



The Network for
Religious and
Traditional
Peacemakers



CONCEPT NOTE

UN Strategic Learning Exchange Series

Strategic Learning Exchange: Religion, Gender & Youth Inclusion in Peace & Security

Introduction:

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called for “a surge in diplomacy for peace”.¹ Identifying challenges ahead, he underscored the need for greater effectiveness in utilizing diplomacy for peace; the effective implementation and follow-up of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Change Agreement; the reinforcement of human rights as “a common responsibility of mankind and of all UN Member States”; and, reform to ensure a more effective UN. He further acknowledged the range of actors who should be more effectively engaged to make a meaningful contribution to conflict prevention and sustaining peace with and beyond UN member states, of which included religious actors. Guterres envisages a role for religious actors, for instance, as part of the SDG 16 – Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies² and a range of dispute settlement processes inscribed in Chapter VI and through regional arrangements as envisaged under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. As a foundation, the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s report “Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution”³ and the supporting “UN Guidance for Effective Mediation”⁴ recognized and asserted support to the important mediating role that “religious leaders and faith-based organizations play...in many conflict situations.” The report highlighted, “These leaders have unique connections to local communities and frequently enjoy the trust of the conflicting parties.”⁵ Over recent years, there has been growing recognition among the international development, humanitarian and conflict transformation communities—through the formation of departments and units to internal policies, research and programmes / projects—that religious actors can and do play a critical role in conflict transformation processes in fluid complex conflict contexts.⁶ Religious actors’ peace actions, among many other examples, have been particularly vital in preventing / countering violent extremism, enacting early warning and response mechanisms, mediating conflicts, and reconciling populations at the community to national level.⁷ While there is a growing evidence base on the importance of engaging religious and traditional actors, as both the UNSG Guterres and Ban Ki-Moon state, “they are often not fully acknowledged, and their potential contribution remains underutilized.”⁸

Today’s international development, humanitarian and conflict transformation practitioners, as recognized by the UNSG’s Guterres and Ban Ki-Moon, are encountering increasingly fluid and complex conflict situations that challenge intersecting religious, gender and youth dynamics. Wars today are waged not in far-off battlefields, but within local communities and neighborhoods, where civilians are disproportionately impacted—making up 70 percent of the casualties of conflict, most of whom are women, girls and young men directly engaged in fighting. Given that the

¹ UN Press Center, 19 October 2016. Interview: ‘A surge in the diplomacy for peace would be my priority’ – UN Secretary-General-designate’. Website consulted on 20 June 2017: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55343#.WV0K5ekpDIU>.

² SDG Goal 16 is dedicated to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

³ UN GA Report A/66/811, 2012. Site consulted on 20 June 2017: http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SGReport_StrengtheningtheRoleofMediation_A66811.pdf

⁴ UN GA Resolution 65/283, 2012. Website consulted on 20 June 2017: http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation_UNDPA2012%28english%29_0.pdf

⁵ Ibid 3.

⁶ Ibid. 3.

⁷ For an evidence base, please reference: PRIO, 2005. Mapping the Terrain: The Role of Religion and Peacemaking: http://file.prio.no/publication_files/PRIO/Harpviken_Roislien_Mapping_the_terrain_stateoftheartpaper_jul05.pdf; USIP, 2006. Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religions Bring Peace, Not War: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PWJan2006.pdf>; Joyce S. Dubensky (ed.), 2016. Peacemakers in Action: Volume 2: Profiles in Religious Peacebuilding 2nd Edition: <https://www.amazon.com/Peacemakers-Action-Profiles-Religious-Peacebuilding/dp/1316606724>.

⁸ Ibid. 3.

majority of the world's population identifies with a faith community, most conflicts are also happening within religious contexts. In many contexts, religion is a defining factor influencing people's core beliefs regarding women's, men's and youth's differing roles and behaviors, including during conflict and in peace. Although religion can be a driver of conflict, it is often political or economic interests that are at its root. Yet, religious identity is often used as a dividing line. Many of today's violent extremist groups draw on religion to justify their violence—including justifying exclusion, sexual and gender-based violence as a pervasive and deliberate conflict strategy.

However, despite the linkages between religion and conflict, there is a lack of acknowledgement and engagement with religious communities in conflict earning warning, analysis, mediation, reconciliation and P/CVE. This stems in part from the international development, humanitarian and conflict transformation communities' shared struggles with how to best understand and engage with religion, religious actors, and faith based organizations.⁹ This is especially true when it comes to the rights-based inclusion of gender and youth in peace and security and how to understand the dynamics of masculinities. Given the vital impact of gender and youth inclusion in peace, security and the SDG 16—as codified in the UNSCR 1325 – Women, Peace and Security and 2250 – Youth, Peace and Security while integrated throughout the SDGs—a shared concern among these communities remains how to effectively engage with religious actors and to ensure a rights based approach to both women's and youth's inclusion in peace and security.

