



Partnership Note

ON FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES AND FAITH LEADERS



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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The daughter (5 years old) of a woman living with HIV. Her mother says she also likes to stay at the monastery because she can speak freely with other people living with HIV.

© UNAIDS/Kyaw Kyaw Winn



1. Background

- 1.1 UNHCR recently embarked on a ‘journey of mutual discovery’ with faith-based organizations by exploring the role of faith in humanitarian responses. In December 2012, the fifth High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges was held on the theme of *Faith and Protection*. The Dialogue assembled over 400 representatives of faith-based organizations, faith leaders and other partners for a two-day discussion in Geneva on partnership with faith-based actors.
- 1.2 This was the first formal multi-faith dialogue UNHCR ever engaged in and explored the common values underpinning the notion of refugee protection in all of the world’s major religions. It also fostered deeper appreciation for and understanding of the role religion and spirituality plays in the lives of those UNHCR serves.
- 1.3 Participants in the Dialogue on *Faith and Protection* further recognized the importance of UNHCR’s existing and potential partnerships with faith-based organizations, especially to improve the protection of person of concern to the organization (e.g. refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons and the internally displaced). Participants strongly reaffirmed the key principles underpinning humanitarian work¹ (i.e. impartiality, non-discrimination, respect for the beliefs of others, diversity, empowerment, equality, humanity, and protection against any form of conditionality), and acknowledged the need to respond to humanitarian situations according to these principles.
- 1.4 At the close of the event, the High Commissioner underscored “the valuable contributions that faith organizations and communities make to the protection of refugees and the displaced.” He highlighted a number of concrete suggestions for follow-up, which included a call to develop guidance on ‘faith literacy’ for UNHCR staff. The present Partnership Note has been prepared pursuant to this request.

¹ For a full description of the principles, see ICRC, “Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief”, 1995. <http://goo.gl/ApRSlr> The Code of Conduct has been subscribed by over 520 organizations.



▲ Burkina Faso / Goudoubo / Malian refugees get ready to break the fast in Goudoubo refugee camp. The camp hosts some 10,000 refugees who fled a violent conflict that erupted in northern Mali in early 2012. Respecting the traditions at Ramadan time is important for the refugees, who hope to celebrate Ramadan back home next year. © UNHCR / H. Caux

2. Purpose

2.1 This Partnership Note sets out broad guidance for UNHCR staff about engaging with, reaching out to and partnering with faith-based organizations, local faith communities and faith leaders. Given the diversity of contexts in which UNHCR operates, this guidance should be adapted to local circumstances and realities and can be a source of inspiration for the work of the UN, other international organisations, non-governmental and community-based organizations and many others.

2.2 The Note:

- describes UNHCR's understanding of the range of faith actors and the role they play in humanitarian responses;
- flags challenges of partnership and red lines;
- identifies examples of good practice and lessons learned from existing partnerships in the field;
- highlights principles that are a point of departure for dialogue and cooperation with faith actors and communities;
- sets out actions and activities to put these principles into practice.

WHO ARE FAITH ACTORS?

Faith-based organizations, local faith communities and faith leaders vary in size from a group composed of a few believers to global religions and broad inter-faith networks. They encompass a range of faith identities and motivations, with diverse degrees of knowledge of, willingness and capacity to observe humanitarian principles.

Faith-based organizations is a term used here to describe a broad range of organizations influenced by faith. They include religious and religion-based organizations/groups/networks; communities belonging to a place of religious worship; specialized religious institutions and religious social service agencies; and registered or unregistered non-profit institutions that have a religious character or mission.² Faith-based organizations have consistently been among UNHCR's top ten implementing partners. In 2013, the Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide were amongst UNHCR's top ten international implementing partners, whereas Caritas was amongst the top ten of UNHCR's national faith-based organization partners.

Local faith communities consist of people who share common religious beliefs and values, and draw upon these to carry out activities in their respective communities. They are often providers of first resort in humanitarian emergencies, mobilizing and providing support through their membership and faith networks. Their members are often unpaid volunteers who act because their faith calls upon them to do so. They may or may not be aware of basic humanitarian principles.

