

# *Coalition for the “Initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace”*

Second Meeting of the Coalition  
Holy Cross Retreat Centre  
Melbourne, 1-3 December 2009

## *Review of experiences of partnership between FBOs and UN and/or government agencies around UN goals*

Progress Report

by

Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, Executive Secretary

### A. BACKGROUND

The need of a “review and assessment” of the experiences of cooperation between faith-based and value-based organizations on one side and UN agencies and/or national governments on the other side, which are related to pertinent UN goals considered in the proposal for a UN Decade, was clearly identified already at Maryknoll. The SC in its first meeting (7-8 May, NY) approved this activity and requested the Executive Secretary to coordinate its implementation. It was decided that preliminary findings will be presented in Melbourne both at the Coalition Meeting and at the Symposium organized by the Coalition in the framework of the Parliament of World’s Religions.

### B. OBJECTIVES

This review and assessment has three main short-term objectives:

1. Producing inputs (“successful stories of partnership”) for ADVOCACY activities with the Member States. (Showing that the DECADE is action oriented; that we are not inventing the wheel; that FBOs can be useful partners).
2. Producing inputs for starting the process of preparing a “PLAN OF ACTION for the DECADE”, or a set of plans of action in a decentralized approach to implementation. Assessing the experience of cooperation with the UN already accumulated by the member organizations of the Coalition seems to be the easier way for finding good examples of the kind of projects and programs which could be the muscles and bones of the DECADE Plan of Action.
3. BUILDING PARTNERSHIP WITH KEY UN AGENCIES: The UN agencies are called to play a central role in the DECADE. Working together for preparing elements/inputs for a Plan of Action (or a set of action plans) seems to be a suitable strategy for engaging the UN agencies in the DECADE initiative. Formal

relationships can only be established when the Decade has been proclaimed by the UNGA.

## C. THE TEAM

The original idea was to work with “human resources” offered by member organizations either as part-time seconded staff or volunteers associated to those organizations. A request with this purpose was included in my first collective message to the Coalition about the review and assessment on 26 May 2009. Nobody replied on this matter.

In July I sent a message through the local Association of UN Retirees living in Santiago, asking for volunteers to participate in an “Executive Secretariat” of the Coalition and the Decade Initiative. The response was encouraging. A team of 5 volunteers is now cooperating with the Executive Secretary, which includes a press officer, a translator, a bi-lingual secretary and two senior social scientists, all of them fluent in English, with long professional experience and proved commitment to the DECADE initiative. This team has taken the main responsibility in the collection and processing of information.

It is in the budget an item for hiring a social scientist which has not been used yet because lack of need and lack of funds.

## D. METHODOLOGY

### 1. **Sources of information**

This review is based on information collected from three main sources:

- a. Member organizations of the Coalition (there are now more than 60, and some of them are “umbrellas” with large number of member organizations associated to them).
- b. Pertinent UN agencies which have experience of cooperation with faith/value-based communities and organizations.
- c. Internet

### 2. **Main expected products**

We would like to have three main outcomes from this exercise:

- a. Some mapping of experiences of cooperation, allowing us to identify the kind of organizations involved, the fields of activity, the pursued objectives, the resources mobilized, the scale of operation and, if possible, information on their social impacts.
- b. A collection of “successful stories” as examples.
- c. A list of the organizations involved from the three sides and their contact information. Actually, if the proposed DECADE is proclaimed by the GA, as we hope, they are expected to be the main actors for developing a Plan of Action (or a set of plans of action focusing in different domains, if we have, as expected, a decentralized approach to implementation).

### 3. **The tools**

The first step for preparing the tools was conducting a case study of a partnership experience in Chile, implying the cooperation of the Chilean government, UNHCR and the Catholic Church in the humanitarian resettlement of a group of Palestinian refugees. “Culture Matters”, the report on the UNFPA experience of partnership with FBOs was also an important source of inspiration. On these bases:

- a. A questionnaire was prepared, aimed at collecting information on the variables already mentioned under “mapping” in the previous section. It is easy to fill and can be sent back to us automatically.
- b. A model or example for reporting on “successful stories” of partnership, in a narrative style.

