

MULTIFAITH ADVISORY
COUNCIL



MFAC

United Nations
Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable
Development

Side by Side Compendium: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights

Developed by the Gender Working Group of the
Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the United Nations
Interagency Task Force on
Religion and Sustainable Development



Faith-based organizations and leaders exercise deep influence in communities and thus play a vital role in advancing gender equality. At this time of profound challenges to gender equality, this advocacy brief is a valuable addition to the body of research needed to better understand the various manifestations of pushback and to help inform strategies to uphold women's and girls' rights.

This work also complements UN Women's Push Forward Strategy, by contributing to inclusive spaces for dialogue. Advancing gender equality is not only a human rights imperative, it is a shared moral and spiritual responsibility across cultures and traditions.

Now more than ever, we must draw upon the wisdom of our diverse faiths to build bridges and reaffirm commitments to gender equality.

Lopa Banerjee,
Director of Civil Society Division,
UN Women





UNFPA recognizes faith-based organizations and leaders as crucial partners in advancing gender equality, viewing it as a human rights imperative and a shared moral responsibility. The ICPD Programme of Action, Beijing Declaration, and SDG commitments align with values shared by many faith traditions like equality, compassion, justice, and respect for all individuals.

This advocacy brief, "Side by Side: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights," offers valuable insights and strategies for constructive responses to advancing gender equality and human rights. UNFPA believes that empowering women and girls and upholding their rights and choices not only strengthens families and societies, but is central to achieving sustainable development.

We must collectively draw upon diverse faiths and perspectives to build bridges and find common ground. UNFPA is committed to strengthening partnerships with faith-based organizations, encouraging interfaith and multifaith dialogue, and supporting initiatives that show how faith can positively contribute to advancing gender equality and human rights for all.

Ian McFarlane,
Director of External Relations, UNFPA





The Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) welcomes the Side by Side Compendium: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights as a timely and important contribution to ongoing efforts to advance gender equality within multilateral and faith-based engagement.

Faith-based actors and organizations play a significant role in shaping social values, ethical reasoning, and community responses related to gender equality and human rights. In a period marked by persistent challenges to women's rights and shrinking civic space, values-based engagement remains essential to sustaining dialogue, building trust, and reinforcing shared commitments to dignity, equality, and justice.

Established by the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development, MFAC serves as a platform for collaboration between the United Nations and faith-based organizations accredited by the UN. The compendium contributes to this mandate by strengthening understanding, fostering cooperation, and supporting inclusive engagement on gender equality and human rights.

Multi-Faith Advisory Council Co-Chairs,
2025-2027



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Executive Summary

The Side by Side Compendium: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights supports global efforts to advance gender equality and women's human rights in the context of documented and growing backlash. It offers an evidence-informed resource that examines how faith-based narratives shape contemporary debates on gender equality and highlights rights-affirming interpretations grounded within religious traditions that contribute constructively to policy, advocacy, and community engagement.

The sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) reaffirmed that gender discrimination remains deeply embedded in economic and social structures, as well as highlighting the persistence of coordinated efforts that seek to undermine progress on gender equality. These dynamics underscored the urgency of addressing not only policy and financing gaps, but also the narratives and values-based arguments influencing global discourse on women's rights.

In response, the Multi-Faith Advisory Council's Gender Working Group, serving as a monitoring mechanism on Sustainable Development Goal 5, analyzed Member State rhetoric, non-governmental organization submissions, and civil society discourse during CSW69. This research aimed to equip faith-based organizations with insights, language, and strategies to respond to the pushback on women's rights. Building on these findings and in support of ongoing CSW revitalization efforts, the Gender Working Group developed the **Side by Side Advocacy Brief** to initiate dialogue among faith-based, multilateral actors, United Nations (UN) Member States, policymakers, gender advocates and experts, and broader civil society, on the use of positive faith-based examples to counter harmful narratives on gender equality and human rights.¹

¹ Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) Gender Working Group. (2025). Side by side: Connecting sacred dialogue and responses in promoting gender equality and human rights. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/final-2-%E2%80%93-Side-by-Side-Connecting-Sacred-Dialogue-and-Responses-in-Promoting-Gender-Equality-and-Human-Rights.pdf>.

The compendium builds on the advocacy brief by expanding its analytical scope and depth. It presents selected sacred texts and faith-based interpretations drawn from diverse religious traditions that affirm women's rights, human dignity, and gender equality. They are offered for illustrative purposes and do not seek to be exhaustive or to represent definitive interpretations within any tradition. Thematic sections address key areas shaping contemporary debates on gender equality, including women's rights, gender-based violence, leadership and participation, family and care, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and intersectional discrimination. Across these themes, the compendium emphasizes values-based approaches that affirm agency, dignity, and inclusion and support coherent rights-affirming engagement across diverse contexts.

The compendium concludes with targeted recommendations for UN Member States, intergovernmental organizations, faith-based actors, religious leaders, and broader civil society. These recommendations emphasize coordination, religious literacy, inclusive dialogue, and collaboration as essential to strengthening collective commitments to gender equality, countering backlash and advancing progress.

Designed as a practical resource for policymakers, practitioners, faith leaders, and civil society actors, the **Side by Side Compendium** supports informed advocacy, policy development, and collaborative action. By centering positive faith-based narratives and grounded examples, it contributes to advancing gender equality in alignment with international human rights frameworks and diverse social and cultural contexts.



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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
FBO	Faith-Based Organization
IATF	UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
MFAC	Multi-Faith Advisory Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
UN	United Nations

About the Gender Working Group of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the United Nations Interagency Taskforce on Religion and Sustainable Development

The Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) was established by the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-Religion) in September 2018. This informal and voluntary entity consists of a distinguished group of UN-accredited faith-based organizations reflecting the diversity of religious expressions with representation from around the world. To support gender justice as a core priority of MFAC, particularly in relation to the rights, agency, and lived realities of women and girls across diverse contexts, a dedicated Gender Working Group was formed, comprising 16 organizations from various countries.

The main objective of the Gender Working Group is to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond, ensuring that advancements in human rights are viewed through the lens of gender justice. This group also plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between the UN and faith-based organizations (FBOs), helping the UN understand how religion and religious beliefs influence its pillars, especially Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). Learn more about the MFAC Gender Working Group and the intersection of faith and gender [here](#).

In this context, the **Side by Side Compendium: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights** advances the broader mandate of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to foster constructive engagement between the United Nations and its diverse faith partners in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. By elevating positive faith-based narratives that affirm gender equality and human rights, the compendium strengthens values-based dialogue, supports coordinated action across faith and policy spaces, and contributes to UN efforts to advance dignity, equality, and justice in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Introducing the Compendium

Purpose and Vision

This compendium provides a structured and evidence-informed analysis of the growing pushback against women's rights, with a specific focus on how faith-based narratives are mobilised in contemporary policy and social debates. It presents broader thematic trends alongside examples of positive faith-based responses drawn from major religious traditions, highlighting how communities are engaging their sacred texts and values to promote gender equality and human rights. The compendium is intended as a practical resource for policymakers, advocates, and faith-based actors, offering guidance and insights to support constructive engagement, challenge harmful narratives, and advance rights-affirming interpretations grounded in religious traditions.



The 69th session of the Commission on Status of Women opens in the United Nations General Assembly Hall in New York. UN Photo/Manuel Elías.²

² UN. (10 March 2025). World's largest conference on women calls for equality amid gender backlash. <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2025/03/104192/worlds-largest-conference-women-calls-equality-amid-gender-backlash>.

Background and Development of the ‘Side By Side’ Advocacy Brief

In March of 2025, the international community convened for the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) and the thirtieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration (Beijing+30) to assess progress and recommit to advancing gender equality.³ This milestone presented a timely opportunity to celebrate achievements, reflect on persisting challenges, and renew efforts to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁴



Secretary-General António Guterres speaking at the opening of the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), New York City, 10 March 2025. UNifeed.⁵

During the opening Ceremony, the United Nations Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. António Guterres highlighted the global gender equality backlash. He stated,

“Women’s rights are under siege. The position of patriarchy is back and it is back with a vengeance: slamming the brakes of action, tearing up progress, and mutating into new and dangerous forms...and around the world, hard-won gains are being thrown into reverse: reproductive rights are under attack, and equality initiatives discarded.”⁶

3 UN Women. (2025). CSW69 / Beijing+30. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women/csw69-2025>.

4 United Nations General Assembly. (2015, September 25). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1). https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf.

5 UNifeed. (2025, March). UN / CSW 69 opening [Screenshot]. <https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d334/d3348165>.

In the following two weeks, CSW69 continued to demonstrate that gender discrimination remains deeply embedded in structures of economies and societies. For example, in the UN Women's CSW69 report, UN Women documented that in 2024, nearly a quarter of governments worldwide reported a backlash on gender equality, hindering the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration.⁷ In response, the MFAC Gender Working Group undertook qualitative analysis of Member State rhetoric, NGO submissions, and civil society discourse during CSW69 to better understand the narratives shaping debates on gender equality. In the course of the comprehensive qualitative mapping of oral and written statements submitted to CSW69 by UN Member States and FBO's, the Gender Working Group identified a number of recurring discursive patterns shaping deliberations on gender equality.

The analysis indicates that discussions at CSW69 reflected a narrative pushing back against women's rights, concerning gender and gender equality, intersectionality and discrimination, motherhood and family values, women's human rights, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. These narratives were articulated through coordinated messaging approaches that sought to influence the interpretation of existing international agreements and the use of language within multilateral spaces that disrupted meaningful advocacy.

Similar trends have been documented in previous and concurrent UN processes, including general debates and interactive dialogues related to the Beijing Declaration and its call for gender equality at the multilateral level. At CSW69 three thematic areas featured prominently across a range of statements.

- First, the definition of "women" was narrowly defined in accordance with biology, and questioned the continued use of the term "gender."
- Second, perceived challenges to women's rights as originating from broader social and cultural changes, including debates around sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as migration and demographic shifts.⁸
- And third, questions of agency and representation, particularly regarding who is best positioned to articulate priorities and propose solutions for women and girls, and how diversity among women is acknowledged within policy responses.⁹

6 Guterres, António. (2025). "Opening Ceremony." Speech presented at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women. New York City, NY. <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1y/k1yrms6jmc>.

7 UN Women. (2025). Women's Rights in Review 30 Years After Beijing. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/womens-rights-in-review-30-years-after-beijing>.

8 Shrier, Jonathan. (2025) "18th Plenary Meeting." Speech presented at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women. New York City, NY. <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k10/k107cgh7w>.

9 IPAS Eye on the Rights (newsletter). (2025). "Special Report: Opposition at CSW69." <https://www.ipas.org/?s=eye+on+the+right>.

In response to these findings, and in response to increasingly polarized landscapes and the fragile global context, marked by a crisis of multilateralism, shrinking civic space and severe funding cuts to gender equality initiatives, the MFAC Gender Working Group wanted to demonstrate the power and role that interreligious dialogue and faith communities have in shaping narratives and leading action. Faith-based actors bring a distinct voice to Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and to the broader human rights landscape. Their deep community roots, moral authority, and long-standing traditions of compassion and justice, position them as influential agents of transformation. The use of interreligious and intrareligious dialogue offers a constructive faith-based framework for also bridging divides and responding to the identified backlash thoughtfully and collaboratively.



Dr. Nkeiruka Didigu moderates the roundtable discussion for the Advocacy Brief launch during the UN General Assembly, September 2025.¹⁰

The MFAC Gender Working Group utilized the findings to develop an advocacy brief partly in response and support of CSW revitalization efforts. It serves as a resource guide to initiate dialogue among faith-based and multilateral actors on how to collectively use positive faith-based examples to illustrate how to counter groups challenging human rights-based approaches.¹¹

10 Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) Gender Working Group. (2025). *Roundtable: Side by Side: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights*. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/side-by-side-connecting-sacred-dialogue-and-responses-in-promoting-gender-equality-and-human-rights/>.

11 Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) Gender Working Group. (2025). *Side by side: Connecting sacred dialogue and responses in promoting gender equality and human rights*. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/final-2-%E2%80%93-Side-by-Side-Connecting-Sacred-Dialogue-and-Responses-in-Promoting-Gender-Equality-and-Human-Rights.pdf>.

The brief was launched at a roundtable discussion on the margins of the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, which brought together UN entities, faith-based organizations, and civil society partners to reflect on the role of values-based messaging in countering gender backlash.¹² The event highlighted the brief's key messages, created space for shared learning on effective responses to harmful narratives, and underscored how faith-aligned approaches can support more coordinated, rights-affirming advocacy across diverse communities. The UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development was formally represented at the event and demonstrated its support for this initiative from the outset, including through the participation of High Level speakers Mariarosa Cutillo, Chief of the Private Sector and Civil Society Branch at UNFPA, and Lopa Banerjee, Director of the Civil Society Division at UN Women.



Side by Side Advocacy Brief Cover. September 2025.¹³

Building on this initial work, the members of the MFAC Gender Working Group have developed this compendium. It provides a spectrum of multi-faith sacred texts and theological analysis as illustrative interpretations that expands on the advocacy brief, providing positive faith-based narratives in response to the global pushback on areas surrounding the promotion of gender equality. The sacred texts and theological reflections included were identified through targeted research and consultation undertaken by the MFAC Gender Working Group, drawing on diverse religious traditions that affirm women's rights and gender equality.

12 Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) Gender Working Group. (2025). *Roundtable: Side by Side: Connecting Sacred Dialogue and Responses in Promoting Gender Equality and Human Rights*. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/side-by-side-connecting-sacred-dialogue-and-responses-in-promoting-gender-equality-and-human-rights/>.

13 Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) Gender Working Group. (2025). Side by side: Connecting sacred dialogue and responses in promoting gender equality and human rights. [Photo Cover] <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/final-2-%E2%80%93-Side-by-Side-Connecting-Sacred-Dialogue-and-Responses-in-Promoting-Gender-Equality-and-Human-Rights.pdf>.

The sacred texts and theological reflections included were identified through targeted research and consultation undertaken by the MFAC Gender Working Group, drawing on diverse religious traditions that affirm women's rights and gender equality. The examples are presented for illustrative purposes and reflect the analytical framing of the MFAC Gender Working Group; they do not seek to be comprehensive or to represent definitive interpretations within any faith tradition. The sacred texts were identified through a consultative process, guided by criteria including relevance to the thematic focus, presence within established faith traditions, and potential to contribute constructively to dialogue within multilateral and multi-faith contexts.

Eight faith traditions are represented in this compendium: Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous Traditions, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. These eight traditions were selected for the compendium to represent the faith traditions leading the pushback to gender equality and women's rights, and are the faith traditions represented in the Multi-Faith Advisory Council. The compendium does not suggest that these traditions are monolithic, nor that opposition to gender equality is inherent within any faith. On the contrary, the examples presented demonstrate the diversity of interpretation and the presence of long-standing rights-affirming traditions within each. The interpretations presented in this compendium reflect the analytical approach of the Working Group and are offered as one set of possible readings among a plurality of theological perspectives. They are not intended to be exhaustive, prescriptive, or representative of all interpretations within any given religious tradition. The compendium seeks to support dialogue by highlighting faith-based narratives that can contribute to mutual understanding, while respecting the diversity of beliefs and interpretive traditions across faith communities.



