YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
with RELIGION *and* FAITH
in the 21ST CENTURY

Religions *for* Peace

WFDD

ICYF
ISLAMIC COOPERATION YOUTH FORUM
منتدى التعاون الإسلامي للشباب
FORUM DE LA JEUNESSE DE LA COOPÉRATION ISLAMIQUE

BERKLEY CENTER
for Religion, Peace
& World Affairs
*GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND FOREWORD

"We are asking you to involve us, engage us, consult with us, as we are all stakeholders of the present, living on this one planet, inspired by and committed to living the peace demanded by our respective faiths"

[Member of the Interfaith Youth Network, October 2021, Lindau, Germany]

The above words capture succinctly why Religions for Peace and the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), came together to sign a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), amid a global Covid-19 lockdown, in New York, in September 2020. As the oldest, largest, multi-religious, institutionally representative, and global platform, with over half a century of experience in convening and facilitating multi-religious collaboration and service to all, Religions for Peace is a unique type of multilateral space.

Religions for Peace's Interfaith Youth Network brings together young faith leaders who are grounded in moral urgency and innovative ideas to our movement. They are equal partners in all our work. The Global Interfaith Youth Network harnesses the energy, commitment, and creativity of young religious leaders on all six of our strategic priorities. Comprised of 15 leaders representing the world's faith traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North America, and Latin America, and the Caribbean, these leaders were elected by their peers during the 10th World Assembly in 2019 and stand as a voice for young people within all Religions for Peace work and action.

The ICYF is an international, non-commercial, non-partisan organization uniting leading umbrella youth organizations from the Member-States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as international youth organizations, ICYF builds

the capacity of OIC youth through strategies, policy frameworks, programs furthering civic engagement, holistic education, capacity-building and best practices addressing the critical problems of limited opportunities, extremism and social exclusion while building their capabilities of intellectual and leadership development, entrepreneurship, media and communication informed by a shared Islamic heritage, culture, and universal values. As such, a collaboration between the two organizations, brings together a legacy of intergovernmental and interreligious institutional support to the voices, experiences, and agency of the world's diverse youth actors.

In October of 2020, Religions for Peace and the ICYF came together to acknowledge the overlapping priority areas of youth engagement and to establish a partnership that would allow for greater synergy between the two institutions. Religions for Peace and the ICYF signed a MoU on 23 October 2020, in which both parties agreed to support and facilitate the meaningful and safe engagement of multi-faith youth communities in OIC and non-OIC countries. It also stated that ICYF and Religions for Peace will mutually consolidate, develop and structure their cooperation in areas of common concern around the spiritual empowerment of youth at global level, and work together to mobilize stronger rights-based and faith-sensitive engagement, advocacy and action.

Thus, on 28 & 29 July 2021, a Symposium on Youth and Faith in the 21st Century took place, featuring a historic convening by a unique constellation of partners with Co-Hosts, Religions for Peace and the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), and Co-Organizing Partners: Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC); The International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA); The Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA); Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs,, Georgetown University; Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University; Office of Religious Life, Princeton University; and the Pontifical and the Royal University of Santo Tomas. A call for authors was issued, to which over forty-five responses came in over an extremely short time. Given the range of partners, the diversity of insights, and the need for in-depth discussion, the organizers decided to accommodate twenty-three of those papers for the first round. Thus, rendering it viable for us to attempt a follow-up round of consultations sometime in 2022.

Authors include Martin Macondzo, Shameer Rishad, Melody Amal Khalil, Arshad Athman, Ghazi Abdullah Muttaqien, Husein Zaenal Muttaqien, Hira A. Siddiqui, Emina Frljak, John Kennedy Odhiambo, Eda Molla Chousein, Sheldiana Jano, Rr. Manda Andrian, Harald Bergmann, Krit Niramittham, Nahla Mohamed Fahmy, Jude Abhulimen, Md. Ridwan Ullah, Dr. Luciano Bizin, PK Sadique, Nishat Hussain, Riaz Ravat, Nur Atika Binti Hairi, Muhammat Sabar Prihatin, and Sakif Al Ehsan Khan. This incredible group of youth is from South Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America all presented their work in the forum, speaking not only from their cultural, theological, and political contexts but also from their personal experiences as young leaders in and of their communities.

We are thrilled to present this compilation of the presented papers. They contain new insights by, about, and for youth themselves, on the intersections with respective faith traditions, in our contemporary times. We hope that the readers will come to perceive, and to understand, the complex challenges facing youth today, through the varied lenses of this diversity and richness of experiences.

Their words reflect how many of them engage diverse challenges by living out their faith in caring and serving their communities. The reflections show not only how the stakeholders and leaders of tomorrow see the world today, but also how some of them own the issues and responsibilities of present-day realities.

The papers in this volume reflect that youth base their decisions and actions on their values and understanding our shared global problems, as well as how we could address these holistically, theologically, and responsibly. The wisdom of the young authors of these papers underlines how imperative it is for young voices to be heard – unadulterated and unfiltered – to inform the decision-making necessary to create a just and thriving socially cohesive present and future.

Youth crave connectivity. For many of them, this craving is one for meaning and purpose, not only in their individual lives but those of their respective communities – our shared planet. We feel privileged to lift and feature these voices and offer them a wider shared platform for visibility and resonance, in a world that we strongly believe needs their wisdom.

While we ensure a disclaimer that the opinions in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the organizing bodies, our respective Boards, or countries/territories, we do seek to recognize and honor the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the authors of these seminal papers, with this publication.

On behalf of all participants and partners, we thank you.

Professor Dr. Azza Karam, Secretary General, Religions for Peace International

H.E. Dr. Taha Ayhan, President, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF)

REFLECTING FROM THE PLACE OF CHAPLAINCY

MATTHEW WEINER

As I reflect upon the initiative at hand I am drawn to some aspects of its great importance in particular and I wish to hold them up as a way of pointing to what a chaplain like me might find most interesting and nourishing about it. There are of course significant institutional bodies involved, and this is surely important, and the level of discussion as recorded in the report is likewise excellent. These are measurable forms of public success for the common good, which are considerable and commendable. I am myself drawn to the choice of calling for conversation across religious lines and between religious and secular lines and doing so in a way that significantly involves youth leadership within these larger structures that sustain and develop traditions. I am drawn further to the notion that this is a good in and of itself, which helps to create and attend to a kind of wellbeing. I use the term wellbeing as in an exploratory sense, in the spirit of the work being so well conducted here. Real conversation across difference is a kind of wellbeing and a way into it.

Wellbeing is not a descriptor ordinarily used for or by agencies, institutions, non-profits, or nation states to describe the anticipated outcome from a conference, but rather for people, communities, and families. And yet as we continue to struggle as a global community to respond with any sense of clarity to the particular and interrelated critical problems of the

day, and to do so through institutions that can and must determine objectives and measure results, this idea of wellbeing is one we might use from the field of chaplaincy to try to check in with how we are really doing; or to help us find our way beyond the secular measurable goals of success- both when we come home at night and take off the professional hat we wear, but also for the institutions themselves to foster. Institutions such as those gathered here are built for the long-term stability of people and society and so it might help us to think, or at least imagine, in terms of well-being for institutions.

The multi-layered interdisciplinary approach of this initiative further strikes me because there tends to be a kind of ongoing informal discussion or debate among those of us working in a professional capacity for the common good: in terms of which topic to address, or which approach to take, or what audience is most significant; but a program such as the one we are reflecting upon gestures in a different direction all together, and toward the significance of bridging the kinds of institutions and the kinds of communities we know must all ultimately be involved. This approach must be the result of listening beyond one's particular professional identity and capacity, and instead to invite and listen and share with all those who might care and share about it; that is to create a community.

Finally, I wish to hold up the kind of invitation that has been offered to the youth representatives from the host organizations, as I understand it: youth simply being invited to speak openly and from their own perspectives and hearts as a way of insuring authentic sharing that can color and shape conversation. This approach is striking because it suggests that some of our larger institutions can choose an approach that gives up some control, but allows both for greater freedom and for what we might call openheartedness.

To gesture toward wellbeing, to invite and listen with openheartedness are but practices, never ideal, always a work in progress, and not very measurable. As a student of religion and a former interfaith organizer both on a grassroots level in New York and on an international scale, I would have reflected upon this project differently. As a Dean in the Office of Religious Life at Princeton University, I am a chaplain, and from this identity very specifically, in a secular institution that is full of religiously diverse students who care, my central task is to listen with an open heart, to ask questions that might be new to them, to test out and experiment, to foster ideas and attitudes that we gage to be healthy, and to help them create programs in response to their heartfelt wish to deepen friendships and help the world in a small but meaningful way.

How to live *for* others, but also how to live *with* others? These questions are not the same, very often only one of the pair is being asked and answered, and yet we cannot live without both of them. How can we live with and for others, and how to do so *within just institutions*? This is a definition of social ethics provided by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur and often serves as a kind of open, not rhetorical, question for students and myself, because students are eager to help and to fix, and like the rest of us they can forget that living with others is required for, a good social ethic, a spiritual community or let us call it wellbeing.

In this way a chaplain like me works within the university and alongside those who professionalize and educate our students to help develop discernment and vocation. This leads to civic engagement and educational based programs, the center of which for me in recent years has revolved around the refugee crises. In particular we have worked on learning about and educating others around the role religion plays in the lives of refugees as they resettle in the United States- something that secular scholars and institutions that work with refugees could recognize, and study, and attend to more robustly. Religion serves as a refuge for a vast majority of religiously diverse refugees here in the United States, and they resettle in locations that are religiously diverse in remarkable ways as well. Our projects include trainings about the role of religion in the lives of refugees, an ongoing oral history project in which students record the religious stories of refugees, and a project that helps asylum seekers by our students locating and connecting scholars to lawyers in need of expert witnesses for their clients. The work as a chaplain then bridges several realms ordinarily understood as distinct: listening to students, attending to the religious diversity of our students, and attempting to convene different religious groups to build trust and partnership, doing so through shared issues such as the plight of refugees, but also through dialogue and friendship, and often without highlighting religion but instead by sensitively decentering that allows for a profound form of attention.