#### D. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

In the past, particularly during the last four months, the following activities have been carried out, with the following results:

##### 1. **Contacting UN agencies and programmes**

###### a. Previous contacts

- Early contacts with some agencies were taken for the launching of the Decade Initiative at Bossey, in January 2008. Representatives from DESA, UNDP, UNHCR, OHCHR and ILO participated in that tripartite Consultation. WHO was expected to attend, but its representative didn't appear in the meeting. UNESCO was represented with an observer. Azza Karam, from UNFPA, couldn't attend due to health reasons.
- DESA, ILO, UNESCO and UNFPA participated at the constituting meeting of the Coalition in Maryknoll, March 2009, reporting on their cooperation with FBOs, although they were officially “observers” only.
- A third collective contact took place two days later at DESA premises in NY, with the participation of representatives from UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP and the DESA's Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, which coordinates activities in the interreligious, intercultural and intercivilizational fields at the UN Secretariat.
- During the first formal meeting of the Steering Committee (NY, 7-8 May 2009) we had separate conversations with UNESCO, the Secretariat of the Alliance of Civilizations, the UN Millennium Campaign and again with DESA,
- The review and assessment of partnership experiences around UN goals was a subject addressed during the last three contacts mentioned above.

###### b. Recent contacts made by the Executive Secretary as part of the REVIEW process

- Previous to the second meeting of the SC (NY, 20-21 August), I had quite productive meetings with Daanish Masood at the AoC, Stephanie Dunstan at UNDP, and Stephen Hanmer (UNICEF) and Azza Karam (UNFPA) at the latter's office. During that last meeting Azza sent a message to Sally Smith (UNAIDS) introducing me.
- During the last three months I have sent letters requesting the cooperation of several agencies in this REVIEW, followed in some cases by telephone conversations. In those letters I explained the objectives and methodology of the REVIEW, as well as the survey being done to the Coalition member organizations (see below), asking our contacts in the UN agencies for their advice and cooperation in the process of collecting useful information on their own experiences of partnership with FBOs.
- The responses from the UN Agencies to our requests for cooperation in the process of collecting useful information have been in general –but not always- positive and constructive.

###### c. Where the agencies stand and how they have reacted to our request

- **UNFPA** (Azza Karam, Senior Technical Advisor on Culture, NY) has been very cooperative. They have done already a very complete “review and assessment” of their rich and long-lasting experience of partnership with FBOs, which is presented in the

UNFPA report labelled “Culture Matters”. UNFPA has been playing a leading role within the UN in this field.

- **UNICEF** (Stephen Hanmer, Manager Civil Society Partnerships NY) has been also very cooperative. Its structure is highly decentralized, with large autonomy of the national offices, which makes difficult to collect at the central level information on specific projects. Nevertheless, UNICEF is conducting a “mapping” of its experiences of partnership with FBOs which should have been ready by November 2009 to be presented at the Parliament of World’s Religions.
- **UNAIDS** (Sally Smith, Partnerships Adviser Geneva) has been also very cooperative. They have prepared a “UNAIDS-FBOs Partnership Strategic Framework”.
- **ILO** (Father Pierre Martinot-Lagarde, Special Advisor for Socio-religious Affairs, Geneva) didn’t answer my letter and expressed by telephone that they have reported already to DESA what ILO is doing in this field. **WHO** (Dr. Alex Ross, Director Partnerships and UN Reform, Geneva) didn’t answer my letter. I will have to follow up by telephone.
- **UNHCR** (Bernard Doyle, Head Inter-Agency Unit, Geneva) replied saying that they don’t have information on projects dealing with the kind of partnership we are reviewing, but keep the door open for further collaboration. Actually, we have found some good examples of tripartite partnership dealing with refugees and involving UNHCR; consequently, the problems seems to be more lack of information at central level and low interest on this particular kind of cooperation with the civil society rather than lack of field projects involving FBOs.
- **FAO** (Marcela Villarreal, Director Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division, Rome). High interest expressed by telephone. Written reply will come soon. She has forward our request to different sections within her division which may have activities to report.
- **UNESCO** (Rochelle Roca-Hachem, UNESCO Office, NY) She has been very cooperative. In a telephone conversation she said that UNESCO has conducted activities, such as seminars and workshop, focused mainly on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, but without direct involvement in field projects.
- Further contacts have to be taken with other agencies which have experience of cooperation with FBOs, such as UNDP, the World Bank, OHCHR, Habitat, UNEP and UNIFEM.