Methodology and Approach

This research compendium employs a systematic, transparent, and replicable methodology designed to map, analyze, and contextualize organized pushback against women's rights and gender equality within multilateral and faith-influenced spaces, with particular attention to CSW69. At the same time, the compendium is intentionally values-driven, recognizing that research in this field is not neutral: it is an act of discernment that seeks to name threats to human dignity and to illuminate pathways toward justice, inclusion, and the common good. The methodological approach integrates three core components: thematic analysis, faith-based contextual mapping, and a commitment to transparency, reusability, and evidence traceability. Together, these components support both rigorous analysis and transformative engagement.

First, thematic analysis is conducted through a comprehensive qualitative mapping of CSW69 Member State and FBO oral and written statements, relevant policy developments, discourse trends, and broader socio-political dynamics. Key areas of backlash are identified and examined to reveal recurring rhetorical strategies, coordinated narratives, and points of convergence and divergence across contexts. By making exclusionary framing visible, the compendium performs a clarifying function that enables researchers, advocates, and faith actors to more clearly understand how rights-based language and religious discourse are mobilized in opposition to gender equality.

Second, the compendium undertakes faith-based contextual mapping, recognizing the influential role of religious actors and institutions in shaping gender norms, public policy, and social attitudes. Through comparative, multi-faith analysis, the compendium examines doctrinal arguments, institutional positions, scriptural interpretations, and community-level practices across major faith traditions. By confronting exclusionary interpretations with deeply grounded theological traditions that affirm the full humanity of women and LGBTQ+ persons, the compendium situates faith itself as a powerful resource for rights-affirming change.

Third, transparency, reusability, and evidence traceability are prioritized throughout the research process. All sources, analytical steps, and classification criteria are clearly documented to ensure methodological clarity, credibility, and replicability. This commitment enhances the compendium's utility as a shared evidence base that can be adapted by policymakers, civil society actors, researchers, and faith leaders across contexts. By offering accessible language alongside rigorous documentation, the compendium creates a common platform for collaboration and dialogue.

Taken together, this combined methodology supports a nuanced understanding of the dynamics shaping global conversations on gender equality, the role of faith-based narratives in advancing rights, and the potential of interreligious and dialogical approaches to counter organized backlash. Beyond its function as a research tool, the compendium is intentionally designed as a communal and moral resource, one that encourages collaboration and inspires prophetic action in defense of justice and dignity.



Diagram of Vancouver School of Theology's Theological Reflection. 2025.¹⁴

Theological Reflection as a Tool for Transformation

Across faith traditions, the belief that every person bears sacred dignity is foundational. The same sacred texts that call communities toward justice are often distorted to restrict women's rights and limit inclusion. The inclusion of theological reflection in this compendium responds to the significant role that faith traditions play in shaping ethical reasoning, social norms, and community life in many contexts. Rather than offering definitive interpretations, the compendium highlights faith-based reflections as illustrative examples of how religious traditions engage with questions related to human dignity, social responsibility, and the role of women in society. The theological perspectives presented do not claim to represent consensus positions within any tradition, nor are they intended to adjudicate between differing interpretations. They reflect the analytical framework of the MFAC Gender Working Group and are included to support understanding of the diversity of faith-based reasoning present in contemporary policy and social discussions.

By situating these reflections alongside policy analysis, the compendium seeks to provide readers with additional context that may inform dialogue, reflection, and engagement across faith, policy, and civil society spaces. In this way, theological reflection serves as a complementary resource.

¹⁴ Vancouver School of Theology. 2025. Theological Field Education. <https://vst.edu/students/theological-field-education/>.

Mapping Positive Faith-Based Practices in Promoting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality

Drawing Inspiration from Faith-Based Action on SDG 5

This section documents selected positive faith-based practices that advance SDG 5 on gender equality and human rights across diverse religious and spiritual traditions. By examining concrete examples from faith-based communities and organizations around the world, it illustrates how faith can serve as a constructive force for social transformation, fostering environments where women, girls, and gender-diverse people can exercise their rights and agency. These practices demonstrate the ways in which moral teachings, sacred texts, and community values are interpreted and mobilized to challenge harmful social norms, dismantle discrimination, and promote inclusion.

Highlighting these practices also emphasizes the potential of faith actors to address both structural inequalities and cultural barriers that impede gender justice. By showcasing positive approaches, this section provides evidence of how religious institutions and leaders can advance social cohesion, cultivate ethical leadership, and embed principles of dignity, justice, and compassion into community life. It offers readers a lens into the practical strategies, innovations, and commitments that faith actors employ to advance gender equality while reinforcing the shared moral and spiritual responsibility to uphold human rights.

The organizations and initiatives below span faith-based, multi-faith, and Indigenous contexts, selected for their demonstrated impact and relevance to advancing gender equality, many either members or partners of the MFAC Gender Working Group. This section showcases their successes, challenges, and strategies for safeguarding individuals and communities while advancing rights-affirming practices. These case studies serve as best practices and offer practical insights for faith actors, feminist organizations, policymakers, and civil society organizations.

1. Multi-Faith Partnership and Engagement

Across the globe, FBOs and communities from many religious and cultural traditions are mobilizing to advance SDG 5 on gender equality and address the multiple challenges. There are several examples of interfaith and multi-faith actors who are already advancing gender justice through positive faith-based messaging and coordinated action.



Prof. Isabel Apawo Phiri, World Council of Churches Deputy General Secretary speaking at a Side by Side joint event on, "Unlocking the Power of Faith-Based Partnerships: Enabling the Right to Social Protection". March 21. 2019. Photo: Douglas Leonard/WCC.¹⁵

¹⁵ World Council of Churches. (2019). WCC offers insights at Commission on the Status of Women. [Photo]. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-offers-insights-at-commission-on-the-status-of-women>.

One of these examples is the **Side by Side**, a global interfaith movement committed to gender justice. It advocates for gender equality within diverse faith contexts, empowering communities to challenge patriarchy and support transformation locally and globally.¹⁶ The movement's wide membership across different faith and regional backgrounds, including chapters in 14 countries, strengthens shared understanding and deepens community engagement.¹⁷ Side by Side has identified regionally specific barriers to gender justice and responds by building intentional partnerships that support education and influence change at national and community levels.¹⁸ ¹⁹ It also navigates resistance by ensuring members act as part of a coordinated movement that safeguards participants and maintains consistent messaging. This collective multi-stakeholders approach, bringing together faith institutions, faith based organizations, and individual advocates, contributes to preventing backsliding and reinforces a common commitment to dignity, respect, and justice for all people regardless of gender.



Experts from diverse religions and faith traditions across Central and South America gather during GIN-SSOGIE's Family and Traditional Values seminar in São Leopoldo, Brazil, August 2019, producing the São Leopoldo Declaration.²⁰

16 Side by Side. (n.d.). About Us. <https://sidebysidegenderjustice.org/who-we-are/>.

17 Side by Side. (n.d.). Member Organisations. <https://sidebysidegenderjustice.org/member-organisations/>.

18 Side by Side. (n.d.). About Us. <https://sidebysidegenderjustice.org/who-we-are/>.

19 Side by Side. (n.d.). Empowering women and children: Reflecting on the past, acting for the future. <https://sidebysidegenderjustice.org/empowering-women-and-children-reflecting-on-the-past-acting-for-the-future/>.

20 The Global Interfaith Network. (n.d.). The family and traditional values seminar series. <https://gin-ssogie.org/the-family-and-traditional-values-seminar-series/>.

21 The Global Interfaith Network. (2024). (n.d.). Publications. [Cover Photo]. <https://gin-ssogie.org/publications/#:~:text=The%20anti-rights%20movements%27%20agenda,of%20life%2C%20as%20well%20as.>

Further highlighting multi-faith engagement, the **Global Interfaith Network for People of All Sexes, Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions (GIN-SSOGIE)** demonstrates the role of faith actors in advancing gender justice for LGBTIQ+ communities. As a network of gender and sexual minority people of faith, GIN-SSOGIE draws on sacred teachings to support human rights globally, with particular attention to regions where religion, culture, and power structures intersect to perpetuate discrimination and violence.²² Their 2024 report, *The Effects of the Religious Anti-Rights Movement on LGBTIQ+ People's Access to Human Rights in Africa*, documents legal, social, and institutional challenges identified by the network, including legislative measures, social dynamics, and security concerns affecting LGBTIQ+ persons, as understood through its research methodology.²³ Within the context of this compendium, GIN-SSOGIE's is referenced as an example of how faith-based actors engage with contested social issues by articulating interpretations of religious texts and traditions that emphasize dignity, protection, and inclusion. The reference illustrates the diversity of faith-informed approaches present in contemporary global discourse.



Cover of the resource, "The Effects of the Religious Anti-Rights Movement on LGBTIQ+ People's Access to Human Rights in Africa." 2024.²¹

22 The Global Interfaith Network. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://gin-ssogie.org/about-us/>.

23 The Global Interfaith Network. (n.d.). *Publications*. <https://gin-ssogie.org/publications/>.

2. Engagement of Men and Boys in Advancing SDG 5

Among the many international movements working to advance gender equality by engaging positive faith narratives, the MenEngage Alliance is the largest international civil society network working on men and masculinities in the area of women's rights and gender justice.²⁴ Promoting positive masculinities and gender norms is central to MenEngage's mission, and with more than 1,000 group members, many work in predominantly faith-based contexts and integrate faith-based approaches into efforts supporting women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, gender justice and climate justice.²⁵



Prof. Isabel Apawo Phiri, World Council of Churches Deputy General Secretary speaking at a Side by Side joint event on, "Unlocking the Power of Faith-Based Partnerships: Enabling the Right to Social Protection". March 21, 2019. Photo: Douglas Leonard/WCC.²⁶

²⁴ MenEngage. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://menengage.org/about>.

²⁵ MenEngage. (n.d.). *Faith-based approaches*. <https://menengage.org/approaches/faith-based-approaches/about>.

²⁶ MenEngage Alliance. (2016). [Consultation participants listening to a presentation by Shafferan Sonneveld of Muslims for Progressive Values, right] [Photograph]. In *Faith-based approaches to transforming masculinities for gender justice & equality: Two-day consultation summary report* (p. 9). <https://cdn.menengage.org/media/documents/resources/faith-based-approaches-to-transforming-masculinities-for-gender-justice-equality-a-two-day-consultation/Faith-Based-Approaches-Consultation-Summary-Report-MenEngage-Alliance.pdf.pdf>.

MenEngage works to transform strongly held beliefs through context specific, faith-informed strategies. For example, a workshop in Uganda brought together religious and traditional leaders to transform gender norms and increase access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services. A consultation through the project convened gender experts and faith leaders to explore faith-based approaches to transforming masculinities for gender justice and develop resources that emphasize the importance of engaging religious leaders to address structural causes of gender inequality.^{27 28 29}

Golden Kangoma, Director of Programmes for the Malawi Inter-Faith AIDS Association, lauded the intersectional work of the MenEngage Africa network and underscored the need to promote positive faith-based narratives for gender equality during a program on faith, gender, and sexuality. He stressed that,

“People misinterpret the Holy Scriptures. People do not know the context and meaning of those texts. They apply selective utilization of texts and use it to their advantage. For example, Ephesians 5:22, says that ‘women must be submissive’, whereas the true meaning according to Paul was that ‘men and women are supposed to be submissive to each other.’”³⁰

Through sustained partnership with faith leaders and FBOs, MenEngage promotes inclusive, positive faith-based narratives that counter regressive interpretations of gender equality frameworks.³¹ By supporting context specific, faith-informed initiatives and centering approaches that engage men and boys as allies in gender justice, MenEngage advances rights-affirming and transformative masculinities rooted in dignity, respect, and mutual understanding.

27 Sonke Gender Justice & MenEngage Africa. (2025). *Engaging religious leaders in SRHR in Uganda*. MenEngage. <https://menengage.org/stories/srhr-workshop-with-religious-leaders-in-uganda>.

28 MenEngage Alliance. (2016). *Faith-based approaches to transforming masculinities for gender justice & equality: A two-day consultation: Consultation summary report*. <https://cdn.menengage.org/media/documents/resources/faith-based-approaches-to-transforming-masculinities-for-gender-justice-equality-a-two-day-consultation/Faith-Based-Approaches-Consultation-Summary-Report-MenEngage-Alliance.pdf.pdf>.

29 MenEngage. (2025). *Structural drivers and working with religious and traditional leaders* [Video]. MenEngage. <https://menengage.org/resources/structural-drivers-and-working-with-religious-and-traditional-leaders>.

30 MenEngage. (2025). *Structural drivers and working with religious and traditional leaders* [Video]. MenEngage. <https://menengage.org/resources/structural-drivers-and-working-with-religious-and-traditional-leaders>.

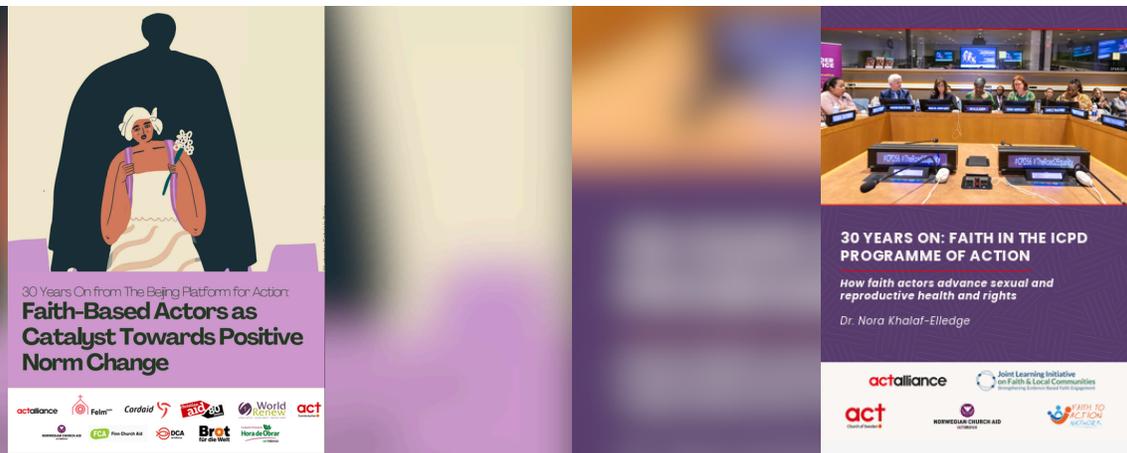
31 Nyadete, D. (2025). *Faith, masculinity, and the fight against gender-based violence* [Story]. Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI). MenEngage Alliance. <https://menengage.org/stories/faith-masculinity-and-the-fight-against-gender-based-violence#why-faith-matters>.

3. Selected Faith-Based Perspectives on SDG 5 and Gender-Related Engagement

The following examples are presented for illustrative purposes to highlight the diversity of faith-based engagement on gender-related issues and do not represent authoritative or comprehensive interpretations within the tradition.

