



South Asia Regional High-Level Meeting of Faith Actors
Statement of commitments
December 8, 2021

We, the participants of the South Asia Regional High-Level Meeting of Faith Actors, have come together to deliberate on the contributions of faith actors in child wellbeing. Convened by **UNICEF**, **Religions for Peace** and **Joint Learning Initiative** on Faith and Local Communities and with the participation of religious leaders, faith actors from across the region, we acknowledge the significance of this meeting.

We recognize that faith actors hold deep and trusted relationships with their communities and, as skilled and influential communicators, they can significantly move the hearts and minds of communities. In situations of conflict, unrest and humanitarian crisis, religious leaders and faith actors can contribute to inter-faith dialogue, diffuse tensions and discriminatory attitudes and provide spiritual support in the face of adversity. We also call upon faith actors to curb any harmful and negative religious practices and influences that can impact on the well-being of women, girls, men, and boys.

Understanding that:

- The values and beliefs of many religions – including human dignity and respect for every human being, justice, compassion, peace and service to others – are in direct alignment with the principles of the Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC). The common ground of religious values and CRC principles provide a foundation for cooperation and collective action.
- Diverse religious leaders, faith actors and communities can come together to build an interfaith partnership with civil society organizations and United Nations agencies to advocate with policymakers, media, civil society and other institutions to prevent violence against girls and boys and promote the wellbeing of children, their families and communities.
- Supporting the agency and dignity of children, girls and boys, is an important way to ensure that girls and boys are healthy, safe, and protected.
- In emergency situations and in the aftermath of violence and conflict, religious leaders and faith actors can contribute to and influence reconciliation and recovery efforts, and advocate for the special protection of girls and boys and other particularly vulnerable members of their communities.

And in keeping with the global partnership initiative on Faith and Positive Change for Children (FPCC) and all the supporting documentation (Programme Guidance on Faith Engagement; Mind-Heart Dialogue Facilitators Guide; Thematic Guides, Global Evidence Review; FPCC Principles Paper, available on <https://www.faith4positivechange.org/>), we declare our commitment to advancing the rights of all children, girls and boys:

- We commit to use our influence and leadership to advance children's rights through active and effective programmes and participatory events in order to reduce violence against children, increase children's access to education opportunities, and foster their survival and development.
- We commit to promote equitable, participatory and co-creating partnerships between faith groups and development actors which will guard against instrumentalization.

- We commit to identifying ways to ensure technical capacity development support for faith actors and religious leaders in order to improve their awareness and knowledge of the physical, psychological, and social consequences and change strategies related to certain attitudes, practices and behaviors on child, family and community wellbeing, so that they will be best equipped to lead, support and engage in positive social and behavior change.
- We promote systematic engagement with inter-faith networks as well as full inclusion of all religious actors according to local religious demographics including minority religions and traditional leaders.
- We encourage joint ownership across religious, government and development actors in relation to engagement with children, families and communities. We also acknowledge that religious leaders have an important role to play in facilitating community-based monitoring of the status of child and family well-being and related services and provisions. We promote the engagement of FBOs in ensuring transparency and social accountability, and in using their influential positions to advocate for needed political will and policy reform.
- We encourage efforts towards more integrated, large scale approaches for FBO engagement across multiple sectors. /
- We commit to ensure that Faith-led SBC efforts seek out the voices, perspectives, and experiences of those from marginalized groups, women, girls and boys, ethnic or religious minorities, and those that do not practice a faith.
- We commit to promoting and supporting greater engagement of women of faith in both formal and non-formal leadership positions within Faith-led initiatives, towards remove gender barriers that exist within faith and the wider society. We encourage showcasing of women of faith champions to help normalize their greater engagement and influence.
- We commit to creative engagement with youth in faith and leveraging of venues, platforms and approaches tailored to their inclinations. We also encourage bringing together of religious and secular youth networks for common causes and collaboration on promoting youth agency and engagement.
- We call for more systematic engagement between international bodies and local faith actors and greater development of their capacities to support life-saving communication, social mobilization, and accountability to affected populations in humanitarian contexts.
- We collectively commit to joint efforts of the South Asia Regional Advisory Group of Faith Actors, to support faith communities in countries across the region to promote, oversee and support implementation of child-centered gender transformative interventions.