## 2. **Contacting Coalition member organizations**

- a. After announcing in my collective message of 19 May to the Coalition that the REVIEW of partnership experiences was to start soon, I sent on 26 May –as already mentioned-- another collective message in which the objectives of the review were presented and we requested to report on this kind of partnership experiences. The first harvest was rather poor, since only two organizations reported on their partnership experiences and other two asked to be sent the questionnaire for reporting.
- b. As soon as the questionnaire and the model of report on a “successful story” were ready, I sent during the last days of September personalized messages to 37 contact persons of Coalition member organizations, attaching the questionnaire and the model of report on successful stories and requesting them to consider three ways of reporting on this type of activities:
  - By filling the attached questionnaire and sending it back to us.

- If they have an outstanding experience to report, they may want to write a brief successful story (maximum 400 words), as in the model of report.
- Giving us addresses in Internet where we can find reports already made on experiences of this kind of partnership and/or the contact information (name, e-mail, telephone number) of key people who could report on this kind of activities.

We also asked the Coalition member organizations, in case that they know of sister organizations which have partnership experiences of this kind, to share with them our letter and the questionnaire, asking them to cooperate with this review.

- c. **The feedback** has been rich in substance but rather poor in number of responses:
- At least one umbrella organization – the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN)- sent our request and questionnaire to all its member organizations.
  - Only seven filled out questionnaires have been received until today (18 Nov 2009). I want to express our gratitude to the senders by listing their names: Won Buddhism International (2), The Scout World Movement (3), The Temple of Understanding (1) and Surrey Neighbouring Faiths Program (SNFP) from Canada, which we assume is associated to NAIN. Our thanks also to IARF and the Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA), from Israel, which reported experiences of partnership in response to our first request. In summary, only one fifth of the contacted organizations have responded UNTIL NOW.

### 3. **Exploring Internet**

The first links explored were suggested by some UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNAIDS). Four members of the Executive Secretariat have been searching for pertinent partnership experiences and some of them have been presented in a special section of our website labelled “**Successful Stories of Partnership towards UN goals**” and classified in the following categories related to the UN goals referred to in the DECADE proposal:

- Combat Hiv / Aids
- Decent Work and Child Labor
- Environmental Sustainability
- Fighting Poverty and Hunger
- Gender Equality
- Human Rights
- Promoting a Culture of Peace
- Universal Education and Maternal & Child Health

Internet and the “Culture Matters” from UNFPA has been until now the richest sources of information, uncovering an amazingly large and diverse range of partnership experiences, as discussed in the following section of this report.

#### D. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

We are still far away from reaching the critical mass of information needed for fully achieving our objectives. Nevertheless, we have already something to offer as useful inputs for pushing forward the DECADE initiative:

- We have now more information and a better understanding of the relations between the UN and the “civil society” over time, with special reference to the so called FBOs.
- We have a still short but illustrative set of “successful stories” which can be used for advocacy purposes with the member states and for start thinking in terms of possible structuring and content of a Plan of Action.
- We are starting to build a solid ground for developing some kinds of partnership with the key UN agencies in this field. In this regard, we should take into consideration that the larger would be the collection of experiences of cooperation around UN goals reported by the Coalition members and systematized in this REVIEW, the higher would be our legitimacy to deal with the UN agencies and the UN member states as potential partners.

