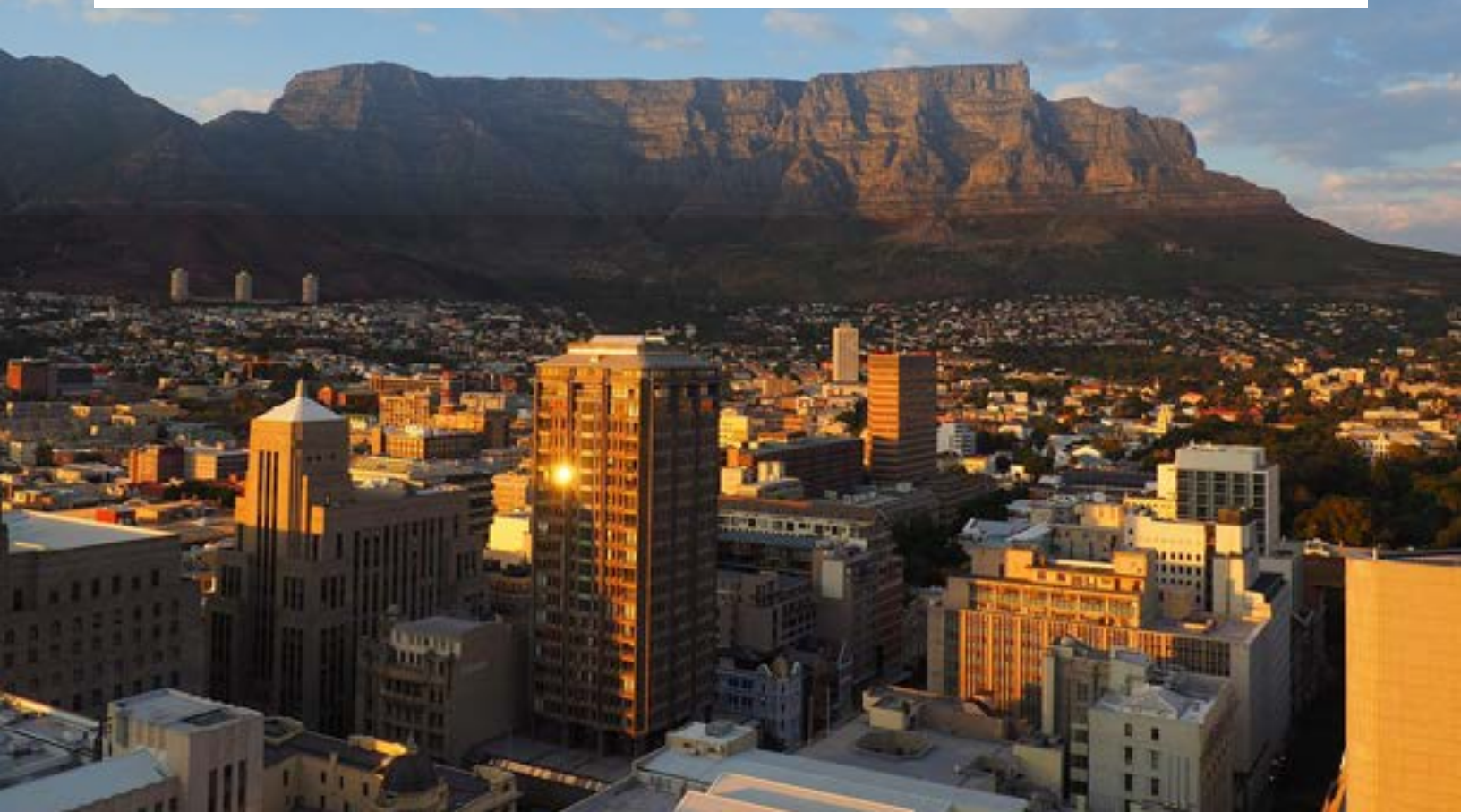




Ubuntu In Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities

Cape Town, South Africa
August 10-14, 2025



Introduction

April 24, 2025

The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) will hold its major 2025 Forum event from August 10-14 in Cape Town, South Africa. The gathering will bring together diverse stakeholders, from religious and spiritual traditions, other civil society organizations, government representatives, multilateral entities, and academia.

The Cape Town event is inspired by South Africa's G20 theme, "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability", and the overarching African philosophy of Ubuntu which are integral to South Africa's approach to its G20 Presidency. Like South Africa, the G20 Interfaith Forum recognizes that neither individuals nor nations can thrive in isolation and that global priorities should ensure that no one is left behind. Reversing the stalled progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential, and demands paradigm shifts in ways to address overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises. The IF20's key 2025 priorities align with the priority areas of the G20 Summit, that will be held on 22-23 November 2025 in Gauteng, South Africa.

Objectives

The IF20's mandate is to contribute to a more just world and a sustainable future by drawing on and enriching the multifaceted ideas, experiences, activities, and contributions of diverse actors inspired by faith across the world. The Cape Town Forum will foster practical approaches to challenges ranging from social polarization and economic and social inequality to the general challenges of finding sustainable solutions to proliferating operational problems facing communities.

The gathering offers the opportunity to harness the transformative potential of religious beliefs and the work of faith-inspired actors to advance global sustainable development agendas (and specifically the United Nations SDGs). It provides a platform where diverse religious and related communities can identify shared priorities and mobilize solutions with a reach from global to local levels. The hope is to serve as a catalyst for policy change amongst G20 countries, especially where there is openness to strategic cooperation among state and religious actors. By harnessing the collective wisdom, resources, and networks of diverse stakeholders, especially religious actors and traditional communities, the Forum aims to inspire concrete actions towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. We aim to foster a more just, equitable, and sustainable world by focusing on advocacy efforts and actions that build on the rich experience of countless communities at local, national, and international levels. The IF20 thus draws on the work of what it sees as a true global "network of networks" grounded in shared humanity and working for the common good.

Primary Objectives of the Annual G20 Interfaith Process:

Objective 1: Foster inclusive dialogues that can enhance solidarity by addressing flagging trust and countering polarization, hate speech, and violence, supporting collaborative partnerships and collective action focused on governments and faith actors from around Africa and the world.

Objective 2: Help build networks and share good practices that contribute to genuine progress in addressing key social problems, supporting those who are most vulnerable, through multi-stakeholder collaborations with faith actors.

Objective 3: Forge links to the work of G20 Engagement Groups (civil society, think tanks, women, youth, business, and others) and relevant Working Groups of the G20 Sherpa Track (notably Anti-Corruption, Health, and Climate and Environmental Sustainability), linking various G20 constituencies in preparation for the G20 Social Summit (November 18-20, 2025).

Objective 4: Communicate richer understandings of the concrete contributions of faith actors to solidarity, equality, and sustainability through humanitarian work, community building, and supporting sustainable progress that benefits the vulnerable.

Objective 5: Develop recommendations on actions that support the world's most vulnerable groups, including children, women, minority groups, and others, amidst challenges such as poverty, violence, forced migration, and the changing climate.

G20 Interfaith's Priority Areas of Focus:

The context of South Africa's priority themes of Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability guides the IF20's 2025 work. The present crises facing global agendas (SDGs, humanitarian, conflict, environment) and critical financial challenges (debt, resource mobilization, poor resource use) provide context. For faith communities, the absolute priority is to give practical meaning to "Leaving No One Behind." Concretely, legacies of the COVID-19 pandemic point to operational challenges that demand urgent attention.

Priority areas of focus are as follows:

1. Food security and poverty. Food security, with its strong links to addressing poverty and inequality, is a leading issue, driving the Global Alliance launched by the G20 in Brazil and inspiring both South Africa and the African Union. The topic extends from the very local to the very global. IF20 supports this multisector program, aiming to show convincingly that religious institutions are major players, and how our (G20 Interfaith) commitments can enhance transnational and national efforts. IF20 builds on global faith inspired efforts to address hunger; examples include the World Council of Churches, the Caritas organizations, PaRD

(International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development), World Vision, Islamic Relief Worldwide, LDS Charities, and countless others.

2. Economic and Financial Action. Fiscal and debt crises confront many countries, concentrated in Africa, and they dampen poverty alleviation and climate action, as well as government capacities to provide basic services like education, health care, water supply, disaster response, and job creation. Religious communities link the economic and financial issues to equity and thriving, notably through their focus on 2025 as a Jubilee year. Action to mobilize public finance nationally and multilaterally can ensure debt sustainability and mobilize finance for sustainable and equitable development.
3. Addressing interreligious tensions through education and enhancing understanding of religious matters. The foundational Cross Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) program and Arigatou International's Ethics Education and Learning to Live Together programs offer potential to strengthen regional and global approaches and address issues of violence and conflict linked to religious actors. Priority efforts directed to reinforce social cohesion are integral to education policies and to broader issues of trust and information, Religious approaches to ethics and practice offer contributions to the fast-developing fields of Artificial Intelligence. Many religious groups work to address gender-based violence and action to support women, children, and families—for example, their physical and mental health, inequalities, and fair, equitable treatment.
4. Migration and refugee movements, human trafficking, and modern slavery present major challenges to leaders and to communities, with distinctive relevance for Africa. IF20's continuing work highlights extensive religious teaching and practices supporting policies and action to support those on the move, especially those who are most vulnerable. Fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and call to religious advocacy for compassion and care. IF20's longstanding focus on the urgent need for multinational action on human trafficking will underpin 2025 advocacy.
5. Disaster prevention, response, recovery. Active religious involvement, as first responders, at regional and global levels and through policy and programmatic analysis, play vital roles. With rethinking at different levels on optimal approaches, the contributions of religious actors deserve greater focus. Disaster relief is closely tied to widely varied environmental challenges, including rainforest destruction and climate movements/migration, underlining the needed focus on prevention, building resilience, and meaningful capacities to respond.

Background on the Organizer

The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) annual platform involves a network of religiously linked institutions and initiatives that engage on global agendas, including the

SDGs. The G20 process has evolved since it was established in 2014, recognizing an expanding range of stakeholders and platforms that allow different sectors and communities to present ideas and recommendations to global leaders. The IF20 contributes insights and recommendations that respond to and help shape the G20 and thus global policy agendas, building on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs and reflecting their rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. Through its networks, the IF20 contributes not only to formulation but also to implementation of G20 policies, and to forging consensus on priorities shared by interfaith and intercultural organizations, religious leaders, scholars, and development and humanitarian entities. IF20's work with business and civil society actors and other key stakeholders contributes to the agenda for each Annual IF20 Forum, inspired each year by successive host governments.



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Introduction: Giving Context for the G20 Interfaith Forum

Katherine Marshall, August 12, 2025

This segment provides an overview and context for the conference and the G20 Interfaith effort, as I address, very briefly, several framing questions: Why the G20, why faith, why interfaith, why the G20 interfaith Forum, why South Africa, why the five issues we've selected, and where does this suggest that it takes us next?

Why focus on the G20? The answer is embedded in broader, looming questions today about global governance, power relationships, and the effectiveness of global institutions: a topic of endless speculation and concern. We have some specialists here who focus precisely on these issues, who can shed some light, but suffice it to say that within the overall universe of transnational institutions, the G20 has an important and rather special role. We are all very conscious of the critical importance but also the limitations on the United Nations system. And we hear too much about the G1 or the G2 and the polarization that stymies action, especially by the UN Security Council. We follow and appreciate the roles of the G7/G8, and of other groupings (the G7+, for example). It was in 1999 that the G20, a broader group than the G7/8, was established. The aim was to be more inclusive, to bring in more voices than simply those that were the world's most wealthy and the most powerful. The 2008/9 economic crisis and the global COVID-19 emergencies gave extra weight to the G20 as a crisis management body.

Thus since 1999, the G20 has met annually, initially simply as a group of individual leaders. In other words, it's a leadership summit. However, over the years, the G20's role and processes have moved increasingly from its initial mandate of simply crisis management, especially economic crisis action, to deal with most of the global agenda, that is, the priority issues that are of concern to leaders.

Some experts see the G20 as the most important, or perhaps the least flawed, or weak, among global institutions in 2025, though others point to erosion of impact with geopolitical polarization. The G20 clearly has special roles and capacities, a nimbleness and flexibility that other institutions lack. It does, nonetheless, sit among a whole series of other institutions and meetings, of the United Nations, regional meetings (ASEAN, SADAC, etc), the BRICS initiative, etc. However, the G20 is our clear mandate. And as everyone here knows who has seen the many signs about the G20 arriving at the airport, the 2025 summit of leaders will be in November in Johannesburg. So that is our immediate focus.

The next question is: why faith? You heard an echo in Suluk Sivarasa's video message and many others of the core argument: that religious actors and voices need to be part of the global governance systems, but too often are not. At some levels, the arguments seem quite obvious: the sheer size of religious communities, their historic and present powers, and their importance in people's lives. But at other levels, we know that engaging religious actors, especially vis a vis states, is infinitely complicated and sometimes contentious. In many respects, in today's global institutions, the roles of religion, despite their critical importance in so many ways, are simply not part of global governance processes. And, as we hear too often, if you're not at the table, you end up on the menu. Therefore, there has been a consistent, rather diverse set of efforts over the years to bring the best of the religious voices, and I emphasize the best of religious voices, into global discussions, whether it is about Gaza or Sudan, about climate change, about health, about education, about water supply, about energy, about AI, and so on. So we are very much part of that continuing effort to bring in a in a thoughtful, balanced, inclusive way, voices from religious and faith communities into the discussions and policy formation that represent global agendas.

There are an extraordinary array of institutions working to this end. I highlighted in my opening comments yesterday our reliance and focus on what we call "a network of networks". In other words, we build on some forty different organizations and alliances working on a wide array of topics. Many people represented here are part of those different networks, that include Religions for Peace, United Religions Initiative, World Council of Churches, ACT Alliance, International Network of Engaged Buddhists, the Global Network of Religions for Children, just to name a few. So that's the voice of faith "at the table", or the very different voices, which we heard from and about yesterday.

Appreciating the different voices is absolutely critical, whether it's at the African Union or the South African government, the United States government, etcetera., but it is also vital to trace the threads and core of common purpose (we call this strategic religious engagement). It's not easy, because these voices or the institutions we hear from have wide differences, from country to country and on specific topics. As an example of the challenges, part of G20 and other processes focus on gatherings and common discussions by ministers, or "ministerials". That's proved especially difficult in the case of religion. Some countries have powerful ministries of religion, while others have virtually no formal entity with continuing relationships, or even a hostile, over-secularized approach. That makes efforts to organize a religious ministerial parallel to, for example, those meeting about health or education, very difficult.

Our efforts are part of a complex community that has taken shape around the G20 process, notably as it has expanded from a focus on economic crisis to the far broader global agendas (well defined in the Sustainable Development Goals—SDGs). Very briefly put, they cover what are known as the five Ps: People, peace, prosperity,

planet, and partnerships. What has emerged is a community, some term it a constellation, of organizations and efforts, that involve ministerials, working groups, task forces, and what are called engagement groups. There are 13 engagement groups now, including for example, the B20 (business), C20 (civil society), Y20 (youth), W20 (women), T20 (think tanks), and so on. Each brings actors from different countries but especially G20 member countries together and they make proposals. The G20 Interfaith Forum is a part of this effort. It does not have formal status but operates in similar ways. An important innovation launched in 2024 in Brazil is a Social Summit immediately before the Leader Summit, that brings together all the civil society actors, thus both formal and informal engagement groups.

And why interfaith? Solidarity, of cooperation, of collaboration: we have heard those are ideas and words repeatedly from the start of these events. So that brings us to interfaith. It was stressed yesterday that we know from much experience that working together is more effective than working separately. We return to the Hans Kung/Parliament of World Religions framing that links peace to dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among religious communities: No peace without peace among religions. And there are many vital interreligious, interfaith, and multifaith efforts that work to those ends. Not everything will involve everyone, but inclusion and understanding are vital and the more we can identify common ground the more effective we will be. Renier Koegelenberg just gave us a wonderful, practical distillation of the power of interfaith when it works well, as it did during South Africa's transition from Apartheid. We saw during the Jubilee campaign in the year 2000, the power of faith to transform the dialogue about poor country debt. And our hope is that the interfaith voice, which you see reflected in two books on faith voices about hunger and food, and faith practical experience, that were part of your package, can help transform the contemporary debate about hunger and poverty, bringing a moral voice but also a practical conviction and paths together. We emphasize that all different religious traditions care about poverty and about hunger, as well as thirst and other aspects of vulnerability and inequality. Thus we are building on the many global Interfaith alliances, the global interfaith effort, or movement, to this end. It's about being inclusive and bringing together the best of the best in terms of moral force, but also of experience and passion and ideas, thus contributing to the global, multipartner effort.

This is a framework of the basic reasons and mandate of the G20 interfaith Forum and our work here in Cape Town.

Why the G20 Interfaith Forum? We are not by any means the world's largest interfaith organization nor are interreligious relationships our primary focus. We build on the work of interfaith organizations, which represent both the global movement and more local initiatives. More important, promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation is far less our purpose than crossing bridges and divides between religious and other communities. Interfaith work is about solidarity

and cooperation and building understanding, but that is not the G20 Interfaith Forum's primary end.

The G20 interfaith has an eleven year history. It was launched in 2014 during the Australian G20 presidency. Brian Adams, who is here, played an important role in that launch, organizing a meeting linked to the G20 Summit. It had a primarily academic flavor, and during the early years religious freedom was a particular focus. Increasingly, and particularly after the German presidency in 2017, we realized that if we wanted to be part of the G20 process, we needed to focus more sharply on the G20 agenda and process. Our G20 Interfaith agenda had to go beyond issues of concern primarily to religious communities, and we needed to have a clear policy focus. That has driven meetings and analytic work, dialogue, and advocacy ever since, in the course of meetings centered each year on the G20 host country and parallel work and discussions. Cole Durham in his introduction highlighted the core work of the organization and the continuing effort to enhance our reach, collaboration through a "network of networks", and our focus. Other partners are also deeply involved, including several foundations and some of the leading faith-inspired Non-governmental organizations (notably World Vision, Islamic Relief USA, and LDS Charities).

Apart from a core structure, a board, and an advisory council, a central feature of the G20 Interfaith Forum is that it works each year with a local committee from the host country. The forums are thus a joint effort, as is the case here, with a focus on the global agendas alongside a focus on the host country.



And why South Africa? A characteristic of the G20 is that the leadership rotates year by year to different member countries that are part of the G20. It has no secretariat, no permanent structures, no office. De facto leadership is provided, besides the host country which defines the core agenda, by what is called a troika, which includes the host from the previous year, the current host, and the host for the following year. Thus the current troika is Brazil (that's why you heard from Rodrigo Alves about highlights of Brazil's presidency in 2024), South Africa, president in 2025, and the United States in 2026 (we might call that a \$64 billion question in terms of how it will be handled). So that is why we're here in South Africa, looking to the November G20 Leaders Summit.

Through this year, both the local South African organizing committee and the G20 Interfaith Forum have organized a series of meetings which have been designed to focus on the main issues to look at, what we should recommend, and where we should be heading in the future. Meetings have included two meetings in Pretoria, one in Cape Town at Bishops court, an African Union focused conference in Addis Ababa, and gatherings in several other settings. All have led up to the Cape Town conference, with an eye also to linking to prior years' work and looking to the future. Thus we need here to focus on November 2025, but also to look to what will happen in 2026 and beyond.

And what should the G20 Interfaith Forum recommend? Around us here in the conference site, you see (amplifying the core theme of Ubuntu in Action) words and phrases that focus both on South Africa's priorities (solidarity, equality, sustainability), and the five focus areas defined by the G20 Interfaith Forum community – food security, refugees, action on international finance, disaster preparedness, and education linked to social cohesion. The G20 Interfaith alliance (justly termed an alliance), has aimed to focus on a series of issues where there is consensus, where there is solidarity, where we see a direction for action, and which relate both to core religious areas of care and priority and to the specific G20 agendas set out by the host country government.

The issues we highlight focus on the current, immediate priorities as set out by the host government each year and on continuing concerns for policy action. The G20 Interfaith alliance draws on the considerable thought and analysis by network members on the issues, and aims to present practical, meaningful recommendations to the sherpas (as the different country officials who support the heads of state and the overall process are known). Ideally there are working groups drawn from different communities and countries who delve into the issues, and a review process that provides feedback and makes the difficult call on which topics should be the annual focus. The Cape Town meeting priority issues thus reflect considerable discussion among partners as well as with South African officials. Our central focus on hunger and poverty reflects both a central priority for many religious communities, the urgency of the current moment with grave famine

challenges before us, and the launch of the Global Alliance Against Hunger, allowing us to focus on the vital importance of faith as an integral, central part of the global partnership.

There is considerable continuity from previous years, notably Brazil and India. We aim to build year after year on partnerships and ideas (the focus on human trafficking is an example of a topic that has been a focus over several years). We focused a lot on COVID measures and health more broadly during the COVID pandemic. We address various issues year after year, including racism, a consistent issue, and what religious communities can do about corruption. Peace is not the priority nor the focus of the G20 itself, but inevitably the conflicts in the world cannot be avoided by leaders or by the G20 Interfaith Forum. Work for peace and its links to development and humanitarian action, and underlying geopolitical issues, are part of the G20 ethos, part of the discussion.

But for this year, 2025, we see two imperatives: to focus on a limited number of issues (no more than five, the fingers of one hand), and, as far as possible, to link them (in solidarity) to the work of other engagement groups and, of course, to the South African government priorities. The result of discussions and an emerging consensus, you see reflected the five centerpiece issues that are highlighted throughout the conference. We hope over these days to sharpen ideas in each of those areas, building on prior work, and looking to both the Social and the Leader summits in November.

But the theme that we hope echoes most powerfully is the need for the G20 leaders never to forget those who are left behind, in the spirit of Ubuntu, in the spirit of South Africa, of Mandela, of Mandela and Desmond Tutu, whose leadership and prophetic voice we recall so often. That imperative should be at the center of their agenda and their attention, as well as ours. That's the message that we're trying to sharpen as we advance and move forward.



Sunday, August 10

ACWAY G20 Interfaith Youth Forum

The ACWAY Forum opened with a warm welcome from Jabari Khalid Smith, who framed the gathering through the lens of Ubuntu—"I am because we are." The program's goals were introduced as a collaborative journey of learning, advocacy, and impact. Speakers included Liliya Khasanova (ACWAY Director), Uzair Ben-Ebrahim (Forum Manager), Federico Kähnlein (Stirling Foundation), and Katherine Marshall (IF20), each emphasizing the importance of co-creating a space rooted in shared values and mutual respect.

Building Community Agreements

To set the tone for the week, participants engaged in activities to co-create community agreements. These agreements were designed to foster trust, inclusion, and collective purpose. Moderator Vlad Artiukhov guided the group in embracing Ubuntu through dialogue, connection, and a commitment to holding space for one another.

Charter for Compassion: Compassion as Action

Led by Babalwa Ngcongolo of the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative, the session on the Charter for Compassion emphasized that "compassion is something you do." Participants explored how compassion is not just a feeling but a principle of action rooted in empathy and justice. Karen Armstrong, founder of the Charter, was quoted: "Compassion is a principle of action rooted in empathy and a commitment to alleviate suffering, not just a feeling." The discussion included the Twelve Steps for a Compassionate Life, which encourages mindfulness, humility, and intentional awareness. Participants were reminded that brevity is a principle of inclusion and that compromise of principle is abandonment of principle.

Ubuntu in Action: Intersectionality and Inclusion

In a dynamic session moderated by Rodge Lelis, presenters shared real-world practices that bring values like dignity and solidarity to life. Raquel Bennet, a gender and race specialist from Brazil, spoke about intersectionality and the importance of listening to marginalized voices. She emphasized that "Ubuntu reminds us that our liberation is collective," and that gender justice must be tied to social justice. The Interfaith Development Goals (IDGs) were introduced as a framework to supplement the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), pushing for inclusive and values-driven change.

Advocacy Through Action: A Decade of Impact

Moderated by Sara Rahim, this panel showcased a decade of interfaith youth action led by ACWAY and South African partners. Panelists Jabari Smith, Uzair Ben-Ebrahim, and Jyuri Michino shared stories of community transformation and highlighted best practices. The IDGs were presented as a guiding framework for sustainable advocacy and inclusive development.

Innovation Studio: Designing Interfaith Projects

Facilitated by Rodge Lelis, Vlad Artiukhov, and Azizah Mutik, the Innovation Studio invited ACWAY Fellows to begin designing their own interfaith initiatives. This hands-on session encouraged collaboration and creativity, laying the foundation for real-world impact beyond the Forum.

Preparing with Purpose: G20 Engagement

Jyuri Michino led a session preparing participants for the G20 Interfaith Forum. Fellows reviewed the schedule, refined their pitches, and learned how to apply the IDGs to their projects and conversations. The emphasis was on amplifying youth voices and making meaningful contributions throughout the week.

Advocacy Tools: Local and Global Influence

Jessica Roland, representing the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, introduced strategies for both in-person and digital advocacy. Participants explored how to influence change through dialogue and online organizing, equipping them to continue their work long after the Forum concludes.