Illustrative Examples from Christian Community Engagement

Several Christian organizations are actively working both internally and collaboratively to advance gender justice across communities and institutions. **ACT Alliance** is a global coalition of more than 152 churches and Christian humanitarian organizations operating in over 127 countries.³² Its members work across humanitarian aid, long-term development, advocacy, and peacebuilding, integrating faith-based perspectives to promote gender justice, climate action, migration support, and local community resilience. Through coordinated national and regional efforts, ACT Alliance supports locally led initiatives and amplifies faith-based actors advancing rights-affirming social norms and sustainable community change. The ACT Alliance Social Norm Report, 30 Years On from the Beijing Platform for Action: Faith-Based Actors as Catalyst Towards Positive Norm Change, highlights 30 case studies from faith leaders and FBOs demonstrating measurable progress in shifting social norms to support gender equality.³³ For example, in Malawi, Norwegian Church Aid developed a toolkit to guide faith leaders in facilitating dialogue on critical issues such as teenage pregnancy and child marriage, engaging men, women, and youth in community conversations.³⁴



ACT Alliance's reports, "30 Years on from The Beijing Platform for Action: Faith-Based Actors as Catalyst Towards Positive Norm Change, highlights the role of faith-based actors in promoting gender equality and transforming social norms" and "30 Years on: Faith in the ICPD Programme of Action: how faith actors advance sexual and reproductive health and rights"

32 ACT Alliance. (n.d.). *Who we are*. <https://actalliance.org/who-we-are/>.

33 ACT Alliance (2025). *30 years on from the Beijing Platform for Action: Faith-based actors as catalyst towards positive norm change*. Switzerland: ACT Alliance. https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ACT_SocialNormReport_2025_v1-1-1.pdf.

34 Ibid.

The report demonstrates the vital role of Christian faith-based actors in advancing gender equality, re-examining religious teachings and practices to advocate for women's rights, creating inclusive spaces for dialogue, and safeguarding across their communities. By amplifying grassroots initiatives and promoting positive Biblical interpretations, these actors advance transformative change, challenge entrenched patriarchal norms, and contribute to broader societal shifts toward justice and equality. In a similar report, *30 Years on: Faith in the ICPD Programme of Action: how faith actors advance sexual and reproductive health and rights*³⁵, ACT Alliance takes stock of faith actors' and religious institutions' contributions to advancing the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action. The report highlights examples of how faith actors are key providers of a wide range of services, including primary health and educational services, both in development and humanitarian settings. Religion shapes values and attitudes and influences behaviors and faith actors are powerful allies in promoting transformative social norms and countering negative and harmful practices.

Illustrative Examples from Muslim Community Engagement

One example is **Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV)**, which demonstrates how the Islamic faith can serve as a foundation for advancing gender equality globally. MPV advocates for women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and freedom of conscience, providing an alternative progressive voice through public education, civil discourse, media engagement, and partnerships with both Muslim and non-Muslim organizations.³⁶ Founded in Los Angeles and active in multiple U.S. cities and countries worldwide, MPV also established the Alliance of Inclusive Muslims, an umbrella human rights organization, to advance inclusive and egalitarian interpretations of Islam and foster positive social change.³⁷ Their Progressive Islam in Practice Series provides accessible resources, including social media content, online guides, and educational resources, that allow people to learn about feminist interpretations of the Qur'an, sexual diversity in Islam, women's and girls' rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, reproductive justice, and other related topics.³⁸ MPV equips communities and advocates with knowledge and tools to challenge discriminatory interpretations of Islam, counter anti-rights narratives, and promote inclusive, egalitarian principles within both Muslim and broader societies.

35 Khalaf-Elledge, Nora. (2025). *30 Years on: Faith in the ICPD Programme of Action*. ACT Alliance. https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/30Years_FaithInTheICDPoA_v1.pdf.

36 Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV). (n.d.). About MPV. <https://www.mpvusa.org/about/>.

37 Ibid.

38 Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV). (n.d.). *Quick learns*. <https://www.mpvusa.org/quick-learns/>.

39 Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV). (n.d.). [Photograph from "It's Your Mic"]. <https://www.mpvusa.org/its-your-mic>.



Participants gather during Muslims for Progressive Values' 'It's Your Mic' program, hosted by the MPV Los Angeles Chapter from 2014–2015, providing youth a safe and celebratory space to explore creativity, identity, and inclusion across the greater Los Angeles community.³⁹

Another example is **Musawah**, a global movement working to promote human rights for women in Muslim contexts and advance equality and justice within the Muslim family.⁴⁰ Musawah conducts research on Muslim family laws and practices that enforce de jure and de facto discrimination against women in both majority and minority Muslim settings.⁴¹ Their work spans global initiatives for equality in family law, the creation of a comprehensive repository of Muslim family laws, and engagement with the Qur'an and Prophetic practice to promote rights-affirming narratives on ethical and spiritual matters.⁴² Musawah draws strength from its broad network of NGOs, activists, scholars, legal experts, policymakers, and community leaders, producing sensitive, scripturally grounded resources that empower ongoing transformation for equality.^{43 44}

39 Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV). (n.d.). [Photograph from "It's Your Mic"]. <https://www.mpvusa.org/its-your-mic>.

40 Musawah. (n.d.). About us. <https://www.musawah.org/about/>.

41 Musawah. (n.d.). Mapping of Global Family Muslim Laws. Campaign for Justice in Muslim Family Laws. <https://campaignforjustice.musawah.org/mapping-of-global-family-muslim-laws/>.

42 Ibid.

43 Musawah. (n.d.). International advocacy. <https://www.musawah.org/international-advocacy/>.

44 Musawah. (n.d.). Capacity building. <https://www.musawah.org/capacity-building/>.

Their approach requires navigating complex international religious and legal frameworks, demanding expertise, time, and resources while advancing gender equality in high-stakes environments. By addressing 12 principal issues of concern, including women’s financial rights after divorce and violence against women in the family, Musawah safeguards women across diverse contexts, influencing social norms through positive interpretations of sacred texts, and shaping legislative and policy frameworks.⁴⁵ The movement’s deliberate diversity, combined with unified messaging, enhances its reach and impact, offering a compelling example of how faith-informed advocacy can drive change at both community and institutional levels.



Musawah’s *Positive Developments in Muslim Family Laws* resource cover. (2019).⁴⁶

45 Musawah. (n.d.). (2019). *Positive Developments in Muslim Family Laws*. <https://www.musawah.org/resources/positive-developments-in-muslim-family-laws/>.

46 Musawah. (n.d.). (2019). *Positive Developments in Muslim Family Laws*. [Photo]. <https://www.musawah.org/resources/positive-developments-in-muslim-family-laws/>.

Illustrative Examples from Jewish Community Engagement

Among the Jewish leaders and organizations advancing SDG 5 gender equality is the **Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)** which trains rabbis, cantors, chaplains, and educators, providing lifelong learning and professional development for Jewish communities across North America.⁴⁷ JTS offers extensive faith-based resources, including their JTS Torah Commentary, which provides Torah insights and online lectures with multiple articles focused on gender and Jewish law, such as commentary on divorce, pregnancy, gender-inclusive translations, and reinterpretation of patriarchal texts.⁴⁸ JTS also affirms human dignity and LGBTQ rights as core Jewish values, demonstrated through public advocacy. One example of this support is through their joining an amicus brief before the United States Supreme Court defending the rights of transgender students and articulating Jewish ethical commitments to protecting marginalized communities.⁴⁹ By equipping leaders and communities with scripturally grounded tools and educational materials, JTS fosters inclusive learning, empowers progressive interpretations of sacred texts, and advances gender equality and justice within Jewish life.



Advocates from Women of Reform Judaism advancing the organization's mission to promote reproductive rights and health.⁵⁰

47 Jewish Theological Seminary. (n.d.). *About JTS*. <https://www.jtsa.edu/about-jts/>.

48 Jewish Theological Seminary. (n.d.). JTS Torah online. <https://www.jtsa.edu/jts-torah-online/>.

49 Jewish Theological Seminary. (n.d.). Human dignity and LGBTQ rights: A statement by The Jewish Theological Seminary. <https://www.jtsa.edu/news/human-dignity-and-lgbtq-rights-a-statement-by-the-jewish-theological-seminary/>.

50 Women of Reform Judaism. (n.d.). Photograph from "Reproductive Health & Rights: Programs in a (Virtual) Box". <https://www.wrj.org/resources-events/wrj-day-action/wrj-day-action-programs-box/reproductive-health-rights-programs/>.

Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) has been promoting the role of women in Jewish life since 1913, advocating through its three pillars of sisterhood, spirituality, and social justice across a broad global network of Jewish women, enriching communities with Jewish rituals and traditions and mobilizing collective action to advance equity, inclusion, and justice.^{51 52} WRJ has developed extensive faith-based resources to advance gender equality, including Reform Jewish Texts and Values, which outlines support for reproductive rights grounded in Jewish principles, and the Jewish Text Study and Discussion Guide on Power Dynamics, Harassment, and Assault, which provides resources and examples to guide discussion and action on harassment, consent, and abuse within Jewish communities.^{53 54} They have also created replicable programs to combat gender-based violence using Jewish frameworks to advance advocacy across synagogues, communities, and society at large.⁵⁵

WRJ has leveraged its expansive global networks, including hundreds of affiliated sisterhoods and its connection to the broader Union for Reform Judaism, to strengthen its role as an amplifier of progressive gender values and positive interpretations of sacred texts. However, decades of experience highlight the challenges faced by WRJ and individual actors in promoting gender equality and human rights, including resistance and deeply entrenched harmful narratives on sensitive topics.⁵⁶ Their sustained movement-building and representation from grassroots to international levels provide a foundation for unity in advancing progressive reforms for gender justice across Jewish communities, demonstrating how faith-based advocacy can safeguard individuals while promoting systemic change.

In the Orthodox community, several organizations have played significant roles in addressing issues of gender equality. The Drisha Institute for Jewish Education has played a pioneering role for advanced Jewish education for women equal to traditional education for men in preparation for being ordained as rabbis.⁵⁷ JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance has provided thought leadership of the intersections of feminism and orthodoxy.⁵⁸ Yeshivat Maharat has also played a pioneering role in the education and ordination of Orthodox women as rabbis.⁵⁹

51 Women of Reform Judaism. (n.d.). *About WRJ*. <https://wrj.org/our-community/about-wrj/>.

52 Women of Reform Judaism. (n.d.). *Our history*. <https://wrj.org/our-community/about-wrj/our-history>.

53 Women of Reform Judaism. (2023). *Reform Jewish Texts & Values*. <https://wrj.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/WRJ%20AA%20Jewish%20Texts%20and%20Values.pdf>.

54 Women of Reform Judaism. (2023). *Jewish Text Study and Discussion Guide on Power Dynamics, Harassment, and Assault*. <https://wrj.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/WSS-%20Jewish%20Text%204WEB%202023%20ehedits21223.pdf>.

55 Women of Reform Judaism. (n.d.). *Gender-Based Violence: Virtual Programs*. WRJ Day of Action. <https://wrj.org/resources-events/wrj-day-action/wrj-day-action-programs-box>

56 Women of Reform Judaism. (n.d.). *Advocacy & social justice*. <https://wrj.org/advocacy-social-justice/>.

57 Drisha Institute for Jewish Education. (n.d.). *About*. <https://drisha.org/about/>.

58 Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance. (n.d.). *Women in leadership*. <https://www.jofa.org/resource/women-in-leadership/>.

59 Yeshivat Maharat. (n.d.). *Mission and history*. <https://www.yeshivatmaharat.org/mission-and-p2>.

Illustrative Examples from Hindu Community Engagement

Among the actors advancing Hindu's positive gender values is **Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR)**. HfHR is committed to promoting a vision of Hinduism that affirms all gender identities and sexual orientations, advocating for pluralism and human rights grounded in Hindu values of shanti (peace), nyaya (justice), and satya (truth).⁶⁰ As a global network with members and chapters in Australia, the United Kingdom, and India, HfHR works to advance gender equality and human rights through advocacy, education, and public engagement, challenging discriminatory practices and promoting inclusive interpretations of Hindu values.⁶¹



Attendees gather during Hindus for Human Rights' Desi drag night in June 2025, celebrating South Asian queer joy, culture, and community in a vibrant affirming space.⁶²

The organization has produced resources on progressive interpretations of Hinduism, including *Notions of Gender and Sexuality in Hinduism*, and hosts a robust calendar of virtual and in-person events linking Hindu teachings to critical contemporary issues, such as the March 2025 event on Partnering for Change to Advance Gender Equality and Uphold the Rights of Women and Girls.^{63 64}

60 Hindus for Human Rights. (n.d.). *Our vision*. <https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/en/our-vision>.

61 Ibid.

62 Hindus for Human Rights. (2025, June 11). Photograph from "A Recap on Desi Drag Night" blog post. <https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/en/blog/desi-drag-night>.

63 Hindus for Human Rights. (n.d.). *Gender and sexuality in Hinduism: Embracing fluidity and diversity*. <https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/gender-sexuality-hinduism>.

64 Hindus for Human Rights. (2025). PaRD CSW69 Roundtable: Partnering for change to advance gender equality and uphold the rights of women and girls – NYC. <https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/events-list/women-and-girls-march-11>.

HfHR collaborates with local and international organizations and coalitions to advance pluralism and human rights, building a wide network of partners for education and advocacy. Their work emphasizes inclusion, dialogue, and truth-telling, highlighting the strength of collective action against bigotry and violence.⁶⁵

By ensuring that advocacy opportunities are accessible and widely circulated, HfHR engages with secular and non-secular current events, using timely, rights-affirming narratives to advance gender equality and human rights.

Illustrative Examples from Buddhist Community Engagement

Buddhism promotes respect for the dignity of life, compassion, and the pursuit of peace, providing a foundation for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.^{66 67} **Soka Gakkai International (SGI)** is an NGO that brings these principles into action by connecting individuals, civil society, and the United Nations to build a more peaceful, just, and inclusive world.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to SGI's work, promoting respect and equality as essential to Buddhist teachings while engaging their global membership to foster the culture of peace and solidarity.⁶⁸ SGI raises awareness among the Soka Gakkai membership of over 12 million people to amplify messages of gender equality across constituencies and strengthen collective action.⁶⁹ The NGO has produced a report on young women's leadership highlighting lived experiences, motivations, challenges, and accomplishments, emphasizing resilience, self-confidence, and agency.⁷⁰ It showcases the inner process of the individual to transform themselves and their situation. SGI has achieved impact through its engaged global network united by Buddhist values, providing a powerful intergenerational platform to promote positive narratives on gender equality and human rights. While navigating challenges such as proximity to conflict and local traditions, SGI's extensive grassroots presence enables the promotion of a culture of peace, safeguarding women's rights, and advancing gender equality across diverse contexts.

65 Hindus for Human Rights. (n.d.). *Our vision*. <https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/en/our-vision>.

66 Soka Gakkai. (n.d.). *Compassion: Solidarity of the heart*. <https://www.sokaglobal.org/resources/study-materials/buddhist-concepts/compassion.html>.