Faith leaders are believers who play influential roles within their faith communities and the broader local community. They benefit from trust and exercise moral authority over members of their local faith community, and shape public opinion in the broader community and even at the national or international level. Recent examples include the impassioned defence of migrants and refugees and their right to life by Pope Francis in 2013, the mediation role played by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in early 2014 in the capital, Kiev, and calls for peace by Christian and Muslim leaders in 2014 in the Central African Republic.

² See UNDP, "Guidelines on engaging with faith-based organizations", forthcoming.

3. Faith and humanitarian responses

- 3.1 The United Nations is a secular organization. Since its creation in 1950, UNHCR has nevertheless engaged with faith-based organizations, faith communities and faith leaders in carrying out its work. This partnership has proven its value over the years and yielded substantial protection and other benefits for persons of concern to the Office. Concrete examples are provided throughout this text.
- 3.2 UNHCR is committed to adopting a coherent approach to partnership in this area. These partnerships are especially relevant in cases where faith actors play an important role at local level and are actively engaged in meeting the needs of forcibly displaced populations. As active members of civil society, faith actors and their organizations can leverage significant social, physical and spiritual assets for the benefit of those UNHCR serves. Strengthening partnerships is further a goal of the wider humanitarian reform process that aims to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response. Finally, faith actors are widely present in all parts of a given country due to their vast networks. Their presence does not necessarily depend upon external or international funding. They often remain long after international attention has faded, and funding has declined.

4. The challenges of partnership

- 4.1 Partnership is not a unilateral undertaking and must be viewed from the perspective of both UNHCR and faith actors. UNHCR, like the broader humanitarian community, is committed to upholding humanitarian principles and ensuring that protection underpins all activities. In partnership with faith actors, therefore, UNHCR must be clear that it will not engage in partnerships that are contrary to these principles. In particular, UNHCR support cannot be used for proselytising or imposing conditions on delivering aid that are contrary to humanitarian principles. On the other hand, it must be recognized that faith actors are occasionally confronted with humanitarian actors who appear to have a bias against them. The challenges of partnership need to be viewed from both perspectives if they are to be overcome, particularly through the positive changes in attitudes and approaches that this Note espouses.³
- 4.2 From our perspective, the most difficult challenges are presented when faith actors promote:
- Antagonism towards or exclusion of members of other faith backgrounds;
 - Hate speech or incitement to violence directed against individuals or communities of another faith;
 - Proselytization and pressure to convert as a pre-condition for continued support;
 - Early marriage or other harmful traditional practices;
 - Gender stereotypes and disregard for the specific rights of women, boys and girls and vulnerabilities in contexts where sexual and gender-based violence and negative coping mechanisms are widespread;
 - Stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV/AIDS;
 - Stigma and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals and networks.
- 4.3 UNHCR staff reported that partnering with local faith communities can become a source of frustration and misunderstanding when the latter lack familiarity with the Office's processes and procedures, including its strategic priorities and notions of risk and vulnerability, or when they may simply not have the desire to serve as 'implementing partners'. Other documented challenges and concerns about partnering with faith actors, especially local faith communities and faith leaders, include power inequalities that appear to be inherent in the models of interaction between faith-based service-providers and persons in need of protection. Charity-based approaches can neglect rights-based approaches to humanitarian assistance. In complex emergency situations, UNHCR staff also recorded that coordination posed the greatest challenge to partnering with local faith communities, their networks and community-based organizations.
- 4.4 But partnership with UNHCR poses specific challenges for faith-based organizations as well, beyond the issue of staff attitudes described earlier. One factor is the inherent inequality of power between a large international organization and a small local institution. Another is UNHCR's procedures and requirements, which faith-based organizations may be unable or unwilling to satisfy. Another important challenge for them is the fact that staff rotation may affect UNHCR's institutional memory and presence in the deep field, with the risk of calling into question long-standing positive cooperation.