Monday, August 11

Opening

The Forum's MC's, Judith Mahlangu and Sandile Hlayisi, opened the event by introducing Prof. Luka David Mosoma who is Former Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa and Chairperson for the IF20 local organizing committee. Prof. Mosoma opened the event by welcoming the attendees to South Africa.

Professor Mosoma's Opening Remarks

The world today is grappling with a host of intractable challenges—social, environmental, spiritual, and structural. This conference has been convened as a space to confront these issues head-on, offering both diagnostic analysis and actionable solutions. It is not merely a gathering of ideas, but a call to collective responsibility and courageous leadership.

This year's theme invites participants to imagine what the world might look like if it were woven together and sustained through ethical, inclusive, and spiritually grounded practices. Within this tapestry of diverse faith traditions, attendees are asked to reflect on how the core tenets of their beliefs can serve as catalysts for meaningful change. The aim is to confront entrenched systems and structures of injustice, especially within existential contexts that threaten human dignity and planetary well-being.

Interfaith collaboration is presented as a powerful force for transformation—especially when guided by visionary leaders. The local organizing committee has emphasized the need to act decisively and leave a lasting mark in the annals of history. This is a moment to challenge complacency and radically reimagine a future rooted in justice, compassion, and shared humanity.

Interfaith Prayers

A choir sang the South Africa National Anthem and the African Union Anthem, after which faith leaders from a variety of religious traditions expressed prayers of peace and comfort:

- President Derrick Sibisi (African Religions and Spirituality) The Revelation Spiritual Home
- Mr Mlingani Poswayo (Bahai) National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahà'i South Africa
- Mr Cecil Platjie (Bhuddist) Soka Gakkai International
- Dr. Nioma Venter (Christian) General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church
- Moulana Abdul Khaliq Allie (Islam) United Ulama Council of South Africa
- Rabbi Pini Hecht (Jewish) Rabbi of Marias Congregation
- Guru Krishna (Hindu) Aim Spiritual Center

- Advocate Sipho Mantula (Rastafari) Rastafari Culture and Spirituality
- Shree Jagdev Gianjii (Sikh) Sikh Gurudwara of SA in Cape Town

Remarks by President W. Cole Durham Jr.

The IF20's president, W. Cole Durham Jr. was unable to attend the Forum because of health reasons, but Pres. Durham did send a video message:

It is with mixed feelings that I welcome participants to the G20 Interfaith Forum this year, since a recent back operation prevents me from traveling and attending in person. I have spent much of the last year working on preparations for this Forum and firmly believe that it will be the best and most impactful Forum we have organized in the decade we have been working on this process. This event could not take place without countless hours expended by numerous local and international colleagues who each deserve profound personal thanks that will have to be conveyed separately, in view of time.

G20 History and South Africa's G20 Leadership

Most people hear briefly about G20 activities each year in headlines about the recurring annual G20 Summits, but often people don't fully realize the significance of these events. The annual summits bring together leaders of the nineteen largest economies on earth, plus the European Union, and since 2023, the African Union. This means that the G20 represents a total of ninety-six countries, representing over 85% of global GDP, 75% of international trade, and approximately two-thirds of the world's population. Because of its importance, many other countries are involved as guests of G20 proceedings, so its influence extends even further. We had the opportunity to join with many others two years ago in recommending that the African Union become a member of the G20, and we are delighted to join in the process this year in South Africa, which has taken the opportunity of its presidency to give a special African focus to this year's proceedings. We are particularly grateful to South Africa's G20 leadership for having been welcomed as a stakeholder in the process.

Focusing on Key Policy Issues

For much of its history, the G20 has focused particularly on economic issues, but over the past decade, as each successive G20 host country chooses priorities for its presidency year, there has been an increasing focus on a range of issues falling within the scope of the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs), including such key areas as ending poverty, ending hunger and achieving food security, promoting good health and well-being, quality education, empowerment of women and girls, environmental advances on multiple fronts, including addressing climate change, decent work for all, reducing inequality, advancing good governance, and making cities and other human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

The G20 Interfaith Forum Association seeks to add the strength of diverse religious voices to the process of framing key policies and actions starting at the G20 level

and penetrating down to local communities. Religious communities have been addressing concerns such as those identified by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for longer than there have been nation states. These concerns have long been central to the deep concerns of religious communities, and these communities bring depth of experience, insight, practical contacts, and expertise that can add major synergies to efforts to achieve the SDGs. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how these objectives can be achieved without optimizing religious partnerships.

G20 Interfaith Forum in South Africa 2025

This year's program, as evidenced by the major plenary sessions, prioritizes key impact areas. The first addresses Action Imperatives and Realities of Finance and Debt. The second highlights Action on Hunger and Poverty. The third adds the crucial focus on Education and Human Development Imperatives. The fourth stresses Religious Responsibilities and Action Regarding Sustainability. And the Fifth emphasizes the importance of Leaving No One Behind—focussing in particular on Vulnerable Communities. In each case, plenary sessions are followed by concurrent sessions that explore the major themes in greater depth. Special care has been taken this year to optimize participation in each session and to track possibilities for further engagement. A new feature that has been added this year is a major project that can involve all participants in preparing thousands of meals that can be shared. In general, a major aim has been to make sure that we not only come together to hold important discussions, but that we find ways to have genuine impact.

One of the great strengths of the G20 Interfaith organization is that it exemplifies a unique type of multifaith effort. It provides a platform that brings experts together from widely differing religious traditions and professional backgrounds who understand the need to identify priority religious concerns that can become the basis for meaningful common efforts. My hope and prayer as we begin this Forum is that it will open important practical vistas giving us all a richer sense of how we can join together to have shared impact.





IF20 Vice President Katherine Marshall's Opening Remarks

In one of the most difficult moments in recent history—where even compassion and empathy seem strained—networks and NGOs are being called to build upon the extraordinary work already underway. This is not a time for hesitation, but for deepened commitment and bold collaboration.

There is a collective hope to discover a Kairos moment: a sacred window of opportunity marked by grace, urgency, and prophetic clarity. It is a call to bring forward voices that speak truth to power and illuminate a path toward justice and renewal. The vision is clear—a world without poverty is not just a dream, but a potential within reach if we act with courage and unity.

This movement is grounded in hope and conviction. It affirms that we can do better, and that through shared action and ethical leadership, we can shape a future that honors the dignity of all people and the sacredness of life itself.

Address by H.E. Adama Dieng. Special Adviser to the Muslim Council of Elders

This moment demands a renewed focus on ethical leadership and shared action. As global crises intensify, faith leaders and communities are called to offer moral frameworks that guide our collective journey toward justice and healing. The urgency of the hour cannot be overstated—silence and inaction risk becoming a lifelong shame as the world bleeds from unchecked violence and systemic injustice.

A clear and courageous condemnation of the Israeli occupation was voiced, alongside a broader call to uphold the sanctity of life and recognize the suffering of all people. The breakdown of meaningful communication has rendered language powerless, collapsing into futility. In this vacuum, prophetic clarity is needed—not performative religiosity, but genuine accountability.

This is a test of our shared humanity, and by many measures, we are failing. The time for pretense is over. We must act with conviction, humility, and urgency to restore dignity, confront injustice, and reclaim the moral voice of our time.

Keynote Address by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town

After an introduction by Katherine Marshall, Archbishop Makgoba shared his address:

It is a great privilege to welcome you in one of the most beautiful cities of the world to this important international Interfaith Forum in the year of South Africa's G20 leadership.

The importance of the G20 summits as a global forum has been underlined by their response to the 2008 global financial crisis, the Covid 19 pandemic, and the broadening of their agenda to include the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The G20 Interfaith Forum was launched in 2014 during the summit in Australia. With 84% of the world's population affiliated with a religious faith, this forum can reflect, influence and shape the values and actions of people in our world. It is therefore an indispensable voice in the global debate.

The Forum draws on the global work of many faith communities that address the challenges and priorities of global agendas. Although it is not part of the formal "constellation" of engagement groups around the G20, it partners and works closely with several of the formal groups, such as the C20 (civil society) and T20 (think tank) meetings.¹

However, the distinctive contribution of the religious sector, of faith communities, is not based on our numbers but rather on our core values which shape our focus and actions. In South Africa, in continuity with last year's theme of "leaving no one behind," we focus on the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. In our Christian tradition, we rely on the passage in John's Gospel (10:10), where the teacher we follow says, "I have come that you may have abundant life" – that means we aspire to an abundant life really for all, not only for those with powerful connections in politics or business.

It is our shared responsibility to remind a world which is in war and turmoil that – regardless of geopolitical alliances or the divides between North and South, between the rich and the poor, between the powerful or and powerless – we have a shared origin and a common destiny: we are all part of God's creation and created by God to love and serve one another. We live in a world that we have not created, and for a very short time. We are only stewards of God's creation. The global climate crisis and the AIDS and Covid-19 pandemics underlined our fundamental connectedness, and highlighted the imperative that we must seek global solutions for health challenges, poverty and food insecurity, and promote economic development for all.

(1) Katherine Marshall, Vice President G20 Interfaith Association: Brasilia: Leave No one Behind. The G20 Interfaith Forum – our journey. August 20, 2024

South Africa's G20 Presidency Focus²

South African government has located its Presidency of the G20 this year in a world, and I quote, that "is facing a series of overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises, including climate change, underdevelopment, inequality, poverty, hunger, unemployment, technological changes and geopolitical instability ". And this is at a time when there are only five years to go before the deadline to reach the UN's the Sustainable Development Goals³.

Although our faith is always fundamentally about more than any developmental agenda, more than any current political or economic ideology, we support the SDGs because we are convinced that they are in line with God's vision for us and our world.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has highlighted that only 12% of the SDG targets are currently on track to being met. About half of the goals call for more substantial progress if they are to be reached, and more than 30% have either stalled or been reversed. Only a fundamental shift in approach and accelerated implementation will be able to achieve them.

In this context South Africa's Presidency has identified inequality as one of the key causes of the lack of progress. Again, I quote: "Inequality poses a significant threat to global economic growth, development, and stability, as the disparities in wealth and development within and between countries are both unjust and unsustainable. Inequality and its deleterious consequences are especially evident in the Global South."

It further highlights the "lack of predictable and sustainable financing for development" which is exacerbated by the high levels of sovereign debt, and the conflict between developmental programmes and the servicing of debt.⁴

South Africa has declared that it aims, and again I quote, "to address these urgent challenges by building partnerships across all sectors of society, acting in the interests of our shared humanity. In the spirit of Ubuntu, we recognise that individual nations cannot thrive in isolation. Countries that attempt to prosper alone amid widespread poverty and underdevelopment contradict the essence of Ubuntu and our collective humanity. This understanding reflects the transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, which are dedicated to ensuring that no one is left behind."⁵

(2) <https://g20.org/g20-south-africa/g20-presidency/>

(3) Mr Antonio Guterres, the Special Edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Progress Report on 25 April 2023; <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/>

(4) <https://g20.org/g20-south-africa/g20-presidency/>

(5) Ibid

South Africa has embraced the theme "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability" to tackle the multiple global challenges we are facing: "Through solidarity," we say, "we can create an inclusive future centred on people. Solidarity will allow us to develop our societies in a way that reflects our shared humanity. In our interconnected world, the challenges faced by one nation impact all nations."

Further "by promoting equality, we strive to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities for all individuals and nations, regardless of their economic status, gender, race, geographic location or any other characteristic."

And finally, Sustainability involves meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Furthermore, looking at the process of how we achieve our goals, our government highlights how decision-making has traditionally worked best in Africa. It says: "Guided by the spirit of Ubuntu, decision-making and governance in traditional African societies has, in the main, operated by way of consensus for what is in the best interest of all."⁶



South Africa IF20 Focus Points

In this year's deliberations, we have inherited Brazil's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty declaration. This is a unique opportunity for us to lead by example. As religious leaders, we must ensure that our governments translate this international commitment into concrete policies and programs that address the food insecurity crisis facing millions of people world-wide.⁷ At an IF20 webinar on the 10th of July this year—a seminar which focussed on the role of Inter-religious actors in addressing Hunger and Poverty, Renier Koegelenberg asked:

Why are people (especially children) dying of hunger globally, and in South Africa? How do we deal with this moral scandal, when:

- There are enough funding and resources available to prevent it.
- There is enough excellent research being done to address this scandal by excellent units at universities and NGOs.
- There are enough examples and case studies of faith-based, NGO and Business networks that successfully address food security and holistic support to vulnerable families – that can be scaled up.⁸

Turning to why, having identified that hunger can be overcome, we have not done it, we need to ask, as Renier did:

- Is it not simply a question of priorities; a lack of political will, and often the wrong/bad allocation of national resources

If our values shape our priorities, we cannot tolerate this scandal.

In a world focused on “wealth creation” and “wealth management” (mostly for a selected few), we as faith leaders must focus on our common humanity, and abundant life for all.

At a recent colloquium I co-hosted in Cape Town,⁹ Katherine Marshall summarized the priority areas of focus as follows: ¹⁰

1.1 Food security and poverty. Food security, with its strong links to addressing poverty and inequality, is a leading issue, driving the Global Alliance launched by

(6) Ibid

(7) Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025,

(8) See IF 20 webinar: The role of Inter-religious actors in addressing Hunger and Poverty, 10 July 2025; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8Mf7xo8m9E>

(9) 9 NCLC and IF20 colloquium, 12-13 June 2025: Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond.

(10) Katherine Marshall, “G20 Interfaith Association meeting in Cape Town: Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities, August 10-14, 2025, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025,

the G20 in Brazil and inspiring both South Africa and the African Union. The topic extends from the very local to the very global. IF20 builds on global faith inspired efforts to address hunger; examples include the World Council of Churches, the Caritas organizations, PaRD (International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development), World Vision, and countless others.

In some of the IF20 publications available, there are numerous examples of international, regional and local projects initiated by faith leaders and faith communities.

- 1.2 *Economic and Financial Action*. Fiscal and debt crises confront many countries, particularly in Africa, and hinder poverty alleviation and climate action, as well as government capacities to provide basic services like education, health care, water supply, disaster response, and job creation. Religious communities link economic and financial issues to equity and thriving, notably through their focus on 2025 as a Jubilee year.
- 1.3 *Addressing interreligious tensions*. This can be done through education and enhancing understanding of religious matters. The foundational Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) program and Arigatou International's Ethics Education and Learning to Live Together programmes offer potential to strengthen regional and global approaches and address issues of violence and conflict linked to religious actors. Many religious groups work to address gender-based violence and action to support women, children, and families—for example, their physical and mental health, inequalities, and fair, equitable treatment.
- 1.4 *Migration and refugee movements, human trafficking, and modern slavery* present major challenges to leaders and to communities, with distinctive relevance for Africa. IF20's continuing work highlights extensive religious teaching and practices supporting policies and action to support those on the move, especially those who are most vulnerable. Fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and calls for religious advocacy for compassion and care. IF20's longstanding focus on the urgent need for multinational action on human trafficking will underpin 2025 advocacy.
- 1.5 *Disaster prevention, response, recovery*. Active religious involvement, as first responders, at regional and global levels and through policy and programmatic analysis, play vital roles. Disaster relief is closely tied to widely varied environmental challenges, including rainforest destruction and climate movements/migration, underlining the needed focus on prevention, building resilience, and meaningful capacities to respond.

As South Africans, our appeal is to our own President, Cyril Ramaphosa, and other government leaders also to prioritize these agenda points.

The Ubuntu Challenge: Meaningful Partnerships

At our recent Cape Town Colloquium, Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, President of the South African Council of Churches, emphasized that "Food security is not just about calories; it's about ubuntu, our interconnected humanity. When children die of malnutrition while food rots in warehouses, when fertile land lies barren while people queue for grants, and when communities that once fed themselves now depend on handouts, our ubuntu is broken..."

Again, the precepts of Ubuntu offer a solution. When government, business, faith communities, and citizens work together with mutual respect and shared responsibility, when we treat people as agents rather than objects, and when we build systems that empower rather than create dependency, then we restore not just food security, but human dignity."¹¹

Therefore, our appeal should be:

Firstly, to our governments: Use the G20 platform to champion not just emergency relief, but sustainable food systems that empower people. Learn from Brazil's success but adapt solutions to our African context. Part of this must include providing enough budgetary allocations for agriculture in national budgets.

Address the critical issue of partnership between government and civil society. A failure to work together undermines the effectiveness of social development programmes, including food security initiatives. Too often, our government adopts an approach of wanting to "do it alone," systematically excluding churches and faith communities from programme implementation, opting for isolation over collaboration.

Faith communities have the organizational structure and unwavering commitment to provide social services and advance the development that governments desperately need. We are present in every corner of our country—in cities and in the most remote rural areas where government services barely reach. More importantly, we have deep personal connections with communities that most government officials cannot replicate. Instead of viewing faith communities as competitors or obstacles, governments should provide funding and support to leverage our existing infrastructure and community trust.

Secondly, our appeal should be to Business Leaders: It is time to go beyond just making donations; let us focus on making real investments. Partner with our communities to help build local capacity and create sustainable livelihoods. There are numerous partnerships between Business and NGOs, between Business and Faith-Based Community Development Programmes: the work of the CDDC Trust

(11) Katherine Marshall, Vice President G20 Interfaith Association: Brasilia: Leave No one Behind. The G20 Interfaith Forum – our journey. August 20, 2024

and Kumba Iron Ore mine in our Northern Cape mining region – focussing on food security and support to vulnerable families, are good examples.

Thirdly, let us appeal to our own Faith Communities: We have a vital role to play in shifting from dependency to empowerment. Our moral authority comes with a practical responsibility to lead this change.

Fourthly, an appeal to Our People: It is time to reclaim your dignity as producers, not just consumers. The land that once sustained our ancestors can nourish us again.

As we join the G20 process and work on our national development agenda, let us remember that our success will not be measured by the size of our grants or how efficiently we deliver services. Instead, it will be about whether our children can hold their heads high, knowing they live in communities that produce, create, and sustain themselves.

The choice is in our hands. We can either continue the cycle of dependency or choose the more challenging but dignifying path of empowerment. Our people are ready for this change.

The real question is: Are we, as Church and faith leaders, prepared to lead them there?

Conclusion

If the world fails to achieve the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals – which seems almost certain right now, it will not be due to the lack of numerous and costly high-level Governmental summits, or of high-level ministerial meetings, different tracks, task forces, working groups, and engagement groups. Nor will it be for the lack of experts and technical advisors. It will be a result of the lack of commitment to set the correct priorities and to build meaningful partnerships.

The world does not only need a new technical “developmental paradigm” to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. It rather needs a new “heart”: a correction of priorities based on values, on ethical, servant leadership – not only to “tolerate” your neighbour, but to love your neighbour as you love yourself; caring for our environment, caring for future generations, so that they too can prosper! This is real stewardship, ethical leadership. The reformer Martin Luther defined sin as “being bent on your own personal needs,” whereas real freedom means to serve the needs of others.

As the first country in the “Global South” to host the G20, bringing North and South, East and West agendas together, we are challenged to transcend historic ideological differences and legacies to advance real democracy and human dignity.¹²

(12) See our NCLC Bishopscourt Statement, 13 June 2025, Cape Town: Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond.

Especially in the Global South we should not be hypocritical. We cannot expect change only from the rich Global North; we need to be self-critical about conditions and priorities within our own countries and regions. Our political elites and those close to power live in a luxury bubble of affluence, absorbing national resources, while most of their people, especially children and women, struggle to survive, to feed themselves, to find jobs.

It is our moral duty to speak out against hate, racism, the instrumentalization of different faiths for political reasons and nationalist ideologies that exclude others – and channel our energy and wisdom to life-giving programmes that foster the dignity and abundant life of all.¹³

In our current global context, amidst increased geo-global political tensions and wars raging in Ukraine and Russia, the Middle East, Sudan and other parts of Africa, more and more resources are being channelled into weapons production and security arrangements, this at the expense of health and social programmes.

Therefore, our plea as faith leaders to global leaders is to “Put People First” – pump resources into “life-enhancing programmes” and strengthen peace-making efforts to stop violent conflicts.¹⁴

Beyond our moral role as faith leaders lies the reality that our faith networks are some of the most trusted, efficient partners that reach all people at grassroots level. That is why we appeal to political and business leaders, to work and partner with us – after all, we are all instruments in God’s hands.

Our mission, as Katherine Marshall told us, is “to highlight the common themes, and above all to keep a laser focus on the problems of the most vulnerable, particularly children, women, refugees, the hungry, and too many other groups.”¹⁵

Our faith therefore demands of us that worship should drive us from our knees, and send us out from our churches, our mosques and our temples to engage the world and ensure that our Creator’s intention is fulfilled.¹⁶

May our Creator bless this gathering, and all those gathered. Once again, welcome to Cape Town.

(13) See my recent message to G20 Interfaith/PaRD meeting in Brasilia Forum, 22 August 2024,

(14) Makgoba UNAIDS virtual address, UNAIDS at AIDS2024, the 25th International AIDS Conference, Munich, 20 July 2024

(15) Katherine Marshall, Bishops court, 12 June 2025

(16) See my address to Communities of Faith Breakfast: building Partnerships for a One-Community Response to HIV, Prioritizing Children in the HIV Response, hosted by UNAIDS, Washington.

Religious Leaders Discussing Actions on G20 Priority Challenges

Faith, Justice, and Shared Responsibility in a Fractured World

Gordon Simango, Director, Liaison Office of the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) emphasized the need to prioritize common ground over national interests, invoking the metaphor of a bird flying on two wings—unity and justice. Speakers called for restraint in speech that incites division and urged Ubuntu to guide our moral compass. Climate change was framed as a moral issue requiring deep ethical commitment, alongside campaigns for Earth's welfare, fair trade, and debt relief. Economic systems that fail to sustain life must be challenged, and immigration policies must uphold human dignity, focusing on the protection of people rather than borders. Reparative justice was demanded for the enduring legacies of slavery, apartheid, and genocide.

Wendy Kahn, National Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies highlighted Ubuntu's call for interconnectivity and harmony, redefining heroism as the ability to turn enemies into friends. She reminded us that while we have many faiths, we share only one world.

Bishop Sipuka, Pres. Of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) mentioned that Catholic voices, including Pope Francis, spoke out on Gaza, stressing that hunger is an indignity and food security a moral imperative. Prayer alone is insufficient—investment in agriculture and rural development is essential. The Church was urged to use its vast land holdings to produce food and empower communities beyond charity.



Elder Thierry K. Mutombo, a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints showcased the Church's global humanitarian outreach, including its tradition of fasting and service. With \$1.45 billion raised in 2024 and over 6.6 million volunteer hours, the focus was on outcomes over output, and specificity over generality.

From the Baha'i perspective, *Bani Dugal*, Principal Representative for the Baha'i International Community pointed out that the Earth was affirmed as one country and humanity its citizens. A profound transformation of the modern world was called for, with religion seen as a force to awaken the individual and promote social cohesion.

Closing reflections from the moderator challenged all present: we know justice, but are we just? We know love, but do we love? We know peace—yet can we truly make peace? The call was clear: to move from knowing to doing.

Call to Action: Michael-Daniel Bam, Cape Town Junior Executive Mayor

The final opening session speaker was Michael-Daniel Bam, Cape Town Junior Executive Mayor, who left all Forum attendees with a strong call to action:

Honoured Ministers, respected religious and political leaders, distinguished professors, honoured guests, and fellow changemakers, Good morning. Assalamualaikum. Shalom. Namaste. Peace be with you all.

My name is Michael-Daniel Bam. It's an honour to be here today, not only as the Junior Mayor of Cape Town, but as someone representing South Africa's youth. We meet here today because we believe that a better world is still possible. A world where faith becomes a bridge, not a barrier. A world where difference is met with curiosity, not hostility. A world where peace is more than the absence of war - it is the presence of justice, dignity, and understanding.

Teach Peace

If we want that world, we must begin by teaching peace - not only in conferences, not only in treaties, but in our homes, our schools, and most importantly, our places of worship. Faith was never meant to be a tool for division. At its heart, every faith calls us to compassion, to mercy, to care for the stranger. If we allow those lessons to guide us, we will dismantle prejudice before it becomes hatred, and hatred before it becomes violence.

Teach Youth

But it is not enough to speak of the future while neglecting those who will live it. We need more youth education - not just in mathematics or science, but in respect, empathy, and interfaith understanding.

We must teach young people that having different beliefs does not mean one must be feared, shunned, or silenced. We are told that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow - but if we truly want tomorrow to be better than today, we must equip the youth to lead in peace today.

Khalil Gibran, in *The Prophet*, reminds us:

"He who wears his morality but as his best garment, were better naked."

Morality is not something to put on when the cameras are watching or when it serves our interests. It must be lived daily - even, and especially, when it costs us something.

And yet, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: we have failed at keeping peace and living in unity. Look at Gaza, where children grow up knowing the sound of sirens better than the sound of laughter. Look at Nigeria, where sectarian tensions fuel cycles of revenge. Look at Myanmar, where entire communities are displaced because of the way they pray.

So, we must ask ourselves:

If our faith does not lead to peace, what is it leading to?