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This question of what it means to be a chaplain in a secular institution can be answered in the way I have above which is both traditional and maybe creative in terms of the programmatic focus. But being a chaplain might also mean asking: what does it means to see institutions from the perspective of chaplaincy? A chaplain's task is to encounter people as they are, and listen to them, but maybe it is also to reflect upon the nature of institutions themselves, and the nature of how they interact with one another. As a chaplain it is normal to say that the encounter between people and the development of friendship is the most priceless of social dynamics. We cannot live without friendship. Indeed, every religious tradition declares friendship as essential for spiritual growth. Can an institution be compassionate? Surely, they can be just and effective, and if so, then why not loving? Can institutions be friends with one another? What would that look like? These are questions I first heard asked by Charles Hallisey, the professor of Buddhist and Comparative Ethics at Harvard Divinity School. From an ordinary institutional perspective such questions are likely not comprehendible, or maybe just wrong headed. But if many of us who care about justice think about just institutions then for those who think about friendship and kindness, why not imagine their value for institutions? If friendship and compassion are requirements for our individual moral and spiritual lives, how could we not consider it?

All of the organizations gathered through this project are concerned with faith-based responses to the world's problems, and thus care about these questions at least implicitly. We care about the world's problems because we care and wish for and imagine that things can be better. The strategies held up earlier, and the work itself, this project, is a good way to keep the work going, at such a critical time.

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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH RELIGION AND FAITH IN THE 21ST CENTURY—A CONTINUING PROJECT TO LISTEN AND LEARN FROM VOICES OF YOUNG LEADERS AND SCHOLARS

KATHERINE MARSHALL

BACKGROUND

Young people in the 21st century are engaged in a myriad of ways on every imaginable issue, working in different locations, with an infinite variety of approaches. These involve honing new skills and employing new approaches, sometimes as part of broad coalitions but often leading the way. Young people belong at policy tables, their voices heard, their experience and views reflected in decision-making processes. This is not only because they are vital players in both present and future, but also because they bring distinctive ideas, insights, skills, and energy. The roles of young people within religious communities have similar features but quite often reflect a different set of challenges, where engagement encounters patriarchal and other attitudes that can stifle youth initiatives. Here also, the spiritual and socio-economic perspectives that young people bring can enrich dialogue and action.

This document reflects preliminary findings of work under a global partnership dedicated to amplifying the voices of young people, individuals and groups, who are inspired by their religious faith and spiritual drive. The partnership brings together diverse interreligious

and academic institutions: The Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF) and Religions for Peace in collaboration with the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC); the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA); the Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA); the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas; the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University; the Office of Religious Life, Princeton University; and the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University.

The insights presented here reflect the substantive content of an online symposium on July 28-29, 2021 (page 21). It built on a worldwide call for proposals for papers on the topic at hand, and featured presentations by young scholars and leaders, as well as leaders from the partner organizations. The central theme was *youth engagement with religion and faith*, with major sub-themes *peacebuilding, environment, and humanitarianism*. Hosted by Religions for Peace and ICYF, the youth symposium was an opportunity for a diverse group of young people to present their findings and analysis. The 23 papers prepared for the symposium focused on different geographical regions, exploring in these different settings and how religion and faith intersect with pressing global priorities. Highlights of the papers presented at the symposium are the foundation for this paper; the full, unedited papers are available at the Religions for Peace website.

An analysis (page 25) prepared by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University (deliberately intergenerational) framed the topic, highlighting the remarkable diversity of youth religious perspectives and links and their analysis and activities. This diversity also characterized the papers presented at the symposium and the participants' contributions (Annex 1 lists papers, authors and short biographical notes, and brief abstracts). Topics range from country-specific analysis (Albania, Argentina, Indonesia, Qatar, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, for example) to broader topics, all falling within the rubric of the project's focus on peace, humanitarian action, and environment. The papers reflect their authors' very different approaches to religious engagement: one, referring to religious institutions, poses the blunt question: "Why are they not being attractive enough for young people to engage with?" (Bizin) Yet others highlight in moving terms the centrality and vital importance of religious communities and spiritual matters to their approach and work. Most compelling are the many ideas put forward on promising paths ahead.

FRAMING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: ENGAGING YOUTH

Defining who counts as youth was a first challenge, marked by both varied understandings (including legal definitions) of who fits in the category and a wealth of data, albeit with some significant information gaps. For statistical purposes, the United Nations defines "youth" as between 15-24 but the age range of those designated as youth differs across the country data they rely on (many countries cut off at 24 but some consider 35 years' old

still as youth). The estimated youth share of the overall population thus varies accordingly. The essential messages, reflecting realities in the many countries explored, is the large and unprecedented size of today's youth populations and its projected growth: some 1.8 billion of the world's 7.3 billion people today, by one count, fall in the youth category. A striking statistic is that some 60% of Africa's population is under age 25. Most youth live in poorer countries, where life challenges tend to be hardest.

What is most crucial, many insist, is that youth is a crucial life turning point (one argues "the most pivotal period" – Khan). "In adolescence, many youths turn toward religion and greater civic involvement, and yet many others who turn away from religion join either gangs or hate groups or become anti-social in other ways." (Hussain) Youth spiritualty and religiosity can be articulated and engaged, stifled and thwarted, or misdirected. In this age period of intense ideological hunger, there is a shared striving for meaning and purpose, as well as a desire for relationships and connectedness. How those passions are channelled will shape the future. (Hussain)

Less precise is understanding the religious affiliations of today's youth and the trends. Common themes explored were both continuity and change: continuity in shared identities and teachings linked to religious affiliations, but change in perceived tendencies for today's youth to accept specific strictures affecting civic and political engagement less readily than in previous generations. While affiliation means different things in different places, several papers noted that a tendency often observed in North America and Europe towards less binding affiliations to specific institutions is also seen elsewhere. Several authors wrote movingly of the power of spiritual motivation. One example: "Christian youth of this generation ... seek to live a spiritual life by integrating their heavenly values with the engagements in earthly issues to advance the societies they live in." (Niramittham) The power of Muslim teachings and especially the fundamental, firm insistence on coexistence was also a common theme. Several papers highlight the dynamism of religious affiliations. Albania, which has seen dramatic changes in political attitudes towards religious affiliations, is cited as a prominent example, showing how "the glorification of one faith to the detriment of other beliefs does nothing but add to the aggravated political and social problems of the Albanian society." (Jano). A central message is echoed in several papers, that we live in a world where isolation is no longer possible.

Focus on the Challenges

The challenges facing youth, detailed in many papers, are myriad. A recurring topic is uncertainty, accentuated by the COVID-19 emergencies, but long a troubling factor, especially in preparing for employment and family formation, with unstable and uncertain job prospects a pattern in different societies. Unemployment is described as "a ticking time bomb." Challenges facing education systems are another recurring theme. The thoughtful case study of the Qatar Education City experience highlights the pivotal importance of secondary school years in shaping religious understandings as well as thoughtfully designed university level approaches to interreligious matters. (Fahmy)

Some perceived a powerful paradigm shift in both perceptions and realities of global youth engagement. Faith institutions offer endless opportunities for young people to engage and to be agents of change, building peaceful communities. A parallel theme is the great responsibility of religious institutions to generate safe and inclusive spaces for youth, to be part of the change and the process. They can foster ideas of global citizenship that mirror religious values of justice, development, and cross-cultural learning, showing how today's youth can come together to respond to the needs of the global population, raising awareness, educating themselves and taking action for sustainable development and for a better future within their religions. (Chousein/Pireau/Plummer).

Much engagement today is occurring beyond the traditional sites of civic engagement, though the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were seen by several authors as a unifying set of directives for youth, secular and religiously focused. Sharp rises in youth engagement are seen as a relatively new phenomenon, exciting in their energy, vision, and determination, but still struggling with meaningful inclusion. The dramatically increased role of social media, linking, shaping, informing and distorting, has special importance for youth who in many senses are masters of the medium.

Youth mobilization thus takes place in the context of social, political, economic, and environmental conditions, shining a spotlight on young people's roles in meeting the challenges of our time. Much engagement cited was clearly seen as positive, contrasted with a recurring preoccupation and concern with tendencies towards extremism and violence, also too often a province of youth, with its distinctive if distorted ties to certain religious teachings and/or communities.

Knowledge and understanding, including of one's religious traditions and nation's history, emerged prominently in several papers. For example, for Indonesia, the observation was that since "[T]he encounter between religion and globalization is a crucial feature of our world," working to assure a deep understanding of how the world has come to be as it is must underpin action. "In this way, this view of the Islamic world becomes the basis or foundation and guide of the Muslims' point of view in studying, understanding and seeing everything." The authors (Muttaqien/Muttaqien) argue that many factors, epistemology and metaphysics included, shape life appreciations, down to descriptions and interpretations of facts. Everything becomes an "identity that is in line" with the worldview or view of the Islamic world. "Knowing history is absolutely necessary to design a bright future!" Another example cited is the youth initiated organization, Baraza, with a purposeful focus on training aimed at building tolerance (thus addressing intolerance) and "peaceful thinking". (Rivat)

Some argued that while religion should have strong influence in the lives of young people, that special role is not always clear. Many religious institutions still have a gap in their perception of young people, in their response to their problems, in their (in)flexibility to changing youth cultural dynamics, in their youth empowerment approaches, and in their approach to peacebuilding and environmental management. These gaps have challenged

youth bonds with religion and "risk creating youth whose world views take no notice of rich-religious values, teachings, and practices." (Odhiambo) Religious institutions, it is argued, must undergo a revolution in approaches to youth to be able to inspire and rebuild new trust with youth actors. The problem is perceived to be linked to rigidities, including presumptions that the central role is to make young people disciples and to uphold youth morality.

Yet the role of religion in inculcating moral behaviour: honesty, integrity, respect for truth, tolerance for other people's feelings, sexual mores, and responsible citizenship is also described as an essential ingredient for character development. "These qualities cannot be enforced by the force of arms." "The approach that [religious leaders] should adopt must put youth at the centre of the affairs." (Odhiambo). A pessimistic view argued that youth engagement processes with religious or spiritual communities "will continue declining (at least, with the most traditional groups) if these do not change their way of mediating their own core of religious and ethical values, affirming their own meanings of life and death, negating what is inhuman in the culture of the others, and building new eminent syntheses - structurally embodied at the ethical political level of every society - in plural unity." (Bizin) Yet if values can be mediated this way, they will promote youth activism within their lines. The goal is a spiritual path that is ethical, wise and disciplined (Siddiqi). One author argues: "It is crystal clear to us that Islam punctuates youth engagement with religion and faith for building peace over the world." (Ullah)

A continuing and central concern is to find ways in which "we as youth align to a unification of direction and purpose?" (Abhulimen).