³ The principles of partnership established by the Global Humanitarian Platform provide five helpful principles which also need to be applied to faith actors specifically: equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. See Global Humanitarian Platform, "Principles of Partnership", July 2007. <http://goo.gl/76Fu8m>



▲ Democratic Republic of the Congo / 2013 Nansen Award winner / Sister Angélique Namaika instructs a literacy class near the town of Dungu, Orientale Province, Democratic Republic of Congo on 1 August, 2013. Literacy in Lingala language is one of several skills that Sister Angélique teaches local people – many of whom are IDPs (Internally Displaced People) who have been resettled following attacks by armed groups. © UNHCR/B. Sokol

5. Good practice examples

5.1 Notwithstanding the challenges for both sides described above, faith-based organizations, local faith communities and faith leaders contribute to saving lives, defending rights and giving spiritual sustenance, including by:

- providing physical protection and facilitating humanitarian access;
- deterring violence through presence and accompaniment;
- mediating tensions between refugees/internally displaced persons and host communities in conflict or post-conflict situations;
- engaging in reconciliation and peace-building activities;
- combating xenophobia and discrimination;
- preventing and responding to SGBV or forced recruitment;
- improving reception conditions and accompanying the detained;
- providing legal counselling and asylum case-management;
- advocating for legislative changes benefitting persons of concern;
- supporting refugee resettlement and/or local integration.



PHYSICAL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

UNHCR Abidjan

“In the aftermath of the presidential elections in 2011 in Côte d’Ivoire, UNHCR and its humanitarian partners faced an emergency situation marked by massive population displacement [...]. It is believed that over 500,000 people became internally displaced persons (IDPs) and more than 200,000 Ivoirians sought asylum in neighbouring countries.”

“The ensuing conflict also adversely affected over 20,000 refugees who had been living in the country for decades. [...] Faith-based groups throughout the country came to the immediate rescue by providing emergency shelter in 35 sites. [...] UNHCR as the UN Protection lead agency relied on traditional humanitarian organizations and, more importantly, on local faith communities, including several parishes of the Roman Catholic Church, Caritas, Muslim mosques and Muslim communities, Charismatic movements, other religious groups and religious leaders, to provide humanitarian assistance [...] for over one year.”

In Côte d’Ivoire, there were examples of local faith communities acting as first responders in a sudden-onset emergency. Local faith communities hosted IDPs, refugees and returnees in and around the premises of their places of worship. They provided immediate protection in the form of physical space before IDP sites were established by UNHCR’s formal implementing partner.

UNHCR Myanmar

“Faith-based organizations have been active throughout all phases of the conflict. They demonstrated their legitimacy in the eyes of both administrations (i.e. government and the Kachin Independence Organization). In practice, they can cross check-points, negotiate with soldiers, border guards and camp managers, and implement activities where no other agency is able to go. They support shelter construction, non-food item distribution, and assistance to individual cases through the Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVI) project, as well as support to camp management.

5.2 This section provides examples of instances where cooperation between UNHCR and faith-based actors has yielded ‘protection dividends’ for forcibly displaced persons. The nature of this cooperation can vary depending upon whether faith actors are UNHCR ‘implementing partners’, ‘operational partners’ or ‘informal partners’ in protection networks or for the purposes of advocacy. The examples are drawn from a survey conducted by UNHCR and a coalition of faith-based organizations. The Survey identified examples of good practices and shed light on the breadth of existing –and potential –partnerships between faith-based organizations and UNHCR at all stages of the refugee and forced displacement cycle. A number are summarized here, by way of example.

5.3 A total of 23 examples were submitted by UNHCR staff, and 32 examples by faith-based organizations and local faith communities.⁴ (See **Annex A** for the complete list of contributors to the Survey on good practice examples.) The following section gives examples drawn from UNHCR responses.⁵

⁴ A preliminary overview of these examples, including from faith-based organizations, is contained in two publications entitled “Overview of the Survey on Good Practices Examples” (<http://goo.gl/nLdEeN>) and “Analysis of the Survey on Good Practices Examples” (<http://goo.gl/YsFnFM>).