With increased attention on religion and religious actors, now more than ever, a move beyond silos to a deepened exploration of the intersections between religion, gender and youth inclusion in peace and security is vital to advance collaborative and innovative inclusive approaches to ensure improved progress toward sustainable peace and development. Several meetings and action planning sessions have been advanced in recent years with a focus on religion, gender and youth inclusive in peace and security. Therefore, building on and learning from previous processes, this **Strategic Learning Exchange and Skills Building Workshop: Religion, Gender and Youth Inclusion in Peace and Security** will explore the aforementioned focus and develop dynamics to deepen practitioners' understanding, while contributing to more innovative and effective inclusive peace and security practices.

Specific Goal:

The specific **goal** of this Strategic Learning Exchange & Skills Building Workshop is to analyze the current *State of the Art* and to define challenges for transformation and opportunities for enhancement. It will contribute to the further development of innovative and effective rights based means to engage with religious and traditional actors that are inclusive of gender and youth in peace and security.

Specific Objectives:

The following objectives will be pursued:

- To explore the current *State of the Art*, trends, trajectories—deriving opportunities for enhancement and challenges for transformation—with a focus on the nexus between religion, gender and youth inclusion in peace and security.
- To contribute to more effective internal and external rights based policies with a focus on the nexus between religion, gender and youth inclusion in peace and security.
- To contribute to rights based pragmatic approaches that more effectively engage religious actors in ensuring gender and youth inclusion in peace and security processes.
- To contribute to a specialized resource base from which practitioners may learn, collaboratively contribute to address vital knowledge and skills gaps, highlight evidence based case studies, etc. to further contribute to refined policies and processes.
- To evolve and deepen the network of UN, governmental, regional, N/FBOs, religious and traditional actors/personal and experts for continued knowledge and skills sharing coupled with collaborative actions.

Specific Outcomes:

It is anticipated that—through participants' active participation and follow-up—the following specific outcomes may be achieved:

- Better understanding of the conceptual and practical dynamics, challenges, opportunities, trends and possible trajectories of the religion, gender and youth inclusion, peace and security nexus.

⁹Taken to include various sizes of faith-based or faith-inspired NGOs delivering services, religious leaders, as well as national, regional and globally-based networks.

- Informed review of specific issues and necessary guidelines required to facilitate better internal and external policy development around/about religion, religious actors, means to engage with a rights'-based approaches to gender and youth inclusion in peace and security processes.
- Familiarity with relevant requirements for improved planning, implementation and review of programmes and projects which engage with religious actors around gender and youth inclusion in peace and security processes.
- Resources, networking, coaching and mentoring opportunities—during and post sessions—that enable further innovation.

Collaborators & Methodology:

Religious actors and faith-based organizations have important roles in realizing SDG Goal 16, UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 2250; all committed to advancing inclusive peace and security. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is one of the oldest UN specialized agencies to engage with faith-based actors, convening them at the national, regional and global levels, since the Millennium. In 2010, UNFPA co-founded and chaired the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Actors. Since then, the UN Task Force has annually convened faith-based partners for a series of strategic policy dialogues and learning exchanges, together with donor governments, academics, development and humanitarian specialists from diverse regions and religions, around human rights, development, peace and security-related issues.

This Strategic Learning Exchange & Skills Building Workshop: Religion, Gender and Youth Inclusion in Peace & Security is the second phase of an on-going Strategic Learning Exchange (SLE) Series¹⁰ being advanced in 2017. The SLE commenced with a session focused on *Partnering with Faith Organizations and Communities on the Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs*, collaboratively led by UNFPA in New York City from 5-6 June 2017. The methods utilized during the series are primarily peer-to-peer learning and information sharing coupled with pre-identified skills/capacity building opportunities. The proposed SLE will be supported by a shared resource database, an evolving network coupled with opportunities to engage in direct mentoring/coaching during and post the SLE – provided through collaborators within the UN Task Force with on-going focused support provided by the Inclusivity Working Group of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

Participant Profile:

Experienced practitioners working at the nexus of religion, gender and youth inclusion in peace and security processes from: UN, government and regional agencies; academic institutions; faith based and non-governmental organizations, religious and traditional actors.

Diversity is an important objective, thus a diverse set of religious, women and youth from different sectors and geographic locations will be involved.

Dates / Times and Location:

The Knowledge Exchange & Skills Building Workshop will be a two day process linked to the forthcoming Women, Peace & Security Open Debate in October 2017.

The SLE dates are set for 30 October - 31 October 2017. The host of the process will be UN Women.

For further information and to provide RSVPs, please contact:

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Given growing expressed interests and limited space, please RSVP by Friday, 13 October 2017.

¹⁰ For further information regarding the SLE series, please see: Concept Note: UN Strategic Learning Exchange Series (2017).