If our religious education does not teach respect, what is it teaching?

If our morality is not lived, is it morality at all?

A Commitment to Peace

The answers to these questions will not come from one speech or one conference. They will come from a commitment - shared across nations, faiths, and generations - to embed peace into the very fabric of our societies.

My call to you today is simple, but urgent: let us teach peace as a central part of faith. Let us make morality a way of life, not a performance. Let us give our young people the wisdom and the courage to see difference not as a threat, but as a gift.

If we do this, we will raise a generation who will not inherit our conflicts, but our hopes. A generation who will not need to gather in rooms like this to talk about peace, because they will be living it every day.

So today, I challenge each of us - leaders, educators, faith communities - to carry this vision forward. Let us be the generation that transforms words into action, that replaces fear with understanding, and that turns divisions into unity.

Because peace is not just a distant dream - it is a responsibility. A responsibility we all share, and a legacy we must build together.

Thank you for your commitment, your courage, and your belief that a better world is still possible.



Plenary 1 – Action Imperatives and Realities of Finance and Debt

The Urgency of Inclusion

Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro, Board Chair of the United World Colleges in Kenya, opened the panel with a powerful reminder: “Leave no one behind is not a joke—it is real.” She highlighted the disconnect between Africa’s abundant resources and the persistent lack of opportunity for its youth. Despite 65% of the continent’s land being arable and rich in minerals, the benefits rarely reach the people. Kanyoro urged participants to return to their communities with a renewed focus on tax justice and civic engagement.

A Continent in Crisis

Eric LeCompte, Executive Director of Jubilee USA painted a stark picture of Africa’s development challenges. “The Sustainable Development Goals are completely out of reach,” he said, citing compounding crises in food, fuel, health, and poverty. One in five children in Sub-Saharan Africa still dies from preventable diseases, while governments spend two-thirds of their revenue servicing debt rather than investing in social services.

LeCompte proposed a return to the biblical Jubilee model: “God created a rich and abundant world... we are closest to the Creator when we share the resources God gave us.” He called for systemic reforms including debt relief, innovative aid, and an international bankruptcy process.

Accountability and Corruption

Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, president of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) raised a critical concern: “What guarantee do we have that debt relief will reach the poor rather than the corrupt?” He cited South Africa’s loss of one trillion rand to corruption and proposed an Accountability Covenant. This would include transparency, civil society oversight, and phased implementation to ensure that debt cancellation truly benefits the people. Faith leaders, he argued, must be central to this monitoring process.

Mobilizing Moral Advocacy

Lord Rev. Dr. Russell Rook OBE, House of Lords, United Kingdom, emphasized the power of moral persuasion. Recalling Gordon Brown’s response to a child’s postcard—“Chancellor, please drop the debt. Love, Mum”—he urged faith

communities to make their voices heard in parliament. "My job is to open the door for faith leaders," he said, calling for bottom-up change and systemic reform.

Challenging Global Financial Injustice

Fr. Charles Chulufya, director of Jesuit Conference of Africa in justice and ecology, addressed the structural injustices embedded in global finance. "No country should be forced to transfer dollars to London while its citizens go without medicine," he said, citing Kenya's \$10 billion debt payments versus \$800 million for healthcare. He called for dismantling the IMF's resistance to debt forgiveness and reforming tax systems that enable \$88 billion in annual evasion—enough to eradicate poverty.

Faith and Internal Transformation

Elder Adeyinka Ojediran, general authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, challenged faith leaders to reflect on their moral authority. "By the principles and doctrines we teach, how can we help change people from within?" he asked. With extreme poverty projected to concentrate in Sub-Saharan Africa, he emphasized the need for internal transformation to drive external impact.

Sustainable Solutions and Climate Action

Dr. Esben Lunde Larsen, senior health specialist at the World Bank, connected sustainable development to technological innovation. Drawing on Denmark's post-WWII agricultural reforms, he argued that "global food production is closely tied to advances in technology." He urged investment in solar power, irrigation, and efficient farming practices, reminding participants: "Each of you that votes is government."

Final Reflections and Commitments

As the panel closed, speakers shared their personal takeaways:

- Eric LeCompte: Organize for debt relief.
- Bishop Sipuka: Educate against corruption.
- Rev. Rook: Challenge systemic banking issues.
- Fr. Charlie Chulufya: Move hearts through shared struggle.
- Elder Ojediran: Appeal to policymakers' conscience.
- Dr. Larsen: Serve locally, not just globally.

Dr. Kanyoro's final call echoed throughout: "Take the opportunity to speak with political leaders, build community, and do something."

Spotlight: Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool

Courage Amidst Conflict & Vulnerability

Faith Rising to the Occasion!

Thank you, very much, and Good Afternoon, Assalamu Alaikum, Molweni, and all the other languages that are represented here! As a resident of Cape Town, to all my friends who have come from all over the globe, most particularly those we intersected with in the United States and who I met last year in Brazil at the G20 Interfaith Forum 2024: Welcome to Cape Town. I hope you're going to find it everything that we had promised it to be.

Last year in Brazil at the IF20, I spoke about how faith communities must move from the moral clarity that religions often have, to finding the moral courage to do what that clarity demands once it pierces our conscience. The question is: what is courage and how do we manifest it in a world of conflict and vulnerability?

Emmanuel Kant, for me, understood courage best when, for example, he posits that the opposite of short sightedness is not perfect sight; the opposite of short sightedness is long sightedness, and that perfect sight is the perfect middle between the two. In that same vein, courage is not the opposite of cowardice; recklessness is the opposite of cowardice. Courage is the perfect middle, because it has the ability to call out the cowards and bring them to action in a time of danger, and at the same time to have the courage to diminish excessiveness, diminish extremes, diminish recklessness, and bring those who peddle them to the middle. So, our courage means our ability to speak to both sides of the equation: to those who are morally cowards and ultra-cautious in the face of power where they should be standing up, and those who are morally reckless, excessive, and extreme when they should be measured and balanced.

Therefore, what we need as moral courage is the ability to speak to both sides of the equation.

That's the spirit in which we have invited you to Cape Town, South Africa, with the thematic coherence of Ubuntu. You have heard all the definitions: I am because you are; we are people through other people; we are interdependent; we have a common humanity! Ubuntu, in a very real way, is the soft power that South Africa presents in a hard world. It reflects the idea that human beings are interdependent despite the differences of race, despite their differences of language, despite the differences of religion, and every other difference; that we are interdependent and that therefore our humanity is what defines us, and our humanity is what drives us, and binds us together.

But Ubuntu has a hard edge, because it is founded also in the words also of the scripture, that says we are each other's keepers. We have a responsibility to each other, we are accountable to each other, and we call each other to account. And that is the art of speaking the truth, to both sides of the equation.

Therefore, when we have our demons as Muslims (like those who appropriate our faith for extremism), on the one side of the equation, we need to call them out. And when you have your demons on either side of that equation, you have the accountability under Ubuntu to call them out, so that the world finds its equilibrium, and religion stands as a religion of that equilibrium, not the religion of an ideology.

Inspired by the Quran, in the dark days of Apartheid, that moral clarity declared that 'Allah, God, has shown us the two ways, but that people are not making haste on the path that is steep and difficult. How can God describe what this difficult path is?' And in describing the difficult path, it is not the path of praying, of fasting only. It is the path of freeing in the days of slavery, feeding in the days of hunger, embracing the stranger, looking after those who have been de-parented. Then you are those who believe. Belief is contingent on those humane acts. Then you are of those who do good, as good is defined by that courage. Then you are people of truth, that you stand up for truth irrespective of its discomfort to you; then you are people of compassion. Those are the things that we need to be in the days of hunger, in the days of marginalization.

What we need to be able to do, in these days, is to define what interfaith is. For some, interfaith is an opportunity for competitive faith: how good is your religion versus mine? How do I get adherents from you or prevent you from you getting adherents from me? For some faith, interfaith is comparative: we pray like this, and you pray like that, and there's merit in that. For others, faith is cooperative: let's work together on this campaign, shoulder to shoulder, etc. All of that is good.

But when faith itself is staring down the barrel [of a gun], then faith needs to be collaborative. When faith and religion is both the doctor and the patient, then it admits its own vulnerability as a phenomenon in this world. And it says, let's hold hands together, because we are fighting an existential battle for faith and religion itself, as we fight the issues on both sides of the equation.

And so, when we embark on that collaborative work, we begin to see the obvious vertical divides between Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jew, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist, non-believer, etc. Those vertical divides are very easy to see, but within those vertical divides, as we found out in the anti-Apartheid struggle, there are also horizontal divides which bring some of us closer to each other. Because some of us, across all our religions, are so orthodox that we find ourselves in a state of inertia. Some of us are so extreme that we find ourselves as a nihilistic phenomenon in the world, that we are destructive in the name of our religion. Some have more in common with their mirror image in the other than they have with their co-religionists. And

some of us are the middle ground, the people who find meaning in doing the work of God amongst the people of God, demanded by today's context of conflict and vulnerability.

And therefore, to end. We spoke last year about predictions for the future, and those predictions have become matters of urgency today. When last year we spoke about a looming populism, that populism predicted last year in Brazil has become the mainstreamed extremism of today, manifesting itself across the world. When we spoke about last year how differences are trying to coexist, the differences of last year have become the divisions of this year. When we spoke last year about the looming tensions that are emerging, the tensions of last year have become full blown conflicts this year. When we spoke about the vulnerable last year, the vulnerable of last year have become the victims of massacres and starvation. We spoke last year about the fears that people have, and those fears of last year have become the intolerances of this year. When we spoke last year about those migrants looking for peace and for well-being in the world, the migrants of last year have become the deported, the outcast, and the discarded of this year.

We spoke last year about the idea of populism. This year that populism has its fingers on the buttons that can defund health programs, on the buttons this year that can fund wars. Populism this year has an impunity that can do whatever it wants with permission from the world.

Religion must act in the name of faith, drawing from its deep and profound spiritual resources. Religion cannot appeal to the powers that be because they themselves are often compromised by their interests in a world where trade wars become pernicious, manifestations of the will of a person or a government. The ears that are waiting for us are the ears of the people of the world. We have seen the campuses rise against the capitals. We have seen the streets become restless against their palaces. We have seen the ordinary people begin to speak. And so while we speak to the powerful, we ignore those who really want our guidance, who want to believe again, who want to understand the manifestation of God. And the closest they will come is to find it in the churches, the mosques, the synagogues, the temples from which we preach. They will reclaim their faith as a force for good and manifest it in good works. And if we compromise because we need to be good with our governments, and we need to escape their surveillance, then we have compromised on the very truth that the world needs.

And if we can't do it, who will?

Thank you very, very much.

Plenary (ii). Action on Hunger and Poverty

Concrete actions to address poverty and hunger are priorities for the G20, building on the launch of the Global Alliance against Hunger in November 2024. This session will outline the shared and distinctive teachings of different religious traditions on hunger and its links to poverty, and the widely diverse programs that serve those in need. It will highlight the vital roles of religious leaders, communities, and actors within the Global Alliance as well as links among poverty, health, and agriculture. South Africa's engagement of religious communities illuminates the links between teachings, ethical commitment, and practical action on the ground.

Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, Resident Coordinator, United Nations, Zambia was the moderator. In this conversation, we are called to look in the mirror and confront an uncomfortable truth: we may be mirroring the very political systems that perpetuate injustice and hold people back. As people of faith, we are often praised for our charitable responses to humanitarian crises—providing aid, shelter, and comfort. Yet charity alone is not enough. What we frequently lack is a commitment to justice: the structural, systemic transformation that addresses root causes rather than symptoms.

Our spiritual imperative demands more than asking “why” suffering exists—it calls us to act, to challenge the conditions that allow injustice to persist. This is especially pressing given that people of faith collectively hold over half of the world's wealth, and steward vast networks of schools, hospitals, humanitarian organizations, and land. Many of the politicians with the power to enact sweeping change also identify as people of faith. And yet, violence against women—especially within sacred spaces—is rising. It is no longer an anomaly but a normalized reality inside places of worship.

We must also recognize that hunger and poverty are not isolated issues. They are shaped by complex systems—finance, technology, and policy—that intersect and influence how people experience deprivation. Religious leaders, with their moral authority and political influence, have a critical role to play in reshaping these systems. But that influence must be wielded with courage, accountability, and a deep commitment to justice—not just charity.

Complexity of Food Issues

Mukwashi questioned how can we as people of faith hold each other accountable for tackling poverty and injustice? How do we tackle these issues? The issue of food insecurity is far more complex than it appears on the surface. It's not just about availability—it's about the type of food being offered, who has access to it, who can afford it, and the timing and mechanisms through which it's distributed. These layers of complexity demand a deeper, more strategic engagement, especially from religious institutions and people of faith. Unless faith communities are willing

to grapple with the business dimensions of food systems—production, pricing, distribution—we risk being unable to meaningfully address the crisis.

At the same time, the scope of poverty is evolving. It is no longer confined to traditional definitions or geographic boundaries. In this shifting landscape, the question of social protection becomes urgent: how do we ensure that those at the bottom are not left in outright destitution? As one voice in the conversation put it, “If we can come together on social protection, we can create a buffer zone for those that are suffering in our midst.” This is not just a policy challenge—it is a moral imperative.

For people of faith, the call to action is rooted in spiritual conviction. If we truly believe in spiritual freedom, then we must also believe that no one can worship freely unless they are free in every sense—free from hunger, violence, and systemic injustice. Freedom is one leg of the journey; justice is the other. And in this moment of global crisis and transformation, we must recognize that “extraordinary actions are needed at extraordinary times.”

Dr. Luka David Mosoma, Former Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of South Africa, Hunger is a universal human experience—natural, cyclical, and shared by all. But poverty is something different. Poverty is what happens when a person cannot fulfill that hunger. It is not a matter of personal failure or laziness; it is the result of systemic forces that deny people access to the resources, opportunities, and dignity they need to survive and thrive.

Too often, our responses focus on alleviating the effects of poverty—feeding the hungry, offering temporary relief—without confronting the deeper causes. We treat symptoms while the systems that produce inequality remain untouched. Poverty is not random; it is engineered through policies, economic structures, and social hierarchies that benefit some while excluding others.

If we are serious about change, we must shift our focus from charity to justice. That means asking hard questions about how these systems operate and who they serve. It means reimagining our role—not just as responders to crisis, but as architects of transformation. Only then can we move beyond managing poverty and begin dismantling it.

Rev. Dr. David Beckmann, Coordinator of Circle of Protection, In 1990, four out of every ten people globally experienced hunger or poverty. Today, that number has dropped to one in ten—a remarkable shift that reflects decades of coordinated effort. USAID played a pivotal role in helping reduce that margin, supporting international development and humanitarian aid that reached millions of vulnerable lives.

However, this progress is now under threat. Current government policies are contributing to the erosion of international trade and aid, undermining the very systems that helped lift people out of poverty. In response, faith leaders across the United States have stepped up. The leadership of nearly every major church body is actively resisting proposed cuts to funding that supports vulnerable communities, both domestically and abroad.

People of faith in the U.S. are working tirelessly to steer the nation toward a more compassionate and just path. Their advocacy is grounded not only in spiritual conviction but in a deep understanding of the moral responsibility to protect those most at risk. In this moment of uncertainty, their collective voice is a powerful force for accountability, hope, and renewal.



Rev. Nicta Lubaale, General Secretary of Organization of African Instituted Churches, In 2005, 19% of people across Africa lived in a state of chronic hunger. Nearly two decades later, that number has risen to 20%. Despite global advancements in agriculture and aid, hunger remains a persistent and devastating reality for millions. This stagnation calls for a deeper examination of the systems that shape food access and equity.

Local farmers produce 70–80% of the food we consume, yet they often remain the most vulnerable within the food system. Among them, women face disproportionate barriers to productivity. If women had equal access to the same resources as men—land, credit, tools, and training—over 100 million people could be lifted out of hunger globally. This is not just a statistic; it is a call to action.

Faith communities have a vital role to play in this transformation. A pastoral response must go beyond prayer and proclamation—it must influence policy in tangible ways. We must move policy “off the paper” and into the homes and fields of smallholder farmers, where real change begins. By 2030, we must commit to doubling the productivity of these farmers, ensuring they have the tools and support to feed their communities and break the cycle of hunger.

Chilufya Chileshe, Chief Operating Officer of the SDG2 Advocacy Hub in Zambia, speculated that it is entirely possible to end poverty and hunger within our lifetime. The last decade has seen extraordinary advancements in technology, innovation, and global connectivity—tools that could radically transform how we address human suffering. Yet despite these breakthroughs, poverty persists. The question is no longer whether we have the means, but whether we have the commitment. For those with wealth and faith, what is truly stopping us from solving this problem?

Hunger is not a natural inevitability—it is a human-made crisis. And because it is created by human systems, it can be dismantled by human solutions. That means investing wisely, encouraging innovation, and ensuring that businesses are incentivized to invest where they should—and to do so ethically, without exploiting the very communities they claim to serve. Fair investment is not just good economics; it is a moral imperative.

As we look to the future, we must also honor the legacy of success already built. Progress does not always require launching new initiatives from scratch. Continuity is essential. The challenge lies in ensuring that future G20 leaders and global decision-makers invest in sustaining and scaling what already works. Every new initiative demands fresh funding and infrastructure, but we already have continental processes and frameworks in place. Strengthening and expanding these systems may be the most strategic path forward.

Mukwashi asked: “How do we hold each other accountable for addressing systemic poverty?” *Andrea Kaufman*, Director of Faith and External Engagement at World Vision International USA, answered that God created a world of generous abundance—a world where creation itself reflects the possibility of flourishing for all. Yet we find ourselves living within systems built on a scarcity model, where competition is prioritized over collaboration, and fear often overrides generosity. These systems distort the divine intention for shared life and mutual care.

As people of faith, we carry a sacred obligation to advocate for a world where everyone can experience abundant life. This means challenging the structures that perpetuate inequality and reimagining economic, social, and political models that reflect compassion, justice, and inclusion. At its core, poverty is not just about material lack—it is about broken relationships. It stems from disconnection: between people and their communities, between institutions and those they serve, and between humanity and creation.

These ruptures lead to marginalization and reinforce systems that exclude and exploit. Yet in the midst of this brokenness, faith communities bring something essential: hope. We enter the conversation not only with critique, but with vision. We believe that transformation is possible, and we are called to be agents of that change—restoring relationships, rebuilding trust, and renewing systems so that all may live with dignity.

Dr. Uzwi-Lezwe Radebe, The Revelation Spiritual Home, discussed that as leaders—whether in faith, community, or governance—we must confront one of the most pressing challenges of our time: the growing lack of food. This crisis demands more than observation; it requires action. We must ask ourselves, what are we doing? And more importantly, are we holding our leaders accountable? It is no longer enough to look to governments for solutions. We, as individuals and communities, must step forward and take responsibility for shaping a more just and sustainable future.

Dependence on external aid and insufficient resources continue to exacerbate the problems we face today. As of 2023, one in five people in Africa live with chronic hunger, compared to one in eleven globally. This disparity is not due to a lack of natural wealth—Africa is rich in resources—but rather to systemic failures and a persistent neglect of African solutions for African problems. The continent's struggles are compounded by a disconnection from spirituality, which can lead to societal degradation and chaos. The path forward begins with a return to our essence as people of compassion, love, and humility. Ubuntu—a philosophy rooted in spirituality and shared humanity—reminds us that we are not just flesh and bone; we are spirit first. Reclaiming this truth can help restore balance and dignity to our communities.

Michael Karabo Dube, Chief Executive and Founder, Invest Rural Platforms, One of the most pressing questions in the fight against poverty is: where will the money and capital come from to eliminate it? The answer lies not only in global financial systems, but in reimagining how and where we invest. We must shift our focus to areas of dignified poverty—places where people live with resilience and potential, yet lack access to opportunity. These are often rural communities, where poverty is not just endured but inherited through generations of exclusion.

To truly make progress, we must reflect on the nature of global alliances and how they operate. Poverty will not be defeated in boardrooms or policy summits alone—it must be defeated in the villages. That means localizing our efforts, empowering communities, and ensuring that global strategies are rooted in local realities. A global alliance must become a local movement.

Imagine a “poverty alleviation deal room”—a space where rural projects are thoughtfully packaged and presented to investors and funders. This would be a marketplace of hope, where innovation meets compassion, and where capital flows toward solutions that uplift rather than exploit. But this vision also comes with a challenge: how much are we willing to contribute? What can we, as a collective, put together to seed the fund that will catalyze this transformation?

Faith organizations have a critical role to play in this conversation, yet they are often sidelined when major decisions are made. Why is that? Perhaps we must ask ourselves: what are we bringing to the table? Beyond moral conviction, are we

offering strategic insight, financial commitment, and scalable solutions? If we want to be taken seriously, we must demonstrate that our values translate into action—and that our presence is not symbolic, but essential.

Julian May, Director of the Centre of Excellence in Food Security at the University of the Western Cape, pointed out that there is enough good in the world—and enough food. In fact, we waste nearly 30% of the food we produce globally. The real crisis is not undernourishment, but malnourishment. Millions of people are consuming diets that are affordable but unhealthy, not because they lack awareness, but because they lack options. The problem lies in the distribution, accessibility, and affordability of nutritious food—not in its availability.

Despite decades of development efforts, poverty has not significantly declined. One contributing factor is the migration from rural areas to urban centers. In rural communities, people often grow their own food and live off the land. But in cities, they must purchase everything they consume, while also paying rent and other living expenses. The issue is not simply a lack of money—it's what that money can buy. In many cases, even with income, people cannot afford healthy, nourishing food.

This is where social support becomes essential. We need trained social workers and community advocates who can guide families toward better nutritional choices and help them navigate systems that are often stacked against them. Food education, access programs, and localized support networks can make a tangible difference.

To address accountability, we must adopt a theory of change. What are the pathways to transformation? Why is change necessary, and who must lead it? A theory of change helps us move from intention to impact—mapping out the steps, stakeholders, and systems that must align to create lasting solutions. Without this framework, our efforts risk remaining reactive rather than strategic.



Concurrent Sessions A

A1: Fighting Hunger as a Critical Element in Addressing Poverty

Faith-Based Partnerships to End Hunger: A Global Call to Action

This session emphasized the urgent need to revitalize global commitments to end hunger, especially where famine looms and vulnerable communities—particularly children—are most at risk. Moderators *Dr. Renier Koegeleberg* and *Dr. Sylvia Pheto* framed hunger as a human-made crisis, deeply intertwined with poverty and inequality. They called for collaboration between governments and religious actors, urging participants to “see others as God sees us” and recognize the moral imperative to act.

Khushwant Singh of PaRD highlighted the ethical dimensions of hunger, arguing that the crisis is not merely about food but about corrupted attitudes and broken systems. Religious organizations, he noted, are experts in localization and must be central to global strategies, offering networks, volunteers, and spiritual insight to drive sustainable development.

Pastor Jan Pretorius shared the Mahlasedi Foundation’s 33-year journey in food security and disaster relief, illustrating how food access restores dignity and reduces crime. He advocated for long-term agricultural entrepreneurship, especially among young Black farmers, and described innovative township-based food ecosystems that bypass exploitative value chains.

Andrea Kaufmann of World Vision International emphasized the vital role of faith communities in addressing child-focused hunger and poverty. With one in five girls facing lifelong complications, faith-led dialogues offer unique assets—prayer, fasting, and community mobilization—that drive action. Religion is part of a complex food system and must be integrated into global strategies. Kaufmann urged reflection on how faith groups may contribute to systemic issues and called for advocacy through practical steps like reducing food waste and teaching nutrition. She stressed the need for partnerships between governments, religious institutions, and businesses, encouraging everyone to become producers—not just consumers—of food solutions.

Local Action and Faith-Based Solutions to Hunger and Poverty

Sr. Juunza C. Mwangani, Projects Manager for the Diocese of Monze in Zambia, emphasized the importance of moving beyond discussion to tangible action in the fight against hunger and poverty. Working with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and local women, her team focuses on household-level agricultural entrepreneurship. This approach targets the most vulnerable—where hunger is felt most acutely and where dignity can be restored. Sr. Juunza argued that food insecurity must be

addressed before poverty can be meaningfully tackled, as hungry children cannot thrive in school and families must constantly choose between education and survival. Her model centers on integrated farming, combining livestock and crop production to build climate resilience and generate income. Women are empowered to use eco-friendly practices, indigenous seeds, and locally adapted techniques to sustain their households. She highlighted the urgent need for accessible irrigation systems, noting that without water, agricultural efforts cannot succeed. Climate change and unpredictable rainfall patterns are already disrupting yields, making localized, sustainable solutions essential.

Elder Denelson Silva of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Brazil echoed the call for compassionate, community-driven responses. He shared experiences from Mozambique, where simple tools were used to assess child nutrition and church meeting houses were opened to the broader community for education and support. Through nutritional interventions and food gardens, families were taught how to supplement diets and restore health without costly infrastructure. Elder Silva reminded participants that God sees each person as a child—worthy of care, dignity, and love—and that faith communities must act accordingly. Together, these voices underscored that hunger is not just a physical condition but a moral challenge. Solutions must be rooted in local realities, spiritual conviction, and practical collaboration to build a future where no one is left behind.

