

Summary outline for a possible “UN multi-faith global partnership”

(Second draft, for internal discussion in the Working Group 27 March 2012)

A. Background

A wide coalition of faith-based and value-based organizations was constituted in 2009 for supporting and promoting the proposed “UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace”.¹ Two consultations to the member states were conducted by DESA on behalf of the UN Secretary-General in 2009 and 2011 about the convenience of proclaiming a decade with that name. Although the idea found support from many countries, the European Union as a block opposed, arguing that the UN could play a facilitating role in the field of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, but should not lead such a dialogue. So, at present, that vehicle is not politically viable within the General Assembly.

Additionally, the Philippines didn’t include any mention to such a decade in the text of the 2011 resolution on a “culture of peace”. So, the idea of a UN decade is not any longer in the agenda of the GA.

In this context the Coalition, led by its Steering Committee, while keeping its long-term objectives which focus on partnering with the UN towards shared goals, has been looking for an alternative global vehicle for pursuing them and considering changing its name to **“Multi-faith coalition for partnering with the UN”**.

B. Summary of the tentative proposal for a new vehicle instead of a “UN Decade”

The proposal² outlines a possible “*UN multi-faith global partnership for development and peace*”, inspired in the Global Compact as organizational model, but involving faith-inspired and value-based organizations instead of business entities as partners.

The suggested “global partnership” would be an alternative vehicle to a “UN decade” --which at present is not politically viable-- for strengthening and widening cooperation between the UN and the faith-inspired sector of the civil society around common values and towards shared goals, with special reference to the MDGs.

The idea of using the UN Global Compact as organizational model for an alternative vehicle was initially suggested by Robert Orr, Director of the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, some time on 2009. It is that approach which we are exploring.

Now the idea is forgetting about any decade and working around a “global partnership”, which would be an incremental open-ended “initiative”, directly sponsored by the UN Secretary General, building on already existing experiences of partnership and cooperation involving FBOs.

¹ See more information on the “UN Decade Initiative” and the Coalition supporting it in www.faitthdecadeforpeace.net

² See “Looking for a new vehicle for the ‘UN Decade Initiative’”, internal working document prepared by Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, Executive Secretary, Steering Committee, *Coalition for the “Initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace”*, on December 2011.

Some of the key elements in the organizational model of the UN Global Compact which could be replicated with faith-based and value-based partners are:

- Being a UN Secretary-General Initiative, which make possible to be connected with the whole UN system, while being based on the UN Office for Partnerships within the SG Executive Office.
- Being an INITIATIVE –not a program or project or office—which means a flexible arrangement which flows, adapting itself to obstacles and opportunities.
- Being based on a strong MORAL COMMITMENT and engagement around shared **values** which lead in practical terms to **cooperation towards shared goals**.
 - That is the reason for having a **set of principles (or commitments)** making explicit those shared values and goals for both the UN and the faith-inspired partners.
 - Those principles or commitments could be structured under the three core fields of “**Human Rights**”, “**Development**” and “**Peace**”.
 - Those “**commitments**” should refer to specific areas where the faith-inspired partners have relative advantages and resources to contribute. (Some examples of commitments are given in Annex 1)
- Allowing the participation of diverse kinds of partners from the Civil Society, with the faith-inspired social actors as the main category, but including also other pertinent value-based organizations as well as academic institutions.
- Allowing the pragmatic articulation of all the partners, including the UN agencies involved, which count already with the Interagency Task Force on Engaging FBOs for the MDGs (IATF-FBO) as coordinating mechanism in this field,
- Combining a UN component –a central office and an interagency team--, with a very flexible NETWORK OF NETWORKS of the Civil Society partners, which allow some degree of global coordination together with large autonomy and creativity at local level or within thematic fields. It would include:
 - a Core Network, integrated by faith-inspired social actors, which operate at global and/or international scale and are accredited by the UN. (Most of the current Coalition members are likely to be eligible for joining the Core Network, but also many others)
 - Local networks with large degree of autonomy, constituted at national, sub-regional or regional levels by faith inspired communities and organizations, academic institutions and other pertinent value-based organizations of the civil society, which would not have as necessary condition to be accredited by the UN with consultative status.
- Combining financial resources provided by member states through a Trust Fund, with a foundation able to raise funds from other sources (A multi-faith club of donors is suggested) and with resources coming from UN agencies for specific projects and activities.
- Although financial resources will be needed, **the most important resources** that the faith-inspired partners would be expected to mobilize are of moral and organizational character, including their influence on public opinion, local leaders and governments; their outreach capacity and their infrastructure in fields such as education, health, and mass media; their human resources, etc.
- As far as **activities** are concerned, the suggested “UN multi-faith global partnership” would be expected to be implemented mainly through “multi-faith specific partnerships” which would be built on, or associated to UN consolidated ongoing programs, projects or campaigns aimed at achieving the MDGs and other goals pursued by the MFGP. An incremental approach would be followed, starting with a pilot phase, in order to test the design before expanding it at a larger scale. In this framework, the consolidation of local networks would lead to the emergence of a large variety of specific activities suitable to the local needs, while taking advantage of the local resources mobilized by the partners.

