huge proportion of the world’s natural resources, both renewables and non-renewables.

For example, Africa is home to 30 per cent of the world’s mineral reserves, 40 per cent of the world’s gold and up to 90 per cent of its chromium and platinum. Africa holds 65 per cent of the world’s arable land.

In most African countries, natural capital accounts for between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of the total wealth. Over 70 per cent of people living in sub-Saharan Africa depend on forests and woodlands for their livelihoods.

A significant share of these resources is, however, used unsustainably while others are lost through illegal activities. Africa loses an estimated $195 billion USD annually of its natural capital through illicit financial flows, illegal mining, illegal logging, illegal trade in wildlife, unregulated fishing, environmental degradation among others.

Some of the key environmental issues that Africa needs to address are the following:

**First: Land degradation**

Africa is the second largest continent in the world with a landmass of 30 million square kilometers. In 2013, the annual contribution of livestock to the economy was $65 billion USD. However, 500,000 square kilometers of land in Africa is being degraded every year due to soil erosion, salinization, pollution and deforestation.

**Second: Freshwater, marine and coastal resources**

Africa’s expanding economies are resulting in greater demand for freshwater, but its quantity and quality are decreasing as a result of over-exploitation, climate change and pollution. More than half of the population in sub-Saharan Africa still does not have access to improved sanitation, compared to 90 per cent coverage in North Africa. Land based activities are polluting freshwater bodies and causing degradation especially that there are 320 coastal cities in Africa.

**Third: Air quality**

Indoor and outdoor air pollution poses a major problem for both the environment and human health. About 90 per cent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa are exposed to indoor air pollution. The key drivers of poor air quality in Africa are urbanization, industrialization and motorization. About 70 per cent of the people in sub-Saharan Africa still rely on solid fuels for cooking, heating and lighting. Poor air quality affects human health, with an estimated 600,000 deaths per year attributed to indoor air pollution in Africa.

**Fourth: Illegal trade in wildlife**

The illegal trade in wild flora and fauna poses serious economic and security risks for Africa which is estimated to be worth up to 150 billion USD per year. Local demand for wildlife products is equally high, and the illegal local harvesting of biological resources may actually be higher than the global organized crime.

Given the rapidly growing human populations in most of Africa, the interactions between human and wildlife species will also increase, with likely implications for transmission of zoonoses back and forth between humans and wildlife.

**So let’s consider some overall recommendations for Africa:**

1. Invest in climate-resilient strategies to improve land productivity.

2. Implement integrated water resource management strategies to increase water efficiency and reduce unregulated fishing.

3. Increase efforts to achieve widespread deployment of renewable energy.

4. Implement policies to halt illegal wildlife trade, poaching, land, marine and ecosystem degradation.

And

5. Facilitate the creation of networks to promote ecosystem stewardship that improves livelihoods, boosts economic growth and maintains environmental sustainability.

*Faith-based communities comprise the largest social organizations in Africa. Conservation leaders should reach out to religious communities to collaborate in implementing these recommendations, with a view to enhancing the capacity for value-based sustainability decisions that link nature and human well-being.*

The environmental crisis facing the African continent is increasingly seen as a crisis of values and, religion, a primary source of human values.

Dozens of faith-based organizations are already providing the needed socio-economic and environmental support; however, these activities are often uncoordinated, fragmented and competing.

There are some current practices of connecting faith and conservation, mainly led by organizations that are headquartered outside the continent with few that are home grown. But in general, such organizations need to focus on some distinct strategic approaches including:

1. Education and awareness of the linkages between religious values and environmental stewardship.
2. Through their aid work, provide sustainable and nature-based solutions to socio-economic challenges, such as cooking stoves, etc.
3. Engage in ecosystems’ restoration through existing programmes such as the Great Green Wall, and the Great lakes and rivers programmes.
4. Interfaith collaboration to fight illegal trade in wildlife as God’s creations.
5. Establish Religious botanical gardens to protect biodiversity and contribute to sustainable biodiversity economy. And
6. The African Union and national governments should adopt practical strategies to engage faith actors in conservation as an important implementation arm for the SDGs and the 2063 African Agenda.

1. Interim guidance”, April 7, 2020 and Principles reiterated in Resolution 4/2020, "Human Rights of People with COVID-19", July 27, 2020, guidelines 51 and 52.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)