⁵ *Ibid.*

6. Principles to guide UNHCR's partnerships with faith actors

- 6.1 From February through April 2013, a coalition of leading faith-based organizations and UNHCR developed guidance for faith leaders which aims to promote tolerance and respect for the human dignity and human rights of asylum-seekers and refugees, migrants, internally displaced and stateless persons.
- 6.2 The text consists of 16 affirmations written in the first person that draw upon principles and values shared by the world's major religions. The document provides faith leaders with an opportunity to affirm the role faith communities play to “welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other [...] to challenge intolerance [...] and respect the right of the stranger to practice his or her own faith freely.”
- 6.3 The call to ‘welcome the stranger’ is a statement of belief flowing from principles of hospitality, respect and equality, as these are values that are deeply rooted in all major faiths. (See **Annex B** for the complete declaration founded on the three following principles.)

Hospitality: Although actors such as local faith communities may carry out humanitarian assistance activities as an adjunct to their faith-related work, they are often the first to respond to individuals, families, and communities in the initial stages of a humanitarian crisis. They respond by virtue of their presence, local knowledge, networks and assets in some of the most isolated and remote areas. Recognition of this fact has sparked off renewed interest in engaging with these communities to improve outreach to the most vulnerable.

Respect: Respect for the diversity of identities, values and traditions is pivotal to enhance the protection and resilience of forcibly displaced individuals and communities. Local faith communities are uniquely aware of the fact that, in many countries and communities around the world, faith is a ‘basic need’ and provides spiritual sustenance for persons of concern to UNHCR. Local faith leaders and faith communities are uniquely positioned for this.

Equality: Cooperation should be based on a shared set of objectives, and be premised on mutual respect and partnership. Equality should also translate into equal treatment and the right to equal protection according to humanitarian standards.

- 6.4 These three principles serve as a normative backdrop to the minimum standards that follow. They are a point of departure for conversations on many issues between UNHCR and faith actors aimed at working together who wish to work together in mutually beneficial ways to serve persons of concern to UNHCR. They can also help guide partners that may wish to establish dialogue across faiths and with humanitarian actors.

“In other instances, faith-based organizations have acted as buffers between warring parties and were hence able to operate in both areas, even at the peak of the conflict. Due to the trust they benefitted from, they were good advocates for protection. They lobbied the government to take full responsibility for the education and health services of IDPs in Kachin State. They also managed to have IDPs released from detention as they were able to vouch for detainees. No other international organization or local non-governmental organization has such a wide margin of manoeuvre to respond to the humanitarian situation.”

In Myanmar, UNHCR recognized the vibrant role the local churches have been playing in civil society. It partnered with local faith communities such as Caritas and the Kachin Baptist Church to obtain humanitarian access to IDPs. These communities became first responders and eventually turned into camp managers, administrators and benefactors for over 100 IDP camps. UNHCR brought its funding, technical expertise and trouble-shooting skills to the work of partners relatively inexperienced in the humanitarian field but whose presence and outreach facilitated unhindered humanitarian access.

DETERRENCE OF VIOLENCE THROUGH PRESENCE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

UNHCR Bangui

“This report is on how the leaders of the Muslim community mobilized some 5 km away from the refugee camp on the road to Tirungulu to stop [non-State armed actors] from advancing. This group literally sat on the dirt road to prevent them from moving. They pleaded and invoked the Holy Qur’an, reminding the non-State armed actors of their duties as fellow Muslims.”

In the Central African Republic, a local Muslim community foiled an attack planned by rebels in 2009 on a Darfurian refugee camp. They did so by physically obstructing the passage of the rebel group on the road leading to the refugee camp.

Muslim faith leaders leveraged their local knowledge of social and political networks to negotiate a peaceful outcome. UNHCR partnered with leaders of the local Muslim community to support the conflict resolution process. To stop the cycle of violence, the local faith community did not assign guilt for the crimes committed by either party but supported claims for restitution instead.