## 1. **The United Nations and the Civil Society**

Although the preamble of the UN Charter begins with the famous “WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS...”, in practical terms the UN has been basically and inter-governmental organization. Nevertheless, during mainly the last four decades we have seen the now called “civil society” gaining social importance within the national states and at the global level, while conquering spaces and gaining legitimacy within the UN system. Some significant issues of this process are:

- a. There have been a growing number of NGOs looking for and obtaining a “consultative status” by the DPI and the ECOSOC. Rev. Levi Bautista can tell us more about this process.
- b. Advocacy has been since the beginning one of their main functions. They have play many times some kind of “prophetic” role by denouncing abuses and bad practices and promoting resolutions in several value-charged fields, such as Human Rights, environment, social development, gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights and peace related matters.
- c. The global UN conferences and summits known by the name of the cities where they were held, such as:
  - the Earth Summit -Rio de Janeiro 1992, on environment and sustainable development, which gathered 108 chiefs of state and 2,400 NGOs;
  - The Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, 1994;
  - The Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, in 1995,
 have contributed to empower the civil society organizations within the UN system.
- d. Partners: More recently, particularly after the adoption of the MDGs by the Millennium Summit, the civil society organizations (CSOs) are seen more and more as useful and sometime necessary partners for development.
- e. Partnering towards UN goals does not imply necessarily the active involvement of UN agencies. In many cases we find cooperation between CSOs and national government agencies, as well as CSOs and development agencies of foreign developed countries. We have found also global CSOs and CSOs of developed countries cooperation with CSOs of developing countries. There are many different arrangements as far as the kind and the number of partners are concerned.

## 2. The UN agencies and the Faith-based Organizations - FBOs

This is being the focus of our REVIEW.

### a. What does FBO means?

UNFPA<sup>1</sup> has defined FBOs as “*religious or faith-based groups or congregations, and officially registered non-governmental or governmental institutions that have a religious character or mandate*”, differentiating the following categories:

- ***Faith-based and/or faith-inspired development organizations***, (e.g., *Islamic Relief, Christian Aid, Catholic Relief Services, and their national, regional, and international chapters*);
- ***Interfaith- or multi-faith-based organizations***: *Organizations that come together for a common cause guided by common values derived from different religious traditions, and provide services that are beyond the scope of a single congregation;*
- ***Local congregations***: *People who worship together and reach out socially (e.g., organizing food pantries, clothing donations, in-home visits and assistance to the elderly);*
- ***Ministries of religious affairs*** (particularly, but not only, in countries where non-governmental organizations may, for whatever reason, find it difficult to register or function).

**FBO** is an in-construction-operational concept, which may be defined in different ways by different actors. This should not be a source of concern or debate for us.

### b. Why some UN agencies look for and appreciate partnering with FBOs?

According to UNFPA’s assessment in “Culture Matters”, these are the main reasons:

“*The basic assumptions underlying the engagement between UNFPA and FBOs are that:*

- *Cultures are the context in which all development work takes place and where all international human rights agreements are implemented*
- *Faith as part of culture is an important determinant of value systems, at both the individual and community levels*
- *Cultures are dynamic, interactive and evolving*
- *FBOs, religious leaders and religious institutions, as the gatekeepers and interpreters of religious text and thus impacting culture, are important partners in the process of development, particularly when it comes to influencing behaviour, attitudes and perceptions*
- *FBOs and religious groups have enormous outreach, both actual and potential. They manage the oldest, most far-reaching and diverse array of social service delivery mechanisms”<sup>2</sup>*

This REVIEW has showed some additional reasons, which are:

---

<sup>1</sup> UNFPA, “Culture Matters”, page 16.

<sup>2</sup> According to the WHO report “Appreciating Assets: Mapping, Understanding, Translating and Engaging Religious Health Assets in Zambia and Lesotho”, between 30% and 70% of the health infrastructure in Africa is currently owned by FBOs, but often there is yet limited cooperation between these organizations and main stream public health services.

- Some FBOs are powerful fund-raisers and important sources of financial resources for FBOs and CBOs in developing countries.
- In some cases FBOs seems to be more reliable than local government agencies and NGOs for administering funds provided by or channelled through the UN agencies.
- FBOs and related religious leaders may be a source of resistance and even political opposition to the social changes required for achieving some UN goals. This has happened in fields such as universal education, religious freedom, gender equity and sexual and reproductive rights. Partnering may reduce resistances or even transform opponents in allies through dialogue and development of consensual approaches to action.