Highlighting Grassroots Efforts

Sr. Juunza Mwangani shared grassroots efforts in Zambia to fight hunger through household-level agricultural entrepreneurship led by women, restoring dignity where poverty is most deeply felt. Integrated farming—combining livestock and crops—builds climate resilience and income, enabling families to prioritize education and health. Elder Denelson Silva emphasized faith-based nutrition programs in Mozambique, using simple tools to assess child health and open church spaces for community support. Both speakers highlighted that hunger is a moral challenge requiring practical, localized solutions. Faith communities must act not only in prayer but through sustainable systems that empower vulnerable households and promote long-term food security.

This session emphasized the importance of showcasing successful, community-driven solutions to hunger and poverty, especially those led by faith-based groups. *Khushwant Singh* urged participants to share evidence of impact, noting that political speeches often lack moral substance and practical outcomes. Examples from India and Cape Town illustrated how interfaith communities collaborate to feed thousands, teach values in schools, and promote environmental awareness. Participants stressed the need for coordination, ensuring food distribution is staggered across days to avoid duplication and maximize reach.

Isaac Morrison from Ghana highlighted efforts to support street children through education and nutrition, with over 30,000 students benefiting from tutoring and meals provided by faith communities. These grassroots initiatives demonstrate that small, consistent actions—like teaching, feeding, and mentoring—can transform lives. The session closed with a call to network, document best practices, and expand interfaith collaboration, recognizing that real change begins with local commitment and shared responsibility. Faith leaders were urged to act as catalysts for hope and dignity.



A2: 2025 as a Jubilee Year: Principles of Equity in the Architecture of Finance

This session was moderated by Eric LeCompte, Executive Director of Jubilee USA Network in the United States, and Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneli, President/CEO of the ONE Campaign in the United States. Discussion launchers included Mohammed Ameen Hassen, Head of Shari'ah Banking at Standard Bank Group in South Africa; Dr. Molefe Tsele, Chaplain General of ANC Chaplaincy in South Africa; and Rampeoane Hlobo, S.J., Director of the Jesuit Justice & Ecology Network in Africa (JENA) in South Africa.

Overview

The session examined how Jubilee 2025 principles could transform global financial architecture to address debt crises and inequality. Eric LeCompte opened by noting these issues have been faith community priorities for 30 years and are now central to South Africa's G20 presidency, with the incoming US presidency also adopting them as critical issues. Ndidi Nwuneli presented stark statistics showing Africa pays 500% more for debt than other regions due to unfair bias - with African bonds averaging 9.8% interest compared to Germany's 3% - representing a \$75 million penalty. Mohammed Ameen Hassen offered a philosophical framework, arguing that

both capitalism (anchored in absolute freedom) and socialism (anchored in absolute equality) create extremes, while justice can provide the counterbalance needed for a practical economic system.

The discussion became particularly intense during audience participation, with provocative challenges about personal and institutional accountability. A Nigerian entrepreneur declared the current financial architecture “a rip-off” requiring complete restructuring, while a South African traditional leader demanded true accountability frameworks and criticized the lack of localized Jubilee implementation. The session’s most powerful moment came when a participant refused to “own the outcomes of injustices inflicted upon me just because I was born with a black grandfather,” tracing current debt structures back to colonial policies that forced his ancestors to reduce livestock from 1,800 to five heads through taxation. Rabbi Dr. Aharon Ariel Lavi emphasized that debt relief must be coupled with building trust through human and social capital, while James Fazira from Georgetown challenged the group to think beyond reforming existing systems by tapping diaspora remittances (\$100 billion annually to Africa) as alternative financing sources.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Establish justice as the counterbalance between absolute freedom and absolute equality in economic systems, enabling everyone to get what they rightfully deserve
- Match surplus Islamic finance capital (\$300 billion) with African medium-term fiscal deficits to provide better pricing for sovereign debt
- Implement use-of-funds requirements in all debt instruments to ensure accountability and proper allocation to vulnerable populations
- Create accountability frameworks that include civil society engagement in both debt relief processes and new debt acquisition
- Develop diaspora financing mechanisms to tap the \$100 billion in annual remittances as alternative funding sources with better interest rates
- Address colonial legacies in financial architecture by acknowledging that current systems were “founded on looting, slavery, rape, and death”
- Personalize debt forgiveness by asking faith communities to forgive debts owed to them and reject corrupt offerings
- Prioritize equality of opportunities over equality of outcomes while maintaining vigilance against corruption in debt relief programs
- Apply Ubuntu principles to finance as “a tool for collective flourishing, not just private accumulation”



A3: Interreligious Action in Africa: South Africa and AU Priorities

This session was moderated by Hazel Maureen D. Dixon, Regional Desk Officer of the African Union Commission in Sierra Leone, and Dr. Tahirih Matthee, Educator with the African Union Interfaith Dialogue Forum in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Ambassador Amr Aljowaily, Director Citizens and Diaspora Director (CIDO) of the African Union Commission in Ethiopia; Ambassador Michael P. Murphy, KM, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Sovereign Order of Malta in the United States; and Musimbi Kanyoro, Board Chair of United World Colleges in Kenya.

Overview

The session explored interfaith cooperation across Africa and the African Union's priorities as a new G20 member. Ambassador Aljowaily highlighted that the AU's 2025 theme is "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations," referencing decision 884 from February 2024 addressing consequences of colonialism, slavery, and apartheid. Musimbi Kanyoro emphasized the importance of Africans telling their own stories rather than having them told through Western voices, noting her role in founding the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, which has published 200 books and dissertations. Ambassador Murphy from the Order of Malta offered practical wisdom about humanitarian work, suggesting that to solve world problems, "don't ask a priest in the Vatican, ask the nun in the field."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Support the AU's reparatory justice agenda by amplifying African voices in global forums and advocating for reform of financial, trade, and UN Security Council structures
- Create AU database of registered doctors to facilitate healthcare delivery across the continent through organizations like the Order of Malta
- Prioritize African storytelling by supporting indigenous research and publication in African languages and contexts
- Invest in maternal and educational empowerment recognizing that "children

- are empowered by mothers, but orphans are empowered by education"
- Strengthen interfaith cooperation building on Africa's proven track record in responding to health crises and promoting peace
- Address universal problems locally while avoiding simplistic blame narratives about Western influence

A4: Challenges of Inequality: How Inequality is Understood, Challenges of Colonial and Political Legacies

This session was moderated by Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, General Secretary of ACT Alliance in Switzerland, and Luka David Mosoma, Former Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa and Former Chairperson of the CRL Rights Commission in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Dr. Christo Van Der Rheede, Maurice Bloem from the Joint Learning Initiative, and Imam Dr. Talib Shareef, President of The International Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation in the USA.

Overview

The session examined inequality through the lens of colonial legacies and contemporary challenges, with particular focus on South Africa's experience. Maurice Bloem opened by noting the symbolic significance of meeting in the Vasco da Gama room, representing the voyages that started the age of imperialism and attacks on local communities. He emphasized the need to move from "extraction to co-creation" and address the "double literacy gap" where faith actors lack development literacy while development actors lack faith literacy. Dr. Van Der Rheede presented stark statistics about South Africa's economic crisis: 60-65% youth unemployment, debt service costs rising from 74 billion to 94.8 billion during 2024, and ranking 132nd on the Global Capital Index. He argued that South Africa's abundance of natural resources has become "actually a curse" due to poor leadership.

The discussion became particularly intense when contemporary conflicts entered the conversation, especially around Gaza, with Muslim and Jewish scholars expressing deep feelings that created heated exchanges. Imam Shareef introduced the "DROP" framework for analyzing inequality - examining gaps in Dignity, Resources, Opportunities, and Power - and emphasized that "inequality is the biggest political test of our time." He drew parallels to the African-American civil rights movement, noting how religious leaders from multiple faiths helped heighten society's consciousness. The session grappled with whether religious vision could motivate youth development similar to how China's educational investment helped lift people from poverty, with one participant challenging: "If a person doesn't treat you right, what makes you think he is gonna teach you right?"

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Apply the DROP framework (Dignity, Resources, Opportunities, Power) to systematically analyze and address inequality gaps in communities
- Prioritize education investment with proper accountability to ensure returns on educational spending translate to actual development outcomes
- Center historically excluded voices by supporting indigenous researchers to publish in their own languages and find seats at decision-making tables
- Address the double literacy gap by building development literacy among faith actors and faith literacy among development practitioners
- Return to foundational principles of human dignity, equality, and human rights through transparent, accountable governance using bottom-up processes
- Teach excellence and human dignity to children as a foundation for changing mentalities and breaking cycles of inequality
- Build interfaith coalitions to heighten societal consciousness about inequality, following historical models from civil rights movements
- Move from extraction to co-creation in development approaches, valuing local wisdom over imposed foreign systems

A5: Solidarity and Interfaith in the G20 Context: Focus on Women and Youth

This session was moderated by Sister Francisca Ngozi Uti, HHCJ, Executive Director of the Centre for Women Studies and Intervention in Nigeria, and Abbey Ngoepe. Discussion launchers included Rev. Dr. Nioma Venter, Secretary General of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa; Sr. Agnes Njeri, Program Officer at the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in Kenya; Sr. Dr. Teresiah Muthoni, Legal Advisor/Officer for the Archdiocese of Nairobi/Hilton Foundation in Kenya; Dr. Pearl Kupe, International President of the Global Forum of Women Entrepreneurs in Botswana; Raquel Bennet, Fellow with A Common Word Among the Youth (ACWAY) in Brazil; and Jessica Roland, Senior Specialist for Inclusive Peace with The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers in the United States.

Overview

The session explored women's and youth leadership within interfaith contexts, emphasizing the Ubuntu principle that "it's not a win unless we all win." Speakers addressed systemic barriers including patriarchal religious structures, lack of political will, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Rev. Dr. Venter opened by referencing the historic 1956 women's march in South Africa, where thousands of women from different faith groups protested apartheid pass laws in silence for 30 minutes. Sr. Muthoni highlighted disability inclusion challenges, noting how able-bodied people create barriers for those with disabilities and calling attention to the lack of accessibility at the forum itself. Jessica Roland presented compelling

statistics showing that peace mediation efforts are 35% more likely to last 15 years when women are involved, despite women comprising only 13.7% of peace-building mediators as of 2013.

The discussion became particularly engaged when addressing scriptural interpretation and cultural practices. One participant challenged how interfaith communities could reinterpret biblical texts like Ephesians 5 about male headship and similar Islamic teachings that elevate men over women. A poignant moment occurred when Jessica Roland shared a story of a woman mediator who was accused of being "too emotional" during peace negotiations - she paused, prayed, and successfully diffused the tension, demonstrating the effectiveness of women's approaches. The session also featured a powerful exchange when Kelvin Akpaloo, a male participant, challenged the notion that women are "behind" men, referencing Adam and Eve to argue that Eve was taken from Adam's side as his helper - "at his side, not behind him." The discussion culminated with participants offering words of encouragement to women who would never enter rooms like these, with responses ranging from "mobilize" to the Zulu phrase "wathinta umfazi wathinta umbokodo" (you strike a woman, you strike a rock).

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Implement Ubuntu-based practices that ensure whole communities benefit, moving beyond traditional approaches that leave women and youth behind
- Foster active citizenry at grassroots levels rather than waiting for government solutions, with communities taking initiative to address local challenges
- Increase women's representation in leadership across religious institutions and peace-building roles, following examples like Rwanda's 64% women leadership structure
- Reinterpret religious texts to present positive narratives about women's roles, moving beyond cultural stereotyping that constructs men as oppressive and de-elevates women
- Address accessibility gaps by ensuring disability inclusion in interfaith gatherings, including sign language interpretation and physical accommodations
- Include youth meaningfully in decision-making processes, not just consultation, to equip them as current leaders rather than future ones
- Challenge traditional gender roles in child-rearing practices to break cycles of stereotyping that limit both boys and girls



A6: The AI Revolution: Ethics and Action

This session was moderated by Rachel Miner, Founder and CEO of Bellwether International in the United States, and Golan Ben-Oni, Global CIO at IDT in the United States. Discussion launchers included Fr. Hugh O'Connor, Secretary General of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference; Liliya Khasanova, Executive Director of ACWAY in Russia; Mark Gaffley, Director of Legal and Operations at the Global Center on AI Governance in South Africa; Prof. Fadi Daou, Executive Director of Globethics in France; and Sean Cleary, Executive Vice-Chair of FutureWorld Foundation in South Africa.

Overview

The session examined how religious communities can engage with artificial intelligence's ethical implications and societal impacts. Speakers addressed AI's rapid expansion affecting everything from education to warfare, with 2 billion ChatGPT prompts generated daily. Fr. O'Connor highlighted religious institutions' natural conservatism in facing technological change, expressing concerns about AI's impact on weaponry, education (students using AI to write papers rather than learning), and medicine (algorithms potentially deciding who receives treatment). Mark Gaffley introduced the Global Index on AI, a multidimensional tool examining countries' approaches to AI across areas including gender equality, privacy, and children's rights.

The discussion revealed significant tensions between AI's potential benefits and risks. Sean Cleary delivered stark warnings about the convergence of three unprecedented factors: surging geopolitical conflict, collapsing global normative agreements, and the largest technological innovation in history. He emphasized that "there has never been a time at which persons of goodwill, based in faith, based in a sense of human agency and integrity, have been more important than at this moment." The conversation became particularly intense around questions of control and governance. While Cleary insisted "Don't kid yourselves -- we can control this," others like Prof. Daou noted that AI leaders openly admit they don't control AI development. Golan Ben-Oni offered a Torah-based perspective, arguing that "a machine can't feel what's found in a man's soul" and highlighting algorithmic biases in policing that favor certain demographics. The session grappled with Rachel Miner's provocative assertion that the consequences of ignoring AI could be genocide, as it represents "the only type of conflict that is completely predictable and therefore, completely preventable."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Release interfaith statements connecting religious doctrines like human agency to ethical AI usage that faith leaders can use across denominations
- Establish partnerships between EU policymakers and informed faith leaders to

- create ethical AI dialogue frameworks
- Train religious leaders on AI literacy using tools like the Global Index to assess local vulnerabilities and challenges
- Collaborate with UNESCO on developing ethical considerations for AI from faith perspectives
- Increase Global South representation in AI normative frameworks and policy discussions
- Develop flexible stakeholder frameworks that include youth and people of faith in AI policymaking at all levels
- Address energy consumption concerns around data centers to ensure AI serves as a genuine common good
- Create frameworks for gray areas where AI brings benefits but involves major ethical complications



Concurrent Sessions B

B1: Health For All: Religious Communities and the Challenges of Rebuilding from COVID-19

Dr. Esben Lunde Larsen, Senior One Health Specialist, The Pandemic Fund – The World Bank, moderated this session. He emphasized that with 81% of the global population identifying with some form of faith, religion should be seen as a bridge—not a barrier—in public health efforts. He advocated for integrating faith communities into health responses, calling on their trust-building capacity and moral influence. The session highlighted the urgent need for partnerships between governments and religious actors to address health and environmental challenges, particularly in South Africa and across Africa. It also reviewed the ongoing legacies of COVID-19 and other pandemics, stressing the importance of the Pandemic Fund and rebuilding trust across sectors for holistic, sustainable health systems.

Faith and Public Health

Dr. Deus Bazira, Director of Georgetown University Global Health Institute & Center for Global Health Practice and Impact, emphasized the importance of integrating faith into public health strategies, especially in Africa where religion shapes daily life. He called for respectful partnerships with faith leaders, who are trusted messengers and vital in communicating health information. Bazira stressed that everyone has a right to quality healthcare, regardless of identity, and condemned governments that misuse health policies for discriminatory agendas. He urged a rethinking of intellectual property systems and highlighted the need for cross-sector collaboration. Faith communities, he noted, witness the real impact of disease and must be empowered to share testimonies and support holistic, people-centered health solutions.

Doug Fountain, Executive Director of Christian Connections for International Health, emphasized the foundational role of religion in public health, particularly in shaping values and attitudes that precede behavioral change. He stressed that religious leaders must be unified with health leaders, working from a shared framework to build trust and influence communities. Vaccine hesitancy, he noted, often stems from proxy issues like distrust in governments, corporations, or Western interventions—barriers that faith leaders are uniquely positioned to address through long-term relationship-building and dialogue.

Fountain also highlighted the importance of continuity in essential health services during crises, citing faith-based institutions' resilience during COVID-19. Their consistent presence built trust and demonstrated compassion, especially when public systems faltered. He urged a shift from short-term projects to long-term

platforms, leveraging the extensive Christian health infrastructure across Africa—over 8,000 assets, many in underserved areas.

However, he acknowledged challenges in working with faith-based groups, including varied capacities, transparency concerns, and fragmented funding. Governments are increasingly strained, yet private investors are recognizing the durability of faith-based communities. Fountain called for honest engagement and strategic investment, noting that faith-based platforms offer rapid mobilization, deep community networks, and sustainable impact. To maximize their potential, stakeholders must rethink funding models and treat these institutions as essential partners in health system transformation.

Faith and Pandemic Preparedness

Peter Yeboah, Executive Director of the Christian Health Association of Ghana, emphasized the critical role of faith-based health systems in pandemic preparedness and response. He argued that these institutions often lose their identity and effectiveness when excluded from national health strategies. Faith-based organizations possess vast assets and capacities, yet remain underutilized due to funding structures that favor governments and intermediaries. Yeboah called for deliberate integration of faith actors into public health systems, with equitable and transparent resource allocation.

The Pandemic Fund, established by the World Bank in 2022, has raised \$2 billion and awarded \$885 million in grants to strengthen global health systems. However, faith-based organizations must be recognized as delivery partners, not sidelined by civil society mechanisms. Yeboah proposed a dedicated funding window for faith actors to build infrastructure, improve governance, and enhance data systems—critical for effective surveillance and accountability.

He stressed that faith institutions must be viable to fulfill their mission of serving the poor. Without proper investment, they risk charging unaffordable fees or compromising their values. Strengthening these systems will allow faith-based organizations to contribute meaningfully to national resilience and global health equity. Yeboah concluded with a call to restructure financial frameworks to ensure faith actors have a seat at the table.



Khushwant Singh Head of Secretariat, International Partnership on Religion and Development (PaRD), emphasized the need for governments to adopt inclusive consultation processes when shaping pandemic-related legislation. He noted that scientific experts are often prioritized, while social scientists and civil society—especially faith-based actors—are sidelined. To ensure coherence and effective policy, religious communities must be recognized as vital contributors and their successful initiatives widely shared through media and knowledge platforms. He warned against divorcing personal faith from public service, arguing that such detachment can lead to corruption and ineffective governance. Both speakers called for structured partnerships and policy reforms that embed faith into health systems.

Dr. Esben Larsen ended with the thought that faith-based organizations must be recognized as strategic stewards of health funding, especially as financial resources shrink and global health systems face mounting pressure. A key priority is to localize global health interventions—ensuring pandemic preparedness and response efforts are rooted in community-led, faith-driven strategies that reflect real-world needs.

B2: Religious Action on Corruption

This session was moderated by Luka David Mosoma, Former Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa and Former Chairperson of the CRL Rights Commission in South Africa, and Rodrigo Alves, Professor at The Brazilian Center of Studies in Law and Religion at the Federal University of Uberlandia in Brazil. Discussion launchers included Dr. Ivo Pereira da Silva, Associate Professor at the Federal University of Pará in Brazil; Dr. Shimmy C. Kotu, Chairman of the Anti Regulation of Religion Summit in South Africa; and Elias Szczytnicki, Regional Secretary General of Religions for Peace Latin America and the Caribbean in Argentina.

Overview

The session examined how religious communities can combat corruption across different spheres of society. Dr. Ivo Pereira da Silva opened by connecting corruption to human rights violations, noting that Brazil scored 34 points on the corruption perception index in 2024, ranking 107th out of 180 countries - its worst result since 2012. He emphasized that corruption drains resources from health, education, and security, undermining access to basic rights and destroying social trust. Dr. Shimmy Kotu highlighted South Africa's massive religious constituency - 78% of 64 million people claim to be Christian - arguing that "the church is the biggest non-governmental organization nationally" and therefore cannot avoid complicity in corruption. He traced how religious leaders who once served as prophetic voices against apartheid have "gone into bed with the new government," losing their activist edge.

The session's most engaging portion involved breaking participants into three groups to address hypothetical corruption scenarios: disappeared emergency aid requiring 50% payoffs, mining permits granted through bribes on ancestral land, and judicial corruption through courtroom favors. The discussions revealed deep tensions about religious complicity in corruption. Groups struggled with fundamental questions like "what if your religious communities are part of the corruption?" and grappled with the reality that in South Africa, "yesterday's activists are now government officials or government consultants," creating a vacuum that allows state organs to take advantage of communities. The breakout sessions generated intense debate about whether religious communities should maintain complete separation from state organs or engage in "decent cooperation," with one group calling for mass mobilization reminiscent of past anti-apartheid activism.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Establish interfaith anti-corruption charters that prepare religious communities to act collectively before crises occur
- Implement institutional transparency within religious organizations by practicing clear governance mechanisms and refusing corrupt offerings from members
- Mobilize collective prophetic voice against corruption through mass action, recognizing that "influence is a very powerful tool for change"
- Address internal complicity by sanctifying religious institutions first, as "a corrupt church can never be a voice within any nation"
- Build strategic alliances beyond religion with civil society, trade unions, and ethical political parties to democratize power
- Develop legal advocacy capacity to equip rural communities with knowledge about mining rights and land protection procedures
- Promote ethical formation using religious spaces to teach honesty, service, and common good values, especially among children and youth
- Maintain prophetic independence by considering separation of religious and state organs while enabling decent cooperation
- Expose and publicize corruption among both government officials and religious community members engaged in corrupt practices



B3: Positives and Negatives of Modern Communications: Addressing Disinformation and Related Social Tensions

This session was moderated by Ambassador (Rabbi) David Saperstein, Senior Adviser on Strategy and Policy with the Union for Reform Judaism in the United States, and Sara Gon, Director of the Free Speech Union of South Africa. Discussion launchers included Dr. Andre Oboler, CEO of the Online Hate Prevention Institute in Australia; Lynn Swain, CEO of Symbiota Leadership Institute in South Africa; Rosalind I J Hackett, Professor Emeritus at the University of Tennessee and Extraordinary Professor at the Desmond Tutu Centre; Yashika Singh, Head of Religion Genre Content Hub at the South African Broadcasting Corporation; Liesl Pretorius, Head of Legal at Freedom of Religion South Africa; and Sibiu Szymanowska, Co-Founder of The Hybrid Tours in the United States.

Overview

The session examined social media's impact on religious communities and society, addressing both harmful content and positive potential. Dr. Oboler warned that "anti-semitism is many miles ahead of all other hate" and emphasized that content producing negative actions spreads without payment while those profiting should pay for cleanup. Lynn Swain provided neurological insights, explaining how social media breaks down our consciousness filters and discussing Ubuntu as "a neurological truth" where people shape each other's brains and neurochemistry. She advocated for spreading oxytocin through compassion to promote moral discernment and reduce anxiety.

The discussion revealed tensions between protecting free speech and combating hate. Liesl Pretorius highlighted the constitutional challenge that freedom of religion falls under equality rights, making hate speech laws difficult since "diverse ideas can be seen as hate speech" and "we want unity and diversity, not unity and conformity." Sibiu Szymanowska brought insider perspective from her work as a Meta content analyst, revealing that "Meta does not care about toxic things posted on social media - they just want more usage on their app." Despite these challenges, speakers emphasized social media's positive potential, with Yashika Singh advocating for spiritual guidance through public broadcasting and indigenous language content, arguing that "when you prejudice against someone's language, you prejudice against their entire being."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Implement human-based hate research rather than AI systems that lack understanding of hate speech nuances
- Practice pre-frontal cortex checking by taking three additional seconds before reacting to social media content
- Develop qualitative research on social media's religious and social impacts,

- building on institutions like the Desmond Tutu Centre
- Support indigenous language broadcasting to prevent linguistic and cultural prejudice in media representation
- Create sustainable content strategies that use social media's reach for humanitarian and educational purposes
- Advocate for platform accountability where companies profiting from harmful content bear responsibility for cleanup costs
- Promote neurological awareness of how social media affects consciousness and community bonding through Ubuntu principles

B4: Addressing Ethnic Tensions, Discrimination, and Racism: Positive Strategies and Challenges Ahead

This session was moderated by Prof. Nayla Tabbara, President of Adyan Foundation in Lebanon, and Professor Tshepo Madlingozi, Commissioner of the South African Human Rights Commission in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Prof. Fadi Daou, Executive Director of Globethics in France; Izzy Ben-Ebrahim, KAICIID Fellow Alumnus in South Africa; and Commissioner Ras Sipho Mantula, Advocate at Thabo Mbeki School of Public and International Affairs at Unisa and Commissioner at the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities in South Africa.