67 Soka Gakkai International. (n.d.). *Gender equality & women's empowerment*. SGI Action for Peace. <https://sgi-peace.org/gender-equality-womens-empowerment>.

68 Ibid.

69 Soka Gakkai International. (n.d.). *Who we are*. SGI Action for Peace. <https://sgi-peace.org/who-we-are>.

70 Soka Gakkai International. (2018). *Young Women's Stories — Fostering Leadership Project*. SGI Action for Peace. <https://sgi-peace.org/resources/young-womens-stories-project>.

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Participants of empowerment workshop. Soka Gakkai International. 2025.⁶⁸

65 Hindus for Human Rights. (n.d.). *Our vision*. <https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/en/our-vision>.

66 Soka Gakkai. (n.d.). *Compassion: Solidarity of the heart*. <https://www.sokaglobal.org/resources/study-materials/buddhist-concepts/compassion.html>.

67 Soka Gakkai International. (n.d.). *Gender equality & women's empowerment*. SGI Action for Peace. <https://sgi-peace.org/gender-equality-womens-empowerment>.

68 Soka Gakkai International. (2025). *Women-Led Initiatives in India and Singapore*. <https://sgi-peace.org/resources/young-womens-stories-project>.

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Illustrative Examples from Bahá’í Community Engagement

The Bahá’í Faith emphasizes the equality of men and women as a core spiritual principle, calling for justice, dignity, and the full participation of women in society.⁷² **The Bahá’í International Community (BIC)**, an NGO representing Bahá’í’s worldwide since 1948, has actively advanced gender equality and human rights in alignment with these principles.⁷³ The BIC engages with the UN CSW, contributes statements, facilitates community consultations on issues such as gender-based violence and equality in development, and supports planning for major international conferences.⁷⁴

69 Ibid.

70 Soka Gakkai International. (n.d.). Who we are. SGI Action for Peace. <https://sgi-peace.org/who-we-are>.

71 Soka Gakkai International. (2018). Young Women’s Stories — Fostering Leadership Project. SGI Action for Peace. <https://sgi-peace.org/resources/young-womens-stories-project>.

72 Bahá’í International Community. (2018, October). The Equality of Women and Men: Divine Imperative for an Age of Transition. <https://www.bic.org/statements/equality-women-and-men-divine-imperative-age-transition>.

73 Bahá’í International Community. (n.d.). About us. <https://www.bic.org/about/about-us>.

74 Baha’í International Community. (2025). “A love letter to humanity”: BIC releases In Full Partnership, a new book showcasing 30 years of contributions to the UN on women’s advancement. <https://www.bic.org/news/love-letter-humanity-bic-releases-full-partnership-new-book-showcasing-30-years-contributions-un-womens-advancement>.



Attendees gather for the launch of the Bahá'í International Community's book *In Full Partnership: Thirty Years of Women's Advancement at the United Nations and Beyond*, marking thirty years of work toward women's advancement.⁷⁵

Cover of the Bahá'í International Community's book *In Full Partnership: Thirty Years of Women's Advancement at the United Nations and Beyond*.⁷⁶

BIC has also led outreach on family wellbeing, participating in events for the UN International Year of the Family and fostering dialogue with agencies including UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN Development Programme (UNDP).⁷⁷ Its work has successfully brought women's lived experiences to the attention of policymakers and strengthened alliances across regions and organizations. At the same time, challenges remain in shifting deeply rooted social norms and amplifying faith-based perspectives within largely secular international forums, making this work essential for safeguarding women's rights and advancing inclusive, faith-informed approaches to gender equality globally.

75 Bahá'í International Community (BIC). (2025, September 17). [Photograph from "A love letter to humanity": BIC releases *In Full Partnership*, a new book showcasing 30 years of contributions to the UN on women's advancement]. <https://www.bic.org/news/love-letter-humanity-bic-releases-full-partnership-new-book-showcasing-30-years-contributions-un-womens-advancement>.

76 Bahá'í International Community. (2025). *In Full Partnership: Thirty Years of Women's Advancement at the United Nations and Beyond*. https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/ifpact24-b_0.pdf.

77 Bahá'í International Community (BIC). (1993). Overview of activities related to women. <https://www.bic.org/statements/overview-activities-related-women>.

Illustrative Examples from Sikh Community Engagement

Sikhism emphasizes equality, justice, and the dignity of all individuals, calling for the full participation of women and the protection of human rights.⁷⁸ Among the organizations advancing these principles, the **World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO)** works nationally and internationally to promote and safeguard the interests of Sikhs while advancing gender equality and human rights. Formed in 1984 and registered as a non-profit organization, WSO provides a credible voice for Sikh communities and represents their interests on national and global platforms.⁷⁹ WSO amplifies positive faith-based messaging, engages with federal and judicial systems, and promotes social justice through initiatives such as the Sikh Youth Leadership Institute and the Sikh Family Helpline.⁸⁰ ⁸¹ The organization has participated in high-level international movements for gender equality, highlighting Sikhism's historical teachings. This includes during the 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence, where WSO emphasized Guru Nanak and other Gurus' advocacy for equality and opposition to discrimination.⁸² Challenges include navigating anti-Sikh narratives and misconceptions about Sikh identity, which WSO addresses by providing guidance and legal counsel to safeguard individuals and the community against discrimination and human rights violations.⁸³ Through its combination of faith-informed advocacy and practical protection mechanisms, WSO strengthens inclusive narratives, promotes gender equality, and ensures the protection and rights of the Sikh Canadian community while advancing a broader global human rights agenda.



Graphic highlighting the World Sikh Organization of Canada's 2016 launch of the Sikh Family Helpline, supporting community members through culturally respectful peer assistance and resource navigation.⁸⁴

78 Sikh Council USA. (n.d.). Views. <https://www.sikhcouncilusa.org/views>.

79 World Sikh Organization of Canada. (n.d.). About. <https://www.worldsikh.org/about/>.

80 World Sikh Organization of Canada. (2015). 2015: Sikh youth leadership launched. https://www.worldsikh.org/2015_sikh_youth_leadership_launched.

81 World Sikh Organization of Canada. (2016). Launch of the Sikh Family Helpline. https://www.worldsikh.org/2016_launch_of_the_sikh_family_helpline.

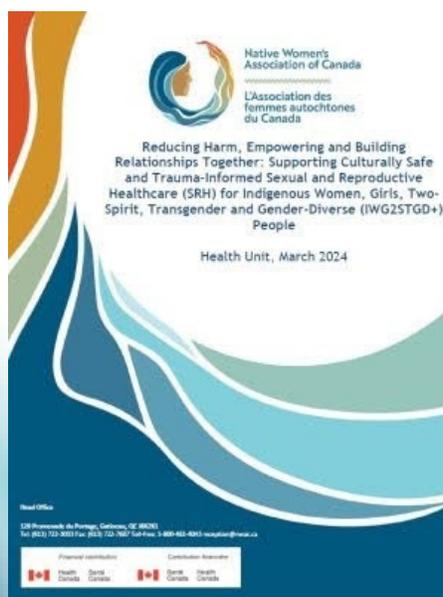
82 World Sikh Organization of Canada. (n.d.). Celebrating Guru Nanak's Message of Equality. https://www.worldsikh.org/celebrating_guru_nanak_s_message_of_equality#:~:text=2.

83 World Sikh Organization of Canada. (n.d.). Dealing with Discrimination: FAQ. https://www.worldsikh.org/dealing_with_discrimination_faq.

84 World Sikh Organization of Canada. (2016). [Graphic from "2016: Launch of the Sikh Family Helpline"]. https://www.worldsikh.org/2016_launch_of_the_sikh_family_helpline.

Illustrative Examples from Indigenous Community Engagement

Indigenous spiritual traditions emphasize the interconnectedness of all life, respect, and the restoration of balance, providing a foundation for advancing gender equality and human rights. There are several examples of Indigenous organizations which have long drawn on these teachings to revitalize positive gender norms and protect the rights of women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people.



Cover of the Native Women's Association of Canada's sexual and reproductive health toolkit for providers, *Reducing Harm, Empowering and Building Relationships Together: Supporting Culturally Safe and Trauma-Informed Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (SRH) for Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender and Gender-Diverse (IWG2STGD+) People*.⁸⁵

The **Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)** defends these rights and amplifies Indigenous perspectives across communities, providing educational resources such as the Honouring Indigenous Women Toolkit to restore honour, respect, and healing.⁸⁶ NWAC also supports sexual and reproductive health through accessible, rights-based resources like the Know Your Rights Toolkit, enabling informed health decisions.⁸⁷

85 Native Women's Association of Canada. (2024, March). [Cover page photograph]. In *Reducing harm, empowering and building relationships together: Supporting culturally safe and trauma-informed sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) for Indigenous Women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender and gender-diverse (IWG2STGD+) people*. https://nwac-afac.ca/assets-documents/srh_training_toolkit_for_providers_-en_website.pdf.

86 Native Women's Association of Canada. (2018). Honouring Indigenous Women Toolkit. <https://nwac.ca/assets-documents/KnowingYourRights-BirthControlOptions-EN.pdf>.

87 Native Women's Association of Canada. (2021, February). Knowing Your Rights Toolkit: Sexual and Reproductive Health [PDF]. <https://stbbi.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Knowing-Your-Rights-Toolkit.pdf>.

Across the Americas, the **Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas (Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas, ECMIA)** connects Indigenous women, youth, and mixed-gender organizations to elevate their voices and influence policy from an intercultural perspective. ECMIA strengthens collective advocacy through studies documenting progress and challenges since Beijing and by issuing statements defending sexual and reproductive rights, addressing violations of Indigenous health practices, and promoting just and sustainable societies in balance with Mother Earth.^{88 89}

These organizations face ongoing challenges, including the marginalization of Indigenous perspectives in policy, limited protective mechanisms for sexual and reproductive rights, and criminalization of traditional health practices.⁹⁰ Their successes lie in connecting and empowering Indigenous communities, elevating voices at national and international levels, and developing educational and advocacy resources grounded in Indigenous worldviews. Through these efforts, NWAC and ECMIA demonstrate how cultural knowledge, collective action, and resilient leadership safeguard rights while advancing broader movements for justice, equality, and recognition.

88 Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas (ECMIA) & CHIRAPAQ Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú. (n.d.). *Indigenous women and youth, 30 years after Beijing: Advances and challenges for the future* [Summary]. <https://ecmia.org/index.php/publicaciones/331-summary-indigenous-women-and-youth-30-years-after-beijing-advances-and-challenges-for-the-future>.

89 Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas (ECMIA). (2023). *Mujeres y juventudes indígenas demandan que garanticen sus derechos sexuales y reproductivos desde una mirada integral e intercultural* [Declaración]. <https://ecmia.org/index.php/voces/declaraciones/315-mujeres-y-juventudes-indigenas-demandan-que-garanticen-sus-derechos-sexuales-y-reproductivos-sean-garantizados-desde-mirada-integral-e-intercultural>.

90 Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas (ECMIA). (2023). *Mujeres y juventudes indígenas demandan que garanticen sus derechos sexuales y reproductivos desde una mirada integral e intercultural* [Declaración]. <https://ecmia.org/index.php/voces/declaraciones/315-mujeres-y-juventudes-indigenas-demandan-que-garanticen-sus-derechos-sexuales-y-reproductivos-sean-garantizados-desde-mirada-integral-e-intercultural>.

Addressing Narratives Hindering SDG 5 and Human Rights Frameworks with Positive Faith-Based Perspectives

Building on the faith-specific examples presented earlier, this section examines recurring narratives observed in international discussions on gender-related issues, including those raised during CSW69. Here, narratives refers to commonly expressed positions, arguments, or framing used in public statements, policy documents, and multilateral debates that either support or challenge specific understandings of gender, rights, and social norms.

The compendium is organized around eight thematic areas that reflect the most prominent backlash and illustrative faith-based responses. The themes include gender and gender equality, intersectionality and discrimination, women's human rights, family values and motherhood, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), women's leadership, gender-based violence, and positive masculinity. These areas were selected based on their prominence in the monitored international discussions, including the 12 Areas of Concern highlighted in the Beijing Declaration. While the advocacy brief previously addressed five of these themes, the compendium expands to include women's leadership, gender-based violence, and positive masculinity to capture a broader range of observed challenges. For each theme, the compendium presents a description of the observed pushback narrative, an illustrative positive example from one of the eight religious traditions and faith-informed perspectives from each of the eighth traditions, presented alphabetically.

Mutuality Is Biblical

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

[Join The Conversation](#)

Defining Gender and Gender Equality

At CSW69, some UN Member States reaffirmed a biologically defined understanding of sex and questioned the continued use of the term 'gender' in policy language. In public discourse, certain statements linked this perspective to interpretations of traditions and religious values regarding roles and authority. Religious texts are sometimes invoked in public and online discourse to legitimize restrictive views about women's roles and authority. By framing social hierarchies as divinely or traditionally mandated, these interpretations influence norms around leadership, family roles, and participation in public life, demonstrating how religious narratives can shape broader social and political attitudes in international and digital spaces. In response, feminist Biblical scholar, Elaine Pagels, reveals how early Christianity offered diverse, often egalitarian views of women and the divine, challenging patriarchal interpretations later solidified in orthodox tradition that marginalized women.⁹² Other faith traditions offer alternative passages and contextual analysis that emphasize the inherent dignity of all individuals. These interpretations draw on scripture, theology, and community practices to provide inclusive perspectives on gender and leadership.

Amid ongoing debates and organized opposition, faith communities engaging with questions of gender and equality have meaningful opportunities to affirm that dignity and equity are deeply rooted in spiritual values. By fostering dialogue and mutual respect, faith actors can help uplift gender equality as a shared moral responsibility. At the same time, coordinated efforts that question the framing of gender, along with the increasing influence of politicized religious movements that frame gender equality as a threat to family, faith, or national identity, reflect a significant and evolving landscape that continues to shape these conversations.

The following further examples demonstrate across religious traditions the rich resources and precedents for understanding gender as a construct not strictly tied to biology. These perspectives affirm the sacredness of diverse gender identities and invite faith communities to embrace a more inclusive view of humanity, one that honors both tradition and lived experience. The examples point to tensions between doctrine and practice, highlighting a clear distinction between scriptural teachings and culturally or socially influenced norms.

- **Bahá'í Faith: "Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God." — Bahá'u'lláh,**⁹³ as interpreted through His teachings. Although Bahá'u'lláh didn't write extensively on gender equality in the modern sense, He set the foundation by affirming the oneness of humanity and removing all forms of hierarchy, including gender.

⁹² Elaine Pagels. *The Gnostic Gospels*. (1979). Random House. <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/Pagels-Gnostic-Gospels.html>.

⁹³ Bahá'í International Community. (2018, October). The Equality of Women and Men: Divine Imperative for an Age of Transition. <https://www.bic.org/statements/equality-women-and-men-divine-imperative-age-transition>.

