

7th Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs

26 January 2021

2021: A Defining Year for Accelerating Gender Equality, Equity and Justice.

The Symposium focused on overcoming pervasive gender inequalities and discrimination as an essential contribution to reshaping the world as we recover and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic and to achieving sustainable peace and development. It explored how faith actors and institutions can work in tandem with governments, the United Nations, and broader civil society to accelerate the pace towards gender equality, equity and justice, presenting directions based on innovative approaches. The Symposium did not shy away from honest appraisal of both the contributions of faith actors to this agenda, as well as pointing to where and how they are hindering progress, but primarily served as a space to recommit to achieving gender justice, grounded in both faith values and universal human rights, and as part of our commitment to begin a more critical understanding of race, post-colonialism and intersectionality within international discourse and practice.

Religions and religious bodies (and their texts and discourses) have approached the issue of gender justice in their respective traditions with varying degrees of consensus, convergences, and divergences. Religious discourses on gender justice antedate the multilateral agreements within the United Nations system. These are discourses that have woven challenging issues that have vexed the imagination of both religions and nations states, issues such as human identity and human belonging, human dignity and human rights, human sexuality and gender, and so many more.

By taking stock of the various dimensions of gender justice offered by religious and multilateral bodies, the Symposium offered space for renewed identification of areas of collaboration to advance the implementation of existing, multilateral declarations and promote understanding of the connections between human rights and faith values.

Many faith actors relating to the UN were ready for strong engagement for gender justice in 2020, based on a vision of a world where all can live in dignity, with equality and the full range of universal rights. Although activities have needed to be suspended, the resolve and commitment of these faith leaders and communities remains as strong now to scale up work for inclusive policies and gender sensitive programmes as we move to 2021 and beyond. The Symposium provided the opportunity to explore together ways to scale up work for gender justice.

Outcomes of the Symposium

- Deepen understanding of the complexities of working for gender justice and equality from faith and rights perspectives.
- Showcase the transformative role faith leaders and faith inspired actors are playing to promote gender equality and human rights and address gender discrimination and gender-based violence.
- Share best practices across diverse stakeholders including faith-based organizations, UN system entities, member states, intergovernmental and non-governmental entities
- Propose policy recommendations.
- Reinvigorate all stakeholders in taking up the call for gender equality with specific commitments, actions and policy recommendations developed from the proceedings to take

into CSW65, the Generation Equality Forum and into the Action Coalitions, Decade of Actions, etc...

Commitments of Faith for Rights

We pledge to ensure non-discrimination and gender equality in implementing this declaration on “Faith for Rights”. We specifically commit to revisit, each within or respective areas of competence, those religious understandings and interpretations that appear to perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes or even condone gender-based violence. We pledge to ensure justice and equal worth of everyone as well as to affirm the rights of all women, girls and boys not to be subjected to any form of discrimination and violence, including harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, child and/or forced marriages and crimes committed in the name of so-called honor.

4 sessions were organized to highlight where faith-based organizations can accelerate progress on gender equality:

- High Level Opening Session: Multi-stakeholder Collaboration to Accelerate Gender Equality, Equity and Justice
- An Epoch-Defining Urgency for Gender Equality, Equity and Justice: Framing the Issue. The session looked at how the legitimization of violence and the dominant discourse of the war-system in both daily life and statecraft have negatively impacted the way women and girls live their humanity.
- Gender Equality, Equity and Justice: Women Advancing Peace and Security. The panel demonstrated the strong connection between the security a woman needs in her home, community and nation to the peace the world seeks.
- Gender Equality, Equity and Justice: Multilateralism and Intersections with Human Rights. Based on experience demonstrating how the pursuit for gender justice is intricately intertwined with other multilateral agendas, such as human rights and climate justice.

Source: ACT Alliance, General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church; Islamic Relief; Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Soka Gakkai International, United Religions Initiative, World Council of Churches and UN Women and UNFPA, for the UN inter-agency Task Force on Religion and Development.

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