

Annex 3
UNFPA engagement of faith-based and religious actors, 2014-2017
2017 Executive Director Annual Report to the Executive Board



United Nations Resident Coordinator Nardos Bekele-Thomas, Health Cabinet Secretary James Macharia, and Anglican Church of Kenya Archbishop Eliud Wabakhala call for action to end maternal mortality and harmful practices against women and girls. ©UNFPA Kenya

I. Background

Attaining the goal of the strategic plan 2014-2017 to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and realize reproductive rights requires partnership with many partners, including religious and faith-based actors to reach communities and accelerate changes in attitudes and practices to promote and protect human rights, save and improve lives, and end discriminatory and harmful practices.

UNFPA is issuing this annex to the UNFPA Executive Director's report on the Implementation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014-2017 to highlight the contribution of faith-based actors to strategic plan results. Although there is no specific indicator in the 2014-2017 strategic plan results framework to capture this engagement, there are multiple indicators on partnership and civil society, including engagement of multi-stakeholders, which were used in preparing this annex. Since engagement with religious and faith-based actors is important to achieve the ICPD and 2030 agendas, especially in an environment of rising conservatism, an indicator for this specific area of engagement was added to the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 integrated resources and results framework.

II. Highlights from a legacy of collaboration

UNFPA has led the United Nations system in developing strategic alliances with human rights-based faith-inspired groups building on a legacy of partnerships with religious actors since the 1970s, which now involves most UNFPA country offices. A snapshot of UNFPA's financial partnership from 2013 to 2016 with international faith-based organizations (FBOs) Caritas, Cordaid, Islamic Relief, World Vision, and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)¹ shows a rise in support from \$380,340 in 2013 to \$1,257,980 in 2016. The information is based on UNFPA country office reports from Belarus, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

A. Global highlights –Building capacity and sustained advocacy through strategic learning exchanges

UNFPA serves as Chair of the United Nations inter-Agency task force for engagement with faith-based organizations on sustainable development. Since its inception in 2010, the task force has led efforts to mainstream religious engagement throughout the UN system, providing a platform to showcase UN partnership with religious actors to uphold human rights. Through this platform, UNFPA has facilitated the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights related issues into broader conversations around religion and development. In 2017, more than 40 side events took place at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on aspects of 'religion and women's rights' by faith-based United Nation partners, with at least 25 percent upholding sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. UNFPA also facilitates United Nation system capacity building to enhance partnership around religion, development and humanitarian work. Since 2010, the annual peer-to-peer exchange has engaged more than 250 colleagues from the UN and faith-based organizations, and built a database of over 200 case studies.

A Call to Action by Religious Actors - "Not in My Name"

On the margins of the 2014 United Nations General Assembly, UNFPA and UNAIDS convened more than 40 leaders from around the world, representing the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim faiths. They issued an unprecedented call to action² urging governments to actively promote sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

¹ The review is based on information from the UNFPA Partner Information Management System, based on UNFPA country office reports from Belarus, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

² <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/call-action-faith-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-reproductive-rights-post-2015>



Faith leaders at United Nations urge action on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. ©UNFPA/Omar Kasrawi

The statement repudiates abuses, often thought to be based in religion, that undermine human rights. "Not in our name should any mother die while giving birth," it says. "Not in our name should any girl, boy, woman or man be abused, violated or killed. Not in our name should a girl child be deprived of her education, be married, harmed or abused. Not in our name should anyone be denied access to basic health care, nor should a child or adolescent be denied knowledge of and care for his/her body. Not in our name should any young person be denied their full human rights."

Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, UNFPA co-sponsored a session with religious institutions and faith-based non-governmental organizations that have a unique comparative advantage in humanitarian contexts. The Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action was endorsed by more than 160 faith-based actors representing all major faith traditions and different geographical regions. The charter presents concrete commitments from religious leaders and other humanitarian actors to increase the impact of faith-based actors in reducing humanitarian need and suffering, and to call for their inclusion within policy- and decision-making at all levels of humanitarian response.

B. National Highlights – The Power of Advocacy with Faith-Based Partners

Afghanistan – Enabling family planning in Muslim contexts

In 2014, UNFPA supported consultations among more than 600 religious leaders in five regions of Afghanistan to enhance advocacy for family planning. As a result, religious leaders signed a declaration that UNFPA printed on posters and distributed to health facilities providing evidence that family planning is not prohibited in Islam. UNFPA supports similar advocacy and training opportunities, in partnership with the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs, the Ulama High Council, the Afghanistan Academy of Science and the Ministry of Public Health. To advance South-South Cooperation, UNFPA sent several religious leaders from Afghanistan to Egypt and Indonesia for training as family planning advocates and some contributed to a popular video endorsing family planning.

Ecuador – Intercultural Approaches to Health and GBV –need time frame

UNFPA disseminated messages related to gender equality and gender-based violence (GBV) during the formulation of the Health Code, Humane Delivery Law and other legislative processes, and through training and workshops on GBV with governmental officials and armed forces' personnel. Support is provided to the Ministry of Health to secure facilities with an intercultural approach in the northern border between Ecuador and Colombia, where the population is largely rural, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian. UNFPA advocates for the recognition of traditional medicine and ancestral traditions, including the value of medicinal plants among other means to ensure safe birth and reduce maternal mortality and morbidity.