PEACEBUILDING

The most common preoccupation of the papers' authors was peace, their understandings of what peace entails and how it can be built articulated in strikingly different ways. For some, the processes of peacebuilding involve creating the structures of opportunity for better, more just lives. Vivid analyses are presented especially by young people who have experienced conflict first hand. Several authors focused sharply on the challenges of radicalization and deradicalization (Andrian, for example). One author focused on the injustice and harm caused by hate speech, seen as targeting primarily Muslims. (Siddiqi) Education that has explicit efforts to build the foundations for peace is seen as a central goal focus of youth engagement. Interfaith peacebuilding efforts also were a shared focus

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of many papers, seen as having contributed to resolving or avoiding disputes, as well as improving the conditions of millions caught up in civil strife.

Many young people, it is argued, "have a clear vision of what peace could look like in their countries and communities, and have the drive to work towards the realization of these goals." They have direct knowledge of present trends and the consequences of conflict on their societies. (Hussain) However, clear-eyed observations about limitations to the successes, impact, or consistency of peacebuilding endeavours are also needed. Voices that delve into such contrasting perceptions are too often drowned out by the "raucousness of strife," cannot gain political traction, and are not a determining factor as such crises play out. (Hussain)

"No one is born a violent extremist: they are made and fuelled." Disarming the process of radicalization must begin with human rights and the rule of law, with dialogue across all boundary lines, by empowering all young women and men, and by starting as early as possible on the benches of schools.

Several papers highlight the importance of understanding the complexities of conflicts and especially their religious dimensions, as a foundation for peacebuilding work. In Kenya, for example, religious institutions are of great importance across aspects of life, given the wide social influence and respect commanded by religious leaders. Kenya, however, "has seen conflict masked with religion or religion used as a proxy for social and political battles." (Odhiambom) Religious difference is sometimes blamed on these conflicts.

Values-based conflicts tend to be framed as mutually exclusive and polarized, and opposing parties believe there is no common ground on which to resolve conflict. Religious actors and faith communities have, nonetheless, intervened, building on the components of peace that are found within religious traditions.

Two major factors and mandates for religions engagement were advanced as central concerns of much youth engagement with world peace. The first is the need to find the commonalities and workable solutions among faiths and their understanding of the factors that unite them. This is achievable only if there is respect for humanity that exists among people belonging to various faiths. The second factor was expressed as the goal of bringing happiness among humans through viable consensus of basic spiritual values that "leaves an impact on every human heart and enhances their gratitude towards acceptance." Interfaith engagement again emerges as an important factor if it helps to find "the common denominator of all world religions, which is a humanitarian ideal." (Siddiqi)

Interfaith work, therefore, is a central path that several authors see to peacebuilding. But all these interfaith efforts, from Africa to the Middle East to East Asia, do so much good at the micro level, yet, some conclude, are rarely able to truly change the short term destiny of countries caught up in civil war or regional strife. Despite these limitations, it is often

the very existence of interfaith groups that inspires or encourages others to move in the direction of peace, mutual cooperation and reconciliation.

The challenge of understanding the temptations of radicalization and related violence is a central concern and several authors offer specific diagnoses of causes as well as ideas on solutions. Factors that push youth to join violent extremist groups include poverty, unemployment, financial inducements from violent extremism groups, lack of education, inequality, climate change, illiteracy, lack of opportunities, misuse of religion and religious ideology, lack of social and political justice, bad governance, wrong interpretation of the Quran, forced recruitment, and the lack of funds to bribe government officials to get employment. Online radicalization is significant, particularly where groups target specific countries (Indonesia is cited as an example), focusing on schools and in person contacts. Prisons and returning foreign fighters also promote radicalization and recruitment. Violent extremist groups make efficient use of local incidents and create their own interpretations about them that support ideologies and goals. Interpretations are spread, especially through social media, thus multiplying the consequences and effects of individual incidents locally, especially if the matter is not reacted to quickly and efficiently.

Religious factors in radicalization challenges are explored with some care, appreciating differences among different social groups and the national settings. Lack of meaningful religious orientation is an important factor. In several instances, Mozambique, for example (Macondzo), a clear factor is the perception of injustice and humiliation by the state. This plays on those at an age where they feel the need for a stable identity and want the opportunity to acquire a material reward. Young people dissatisfied with their position in their social structure and lack of economic integration, low levels of schooling, and hostile relations with certain ethnic groups considered dominant, find expression of feelings of exclusion. When the promise of payment in monetary forms, integration in the job market, scholarships, temptations arise, temptations are enhanced. The challenges for tempted youth may take the form of visions of establishing a new social order, especially relevant in view of the all too common conditions of vulnerability.

Several authors suggest responses to the temptations to radicalization and violence. "It is not enough to counter violent extremism...we need to prevent it." This calls for forms of "soft power," to prevent a threat driven by distorted interpretations of culture, hatred, and ignorance. "No one is born a violent extremist: they are made and fuelled." Disarming the process of radicalization must begin with human rights and the rule of law, with dialogue across all boundary lines, by empowering all young women and men, and by starting as early as possible on the benches of schools. Individuals and groups become radicalized and operate locally and are part of local social networks and communities. (Andrian)

A first and common suggestion is to focus on youth empowerment, including life skills and entrepreneurship. Improved communications between government and youth is vital, but so is solid training and better quality education. Specific job training and employment can be helpful. Focusing on those who are displaced, whether in their own country of elsewhere, has capital importance. Several promising programs are outlined, some

engaging Religions for Peace. UNSECO programs, for example, work with young people in delivering education programs that build young people's resilience to violent extremism messaging and foster a positive sense of identity and belonging. (Khalil) Effective local prevention of violent radicalization and extremism calls for cooperation between different authorities and with non governmental organizations, including young people, women, and religious communities in the operations, sustaining a knowledge based overview, training different actors, introducing broad preventive measures as well as effective, well timed interventions. Individuals who have been or are in danger of being radicalized must be referred to appropriate services. Starting early to inculcate openness and curiosity has particular importance. One author observes: "If we educate the earliest generations on peace, we have more opportunities for dialogue to be a "way of life" and not just a future goal." (Khalil)

> *Non-confrontational approaches can build 'youth-capital' so that messages of peace and human rights can be mainstreamed in all issues.*

On example from India sees a key mission of peace workers as proactive and strategic work with youth to protect them from dangerous messages "which could poison their minds." "We need to counter harmful messages with positive ones which appeal to them, making youth question their own myths and stereotypes." (Rishad) Rights based, action-oriented workshops for youth on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) are seen as helping to build capacities of young people so that they mainstream peace work in issues relevant to their context. Non-confrontational approaches can build 'youth-capital' so that messages of peace and human rights can be mainstreamed in all issues.

The perceptions and realities of Islamophobia emerge as a large and largely shared concern. One paper describes "a massive surge of hatred against Islam and its adherents in recent past." "Islamophobia has not only been on the rise in the Americas, Australia, Europe, Asia, and Africa; it has reached an intractable point and is growing strongly in these continents." (Muttaquien/Muttaquien) Measures to address this broad challenge are highlighted in several papers as having vital importance.

Various commentators have grown sceptical about the role and scope of religious communities in peacebuilding. Young people perceive that most destructive conflicts have been fuelled by people who profess one faith or the other, but often conclude that religious institutions have simply failed to uphold their prophetic role. "We have to acknowledge that the same religion. That should provide peace ambassadors, has been at the helm of affairs in fuelling violence," (Odhiambom) through exclusionist attitudes that lead to lack of respect for other faiths and traditions, stifling imagination, and limiting people's cultural capacity to respectfully encounter and transcend identity and faith-based prejudice and conflict.

Many positive peacebuilding ideas are articulated with differing degrees of elaboration. Prevention is an important focus, as is the importance of early warning systems "to

extinguish fires before they start." (Odhiambom). Healing and reconciliation strategies led often by "wounded healers," using religious teachings as a core idea, as are youth-led efforts focused on countering hate speech and Islamophobia. Digital courses and other uses of media have numerous practical examples. "Youth ambassadors can be a bridge between young people, society, and digital technologies," (Siddiqi) creating awareness about the evils of hate speech and fake content on digital media. Ways to enhance effectiveness often benefit from experience in practice. The deconstruction of fake news, some argue, may be more important than any other activity.

Religious leaders and scholars are urged to play more visible and articulated roles. "They should preach peace, tolerance and love for all religions, instead of inciting bigotry, hate, and extremism in their temples and worship places." (Siddiqi) Muslims scholars and leaders "need to study about Islam more;" in many Muslim countries, "the practice of Islam is contrary to the teachings of Holy Quran and traditions of noble Prophet Muhammad." Youth perceptions see too often that some religious leaders do not reflect the values of coexistence and tolerance and "justify war with a blind eye to humanity and love, rather clinging to ideology and identity, through shared beliefs and teachings tamed to mentally enslave actors." (Jude) In contrast, forums for peace-building advocacy that aim at transformation necessitate "perpetual educating and dialogue to uncover generational traumas and promote sustainable peace and development." Peace workers need to navigate the wide range of relationships "without pushing the agenda of interfaith work too hard." (Rishad) Peace workers should, it is argued, aid youth to strengthen positive systems around them so that they feel supported while engaged in interfaith work.

In designing peace programs, ownership is an important idea and challenge, crucial to the success of any initiative. Without understanding the need or importance for an intervention, young people will not want to sacrifice their time and energy. Engagement design must include the voices, thoughts, and ideas of young people so that they have an active stake in the process of engagement. Brainstorming ideas and asking team members to develop plans of action can encourage volunteers to come forward and take responsibility for tasks. Young people are often wary of adult governance and can "dismiss/rebel against those who tell them what to do," while they may want support while attempting new tasks. (Rishad) In short, peace workers need unbiased approaches while working with youth groups. Building self-esteem in young people is paramount and self-reflection along with other esteem building activities are helpful. A culture of empathy should be nurtured.

Without understanding the need or importance for an intervention, young people will not want to sacrifice their time and energy. Engagement design must include the voices, thoughts, and ideas of young people so that they have an active stake in the process of engagement.