Overview

The session examined strategies for addressing racism and ethnic tensions through religious and interfaith approaches. Professor Madlingozi opened by emphasizing that South Africa continues to grapple with settler colonization, having the longest history of colonization, and stressed that "there is no solidarity without addressing ethnic tensions." Commissioner Mantula highlighted the role of sacred texts in perpetuating racial undertones and called for using culture and religion as "soft powers" to combat racism, emphasizing that "there is only one race: the human race." He referenced the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, noting that religious leaders Desmond Tutu and

Alex Boraine led the process, though he argued reparations were insufficient and cautioned to "not rush [reparative justice]. If you rush, you crush."

The discussion took a powerful turn when Prof. Fadi Daou emphasized the moral dimensions of addressing racism, focusing on Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." He argued for shifting from identity-based to value-based narratives and referenced the Kairos document, noting that the Palestinian Kairos document wasn't as successful as the South African one due to power dynamics. The session's most intense moment came when Izzy Ben-

Ebrahim challenged the forum's youth inclusion, expressing frustration that young people were relegated to roles as "videographers and timekeepers, not moderators." He referenced the Rhodes Must Fall movement where protestors were shot at, declaring "The Youth know what's up, and... we will take the measures to be heard" and lamenting that "we don't know what healing is [in South Africa]."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Shift from identity-based to value-based narratives to enable greater religious leader involvement in anti-racism work
- Develop national action plans as required by UN member states to systematically combat racism in each country
- Use cultural and religious "soft power" including historical sites like freedom parks and apartheid museums to educate about past racism
- Apply Ubuntu principles correctly to increase solidarity and unity while recognizing the continuing effects of settler colonization
- Create global Kairos documents that unite religious communities in declaring that "evil will not win"
- Include youth meaningfully in leadership roles rather than relegating them to support functions, recognizing their lived experiences with movements like Rhodes Must Fall
- Emphasize restoration and repentance in transitional justice processes while being patient and careful about reparative justice implementation
- Deconstruct instruments of colonization and dehumanization through sustained religious and interfaith engagement
- Focus on healing wounds through religious community involvement, recognizing the necessity of spiritual approaches to reconciliation



B5: Taking Stock: How the G20 Agendas Relate to Religious Freedom

This session was moderated by Professor Hannah Smith, J.D., Associate Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies in the United States, and Michael Swain, Executive Director of Freedom of Religion SA in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Sr. Hedwig Muse, Legal Officer and Program Manager for Catholic Care of Children and Human Rights at the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya; Thembi Tulwana, Secretary General of Inkululeko Yesizwe Association in South Africa; Moulana A. K. Allie, President of the United Ulama Council of South Africa; Juan G. Navarro Floria, Vice President of Consejo Argentino para la Libertad Religiosa (CALIR); Elder Adilson de Paula Parrella, General Authority of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Brazil; and Rev. Bert Pretorius, President of SACOFF in South Africa.

Overview

The session examined how religious freedom intersects with G20 priorities and contemporary policy challenges. Michael Swain emphasized that all faith communities share the common cause of passing faith to children and practicing beliefs without sanction, noting that when religious freedom erodes, it serves as a warning that other fundamental rights are threatened. Sr. Hedwig Muse highlighted how her Catholic organization empowers Muslim girls to wear hijabs, demonstrating that protecting one religion's rights protects all others. Juan Navarro Floria celebrated Argentina's immigrant diversity, noting that religious communities were instrumental during the 2001 economic crisis when the Catholic Church and other groups made crucial differences.

The discussion became particularly intense around contemporary challenges to religious freedom. Thembi Tulwana raised serious concerns about South Africa's Department of Basic Education Early Childhood Education Toolkit, arguing it promotes gender ideologies that infringe on parental rights and African indigenous spirituality, which "is founded on order and discipline" and asserts "2 biological genders exist." Moulana Allie highlighted confusion around the Hate Speech Act, which fails to define "hate" clearly, leaving room for weaponization against religious communities discussing culturally controversial issues. The session grappled with fundamental tensions between religious freedom and secular governance, with speakers noting that while secularism promotes openness to diverse beliefs, it becomes dangerous when states promote particular worldviews through education that conflict with religious teachings.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Build interfaith coalitions to find common cause across different faith groups when influencing government laws and policies

- Advocate for parental rights to opt children out of educational programs that conflict with religious beliefs and values
- Promote clear legal definitions in hate speech legislation to prevent weaponization against religious communities discussing controversial issues
- Educate congregants about religious freedom as linked to human dignity, ensuring communities understand their rights
- Engage constructively with host countries by learning cultural practices while maintaining religious identity, rather than isolating into separate customs
- Practice tolerance and respect while maintaining the right to disagree, recognizing that government cannot legislate hearts but communities must coexist
- Support reasonable accommodation policies in schools and workplaces for religious practices, building on legal precedents
- Monitor government policies that may unintentionally curb religious freedom while attempting to address other social issues
- Emphasize mission-driven approaches that demonstrate how faith-based organizations contribute to community well-being beyond profit motives

B6: Strategies for Action: Linking Religious Communities and Global Agendas

This session was moderated by Maurice Bloem, President/CEO of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) in the Netherlands, and Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, UN Resident Coordinator for the United Nations in Zambia. Presenters included H.E. Amb. Antonio Almeida-Ribeiro from KAICIID (via video); Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, General Secretary of ACT Alliance in Switzerland; Maria Lucia Uribe Torres, Executive Director of Arigatou International Geneva in Colombia; Ravan Hasanov, CEO of Baku International Multiculturalism Center in Azerbaijan; and Martine Miller, President of the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy in the United States.

Overview

The session examined how religious organizations can effectively engage with global agendas, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals. Maurice Bloem introduced JLI's "3 M's" approach: Moments (building trust through short experiences), Mastery (sharing knowledge), and Movement (fueling sustainable change through networks). He emphasized addressing three key challenges: structural crises like climate change, institutional gaps where faith actors remain subcontractors rather than co-leaders, and the "double literacy gap" where secular actors lack tools to understand faith contexts and vice versa. Maria Lucia Uribe Torres highlighted Arigatou International as "the only grassroots global network that supports children's well-being," emphasizing localization and working through ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results.

The discussion became particularly intense around systemic critiques and power dynamics. Amanda Mukwashi delivered a powerful challenge: "Even for faith-based organizations, we have modeled structures/systems on systems of oppression. It is not surprising that we haven't managed to stop the escalation of conflict and poverty." She emphasized that until faith communities acknowledge being "part of the problem that perpetuates" division, meaningful change remains elusive. Martine Miller shared compelling examples from conflict zones, including religious leaders successfully mediating when all other reconciliation tactics failed, and interfaith platforms opening humanitarian corridors through "moral authority and deep trust." The session culminated in calls for structural transformation, with Mukwashi declaring: "This is the time for us and our organizations to change structurally internally... If we can do that, we can lead the world by example with hope in every step that we take."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Bridge the double literacy gap through joint training that builds religious literacy among secular actors and development literacy among faith communities
- Embed religious actors in regional governance through partnerships with bodies like the African Union to enable local communities to shape strategies
- Support locally-led knowledge production through research, mentoring, and grassroots networks that inform global policy
- Create "third tables" where faith leaders and global agenda-setters meet in plain language to form agendas dynamically
- Transform organizational structures internally within faith-based organizations to stop modeling systems of oppression
- Invest in early warning mechanisms and humanitarian corridor negotiations led by religious actors in conflict zones
- Accelerate knowledge flow between grassroots and international levels through systematic information exchange mechanisms
- Work within own religions first before engaging interfaith work, as internal disagreements often drive wrongdoing more than external political powers
- Make tables bigger by advocating for cross-sectoral spaces to solve today's problems in new ways



Tuesday, August 12

Plenary (iii) Education: Leading Human Development Imperatives

This plenary session focused on education and, more broadly, translating the oft-stated priority of "youth" into effective action. The discussion linked the goals of quality education for all to the challenges of social cohesion and assuring diversity and equality among different communities. The session highlighted examples of programs tailored to these objectives, such as Indonesia's Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) program, Ethics Education, as pioneered by Arigatou International, and South African examples. The challenges of intergroup tensions and efforts to address them, including youth perspectives, were highlighted.

The moderators for this panel were Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi and Prof. Maniraj Sukdaven. The Indonesian Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Abdul Mu'ti gave a keynote address during this session. Mu'ti stated that education plays a crucial role in developing the character of the younger generation. One Indonesian initiative, the CCRL program, has been proven to help students discover their identity, understand others, and collaborate to build a peaceful, happy, and prosperous society.

From Indonesia, the panelists included Executive Director of the Leimena Institute, Matius Ho, and Amin Abdullah, a member of the Steering Committee of the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPIP). Both presented the CCRL program, which has trained more than 10,000 teachers of various religions from across Indonesia.

Mu'ti explained that in its primary and secondary education policies, Indonesia prioritizes character education for the younger generation through the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children Movement, strengthening the role of teachers, and in-depth learning. In line with this, CCRL can strengthen the Habits of Great Indonesian Children, especially in society, by teaching values of tolerance and eliminating hostile behavior and attitudes toward followers of other religions, including labeling based on differences in religious interpretation.

According to Mu'ti, CCRL calls for cooperation among various religious groups and beliefs, races, ethnicities, and genders to address global humanitarian issues, such as environmental destruction, global warming, climate change, and finding solutions to end inter-state wars.

“Through cross-national, cross-cultural, and cross-religious collaboration, we can raise a generation of young people who are not only academically intelligent but also socially wise,” said Muṣṣi. All parties must collaborate to face global challenges. Big changes start with small, consistent steps supported by schools, families, communities, and the media.

The Executive Director of the Leimena Institute, Matthew Ho, emphasized the importance of pedagogy that promotes cooperation and solidarity in an increasingly divided and polarized world. The CCRL program has trained more than 10,000 teachers of various religions from across Indonesia. “As we see whatṣṣs happening in the world today, I think itṣṣs increasingly urgent and important how we teach future generations to reach out to people outside their own groups, whether ethnic or religious. We strive not only to build relationships, but also collaboration,” said Matius.

Matius said that the CCRL program in Indonesia, which has been running for four years, is a concrete example of interfaith collaboration, involving more than 40 educational institutions and religious organizations. The CCRL program began with a simple idea: teacher training to foster mutual trust as social capital in a pluralistic society. “Indonesia, for example, has been engaging in interfaith dialogue for decades, but dialogue is often only a first step; dialogue stops at dialogue. We need to take more concrete steps to collaborate with people of different faiths,” he said.

Maria Lucia Uribe Torres, Executive Director of Arigatou International Geneva, Colombia, emphasized the importance of holistic education. “Until now, education has focused too heavily on cognitive aspects, such as literacy and numeracy, while childrenṣṣs social, emotional, and spiritual aspects have often been neglected. Education must also support respect for cultural, linguistic, value, and religious diversity,” she said. “Through cross-cultural and cross-faith unity, we can shape a generation of young people who are not only knowledgeable but also socially wise. Inclusive education is key to building a resilient and character-driven nation,” she said.

Additional speakers included Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi, Prof. Muhammed Haron, Rev. Prof. Peter Mageto, and Prof. Jonathan Jansen.



Spotlight

As part of a long-term effort to promote Jewish-Muslim reconciliation, a delegation of Jewish and Muslim faith leaders convened in Cape Town, South Africa, at the G20 Interfaith Forum Summit, to issue the following declaration:

With a shared commitment to fostering genuine understanding and respectful dialogue between our Jewish and Muslim communities, we acknowledge the deep-rooted historical complexities that have shaped their relations.

Rooted in our shared humanity as descendants of Adam, we view the deepening of religious fraternity between Jews and Muslims not merely as a means to ease tensions but as a revival of our common Abrahamic heritage and a fulfillment of God's will. This delegation is part of a long-term process of dialogue, joint study, and cooperation. Its purpose is to make our religious identities a source of connection rather than conflict.

We draw inspiration from the al-Madina Constitution of the 7th century, which brought our communities together, as well as from the historic Nostra Aetate declaration of 1965, which marked a pivotal shift in Jewish-Christian relations. As we commemorate its 60th anniversary in 2025, we seek to build upon its legacy by embarking on a parallel journey for Jewish-Muslim relations.

This endeavor will critically examine both the convergences and distinctions between our traditions, with the overarching aim of equipping our communities with the wisdom and perspective necessary to address illnesses in the world that plague our ability to coexist in lasting peace.

The road ahead is long and fraught with complexities. Our efforts will require strategic planning, scholarly engagement, participation in global forums, dedicated women-led interfaith dialogue, and the dissemination of our shared vision through educational and media channels, and more.

We do not presume to predict the timeline or ultimate success of this undertaking. However, we recognize that it holds the potential to be one of the most significant interfaith initiatives of our time. We, the undersigned, guided by hope and faith, commit to taking the first step on this journey.

We invite all of you to join this endeavor.

Imam Dr. Talib M. Shareef, President, International Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation, United States

Rabbi Dr. Aharon Ariel Lavi, Managing Director, Ohr Torah Interfaith Center, Israel

Imam Rashad Abdul-Rahmaan, Director, International Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation

Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen, Executive Director, Ohr Torah Interfaith Center

Comments by Imam Dr. Talib M. Shareef, President of the Nation's Mosque in Washington D.C.

It is a great honor to stand before this esteemed assembly and speak on the foundation of our collaborative work – which is a matter that touches the heart of our sacred traditions and our common future: Muslim-Jewish relations.

I speak as a student in the spirit of the late Muslim-American Imam W. Deen Mohammed, a visionary leader, a bridge-builder, and a reformer who saw in our sacred texts and histories the potential for peace, not division; for dignity, not degradation.

He taught that “the Qur’an came to confirm the truth that came before it,” and that Islam honors the faiths of Jews and Christians NOT in spite of our differences, but because of our shared origin. It’s stated in the Qur’an 2:136: Saying, ‘We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes...’”

This reminds us that we are not enemies of each other; we are branches of the same sacred Abrahamic tree, which has many branches. Muslims and Jews alike are children of a covenant, keepers of prophetic wisdom, and inheritors of the original Human identity dating back to Adam.

Thus, we are not to inherit the hatreds of history. We are to inherit the intelligence and mercy of scripture.

Our scars should not divide us—they should make us healers. That is our charge today and is the basis of our partnership and presentation.

We have A Shared Moral Responsibility. The Qur’an and the Torah both speak to the sacredness of life, the sanctity of justice, and the moral duty to uphold the rights of others.

We as Muslims are to meet others not on the battlefield of past grievances, but on the common ground of our moral teachings. For interfaith engagement is not simply about tolerance—it is about cooperative human excellence.

Out of the African diaspora, as an African American Muslim Leader, I’m no stranger to struggle, having experienced racism, oppression, and the need to overcome inherited pain—not by perpetuating blame, but by rising in dignity. The future is not built by looking back in anger, but by walking forward in understanding.

This forum is not merely a conference—it is a global call to conscience. It is an imperative that all of us – Muslims, Jews, Christians, and people of all faiths—rise

above political entanglements and partisan fears, and return to the moral clarity of our scriptures.

We are here to urge Muslim and Jewish leaders to cooperate in serving humanity—not in silos, but shoulder to shoulder. To fight hunger, educate the poor, protect the planet, and build peace—not as a favor, but as a fulfillment of divine responsibility.

In our collaboration, we've learned not to underestimate the power of dialogue. One sincere conversation between a rabbi and an imam can ripple through generations. One act of mutual respect or one shared project can break a chain of centuries-old suspicion and transform it into solidarity.

In conclusion: We are not here to fight each other's religion. We are here to witness what God wants for the Human Being. And what God wants, we believe, is justice, mercy, and mutual respect. We are to value God's Mercy, His Creation, and God's ways, being mindful that God does not want us to be cruel to each other, nor to be the victim of cruelty, but treat all Humans as the sacred creation of the Almighty Creator.

Today, let that be our aim—not merely to coexist, but to co-elevate. We invite you, in preparation for and ahead of next year's G20 in my country, the USA, to join us in this sacred responsibility, embracing our shared identity as humans and to value our intrinsic nature to live together intellectually.

Let our efforts here at the G20 Interfaith Forum be a beacon for others. And may the spirit of justice, mercy, and unity guide us in all that we do.

Thank you and Peace be upon you.



Concurrent Sessions C

C1: Education for Solidarity: Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy and Addressing Religious

Global leaders and educators emphasized the transformative power of inclusive education and interfaith engagement. Rev. Fr. Canice Chinyeaka Eyiaka, Director of African Peach initiative, was the moderator for this session. He highlighted solidarity rooted in Ubuntu and spiritual teachings, while Matius Ho, Executive Director of Leimena Institute, showcased Indonesia's cross-cultural literacy program training over 10,000 teachers. Professor Muhammed Haron, Head of Office of Deputy Minister of Social Development, reflected on overcoming racial divides through education, and Ravan Hasanov, CEO Baku International multiculturalism Center, described Azerbaijan's national multiculturalism curriculum. Prof. Dr. M. Amin Abdullah, Pancasila Ideology Development Agency, reinforced interfaith collaboration in classrooms, and Aarifa Hunter, Equal Education in South Africa, spotlighted youth activism using indigenous arts and spiritual frameworks. Dr. Kamilov addressed stigmatization and extremism, stressing early education and respectful dialogue. Together, these voices affirmed education's role in fostering empathy, justice, and peaceful coexistence across diverse societies.

Rev. Eyiaka opened the session by emphasizing solidarity as a moral and spiritual imperative rooted in the principle of Ubuntu and the teachings of Pope John Paul II. Solidarity, he explained, means recognizing our shared humanity and working together across differences to build a just and peaceful society. Education plays a vital role in cultivating this interconnectedness—not just through knowledge and skills, but through character development and engagement with diverse wisdom traditions.

Matius Ho expanded on this by presenting a cross-cultural religious literacy program in Indonesia that trains teachers to engage students with values of diversity and mutual respect. The initiative has reached over 10,000 educators and is now being adopted by multiple government ministries. Teachers integrate interfaith dialogue into subjects like Arabic and mathematics, fostering inclusive classroom environments. Plans are underway to expand the model to other countries, including the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Professor Haron reflected on his personal journey growing up in a racially segregated environment and how education helped him appreciate diverse religious traditions. He stressed the importance of leveraging shared values to prevent misinterpretation and misuse of religious texts.

Ravan, representing Azerbaijan's International Multiculturalism Centre, described how multiculturalism is embedded in national policy and education. His center

operates in 27 countries and has developed a mandatory university curriculum on Azerbaijani multiculturalism. Through youth programs and global partnerships, they aim to combat manipulation, exploitation, and discrimination. Together, the speakers highlighted education as a transformative tool for fostering solidarity, religious literacy, and peaceful coexistence.

Abdulla shared how cross-cultural religious literacy training in Indonesia empowers teachers to engage with diverse faiths, fostering collaboration and deeper understanding in classrooms. Aretha Hunter emphasized youth-led activism in South Africa, using education, indigenous arts, and spiritual frameworks to promote justice and care.

Youth voices in South Africa are central to shaping education activism and envisioning a safer, more inclusive world. Despite challenges, efforts focus on embedding cross-cultural religious literacy and promoting tolerance through frameworks rooted in indigenous traditions. These include spiritual callings, song, dance, and lived experience. The goal is to dismantle barriers within education and society by practicing a politics of love and care, empowering youth to lead transformative change and contribute meaningfully to justice and cultural understanding.

Aarifa Hunter discussed youth voices in South Africa are central to shaping education activism and envisioning a safer, more inclusive world. Despite challenges, efforts focus on embedding cross-cultural religious literacy and promoting tolerance through frameworks rooted in indigenous traditions. These include spiritual callings, song, dance, and lived experience. The goal is to dismantle barriers within education and society by practicing a politics of love and care, empowering youth to lead transformative change and contribute meaningfully to justice and cultural understanding.

Dr. Kamilov addressed the dangers of stigmatizing identities, especially in relation to extremism and terrorism, stressing the need for early education and interfaith engagement to prevent radicalization. Together, these voices highlighted the transformative power of inclusive education, spiritual empathy, and cross-cultural dialogue in building peaceful, resilient societies rooted in mutual respect and shared human dignity.

C2: Focus on Challenges for Africa

This session was moderated by Michael Swain, Executive Director of Freedom of Religion SA (FOR SA) in South Africa, and Asher Maoz, Founding Dean - Head of the Committee on International Academic Relations at Tel-Aviv University & The Peres Academic Center in Israel. Discussion launchers included Professor Mark Hill, KC Distinguished Global Professor at the University of Notre Dame London Law Programme in the United Kingdom; Prof Rassie Malherbe, Acting Convenor of the

South African Council for Religious Rights And Freedoms in South Africa; Pastor Giet Khosa, General Secretary of the International Federation of Christian Churches (IFCC) in South Africa; Jan Pretorius, President of SACOFF in South Africa; Francis Nyakoojo, Head of Access to Justice at Uganda Christian Lawyers Fraternity in Uganda; and Elder Thierry K. Mutombo, General Authority of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Overview

The session examined religious freedom challenges across Africa, with particular focus on state regulation attempts following religious abuses. Michael Swain highlighted South Africa's CRL Rights Commission as posing threats to religious freedom by proposing a Section 22 Committee that would regulate religious leaders and institutions, despite existing laws already criminalizing spiritual abuses. Professor Mark Hill emphasized that COVID-19 lowered the bar for government limitations on religious freedom, with draconian laws disadvantaging religious communities while most couldn't afford litigation. Francis Nyakoojo described Uganda's 2016 regulatory efforts following tragic incidents like a Catholic priest's movement that resulted in 700 people burned alive, and current Kenyan policies shutting down smaller churches for insufficient membership.

The discussion revealed significant tensions between accountability and autonomy. Former CRL Chairperson David Mosoma offered a nuanced perspective: "Religion and Belief are like air: you can't touch it. You can't regulate what you can't touch. But you can regulate conduct." Elder Thierry Mutombo shared the stark reality that 400 people starved to death in a Kenyan cult, leading to government controls that now shut down churches for not meeting registration requirements. The session grappled with fundamental questions about state intervention, with Jan Pretorius noting that SACOFF's 226 member bodies representing thousands of institutions have chosen voluntary accountability rather than accepting state compulsion. The debate intensified around whether governments can determine doctrinal correctness, with speakers emphasizing that "any law that negatively affects one person's religion will invariably negatively affect everyone else's."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Strengthen interfaith unity to demonstrate collective political influence, showing governments "these are the people you want voting for you"
- Promote voluntary accountability within religious institutions rather than accepting state compulsion, building on successful self-regulation models
- Distinguish between regulating conduct and beliefs, recognizing that existing criminal laws already address spiritual abuses without requiring new religious oversight
- Educate communities on religious rights through institutions like the CRL Commission to reduce misunderstanding and abuse

- Support underfunded regional bodies like the African Court of Human Rights to strengthen continental religious freedom protections
- Build religious literacy among general populations, as “ignorance leads to misunderstanding leads to hatred”
- Implement existing legal frameworks rather than creating new regulatory structures, since religious freedom cannot defend criminal activity
- Focus on commonalities rather than divisions when building interfaith coalitions to influence government policy
- Maintain institutional autonomy while accepting that rights come with responsibilities to respect others’ rights



C3: Addressing Youth and Mental Health

This session was moderated by Andrea Kaufman, Director of Faith & External Engagement at World Vision International in the USA, and Angela Nielsen Redding, Executive Director of the Radiance Foundation in the USA. Discussion launchers included Sandile Hlayisi from the Church of Scientology and Citizens Commission of Human Rights in South Africa; Doug Fountain, Executive Director of Christian Connections for International Health in the USA; and Rogelio P. Lelis, Jr., Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Technical Advisor for ACWAY in Iraq.

Overview

The session examined the intersection of faith, youth development, and mental health challenges across communities. Andrea Kaufmann emphasized that faith and mental health constitute a human right, noting that while religious expression can have massive positive impacts on mental health, traumatic church experiences can also occur. Angela Redding presented compelling research data showing that 84% of the world population is involved in religion, yet 74% of faith-related digital content is negative with only 6% being personal and positive. She highlighted that those with spirituality are 82% less likely to commit suicide, especially when paired with community and belonging. Doug Fountain focused on Africa as the world’s youngest continent, where some countries have half their population under 18, and noted that 10-15% of disease burden among 10-24 year olds is mental health-related, representing the fastest growing disease category.



Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Increase positive faith-related digital content to counter the 74% negative representation currently dominating online spaces
- Integrate youth as program designers rather than recipients, recognizing their capacity to address mental health challenges in their communities
- Train religious leaders to recognize when professional mental health support is needed and how to provide appropriate referrals
- Address generational misunderstandings by validating youth struggles rather than dismissing them as “petty teenage issues” or lack of faith
- Promote positive spiritual identity through messaging like “I am a child of a loving God” in social media and community interactions
- Create safe spaces for youth to discuss mental health without stigma or pressure to remain quiet about struggles
- Develop community-based interventions that leverage the protective factor of spirituality paired with belonging
- Advocate for mental health awareness as a human rights issue, encouraging people to speak up when they witness violations

C4: Health Challenges in Practice

This session was moderated by Martin Egbert, Advisory Board Member of Ponseti International Association at the University of Iowa in the USA, and Karen Mara Moss, Executive Director of Steps Charity in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Sr. Zelna Oosthuizen, President of LCCLSA and Unit Leader of Congregation in South Africa from the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in South Africa; Santhosh George, Director of CURE International India in India; Atula Jamir Santhosh, National Program Manager of CURE International India in India; and Sara Rahim, Program Manager of SHRM Foundation in the USA (who was unable to participate).