It is worth noting that UNFPA –and likely also the other UN agencies- looks at the world of FBOs from a basically “secular perspective”. They have a pragmatic interest in partnering FBOs.

c. A relationship which is being institutionalized

Within the UN environment, it seems that FBOs are transiting from being “one more” in the diverse population of NGOs to becoming a distinct category which deserves special attention and treatment. This process seems to be more advanced in some agencies (UNFPA, UNAIDS, the World Bank) than in others (UNDP, UNHCR).

(i) UNFPA is quite advanced in this respect.

- UNFPA claims partnerships with over 400 different faith-based organizations in more than 100 countries.
- During 2007 and 2008 it held regional consultations in Africa, Asia & the Pacific, the Arab region and Latin America & the Caribbean “*bringing together its partner FBOs to share best practices and lessons learned. Each of these Fora was an opportunity to convene a critical mass of FBOs that support the agenda of the ICPD and MDGs, and thereby to form regional interfaith networks*”.<sup>3</sup>
- The next step was the launching of the “*Global Interfaith Network on Population and Development*” during a two-day Global Forum of Faith-based Organizations, convened by UNFPA in Istanbul on October 2008.

(ii) UNAIDS has also a long experience of partnership with FBOs, characterized by a decentralized participatory approach.<sup>4</sup>

- UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, brings together, in the global response to AIDS, the efforts and resources of 10 UN system organizations: ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, WFP, WHO and the World Bank.
- Its main FBO partners are: Religions and Peace (WCRP), the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, the Tearfund, Caritas Internationalis, World Vision, Positive Muslims, Islamic Relief, the Buddhist Sangha Metta Project, the Art of Living Foundation, the Interconfessional Committee on HIV/AIDS in the Russian Federation and the CHAHAMA Network (Muslim and Christian

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem

<sup>4</sup> The following information on UNAIDS is based on the final draft of “*UNAIDS-FBOs Partnership Strategic Framework*”



Religious Leaders in Response to HIV in the Arab Region). The potential impact of all these groups is large, for example Caritas Internationalis alone works with 163 national member organizations in more than 200 countries and territories.

- In June 2001, at the UN Special Assembly on HIV/AIDS, an statement labeled “Increased partnership between faith-based organizations, governments and inter-governmental organisations” by faith-based organizations facilitated by the WCC says: “*We are asking UNAIDS and other UN organizations to consider:*
  - ◆ *Involving FBOs in the planning, implementation and monitoring of HIV/AIDS programmes at local, national and international levels.*
  - ◆ *Calling on religious leaders wherever possible to make use of their moral and spiritual influence in all communities to decrease the vulnerability of people for responding to HIV/AIDS and to contribute to the highest level of care and support that is attainable.[...]*
  - ◆ *The FBOs represented at this Special General Assembly on HIV/AIDS realize that we cannot claim to speak for all world religions and religious organizations. But we wish to express our sincere commitment to continuing to work within our own communities for the dignity and rights of People Living with HIV/AIDS, for an attitude of care and solidarity that rejects all forms of stigma and discrimination, for an open atmosphere of dialogue in which the sensitive root causes of HIV/AIDS can be addressed and for a strong advocacy to mobilize all the necessary resources for an effective global response to the pandemic.”*
  - ◆ It is in this spirit that UNAIDS and FBOs have been cooperating and have produced the “2007–2011 Strategic Framework for UNAIDS Support to Countries’ Efforts to Move towards Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support”, and are now updating those guidelines in a comprehensive document labeled “Partnership with Faith-based Organizations UNAIDS Strategic Framework”
  - ◆ It is worth noting that this central organization offers ideas and approaches, but specific partnerships and action programs are defined at national levels.

(iii) The WORLD BANK has been associated with religious leaders and organization for several years. It has at present a small unit -- Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics (DDVE)-- whose purpose is to contribute to analytical work, capacity development and dialogue on issues related to values and ethics. DDVE, founded in 2000, is working with FBOs for reducing poverty in developing countries. Action oriented research is being carried out in various fields such as: protecting vulnerable groups, improving access of the poor to health and education services, and better using the resources generated by migrants in benefit of their families in their countries of origin.

(iv) UNICEF: FBOs play an important role as Partners in UNICEF’s work with children across the globe. Religious communities working with UNICEF go from those of the Buddhist and Islamic faith to several denominations within

the Christian faith whose tenets of religion include an interest in the health and well-being of people, and particularly of children.