- **Buddhism: Equal Capacity for Enlightenment:** The Buddha declared that women are equally capable of achieving enlightenment, leading to the establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha (community of ordained women). From a Buddhist perspective, all beings possess the innate potential for Buddhahood. The Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra uses the Dragon Girl's instant enlightenment to demonstrate that awakening transcends gender and social status.⁹⁴ The Dhammapada teaches that character and actions, not gender, define a person's moral and spiritual value.⁹⁵
- **Christianity: Genesis 1:27: "All human beings are created in the image of God,"**⁹⁶ which affirms the inherent dignity and equality of all people, regardless of gender. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is seen engaging with women in a way that was countercultural at the time, treating them with respect and elevating their status in a patriarchal society. This verse highlights that both men and women are created in the image of God, affirming their equal value and dignity. Jesus' interactions with women (e.g., the Samaritan woman at the well, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary) showed respect, inclusion, and recognition, countercultural for his time.
- **Hinduism: Divine Feminine and Balance:** Hinduism honors the Divine Feminine (Shakti) in the forms of Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, symbolizing power, wisdom, and prosperity. The concept of Ardhanarishvara (half-male, half-female form of Shiva) reflects the interdependence and balance between masculine and feminine.⁹⁷
- **Indigenous and Two-Spirit Identities:** Many Indigenous spiritual traditions (in North America and elsewhere) have long recognized Two-Spirit people—those who embody both masculine and feminine spirits—as sacred and spiritually gifted. Gender in many of these traditions is seen as fluid, relational, and non-binary, often tied to one's spiritual role in the community rather than biology.⁹⁸
- **Islam: Qur'an 33:35: "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women... God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward."**⁹⁹ Islam emphasizes that both men and women are equal before God in terms of spirituality, morality, and accountability. Prophet Muhammad gave women rights in marriage, education, inheritance, and leadership—radical for his era.

94 D. Ikeda. (2003), *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra* (vol. 3). World Tribune Press.

95 B. Bodhi. (Trans.). (2012). *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Ariṅguttara Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications. <https://www.kusalassaupasampada.com/assets/English/anguttara%20nikaya.pdf>.

96 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Genesis 1:27). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

97 D. Kinsley. (1988). *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. University of California Press.

98 Q.-L. Driskill. (2010). Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances Between Native and Queer Studies. *GLQ*, 16(1-2), 69-92. https://www.joycerain.com/uploads/2/3/2/0/23207256/double_weave.pdf.

99 A.Y. Ali. (Trans.). (1989). *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Amanah Corp. (Qur'an 33:35). <https://legacy.quran.com/33/35>.

100 I. Epstein. (Ed.). (1935). *The Babylonian Talmud* (Soncino trans.). Soncino Press. https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Bikkurim.3.1?lang=bi. See [Tumtum \(Judaism\) - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tumtum).

- **Sikhism: The first Sikh guru "dismissed the existing attitudes by saying, Of woman Kings and paupers are born, how can she be inferior?"** Guru Nanak taught the creator is also all of the creation. Thus all genders and all species are simply manifestations of the One. Sikhism strongly upholds gender equality, and women have equal rights to lead religious services and participate fully in all aspects of spiritual and community life.¹⁰¹



Buddhist Action Coalition (BAC) NYC explicitly uses intersectionality, committing to dismantle systems of oppression (race, class, gender, disability) and amplifying marginalized voices in their activism.¹⁰²

Intersectionality and Discrimination

At CSW69, several Member States expressed concerns regarding references to “multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination” in verbal and written statements, noting challenges with terminology that categorizes individuals by identity. This type of pushback is related to the concept of intersectionality which examines how gender, race, class, class, sexuality, disability, and religion intersect to shape people’s experiences. Intersectionality can provide a more nuanced understanding of inequality, revealing layers and systemic patterns that simpler narratives may not capture.¹⁰³ Anti-rights groups often promote simplified narratives. Intersectionality disrupts these narratives by showing that inequality is layered and systemic. Intersectionality also challenges traditional hierarchies, which is why some frame it as a threat to religious freedom. Some anti-rights religious groups claim intersectionality is a secular, ideological imposition that forces them to accept values they oppose.

101 Guru Nanak. (1604/2006). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (English transl., various editions). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. [https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20\(matching%20pages\).pdf](https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20(matching%20pages).pdf).

102 Buddhist Action Coalition NYC. (2018). <https://www.buddhistaction.org/>.

103 Crenshaw, Kimberlé. (2016). The Urgency of Intersectionality. (Speech) TEDWomen. https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality.

Within religious traditions whose core teachings emphasize compassion and non-discrimination, some adherents use selective or simplified interpretations to resist contemporary social justice efforts. In this case, appeals to religious doctrine are used to frame identity-based organizing and intersectionality as incompatible with spiritual goals, thereby legitimizing opposition to inclusion and equity initiatives. Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term “Engaged Buddhism” which is a movement applying Buddhist principles of compassion, mindfulness, and interconnectedness to actively address social, political, and environmental suffering and injustice.¹⁰⁴ He emphasizes interconnectedness, mindful engagement, and social and environmental justice. Traditions teach us to love our neighbor and pursue justice without partiality. Intersectionality means seeing more clearly and acting more justly. Let us not only preach love, let us practice it inclusively, intersectionality, and restlessly. Faith traditions, at their best, offer powerful tools to understand and respond to complex, layered forms of identity and injustice. From ancient texts to modern practice, these examples show that intersectionality is not a modern invention, it resonates deeply with spiritual teachings about dignity, justice, and compassion for all.

Each of the eight faith traditions below offer positive examples supporting intersectional identities and experiences. They point to tensions between doctrine and practice, highlighting a clear distinction between scriptural teachings and culturally or socially influenced norms.

- **Bahá’í Faith: Unity of Humanity (Foundation of Intersectional Justice):** **“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” — Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, CXVII.*¹⁰⁵ **“Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness.” — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 138.**¹⁰⁶ This core Bahá’í teaching calls not only for unity but for conscious removal of all forms of prejudice, which is central to intersectionality. **“All prejudices, whether religious, racial, patriotic or political, are destructive to the foundation of human development.” —‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 299.**¹⁰⁷**

104 C.S. Queen and S.B. King (Eds.). (1996). *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist liberation movements in Asia*. State University of New York Press. <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/br86b614f>.

105 Bahá’u’lláh. (1976). *Gleanings from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (Shoghi Effendi, Trans.). Bahá’í Publishing Trust. (Original works revealed 1857–1892). <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/gleanings-writings-bahauallah/1#529444114>.

106 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. (1969). *Paris talks: Addresses given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912*. Bahá’í Publishing Trust. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/paris-talks/1#733601770>.

107 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. (n.d.). *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/9#882843088>.

- **Buddhism: Interconnectedness and Compassion for All:** The concept of “dependent origination” (Sanskrit: pratītya-samutpāda) expresses the interconnectedness of all beings or phenomena.¹⁰⁸ A metaphor for interbeing often used in Mahayana Buddhism is Indra’s Net. Compassion (Karuna) must take into account the complex causes of suffering, including social and structural issues that affect people differently based on their identities.¹⁰⁹
- **Christianity: John 4:1–42: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well.**¹¹⁰ Jesus speaks to a Samaritan (ethnic outsider), a woman (gender), and someone socially marginalized (due to her marital history). He acknowledges her full humanity and engages her theologically—breaking cultural, religious, and gender norms. This story demonstrates intersectional awareness and compassion by challenging multiple layers of exclusion.
- **Hinduism: Isavaya Upanisad Verse 6 and 7: "One who sees all beings in the self alone and the self in all beings, feels no hate by virtue of that understanding. For the seer of oneness, who knows all beings to be the self, where is delusion and sorrow?"**¹¹¹ This verse affirms that one should see all beings in themselves including all their identities, including class, race, and gender. At the same time, they should see themselves and their identities in all beings. Embracing intersectional identities by definition makes you feel no hate, and seeing that oneness in all in spite of their identities prevents delusion and sorrow.
- **Indigenous Spiritualities: Holistic View of Identity:** Many Indigenous traditions view identity as relational and holistic, connected to land, community, gender roles, ancestry, and spirit. Two-Spirit identities, for example, represent intersectional understandings of gender, spirituality, and community roles, rooted in sacred traditions. Inclusion and respect are spiritually mandated as part of a community's well-being.¹¹²

108 The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (n.d.). <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/D/29>.

109 Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha taught*. Grove Press. https://www.theravada.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Dr_Walpola_Rahula_What_the_Buddha-Taught.pdf.

110 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (John 4:1-42). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

111 Rambachan, Anantanand. *A Hindu Theology of Liberation: Not-Two is Not One*. Pg. 42. <https://archive.org/details/hindutheologyoff0000ramb>.

112 A. Wilson. (1996). *How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People*. Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. <https://www.harvardeducationalreview.org/content/66/2/303>.

- **Islam: Qur'an 49:13: "O mankind! We created you from a single male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another..."**¹¹³ This verse affirms diversity of ethnicity, gender, and identity as God's intention, encouraging mutual respect and understanding. Islamic social justice values stress fairness and equity across race, class, gender, and ability, consistent with intersectional ethics.
- **Judaism: Leviticus 19:33–34: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens..."**¹¹⁴ The Torah consistently calls for care of the widow, orphan, and stranger—groups marginalized by multiple intersecting factors (social, economic, legal). Jewish ethical tradition upholds the principle of tzedek (justice) for those at the intersections of vulnerability.¹¹⁵
- **Sikhism: Universal Equality and Rejection of Caste/Gender Hierarchies: Guru Granth Sahib – "Recognize all human beings as one."**¹¹⁶ Sikhism strongly rejects caste, gender, and class-based discrimination. Langar (community kitchen) was created to bring all people, regardless of background, to eat as equals. This practice embodies intersectional inclusion and spiritual equality.¹¹⁷

Promoting Women's Human Rights

Two prominent take-aways from CSW69's statements on women's human rights are: 1) women's human rights received pushback with regard to the right to development; and 2) some UN Member States noted that human rights were only one of twelve critical areas of concern and received disproportionate attention in the political declaration. These two points are demonstrated in the pushback narrative, where some critique the emphasis on women's rights as competing against other priorities such as religious freedom, traditional family structures, or national sovereignty. Nationalistic and ideological movements can appropriate religious tradition and symbolism to oppose women's rights while presenting their agenda as culturally authentic.

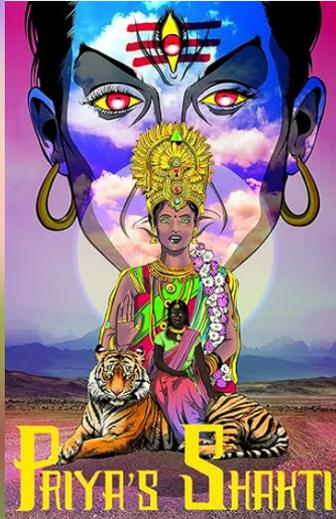
113 Ali, A.Y. (Trans.). (1989). *The Holy Qur'an: Text, translation and commentary*. Amana Corp. (Qur'an 49:13). <https://legacy.quran.com/33/35>.

114 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Leviticus 19:33-34). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

115 E.N. Dorff. (2003). *The Jewish Tradition: Religious Beliefs and Healthcare Decisions*. Charles Press. <https://institutionalrepository.aah.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1374&context=alldocuments>.

116 Guru Nanak. (1604/2006). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (English transl., various editions). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. [https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20\(matching%20pages\).pdf](https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20(matching%20pages).pdf).

117 Kaur Singh, N. (1996). *Feminism and Sikhism*. In A. Sharma & K. K. Young (Eds.), *Feminism and World Religions*. SUNY Press.



In response to a brutal gang rape on a Delhi bus, artists created a graphic novel focusing on Priya, a human woman and ardent devotee of the Goddess Parvati who experienced rape, but fights back against sexual violence with the help of the Goddess and a tiger.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, noted historian, Uma Chakravarty, coined the term “Brahminical patriarchy,” which argues that caste and gender hierarchies are organized principles of social order in India.¹¹⁹ Chakravarty’s framework is used by contemporary feminists to critique Hindutva.

Alternatively, collective faith-based narratives defend women’s human rights as a sacred responsibility. Promoting women’s human rights is a sacred act in many faith traditions, not only because women are created with equal worth, but because doing so heals and uplifts entire systems. When women flourish, families, communities, and nations flourish too, and that is deeply aligned with the divine vision found in sacred teachings. These teachings are explored in more depth in the examples below, highlighting a clear distinction between scriptural teachings and socially influenced norms.

- **Bahá’í Faith: Women’s Rights as Essential to Justice and Peace: “The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly.” — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 133.¹²⁰** This metaphor is central in Bahá’í discourse on gender justice: progress is impossible without the full and equal participation of women.

118 Devineni, R., and Menon, V.K. (2014). *Priya’s Shakti*. Rattapallax. <https://www.priyashakti.com/priyas-shakti>.

119 Uma Chakravarti. (1993). *Conceptualising Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28(14), 579-585. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4392556>.

120 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. (n.d.). Paris Talks. (p. 133). <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-l-baha/paris-talks/1#733601770>.

- **Buddhism: Bodhisattva Ideal:** Practicing compassion (karuṇā) includes alleviating all suffering, especially where it is most systemic. Promoting women’s rights reduces gender-based violence, human trafficking, and structural inequality, which are root causes of broader suffering in society. When women are safe and empowered, children are safer, families are healthier, and communities are more peaceful.¹²¹
- **Christianity: Proverbs 31:20, 26: “She opens her hand to the poor... She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”**¹²² The Eshet Chayil (woman of valor) is not only strong and wise, she uplifts the poor, educates others, and contributes to the well-being of her household and community. Promoting women’s rights (e.g., to education, leadership, and economic empowerment) enables them to address poverty, care for families, and nurture peace in society.
- **Hinduism: Mahabharata: “A society that does not respect its women will not prosper.”**¹²³ When women are respected and protected, families thrive, and communities remain spiritually and socially balanced. Rights to safety, healthcare, and education for women help address maternal mortality, child welfare, and economic well-being, all deeply interconnected.
- **Indigenous and African Traditional Religions: Women's Rights Sustain Community Well-Being** - In many Indigenous and traditional African religions, women are custodians of land, birth, healing, and justice. When their roles, voices, and safety are affirmed through rights, it preserves culture, ensures sustainability, and maintains social harmony. Denial of their rights weakens the entire fabric of the community.¹²⁴
- **Islam: Qur’an 9:71: “The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong...”**¹²⁵ When women are given full rights, as partners in shaping society, they strengthen families, communities, and moral justice. Upholding women’s rights to education, safety, and participation enables them to combat injustice, advocate for children, and build ethical societies.¹²⁶

121 Rahula, W. (1974). What the Buddha taught. Grove Press. https://www.theravada.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Dr_Walpola_Rahula_What_the_Buddha_Taught.pdf.

122 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Proverbs 31:20, 26). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

123 Menon, R. (2006). The Mahabharata: A Modern Rendering. HarperCollins. https://archive.org/stream/MenonRameshTHEMAHABHARATAAModernRenderingVol1/Menon%2C%20Ramesh%20-%20THE%20MAHABHARATA_%20A%20Modern%20Rendering%2C%20Vol%201_djvu.txt.