Overview

The session examined health equity challenges through the lens of clubfoot treatment, demonstrating how locally-led programs can transform health systems for marginalized communities. Sr. Zelna Oosthuizen outlined systemic barriers including logistics and mobility costs, mental health stigma, myths and misinformation, and negative perceptions of overworked health personnel, emphasizing that “where someone lives, how much they earn or the stigma they face can determine whether they receive care or fall through the cracks.” Karen Moss explained how clubfoot affects 1 in 500 births in Southern Africa, becoming permanent disability without treatment, yet the Ponseti method can correct feet in 6-8 weeks through casting followed by bracing until age four.

Santhosh George and Atula Jamir Santhosh described CURE India’s transformation of the public health system, treating over 120,000 children through 448 weekly clinics with government partnerships that provide facilities while CURE supplies training, counselors, and braces. Their model demonstrates that “we can change the way a big nation like India look at and treat children with clubfoot,” shifting from expensive surgery (affecting only 10% of children) to accessible non-surgical treatment reaching 35% of affected children. The discussion revealed how faith communities can effectively advocate for policy change, with speakers emphasizing the importance of relationship building, storytelling, and working within existing systems rather than competing against them.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Strengthen faith-healthcare advocacy by building relationships with policymakers and inviting them to see grassroots programs firsthand
- Develop collaborative partnerships between traditional healers and healthcare workers to address myths and misinformation in communities
- Implement patient-centered training for healthcare personnel to treat patients as people rather than numbers and reduce stigma
- Establish mobile clinic programs that bring healthcare services directly to remote and marginalized communities
- Create public-private partnerships where faith organizations provide training, counselors, and equipment while governments provide facilities and staff
- Document and share success stories through academic partnerships and social media to secure funding and policy attention
- Scale proven models like the Ponseti method through international conferences, webinars, and digital training platforms
- Address mental health integration by treating psychological wellbeing as essential to physical healthcare rather than a luxury
- Build interfaith healthcare networks to identify and address health challenges immediately after birth through ground-level religious community connections
- Advocate for inclusive healthcare policies that ensure access regardless of documentation status or ability to pay

C5: Ethical Issues for Artificial Intelligence: The Practice

This session was moderated by Manisha Jain, Distinguished Engineer at Microsoft in the USA, and Carike Noeth, Southern Africa Regional Manager at Globethics in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Medlir Mema, Head of AI Governance Programme at the Global Governance Institute in the USA; Dr Andre Oboler, CEO of the Online Hate Prevention Institute in Australia; Golan Benoni, Global CIO at IDT in the USA; and Rabbi Dr. Aharon Ariel Lavi, Managing Director of the Ohr Torah Interfaith Center in Israel.

Overview

The session examined practical ethical challenges in AI implementation, particularly from African and faith perspectives. Manisha Jain declared that "when it comes to ethics in AI, it's time for the faith community to lead again," while Carike Noeth emphasized that "Africa is not only vulnerable, we're extremely visionary" and called for "African solutions, not imported models." Medlir Mema highlighted tensions around AI's environmental impact, noting that while AI could help achieve Sustainable Development Goals through optimizing energy use and tracking pollution, companies like Google, Amazon, and Meta have underreported emissions from AI data centers. He warned

against "thinking we can innovate our way out of crisis without addressing the root causes." The discussion took a profound turn when Rabbi Dr. Aharon Ariel Lavi focused on AI's impact on human connection, arguing that "human connection is gym for the soul" and warning that AI's flattering communication could create "chaotic agents" without limits or feedback. He noted that loneliness has become the number one health risk for

Americans, surpassing heart attacks, and emphasized Ubuntu's teaching that "the community builds the person - without you I do not exist." Dr. Andre Oboler shared practical challenges from monitoring antisemitism online, emphasizing that "human creativity is greater than AI's creativity" and that companies need more human oversight rather than AI-driven decisions. The session culminated in Lavi's observation about their in-person gathering: "If we had held this meeting via Zoom, what would have happened to our brains is different than what is happening to us as we are together. We're here in person building communities. And this is powerful."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Prioritize African-led AI solutions rather than imported models, recognizing Africa's visionary potential alongside its vulnerabilities
- Ensure faith communities contribute to AI training data to prevent misrepresentation and promote accurate religious content
- Increase human oversight in AI systems rather than relying on AI for decision-making, especially in hate speech detection
- Address AI's environmental impact by demanding transparency from tech

- companies about data center emissions
- Train religious leaders as community builders to counter AI-driven isolation and maintain human-to-human connections
- Focus on building resilient communities rather than tackling specific AI problems that will quickly evolve
- Promote interfaith cooperation to combat disinformation and tribalism, creating “pro-kingdom of God” solutions
- Maintain in-person gatherings to preserve the neurological and social benefits of physical community presence
- Advocate for concrete AI safeguards that ensure technology serves rather than dominates marginalized communities



C6: Religion and Civility: Lessons from Ubuntu

This session was developed and led by the G20 Interfaith Local Organizing Committee, moderated by Prof. Mathole Motshekga, Executive Founder of Kara Heritage Institute and President of South Africa Interfaith Council, and Avhasei Fredah Mulovhedzi, Secretary General of Southern African Interfaith Council in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Dr. Jane Mufamadi, CEO of Freedom Park in South Africa; Bhekinhlanhla Sibisi, President of AAFIS in South Africa; Rev. Adv. Thandi Nhlengetwa, Advocate of the High Court South Africa from Unity Center of Love and Light; and Rev. Prof. Peter Mageto, Vice Chancellor/CEO of Africa University in Kenya.

Overview

The session explored Ubuntu as a foundation for interfaith cooperation and social healing. Dr. Jane Mufamadi emphasized that Ubuntu represents responsibility and accountability - "seeing yourself reflected in the other and taking responsibility for others" - rather than charity. She stressed that "healing will come from truth telling" and that true Ubuntu means recognizing "if your brother and sister are not free, you are not free." Rev. Thandi Nhlengetwa used a parable of three stonecutters with different motivations to illustrate whether participants were working to build the constitutional vision of transformed society. The discussion addressed tensions between individual rights and communal responsibility, with speakers noting that Western individualism undermines Ubuntu's principle of "I am because we are."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- *Apply Ubuntu principles to interfaith cooperation by moving beyond tolerance to active mutual support and responsibility*
- *Focus on shared humanity rather than doctrinal differences when building interfaith relationships*
- *Address healing processes for historical trauma through truth-telling and community cooperation*
- *Counter individualism by emphasizing collective responsibility and community worth over individual achievement*
- *Recognize Ubuntu's spiritual dimensions as complementary to various religious traditions while respecting diverse perspectives*
- *Build constitutional vision through practical Ubuntu-based community cooperation and dialogue*



Service Project Centered on Feeding the Hungry

On Tuesday, 12 August from 3-5pm, IF20 delegates, faith communities, and local volunteers will work together to package 32,400 nutritious meals, enough to feed 124 children five meals a week for a year. This effort will support feeding programs at early childhood development centers, helping to combat hunger while creating a foundation for learning and healthy growth.

Concrete, Meaningful Actions

Prof. Rodrigo Alves, the Director of the Brazil Organizing Committee for G20 Brazil 2024 pointed out: "In building a just, sustainable, and inclusive world, our communities desperately need our continued collaboration. The coming days will transform our shared reflections into tangible policies and concrete actions."

As part of its commitment to concrete, meaningful actions in support of the world's most vulnerable communities, IF20 has organized a food packing service project aligned with the Forum's theme: "Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities."

In partnership with Rise Against Hunger Africa—a global humanitarian organization dedicated to ending hunger through community empowerment, emergency response, and sustainable development—this initiative will transform compassion into action. Rise Against Hunger has packaged and distributed more than 600 million meals worldwide, and its impact continues to grow.

In Brazil, G20 focused their efforts on food inequality. G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) has continued to focus on this priority by writing two documents:

1. Working to Address Hunger: Religious Communities in Action Across the World: Profiles of Diverse Communities in Action
2. Religious Leaders and Actors on Moral Imperatives to Serve the Hungry and to End Hunger

Hunger and food insecurity remain major barriers to education, health, and long-term development. By working together, interfaith communities can provide immediate relief while supporting sustainable, long-term solutions that uplift vulnerable populations.



Wednesday, August 13

Plenary (iv) Sustainability: Religious Responsibilities and Action

Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary, World Council of Churches, delivered a powerful reflection on sustainability as a moral, ecological, and spiritual responsibility. He traced the term's origins and emphasized its relevance in today's climate crisis, arguing that sustainability must challenge consumerism and demand a new economic model rooted in justice and equity. He highlighted the deep link between sustainability and health, noting that human well-being depends on ecological balance. Pillay called for a spirituality of interconnectedness, stewardship, resistance, and transformation—one that draws from indigenous wisdom and traditions like Ubuntu. He urged faith communities to embrace prophetic witness, advocate for climate justice, and resist systems of overconsumption and inequality. Sustainability, he argued, cannot be achieved without equity, and both must be central to global action. The World Council of Churches has made climate justice a priority, and Pillay emphasized that faith leaders must lead with courage, compassion, and commitment to ensure a viable future for all people and creation.

Sustainability must be rooted in justice, equity, and spiritual responsibility and are inseparable, especially when addressing climate change, economic inequality, and intergenerational justice. Drawing on the legacy of the World Council of Churches, he called for a spirituality of interconnectedness, stewardship, resistance, and transformation—one that challenges overconsumption and neoliberal economic systems. Pillay highlighted the Ecumenical Decade of Planet Justice Action, a global initiative to mobilize churches toward renewable energy, green budgeting, and climate advocacy. He stressed that faith communities must lead by example, turning churches into centers of resilience and sustainability. Indigenous wisdom and traditions like Ubuntu offer vital insights into this spiritual and ecological renewal. Ultimately, he urged religious actors to take prophetic action, hold governments and corporations accountable, and work collectively across divides to protect creation and ensure a just, livable future for all.

Faith communities must take bold, responsible action to address climate justice. This includes transitioning places of worship to renewable energy, advocating for climate finance, debt cancellation, and progressive taxation to support vulnerable nations. Sustainability requires transforming economic ideologies that prioritize endless growth over ecological balance. Rooted in spiritual values, religious actors are called to care for creation, raise awareness, challenge unjust systems, and build

compassionate, regenerative societies. Through faith, we must stand together for justice, equity, and the well-being of future generations.

Moderator Sam Worthington, Forus USA, emphasized that climate crisis is a present reality, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities and driving mass migration. He called on faith traditions to mobilize compassion and moral courage, urging concrete action to influence climate policy. He criticized harmful government responses and stressed the need for resilient, just futures.

Sister Alexandra Semarelli, FMA, Sec. of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican City, emphasized the urgent need to shift from global indifference to solidarity, drawing on Pope Francis's 2013 visit to Lampedusa as a moral call to action. She highlighted the Pope's response to the migrant tragedy—not with words, but with presence—challenging the world to confront the causes of migration and ecological crisis. Migration, she stressed, must be seen not as a problem but as a human reality requiring compassion and coordinated support.

She introduced the Vatican's transformation of Castel Gandolfo into a center for integral ecology and education, offering vocational training in sustainable agriculture, circular economy, and regenerative practices. This initiative aims to educate youth, elders, and business leaders, fostering ecological conversion and replicable models of sustainability. Sister Alexandra called on faith communities to recognize their responsibility to protect creation, welcome the marginalized, and act prophetically. Her message underscored that faith must inspire concrete, systemic change for a just and sustainable future.

Somboon Chungprampree, International Network of Engaged Buddhists, reflected on Thailand's recent equal marriage law as a step toward a more inclusive society, rooted in Buddhist values of interdependence and compassion. Drawing parallels to Ubuntu, he emphasized that personhood is realized through community and activism. He challenged conventional views of education, advocating for transformative learning that empowers communities rather than promoting individualistic advancement. Mu warned that urban migration and the loss of communal ties leave vulnerable populations behind and called for educational models that train individuals to return and serve their communities. His team is developing curricula that integrate Buddhist principles, respect for other religions, and global awareness. He highlighted monastic schools as spaces for deep learning and spiritual grounding. In response to the Myanmar crisis, Mu described collaborative efforts with UNICEF and Arigatou to protect displaced children in Thailand, using Buddhist temples as safe havens. His message underscored education as a tool for justice, inclusion, and sustainable community resilience.

Elder Isaac K. Morrison, General Authority for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, emphasized that climate change is not merely political or scientific—it is a deeply moral and spiritual issue. Drawing from scripture, he affirmed

that creation is meant to gladden the heart and serve humanity, calling all faith communities to action. He outlined three key lessons from disaster response: First, build trust and relationships with faith leaders before disasters strike, as they know their communities intimately and can mobilize effectively. Second, encourage preparedness by teaching families to store small amounts of food and water, creating buffers for emergencies. Third, involve those affected in the healing process by allowing them to share their stories, which fosters resilience and community support. Isaac shared his personal loss and how storytelling within his faith community helped him heal. He concluded by affirming the power of local voices and faith-based networks to build peace and respond compassionately, echoing the teaching: "Blessed are the peacemakers."



Concurrent Sessions D

D1: Crossing Bridges Among Sectors and Institutions

Katherine Marshall, Vice President of IF20, moderated this session and shared her experience at the World Bank, where religion was initially excluded from development discourse due to assumptions of conflict, ethical tension, and irrelevance. Over 25 years, efforts have aimed to integrate religious voices into global development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian work. She emphasized that traditional institutional divides—between economics, peacebuilding, and social development—are breaking down, requiring new, integrated approaches.

Rev. Susan Hayward, Research Fellow at Berkley Center, highlighted the urgent need to bridge the divide between secular institutions and religious communities in global policy and diplomacy. Hayward, drawing on her experience with the U.S. Institute of Peace, emphasized the importance of religious literacy among policymakers and lamented the dismantling of strategic religious engagement programs. Yet she sees this moment as an opportunity to rebuild more flexible, inclusive systems that authentically partner with faith actors.

Prof. José Casanova, Emeritus Prof. of Sociology, Georgetown, underscored that secular politics and global governance are failing, and religious voices must now reset the table with moral leadership. He praised the global-local nature of religious networks, especially the role of women and sisters in faith communities, as uniquely positioned to act across scales. Religion's universal message and embrace of diversity offer a model for global cooperation. Both speakers called for prophetic creativity and bold action to address global crises where traditional structures have proven inadequate.

Bani Dugal, Principal Representative for the Baha'i Community USA, highlighted the divide between religious freedom and religious engagement, emphasizing the need to bridge secular and faith-based actors, especially in global institutions like the UN. Despite strong commitments from faith traditions, grassroots communities often lack awareness of international mechanisms, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. She stressed that greater collaboration would amplify impact and visibility.

Ambassador Salah Hammad, head of AGA-APSA Secretariat, of the African Union underscored the importance of inclusive partnerships in policy development. While the AU engages religious institutions, he noted a gap in integrating women and youth voices. To address this, the AU developed two key strategies: women's empowerment and youth engagement. With 65% of Africa's population under 35, youth inclusion is vital for sustainable development. He called for collective

responsibility and emphasized the unique role of religious institutions in connecting top-level policy with grassroots realities. Together, these insights advocate deeper, more inclusive collaboration across sectors.

Dr. Brian Adams, Chair of ACWAY, emphasized the importance of giving youth a genuine place at decision-making tables, sharing three powerful examples from professional, ecclesiastical, and civil society contexts. At Griffith University, student-led projects flourished when youth were asked what they wanted to achieve. As a bishop, Adams empowered young adults to lead congregational initiatives, demonstrating their capacity for meaningful leadership. In ACWAY, youth not only participate but lead the organization, shaping its direction and partnerships. His message: youth leadership works when trust and responsibility are given.

Sean Cleary, Exec. Vice-Chair, Future World Foundation, South Africa, framed global governance challenges through a neurochemical lens, identifying fear, greed, and empathy as drivers of human behavior. When empathy recedes, societies suffer. He warned of rising geopolitical conflict, the breakdown of shared norms, and the disruptive convergence of advanced technologies. Cleary called for a reset of global structures, emphasizing that faith communities—uniquely global and local—must lead with moral clarity and creativity to address today's complex crises.

José Casanova: Religion's Prophetic Role

Religion must reclaim its moral voice to counter harmful narratives falsely spoken in its name. Gender equality is essential for religious credibility; women's leadership is key to revitalizing faith communities. Religious institutions must embrace diversity and empathy to remain relevant and transformative.

Rev. Susan Hayward: Destruction and Reimagining

We are in a global moment of institutional collapse and potential rebirth. Youth-led movements in Myanmar and Sri Lanka offer models of pluralistic, creative resistance. Older generations must support youth leadership and rethink outdated systems.

Bani Dugal: Progress and Collaboration

Despite challenges, progress has been made in youth and women's inclusion. Faith and secular actors must step out of comfort zones to collaborate on shared human rights goals. Freedom of religion or belief includes the right not to believe—dialogue must be inclusive.

Ambassador Salah: Religion and Peacebuilding in Africa

Religion has been misused to fuel conflict, but it can be a force for peace. AU includes religious institutions in post-conflict policy development. Youth and women must be central to building a peaceful, inclusive Africa. Education and historical narratives must be reformed to prevent future divisions.

Final Points

Fear, greed, lust, and empathy drive human behavior, and imbalance among these forces leads to societal breakdown. He called for a return to shared norms and a collective culture rooted in empathy and purpose, reminding governments that their sole mission is to serve the well-being of people. Katherine reinforced the need to revitalize the common good in a pluralistic world, urging transformation of power structures to include women and youth meaningfully. Participants stressed that systems are broken and energy must shift toward rebuilding. Youth must be mentored and empowered to lead, and faith communities must engage from the ground up. Neuroscience and social intelligence were highlighted as tools to reform engagement. Bani Dugal and others called for partnerships between religious and secular actors, aligning efforts with higher principles. The crisis we face, like South Africa's past, has both danger and opportunity—requiring bold, inclusive, and transformative action.

D2: Peacebuilding: Global and African Challenges

This session was moderated by Fr. Boniface Neibo, Deputy Director of Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP) in Nigeria, and Martine Miller, President of the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy in the USA. Discussion launchers included Nirina Kiplagat, Governance and Peace-building Coordinator at the Regional Service Centre for Africa in Ethiopia; Maria K Daka, Member of ACWAY in Zambia; Prof. Tim Murithi, Honorary Research Associate at IDCPPA; Dr./Amb/ His Majesty King Bongwe II, Africa President of the International Association of World Peace Advocates in South Africa; and Nureldin Mohamed Hamed Satti, Former Sudanese Ambassador to the United States in Kenya.

Overview

The session examined peacebuilding challenges across Africa and globally, emphasizing local solutions within complex geopolitical contexts. Fr. Neibo highlighted South Africa's specific challenges including climate-related displacement, community violence, gender-based violence, and xenophobic incidents threatening social cohesion. He emphasized the need to "learn how to mediate rather than just respond to conflicts after they occur." Nirina Kiplagat identified extremism as one of the toughest contemporary challenges, noting its spread between countries and the subtle nature of community-level recruitment that requires early identification and intervention. Maria Daka stressed that "peacebuilding cannot exist without the dynamic involvement of youth and women," pointing to unemployment, hunger, sexual assault, and lack of education as fundamental roadblocks.



The discussion revealed tensions between theoretical approaches and practical needs. His Majesty King Bongwe II emphasized moving beyond theory: "Let's not be theoretical; everything theoretical is not going to help. Our young need practical education to be practical problem-solvers." He connected peace to basic needs, stating "you cannot have peace while you must have food; you cannot have peace when not working." Nureldin Satti offered a stark assessment of external exploitation: "When rich men sneeze, Africa catches cold," linking mineral extraction and technological dependency to conflict while advocating for education as "the foundation of peace."

Prof. Murithi provided a spiritual perspective, emphasizing humanity's shared divine connection while critiquing how government structures often "promote darkness, not light, by fostering conflict."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Shift from reactive to proactive approaches by learning mediation techniques rather than only responding to conflicts after they occur
- Address root causes of extremism through primary research focusing on local grievances and community-level prevention strategies
- Ensure meaningful youth and women participation by addressing fundamental barriers like unemployment, hunger, and lack of education
- Focus on practical problem-solving rather than theoretical approaches, providing youth with practical education for real-world challenges
- Connect peace to basic needs by addressing food security, employment, and shelter as prerequisites for sustainable peace
- Promote traditional sharing cultures as alternatives to conflict-generating competition and resource extraction
- Invest in education infrastructure as the foundation for long-term peace and development
- Develop early warning systems to identify and disrupt subtle recruitment into extremist groups at community levels

D3: Roles of Cultural Heritage and Protection of Sacred Sites

This session was moderated by Dean Lepini, CEO of Sacred Sites Foundation of Southern Africa in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Rabbi Yakov Nagen, Director of Ohr Torah Interfaith Center in Israel; Celine Doguile-Shamase, CEO of Freedom Park Heritage Site and Museum in South Africa; Amos Mlauzi, CEO of National Heritage Council in South Africa; and Peggy Lantler, CBC, representing African Association for Indigenous Spirituality in South Africa.

Overview

The session explored challenges facing sacred sites globally, from Jerusalem's contested religious spaces to South African mountains and rivers threatened by commercialization and restricted access. Rabbi Nagen described Jerusalem as embodying "Shalom" - integrating opposing forces like fire and water - and proposed practical solutions including international security without national symbols and mutual recognition of prayer rights for all Abrahamic faiths. He shared powerful examples of coexistence, including hospitals where Jewish, Muslim, and Christian staff work together as "a deeply spiritual temple." Dean Lepini emphasized that sacred sites require custodianship by indigenous communities rather than government or private control, noting how national parks restrict access during spiritually significant times like sunrise and sunset.

The discussion revealed systemic issues affecting sacred site access across different contexts. Celine Doguile-Shamase from Freedom Park Heritage Site and Museum described tensions between commercialization needs and spiritual integrity, while Amos Mlauzi explained how the National Heritage Council works to redress colonial-era bias that displaced communities from spiritually significant lands. Peggy Lantler highlighted African Indigenous Spirituality's connection to mountains, rivers, and oceans as "natural temples" where communities renew spiritual vows annually. Audience members challenged both the idealized portrayal of Jerusalem's situation and the ongoing privatization of traditional spiritual spaces throughout South Africa, emphasizing that ordinary citizens face fences and "No Trespassing" signs at sites their ancestors used for generations.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Establish community custodianship management plans that transfer moral ownership of sacred sites from government/private control to indigenous communities
- Remove access restrictions that prevent spiritual practitioners from visiting sacred sites during significant times like sunrise, sunset, and traditional ceremonies
- Implement inclusive security measures at contested sites using internationally vetted personnel without national symbols to reduce provocations
- Repatriate stolen artifacts and spiritual objects taken during colonial periods to restore communities' ability to practice traditional rituals
- Develop protocols for sacred site visitation that prevent desecration while maintaining accessibility for legitimate spiritual practices
- Create interpretive centers near (not on) sacred sites to educate communities about collective cultural heritage without commercializing the sacred spaces themselves
- Advocate for legislative protection of indigenous peoples' constitutional rights to cultural and spiritual practice on ancestral lands

- Build interfaith cooperation around shared sacred spaces, recognizing that spiritual connection transcends exclusive territorial claims
- Address privatization impacts where commercial development blocks traditional access to rivers, mountains, and other natural sacred sites

D4: Distinctive Wisdom, Special Challenges facing Traditional Communities

This session was moderated by Prof. Maniraj Sukdaven, Professor at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Discussion launchers included Makoena Masha, Director of Baha'i Faith in South Africa; Thembi Tulwana, Secretary General of Inkululeko Yesizwe Association in South Africa; and Mamsi Sebolai from Kara Heritage Institute in South Africa.

Overview

The session explored how traditional African communities balance preserving indigenous wisdom with modern pressures from urbanization and business development. Makoena Masha emphasized that "much of what makes Africa distinct is found in the tribe and family" while acknowledging that urban life challenges these traditions, requiring integration rather than abandonment of traditional practices. Thembi Tulwana distinguished between tradition and culture, arguing that "tradition evolves through time" but "culture emanates from spirituality" and provides a more stable foundation. She highlighted how forests used for prayer and medicine are removed by big business, stripping away resources essential to traditional healers who serve children, elders, and the nation. The discussion addressed practical challenges including loss of sacred sites to development and the need for indigenous consultation on land use.