RECEPTION OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE DETAINED

UNHCR Central America

“In 2011, the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua, UNHCR’s implementing partner, started an informal collaboration with the mosque in Managua, the country’s capital. At the Council’s request, the mosque provides interpreters as well as food, clothes, hygiene kits and spiritual support for Muslim asylum-seekers.”

In Nicaragua, UNHCR partners with the Council of Protestant Churches and other organizations, such as Caritas Nicaragua and the Managua mosque, to improve reception conditions and accompany detained asylum-seekers and migrants.

The Council of Protestant Churches has direct access to the detention centre and, with the help of the Managua-based mosque, visits and provides psychosocial counseling and spiritual support to those in detention.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY BENEFITTING REFUGEE POPULATIONS

UNHCR Lebanon

“Dar el Fatwa was established in 1955 by virtue of a presidential decree which conferred upon the organization the capacity in Lebanon to issue religious guidance in areas related to Sunni religious affairs and in the management of its affiliated charity institutions. It is led by the Grand Mufti, and its large network of community-based organizations has been assisting with the provision and distribution of food, non-food items, health services, cash grants, shelter and psycho-social support to Syrian refugees in Lebanon since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011. This support extended to areas with high numbers of refugees where UNHCR has not yet established a presence.”

In Lebanon, UNHCR established a new partnership at the outset of the Syrian refugee crisis to ensure that refugees receive assistance in the initial stages of displacement. The organizations helped UNHCR to build trust with refugees, local communities and authorities, as well as to reach thousands by mobilizing the local faith communities’ large network of volunteers and outreach workers.

The local faith communities and their organizations played a major part in negotiating access for refugees to services both at the local village/municipal level and the central level. It also played a mediation role between host and refugee communities. UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the organization in 2012, which includes exchange of information and distribution of assistance through its channels.

7. Putting partnership principles into practice

7.1 The following are suggested actions to put the principles of hospitality, respect and equality into practice.

Map out potential partners in local faith communities

- What are the predominant faith traditions in your country/operation?
- What are their basic organizations, structures and systems?
- Who are the trusted community-based counterparts?
- What are the national faith-based organizations that can act as liaisons with faith leaders?

Identify supportive religious leaders in the local area. Invest time in getting to know the leaders as a means to increase trust and lay the ground for potential collaboration. Undertaking joint protection initiatives, such as awareness-raising on protection challenges and sensitizing communities to protection issues, can be a powerful way to increase protection space.

Become familiar with the activities undertaken by faith actors

- What kind of relationship exists between faith communities in the same country/region?
- What, if any, are the interfaith organizations?
- What are the existing services provided by faith actors, including in partnership with UNHCR?

Understand the activities and map the existing work of faith and/or interfaith groups and their relevance to the protection of persons of concern. The spiritual sustenance provided by faith actors to persons of concern is often a neglected indicator of wellbeing but is a critical factor in promoting resilience. These indicators should be borne in mind in evaluating the potential impact of partnering with local faith communities, their organizations and faith leaders.

Use the Affirmation of Welcome as an entry point for dialogue. (See **Annex B**.)

Establish a relationship of mutual understanding and trust to ensure that humanitarian principles are respected

- Is aid delivered without imposing conditions?
- Are persons of concern willing or reticent to be aided by organizations of the same or different faith?
- Are there other specialized groups that can deliver aid when conditions become unacceptable?
- What role do other members of the local faith communities, such as women, boys and girls, play in developing shared objectives and in undertaking activities?

Mobilize local faith communities and faith leaders for the prevention of and response to protection threats. In scenarios where States are unable or unwilling to protect their own citizens as well as the refugee communities they host, the moral authority of religious leaders is an important means to access communities and convey key messages:

- What are the advocacy activities that faith actors are undertaking in relation to or in collaboration with persons of concern to UNHCR?
- What are the areas of commonality or convergence with UNHCR's strategic priorities?
- What are the key advocacy messages that faith actors can help convey in partnership with UNHCR (e.g. on attitudes towards asylum-seekers and migrants, to prevent and defuse strife, to prevent, map and resolve statelessness, protection at sea, finding alternatives to simply detaining asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless people and migrants, etc.).