124 Amadiume, I. (1987). Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society. Zed Books. <https://en.pdfdrive.to/book/male-daughters-female-husbands-gender-and-sex-in-an-african-society-0>.

125 Ali, A.Y. (Trans.). (1989). The Holy Qur’an: Text, translation and commentary. Amana Corp. (Qur’an 9:71). <https://legacy.quran.com/33/35>.

126 A. Wadud. (1999). Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman’s Perspective. Oxford University Press. <https://archive.org/details/quranwomanreread0000wadu/page/n5/mode/1up>.

- **Judaism: Micah 6:8: “What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.”**¹²⁷ Pursuing justice for women leads to structural changes that benefit others, protecting children, reducing poverty, and promoting dignity. Jewish ethics call for caring for the widow, orphan, and stranger, groups often overlapping with women in vulnerable situations. Advocating for women’s rights directly impacts the well-being of families and marginalized communities.¹²⁸
- **Sikhism: Guru Nanak – “There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim” (emphasizing equality), and “Why call her inferior from whom kings are born?”**¹²⁹ Gender justice is a justice issue for all, not just for women. When women’s human rights are promoted (e.g., rights to inheritance, safety, worship), entire communities become more just, equitable, and spiritually whole.

Family Values and Motherhood

At CSW69, eight of the thirty-two Member States who submitted written and oral remarks expressed disappointment in the exclusion of the words “family” and “motherhood,” emphasizing the inclusion of these in the Beijing Declaration. This disappointment is reiterated in the pushback narrative, where some actors express concern that international frameworks undermine motherhood and traditional family structures and roles. Family values are often interpreted through the lens of strict traditionalism, centered on the hierarchical nuclear family model and distinct gender roles. Motherhood is described as a woman’s primary, natural, and most virtuous calling within this structure. Selective and extremist interpretations of religious teachings are used in online spaces to reinforce patriarchal norms and resist gender equality. By framing restrictive views of women’s roles as authentic religious or cultural values, these narratives legitimize discrimination, undermine women’s leadership and public participation, and portray gender inequality as necessary for social or moral order. The text highlights how such interpretations circulate through digital media to normalize misogyny and oppose inclusive understandings of family and society. These narratives are not representative of mainstream belief or practice within these traditions, but they exert influence through digital platforms and politicised religious messaging.

¹²⁷ *Holy Bible*. (n.d.). (Micah 6:8). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

¹²⁸ Dorff, E.N. (2003). *The Jewish tradition: Religious beliefs and healthcare decisions*. Charles Press. <https://institutionalrepository.aah.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1374&context=alldocuments>.

¹²⁹ Guru Nanak. (1604/2006). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (English transl., various editions). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. [https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20\(matching%20pages\).pdf](https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20(matching%20pages).pdf).

TOGETHER WE CAN SHAPE

A world where every pregnancy is *safe*

*The organization, Every Pregnancy, focuses on saving lives ended from preventable pregnancy complications. They advocate for the right of every mother to survive childbirth, supporting women and children through maternal health interventions.*¹³⁰

In response, scholars like Dr. Kecia Ali offer a feminist, scholarly examination of sexuality within Islamic texts and traditions, critiquing patriarchal interpretations and exploring contemporary issues like consent, marriage, divorce, homosexuality, and female genital mutilation (FGM) through a lens of justice and equality, aiming to provide a nuanced resource for understanding complex sexual ethics in Islam.¹³¹

More commonly, faith traditions affirm true family values that uplift and honor all members, recognizing the full humanity and multidimensional contributions and roles of women, not only as caregivers and nurturers, but also as leaders, economic providers, and agents of change. Faith inspired family values and motherhood can be inclusive and not limited to male-centered and traditional norms, protective of rights and dignity, supportive of all caregivers and not just biological mothers and grounded in compassion, love, justice and community. Below are more positive faith-based narratives.

¹³⁰ Every Pregnancy. (2023). <https://everypregnancy.org/who-we-are/>.

¹³¹ K. Ali. (2006/2026). *Sexual ethics in Islam: Feminist reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and jurisprudence*. Oneworld Publications. <https://archive.org/details/sexualethicsisla0000alik>.

- **Baha'i Faith: Balance Between Family and Public Life** – While the Bahá'í writings celebrate the role of mothers, they do not confine women to domestic roles. Instead, they promote a vision where family life and public service are both honored, and neither is exclusive to women or men. **“The new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals... cooperation will take the place of competition.”**— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 104.¹³² This suggests a future where leadership itself is reshaped by qualities traditionally associated with both motherhood and public service—empathy, cooperation, and justice.
- **Buddhism: Nurturing as a Path to Compassion** – Buddhism emphasizes compassion (*karuṇā*) and non-harm, which begin in the family and extend outward. The Buddha spoke of parents as first teachers and worthy of reverence, highlighting the spiritual importance of nurturing relationships. Motherhood and family care are seen as expressions of generosity, patience, and wisdom, values at the core of Buddhist practice.¹³³
- **Christianity: Mark 3:35: “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”**¹³⁴ Jesus redefines family beyond blood ties to include spiritual kinship, care, and inclusion, a radically inclusive concept of “family values.” This affirms all kinds of families, including single-parent homes, adoptive families, LGBTQ+ families, and communities of mutual support.
- **Hinduism: Motherhood as Sacred Power (Shakti)** – In Hindu tradition, mothers are revered as expressions of Shakti (divine feminine power). Devi Mahatmya – Goddesses like Durga and Parvati are protectors, warriors, and nurturers, showing that motherhood includes strength, wisdom, and leadership. Family values include dharma (moral duty), mutual respect, and the spiritual growth of all family members, not only patriarchal control.¹³⁵
- **Indigenous and African Traditional Religions: Family as Community Responsibility** – In many Indigenous and African traditional contexts, motherhood is communal, and family values involve care for elders, children, the land, and spiritual balance. Mothers are honored as life-givers, healers, and wisdom keepers, and families are seen as networks of care, not nuclear units alone.¹³⁶

132 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. (n.d.). *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/9#882843088>.

133 Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha taught*. Grove Press. <https://www.theravada.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Dr-Walpola-Rahula-What-the-Buddha-Taught.pdf>.

134 *Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version. (Mark 3:35). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

135 Kinsley, D. (1988). *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the divine feminine in the Hindu religious tradition*. University of California Press.

136 L. Simpson. (2014). Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), 1-25. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/22170/17985>.

- **Islam: Family as a Space of Mercy and Justice – “Paradise lies at the feet of mothers.” -Hadith.**¹³⁷ Motherhood is deeply honored in Islam, not only for bearing children but for the sacrifice, education, and spiritual leadership mothers provide. Supporting mothers means ensuring their health, rights, education, and economic security.
- **Judaism: Proverbs 31:** Describes a woman of valor who works, leads, and nurtures. She is a mother and a public contributor, combining motherhood with dignity and strength.¹³⁸
- **Sikhism: Guru Granth Sahib – “From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived...”**¹³⁹ Sikhism rejects gender hierarchy and affirms the equal dignity of women, especially mothers. Family values include serving, sharing, justice, and spiritual growth—fostered by both parents.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

At CSW69, UN Member States expressed reservations regarding references to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), while also noting the limited attention given to broader health considerations. This pushback reflects that SRHR is sometimes associated with contested issues such as population control and abortion, which some actors perceive as conflicting with the “right to life.”



Strengthening Survivors, Families, Friends & Organizations towards Gender Justice & Well-being.



*Sikh Family Center promotes community health and well-being with a particular focus on gender justice. They provide trauma-centered interventions for victim-survivors of violence while working to change the social and cultural conditions that allow gender violence to occur.*¹⁴⁰

137 M. N. Al-Albani. (1982). *Silsilat al-ahādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa* [Series of authentic hadiths]. Maktab al-Ma’ārif. <https://preciousgemsfromthequranandsunnah.wordpress.com/2025/04/24/silsilah-al-ahadith-as-sahihah-volume-1-hadiths-1-10/>.

138 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Proverbs 31). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

139 Guru Nanak. (1604/2006). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (English transl., various editions). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. [https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20\(matching%20pages\).pdf](https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20(matching%20pages).pdf).

140 Sikh Family Center. (2009). <https://sikhfamilycenter.org/>.

Debates about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Sikh online spaces are shaped more by patriarchal cultural norms and conservative interpretations than by Sikh scripture itself. While the core sacred texts do not explicitly restrict women's reproductive autonomy, online discourse often invokes ideas such as chastity, divine will, and community honor (izzat) to regulate women's roles and choices. As a result, control over women's reproductive decisions is framed as necessary for protecting Sikh identity, with social and online pressures enforcing expectations that are culturally constructed rather than scripturally mandated. Modern scholars and activists, such as Mallika Kaur, build upon the legacy of Gurus like Guru Nanak, challenging patriarchal norms by emphasizing women's spiritual equality and vital societal roles. Kaur advocates for gender justice and works with survivors of violence, continuing the Gurus' vision of empowering women's voices and actions.¹⁴¹

At the same time, many faith traditions emphasize care for health, dignity, and overall the soul of our communities. Promoting SRHR respects human dignity, reduces suffering and harm, upholds responsibility and informed choice, protects the vulnerable and builds healthier families and communities by empowering individuals to plan families, fostering economic growth and leading to more stable, prosperous, and equitable societies. Below are more positive faith-based examples that support SRHR and demonstrate the tensions between doctrine and practice.

- **Bahá'í Faith:** Every individual is endowed with the capacity for independent investigation of truth and moral decision-making. This includes women's right to make informed choices about their bodies, health, and lives. **"Man must independently investigate truth... each must see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears and investigate with his own mind. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá,** The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 291.¹⁴² This foundational teaching supports the idea that women are moral agents, capable and entitled to make decisions about their reproductive lives.
- **Buddhism: Compassion and Non-Harm (Ahimsa): The First Precept – "Do not harm any living being."**¹⁴³ Denying SRHR can cause physical, emotional, and generational harm, especially to women and girls. Promoting SRHR aligns with reducing suffering and protecting well-being, essential values in Buddhism. Right Intention (from the Noble Eightfold Path) – Encourages wise, ethical choices. Supporting SRHR empowers people to make wise, compassionate, and ethical choices about their bodies, families, and futures.

141 M. Kaur. (2019). *Faith, gender, and activism in the Punjab conflict: The wheat fields still whisper*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17448727.2021.1965761>.

142 Abdu'l-Bahá. (n.d.). The Promulgation of Universal Peace. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/9#882843088>.

143 Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha taught*. Grove Press. <https://www.theravada.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Dr-Walpola-Rahula-What-the-Buddha-Taught.pdf>.

- **Christianity: Genesis 2:7: Genesis 2:7: “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”**¹⁴⁴ This passage emphasizes that human life is both physical (“dust of the ground”) and spiritual (“breath of life”). This affirms that the human body is inherently worthy, not something shameful or secondary. Sexual and reproductive health, being rooted in the body, is therefore not outside spiritual life but part of the sacredness of being human. According to scripture, life starts at first breath.
- **Hinduism: Mahabharata – “The body is the temple of the soul; care must be taken to keep it in good health.”**¹⁴⁵ Reproductive health is part of overall spiritual and physical well-being. Hindu philosophy encourages responsible decision-making (dharma), including over family planning and relationships. Promoting SRHR gives people, especially women, the ability to fulfill their life purpose (dharma) without being trapped by unsafe health conditions or social pressure.
- **Indigenous and African Traditional Religions:** Holistic Health and Community Well-being – Many Indigenous and African spiritual systems honor the sacredness of the body, fertility, and the cycles of life. Reproductive health is not only a personal issue but a community concern; safe motherhood, birth, and bodily autonomy are seen as essential for the survival and harmony of the people. Promoting SRHR aligns with sacred duties to protect life, community well-being, and spiritual balance.¹⁴⁶
- **Islam: Qur’an 6:151: “Do not kill your children for fear of poverty – We provide for them and for you.”**¹⁴⁷ Often cited to protect life, this verse is also interpreted by some Muslim scholars to support planned and responsible parenthood, not as a restriction, but as careful stewardship of life. Islam emphasizes seeking knowledge (‘ilm), and SRHR education helps people make informed, responsible decisions.¹⁴⁸

144 *Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version. (Genesis 2:7). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

145 Menon, R. (2006). *The Mahabharata: A Modern Rendering*. HarperCollins. https://archive.org/stream/MenonRameshTHEMAHABHARATAAModernRenderingVol1/Menon%2C%20Ramesh%20-%20THE%20MAHABHARATA_%20A%20Modern%20Rendering%2C%20Vol%201_djvu.txt.

146 Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. Zed Books. <https://en.pdfdrive.to/book/male-daughters-female-husbands-gender-and-sex-in-an-african-society-0>.

147 Ali, A.Y. (Trans.). (1989). *The Holy Qur’an: Text, translation and commentary*. Amana Corp. (Qur’an 6:151). <https://legacy.quran.com/33/35>.

148 R. Hassan. (1991). *Equal Before Allah? Women In Islam*. In J. Platt & J. Hinnells (Eds.), *Women and Religion* (pp. 71-89). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315662244-16/issue-woman-man-equality-islamic-tradition-riffat-hassan>.

- **Judaism: Pikuach Nefesh** – The Jewish legal principle that saving a life overrides almost any other religious rule. When women’s lives or health are endangered by pregnancy, lack of care, or reproductive coercion, supporting SRHR becomes a moral imperative.¹⁴⁹
- **Sikhism: Guru Granth Sahib** – “**We are born of woman, we are conceived in the womb of woman...**”¹⁵⁰ Women are revered and honored in Sikhism; protecting their health and bodily integrity is essential to that respect. Promoting SRHR ensures women can make decisions as equals, in line with Sikh teachings on justice and dignity.

Women’s Leadership

At CSW69, the empowerment of women and girls and women in power and decision-making were briefly discussed, but no definitive steps were mentioned. We focus on this thematic area because anti-rights groups often resist women in leadership positions because doing so challenges the traditional gender hierarchies they seek to preserve. These groups frequently rely on rigid interpretations of gender roles that place men as decision-makers and women as supporters or caregivers. The perception of “leader-like” traits linked to assertiveness and authority are correlated to masculinity, while feminine traits are correlated to communal and collaborative traits, which many believe are at odds with effective leadership. Women’s leadership disrupts these power structures, undermines their claims about natural or divinely ordained male authority, and opens space for more inclusive, rights-affirming models of governance. As a result, they often frame women’s leadership as incompatible with their vision of family, community, or religious order, even when such views limit women’s full participation and agency.



Jewish Women International creates opportunities for women to explore ambition, ensure security, and realize the full potential of women’s personal strength. JWI forms supportive peer-led communities and provides professional development programs.¹⁵¹

149 Dorff, E.N. (2003). *The Jewish tradition: Religious beliefs and healthcare decisions*. Charles Press. <https://institutionalrepository.aah.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1374&context=alldocuments>.

150 Guru Nanak. (1604/2006). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (English transl., various editions). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. [https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20\(matching%20pages\).pdf](https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20(matching%20pages).pdf).