C. Why a “UN multi-faith global partnership” now?

We see four main reasons for thinking that the outlined “UN multi-faith global partnership” could be a suitable and timely “win-win” undertaking for both the UN and an important sector of the civil society.

1. There is a new sense of urgency in the world *of our shared responsibility* for a more just, peaceful and sustainable future. In the face of escalating violence, financial turmoil, and unprecedented climate change, the global community increasingly recognizes that we must address these challenges together. No one sector of society or single institution can do it alone. We must find collaborative ways to uphold human rights, to promote the honor, dignity and self-determination of communities and peoples, to seek equitable distribution of goods and services, and to care for the earth.
2. This imperative of working together animates “*The Secretary General’s Five-Year Action Agenda*” presented by Mr. Ban Ki-moon on January 25, 2012, where he includes among the “enablers” “*harnessing the full power of partnership across the range of UN activities*”. With this aim, the Secretary General announces that he will “*scale up UN capacity to engage in transformative multi-stakeholder partnerships with the private sector, civil society, philanthropists and academia...*”. This is certainly a positive signal for a Coalition focusing on action-oriented partnership with the UN.
3. The already long-lasting participation of religiously inspired social actors as partners in UN campaigns, programs and projects is quite important, diverse and growing, being increasingly appreciated within the UN system. They are operating in a large variety of fields related to MDGs and other UN goals such as, protecting refugees, combating HIV/AIDS pandemic, fighting poverty and hunger, educating on Human Rights, eliminating the worst forms of child labour, protecting nature and preventing global warming.³ While some UN agencies explicitly recognize FBOs as partners and have institutionalized their relationship with them (UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF and the World Bank are good examples), others do not distinguish FBOs from the bulk of NGOs working with them as implementers. While a large and rich experience has been already accumulated, there are still unnumbered needs and opportunities for deepening and widening this kind of partnerships.
4. The organizational model of the UN Global Compact that inspires this proposal has been tested for longer than ten years, showing to be effective for promoting global partnerships able also to reach the grass-root level. (See more in www.unglobalcompact.org)

ANNEX 1

Examples for a Set of Commitments:

- *In the field of **Human Rights**:*
 - *Commitment to fully respect Human Rights in all the fields of activity of their institutions and to use their moral authority to promote their observance and condemn their violation;*
 - *Commitment to educate their constituencies on “Human Rights” and to advocate for their respect at all levels;*

³ Examples can be seen in the section “Successful Stories of Partnership towards UN Goals” of the Coalition’s website: www.faihtdecadeforpeace.net

- *Commitment to promote and defend the “right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”, as stated in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴*
- *Commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to individuals and communities victims of violation of their human rights, such as refugees, slavery, worst forms of child labor, human trafficking, forced migrants.*
- *In the field of **Development**: General commitment to contribute whenever is possible to implement the MDGs and to coordinate with the pertinent UN bodies, with special reference to:*
 - *Elimination of extreme poverty and hunger*
 - *Achieve universal primary education*
 - *Promote gender equality*
 - *Ensure environmental sustainability*
- *In the field of **Peace**: Commitment to*
 - *promote dialogue and cooperation between people and communities of diverse religions and cultures, and by seeking commonalities and respecting differences, increase mutual understanding and trust;*
 - *Identify the root causes of violence in multireligious and multicultural societies, in order to promote non-violent conflict resolution, justice, tolerance, gender equality and elimination of all forms of religiously and ideologically related injustice, violence and discrimination, leading towards harmonious coexistence between people and communities of diverse religions and cultures;*
 - *Educating their constituencies in a culture of peace and non-violence*
 - *Commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to individuals and communities victims of war and other forms of social violence, such as displaced people.*
 - *Issues related to “security” may fit also under “peace”.*

⁴ “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”