One youth vision for peace and peacebuilding (Khalil) highlights that absence of direct violence doesn't mean that we live in peace; we understand that peace is much more than that. We nurture the notion of positive peace, which is not a destination, but a never-ending process, and work on peacebuilding never stops. Positive peace is filled with content such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict. Positive peace means the absence of violence in all forms (direct, structural, and cultural one) and the unfolding of conflict in a constructive way. To make and build peace like this, involvement and interaction of various actors is essential: community leaders, governments, religious leaders, academics, teachers, businesses, civil society actors, women, and youth… and the list can go indefinitely. (Frljak)

"Faith is necessary to bring the spiritual, empathy driven approach, an approach that helps people to put themselves into the shoes of the others, feel their pain, joy, happiness, but act from their own position." (Frljak) And why is youth important? Young generations are an essential part of the process. It is they who will continue this never-ending process, those who will support the new generations who will come after them. Young people, some stress, should not be seen as a tabula rasa that needs simply to be filled with previous experiences and existing knowledge. Young people are independent thinkers, who need support to grow and develop their own ways of acting. Young people bring new, fresh, and creative ideas that need to be heard, harnessed, and taken seriously. "Yes, we need empowerment, but once empowered, young people are equal and worthy partners. And they have proven that."

ADDRESSING THE CRISES FACING THE ENVIRONMENT

The looming environment crises represent an area of sharp focus for youth engagement. Among the papers, many touch on environmental issues in the broad context of social justice and spiritual motivations, in other words as integrally embedded in broad youth activism and approaches. A few highlight a specific ecological focus of youth movements, linking them to religious teachings and inspiration as an essential element: As one author argues, "Proper care of the earth is not possible without ecological morality." (Sadique PK). Another paints a vivid picture of contrasting attitudes, one positive, describing young people playing active roles in protecting and improving the environment, changing lifestyles, making homes, schools, and youth organizations more environmentally friendly, recycling different materials and preserving resources such as water and electricity, while others "choose to spend their days doing drugs and playing video games," their nights partying and living it up, sitting at home in front of their televisions playing games all day instead of bettering themselves or going to work. The latter group "have no vision and if they do have dreams they do not have the drive to make any attempt at achieving them." (Hussain) Awakening and mobilizing, building on those who are leading efforts, is the central challenge.

A tone of pessimism about attitudes towards environmental protection (even among young people) is evident in several analyses. It is notable in an account of continuing pollution and neglect of basic environmental stewardship in a poor area of Nairobi, Kenya where engagement on addressing pollution is visibly absent. Yet environmental awareness and protection of natural resource and sustainable use of resources, the authors (Athman/Mohamud) argue, are an integral part of Islamic beliefs. Mosques offer ample opportunities to practice and teach environmental awareness with spaces for youth to engage with religious leaders and learn valuable teachings from scriptures. Social media also offers innumerable opportunities to motivate and raise funds.

A striking feature of several authors is the practical bent of analysis and action. A prominent and illustrative case is the Solidarity Youth Movement, a South Indian Muslim youth organization working in Kerala. It absorbs the emancipatory aspect of religion and radical forms of ecopolitics that draw on that region's history, seen as a Muslim liberation theology that has green politics as its focus. This new Muslim green politics has emerged in the context of citizenship politics that evolve around ethical considerations in a dynamic society. The overall environment supports this youth involvement, as the state seeks participation from all kinds of groups to enlarge its domain of governance. In the case of Muslims, "the state's efforts after the Sachar Committee report to include more and more Muslim groups is unprecedented." Efforts are not flawless, but the art of governance gives a new understanding to the state–society relationship and notion of citizenship. Solidarity as an idea "recognizes the search for social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and domination," charting a decolonial future and in essence rediscovering and trying to put into praxis a theology of Islamic liberation. "Solidarity sees their activities as expression of a political spirituality." (Sadique PK)

Most authors admire the altruistic, committed action of young people but at least one points to a darker side. The motivation for engagement, one commented, is primarily about gain: a 'What can religion do for me?' approach. (Athman/Mohamud) The reality is that many grassroots informal civil society groups are driven by youth in part because so many are jobless, often left with nothing but to keep themselves busy and open to doing anything that can replace their aggression and disappointment, including charity work or community service. While they engage in advocating for environmental conservation, i.e., collecting plastic waste, or cleaning storm water drainage, "they often lack the motivation and capacity to continue such work." Only a few fully commit to the cause while majority become fully absorbed in the search for opportunities and better livelihoods. Muslim youths, this author argues, have taken a back seat in solving some of the environmental issues in the society. An especially discouraged view comes from Kenya, where disarticulation of youth from traditional religious teachings is seen to foster attitudes of disinterest that are reflected in neglect of core principles of cleanliness and care for the environment.

HUMANITARIAN ACTION

An underlying theme, expressed at times in hope but also as a perhaps distant aspiration, is the humanitarian impulse to help others. The spiritual roots of these motivations are a common, shared expression in several papers. As one expressed it: "Christians should bring heaven into realization on this earth by engaging in humanitarian works, creation care, and social issues, further acknowledging them as spiritual activities." (Niramittham).

A prominent example is the account of action to support Rohingya communities forced to leave Myanmar and living now in various ASEAN countries. (Hairi) Youth are actively engaged in a wide range of humanitarian programs through civil movements and formal associations that seek to help the Rohingya refugees. Apart from very local actions, some approaches involve collaborations at national and global levels.

Even if many young people may feel less obligated to practice religion, young people do perceive an obligation to tackle intersectional problems like injustice.

The discussions of humanitarianism gave rise to much reflection on the significance of both lived realities of contemporary life and understandings of the essence of both religion and spirituality. Religion does matter to many if not most young people, but the way concepts and motivations are described matter in significant ways. (Khalil) Religion and spirituality can be two words that aspire to the same things, in essence, "things like goodness, connection, community, awareness, morality, etc., but the problem that youth seem to have with 'religion' is in rigidity and authority that the word 'religion' arouses in young people's mind which can seem to go against their values." (Chousein/Pireau/Plummer) Young people, it is argued, do not seem to feel obliged to practice religion but may pick and choose practices from different religions that help them to live out their 'authenticity,' their personal needs, desires and capabilities. Authenticity is a key tenet to widely known definitions of spirituality. Religion and spirituality intersect but whereas religion is understood to be practiced within formal structures, spirituality can represent a more experiential dynamics of personal meaning and transcendence.

This complex semantic landscape is reflected in the ways in which youth, individually and in their different communities, view their obligations to others both very locally and at a global level. Even if many young people may feel less obligated to practice religion, young people do perceive an obligation to tackle intersectional problems like injustice, which is in many if complex ways informed by their religious heritage. Many identify their personal experience and self-expression as spiritual, but with religion providing an indispensable foundation to this experience.

LOOKING TO THE NEXT STEPS

So it is beyond dispute that the youth engagement with religion and faith can help to build peace against all injustice over the world.

Yet

The materialistic society is bound by the shackles of oppression and defeat in all aspects of life. They have lost the courage to find their way out of the darkness of dictatorial control. Young people are running after a deceptive mirage which will bind them in the chains of oppression day after day and give them a life of extreme humiliation and great betrayal. No one can get rid of this great oppression except by following the guidance of Muhammad, peace be upon him, in regard to youth engagement with religion. (Ullah)

Religious beliefs and the inspiration and support of religious communities gives to many young people a sense of purpose and identity, the strength "to persevere [through] whatever challenges they are facing in the faith that God will still open doors for them and improve their lives." (Athman/Mohamud) This remains an ideal for many authors who contributed to the youth engagement project. In contrast, however, a number expressed concerns that religious institutions may be losing their relevance in influencing young people's behaviour (Odhiambo). In some cases, young people are finding better coalitions to work with, both a result and a stimulus to changing relationships and influence on young people's world views and perceptions. And still others in essence urge a turn towards more traditional religion as a remedy and focus of youth engagement. They fear that the mirages of secular society, of wealth, or of indifference will blind them, condemning them to harsh and unfulfilling lives.

Several youth authors put quite stark challenges to their religious leaders and institutions. The issues include but probably are not primarily a youth disaffection with traditional religious practices. Many other complex factors have large influence on youth lives: globalization, technology, arts, football, wealth, fame, and fashion, among many others. Youth may see this as "more fun" than what the religious institutions are offering. Religious institutions "need to be keenly aware of these changing trends in order to find a better framework/strategy in ministering to the youths." (Odhiambom) Issues affecting youth need a resolute response from religious institutions include joblessness, risks of being recruited to terrorism, and crime, or ills of dysfunctional societies. The alternative to the much-discussed youth dividend is a youth bulge, characterized by high youth unemployment and widespread protests—a recipe for political instability.

Most studies into youth religiosity and civic engagement have focused on religiosity within a single religion, or in a more spiritual sense that can be rather detached from traditional religious institutions. Questions around religious engagement are tightly linked to what must be understood as complex issues of identity, that take different forms in different countries as well as among different socio-economic groups. Two papers, for example, highlight the Muslim identity issues (positive and less so) driving youth engagement in

Bangladesh. "The majority of the youths in Bangladesh… 68.5% of the youths...intend to uphold the national identity 'Bangladeshi' whereas only 12.4% of the university going and graduated youths would like to prefer their religious identity first." (Khan) Another observes that "a devout Christian youth of this generation may seek ways to address and engage in these issues practically, positively, and peacefully; bringing hopeful *restoration*, harmonious *relationships*, and holy *rest* to the broken society through their heavenly *roles*—faith and actions." (Niramittham)

Comments about the vital roles of education are woven through much of the analysis, but so are the many challenges facing educational systems - whether formal or informal. Access for marginalized groups remains a stark issue but so does both content and quality. The need for religious education grounded in understandings of plural society, respect for religion without rigidity, yet with age appropriate considerations and openness to critical approaches, are all live issues, albeit presented differently in different settings.

> *The marginalization of religion in the intellectual space of higher education today is described as a disservice to its students, turning a blind eye to the diversity of socio-cultural realities brought forth by global interaction and interdependence.*

The marginalization of religion in the intellectual space of higher education today is described as a disservice to its students, turning a blind eye to the diversity of socio-cultural realities brought forth by global interaction and interdependence. Higher education has become an essential site where students construct and solidify their sense of self. Moves towards universalization of education, which might universalize certain behaviours and modes of thought pose interesting opportunities and challenges. In the Middle East, one paper argues, such thinking can increase what is called 'deterritorialisation,' bridging gaps between local and foreign influence over social, economic and political functioning. Increasing focus on skill and the commodification of education is a concern, as is "westernization", masked through concepts of universalization and globalization. (Fahmy) This confronts the fear of a cultural imperialism of sorts, reflected in for example English language preference, replacement or secondary importance to religious instruction, and foreign teachers unaccustomed to local values, and traditions.