UNICEF and religious groups act as advocates in a variety of programs, among them:

- + educational projects for out-of-school and abused children,
- + advocacy and education for HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention,
- + combating sexual commercial exploitation of children and child labour,
- + best possible health care for children,
- + promotion and defense of children's rights, and
- + integration of child rights promotion and child protection into social action programs led by churches and religious groups.

(v) Institutionalizing the intra-UN coordination about partnering with FBOs:

- + In July 2008 UNFPA organized an "Interagency Consultation on Engagement with FBO, which was replicated in July 2009.
- + An informal interagency committee or working group integrated by the responsible or focal point in the relationship of the agencies with FBOs has been operating.
- + I understand that in the last interagency consultation on this matter UNFPA proposed to formalize the interagency coordinating committee, but it was agreed to keep it as an informal mechanism.
- + This group will present its activities and views at the Parliament of World's Religions in a workshop on "Engaging Faith-Based Organizations for the MDGs: The UN Experience", which will be held on Saturday 5 December. The workshop is organized by Azza Karam (UNFPA) and will count with the participation of other five UN agencies.

### **3. Some examples of partnership of FBOs with UN and/or government projects and programs toward pertinent UN goals.**

It is worth noting that the FBOs are carrying out all over the world an amazingly large amount of regular activities, programs and projects which contribute to the achievement of UN goals in fields such as health, education, poverty reduction, promotion of human rights, etc. In this REVIEW we are not looking at this wide range of activities, but only to those which imply some form of cooperation with UN agencies and/or government agencies in a condition of partners.

I will present here below only some examples of partnership which show the extremely large variety of fields and kinds of arrangements being found in this REVIEW, based on a still very limited set of reports.

We in the Secretariat have been calling "successful stories" the cases of partnership that we have found, although we must confess that we don't know in most cases how successful they have been. Most of them are presented in the DECADE website ([www.faithdecadeforpeace.net](http://www.faithdecadeforpeace.net)), where you can see them in the section "Successful stories...", as mentioned already in section 3. of this report. Here below are some examples:

- a. Making education accessible to the poor in Latin America: the Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics (DDVE) unit of the World Bank is working with “Fe y Alegria” (Faith and Joy) movement, a Jesuit-inspired network of primary and secondary schools, vocational education, distance learning, and adult education programs in 17 countries in the region. Fe y Alegria schools enroll some 1.5 million students, and represent a far-reaching instance of Public-Private Partnerships in education in Latin America (enrolling for example 6% of primary students in Bolivia, one of the poorest countries of the region).
- b. Preventive health for the poor children in Africa: The United Nations Nothing But Nets campaign was created to distribute millions of long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets to children in Africa as a form of preventing malaria. Among the partners and supporters of this project are the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Union for Reform Judaism and the United Methodist Church.
- c. Fighting HIV/AIDS in Thailand and neighbouring countries: In partnership with UNAIDS and within the framework of Buddha’s teachings and ethics, the Sangha Metta Project covers an important education activity which consists of (a) teaching Buddhist monks, nuns and novices about HIV/AIDS, equipping them with modern participatory social management skills and tools to take part in HIV/AIDS prevention and care at the community level, and (b) educating youth groups and raising their awareness on HIV/AIDS and narcotic. Because the project gives monks a way to become actively involved in their communities, it is spreading into other regions of Thailand (besides Chiang Mai) as well as neighboring countries such as Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Southern China.
- d. Educating on Human Rights and religious freedom in Asia: The Human Rights Education project, initiated in 2002, has as main goal to create, in selected communities, understanding of freedom of religion and belief as a basic human right guaranteed in the National Constitution, the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights (UDHR) and the Declaration of the Elimination of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief (DEIDRB). It is implemented by the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in partnership with the People’s Decade for Human Rights Education (PDHRE), and the financial support of the Governments of The Netherlands and Japan. This project has been implemented in India, Bangladesh, and The Philippines.
- e. Protecting the civil rights of the children in Latin America: UNICEF and The Latin American Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church (CELAM) have carried out jointly programs directed at protecting the social rights of children and adolescents and their families in L.A. and the Caribbean for over 20 years. An example is the project in Dominican Republic supporting the campaign “*For the Right to a Name and Nationality*” which resulted in thousands of children registered by the Office of Civil Registration.
- f. Helping displaced people in Pakistan: People displaced by the upsurge in fighting in Pakistan’s Swat Valley and Lower Dir and Buner districts have found shelter with host families and communal buildings such as schools in the North West Frontier Province. Since the number of displaced continues to rise, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Office is seeking to ease the congestion by expanding camps. In addition, it is exploring the possibility of providing shelter kits for the displaced people