PREVENTION OF AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

UNHCR Tehran

“Recognizing the importance of collaboration with religious leaders to prevent and reduce SGBV in an Afghan refugee community, the refugee focal points and community facilitators held initial sessions with religious leaders. All four leaders were given the training materials in advance, and devoted part of their sermons to validate and promote best practices to prevent and reduce SGBV in refugee communities.”

In Iran, there were examples where Muslim communities and their faith leaders partnered with UNHCR to endorse materials developed by UNHCR and to advocate for the dissemination of information on prevention of SGBV.

Faith leaders helped protect women by speaking to issues of SGBV in a 5-day religious gathering in which 3,000 Afghan refugees participated, raising awareness of and reducing social stigma associated with this form of physical and psychological harm amongst men and women equally.

In this instance, the local Muslim faith community provided UNHCR with an important means to connect with the refugees by exercising their moral authority and common religious beliefs and values to reinforce and amplify key messages.

PREVENTION OF AND RESPONSE TO HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

UNHCR Jijiga Sub-Office, Ethiopia

“The capacity, knowledge and skills of the faith-based organizations and the community religious leaders prompted the office to work closely with them, given their potential to address the protection needs of the refugee community. [...] There was a call for the support of religious leaders from the women’s Anti-FGM group in camps, since the community was challenging them on religious grounds during awareness-raising efforts.”

In Ethiopia, the Jijiga Sub-Office made a drive to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) together with an implementing partner, a government counterpart, host and refugee communities, as well as refugee faith leaders, to de-link FGM, which is a harmful traditional practice, from the holy precepts of Islam.

LEGAL COUNSELLING, ASYLUM CASE-MANAGEMENT AND MEMBERSHIP IN ‘PROTECTION NETWORKS’

UNHCR Brasilia

“In addition to their crucial role in the field, faith-based organizations are active members of the public body responsible for dealing with asylum-seekers and refugees in Brazil. The National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) is comprised of a representative from civil society with the right to vote in the committee’s meetings. Caritas of the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro is the civil society representative, whereas Caritas of the Archdiocese of Sao Paulo is the deputy representative. [...]

“Were it not for their inputs in this process – with UNHCR’s technical advice and support – the recognition rate in Brazil would have been only 16% in 2012. However, civil society’s findings were able to reverse some of CONARE’s decisions towards a positive outcome for 67 cases, raising the recognition rate to 24%.”

In Brazil, UNHCR supported the establishment of a Protection Network which consists of 50 operational partners linked to the Catholic Church and 6 UNHCR implementing partners, 5 of which are faith-based organizations.

The Protection Network operates throughout the country, including in border and remote areas where the State and UNHCR have limited presence. It is responsible for reception arrangements, emergency assistance, and referrals of asylum claimants. Faith-based Network members also played a crucial role in sensitizing authorities and service-providers to the protection needs of asylum-seekers and resettled refugees.



Build the capacity of local faith communities, their organizations and faith leaders to become more effective partners. Staff are encouraged to associate faith actors in training and capacity-building initiatives in order to deepen their understanding of UNHCR's strategic protection priorities in a given setting, and identify potential areas for joint action or advocacy.

- What relevant technical experience and skills do faith actors have?
- What financial resources and resources in kind do organizational structures have for carrying out their activities?
- What is the breadth and depth of the support base of faith actors?
- How can these resources and assets be leveraged when partnering with faith actors?

Better coordinate with faith actors to facilitate their participation in the established humanitarian framework. Especially in emergencies, information-sharing is critical for closer strategic cooperation. Faith leaders or local faith community representatives can become increasingly integrated into the established humanitarian framework by being invited to regular coordination meetings. This further helps to bridge the gap between humanitarian partners. Issues to explore here are:

- How does the religious community define leadership?
- Who is responsible for decision-making in the local faith communities as well as the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects?
- What are the methods faith actors use to share information?
- Who can represent local faith communities at coordination meetings?



