



Religions for Peace  JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES 

Religions for Peace -UNICEF Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action Regional Webinar in East Asian and Pacific Regions (EAPR) 2020

Highlights/Summary Report

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seven Regional Webinars to launch the Multi-religious Faith in Action COVID 19 Global Initiative #FaithinActionCOVID-19 | March-May 2020. See full Executive Summary of all webinars [here](#).

BACKGROUND

At the onset of the Global COVID pandemic in February 2020, the 3 main partners of the Global Initiative on **Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities** (FPCC) agreed to launch a multi-religious initiative to address the needs of families and communities in relation to the pandemic. FPCC is a partnership between Religions for Peace, UNICEF, and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI).

The #FaithinActionCOVID-19 initiative which was [launched](#) on April 7 by RfP, top religious leaders and UNICEF Executive Director released a joint statement and call-to-action to mobilize faith leaders for an on-going response to the global crisis precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The #FaithinActionCOVID-19 Initiative has outlined the following **7 main actions** as its core objectives:

1. Manage communication, misinformation, and rumors
2. Dispel fear, stigma, discrimination, reduce tensions and promote social harmony
3. Promote adaptation of religious gatherings, practices, rituals, handwashing, and hygiene
4. Address the specific needs of vulnerable groups
5. Promote the prevention of violence against children and women
6. Promote the participation and active engagement of children and young people
7. Promote and support the recovery of social services, resilience and return to normalcy

The Initiative also seeks to promote the wider FPCC goal of large scale **engagement of local multi-religious leaders**, their **faith communities** and **local FBOs**, in collaboration with **UNICEF country offices** through learning exchange, joint priority-setting and action planning, and mutual support.

REGIONAL WEBINARS

To rapidly connect with religious leaders, UNICEF country offices, FBOs, and other partners for briefing, consultation, and learning exchange, the Initiative organized a series of 7 regional webinars, aiming to:

- **Increase awareness** and strengthen **coordinated efforts** of the global Faith-in-Action Initiative,
- **Mobilize** and call to action inter-faith commitments of Religious Leaders and Faith representatives including Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Network.
- **Equip** these influencers with a set of global guidance around the 7 main #Faith-in-Action objectives, including messages and resources that can be customized for local use.
- **Consult** with the religious leaders to learn about their existing efforts, understand their challenges and priorities for support.

Webinar Participants:

- RfP senior religious Leaders, members of regional and national IRCs, including Women of Faith, Interfaith Youth Networks, and district religious leaders
- Representatives from Ministries of Religious Affairs and other relevant Ministries
- National and local FBO affiliates and partners of international FBOs from the FPCC Advisory Group
- UNICEF technical leads from HQ, regional, country office and field offices
- WHO Regional representative
- Others at discretion of RfP

Over **700 participants** and **67 local partners** of international FBOs participated in the 7 Regional webinars. shared information about ongoing activities and good practice; listened to and asked questions about 3 thematic presentations; collectively identified key issues and challenges they were facing; and framed priority needs and asks of the Initiative's coordinating partners.

KEY ASKS & PRIORITIES

As a result of the webinars, several priority needs and asks will be supported as articulated by religious leaders, FBOs, and UNICEF staff:

- **Information dissemination** | assistance in content creation, framing appropriate messages that will balance science and religion, dissemination strategies, with particular focus on inclusion of technologically isolated, underrepresented and vulnerable groups.
- **Platform** | access to technical resources and outreach activities on a common platform.
- **Evidence gathering** | support in generating evidence from faith communities to inform communication strategies and inter-religious advocacy.
- **Vulnerable groups** | support for increased inclusion and participation of youth and women, religions that are not formally recognized, and advocacy and support on sexual and reproductive health.
- **Official Collaboration** | more systematic collaboration between sub-national and national levels and increased communication with the health sector.

Overarching and Strategic Asks

1. Desire to move beyond the global call to action and regional orientation to **concrete action on the ground at national and sub-national levels.**
2. Call for UNICEF as convener of a mechanism for systematic integration of the inter-faith constituency in global COVID-19 response. Specifically, formalizing a Troika (UNICEF, Inter-religious Councils and IFBOs) operating at global, regional, national and subnational levels.

ACTIONABLES

Resources

- Widely disseminate #FaithinAction resources, including thematic guidance presentation, technical resources.

Community

- Reach back to all regional webinar participants with package of materials and encourage widespread dissemination of the package to respective regional and local networks.
- Where possible support joint review and local adaptation of the Guidance.
- UNICEF and RfP co-hosting regular dialogue platform as a community information and feedback mechanism.
- Develop database of focal points within UNICEF, Inter-Religious Councils and FBOs (see Contacts Tab on website).
- Ensure inclusion of less-established faith and traditional groups.

Institutionalization

- Forge relationships between UNICEF and RfP entities at regional level.
- Support formation of country-level Inter-Faith Advisory Groups.
- Coordinate joint action planning and develop joint action plans.
- Ensure adherence to FPCC principles of participatory planning and non-instrumentalization of faith leaders.
- Support development of RfP-UNICEF Inter-Faith plans linked to country level Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) plans (and eventually the wider COVID-19 plans).
- Support development and implementation of a digital engagement strategy, engaging interfaith youth networks.
- Develop simple monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy, with indicators relating to the joint action and with reporting mechanism for the RCCE country plan.