living in rural areas. The project is a joint effort between UNHCR, UN Habitat, World Vision, Norwegian Refugees Council, Catholic Relief Services and Relief International.

- g. Empowering rural women for fighting poverty in Sudan: The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), under the Sudan Work Plan 2009 (Humanitarian/Early Recovery Component) has initiated the project “*Support Livelihoods and Food Security Initiatives for Women*”. The objective of this project is to promote simple and appropriate agricultural technologies among women groups, to strengthen women’s livelihoods through capacity building on entrepreneurial skills and to facilitate the availability of market information and access to credit facilities. Five hundred women will benefit from this project in Southern Sudan that will end on December 2009. The implementing partners are Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UNIFEM, CBOs, FBOs, NGOs, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO), the State Ministry of Agriculture (SMoA) and the Ministries of Social Development.<sup>5</sup>
- h. Addressing gender-based violence and HIV in Africa: Religions for Peace and Futures Group International designed and implemented the project “The Role of Religious Communities in addressing gender-based violence and HIV”, sponsored by US AID. This project was planned considering that religious leaders are often key catalysts for positive social change. The project has three components: regional training, national action plans and regional leadership forum. Training workshops were carried out in Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The regional training in Kenya was funded by UNIFEM.<sup>6</sup>
- i. Protecting the living planet: Faith leaders from around the world representing nine of the world's major faiths met at Windsor, United Kingdom, from 2 to 4 November 2009, at an event hosted by Prince Philip and attended by the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon to discuss and announce their long term initiatives to Protect the Living Planet. Main partners in promoting this initiative are the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and UNDP.
- j. Muslim seven year action plan on climate change: On 5-7 July 2009 Muslim leaders, scholars, civil society members and government ministries from Islamic civil society have agreed in Istanbul to spend the next seven years planning serious commitments to protecting the natural environment, and combating climate change. The plan was drawn by Earth Mates Dialogue and is part of United Nations (UN)/Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) Seven Year Plan Initiative. It includes, among others: developing the major Muslim cities as green city models for other Islamic urban areas; developing an Islamic label for environmentally friendly goods and services and creating a best practice environmental guide for Islamic businesses.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Source: [http://ocha.unog.ch/CAPprojectsPDF/Reports/projectsheets/CAPProjectSheet\\_832\\_22922\\_2009113.pdf](http://ocha.unog.ch/CAPprojectsPDF/Reports/projectsheets/CAPProjectSheet_832_22922_2009113.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Source: [http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com/Publications/Documents/867\\_1\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Religious\\_Communities\\_in\\_Addressing\\_GBV\\_and\\_HIV\\_FINAL\\_acc.pdf](http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com/Publications/Documents/867_1_The_Role_of_Religious_Communities_in_Addressing_GBV_and_HIV_FINAL_acc.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=334>

#### 4. Lessons learned from the UN partners

In our still incipient review of the experiences of partnership involving UN agencies and FBOs we have found statements about “lessons learned” made by the two most committed agencies in this field: UNFPA and UNAIDS.

a. Some of the lessons learned by UNFPA in its collaboration with FBOs are that:

- Communities can be encouraged to incorporate universally recognized rights into their own realities through an exploration of how human rights and gender issues contribute to the well-being of men, women, young people and families.
- Promoting behaviour change often begins by identifying religious leaders who have the capacity and legitimacy to motivate and mobilize communities. Moreover, partnering with local religious leaders or agents of change has repeatedly become an invaluable strategy in gaining wider acceptance and ownership of programmes.
- Carefully developed advocacy campaigns, closely tailored to the religious and cultural contexts in which they are launched, make it easier to deal with sensitive subjects.
- Effective negotiation requires an understanding of the interests of diverse stakeholders—from political leaders to FBOs, cultural leaders and the private sector. Instances of successful partnership demonstrate that the interests of these stakeholders can be just as critical as political and economic concerns, and once these are clearly understood, the necessary common ground is established, with a clear respect for each other’s particular space.
- Incorporating language that appreciates the nuances of religion and religious sensitivities is sometimes critical to the creation of spaces in which there is understanding and support for programme objectives, with a solid understanding of each other’s constraints.

b. Some of the lessons which appear in the UNAIDS-FBOs “Partnering Strategic Framework” are:

- The cooperation of FBOs is indispensable for achieving the UN goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Actually, they have been main actors in the global response to IDS over the last 25 years, gaining experience and legitimacy.
- FBOs can fulfil tasks which public services and other social actors are not well equipped to play, such as:
  - + HIV prevention education in schools, hospitals, clinics, temples, mosques and churches.
  - + HIV prevention among key populations at higher risk of HIV infection
  - + establishing networks of religious leaders affected by HIV, which have mobilized church leaders to respond to AIDS.
  - + Home-based care for HIV-positive people, even in remote rural areas.
  - + Care and support for orphans, often in their own homes and communities
  - + Hospital and clinical care,
  - + pastoral and spiritual care to people living with HIV and their loved ones.

- + Advocacy to influence political decision-making processes, resource allocation and public policies.
- NEVERTHELESS, many FBOs remain on the margins of national AIDS responses for a number of reasons:
  - + Staff of national AIDS programmes often can have misperceptions and prejudices, such as: ignorance of their work and its impact; reluctance to engage with faith-based communities; the perceived complexity of working with FBOs;
  - + lack of capacity among some faith communities to engage effectively with HIV-related issues;
  - + a lack of capacity among some secular partners to engage effectively with FBOs.
- The FBOs need of partnership with governments and an agencies for achieving their own goals: while the evidence shows that FBOs are capable of providing a wide range of HIV-related services, they are unlikely to reach their full potential in supporting countries to achieve their universal access targets without increased support from governments and development agencies.
- Prejudice (which some times may be based on bad experiences) is common among FBOs and between FBOs, governments, international organizations and secular AIDS actors:
  - + some decision-makers may fear that FBOs may use HIV work as an opportunity to promote their own faith or will be judgemental;
  - + others worry that FBOs may lack the capacity or skill to run high-quality programmes. However, the evidence shows that many FBOs run high-quality HIV programmes.
- c. We have found, not in written statements but in conversations with some of our counterparts in UN agencies and programmes, that some governments seems to be concern about the risk of –directly or indirectly-- strengthening terrorist groups when some FBOs are given key roles in development projects. On the other side, it seems to be among FBOs a wide spread fear of being used for political purposes if they cooperate as partners in government sponsored development programmes.

## 5. Our own lessons and work-lines for the future

- a. The first lesson is that the ongoing REVIEW of partnership experiences is of great importance for the implementation of the proposed DECADE and should be continued with renovated energy.
- b. The active involvement of the Coalition member organizations is essential for succeeding; consequently, an important task to be accomplished during its Melbourne meeting is agreeing on the right mechanisms for collecting the information, together with activating the commitment of supporting this initiative made at joining the Coalition.
- c. We will have to cultivate our still incipient working relationship with the pertinent UN agencies around this REVIEW. Having a rich set of information on the partnership experiences of the Coalition members and their sister or associates

organizations would be our main capital for legitimating our partnership and links of cooperation with the UN agencies.

- d. Together with continuing our current search for experiences of cooperation between FBOs and UN and/or government agencies, it would be useful to identify those projects or activities carried out by NGOs without participation of UN or governments, but which offer room for that kind of partnership in the future.
- e. In many cases several agencies are participating in the same programme or project, developing synergies. Nevertheless, the diversity of UN goals; the variety of mandates and competences of both UN agencies and FBOs; as well as the multiplicity of cultural settings and political contexts in the frame of which the identified projects are being implemented ask for a highly decentralized approach when a “plan of action” for the DECADE would have to be prepared.