Umm spends much of her time during Ramadan in her caravan working her fingers through her string of prayer beads. One of her greatest regrets is that in her temporary home in Za'atari refugee camp she has no Qur'an. "The Qur'an and the prayer beads are the most important things during Ramadan" she tells me. Umm says that Ramadan without the Qur'an doesn't feel like Ramadan.

© UNHCR / J. Kohler

Annex A – Contributors to the Survey on Good Practice Examples

The following UNHCR offices submitted examples of partnership:

- UNHCR Tehran, Iran
- UNHCR Bangui, Central African Republic
- UNHCR Malaysia
- UNHCR Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
- UNHCR Austria
- UNHCR Sub-Office Jijiga, Ethiopia
- UNHCR Mexico
- UNHCR Central America and Cuba
- UNHCR Brasilia, Brazil
- UNHCR Washington D.C., United States of America
- UNHCR Myanmar
- UNHCR Lebanon

The following non-governmental organizations and religious communities submitted examples of good practice:

- Act for Peace, Australia
- Armenian Caritas, Armenia
- CAFOD
- Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, Chile
- Caritas Internationalis
- Caritas Nairobi, Kenya
- *Casa del Migrate Scalabrini*, Mexico
- Catholic Relief Services
- Church World Service
- Christian Aid, Dominican Republic
- Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel, Occupied Palestinian Territories
- Edmund Rice International
- Franciscan Family, Chad
- Franciscans International
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, United States
- Integration and Support Unit/ Mount Zion, United Kingdom
- Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
- *Kerk in Actie*, The Netherlands
- Lutheran Children and Family Service of Eastern Pennsylvania, United States
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, United States
- Lutheran Services Georgia, United States
- Lutheran World Federation
- Lutheran World Service, Lutheran World Federation, Kenya
- National Christian Council of Sri Lanka and Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka
- Nepal Country Office, Lutheran World Federation
- OFADEC, Senegal
- Revive/Holy Ghost Fathers and Christian Brothers, United Kingdom
- Sanctuary Movement/German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, Germany
- South African Jewish Board of Deputies, South Africa
- The Refuge Pnan, South Korea
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services
- World Outreach Initiatives, Burundi
- Zimbabwe Council of Churches



Annex B – Affirmation of Welcome

From December 2012 through to December 2013, the document, *Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders* (<http://www.unhcr.org/51b6de419.html>) was signed and endorsed by over 1,700 religious leaders, members of faith communities and faith-based organizations worldwide, and formally launched at a signing ceremony before an assembly of 600 faith leaders at the *Religions for Peace 9th World Assembly* on 21 November 2013 in Vienna.

Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders

A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same.

Together with faith leaders, faith-based organizations and communities of conscience around the world, I affirm:

“I will welcome the stranger.

My faith teaches that compassion, mercy, love and hospitality are for everyone: the native born and the foreign born, the member of my community and the newcomer.

I will remember and remind members of my community that we are all considered “strangers” somewhere, that we should treat the stranger to our community as we would like to be treated, and challenge intolerance.

I will remember and remind others in my community that no one leaves his or her homeland without a reason: some flee because of persecution, violence or exploitation; others due to natural disaster; yet others out of love to provide better lives for their families.

I recognize that all persons are entitled to dignity and respect as human beings. All those in my country, including the stranger, are subject to its laws, and none should be subject to hostility or discrimination.

I acknowledge that welcoming the stranger sometimes takes courage, but the joys and the hopes of doing so outweigh the risks and the challenges. I will support others who exercise courage in welcoming the stranger.

I will offer the stranger hospitality, for this brings blessings upon the community, upon my family, upon the stranger and upon me.

I will respect and honor the reality that the stranger may be of a different faith or hold beliefs different from mine or other members of my community.

I will respect the right of the stranger to practice his or her own faith freely. I will seek to create space where he or she can freely worship.

I will speak of my own faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faith of others.

I will build bridges between the stranger and myself. Through my example, I will encourage others to do the same.

I will make an effort not only to welcome the stranger, but also to listen to him or her deeply, and to promote understanding and welcome in my community.