A central reality that is linked to youth engagement is the ways in which social media has so rapidly changed the way young people view the world. (Athman/Mohamud) At least those from elites and much of the middle classes are no longer limited to the geographical, cultural (including religious) boundaries that once bound their understanding of faith within a specific geographical sphere. Youth with access to the Internet resonate with online platforms such as Instagram and Facebook which have no boundaries and are not morally regulated. Youth can use various social media platforms to articulate their agenda, and mainstream media has had to borrow and update their information from the

knowledge of the youth as displayed in the social media. Youth interact through social media, in their social lives, and in religious affairs, negatively and positively. Religious institutions need to recognize these changes and be willing to change their traditional approach and adapt to the changes that social media has brought to engage with the youth effectively.

A feature of some youth religiosity and civic engagement in the 21st century is new forms of engagement with interfaith organizations and movements. Interfaith collaboration can fit better with ways in which today's young people experience work, which has been shaped by processes and practices of globalization. Notions of global citizenship and global values can at times seem to rub up against more traditional/orthodox/conservative views and values found in organized religions. Young people can feel that a commitment to global or liberal values, such as justice, equality, equity, cross-cultural collaboration, is more important than "sticking rigidly to religious teachings that may go against such values." (Chousein/Pireau/Plummer) Today's biggest issues are transboundary and affect not only specific groups but are a concern for everyone. Many young people understand the world based on concepts that support this reality, including interconnectedness and interdependence which shift mindsets from looking out for oneself/one's own, to looking out for everyone as a global community.

The blurring of social, environmental, and economic injustices seems to be mirrored in how young people understand religion in the 21st century. Traditional differences between religions do not appear to present practical issues for young people, as they instead focus on the spiritual commonalities among traditions. Many initiatives thus work actively on relationship and community building, with a particular focus on dialogue and creating spaces for conversations. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is an increasingly a focus, as are stronger partnerships based on interfaith and cross-faith collaboration. Respected religious and faith leaders show leadership by acting on social and environmental issues and being role models for community members by "leading by example".

An interesting and closer to the ground example of approaches to religious literacy and understanding is the enthusiastic presentation of Peace Journey, a game developed in Indonesia. Interreligious dialogue makes learning possible through the intentional study of another culture and faith, to understand another faith/belief, as well as by reflection on the meaning of this for one's own belief. With it can come the recognition that "religious and spiritual voices of diversity are not only in society, but also within ourselves, so that we can be more tolerant, pay more respect as well as make peace movement practical and real." The game approach through Peace Journey is presented as an example, which offers to increase knowledge levels (in this case about Indonesia's religious diversity), as well as promotion for tolerance, respect, and peace. (Prihatin) Offering interreligious dialogue tools through games, it is suggested, might make interreligious dialogue of learning more widely practiced and accessible for anyone at any level.

A bold vision that emerges (for example, Abhulimen) is that peacebuilding concepts grounded in interfaith dialogue can contribute in transforming certain misconceptions about religion and faith. An underlying premise is that religious perceptions and particularly worldviews can be, indeed truly are, dynamic. Norms and ideologies often considered provocative in preceding generations are becoming fluid in thoughts and action. A great hope is that such approaches, taking "the best of religion", can break intellectual, social, political, philosophical, economic, and theological barriers and inequalities, bringing, for example, views from the margins to bridge gaps and build understanding among us.

Purposeful intergenerational approaches also offer positive avenues for the future. If we want to find a path and reach outcomes that give young people a sense of belonging to their respective religions and engage in the problems of global society from religious and human standpoints, we must give them the same room, in time and place, in the agenda that is given to adults, and understand that young people are also adults or capable of understanding like them. (Khalil)

Many activities, problems, and institutional or social commitments are not confined to youth or to older generations and assumptions that they would not understand the matter, or even worse, that they are not part of it, create unnecessary problems and obstacles. Ideas of global citizenship that mirror religious values of justice, are intergenerational and cross-cultural learning can support today's youth in the already perceptible trend towards coming together to respond to the needs of the global population. Paths that allow young people to maintain a sense of belonging to their respective religions and engage in the problems of global society from religious and human standpoints, demand for young people the same room, in time and place, in the agenda that is given to adults, understanding that young people are also adults or capable of understanding and offering distinctive insights.

With the above directions in mind, *Religions for Peace* is already taking the fruits of these papers and the discussions and wisdom to the ***Conference of the World Council of Religious Leaders on Faith and Diplomacy: Generations in Dialogue***[1] that is to take place in Lindau, Germany on 4-7 October 2021. Focusing on ***the nexus between faith and diplomacy***, this international conference seeks to **redefine** leadership, **re-envision** faith and **reconstruct** diplomacy

The partnership with the myriad institutions who provided this intellectual and practical guidance has only begun for *Religions for Peace*, which has a Standing Commission on Interreligious Education, and which takes on board the need to publicise the recommendations to governmental, intergovernmental and broader civil society partners alike.

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1 This convening of over 100 faith leaders, diplomats, and youth leaders in Lindau, and thousands virtually, will –
- **Showcase** the strategic value-added of multi-religious collaboration and multi-stakeholder efforts (through an intergenerational lens and praxis.)
- **Highlight** the multiple forms of intergenerational leadership and multi-religious collaborative efforts which create the innovative synergies we need to build back better.
- **Provide** a unique networking and learning platform for multiple generations, different faiths, and diverse agents of peace (from the diplomatic corps, civil society, international development and media.)

Agenda

Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith in the 21st Century

28-29 July 2021

8 am – 11 am EST

Join Zoom Meeting

https://icyforum.zoom.us/j/85004090389?pwd=NlJyZElFTlNjUmhGSEZ5TTRvUTVoZz09

Meeting ID: 850 0409 0389

Passcode: 34534

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Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith in the 21st Century

28-29 July 2021

<u>8 am – 11 am EST</u>

Day 1: Wednesday, 28 July 2021

Master of Ceremony
- Ms. Fatma Nur Şencan, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum
- Mr. Christian Kazadi Kalonga Lupemba, Chairperson, Democratic Republic of Congo Interfaith Youth Network

Opening Session I: Introduction and Welcome – 8:00 am EST [13 minutes]

- Moment of Silence
- Welcoming Remarks
    - **Prof. Azza Karam**, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* [6 minutes]
    - **H.E. Mr. Taha Ayhan**, President, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum [6 minutes]

Keynote Remarks – 8:13 am EST [14 minutes]

- Professor Dr. Priyankar Upadhyaya, UNESCO Chair Professor, Banaras Hindu University and Global Fellow, Peace Research Institute [7 minutes]
- Dr. Katherine Marshall, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University [7 minutes]

Musical Piece – 8:27 am EST [3 minutes]

- Video recording of musical piece or poetic expression, performed by religious/spiritually motivated youth

Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith – 8:30 am EST [10 Minutes]

Moderator: Dr. Fadila Grine, Senior Advisor, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum

- Ms. Tazeen Qureshi, Researcher, Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries [5 minutes]

Peacebuilding I – 8:40 am EST [40 Minutes]

Moderator: Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol Mahidol University and Secretary General, Religions for Peace Thailand

- Ms. Nahla Fahmy, Researcher at Doha International Center for Religious Dialogue [5 minutes]
- Abhulimen Jude, USA [5 minutes]
- Andrian Manda, Indonesia [5 minutes]
- Rishad Shameer, India [5 minutes]

- Ridwan Ullah, Bangladesh [5 minutes]

Question and Answer [15 min]

Short Video Session – 9:20 am EST [5 Minutes]
Religions for Peace Youth Media Team Video

Environment I – 9:25 am EST [40 Minutes]
Moderator: Mr. Irfanullah Faruqi, Assistant Professor, South Asian University
- Dr Niramittham Kirt, Thailand [5 minutes]
- Molla Chousein Eda, UK [5 minutes]
- Arshad Athman, Kenya [5 minutes]
- Muhammad Nishat Hussain, Pakistan [5 minutes]
- Luciano Ezequiel Bizin, Argentina [5 minutes]

Question and Answer [15 min]

Humanitarianism I - 10:05 am EST [40 min]
Moderator: Dr. Ahmet Koroglu, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum
- Dr. Evren Tok. Professor, Hamada ben Khalifa University [5 minutes]
- Martin Dolua Monteiro Macondzo, Mozambique [5 minutes]
- Binti Hairi Nur Atika, Malaysia [5 minutes]
- Sheldiana Jano, Albania [5 minutes]
- Sakif Al Ehsan Khan, Bangladesh [5 minutes]

Question and Answer [15 minutes]

Concluding Remarks – 10:45 am EST [5 minutes]
- Concluding Remarks [5 minutes]
  - Merylene Chitharai, Youth Member, *Religions for Peace*, South Africa

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DAY 2: Thursday, 29 July 2021

Master of Ceremony
- Mr. Christian Kazadi Kalonga Lupemba, Chairperson, Democratic Republic of Congo Interfaith Youth Network
- Ms. Fatma Nur Şencan, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum

Opening Session II: Introduction and Welcome – 8:00 am EST [6 minutes]
- Welcome and Moment of Silence
- Recapping of Day One, Jimmy Obuya, *Religions for Peace* [5 minutes]

Keynote Remarks - 8:06 am EST [21 minutes]

- Prof. Koutoub Moustapha Sano, Secretary General, Fiqh Academy [7 minutes]
- Dr. Pritpal Kaur Ahluwalia, Education Director, Sikh Coalition and Co-President, *Religions for Peace* [7 minutes]
- Dr. Mustafa Ceric, Raisu-L-Ulama Emeritus, Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Honorary President, *Religions for Peace* [7 minutes]

Peacebuilding II - 8:30 am EST [40 minutes]
Moderator: Mr. Yunus Colak, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum
- Dr. Lilian Sison, Director of the Office of International Relations and Programs, Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas and Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* Philippines [5 minutes]
- Ms. Emina Frljak, Educational Programs Coordinator, Youth for Peace and International Youth Committee Member, *Religions for Peace* [5 minutes]
- Anum Hira, Pakistan [5 minutes]
- Harald Bergman, Germany [5 minutes]
- John Kennedy Odhiambo, Kenya [5 minutes]