151 Jewish Women International. (1897). <https://www.jwi.org/ywin>.

In contrast, many faith traditions offer a positive framework for supporting women's leadership. Orthodox feminist, Blu Greenberg, for example, advocates for greater roles for women within halakha, advocating for women's ordination within Orthodoxy. Greenberg emphasized using halakha to empower women, famously saying, "Where there's a rabbinic will, there's a halakhic way."¹⁵² As a positive collective response from many faith traditions, women have always stood as vital bearers of wisdom, courage, and spiritual authority. Whether as prophets, teachers, scholars, saints, or divine figures, their leadership consistently reveals a shared sacred truth: the capacity for spiritual insight, moral strength, and transformative service belongs equally to women and men. Diverse faith groups build coalitions, challenge patriarchal interpretations, leverage spiritual authority for gender equality, develop women's skills through programs, and promote scriptural narratives of female leaders to transform societal structures, emphasizing inclusion and justice. The examples below expand on the positive faith-based narratives, highlighting a clear distinction between scriptural teachings and socially influenced norms.

- **Baha'i Faith: Táhirih (Qurrat al-'Ayn) as a paradigm of spiritual leadership: "Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God." – Bahá'u'lláh.**¹⁵³ The Baha'i writings affirm the full equality of women and men. Táhirih is celebrated for her scholarship, teaching, and courage at the dawn of the Bábí Faith. She served as a religious teacher, poet-theologian, and catalyst for the principle of gender equality, embodying the Baha'i teaching that leadership is measured by service and spiritual capacity, not gender.
- **Buddhism: Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, first woman to lead the Bhikkhunī Sangha:** In the Pāli Vinaya, the Buddha approves the ordination of Mahāpajāpatī, establishing the order of Buddhist nuns. As the first bhikkhunī, she became a foundational leader for women's monastic communities and spiritual teachers for generations. Core Buddhist doctrine teaches that the potential for full enlightenment regardless of gender.¹⁵⁴ The Lotus Sutra depicts the Dragon Girl (or Dragon King's Daughter) not only becoming a buddha but also as a leader "preach[ing] the Law to all the human and heavenly beings in the assembly."¹⁵⁵

153 Greenberg, B. (1981). *On women & Judaism: A view from tradition*. Jewish Publication Society of America. <https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/on-women-and-judaism-a-view-from-tradition>.

154 Bahá'u'lláh. (1976). *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Research Dept., Trans.). Bahá'í World Centre. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/tablets-bahauallah/1#030537471>.

155 Buddhist Publication Society. (1964). *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)*, Vol. 4: Cullavagga (I. B. Horner, Trans.). Oxford University Press. <https://wiswo.org/books/resources/book-reference-pdfs/Horner-Book-of-Discipline/Original-Print-Version-with-Introductions/4.-I.B.Horner-Vol-IV-Suttavibhanga.pdf>.

- **Christianity: Mary Magdalene as ‘apostle to the apostles’:** In the Gospel of John (20:11-18), the risen Christ commissions Mary Magdalene to proclaim the resurrection to the disciples.¹⁵⁶ Her role as first witness and messenger of the resurrection represents the earliest Christian proclamation. Many early theologians (e.g. Augustine) call her *apostola apostolorum*.¹⁵⁷
- **Hinduism: Sarasvatī, the goddess who embodies wisdom and guides sages:** The Rig Veda (RV 6.61, RV 10.17) praises Sarasvatī as a source of knowledge, inspiration, and eloquence.¹⁵⁸ As the patron of learning, music, and sacred speech (*vāc*), Sarasvatī represents divine female authority over knowledge and teaching.
- **African Traditional Religion: The Ìyánifá (female Ifá diviner) and the authority of Oshun:** In Yoruba creation stories, Oshun is essential for cosmic balance; when the male orishas exclude her, their work fails, and only her leadership restores creation. These stories affirm that divine feminine power is indispensable and that women serve as priestesses, diviners, healers, and leaders.¹⁵⁹
- **Islam: The leadership of Khadija bint Khuwaylid and the authority of female scholarship:** The Qur’an presents spiritual equality: **“The believing men and believing women... God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward.”** — Qur’an 33:35.¹⁶⁰ Khadija supported, protected, and was the first believer in the Prophet Muhammad’s mission, an example of moral, social, and economic leadership in early Islam. Islamic jurisprudence recognizes knowledge (*‘ilm*) as a primary qualification for authority, accessible to both men and women.

156 *Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version. (John 20:11-18). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

157 *Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version. (John 20:11-18). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

158 E. Schüssler Fiorenza. (1983). *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. Crossroad. <https://archive.org/details/inmemoryofherfem0000schs>.

159 Doniger, W. (Trans.). (1981). *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. Penguin Books. [https://kyl.neocities.org/books/\[SPI%20RIG\]%20the%20orig%20veda.pdf](https://kyl.neocities.org/books/[SPI%20RIG]%20the%20orig%20veda.pdf).

160 W. Abimbola (1975). *Ifa: An exposition of Ifa literary corpus*. Oxford University Press. <https://www.scribd.com/document/412453460/Ifa-an-Exposition-Abimbola>.

- **Judaism: Deborah: judge, prophet, and military leader:** Judges 4–5 describes Deborah as a nevi'ah (prophet) who leads Israel, adjudicates disputes, and inspires victory against oppression.¹⁶¹ She fulfills roles of spiritual leader, judge, and national guide. Hebrew Scripture includes other women prophets (e.g. Miriam, Huldah), showing divine endorsement of women's spiritual leadership.¹⁶² The greatest example of addressing gender equality in the Jewish denominations is regarding women's education in the study of Judaism, participation in prayer services, and ability to play leadership roles, such as as rabbis.
- **Sikhism: Mata Khivi and the egalitarian vision of the Gurus:** The Guru Granth Sahib repeatedly affirms equality and condemns gender discrimination (e.g., **“Why call her inferior, from her kings are born”** — Guru Nanak).¹⁶³ Mata Khivi organized the langar (communal kitchen), administering one of Sikhism's central institutions of spiritual equality and service. Sikhism teaches the equality of all before the Divine; leadership is based on seva (service), devotion, and virtue, not gender.¹⁶⁴

Gender-Based Violence

Most UN Member States at CSW69 acknowledged that violence against women and girls is detrimental to society, with many regretting that the statement does not go further to protect women and girls from violence in all its forms. These include intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, harmful practices such as early and forced marriage, sexual violence, psychological and emotional abuse, economic violence, and other forms of coercive control that disproportionately affect women and girls across their life course. For some States, the topic was an opportunity to amplify anti-immigrant sentiments or disregard gender-based violence against men and non-binary persons.

¹⁶¹ *Holy Bible*. (n.d.). (Judges 4-5). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

¹⁶² *Holy Bible*. (n.d.). (Judges 4-5). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

¹⁶³ J. C. Exum. (1996). The tragedy of victory: Deborah and Jael in Judges 4. In *Fragmented women: Feminist (sub)versions of biblical narratives* (pp. 33–61). Sheffield Academic Press. <https://archive.org/details/fragmentedwomenf0000exum>.

¹⁶⁴ Guru Nanak. (1604/2006). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (English transl., various editions). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. [https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20\(matching%20pages\).pdf](https://www.sikhnet.com/files/ereader/Siri%20Guru%20Granth%20-%20English%20Translation%20(matching%20pages).pdf).

Seeking Safety And Justice For Survivors Of Violence

By amplifying the experiences of survivors, our mission is to create a world in which all people share equal rights and live in safety and with dignity.

[Learn More](#)



The Tahirih Justice Center is a non-profit, founded on the principles of the Baha'i Faith, that serves women, girls, and all immigrant survivors of gender-based violence by providing free legal support and social services to secure their rights and build stable lives.¹⁶⁵

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We can see that the pushback narrative reiterates that violence against women and girls is often conducted to enforce male dominance over women, whether through physical harm, control of sexuality and reproduction, or restrictions on autonomy and decision-making. While many traditions clearly condemn abuse and affirm gender equality, some passages, especially when removed from historical, literary, or ethical context, can be read as encouraging endurance or submission in harmful relationships. This is especially concerning in contexts involving partner violence or early marriage, where teachings intended to promote patience, compassion, or moral perseverance may be protection and justice. Such interpretations risk obscuring core ethical principles and inadvertently reinforcing unhealthy or abusive power dynamics.

¹⁶⁵ The Tahirih Justice Center. (1997). <https://www.tahirih.org/>.

In contrast, readers can look to the majority of, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings and actions, which championed the fundamental equality of women and men, calling it essential for human progress, stating they are two wings of humanity, needing equal development for society to soar, and advocating identical education and rights, through acknowledging complementary natural differences that enrich civilization, not limit it.¹⁶⁶

As a collective faith-based response, many faith traditions address gender-based violence, including domestic violence and intimate partner violence, early and forced marriage, and other harmful practices, by drawing on core teachings about human dignity, compassion, and justice, which condemn harm and call for the protection and respect of all people. Sacred texts and moral principles are often used to challenge violence, promote equitable relationships, and encourage accountability and healing. Many contemporary religious communities also engage in education, advocacy, and support services to prevent abuse and to care for survivors. This is highlighted in the examples below.

- **Bahá'í Faith: Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh: "Regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship."**¹⁶⁷ This text encourages respectful and non-violent treatment of all human beings, explicitly promoting a world without abuse or oppression, which encompasses gender-based violence.
- **Buddhism: Dhammapada 5: "Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal rule."**¹⁶⁸ Violence, including gender-based, is inconsistent with Buddhist values. The Buddha's Teachings – Emphasize compassion (*karuṇā*) and non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) toward all beings, regardless of gender.
- **Christianity: Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."**¹⁶⁹ This models sacrificial love, not domination or abuse.

¹⁶⁶ National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. (1997). *Two wings of a bird: The equality of women and men*. <https://opa.bahai.ca/podcast/s03e03-the-role-of-religion-in-eradicating-violence-against-women/>.

¹⁶⁷ Bahá'u'lláh. (n.d.). Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/gleanings-writings-bahauallah/1#529444114>.

¹⁶⁸ Acharya Buddhārakkhita. (Trans.). (1985). *The Dhammapada*. Buddhist Publication Society. <https://www.bps.lk/olib/bp/bp203s-Buddharakkhita-Dhammapada.pdf>.

¹⁶⁹ Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Ephesians 5:25). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

- **Hinduism: Bhagavad Gita: 6.29:** one who is spiritually realized sees the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.¹⁷⁰ This verse repeatedly emphasizes seeing the same divine essence in everyone.
- **Indigenous Tradition: The Seventh Generation Principle (Haudenosaunee and others).** This teaching says we must make decisions considering how they will affect seven generations into the future. Protecting women and girls is essential to preserving the well-being of future generations. Teaching: "If our women are not safe, our people are not safe. Violence against women is violence against the future."¹⁷¹
- **Islam: Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) – “The best of you are those who are best to their wives.”** (Tirmidhi) establishes kindness in marital relationships as a moral ideal.¹⁷²
- **Judaism: Talmud, Sanhedrin 74a** – Prohibits violence and teaches that one must not harm others, especially the vulnerable.¹⁷³ This reinforces the idea that no person has the right to dominate, injure, or intimidate another. Gender-based violence, which relies on misuse of power, is therefore incompatible with this core ethical teaching.
- **Sikhism: Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) 473: “So kyo manda ākhīai jīt jammeh rājān.”—“Why call her inferior, from whom kings are born?”**¹⁷⁴ Guru Nanak explicitly condemns all attitudes that treat women as lesser—this includes degrading speech, coercion, and all forms of abuse. The verse insists that violence or disrespect toward women is a spiritual offense because women are the carriers of divine creation and dignity.

170 Easwaran, E. (Trans.). (2007). *The Bhagavad Gita* (2nd ed.). Nilgiri Press. <https://ebooks.tirumala.org/downloads/The%20Bhagavad%20Gita.pdf>.

171 O. Lyons. (1980). An Iroquois Perspective. In J. Birnbaum (Ed.), *The Sacred Earth* (pp. 173–180). Harper & Row. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5800/sc5881/000001/000000/000297/pdf/msa_sc_5881_1_297.pdf.

172 Al-Tirmidhi, M. ibn ʿIsā. (n.d.). *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* (various English translations available). <https://www.muslim-library.com/english/english-translation-of-jami-at-tirmidhi/>.

173 Epstein, I. (Ed.). (1935). *The Babylonian Talmud* (Soncino trans.). Soncino Press. https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Bikkurim.3.1?lang=bi.

174 Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. (2006). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (English translation). SGPC. [https://www.gurmatveechar.com/books/English_Books/Sri_Guru_Granth_Sahib_Translation/SGPC/Sri.Guru.Granth.Sahib.English.And.Punjabi.Translation.by.SGPC.05.\(GurmatVeechar.com\).pdf](https://www.gurmatveechar.com/books/English_Books/Sri_Guru_Granth_Sahib_Translation/SGPC/Sri.Guru.Granth.Sahib.English.And.Punjabi.Translation.by.SGPC.05.(GurmatVeechar.com).pdf).

Positive Masculinity

Masculinity and the engagement of men and boys was not mentioned in any of the UN Member States oral or written statements at CSW69. This is critical to underline because it reveals a major gap in addressing gender equality holistically. Efforts to advance women's rights are strengthened when norms, behaviors, and social expectations for men and boys in all their diversity are also considered. Without attention to these dynamics the root causes of gender inequality remain insufficiently addressed, opportunities to prevent gender-based violence are limited, responsibility for gender equality falls disproportionately on women, and policy frameworks risk remaining incomplete.



Photo illustrates Indigenous storytellers as part of the Warrior Women, which is a project that recovers the stories of warrior women who fought for Indigenous self-determination and cultural survival during the Red Power movement (1960s-1989s).¹⁷⁵

In some contexts, historical and social processes have shaped narrow and rigid understandings of masculinity, highlighting the tension between original cultural ideals and their reinterpretation under external influence. Traditionally, the figure of the warrior emphasized relational responsibility, spiritual strength, and service, rather than violence, domination, or rigid gender roles. Colonial or external reinterpretations narrowed this vision, promoting aggressive, exclusionary notions of masculinity that prioritize physical strength, emotional stoicism, and control, while marginalizing women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people and reshaping leadership and cultural values to align with a more hierarchical, combative model.

175 Warrior Women Project. (2006). <https://www.warriorwomen.org/>.

Key figures, like Zitkála-Šá, a Native American activist, writer, and composer, re-centered warriorhood in kinship and family, creating spaces for female warriors, countering hypermasculine tropes like “A Warrior’s Daughter.”¹⁷⁶ Additionally, Dr. Elizabeth Castle, creator of The Warrior Women Project, highlights how the “bloodthirsty warrior” trope justified colonialism, noting the role of the warrior was broader and included feminine aspects.¹⁷⁷

Faith traditions provide positive models of masculinity, the embodiment of healthy traits and behaviors that reject negative stereotypes, such as aggression and emotional suppression, by grounding male identity in values such as compassion, humility, responsibility, and respect for others. Teachings often emphasize that true strength is shown through service, integrity, and care rather than dominance or aggression. Religious communities increasingly encourage men to form healthy relationships, reject harmful gender norms, and embody character traits that nurture family and community well-being. Below are examples of positive faith-based narratives to uplift positive masculinity.