The session grappled with tensions between progress and preservation. Speakers emphasized that "modernization should not happen at the expense of who the people are" and called for government engagement with indigenous practices. Professor Mosoma noted how colonization destroyed African knowledge systems while Christianity was used as political power, emphasizing that "we cannot exist without the land" as it represents "the bones and blood of our people." The discussion touched on combating negative stereotypes about African spirituality while highlighting traditional ecological wisdom that capitalism has often exploited, noting that traditional societies never measured worth by material accumulation.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Require indigenous consultation before business development on traditional lands to protect knowledge systems and sacred sites
- Integrate traditional and modern approaches rather than forcing communities to choose between progress and cultural identity

- Preserve access to medicinal plants and forests essential for traditional healers serving community health needs
- Promote government engagement with indigenous practices to ensure policy makers understand community needs and sacred site importance
- Combat negative stereotypes about African spirituality while highlighting its benefits to broader society
- Protect traditional ecological knowledge that offers sustainable alternatives to purely capitalist resource extraction
- Maintain cultural foundations rooted in spirituality rather than relying solely on evolving traditions
- Share traditional wisdom across South Africa's diverse communities by connecting through commonalities like Ubuntu and the golden rule

D5: The Impact of Theology and Advocacy In Action: The Examples of Laudato Si', Al Mizan

This session was moderated by Prof. Husna Ahmad OBE., CEO of Global One 2015. Discussion launchers included Azmaira Alibhai, Faith & Ecosystems Coordinator at UNEP in Kenya; Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director of the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers; Mushra Hartley, Global Operations Manager at the International Emissions Trading Association (IETA) in South Africa; Merylene Chitharai, Youth Coordinator & Professional Architectural Technologist at Religions for Peace South Africa & African Council of Religious Leaders in South Africa; Grace Chilongo, Director of Youth Empowerment and Environmental Management (YEEM) in Malawi; H.E. Sheikh Al-Mahfoudh Bin Bayyah, Secretary General of Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace in UAE; and Immanuel Mwendwa Kiilu from Eco-Faith WG CYMG UNEP.

Overview

The session examined how theological frameworks like Laudato Si' and Al Mizan translate into climate action advocacy. Dr. Elsanousi emphasized that "no one should be left behind" in fighting climate change and highlighted successful youth initiatives like "Bye Bye Plastic Bags," started by 16 and 13-year-olds in Bali who were inspired by Nelson Mandela and created an international movement. Merylene Chitharai shared her personal experience from flood-riddled Durban, designing programs that combined theological education across religions, food security through rural gardens, and multifaith intergenerational approaches. The discussion addressed structural challenges, with Dr. Elsanousi noting that religious communities are "under-resourced" despite their extensive work, citing the World Bank's reluctance to fund religious organizations due to lack of mechanisms.

The session sparked debate about Ubuntu's role in climate advocacy when a participant questioned whether Ubuntu's emphasis on humility prevents Africans

from advocating for themselves, referencing colonialism and economic exploitation. Dr. Elsanousi responded that while acknowledging past injustices, “forgiveness is necessary for us to move forward and to do what is good for society.” Mushra Hartley highlighted women’s disproportionate climate impacts through her “Women in Carbon” initiative, emphasizing that women drive purchasing decisions and are key to achieving net-zero reality. The discussion concluded with practical household-level suggestions including covillages, manure use, and challenging personal accountability while influencing children to be intentional about their environmental choices.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Activate theological positions from each religion to support climate advocacy through interfaith collaboration
- Ensure meaningful youth participation through intergenerational collaboration rather than treating climate action as solely the religious sector’s responsibility
- Address women’s disproportionate climate impacts through targeted programs and recognition of their decision-making power
- Combine education with practical action by integrating theological climate teachings in schools alongside food security and community gardens
- Build evidence-based religious leadership where inspiring statements are backed by institutional work and real-life examples
- Learn from marginalized communities through humble, mutual respect rather than imposing solutions
- Hold governments accountable through unified interfaith collaboration that leverages religious institutions’ permanence compared to political structures
- Influence change at household level through personal accountability, sustainable practices, and intentional parenting that shapes the next generation

D6: Women’s Roles in Building Peace and Sustainable Communities: Religious Dimensions

This session was moderated by Lee-Shae Salma Scharnick-Udemans, Senior Researcher at the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, and Anne Simmons-Benton, Co-head of US Delegation for W20 in the United States. Discussion launchers included James Patton from Lead Integrity in the United States; Dr. Sohaira Siddiqui, Executive Director and Professor at Al-Mujadilah Mosque and Center for Women and Georgetown University in Qatar; Sister Enelless Chimbali, Senior Program Officer at All Africa Conference Sister to Sister (AACSS) in Malawi; Prof. Nayla Tabbara, President of Adyan Foundation in Lebanon; Sarah Oliver, URI Learning and Action Coordinator for United Religions Initiative/CTII in South Africa; and Ms. Babalwa Ngcongolo from Charter for Compassion and CTII in South Africa.

Overview

The session examined why women remain excluded from formal peace processes despite their central role in maintaining daily peace within communities. Lee-Shae Scharnick-Udemans posed the fundamental question: "If we already trust women to hold together the fragile peace of daily life, why do we not trust them to shape the face of the world?" James Patton highlighted a critical paradox: community-based organizations are increasingly run by women, yet this hasn't "percolated into the higher structures." He explained that peace tables are "derived to talk to those who have control over violence," meaning predominantly male-led institutions, and argued for changing incentive structures around legitimacy in peace processes. Dr. Sohaira Siddiqui shared that 600 million women (15%) lived within 50km of armed conflict in 2022 - a number that doubled since the 1990s - emphasizing that "when governments collapse, women carry the weight."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Change incentive structures in peace processes to legitimize women's participation rather than centering violent actors as primary architects of peace
- Address systemic exclusion by recognizing that women's absence from leadership isn't just ignorance but stems from entrenched social constructions
- Create theological education programs that challenge narratives preventing women from taking active community roles
- Develop specialized training for women as peace negotiators and mediators at formal peace tables
- Build communities of belonging that provide spaces for trust, healing, and women's contribution to peacebuilding
- Challenge benevolent sexism that excludes women from difficult conversations under the guise of protection
- Establish interfaith women's networks that can bridge divided communities and share healing experiences
- Implement justice and repair ethics that acknowledge historical wounds while empowering future generations
- Move beyond tokenism to meaningful participation by ensuring women have necessary skills and legitimate power
- Address women's complicity in maintaining oppressive systems while fighting oppression rather than oppressors



Plenary (v) Leave No One Behind: Vulnerable Communities at the Center

Timothy Stratford, General Counsel for IF20 and *Moeletsi Mbeki*, Chairman of The South African Institute of International Affairs were the moderators for this plenary. *Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneil*, Pres. Of ONE Campaign, urged collective action to save lives and promote equity in Africa. She emphasized supporting proven health initiatives, holding governments accountable, and engaging the diaspora. Investment in healthcare, agriculture, and fair trade is essential. Faith communities must scale up efforts, driving systemic change with urgency, integrity, and shared compassion.

Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Muslim Council of Elders, called for urgent moral leadership and collective responsibility to protect the most vulnerable. He highlighted ongoing crises in Sudan and Rwanda, emphasizing the need for faith-based action, compassion, and solidarity. Religious leaders must unite to uphold human rights, prevent violence, and ensure inclusive peace and security for all.

Prof. Jose Casanova, Emeritus Prof. of Sociology, Georgetown, urged global unity amid failing national systems and rising inequality. He criticized political divisiveness and called on religious leaders to guide with moral clarity. Emphasizing bridge-building and realism, he advocated for collaboration across borders to restore bonds, pursue the common good, and resist the retreat into harmful nationalism.

Kevin Hyland OBE, CEO of Praeveni Global, exposed the brutal realities of human trafficking, emphasizing that vulnerability is created and exploited by the wealthy and consumers. With 50 million victims globally and justice rare, he called for urgent action. Governments must invest in prevention and uphold every person's right to life, dignity, and equality.

Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, UN Resident Coord. United nations, Lesotho, highlighted three vulnerable groups: African communities harmed by climate change and economic projects, women and girls facing abuse, and people of color marginalized globally. She stressed that faith communities must restore spiritual dignity and challenge systems that perpetuate injustice. True help begins with understanding the issues and acting collectively, not for accolades but for change. Faith-based organizations once led in healthcare and education and must reclaim that role. Amanda urged honesty about our broken systems—economic, political, and environmental—and called on faith leaders to unite, speak truth, and guide healing toward justice and equity.

Elder Vaiangina Sikahema, General Authority, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, shared a deeply personal reflection on faith, dignity, and self-reliance, rooted in his experience as an immigrant from Tonga and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He emphasized that the Church's commitment to the vulnerable is guided by the two great commandments: to love God and to love others. His family, despite limited means, was taught to contribute through tithing and service, instilling a sense of dignity and responsibility. Working at the Bishop's storehouse as children taught them that blessings come through effort and faith. He highlighted that whether wealthy or poor, all members contribute equally in spirit, reinforcing unity and shared purpose. Elder Bisecahumer's message underscored the power of faith communities to uplift, empower, and serve with humility. As the panel turned to recommendations for the G20, his story served as a reminder that sustainable change begins with compassion, shared responsibility, and moral conviction.

Here is a summary with final points from the speakers:

- *Adama Dieng* called for peace, African unity, and an end to corruption and foreign exploitation. He urged Africans to take responsibility, silence the guns, and reclaim dignity without dependence on Western powers.
- *Jose Casanova* emphasized humility, interreligious recognition, and treating all humans as equal. He warned that the G20 is fractured and urged a fresh start rooted in cooperation and shared humanity.
- *Kevin Hyland* challenged world leaders to feel the shame of global injustice. He praised faith communities for their resilience and called for ego-free leadership that welcomes migrants and prioritizes compassion.
- *Amanda Khozi Mukwashi* urged the G20 to launch a Marshall Plan for Africa, including debt relief, climate finance, and fair trade. She invoked Micah 6:8, calling for justice, mercy, and humility as pathways to hope.
- *Elder Valangina Sikahema* encouraged building coalitions and partnerships—a "network of networks"—to bless the world through collective action.
- *Moeletsi Mbeki* reminded that faith communities helped end apartheid and must now play a stronger political role. He called on Western faith leaders to hold governments accountable, especially the U.S., for global obligations.



Concurrent Sessions E

E1: Focus on Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced People: Faith, Rights, and Protection

Critical challenges of human displacement, especially linked to conflicts but increasingly to the effects of changing climate conditions, present policy and humanitarian demands that from many perspectives require new global, national, and local responses. Generosity in welcoming refugees, displaced people, and voluntary migrants can sadly give way to xenophobia and social tensions. The rich religious traditions of welcoming the stranger support both urgent responses and mechanisms to build on narratives and policies that are responsive to contemporary challenges but also prepare the way for what are widely understood as rising future levels of human movement and intersocietal engagement. Plural societies are an inevitability, and religious communities need to lead in the underlying societal understanding and response to current and future needs.

For this session, Christina Tobias-Nahi, Director of Public Affairs, Islamic Relief USA and Dr. Jan Mufamadi, CEO, Freedom Park, South Africa were the moderators. The discussion launchers were Şafak Pavey, Special Adviser, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Switzerland; Gareth Stead, Head: Nation Building, Every Nation Churches (Southern Africa), South Africa; Lance Thomas, Manager, University of Pretoria, Faculty of Theology and Religion, South Africa; Elissa McConkie Gifford, Director of Global Field Operations for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, USA; Sr. Kayula Lesa, Director, Talitha Kum Zambia (TAKUZA), Zambia; Peter-John Pearson, Director, Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office, South Africa; and Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov, Country Director, HIAS South Africa, South Africa.

The discussion emphasized the urgent need to center vulnerable communities in decision-making, not as passive recipients but as contributors to change. Speakers called for meaningful representation of women, youth, and marginalized voices from the outset—not after the agenda is set. Climate refugees, mental health fallout, and systemic inequality were highlighted as under-addressed issues. Faith leaders were urged to use their moral authority to speak where politicians cannot, especially on sensitive topics like Gaza. Participants stressed the importance of collaborative action over parallel efforts, and the need to use technology to broaden engagement. Legal and policy reforms were proposed, including recognition of climate refugees and stronger advocacy mechanisms. The call was clear: move from talk to transformative action, listen to the margins, and build inclusive platforms that reflect the lived realities of vulnerable populations across regions and generations.

E2: A Historical Reflection: A New Book on the G20 Interfaith Experience

This session was moderated by Dr. Marianna Richardson, Director of Communications for the G20 Interfaith Forum Association in the USA. Discussion launchers included Dr. Sherrie M. Steiner, Associate Professor of Sociology at Purdue University Fort Wayne in the USA; Rt Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake, Chair of the Board of the International Shinto Studies Association in Japan; and Dr. Brian Adams, Chair of ACWAY (A Common World Among the Youth) in the USA.

Overview

The session examined the G20 Interfaith Forum's evolution through a new publication titled "Continued Moral Pressure for Responsible Globalization, 2 Volumes," which covers 2018-2023 with 22 contributors examining religious, economic, and environmental changes. Dr. Brian Adams shared the origin story of IF20, explaining how the idea emerged in 2013 when he recognized that G20 engagement groups ignored religious perspectives despite faith being "one of the major drivers for economic decision-making." The discussion highlighted communication as critical for IF20's expansion and noted how technology like interpretative AI has made interfaith materials more accessible across languages.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Document interfaith evolution through academic research capturing religious-economic intersections
- Expand communication strategies to strengthen IF20's network influence through multimedia platforms
- Leverage technology including AI for cross-language accessibility of interfaith materials
- Address governance gaps by ensuring religious perspectives inform global economic decision-making

E3: The Fight Against Human Trafficking: Looking to 2030

This session was moderated by Frederick W. Axelgard, Director of G20 Interfaith Forum Association in the USA, and Dr. Ahmed Zanya Bugre, Coordinator for the Global Circle for Reparations and Healing and AU Liaison in Ethiopia. Discussion launchers included Ken Deli Mark (CEO of Hope Africa), Dr. Reverend Cecilia Popina-Mahlala (National Coordinator of Talitha Kum South Africa), Sorofo Mucheka (founder and director of Kera Development Ministries), Kanyisile Motsa (director and founder of Berea Hillbrow Home of Hope for Girls), Sister Diana Cagnari (National Coordinator in Zimbabwe), Lisa Churcher (Human Trafficking Institute), Hira Haftar

(founder of Our World Too), Ambassador David Saperstein (US Department of Transportation anti-trafficking commission), and Ambassador Michelle Guthay (Ambassador against Human Trafficking for the Sovereign Order of Malta).

Overview

The session examined human trafficking as both a local and global crisis requiring systemic change beyond individual rescue efforts. Speakers highlighted how trafficking is fundamentally an economic crime generating \$260 billion annually in illicit profits, with poverty driving families to unknowingly push children into exploitation. Lisa Churcher emphasized that “you cannot stop trafficking without stopping traffickers,” stressing the need for enhanced prosecution capacity, while Sister Diana Cagnari shared using prayer and community mobilization to rescue a child trafficked for organ harvesting.

Ambassador David Saperstein warned that recent US policy changes have dismantled anti-trafficking infrastructure worth over \$500 million, while local practitioners described ongoing challenges including inadequate funding, weak justice systems, and the need for better collaboration between faith communities and government agencies. The discussion connected trafficking to broader historical injustices, with Dr. Ahmed linking it to the African Union's 2025 declaration on reparations, arguing that systematic economic inequality creates the conditions where “a mother sends a child to the street to prostitute.”

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Combat digital recruitment by leveraging youth expertise to identify trafficking networks on social media platforms
- Strengthen prosecution capacity through specialized training for police and prosecutors to identify cases and secure convictions
- Enhance collaboration between faith communities, NGOs, and government to avoid working in silos
- Address root causes including poverty and economic inequality that make families vulnerable to trafficking
- Implement supply chain transparency for G20 governments and companies to eliminate forced labor
- Redirect criminal profits through asset recovery funds to victim services and prevention programs
- Build trust networks between communities and law enforcement for effective victim identification
- Maintain international cooperation despite political changes and budget cuts in donor countries

E5: Child Rights and Dignity: A Religious Imperative

This session was moderated by Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali, Secretary-general of the Global Network of Religions for Children and Director of Arigatou International Kenya. Discussion launchers included Nobukhosi Zulu-Taruza, Law and Policy Specialist and Independent Consultant in South Africa; Avhasei Fredah Mulovhedzi, Secretary General of Southern African Interfaith Council in South Africa; and Mawlānā Uwais MA Dockrat from Markaz Manār al-Fikr in South Africa.

Overview

The session examined child protection from religious and legal perspectives, focusing on tensions between parental rights and state intervention. Dr. Ali emphasized that children should be viewed not just as recipients but as advocates, referencing the June 16, 1976 student protests against apartheid education. Nobukhosi Zulu-Taruza outlined key legal principles: children under 18 deserve special protection due to brain development, parents have primary responsibility for care including passing on values and beliefs, and the state should only intervene when parents fail to meet children's needs. Mawlānā Dockrat highlighted current controversies around South Africa's Early Childhood Education Toolkit, arguing that teaching gender and sexual ideologies to young children contradicts many parents' religious views despite government engagement attempts yielding "no joy."

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Respect parental primacy in child-rearing while ensuring state intervention only when parents fail to meet fundamental needs
- Promote grassroots education on child protection standards to change attitudes around practices like child marriage from community level up
- Strengthen collaboration between government and religious leaders rather than antagonizing faith communities over ideological differences
- Address implementation gaps between well-designed child protection laws and their practical effectiveness on the ground
- Support faith-based child advocacy including initiatives where children write to peers in conflict zones to build hope and solidarity
- Ensure adequate funding for child welfare programs, recognizing that current grants may be insufficient given inflation
- Protect religious freedom in child education while maintaining universal safeguarding standards in all institutions
- Leverage religious networks for child protection given their extensive community presence and charitable infrastructure

E6: Ubuntu Meets Talanoa: A Conversation about the Most Vulnerable Populations Affected by Climate Change and Learning from Different Examples of Traditional, Cultural, and Indigenous Practice

This session was moderated by Romanna Remor from Roble del Sur Foundation in Brazil and Dr./Amb./His Majesty King Bongwe II, Africa President of the International Association of World Peace Advocates in South Africa. Discussion launchers included David N. Munene, Board Chair of SAFCEI and Programs Manager of CYNESA in Kenya; Dr. Melanie Barbato, Coordinator Mission and Interfaith Centre at Pasifika Communities University in Fiji; Francesa de Gasparis; and Tambi Tauloa.

Overview

The session explored how traditional concepts of Ubuntu and Talanoa can inform climate action for vulnerable populations. Romanna Remor emphasized that “our shared humanity is the strongest foundation for climate action” and stressed the need to create environments where politicians can listen to community wisdom. King Bongwe II provided a spiritual perspective, arguing that “disaster happens when you are not aligned with your spirit” and emphasizing that indigenous people represent “the origin of the beginning.” Dr. Melanie Barbato explained Talanoa as a Pacific approach offering “time and space for listening, talking, and storytelling” that recognizes all communications as fundamental to community, while arguing that “collaboration is not optional” and “leaving people behind is not just a lack of charity, it’s also a lack of good judgement.”

David Munene highlighted the disconnect between academic environmentalism and lived experience, sharing how he learned sustainable practices from his father but struggled with UN environmental meetings that used unfamiliar terminology despite his practical knowledge. He emphasized the principle of enhancing existing initiatives rather than starting new ones and called for engaging politics from within rather than “shouting at the system.” Francesa de Gasparis stressed that “solutions to climate change are coming from those communities that are dealing with it every day” and advocated for making policy discussions more accessible to affected populations.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- Bridge knowledge gaps between academic climate discourse and traditional environmental practices through accessible vocabulary and communication
- Apply Talanoa principles by creating spaces for listening, storytelling, and community dialogue in climate policy development
- Enhance existing initiatives rather than creating new programs, recognizing that effective solutions already exist at community levels

- Integrate traditional warning systems and sustainable farming methods from indigenous knowledge into formal climate responses
- Establish indigenous-managed lands recognizing that sacred spiritual sites often overlap with biodiversity hotspots and water reserves
- Foster cross-sectoral collaboration involving government, science, religion, and communities to create holistic climate policies
- Engage politics constructively by working within systems while maintaining integrity rather than external criticism alone
- Promote food sovereignty through religious leadership that emphasizes ethical food production appreciated by communities
- Address systemic debt issues that prevent communities from implementing sustainable livestock and land management practices



Thursday, August 14

Summary

Katherine Marshall reflected on the critical themes of disaster preparedness and climate change, emphasizing the importance of understanding unequal vulnerability. The final plenary focused on this issue, sparking one of the most dynamic discussions of the gathering. Breakout groups, including one on refugees and migrants, were described as lively, informative, and challenging. Katherine highlighted the presence of Catholic sisters, supported by the Hilton Foundation and Georgetown University, as a meaningful step toward integrating women's voices and agendas into global interfaith dialogue.

Vinu Aram, co-president of Religions for Peace, shared a video message from India, urging participants to find quiet reflection and purpose in their work. She emphasized the importance of collective action rooted in compassion and spiritual connection. Vinu called attention to two urgent issues: food insecurity and climate justice for children. She condemned the weaponization of food and the breakdown of distribution systems that leave children hungry during their formative years. She also urged the creation of public awareness around climate threats, especially those affecting young people.

Drawing on the African philosophy of Ubuntu—"I am because you are"—Vinu encouraged participants to translate shared values into concrete action. She reminded the group that meaningful change requires intentional effort and praised the G20 Interfaith Forum for convening diverse stakeholders during a time of global violence and degradation. The session concluded with a call to move into breakout discussions on food, education, governance, disaster preparedness, and vulnerable communities.



Five Fishbowl Sessions: Open Discussion on the Event's Five Core Topics

Food: Renier Koegelenberg

The discussion on food security and vulnerability emphasized the need for systemic, locally grounded solutions. Speakers highlighted that emergency food parcels are insufficient without access to nutritious meals and sustainable systems. Faith communities play a vital role in gathering data, supporting neighbors, and advocating for long-term change. Political manipulation of food, as seen in Sudan, can destabilize nations, while youth migration from rural areas threatens agricultural continuity. Projects linking farming to education, like hydroponics tied to math and science, can inspire youth to return to agriculture. David Beckmann stressed the importance of supporting the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty to scale successful national programs. Participants urged global institutions to back local efforts and prevent food from becoming a source of conflict. Shared African values like communal generosity must be revived. The call to action: empower youth, protect local food systems, and ensure global structures support grassroots resilience and peace.

Debt/Global Governance: Mohammed Elsanoussi

Religious institutions have a moral imperative to engage with the global debt crisis and the evolving landscape of global governance. As stewards of ethical leadership and community trust, they must challenge unjust financial systems that trap nations and families in cycles of poverty. By advocating for debt relief, transparent lending practices, and equitable economic policies, faith communities can amplify the voices of the vulnerable and hold powerful institutions accountable. Their spiritual teachings—rooted in justice, compassion, and solidarity—offer a counter-narrative to exploitative systems that prioritize profit over people. Moreover, religious institutions can help shape global governance by promoting inclusive dialogue, ethical frameworks, and the protection of human dignity across borders. In a world fractured by inequality and ecological strain, their prophetic voice is needed to call for reform, reconciliation, and shared responsibility.

Education: Maniraj Sukdaven

Education should foster understanding, empathy, and respect across faith traditions. In a world increasingly fractured by religious intolerance and misinformation, faith communities must become proactive educators—offering curricula, dialogues, and programs that illuminate the shared values among diverse religions. By promoting

interreligious literacy, they help dismantle stereotypes and cultivate environments where difference is not feared but honored. This work begins with children and youth, who must be taught not only the tenets of their own faith but also the beauty and wisdom found in others. Religious institutions can partner with schools, host interfaith workshops, and model inclusive theology that embraces pluralism as a divine gift. Such education is not a threat to faith—it is its fulfillment. When religious leaders invest in teaching tolerance, they sow seeds of peace, preparing future generations to lead with compassion, humility, and a deeper sense of shared humanity.

Disaster Preparedness: Whitney Clayton

Whitney Clayton led a robust discussion on disaster preparedness. Religious institutions play a vital role in community resilience and must proactively prepare for natural disasters. As trusted centers of refuge and moral leadership, they are often among the first places people turn to in times of crisis. By developing emergency response plans, training volunteers, and coordinating with local authorities, faith communities can offer shelter, distribute aid, and provide spiritual comfort when disaster strikes. Preparation is not just practical—it's a moral imperative rooted in compassion, stewardship, and the sacred duty to protect life and dignity.

Vulnerable Communities: Christina Tobias-Nahi

The IF20 discussions emphasized the urgent need to center vulnerable communities in global decision-making. Faith communities, representing 84% of the world's population, are uniquely positioned to fill gaps left by governments and advocate for justice, dignity, and transformation—not just charity. Speakers called for meaningful representation of women, youth, and marginalized voices, urging that they shape the agenda from the start. Climate refugees, mental health fallout, and systemic inequality were highlighted as under-addressed issues.