KEY RESOURCES

- [Website: faith4positivechange.org](https://faith4positivechange.org)
- [Background to the Initiative](#)
- [Regional Webinar Reports](#)
- [Thematic guidance documents](#)
- [Resources on Faith & Positive Change](#)

Summary Report of the Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action Regional Webinar in EAPR (East Asia and Pacific Regions) Webinar

Participants: Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, Dr. Kerida McDonald, Dr. Desmond Cahill, Ms. Daw Yin Yin Maw, Ms. Nivy Balachandran, Ms. Elga Sarapung, Dr. Philip Kuntjoro Widjaja, Ms. Naureen Naqvi, Dr. Supriya Bezbaruah, Mr. Jimmy Otieno

Examples of Faith-in-Action Responses by Country/Organization

Australia

- **Joint Media awareness-raising** - *RfP* Australia issued an impactful statement by Religious Leaders representing various different faiths
- **Addressing overlooked populations** - *RfP* Australia is engaging with the Australian Prime Minister's office to address the COVID-19 response among temporary migrants and international students
- **Coordinating statements from senior religious leaders and bio-ethics Scientist** - *RfP* Australia is liaising with UNESCO chair in bioethics to generate a report discussing ethical, moral and legal implications of COVID-19

Myanmar

- **Issuing of a political statement in the Rahkine area** - Women of Faith in Myanmar issued a statement in the conflict-ridden Rahkine State asking both sides for a ceasefire
- **Issuing advisory statements in tandem with community news** - *RfP* Myanmar coordinated new years messaging about COVID-19 and urging people to stay at home
- **Coordinating with the government to disseminate information and enforce COVID-19 prevention practices** - Religious offices and churches have been closed under guidance from the government
- Women of Faith in Myanmar are sharing update by the Ministry of Health updates with their communities
- **Distribution of supplies** - Women of Faith in Myanmar are working with local communities to provide PPE and hand sanitizer to hospitals

Indonesia

- **Donation of materials** - The Interfaith Network donated food to the government for dissemination
- **Youth peer support for affected youth** - Youth leaders have coordinated to reach out and talk to affected individual youth
- **Multi-media communication** - The Interfaith Network has promoted social media and faith-based radio and TV stations to push information on COVID-19 response

- **Distribution of food and supplies** - Interfidei along with other interfaith organizations opened 5 large "Solidarity Kitchens" providing cooked food for students, unemployed people, and other vulnerable individuals
- The Interreligious Council for Indonesia has provided equipment and thousands of packages of food to those in need
- **Coordinating directly with health sector** - Interfidei is working with hospitals and doctors to determine their particular needs
- **Spearheading coordination efforts with Government, Universities, and FBOs** - Interfidei representatives, governments, and universities are working together on projects surrounding health, education, economy, social response, and information communication on COVID-19
- UNFPA Indonesia, in collaboration with FBOs, is promoting a campaign on COVID-19 prevention specifically targeting women and girls
- **Asian Inter-faith Youth Network**
- **Youth peer support for faith networks** - Young people have helped to set up the infrastructure for online faith services

Main Issues and Challenges

- **Economic Repercussions** - Many countries face dire economic effects as a result of the global pandemic
- Economic repercussions will impact vulnerable populations, such as young people (more likely to work in hospitality), overlooked populations like temporary migrants and international students, and those in urban slums in particular (reported by *RfP* Australia)
- **Discrimination against particular communities** - There are cases of governments and individuals blaming certain religions or faith communities as COVID-19 "spreaders"
- Urban slum dwellers oftentimes cannot fully practice physical distancing and thus are considered "gone cases" by governments and NGOs alike
- **Violation of Rights** - There have been numerous cases of harassment and enforcement of curfew/lockdown without due respect to peoples' rights, especially in urban slums, refugee camps, and isolation centers

Priority Needs and Asks of UNICEF from the different perspectives of the groups present

- **Add missing information to messages to address underrepresented issues and groups**
 - Inclusion of advocacy and support on sexual and reproductive health in the context of COVID-19
 - Inclusion of PLHIV in all faith communities' response to COVID-19 outreach (the participant also suggested consideration of LGBTI issues)

- **Access to a platform of resources for outreach activities** - Informational/social media bank of resources to encourage appropriate healthy behavior/tips and to spread messages against discrimination or violent behavior against a religion or faith community
- Religious leaders want to provide accurate information while pushing a narrative of compassion, reason, and credibility
- **Urgently ask for a short video clip** - Video directly from Chair of *RfP* Australia to counter discrimination against Chinese students in Australia
- **Support for inclusion of isolated groups** - Need solutions to better reach out to technologically isolated and/or rural communities, while maintaining physical distance
- Need to address how young people can connect with more socially isolated community members
- Need to ensure populations such as urban slum dwellers, temporary migrants, and other overlooked populations are receiving care, attention, and appropriate information on COVID-19 response
- Religious leaders ask for partnerships with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF, FBOs, and community health volunteers to utilize existing organized community interest groups within urban slums
- **Ensuring the safety of faith community volunteers as aid workers** - Need to ensure that volunteers are provided with protective materials
- **More Communication with Health Sector** - Need for better understanding of the needs of hospitals and doctors