I will speak out for social justice for the stranger, just as I do for other members of my community.

Where I see hostility towards the stranger in my community, whether through words or deeds, I will not ignore it, but will instead endeavor to establish a dialogue and facilitate peace.

I will not keep silent when I see others, even leaders in my faith community, speaking ill of strangers, judging them without coming to know them, or when I see them being excluded, wronged or oppressed.

I will encourage my faith community to work with other faith communities and faith-based organizations to find better ways to assist the stranger.

I will welcome the stranger.”

Founding Principles

The call to “welcome the stranger,” through protection and hospitality, and to honor the stranger or those of other faiths with respect and equality, is deeply rooted in all major religions.

In the *Upanishads*, the mantra *atithi devo bhava* or “the guest is as God” expresses the fundamental importance of hospitality in Hindu culture. Central to the Hindu *Dharma*, or Law, are the values of *karuṇā* or compassion, *ahimsā* or non-violence towards all, and *seva* or the willingness to serve the stranger and the unknown guest. Providing food and shelter to a needy stranger was a traditional duty of the householder and is practiced by many still. More broadly, the concept of *Dharma* embodies the task to do one’s duty, including an obligation to the community, which should be carried out respecting values such as non-violence and selfless service for the greater good.

The *Tripitaka* highlights the importance of cultivating four states of mind: *mettā* (loving kindness), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), *upekkhā* (equanimity), and *karuṇā* (compassion). There are many different traditions of Buddhism, but the concept of *karuṇā* is a fundamental tenet in all of them. It embodies the qualities of tolerance, non-discrimination, inclusion and empathy for the suffering of others, mirroring the central role which compassion plays in other religions.

The Torah makes thirty-six references to honoring the “stranger.” The book of Leviticus contains one of the most prominent tenets of the Jewish faith: “The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:33-34). Further, the Torah provides that “You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:1)

In Matthew’s Gospel (25:35) we hear the call: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” And in the Letter to the Hebrews (13:1-3) we read, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

When the Prophet Muhammad fled persecution in Mecca, he sought refuge in Medina, where he was hospitably welcomed. The Prophet’s *hijrah*, or migration, symbolizes the movement from lands of oppression, and his hospitable treatment embodies the Islamic model of refugee protection. The Holy Qur’an calls for the protection of the asylum seeker, or *al-mustamin*, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, whose safety is irrevocably guaranteed under the institution of *Aman* (the provision of security and protection). As noted in the Surat Al-Anfal: “Those who give asylum and aid are in very truth the believers: for them is the forgiveness of sins and a provision most generous.” (8:43)

There are tens of millions of refugees and internally displaced people in the world. Our faiths demand that we remember we are all migrants on this earth, journeying together in hope.



▲ Thailand / Refugees from Myanmar at Nu Po Refugee Camp. © UNHCR / R. Arnold

Background

In December 2012, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres organized a Dialogue with faith leaders, faith-based humanitarian organizations, academics and government representatives from countries around the world on the theme of “Faith and Protection.” As the High Commissioner noted in his opening remarks, “...all major religious value systems embrace humanity, caring and respect, and the tradition of granting protection to those in danger. The principles of modern refugee law have their oldest roots in these ancient texts and traditions.” At the conclusion of this landmark event, the High Commissioner embraced a recommendation for the development of a Code of Conduct for faith leaders to welcome migrants, refugees and other forcibly displaced people, and stand together against xenophobia.

In response to this call, from February through April 2013, a coalition of leading faith-based humanitarian organizations and academic institutions (including HIAS, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Jesuit Refugee Service, Lutheran World Federation, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Religions for Peace, University of Vienna Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance and World Vision International) drafted “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders.” The Affirmations, which have been translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, Hebrew, Russian and Spanish, inspire leaders of all faiths to “welcome the stranger” with dignity, respect and loving support. Faith groups around the world can use the Affirmations and supporting resources as practical tools to foster support for migrants, refugees, the displaced, the stateless and other marginalized members of their communities.

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