Question and Answer [15 minutes]

Short Creative Piece – 9:10 am EST [5 Minutes]
Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum

Peace Building III – 9.15 am [40 minutes]
Moderator: Mrs. Sumeyye Samiha Buyuk, Expert, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum
- Muttaqien Ghazi Abdula [5 minutes]
- Melody Amal Khalil Kabalan, Argentina [5 minutes]
- Dr Sadique Pk, India [5 minutes]
- Prihatin Muhammat Sabar [5 minutes]
- Riaz Ravat, UK [5 minutes]

Question and Answer [15 minutes]

Concluding Remarks – 9.55 am EST [10 minutes]
- **H.E. Mr. Taha Ayhan**, President, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum [5 minutes]
- **Prof. Azza Karam**, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* [5 minutes]

WHY YOUTH MUST BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF FAITH ENGAGEMENT: LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

KATHERINE MARSHALL AND RUTH GOPIN

Behind the many calls to engage youth in more meaningful and systemic ways lies the reality that traditional mechanisms and institutions, religious among them, too often fail to relate proactively and productively to young people. Calls to involve youth in understanding trends and challenges, and in reform efforts involving faith communities, also reflect wide acknowledgement that young people play vital roles across countless topics. Contemporary efforts to redress the gaps and engage youth in purposeful ways draw on myriad reasons and take many routes. This article draws on examples from different world regions, and especially lessons centered on the COVID-19 pandemic experience, to explore both the positive merits of youth engagement and reasons why performance often falls short of rhetoric. The article explores ideas that suggest potential and promising approaches to widening engagement. The authors come from different generations (one an elder, the other a millennial), but they share many common challenges and beliefs and a firm commitment to substantive change.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: IMPORTANCE AND OBSTACLES

"Youth" are defined in different ways in different nations, communities, and even families, but with more than half of the world's population under age 30 young people obviously represent a large and important segment of the world's population.[1] The share and numbers

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1   https://www.usaid.gov/youthimpact

of young people vary by region and over time, with historically high numbers in certain world regions. Of stark importance is the fact that some 90% of the world's youth population lives in poorer countries. Africa is noteworthy as the youngest continent: almost 60% of Africa's population is under age 25.[2]

How Is the World's Youth Population Changing?

Youth population, ages 15-24

■ East Asia & Pacific ■ Europe & Central Asia ■ Latin America & Caribbean ■ Middle East & North Africa ■ North America ■ South Asia ■ Sub-Saharan Africa
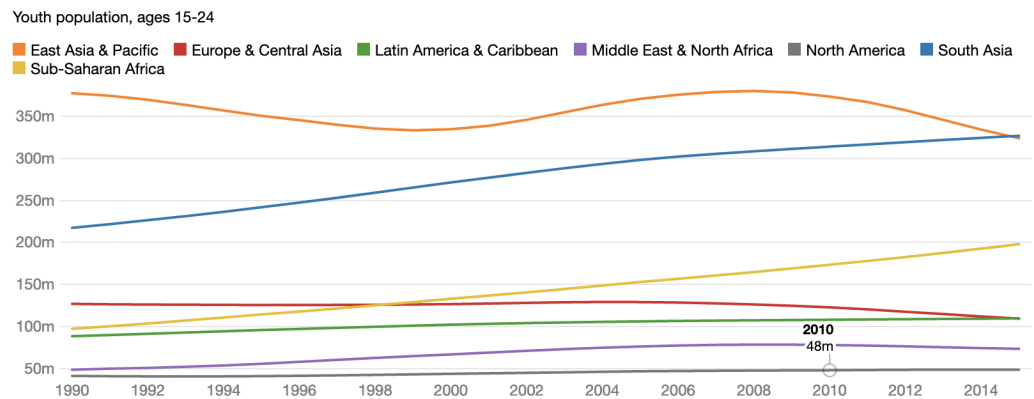

Image: World Bank Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2017

Why is youth engagement an issue in so many places—why so difficult to achieve in meaningful ways? While specific cultural habits and attitudes play significant parts in some areas, across cultures common arguments are advanced as explanations for less than robust youth roles in decision-making. Noteworthy are assumptions that youth are immature and lack experience. These arguments give rise to expectations that young people must "wait their turn" and commonly relegate youth to marginal roles in decision-making.

A central challenge is to develop meaningful mechanisms to assure youth engagement in the diverse aspects of building policy and programming—analysis, setting priorities for planning, planning, debate about options and priorities, decision-making, implementation, and review and monitoring. Youth also can and should be an active part of accountability mechanisms.

Obvious arguments for youth inclusion include the potentially valuable insights that young people can bring as well as their roles in implementation. Three examples are illustrative: experience in education from all vantage points, entry into changing job markets, and direct involvement in recruitment and often leadership of political protests, extremist movements,

2   See an article by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation for some facts and analysis of the implications: https://mo.ibrahim.
     foundation/news/2019/africas-first-challenge-youth-bulge-stuck-waithood

and violent reactions. Many often-stereotyped understandings of characteristics of young people, especially those in the 16-30 age group, ring true and help demonstrate the value of active youth participation: energetic, open to new ideas, at home with new technologies, and better educated than previous generations, for example. Young people sometimes also have more time and motivation to volunteer or become involved in activism, especially among more affluent groups. Above all, young people have a stake in decisions made, and a shared desire and right to be part of decision-making processes. Finally, they are already making their voices heard: when the common assertion is advanced that youth are the future, the response is often: "no, we are the present."

Assuring a plausible sense of who can represent such a large and diverse community is far from easy. To ensure that robust youth perspectives are represented, different identities within the youth demographic need to be considered in meaningful ways. The distinctly different challenges and opportunities facing girls vis-à-vis boys is a prominent example but sub-groups by income levels, religious affiliation, experience of trauma, ethnicity, geography, etc. also demand careful reflection and approach. In certain contexts, often in poorer or more traditional communities, youth are married earlier, making their involvement in activities, religious or otherwise, markedly different and often less than non-married youth. Younger young people (children) also have relevant experience and ideas to contribute and thus their voices need to be heard, directly as well as indirectly. However, ways to listen to and to engage children present somewhat different challenges than teens and young adults.

Some conclusions and implications: the wide gaps between rhetoric and reality on what youth seek and what they can contribute should be a focal point. Questions of who "represents" youth need to be taken seriously. An especially important dimension is the degree to which youth from more elite social groups truly understand and "represent" those who are less included in organized settings, including interreligious bodies.[3] Which groups are considered youth in meaningful and operational ways will vary; definitions and reach thus need to be viewed with an informed understanding of context, including the complexities of multiple and overlapping identities and communities. The question of youth engagement with religion and faith reflects many of the overall challenges we have outlined, and thus can and should usefully be understood in these larger contexts. However, youth religious engagement also has unique dimensions and interactions with global events and patterns.

WHY RELIGION?

A first question in exploring why and how to engage youth in religious efforts turns on broad trends regarding the importance and priority young people give to their religious engagement. Whether and to what extent religious communities and connections are

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3   This question has arisen, for example, in an organized dialogue project in the Sahel among youth and religious leaders on sensitive issues around family and reproductive health: https://www.prb.org/resources/nothing-is-taboo/

important to young people matters in assessing how these communities relate, in turn, to youth. In 2018, the Pew Research Center reported that younger adults are less likely to identify with any religious group than are older adults in a total of 41 countries, largely in the global West and South America.[4]

The implications of data suggesting that younger generations are becoming less religious are widely researched and discussed. This reaches back well before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the recent and ongoing global emergencies may have accelerated or modified some trends. The United States is both a case in point for the 41 countries whose populations are becoming less religious and something of an outlier in a global context. The website *FiveThirtyEight* ran a piece in 2019 titled "Millennials Are Leaving Religion and Not Coming Back."[5] Reporting on a national survey from the American Enterprise Institute, the article suggested several reasons why millennials in the United States are not following the tidal pattern of Americans' relationship with religion that has long been cited in social science research: less of a connection to begin with, increasingly likely to marry someone nonreligious, and changing views linked in part to common negative views about religious communities and beliefs. 57% of the millennials who were surveyed agreed with a statement that religious people are generally less tolerant of others. Many young people are tired of actual or perceived intolerance in religious spaces and are choosing to distance themselves from it.

The American phenomena and tacit assumptions about trends and underlying reasons tell only part of the story. Another much studied trend is whether people tend to focus more on religious beliefs and practice as they grow older, thus providing an explanation for lesser involvement with religious institutions among youth. Current trends in the 41 countries noted in the Pew study may still reverse in the future, despite predictions that historical patterns of increased religious engagement with age will not be maintained among the younger generations. Of course, the data is also not fully representative - many young people, even in more "secular" countries, do relate intensely to religious beliefs and communities. Of even greater significance, perhaps, is the overall diversity of relationships and identities of today's youth, especially among those who might be considered "globalized citizens" and who tend to be part of the leadership of transnational and national faith and interfaith organizations.

The global story is also very different: in much of Asia and Africa, data and experience suggest that there are no significant differences between youth and adults in religious affiliation. For example, in two countries - Chad and Ghana - adults over 40 were less likely to affiliate with any religious group, meaning that their youth appear to be more actively religious now than earlier generations. The large concern often expressed among religious institutions about youth "leaving the fold" thus has important associated demographic trends, and ought to be examined in global as well as national and local contexts. As always, context matters.

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4   https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/
5   https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religion-and-not-coming-back/

There is also a separate but related question as to whether religious youth engagement is or ought to be viewed as distinct or different from patterns of youth engagement (or lack thereof) that challenge many other institutions. Politicians, educators, nonprofit organizations, and business all vie for the attention of young people and laud their importance and qualities. They do, however, tend to be quick to quash their criticisms. Young people, in turn, tend to be less trusting of public institutions dominated by older elites and, perhaps, of earlier generations in general. The rise of social media and its fast acceleration of information production and spread offers new ways for youth to communicate and share approaches, understandings, and belonging. The silos that social media creates, however, deepen the divides between generations. For example, many religious institutions are only recently starting to utilize apps such as Facebook, and meanwhile Gen Z has already moved on to newer platforms such as TikTok.