Georgia – Engaging religious leaders to end son preference

A widespread preference for sons has resulted in severely skewed sex ratios in Georgia with 108 boys born for every 100 girls. UNFPA engaged with stakeholders including religious leaders to improve the status of women and girls. “I believe the number of these cases has decreased over time,” said priest Giorgi Ugrekheldze, pictured left with his wife, daughters and granddaughters. UNFPA launched a global programme to prevent son preference and gender-biased sex selection in 2017. Funded by the European Union, the programme works with governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Georgia, Nepal and Viet Nam to gather information about gender-biased sex selection and raise the value of girls and women.



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Guinea – Confronting the Ebola Outbreak

Confronted with Ebola in Guinea, UNFPA engaged religious leaders’ associations, which had carried out successful efforts to prevent female genital mutilation (FGM). In collaboration with the government, other UN entities and FBOs, the UNFPA country office identified religious leaders and facilitated learning and advocacy for alternative burial practices, which eventually helped to eliminate the spread of the disease.

Morocco – Raising Voices of Women of Faith as Agents of Change

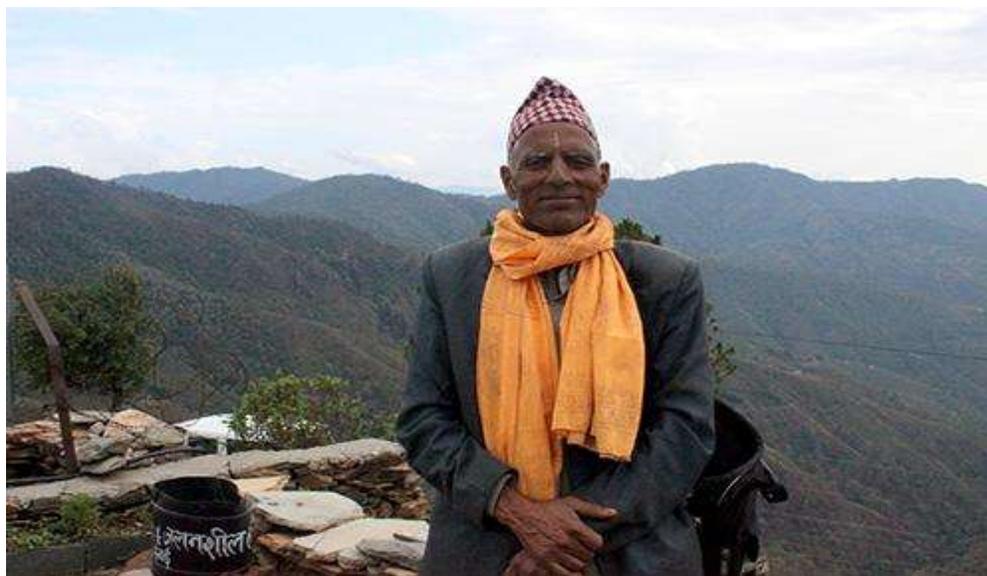
A seminal program with the *Rabita Mohamedia des Oulamas*, a Moroccan faith-based network, was initiated to improve youth access to sexual and reproductive health information. The partnership trains religious leaders in all regions of Morocco to become agents of change in their communities. Efforts focus on strengthening the skills of peer educators and organizing programs with local radio and TV channels for discussions involving men and boys on improving SRH, human rights, gender equality and ending GBV. A special focus is placed on reaching adolescents and youth from traditional schools, youth in prisons, and adolescents in child protection centers. Modules are being introduced in the Training Institute of Imams and *Morshidat* (female religious leaders) in Rabat.

Nepal - Advocating against child marriage

In collaboration with religious and secular women’s rights entities, UNFPA developed a manual on “*Family planning, Reproductive Health, and Gender: Islamic Perspectives*” in both Urdu and Nepali languages, and organized a validation workshop with representatives of the Ministries of Health, and Women, Children and Social Welfare.

In 2017, UNFPA-Nepal developed a short video with religious leaders, speaking out against child marriage. UNFPA works with astrologers, shamans and Hindu priests to develop and implement national action plans to end child marriage and to prevent harmful practices against women and girls.

Astrologer and priest Dev Dutta Bhatta fights child marriage in Nepal. ©UNFPA Nepal/Santosh Chhetri



The Gambia - Education sessions to end Female Genital Mutilation

Islamic religious leaders and scholars led advocacy efforts at policy and community levels to end FGM in The Gambia. The participation of religious leaders in community dialogues facilitated open discussion about topics that were previously taboo. In 2017, 300 influential community members, including local religious leaders representing 32 communities, facilitated education sessions about the need to end female genital mutilation.

Trinidad and Tobago – Creating youth-friendly spaces

In 2016 UNFPA collaborated with FBOs such as the YMCA, YWCA, Cyril Ross Nursery, Red Cross, the Faith-Based Network of Trinidad and Tobago, the Anglican Church, the Hindu Women's Organization, and other organizations to create youth-friendly spaces to promote UN values. Efforts focus on engaging men and boys to end violence against women and girls; building capacity and awareness among adolescent girls to end abuse, adolescent pregnancy and child marriage; facilitating access to HIV prevention, care and treatment; and providing shelter and support to survivors of GBV and human trafficking.