



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

2012 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges Theme: Faith and Protection

Overview of Follow-up Actions

Introduction

In December 2012, the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges focused on the theme of Faith and Protection. The Dialogue brought together faith leaders, faith-based organisations (FBOs), academics and government representatives to explore how asylum and the protection of refugees, stateless persons and the internally displaced are reflected in religious values and traditions, and how to improve cooperation between UNHCR and faith actors.

At the close of the Dialogue, the High Commissioner identified four broad work streams as areas for follow-up. This note provides an overview of follow-up actions, but does not do justice to the range of initiatives spawned by the Dialogue.

1. Good practice examples of the work of faith-based organizations and local faith communities in contributing to protection

The first work stream explored lessons learned and identified good practices from the engagement of FBOs and communities in protection-related activities.

In April 2013, UNHCR staff and FBOs were invited to contribute to a compilation of good practice examples of protection-related activities and outcomes achieved in partnership with local faith communities, their faith leaders and organizations. The survey helped UNHCR to compile over 50 examples that explored the impact of faith identities, motivations and structures; the strengths and weaknesses of partnership; and the lessons learned from the experience.

The survey has been distilled into two documents. *Examples of Good Practice: Preliminary Overview* (<http://www.unhcr.org/51b6debe9.html>) and *Protection Outcomes* (<http://www.unhcr.org/51b6df179.html>) deriving from the survey of good practice examples were published and presented during a Side Event on Faith and Protection at the June 2013 UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs. In collaboration with co-organizers of the Side Event, a note summarizing key points and recommendations was submitted for publication in the *Report on the Annual Consultations with NGOs* (<http://www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations/index.html>).

2. Affirmation of Welcome for Faith Leaders

The second work stream has developed specific guidance for faith leaders, encouraging them to welcome migrants, refugees and other forcibly displaced people in their communities, and to stand together against intolerance, exclusion and xenophobia.

Between January and April 2013, a coalition of FBOs and UNHCR staff pursued a recommendation to develop guidance for faith leaders and drafted a text that consists of 16 affirmations. They are a call to deepen dialogue and cooperation within and across faith communities, and to work toward the common goal of protecting the world's forcibly displaced. They are available in Arabic, English, French, Russian, Spanish, German and Hebrew.

A 'soft launch' of the *Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders* (Affirmation of Welcome, <http://www.unhcr.org/51b6de419.html>) took place during a Side Event on Faith and Protection at the June 2013 UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs. A panel consisting of two religious leaders, FBO representatives and the Director of International Protection, Mr. Volker Türk, agreed that the Affirmation of Welcome is a valuable point of departure for dialogue and a unique reference tool for engagement with faith communities and its leaders. HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and the Lutheran World Federation also formally endorsed the Affirmation of Welcome and rolled it out within their respective faith communities.

A formal launch of the Affirmation of Welcome is planned at the *Religions for Peace IX* World Assembly in Vienna in November 2013. Plans for a signing ceremony and endorsement by major Christian leaders are also underway in cooperation with the World Council of Churches during its 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea in late October and early November 2013. Other activities in the lead-up to these Assemblies include country-level roll-out in host communities around the world.

3. Research in collaboration with the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities

The third work stream helped identify key research and learning topics related to faith and protection, which could benefit from further study and analysis.

UNHCR engaged with the Joint Learning Initiative on Local and Faith Communities (JLI), widely circulating the JLI Learning Hub on Resilience's Policy Note at the 2012 High Commissioner's Dialogue. UNHCR staff attended and played an active role in the Learning Hub's meetings, alongside practitioners, academics, policy-makers and other experts in humanitarian situations and faith communities.

4. 'Faith literacy' training and materials for UNHCR staff and partners

The fourth work stream looks inward at UNHCR. The aim is to develop guidance for staff at Headquarters and in the field on the multiple dimensions of faith in the context of displacement and the 'how to' of dealing with, outreach to and partnering with FBOs.

Between January and October 2013, UNHCR has joined other UN agencies, such as UNFPA and UNAIDS, in more closely examining the issue of partnerships with FBOs. The three are jointly organizing the second United Nations System Staff College course on 'Partnering with Faith Organisations'. This year's edition will explore the linkages between faith and health, development, and humanitarian work, and provide an opportunity for UNHCR staff to share their experience of engaging with faith communities and organizations in the course of their respective work. The course will take place from 22-24 October 2013 in Rome, Italy. 'Faith literacy' guidance materials for UNHCR staff will be compiled based on the course and the survey on good practice examples.

5. Related follow-up

Due to the growing interest in the topic, the editors of the University of Oxford's Forced Migration Review (FMR) have agreed to dedicate the forthcoming issue to 'Faith-based organisations and responses to displacement'. FMR expressed a keen interest in receiving examples of good, replicable practice and experience as well as sound analysis of faith-related issues, including those that reflect the experience and knowledge of communities and individuals directly affected by displacement. Submissions of articles will be accepted until Monday, 9 December 2013 (www.fmreview.org/faith).

Additionally, an emerging strand of follow-up has been dialogue on interfaith partnerships between leading partners. One such example is the Lutheran World Federation's 'Workshop on exploring opportunities for collaboration between Christian and Muslim humanitarian actors' that will take place from 5-6 October 2013 in Amman, Jordan. This ground-breaking initiative seeks to foster closer relations with Islamic faith-based humanitarian organizations, and to explore possibilities to deepen cooperation, including for sharing information, technical expertise, and engaging jointly in humanitarian operations.

UNHCR, Division of International Protection
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