WHAT CAN YOUTH RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE? SOME SIGNIFICANT EXAMPLES

Religious engagement on issues that affect youth can take very different forms. It can reflect global and strategic approaches, as well as very local examples or instances inspired by specific needs or crises. It is noteworthy that the major world interreligious and ecumenical movements reflect the historic and actual awareness that deliberate, organized efforts to engage youth can overcome some of the traditional obstacles to involvement. Religions for Peace (RfP) is a noteworthy example, with its youth network and assemblies extending back to the organization's early years. The Parliament of the World's Religions, United Religious Initiative, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, the King Abdallah bin Abdulaziz Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), and the G20 Interfaith Forum all emphasize youth engagement. All of these are examples of major organizations that do an exemplary job of making youth engagement a priority, as do many local religious institutions such as churches, mosques, and temples (with many others that have room for improvement at best, and serious problems with abuse of children and youth at worst). Also of note are organizations whose primary, core mission revolves around youth engagement in a religious or interreligious context, such as the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), the Inter-religious Forum of World Scouting (IFWS) and ACWAY.

The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) also focuses, in its religion-focused work around conflict, on inclusion in peacebuilding, with a particular focus on engaging youth and women. A large and significant set of programs and broad approaches relates to extremism, especially violent extremism, where youth are often at the center, and religious ideologies and, at times, religious leaders, are involved.[6] Analysis of the attractions of

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6   See for example https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1008192 highlighting United Nations supported youth engagement programs, a 2019 UNDP report on the topic: https://www.undp.org/press-releases/young-people-are-key-preventing-violent-extremism-says-new-undp-report, and a project in Morocco, supported by UNDP and the Japanese government, that focuses both on radicalized youth and on specific programs in secondary schools https://northafricapost.com/45376-morocco-japan-undp-pool-efforts-to-fight-youths-radicalization.html.

extremism, and building positive youth models and opportunities is a global priority that this article does not address in depth.

In the context of the present COVID-19 emergencies, various initiatives give priority to engaging youth from religious communities in designing social media campaigns and other responses to the pandemic. The Big 6 youth organizations (World YMCA, World YWCA, World Organisation of the Scout Movement, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, Duke of Edinburgh International Award, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) engage over 250 million young people globally every year, including many religious youth groups, and have all been directly involved through their member associations in COVID-19 resilience and recovery efforts. Together with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Foundation, they launched a project called "Global Youth Mobilization," a fund of $5 million USD to support young people to design and lead COVID-19 recovery efforts.[7] The European Union (EU) supported Awareness with Human Action (AHA) project includes youth leadership as central to the design.[8] IFYC has mobilized young people to promote vaccination against COVID-19.[9] Another systematic effort to promote active engagement is the global multi-religious faith-in-action COVID-19 initiative launched by Religions for Peace (RfP) and UNICEF during the pandemic, with support from interfaith youth and women's networks and in collaboration with the Joint Learning Initiative of Local Faith Communities (JLI).[10] RfP's Global Interfaith Youth Network is another positive example that involves direct youth leadership in a multireligious, global context.[11] This builds on RfP's long history of deliberate work to involve youth.

Much youth engagement happens on a local level and tends to be poorly documented and analyzed. Generally, youth groups, camps, and other activities are organized by local religious institutions with the aim of attracting young people to become more involved in the local religious community and, often, to promote harmonious relationships, especially in situations where there are tensions. Often the best results are achieved when young people themselves take on leadership roles and design programming that fills a need that is particular to their community and/or advances causes they are passionate about. Moreover, programming that communicates with youth on their own terms and through their preferred mediums can be beneficial, though intergenerational approaches and compromises also have their merits.

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7   https://globalyouthmobilization.org/about/ ; https://www.ymca.int/big-6-policy-2020/
8   https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/our-work/peace-support/aha/
9   https://ifyc.org/faith-and-public-health
10   https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/launch-global-multi-religious-faith-action-covid-19-initiative
11   https://www.rfp.org/where-we-work/interfaith-youth-network/

COVID-19 CHALLENGES AND INSPIRATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global crisis that shines a sharp light, from many different angles, on underlying social tensions and challenges. The involvement of youth and their religious engagement is a complex and important part of both impact and response.

The COVID-19 emergencies have exacerbated many crises that have a direct and indirect impact on children and young people around the world. Health is a central issue. In addition to being at risk, albeit lower risk, for infection with COVID-19, an estimated 23 million children missed out on basic childhood vaccines in 2020 (the highest number since 2009), putting them at risk of contracting other deadly diseases.[12] Children are among the up to 811 million people who were undernourished in 2020, with hunger rising dramatically during the pandemic in both absolute and proportional terms.[13] While the advice at the onset of the pandemic was wash thoroughly with soap and water, many young people live in households where this was not possible because they did not have access to clean water and basic sanitary items.[14]

Education and related basic issues of child welfare and protection are profoundly important for young people, both for the present and looking to their future. Progress made in recent years on issues like access to education and reducing child marriage and abuse is threatened, with reports of increased gender-based violence and 10-13 million additional girls put at risk of child marriage given school closures, economic stress, service disruptions, pregnancy, and parental deaths due to the pandemic.[15] Up to 1.6 billion children have faced school closures during the pandemic, with many unlikely to return.[16]

One of the most urgent and tragic realities of the pandemic is the estimate (likely underestimate) that 1.5 million children have lost parents or caregivers to COVID-19.[17] This is especially challenging in intergenerational homes. In some places, children who lost parents to Ebola or AIDS are in the care of grandparents who are now falling victim to COVID-19. A combination of unequal access to vaccines (more than 75% of COVID-19 vaccine doses have been used by the world's richest countries to date), high levels of vaccine hesitancy, and deadly variants mean that many more children will be orphaned by COVID-19 over the next several years. The long-term impact of the trauma this will create for many young people and strain on already worrying patterns of increased mental health

12   https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-pandemic-leads-major-backsliding-childhood-vaccinations-new-who-unicef-data

13   https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/un-report-pandemic-year-marked-spike-world-hunger

14   https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/billions-people-will-lack-access-safe-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-2030-unless

15   https://data.unicef.org/resources/covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/ ; https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/covid-19-and-child-early-and-forced-marriage-an-agenda-for-action/ ; https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/child-marriage-unspoken-consequence-covid-19

16   https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/12/covid19-education-innovation-outcomes/

17   https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/20/health/covid-orphans-lancet/index.html; https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/20/opinion/covid-19-orphans.html ; https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/orphanehood-report.pdf

problems is still unknown, but programs aimed at preventing substance abuse, self-harm, and other negative consequences of trauma will doubtless have large consequences in the decades ahead. These topics are of central concern and engagement of many religious communities worldwide.

As world and public health leaders focus on COVID-19 vaccinations and post-pandemic recovery, children and young people are often left out of the discussion. Their distinctive needs are not considered and given the priority they deserve. A June 2021 UNESCO/UNICEF/OECD/World Bank report documented education responses to COVID-19 in 142 countries and found that one in three countries are not taking action to help students catch up on their learning post-COVID-19 school closures.[18] Young people are also deeply involved in and affected by climate disasters, racial inequalities, poverty, polarization, and the myriad of additional challenges that have been exacerbated by the global pandemic. This puts a large swath of the next generation in a terribly vulnerable situation. At the same time, it may well mean that we will see a generation that is more independent and resilient than ever before.

So how are young people dealing with these mounting challenges? How far are their responses focusing on their religious affiliations? What is the appeal of interreligious engagement? Is there a turn towards faith? Ought there to be? What would it take for young people and religious institutions to be more active and central partners in facing these challenges? Can religion be perceived by youth leaders not as part of the "old guard" that played a role in creating divisions and suffering but as positively engaged in rebuilding a better future?

There is some evidence to suggest that many people have turned to religion to cope with the stress of the pandemic[19]. This aligns with existing research about how many rely on their faith and faith communities as a coping mechanism during traumatic events such as the experience of forced displacement or after a natural disaster. Countless faith leaders, actors, and NGOs were also active during the pandemic, providing essential spiritual and humanitarian support across the globe and advocating on behalf of the most vulnerable.[20] However, few studies to date have examined whether and how young people have specifically utilized their beliefs and religious affiliations as a coping mechanism, nor whether it has motivated them to become more involved in their communities or in national/global advocacy and direct action. There is no denying that they have, however, not only participated in, but often driven, much civic engagement of the past two years, often utilizing social media and other online tools to redefine the meaning of engagement.[21] This appears

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18   https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/1-3-countries-are-not-taking-action-help-students-catch-their-learning-post-covid-19

19   https://www.pewforum.org/2021/01/27/more-americans-than-people-in-other-advanced-economies-say-covid-19-has-strengthened-religious-faith/

20   See the Berkley Center/WFDD/Joint Learning Initiative repository of information about faith responses to the COVID-19 emergencies: http://bit.ly/faith-and-COVID-19. Both authors are leaders of the project.

21   https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/3-ways-covid-19-has-changed-youth-activism/ ; https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/stories/pandemic-participation-youth-activism-online-covid-19-crisis

to accelerate trends that already existed prior to the pandemic, where so many of members of younger generations utilized the internet to form connections in ways that were unimaginable only a few years ago. Time will tell whether social bonds formed online during the pandemic will continue as the world eases social gathering restrictions. It surely seems likely that, in some form, they will.

Religious institutions and actors can enter these online social spaces, as many have during the pandemic. They can learn from young people as they do so. In turn, the intensely cyclical and frenzied nature of social media, and social interaction and activism channeled through social media that is largely driven by young people, could benefit from the stabilizing force of religion.

At the same time, religious beliefs and institutions have, even during extreme lockdowns, provided a vestige of communal gathering that is very special to many young people. The fact that so many religious institutions resisted closing their doors even in the face of COVID-19 threats and official restrictions presented many health and legal challenges, but it also demonstrates that large swaths of the population consider religion to be an essential need. Emerging anecdotal and survey data points to this holding true for young people as well.[22]

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affair's position at Georgetown University, a Jesuit institution, provides a distinctive insight into what can be viewed as a Venn diagram of three often overlapping dimensions of today's challenges: youth, religion, and responses to COVID-19.