- **Bahá’í Faith: Abdu’l-Bahá and the Bahá’í ideal of masculinity as service – Bahá’u’lláh teaches that true power is expressed through justice, mercy, and service. “Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.”** — Bahá’u’lláh.¹⁷⁸ Abdu’l-Bahá embodied leadership through humility, gentleness, and caring for the poor and oppressed. Masculinity is not dominance; it is reflecting divine virtues, kindness, fairness, trustworthiness, and unity.
- **Buddhism: The Bodhisattva ideal - compassion over aggression:** The Jataka Tales and Mahayana Sutras portray male bodhisattvas practicing compassion, restraint, and nonviolence. Prince Vessantara (Jatata) demonstrates generosity, empathy, and emotional openness. Spiritual maturity comes from overcoming harmful impulses (anger, ego, dominance) and developing *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (lovingkindness).¹⁷⁹
- **Christianity: Jesus as servant-leader – Mark 10:45 “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”**¹⁸⁰ Jesus models empathy, courage, justice, forgiveness, and deep emotional expression. Leadership comes through service, advocacy for the vulnerable, and nonviolent strength.

176 Zitkála-Šá. (1921/2003). *American Indian stories*. Hayworth Publishing House. <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/zitkala-sa/stories/stories.html>.

177 Warrior Women Project. (2018). *Warrior Women Project: History and Methodology with Dr. Elizabeth Castle*. [Speech]. <https://www.warriorwomenarchive.org/2025/06/05/warrior-women-project-history-and-methodology-with-dr-elizabeth-castle/>.

178 Bahá’u’lláh. (n.d.). *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/gleanings-writings-bahauallah/1#529444114>.

179 E. B. Cowell. (Ed.). (1895-1907). *The Jataka: Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births* (Vols. 1–6). Cambridge University Press. <https://www.discoveringbuddha.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CUP-Jataka-vol-1-Chalmers-Cowell-1895.pdf>.

180 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Mark 10:45). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

- **Hinduism: Rama and Krishna as dharmic exemplars** – Rama represents self-control, moral integrity, duty (dharma), and respect for relationships. Krishna encourages compassionate leadership, wise counsel, and emotional intimacy (e.g., friendship with Arjuna). Rooted in dharma, protection without hostility, spiritual wisdom, humility, and devotion (bhakti).¹⁸¹
- **Indigenous Spirituality: Warrior-protector as healer and community servant – The “warrior” is not an aggressor but a protector of the people, living by honor, generosity, and balance.**¹⁸² Courage is paired with humility, respect for women, and responsibility to the next seven generations.¹⁸³
- **Islam: The Prophet as the ideal of gentleness and justice – Qur’an 21:107: “The Prophet is a mercy to all worlds,”**¹⁸⁴ and Hadith: “The most perfect of believers are those best of character, and the best of you are those best to their families.”¹⁸⁵ The Prophet exemplifies kindness, fairness, emotional literacy, and shared domestic responsibility. Qur’anic masculinity centers on justice (adl), compassion (rahma), and trustworthiness (amana).
- **Judaism: Moses and the prophetic tradition: Numbers 12:3: Moses is called the “meekest (most humble) of all men,”**¹⁸⁶ and in Micah 6:8, he is told “Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God.”¹⁸⁷ Prophets use strength for moral courage, not domination. Emotional honesty (e.g. David’s psalms), gentleness, and responsibility for community are virtues of righteous men (tzaddikim).¹⁸⁸
- **Sikhism: Guru Gobind Singh and the Sant-Sipahi (saint soldier):** The Guru Granth Sahib teaches equality, courage, compassion, and service. “Bravery and humility adorn the one who serves the Divine.”¹⁸⁹ The “saint-soldier” is spiritually grounded, fearless in defending others, yet humble, gentle, and ethical. Masculinity is inseparable from seva (selfless service) and justice for the oppressed.¹⁹⁰

181 Vālmiki. (1996). *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki* (R. Goldman et al., Trans.). Princeton University Press. https://ia902902.us.archive.org/26/items/vr_001_bk/VR-001-BK.pdf.

282 G. Cajete. (2000). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Clear Light Publishers. <https://archive.org/details/nativesciencenat0001caje>.

183 T. King. (2020). *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. House of Anansi. https://www.academia.edu/73199632/The_Truth_About_Stories_A_Native_Narrative.

184 Ali, A.Y. (Trans.). (1989). *The Holy Qur’an: Text, translation and commentary*. Amana Corp. (Qur’an 21:107). <https://legacy.quran.com/33/35>.

185 Al-Tirmidhī. *Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Book of Righteousness, Hadith 1162*. <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:1162>.

186 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Number 12:3). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

187 Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (Micah 6:8). (1989). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>.

188 Plaut, W. G., & Stein, D. E. (2006). *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. URJ Press. <https://archive.org/details/torahmodern0000plau>.

189 Guru Granth Sahib. (Anglicized ed.). (2006). *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee*. <https://sgpc.net/sri-guru-granth-sahib/>.

190 Mandair, A.-P. S. (2013). *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Bloomsbury. <https://archive.org/details/sikhism-guide-for-the-perplexed>.

Recommendations

This compendium is designed as a practical tool for UN Member States, international organizations, the private sector, faith actors, and broader civil society advocates who are working to advance gender equality and human rights. Despite harmful interpretations used to undermine human rights, there are powerful faith-based actors advancing inclusive, justice-oriented approaches rooted in long-standing traditions of compassion and moral leadership of religious actors. Their work demonstrates that faith and interreligious dialogue can be essential drivers of transformation rather than a barrier. This compendium is meant to support and amplify these efforts, offering evidence and narratives that counter anti-rights messaging and strengthen the foundations for collective action.

Moving forward requires leaders and organizations to not only recognize these positive faith-engaged approaches but to actively use them. The compendium provides concrete examples, strategies, and entry points for collaboration that can reinforce ongoing initiatives and inspire new partnerships. It equips actors across local, national, regional, and international levels with resources to respond to current challenges, foster alignment across sectors, and build stronger movements for justice and equality. By engaging with the case studies, analysis, and recommendations included, stakeholders can leverage the compendium to deepen coordination, strengthen advocacy, and position inclusive faith-based perspectives as critical tools in advancing gender equality and human rights.



UN Members States

Encouraging Member States to:

- **Affirm** gender equality as a universal human right and a value shared across diverse faith traditions drawing on commitments in the Beijing Declaration, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ICPD Programme of Action and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- **Promote** positive faith narratives and sacred texts to support SDG 5 on gender equality and counter misinformation as well as regressive narratives and misuse of religions.
- **Strengthen** religious literacy through educational initiatives for the international development community, including trainings within UN system entities, foreign ministries, and international development agencies to enhance understanding and effective collaboration with religious actors.
- **Facilitate and fund** interfaith and cross-regional partnerships and initiatives that promote SDG 5 on gender equality.
- **Create and protect** enabling environments for faith-based and civil society actors by ensuring their meaningful participation in UN high-level forums and policy processes that are often limited to Member States, opening structured opportunities for consultation and safeguarding their access to these spaces.



A view of the General Assembly Hall during the Town Hall Meeting with the UN Secretary General and Civil Society on the occasion of CSW69 /Beijing+30. 2025. UN Photo/Evan Schneider.

International, Regional and Sub-Regional Intergovernmental Organizations

Inviting international, regional, and sub-regional intergovernmental organizations to:

- **Engage** faith-based actors and organizations as strategic allies and uplift their voices in advancing gender equality through institutionalizing inclusive consultation mechanisms during global policy processes.
- **Integrate** faith-informed gender equality strategies and approaches across programming, recognizing faith actors' influence on public discourse and rights-based outcomes.
- **Create spaces** for shared learning, dialogue, and theological reflection among religious actors across contexts to amplify rights-affirming narratives and promote religious literacy.
- **Align** intergovernmental declarations with multi-faith support for human rights through encouraging regional intergovernmental bodies to issue joint statements or frameworks affirming the compatibility of gender justice and faith values.
- **Allocate** funding and technical support across government and intergovernmental programming to strengthen faith-informed gender equality initiatives, including capacity-building, research, coalition-building, multi-level projects, and investing in partnerships that empower faith actors to advance human rights and counter regressive norms.



In alignment with the [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) Revitalization process, the Gender Working Group of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) and members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF-Religion) co-hosted a roundtable event on the margins of the 80th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) with UN Agencies, faith-based organizations, and civil society members. 2025.

Private Sector

Inviting the private sector to:

- **Align** corporate strategies, investments, and business practices with international commitments on gender equality, including the Beijing Declaration, CEDAW, the ICPD Programme of Action, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with particular attention to SDG 5.
- **Advance and amplify** positive faith-based narratives on gender equality through responsible corporate communications, partnerships, and influence, including the use of corporate platforms and convening power to counter misinformation and regressive narratives.
- **Engage** in partnerships with faith-based organizations, women-led initiatives, and civil society actors to advance gender equality across workplaces, supply chains, and communities, ensuring coherence with international human rights standards and corporate due diligence frameworks.
- **Strengthen** religious literacy and contextual understanding within corporate sustainability, social impact, and development initiatives to enable informed, respectful, and effective engagement with diverse faith communities.
- **Invest** financial resources, technical expertise, and innovation capacity in gender equality initiatives that engage faith actors constructively, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships that advance inclusive, rights-based outcomes and ensure long-term social and environmental sustainability.



Faith-Based Actors, Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Organizations

Inviting faith-based actors, religious leaders, and faith-based organizations to:

- **Affirm** that gender justice and women's rights align with sacred texts, moral teachings, and spiritual values.
- **Participate** in national and international forums to promote religious narratives supporting women's rights, bodily autonomy, and inclusion of all gender identities as expressions of divine justice and compassion, while providing theological responses and alternative interpretations that dismantle regressive rhetoric.
- **Create** inclusive spaces within faith institutions to facilitate open dialogue, reflection, and education on gender equality, ensuring that women, young women, and gender-diverse individuals can safely express their perspectives and contribute to faith-based decision-making.
- **Collaborate** across faith traditions and sectors to address the gender backlash with united messaging rooted in justice and peace, and joint initiatives such as submissions, side events and public statements.
- **Document** and share faith-based successes by collecting examples of effective gender-affirming programs, positive scriptural interpretations, and community initiatives, creating accessible resources to guide and inspire other faith actors globally.



MFAC CSW69 Reception. 2025.

Broader Civil Society

Inviting broader civil society organizations to:

- **Collaborate** with faith actors and organizations to counter gender backlash through coordinated, values-aligned messaging that reclaim moral and spiritual frameworks.
- **Support** the visibility and leadership of faith actors and encourage partnerships with religious leaders and communities to dismantle patriarchal norms collaboratively.
- **Facilitate** dialogue and create safe trust-building spaces between secular feminist groups and faith-based organizations to encourage mutual learning, strengthen relationships, and promote a more united movement for gender equality.
- **Integrate** faith-informed strategies into advocacy and programming to amplify positive gender equality messaging across diverse communities, including spaces where resistance is high. Draw on evidence-based examples of faith-based practices to ensure efforts are context-sensitive, credible, and effective in transforming harmful social norms.
- **Increase** understanding of religious literacy and community values to ensure that advocacy and programming are informed by the beliefs, practices, and social dynamics of diverse faith communities. This includes investing in training, research, and engagement that equip civil society actors with the knowledge to work respectfully and effectively with faith-based groups, and to design interventions that resonate with local values while advancing gender equality.



#Townhall CSW68. Photo: NGOCSW. <https://ngocsw.org/about-us/>.

Conclusion

This compendium was created to document positive faith-based responses and to strengthen the foundations for action that will transform generations. Across traditions, regions, and communities, the examples highlighted throughout these pages demonstrate that advancing SDG 5 on gender equality is both a moral imperative and a lived expression of faith for many around the world. By platforming these efforts together, the compendium provides a shared reference point for advocates, leaders, and institutions seeking to deepen their engagement with values-based approaches that uplift the rights and well-being of all people. It is intended as a guiding resource to support ongoing and future movement-building, offering practical entry points for those working to ensure these commitments translate into real change in their communities.

Reaffirming Unity in Diversity

The compendium illustrates a global movement rooted in diversity and united in purpose. Each faith tradition featured here advances valuable teachings, practices, and community-driven initiatives that promote gender equality and protect human rights. These efforts arise from different contexts and experiences, but they reinforce a common truth. No organization, community, or movement exists in isolation. The work undertaken across faiths forms an interconnected landscape of solidarity, countering attempts by anti-rights actors to sow division or undermine shared human values. By highlighting these diverse contributions side by side, the compendium demonstrates how distinctive voices can collectively strengthen the global pursuit of justice. It reaffirms that unity in diversity is not only possible but essential for advancing equality at scale.

The examples showcased reveal the remarkable consistency of values across traditions. Compassion, dignity, equality, and the protection of those most at risk emerge repeatedly as central teachings. This multi-faith alignment provides a powerful foundation for collaborative action. When these values are brought forward through inclusive interpretation, community leadership, and broad-based partnerships, they create pathways for real transformation. The compendium serves both as evidence of this shared moral framework and as encouragement to build stronger coalitions that reflect the diversity of the global community.

The Future of Faith-Based Advocacy

Looking forward, the compendium points to the significant potential for faith-based advocacy to shape more equitable and rights-affirming societies. The case examples throughout demonstrate that positive interpretations of sacred texts can have a strong impact. When paired with committed leadership and effective community engagement, these interpretations resonate across constituencies. FBOs, religious leaders, and community advocates play an indispensable role in shifting norms, strengthening solidarity, and expanding opportunities for women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Their influence is far-reaching, and their capacity to inspire action is considerable.

To secure meaningful progress in the coming years, it is essential for all actors committed to gender equality to mobilize with greater coordination and shared purpose. Experience shows that consistent messaging and strategic engagement can shape public discourse and influence policy. The global gender equality movement can benefit from rights-affirming narratives that are evidence-based, values-driven, and informed by the lived experiences of communities. Stronger collaboration among secular and faith-based actors, global institutions and local leaders, and grassroots networks and formal mechanisms of governance will be indispensable. The compendium offers a foundation for that collaboration by bringing forward practical guidance, theological resources, and community-driven models to advance inclusive advocacy in every context.

Religious and non-religious actors can draw from these examples to expand partnerships, deepen intersectional strategies, and create cohesive campaigns that uplift gender equality as both a universal right and a shared moral commitment. The future of faith-based advocacy depends on the continued willingness of diverse actors to stand together with clarity and conviction, guided by evidence, shared values, and the communal need to counter harmful narratives with messages of equality and justice.



Looking Forward to a More Inclusive Future

Join the Call **#SidebySide4Equality**
#Faith4GenderJustice



Together, we can build a united future where every voice is heard, every faith respected, and every person valued. Let us walk in the footsteps of prophets, sages, and ancestors who stood for justice.

Let faith inspire inclusion, our voices to speak for dignity and our actions to drive stronger transformation together.



Be Part of this Journey

Connect with us to collaborate,
share ideas, or take action together.
Contact us at un.mfac@gmail.com.

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