



## *Concept Note*

### **Faith and Diplomacy: Strategic Reflections on Religiously Inspired Global Efforts Towards Building Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies**

#### *INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND*

The role of religious leaders and faith-based organizations (FBOs) as key players in their respective countries and in the regional and international levels, as well as harnessing the unifying potential of faith, are key issues at the intersection between faith and diplomacy.

The UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)- the leading United Nations platform for intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation- and Religions for Peace- the only international multi-religious organization with affiliated and legally registered multi-religious leadership platforms in every continent-, have been working on the nexus between faith and diplomacy over the years with the ultimate goal of building and strengthening dialogue, social cohesion and mutual understanding in societies around the world.

In 2019, Religions for Peace hosted its 10<sup>th</sup> World Assembly. Established in 1970, the systematic efforts of fifty years of the existence of this “UN of Religious Institutions”, have been dedicated towards advocating and supporting multi-religious efforts designed at enabling a positive peace. The latter defined as the whole of society and of governments’ efforts beyond ensuring the absence of war, towards securing lasting human dignity for each and all.

The 10<sup>th</sup> World Assembly was also the beginning of a ‘trinity’ of efforts with Ring for Peace, a Foundation founded in 2018, with the aim to foster the peaceful coexistence between people and religions to strengthen international understanding and cooperation, and to promote the dialogue between civil society and governments, within Germany and Europe. The partnership between *Religions for Peace* and Ring for Peace was enabled, in all three cases, thanks to the generous support by the German Federal Foreign Office, thus underlining the strategic vision of Europe’s largest and most powerful economic and political nation, in the importance of multi-religious engagement, globally. The UNAOC High Representative provided an opening keynote

at this Assembly in which he announced that the UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites<sup>1</sup>- elaborated by UNAOC at the request of the UN Secretary-General in the aftermath of the attacks on mosques in Christchurch (New Zealand)- was nearly completed. He was also actively engaged in all discussions and meeting with faith leaders and diplomats throughout.

In 2020, at the height of global lockdowns due to Covid-19, *Religions for Peace* and Ring for Peace ensured a global Assembly, as a follow up, focusing on a critical constituency which had hitherto not received its due of global attention and recognition: women of faith. Accordingly, in this Assembly, which was fully virtual, managed to convene religious leaders (male and female), together with diplomats, politicians, and academics, to highlight and assess the unique roles and contributions of faith, to women's leadership and all diplomacy efforts focused on diverse aspects of peace making, peace building and sustainability of human rights and development efforts. Approximately 1,600 people tuned in and joined the virtual discussions and presentations from around the world, daily, for 3 days. The UNAOC Chief of Staff presented a Keynote at this event and was consulted in the framing of the Conference. In 2020 UNAOC became one of the three co-Chairs of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force for Religion and Sustainable Development (UN-IATF), together with the UN Population Fund and the UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

Building on the outcomes – and indeed recommendations - of the above two assemblies, *Religions for Peace* and Ring for Peace were positively compelled to host the third in the trinity of global multi-stakeholder consultations, focusing on an intergenerational dialogue around the most pertinent of our challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: humanitarianism, environmentalism, and the broader dynamics of peace and security. Accordingly, the *International Conference of Religious Leaders on Faith and Diplomacy: A Generational Dialogue*, was convened, as a hybrid modality, also in Lindau, Germany. A total of 150 participants were convened in person, with a total of 1700 participants (including virtually), wherein twenty-two percent were **younger than 35**, and **women made up 45 percent** of all.

## *STRATEGIC REFLECTIONS on DECEMBER 10: LESSONS LEARNED AND MOVING FORWARD*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unaoc.org/resource/united-nations-plan-of-action-to-safeguard-religious-sites/>

As 2021 comes to an end, *Religions for Peace* is partnering with UNAOC to host a strategic reflection on the nexus of faith and diplomacy in 2022 and beyond. This reflection will bring on board key actors involved in the last three editions of Religions for Peace

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World Assemblies, including Ring for Peace Directors, Religions for Peace religious leaders -male and female, young and older, active within its 96 Interreligious Councils. Representatives of member states with a record of engagement on the nexus between faith and diplomacy, including those who took part in the Religions for Peace World Assemblies, will also participate in the strategic reflections.

A number of UN entities which are part of the UN-IATF and members of its Multi Faith Advisory Council will also be part of this exercise.

The objectives of the strategic reflections are to take stock of the highlights and main outcomes of the consultations that took place in 2019, 2020 and 2021, and to debate how to strengthen and better articulate the nexus between faith and diplomacy in 2022 and beyond.

#### *GUIDING QUESTIONS:*

The following guiding questions are suggested for the strategic reflection: 1. What are some of the main outcomes and policy recommendations of the consultations that took place during the last three editions of Religions for Peace World Assemblies on the faith and diplomacy nexus to help build peaceful, just and inclusive societies?

2. How can some of those main outcomes and recommendations help strengthen the nexus between faith and diplomacy in issues related to peace and security, as well as to humanitarian, developmental and environmental challenges?

3. What are the strategic priorities for member states in the nexus between faith and diplomacy? Are there examples of policies and best practices? What are the main challenges going forward?

4. What are the strategic priorities for religious leaders and FBOs to strengthen the nexus between faith and diplomacy? What are the main challenges going forward?

5. How can the UN system contribute to this conversation? What are the lessons learned and priorities in their work with other stakeholders in the nexus between faith and diplomacy?

6. How can all the relevant stakeholders work more closely together in 2022 and beyond?

*Date, Venue and Format*

On December 10, UNAOC and Religions for Peace will host an event which will take a hybrid format (on-line/virtual) and in person, at the Church Center of the UN (CCUN), located at 777 UN Plaza - 2nd Floor. The link to the event will be sent out to all participants closer to the event. A lunch will be offered after the meeting.

*Agenda*

**10:00 – 10:30**

**Part I: Introduction & Welcome by Hosts & Key Partners**

**10:30 – 11:45**

**Part II: Faith and Diplomacy Consultations: Main Outcomes and Recommendations from the Religions for Peace World Assemblies**

**11:45 – 12:20**

**Part III: Faith and Diplomacy: Strengthening the Nexus in 2022 and Beyond**

**12:20-12:30**

**Part IV: Concluding Observations**

**12:30-13:30**

**Lunch**