Participants stressed the importance of updating laws, challenging complicity, and using technology to broaden engagement. African leaders emphasized regional specificity, reparations, and the moral authority of faith leaders. Calls were made for webinars, policy papers, and legacy projects to ensure continuity and impact. The forum must move from talk to action, weaving together efforts rather than running parallel. Only by listening to the margins and confronting uncomfortable truths can IF20 fulfill its mission and influence the G20 meaningfully.

Interactive Session: Elders and Youth

Here are the key points from the interactive dialogue between elders and youth:

Leadership and Inclusion

- Leadership must evolve to include women, youth, and marginalized voices.
- True leadership is earned through service and empowerment, not just titles.
- Courageous leaders acknowledge failures and make space for others to lead.
- Servant leadership focuses on meeting the needs of the community.

Technology and Social Media

- AI and social media can be bridges or barriers depending on how they're used.
- Youth call for ethical platforms and intergenerational alliances.
- AI lacks morality—humans must guide its use with care and compassion.
- Access to technology must be equitable, especially for vulnerable communities.

Climate and Generational Justice

- Africa suffers most from climate change despite contributing least.
- Youth demand inclusion in decision-making and financial support.
- Indigenous knowledge and tech must be combined for sustainable solutions.
- Environmental stewardship begins with local action and moral education.

Education and Values

- Education must go beyond exams to teach values, citizenship, and peace.
- Values start at home—parents are the first educators.
- Intergenerational dialogue is essential to pass on wisdom and reform systems.
- Youth must be safe, respected, and empowered to shape the future.

Final Call to Action

- Youth are not just participants—they are leaders and agenda-setters.
- Faith communities must mentor, uplift, and collaborate across generations.
- Together, we must build inclusive, ethical, and sustainable societies.



Closing Plenary: Conclusions and Paths Forward

Deputy Minister Ganief Ebrahim Hendricks addressed the deepening inequality in South Africa, noting the country remains one of the most unequal globally, with limited recovery from apartheid and unresolved land expropriation issues. He expressed gratitude for international support and emphasized that poverty persists across Africa, despite the goal of eradicating it by 2025. Hendricks highlighted South Africa's child support grant and the growing demand for a basic income grant, stressing that righteousness and ubuntu must guide policy.

He called on the interfaith community to play a vital role in addressing gender-based violence, child pregnancies, and elder abuse. Applauding the intergenerational panel, he urged leaders to prioritize the Global South on the global agenda and to work toward ending starvation. Hendricks shared a personal reflection on Albert Luthuli's family values and lamented the abdication of fatherly responsibility. He concluded by urging faith communities worldwide to unite behind South Africa's national convention and build bridges for collective action.

Deputy Minister of Social Development, Mr. MGE Hendricks, MP Closing Remarks

Distinguished Guests; and Ladies and Gentlemen.

May the grace, peace, blessings, boundless light and love be with you all!

I am indeed pleased to have received the kind invitation from the G20 Interfaith Forum's chairperson Prof. Mosoma, and his two deputy leaders Mr. Sandile Makasi and Prof. Maniraj Sukdaven to address you all at this conference's Closing Session that addressed a critical theme 'Ubuntu in Action: Supporting the Vulnerable Communities;' a theme that resonates with my ministry and on which I wish to briefly comment.

But before doing so, allow me to also thank Professor W. Cole Durham Jr as well as his deputy Prof. Katherine Marshall whose support for this conference has been unwavering and for having invited me to share some thoughts with the participants at the University of Pretoria's G20 Interfaith Forum Planning Meeting during mid February 2025.

On the present occasion, let me express my gratitude – on behalf of the Department of Social Development (and our Minister Tolashe), the Government of National Unity (GNU), and the people of South Africa that is under His Excellency President Cyril

Ramaphosa's leadership – to all the delegates for having graced our beautiful City of Cape Town (fondly referred to as the Mother City) with their august presence and dignified participation.

Over the past few days, this G20 Interfaith Forum Conference turned out a record crowd that passionately participated in the plenaries and break-away sessions; as a result of each one's interactive participation many described it as a highly successful gathering.

Lest it be forgotten, this event forms part of a series of high-level engagements for South Africa's Presidency of the G20 Presidency since 1 December 2024. And the series will culminate in the G20 Leaders' Summit towards the end of November 2025.

Let me add that it is the first time that the South Africa's Presidency hosted the series; in other words, the only African country that has presided over the series of G20 activities. Our country - under President Ramaphosa's leadership - sought to effectively use its G20 Presidency's platform to place onto the G20 agenda the Global South and the African Continent's developmental priorities; for this reason, the theme: "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability" was consciously adopted.

The G20 Presidency's selected theme, I should say, resonates with the work and contributions of several faith communities across the globe; many of which are represented at this G20 Interfaith Forum conference.

The fact that our local committee convened such an important conference since Sunday (10 Aug.) until today (14 Aug) indicates that the participant's voices at this G20 Interfaith Forum were considered central to international development discourse, its global cooperation agenda, and for promoting world peace. From my perspective, I think that your conscious choice of the conference's theme 'Ubuntu in Action: Supporting the Vulnerable Communities' ties in with my ministry's agenda that strives to serve them.

In this era of heightened geopolitical tension among various groups, increasing nationalism in certain nation-states, and rising right-wing political activities in so-called democratic environments, these developments threaten to reverse the gains achieved through global cooperation, mutual respect among nations, and open robust interaction.

Factoring in these and other negative developments, I am of the view that faith communities such as yourselves and peace movements need your critical prayerful voices to address harmful global challenges such as Zionists' genocide in the State of Israel, India's stranglehold of Jammu & Kashmir for desiring their independence, and Morocco's control over the Western Sahara.

I have no doubt that few days deliberations generated positive presentations, constructive discussions, and collective solutions on matters that affect all our vulnerable communities.

I can imagine that the oral and written presentations in both the plenaries and the breakaway sessions resulted in vigorous discussions between the panel presenters and their audiences; from the conference's rapporteurs, I was informed the good discourses, among others, regarding the reduction/eradication of poverty, the brief reflections on the desperate refugees' status, the tearful images of displaced persons, and the critical importance of humanitarian aid to starving/malnourished children, and the ongoing demand to bring about gender equality.

Allow me to state that in our beloved South Africa, faith communities have and continue to play a crucial role in advancing the national development agenda. At the height of COVID-19 pandemic, members of our communities have witnessed extraordinary acts of courage and love; they demonstrated acts of solidarity and support for the most vulnerable population at the time of their greatest need.

Today, our religious institutions may be described as resilient in undertaking valuable work in strengthening families & improving the educational offerings, sharing much needed skills training to empower our young people, tackling the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide and providing humanitarian relief assistance in the face of the frequent natural disasters.

Through South Africa's G20 Presidency and DSD's participation in the G20 Interfaith Forum, the aim is to harness and deepen the partnership that exists with faith communities; the partnership is meant to address development challenges confronting the global societies at large and the vulnerable communities in particular.

Over the last three decades and in partnership with faith communities, the Government has transformed the lives of millions of South Africans by providing the necessities of life and creating opportunities that never existed before 1994. In truth, South Africa is still a work-in-progress and it is daily challenged to keep building bridges in spite of the various obstacles that the country's communities face.

The challenges of poverty, unemployment, landlessness, and the divisions around race, class and gender make it difficult to arrive at a socially cohesive and united society as fast as the government want. The journey towards the kind of society envisaged by Madiba and other forbearers of our liberation struggle is long with various challenges along the path. But if all of us look back, you and I can confidently say that all of us has every reason to celebrate the obstacles that were encountered along the path.

As we prepare for the National Dialogue, which President Cyril Ramaphosa spoke about during his recent State of the Nation Address (SONA), I hope that the G20 Interfaith Forum Planning Meeting and the conference will lay a solid foundation for the South African faith communities to consolidate and solidify their positions on matters of national interest.

The National Dialogue will bring South Africans from all walks of life to reflect on our long journey to freedom, the progress that the country has made so far and to define a vision for the country for the next 30 years. As all of us in South Africa proceed along this journey towards re-building South Africa, you and I will have to ask and answer difficult questions. You and I will have to confront head-on complex and uncomfortable realities facing our nation.

Regardless of our religious & political persuasions and racial & ethnic identities, the National Dialogue is an opportunity for every one of us to unite our people behind one common vision and that would be to build a South Africa that you and I truly want.

Recent developments in our country that has created unnecessary tension and driven by those who seek to divide our nation and undermine our sovereignty as a nation, highlight the urgent need for the National Dialogue, which will assist us to collectively discuss how to bring to life what our forebears left to us, and that is a legacy that says this country belongs to all racial, ethnic and religious groups that reside in it.

In the face of false and divisive narratives, my clarion call, therefore, to you as leaders of faith communities is that we should become a united force against bigotry, anti-by our differences and not be destroyed by them. And, there is no more crucial time for us Page4 to be united than now. This is a time to pull together behind South Africa's G20 Presidency to build a free, peaceful, and secure world.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is both pleasing and fitting to note that the conference's outcome resulted in healthy engagements and deliberations. And may I repeat that some of you who were at Tshwane's Freedom Park during mid- February 2025 that it stands as a tangible monument of our country's freedom and democracy; one that founded on the values of Ubuntu, equality, and dignity for all.

As I conclude, I am assured that the lively sessions at this conference along with various robust deliberations with regards to rich inter-faith insights will concretise our common conviction to hold onto our faith, to foster practical inter-religious collaborations, and lead to healthy interfaith cooperation with the global government departments, civil societies, and the expansive private sector; this is with the fervent hope that our vulnerable groups in particular will meaningfully benefit from these developments and outcomes across all continents.

Let me stress that the importance of the G20 interfaith forum's role; it is necessary

in this era to, among others, respond to the emerging health hazards, climate change challenges, negative economic concerns, and damaging environmental disasters. So, I urge that as all of us face these and other issues, all of us should construct sustainable partnerships, reinforce ubuntu-type ethical values, and to work together faithfully to address the mentioned matters.

As I end, I wish you well as you and I travel along a challenging path that lays ahead. And I want to underline that our government and the ministry - that I represent - will throw their weight behind South Africa's interfaith initiatives to tackle the tasks that affect all our vulnerable communities. I am confident these efforts will lay a legacy of our country towards the G20 Presidency; it will do so in shaping the global policy agenda, chart out our pathways towards cementing international solidarity, and reigniting socio-moral and regenerative spirit globally

Permit to end with reference to my ministry's Hon. Minister Tolashe who was unable to participate; she said: "The faith sector remains a critical stakeholder in addressing the deep-rooted social challenges our world continues to face. It also plays a vital role in our collective efforts to restore the moral fiber of society. As we prepare to host the G20 Summit and the all-important National Dialogue, we hope and trust that the voice of faith will find meaningful expression."

Thank you very much for your attention.

Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, President, South African Council of Churches, Closing Remarks

From Words to Witness: Our Covenant of Action

Grace and peace to you all, beloved servants of humanity.

As we prepare to leave this sacred gathering, I am reminded of the African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." These four days in Cape Town have shown us that we—Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, traditional African spiritualists, and all faith traditions represented here—have chosen to go far together.

The Ubuntu Revelation

We came to Cape Town under the banner of "Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities." Ubuntu has taught us that our humanity is interconnected—"I am because we are." But this week, we have discovered something profound: Ubuntu is not just philosophy; it is prophecy. It calls us beyond mere acknowledgment of our connectedness to active responsibility for one another's dignity.

When we heard from our Indonesian colleagues about education that cultivates cross-cultural religious literacy, when our Islamic brothers and sisters spoke of justice and peace, when our Christian communities shared about serving the marginalized, when our Jewish traditions reminded us of Jubilee justice, when our Hindu and Buddhist communities spoke of compassion in action—we were not hearing different messages. We were hearing the same divine call in different sacred languages.

The Mirror of Truth

But let me speak with the honesty that our faiths demand. This forum has held up a mirror to our souls, and what we see is both inspiring and convicting. We have confronted uncomfortable truths about ourselves as faith leaders.

Too often, we who claim to serve the God of the poor are viewed with suspicion by those very poor. Why? Because our proximity to power has sometimes made us complicit in systems that perpetuate injustice. It's easy for religious leaders to be co-opted by those in power for the benefits offered, and in exchange lose our prophetic stance to stand and be the voice of the voiceless. This sometimes results in religious leaders living in mansions while their congregants queue for food parcels, it leads into our institutions accumulating wealth while children in our communities go hungry, it leads into us religious leaders blessing policies that oppress rather than liberate—where we become part of the problem we claim to solve. It leads into some of living a very luxurious life at the expense of those poor they claim to love and serve.

Let us ask ourselves: How can we speak against the corruption in governments and corporations while ignoring the corruption in our own hearts and institutions? If we demand transparency from others, should we not model it ourselves? If we call for justice in society, should we not practice it in our faith communities first?

The Five Pillars of Our Commitment

Over these days, we have examined five critical areas where our faiths must move from rhetoric to reality:

1. Food Security and Human Dignity My wish is that we could commit ourselves not merely to feeding the hungry, but to transforming the systems that create hunger. The World Council of Churches, Caritas organizations, World Vision, Islamic Relief, LDS Charities, and countless others are already demonstrating what interfaith cooperation can achieve.

As we conclude this conference and go back to our bases, let us commit to establishing food security projects in every faith community represented here, not as charity that creates dependency, but as empowerment that restores dignity. Let

us commit to reviving traditional farming wisdom, establishing community gardens, and building agricultural value chains that honour both creation and Creator.

2. Regarding Economic Justice and Debt Cancellation, My wish is that we could commit to becoming accountability partners in the Jubilee call for debt cancellation. Let us commit to not simply advocating for debt relief, but let us also commit to guaranteeing its integrity and its good use for the benefit of the vulnerable. Through our community networks, let us aspire to establish transparent tracking systems to ensure that cancelled debt reaches the poor, not the corrupt.

The Jewish notion of Jubilee restoration, our Christian communities' moral authority, our Islamic communities' principles of economic justice that prohibit exploitation—together, I hope we can build an "Accountability Covenant" that ensures justice reaches those who need it most.

3. From the powerful keynote address on Education, presented here, we heard how Education is the greatest equaliser—with transformative potential to level the playing field and create opportunities for all, perfectly embodying the themes of solidarity, equality, and sustainability that have guided this G20 Interfaith Forum. Quality education and religious education can serve as means to cultivate cross-cultural religious literacy and eliminate attitudes and behaviours which include hostility towards people of other faiths. As we part, my wish is that we could commit to transforming our educational approaches.

Let us commit to establishing interfaith educational partnerships that teach not just literacy and numeracy, but social, emotional, and spiritual intelligence. Through cross-cultural religious literacy, may we be able to help end the devastating wars fought in the name of religion that humiliate, brutalise and kill children and the elderly alike. May our madrasas, our church schools, our temple institutions, our community centres become laboratories of Ubuntu—places where children learn that difference is not division, but a tapestry of diversity created by the pleasure and joy of divine design.

4. About Migration and Human Dignity I want to note that fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and calls for religious advocacy for compassion and care. My hope is that as we part, we could commit to being practical sanctuaries of hope for migrants and refugees. May our mosques, churches, temples, and synagogues open not just our doors, but our communities to those fleeing violence and seeking opportunity.

5. Regarding Climate Justice and Creation Care, I invite us to commit to the treatment of creation with care as a sacred duty. The world's future requires a vision of development that can be sustained in the long run. My wish is that our faith communities could become models of sustainable living, champions of renewable energy, and prophetic voices for environmental justice.

The Pastoral Commitment: Having the Smell of the Sheep

Pope Francis of happy memories, called religious leaders to have “the smell of the sheep” they claim to pastor, not to smell differently from the people they claim to care for—to live so close to those we serve that their struggles become our struggles, their hopes become our hopes. This is not just a Christian calling; it is the essence of all authentic spirituality.

My wish is that we could commit to pastoral proximity over political comfort. Let us commit to spending more time in informal settlements than in government offices, more time with the unemployed than with the employed elite, more time listening to the cries of the poor than to the promises of politicians.

When we speak, may we speak not as outsiders looking in, but as insiders looking up—from the perspective of those whose dignity is daily denied, whose hopes are daily deferred, whose humanity is daily diminished.

Beyond Calling to Commitment

Let me be clear about what distinguishes this moment from countless other gatherings. We have not gathered here to issue another statement “calling on governments, “calling on business and corporations,” and “calling on business” to act. The poor are tired of our calls. The poor are hungry for our commitment.

My hope is that we, as interfaith leaders, could commit ourselves to action.

My wish is that every faith community represented here could take the initiative—not waiting for perfect conditions, not depending on external funding, but beginning where we are, with what we have, for whom we serve.

Rather than setting rigid timelines that may become empty promises, let each of us return home and begin. Some may act immediately, others may need time for consultation and planning. What matters is not the speed of our response, but the sincerity of our commitment.

Instead of a universal deadline, let us each ask: What is the first step my community can take? When can we begin? How will we measure our faithfulness, not just our success?

The Prophetic Challenge

To my fellow Christians: Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them.” The world is watching our fruits, not just listening to our words.

To our Muslim brothers and sisters: The Quran reminds us that faith without righteous action is incomplete. Our actions must reflect our submission to Allah's justice.

To our Jewish friends: The tradition of Tikkun Olam—repairing the world—and the ancient notion of Jubilee restoration call us to righteous action that restores justice.

To our Hindu and Buddhist colleagues: The principle of dharma calls us to righteous action that upholds cosmic order.

To our traditional African spiritualists: Our ancestors judge us not by what we promise, but by what we preserve for future generations.

To all of us: The vulnerable communities we claim to serve are not objects of our charity—they are the measure of our authenticity.

The Ubuntu Covenant

As we leave Cape Town, my hope is that we could leave not as individual faith traditions returning to separate spheres, but as an Ubuntu coalition aspiring to shared action. Let us say we will sign—with our lives, not just our signatures—a covenant that calls us to:

1. Transparency in our own institutions before demanding it from others
2. Service to the marginalized as the measure of our spiritual maturity
3. Accountability to each other as guardians of this sacred trust
4. Prophetic courage to speak truth to all powers, including religious power
5. Practical action that transforms systems, not just symptoms

The Final Word

The children of the global south, the poor of this world, the marginalised of every nation, are not waiting for our next conference. They are waiting for our conversion. From talkers to doers. From advocates to agents. From religious leaders to radical servants.

Ubuntu teaches us that we are because others are. Today, we commit to ensuring that others can be because we have been. Not because we spoke beautifully about their plight, but because we acted boldly for their liberation.

When the history of this moment is written, may it record not what the G20 Interfaith Forum called for, but what it committed to. Not the eloquence of our speeches, but the faithfulness of our service.

The God of all faiths, known by many names but recognised by one love, has called us not to be successful, but to be faithful. Not to be applauded, but to be authentic.

Not to be comfortable, but to be converted.

May we leave Cape Town not as we came—as separate traditions with good intentions—but as we must go: as one interfaith family with sacred commitments, carrying the smell of the sheep, bearing the burden of the broken, embodying the hope of the hopeless.

The world is waiting. The poor are watching. God is calling.

Ubuntu. Let us act because we are, and others shall be not because we have called but because we have acted.

Amen. Insha'Allah. Shalom. Om. Asante sana.

God bless our sacred work together.

A Review of Final Appeals from Bishop Sipuka:

- Service Over Status: Faith leaders must reject luxury and embrace sacrificial service, especially where congregations suffer.
- Accountability Covenant: He urged the creation of mechanisms to ensure resources serve the poor—not the corrupt.
- Ubuntu as Prophecy: Ubuntu is not just philosophy—it's divine prophecy. Our shared humanity is sacred and multilingual.
- Protect Childhood & Sabbath: Children deserve weekends with family and faith—not relentless academic pressure.
- Sustainable & Compassionate Living: Faith communities must lead in ecological stewardship and defend the dignity of migrants and refugees.
- Embodied Ministry: Leaders must "smell like the sheep"—immersed in the lives of the people, not cloistered in offices.
- Beyond Statements: Words are no longer enough. The poor demand visible, committed action.
- Intergenerational Accountability: "Our ancestors will judge us not by our promises, but by what we preserve for future generations."

Final Points from Closing Reflections:

- *Liliya Khasanova*, Director of ACWAY, urged intergenerational alliances and courageous dialogue. She emphasized that ambition must be matched by action, and that our liberation is shared.
- *Whitney Clayton*, Exec. Director of G20 Interfaith Forum, expressed his gratitude and humility, calling for reflection and reform within IF20. He invited participants to consider their personal calling to make things happen and to act upon what they have heard at the Forum.

- Katherine Marshall, VP of G20 Interfaith Forum, acknowledged the anger in society and called for responsibility and action. She introduced the ADVANCE framework—Accountability, Determination, Vision, Action, Now, Compassion, Empowerment—and emphasized moving from talk to transformative action.
- King Bongwe thanked participants and called for collective action.

Prof. Luke David Mosoma's final words were that together, these voices called for humility, courage, intergenerational collaboration, and bold action to address global challenges with compassion and resolve.

We have named the problems—inequality, exclusion, and the quiet harm of looking down on others. We have honed new skills, shared wisdom, and built bridges. But this cannot end as just another conference. What remains is the urgent need for a plan—with a clear timeframe, measurable impact, and shared commitment.

Let us agree not only to speak, but to act. Let our actions shape the future of IF20 and leave behind a legacy project that continues forward. Let us root our work in three enduring pillars: solidarity, equality, and sustainability. These are not just ideals—they are sources of strength, clarity, and purpose.



Closing Comments, Katherine Marshall, G20 Interfaith Forum Vice President

Professor Mosoma, when you started us off at the beginning of the Forum on Monday, you began by reminding us to take a moment to remember the people who are suffering in the world, to remember the violence that's taking place, the hunger, the people who don't have opportunities. And I think that throughout this event, this call and this reminder has remained on our minds. Many of us hear echo after echo of the words we've heard over the past days. One that still resonates for me is hearing that "we're in an angry nation". I think we're also in an angry nation in the United States as well, and in other parts of the world. And it is our privilege, but also our duty and our responsibility, to remember what we have heard. We also come away inspired by the spirit and hope of the ideals of Ubuntu and the work that you, we, all do that brings us together.

We've heard so much here that is inspirational about Ubuntu and the spirit of Ubuntu. But I remember also Ebrahim Rasool's reminder: that there's a hard edge to Ubuntu, which is that "I am my brother's keeper, that we have the responsibility to act so, with words and ideas and experience, with prophetic voices that call us to action, demand action, for peace, for caring, for compassion. I think we all leave this Forum with a powerful sense of what we can do and what we must do together.

I started out on Monday talking about something that echoes in my mind always: a young leader's quip about a conference - "NATO: no action, talk only". Through these days, I have been echoing or thinking of alternatives that convey our true spirit, which is decidedly NOT NATO. I came up with some other acronyms, words constituting "brave" and "grace". I will mention another here: ADVANCE, because it brings together some words that I think reflect our discussions.

So A is for *accountability*, as we heard time and time again, that we have and we need to build practical mechanisms for accountability.

I think we heard a lot about D: *determination*, and commitment to action.

V stands in for the idea that we are inspired and directed by a *vision*, by a prophetic voice.

A is for *action* and the courage, moral and physical, to act.

N is for *now*, which symbolizes urgency but also that we are living another Kairos moment, a moment when we can be transformational, reflecting the wisdom in the idea that in crisis there is both danger and opportunity.

C calls us to *compassion*, with grace and spirit.

And the final E exemplifies *empowerment* and the inspiration it calls out.

There are many other words and ideas, but those in ADVANCE represent some of the thoughts that echo as we move away from talk and the need for dialogue and learning from each other to action.

I'll end the important need for appreciation and thanks, inspired by the idea of the theater, where what happens at the end is that one by one, the cast comes out and takes a bow. We can't do that here for the full cast, but let's imagine everyone who should take a bow and be applauded.

Start with the sound technicians, the people who've served us food, the people who've arranged our hotels: they all need to come out.

Each one of you who's participated in any of these plenaries and panels, who's contributed your challenges, experience and ideas, who've written blogs, and posted on social media. Thank you to all of you.

Thank you so much also to our colleagues in the G20 interfaith family. It is a family of people who are engaged in the process, almost all volunteers, as almost everyone who is doing this work does it because of caring and passion. They volunteer hours and hours of time, many Zoom calls, many hours on planes. To the large team from Utah, I'd add the team from Georgetown University, the foundations that have helped us over the years, and had patience with us, and other partners.

I think that the greatest, the final call of this cast as they come to the stage, is the local organizing committee, our friends, as Whitney has highlighted, who have put in so much effort and made this event a truly South African event, where we have learned about South Africa, from South Africa's challenges and its dogged determination and spirit of inclusion, of Ubuntu. Thank you and congratulations!

We're reminded of the miracle of South Africa's transition, which is very much a centerpiece of my own professional life and experience. 1994 was a great year, a year dominated by Nelson Mandela, who remains, I think, one of the greatest inspirations among all world leaders, ever. Mandiba is our model, our example, our inspiration. But there are so many others, men and women, young and old, who inspire us. So special thanks to all of you, South African brothers and sisters. I won't name people, I won't go into that, because we don't have time and the planes are waiting.

So thank you to all of you.