22   https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2020/04/study-finds-youth-strong-in-faith-amid-virus-but-increasingly-lonely/ ; https://portlanddiocese.org/harvest/teens-find-strength-christ-during-covid-19

Students have been interested and engaged in work on the [Religious Responses to COVID-19](#) project, participating in several webinars, including "[Young Women of Faith and Transformative Leadership in COVID-19 Response](#)," "[Looking Through Gender Lenses at COVID-19's Impact: Religious and Ethical Perspectives](#)," and writing up summaries of others, such as "[Vaccinate Thy Neighbor: Governments Engage with Faith Groups on Global COVID-19 Rollout](#)." They have also written reflection pieces for a discussion platform, the [Berkley Forum](#), and engaged in coursework to better understand religious and ethical intersections with pandemics past and present.[23] Georgetown University has chronicled various ways that students have made a difference during the pandemic, from paying local restaurants to deliver meals to emergency departments and intensive care units of hospitals to organizing global donations of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).[24] And once vaccines became widely available in Washington D.C. in March 2021, the university formed partnerships with the D.C. government to coordinate a high-capacity vaccination site supported by dozens of student volunteers. "It takes a lot of teamwork to pull off a clinic like this, and we could not have done it without the student volunteers – they were the key ingredient in our success," said Nellie Darling, a fourth-year medical student at Georgetown herself and one of the organizers of the vaccination site.[25] This demonstrates the special drive of young people, and particularly young people of faith, and their distinctive ability to respond to global challenges.

ADDRESSING CORE REALITIES OF DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

As researchers investigate patterns of violence and extremism in a post-9/11 context, a much-discussed theory has focused on the association of "youth bulges" with increased risk for political violence and violent extremism. Large, often disproportionately large populations of male youth, highly educated and unemployed, are seen as particularly susceptible to resorting to violent methods. Trust in governments, but also corporations and religious institutions, tends to be low among youth and appears to be on the decline. A common thread among social movements that have captured the attention of young people is a desire to tear down systems built by past generations and rebuild more inclusive and sustainable social structures. Channeling this energy into constructive social impulses rather than destructive ones is a challenge for peacemakers across generations.

Racism, notably in the form of discrimination targeting people from different origins, has come under sharper focus in many places during the COVID-19 pandemic,[26] as has the amount of coverage and awareness people have about such attacks. Survey findings suggest

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23   For example, Katherine Marshall's freshman seminars in 2020 and 2021 on Pandemic responses.
24   https://www.georgetown.edu/georgetown-community-serves-advocates-creates-ways-to-help-during-pandemic/
25   https://www.georgetown.edu/news/answering-the-call-georgetown-coordinates-covid-19-high-capacity-vaccina-tion-site/
26   https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56218684; https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/re8 source-knowledge-base/adl-tracker-of-antisemitic-incidents ; https://cssh.northeastern.edu/hate-crimes-against-black-residents-more-than-doubled-in-2020/

that young people are highly concerned that racial stigma and widespread disinformation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic will persist in the long-term.[27] In the United States in June 2020, at the height of the protests for racial equity, 41% of those who said they had recently attended a protest focused on race were ages 18-29; among all U.S. adults, 19% are in this age group. In turn, those ages 50 and older were underrepresented among the protesters.[28]

Some research suggests that today's young people may be hold different approaches to social issues than earlier generations. Matt Henn, professor of social research at the U.K.'s Nottingham Trent University, argues that: "People's views on key values such as concerns over the climate emergency, support for investment in public services rather than privatization … are not necessarily going to dissipate over time. These are fundamental values that, research suggests, broadly stay with people into later life."[29]

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PACE OF CHANGE

The accelerating pace of using online tools and social media, in particular, to communicate has many repercussions – it can be a means of connection, but also of isolation; it can be a way to share information, or misinformation; it can rally people around a cause, and it can shift with dizzying swiftness from one cause to the next without a careful examination of context or nuanced discussion. Young people are more likely to use social media as their main source of news. Both opportunities and dangers are involved. One recent study found that social media accounts for 88% of misinformation related to the pandemic.[30] That young people are eager for change is a laudable quality, but dialogue about how to achieve goals should not be stifled, as it often helps to uncover deeper truths. The ability to have a productive and nuanced conversation around sensitive issues fully via social media is a skill that society as a whole does not seem to have mastered yet. It is an important growth opportunity that should not be neglected.

PATHS FORWARD

Youth engagement in the complex processes underlying transnational, global policy (the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, for example) demands both a sharp focus on distinctive issues that affect young people and systematic efforts to engage them, meaning hearing their voices and their opinions, and mobilizing their energies in the effort to translate ideals into action, at the many different levels that are involved. It also calls for more and different intergenerational exchange and mechanisms to ensure balanced, thoughtful sharing and action.

27   https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/
28   https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/24/recent-protest-attendees-are-more-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-younger-than-americans-overall/
29   https://time.com/collection/davos-2020/5764625/global-youth-movement/
30   https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/

New social dynamics are emerging and are likely to solidify as policy makers and citizen's groups (religious among them) seek to move into a recovery phase from COVID-19. There are innovative and creative new ways of communicating online, but also of connecting in-person, that have not been widely utilized up to now. A desire to establish stronger connections with elderly friends and family members was thrust into sharp focus during the pandemic. Many young people worked actively to ensure that isolated elders had access to physical and emotional support. When asked about the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, surveyed youth-led organizations from OECD countries articulated their greatest concerns about the well-being of the elderly.[31] Maintaining and building on these intergenerational relationships is likely to lead to beneficial mental health outcomes for all involved and stronger partnerships on global challenges.

A group of women, young and old, came together (virtually) in June, 2020, at the Berkley Center to think together about challenges and strategies for women of faith and women's leadership roles. The resulting discussion and associated blog series spanned a range of topics, from systemic inequality to how to deal with personal and communal grief. Our conclusion? A hopeful sense of possibilities and sense that a new ethos of intergenerational exchange and action is called for as we look to the future.

TOWARDS SPECIFICS: IDEAS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND ALERTS FOR ACTION OR POLICY TO GOVERNMENTS, INTERGOVERNMENTAL ACTORS, NGOS, AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Engaging youth: priorities and practices

- Engage actively, purposefully, openly, and creatively with adolescents and youth, seeking to understand what their needs are and how they prioritize them, and facilitate youth ownership over projects, programs, and policies;

- Make youth participation not only visible, but a community-wide expectation, practical and action focused, not cosmetic or rhetorical;

- Recruit youth who are experienced leaders and pair them with those who are younger and less experienced in efforts to solicit the advice of youth, inquiring what they believe to be useful in recruiting others;

- Be thoughtful and attentive to which youth voices are heard; avoid "elite dominance and capture" and promote age diversity to reflect the needs and concerns of different age cohorts in decision-making;

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31 https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/,

- Consider the most disadvantaged and marginalized populations (such as young women and girls, those with disabilities, those affected by violence, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, and IDPs) and make use of relevant communication channels to reach them (such as organizations working with these specific groups, peer-to-peer communications, social media, etc.)

- Never forget that youth is not a monolith and it is important to take an inclusive view.

- Facilitate intergenerational friendships and partnerships.

Priorities for immediate action, towards long-term solutions

- Priority needs to go to jobs and workable efforts to support employment initiatives;

- Identify and support services with proven track records in addressing child poverty and improving multiple outcomes, including reducing violence, boosting school enrollment, preventing early marriage and/or pregnancy, and undernutrition;

    - Support trauma and mental health initiatives;

    - Give priority to often-hidden problems of children who suffer, starting with efforts to identify and support children at risk of losing family-based care;

- Apply a youth and intergenerational lens in crisis response and recovery measures;

    - Support youth-led responses by providing the space for young people to connect, share, and collaborate during the crisis and to evaluate lessons learned. Offering small and rapid resources can also help young leaders to pilot or scale locally-led solutions;

    - Support evidence-based psychosocial and economic support to children who have lost a caregiver;

- Leverage young people's current mobilization to build readiness and resilience in societies against future shocks and disasters;

    - Utilize creative engagement strategies such as virtual consultations, hackathons, intergenerational dialogues, and youth advisory councils

- Align short-term emergency responses with investments into long-term economic, social and environmental objectives;

    - Consider long-term sustainability in decision-making, and prioritize more equitable and inclusive policy/program outcomes and societal resilience;

- Engage youth in the formulation, co-creation, and implementation of policy responses and recovery plans.

Assessment priorities

- Regularly assess projects, programs, and policies to see how youth are truly involved and engaged;

- Regularly assess projects, programs, and policies for both youth and adult "buy-in";

- Create space for reflection and honest feedback on what youth engagement can and should involve;

- Promote public governance measures that include principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation.

LIST OF PAPERS: ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Religion for Peace: Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith in the 21st Century

Author: Jude Abhulimen

Biography: Jude Oluwamuyiwa Abhulimen, is a young graduate from the Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of St Paul's Limuru, Kenya, a member of the British Project Managers from the Rayn institute London, with a masters in view in Peace and Conflict Resolution, at the National Open University Abuja, he is currently the Secretary general at Justice Development and Peace Commission, Abuja Division, he is committed to advocacy programs on Peace and Security Dynamics.

Abstract: This paper examines the religiously linked conflicts and the potential for inter-faith dialogue to spur peacebuilding. Faith and religion can be engaged to either escalate or de-escalate violence in different circumstances. Youth can play a unique role in peace-building initiatives, especially as advocates.

The Role of Young Adults in Preventing Violent Extremism in Indonesia

Author: Manda Andrian

Biography: Manda Andrian graduated from Jakarta Theological Seminary and Bossey Ecumenical Institute Switzerland in 2020. She preciously served on the core group of the Ecumenical Network of Indonesian Students and Youth (ENISY), the YMCA

Indonesian National Council, and worked at the Society for Inter Religious Dialogue (MADIA), an interfaith NGO. She also participated in various interfaith and peace programmes at local, national, and international level, including the ecumenical youth leadership training, "Building an Interfaith Community" at the WCC's Ecumenical Institute Bossey in Switzerland, a School of Peace in South Thailand, Youth for Peace in Canada, and the WCC's Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity (YATRA) in Cambodia. Her focus areas are interreligious dialogue, ecumenical, peace and conflict resolution, & cross cultural studies.

Abstract: Indonesia has a substantial youth population. While large young population offers demographic dividend, several social, political, and religious factors lead a section of the youth towards extremism, violence, and social unrest. Following a regional trend, radicalism and extremism is on the rise among Indonesian youths in recent times. This paper aims to map the root causes behind such increase in radicalization. Through a review of secondary sources such as newspaper reports, research articles, and case studies, this paper first explores certain educational institutions' roles in spreading extremism along with broader social changes. The paper then highlights several efforts made at different levels to counter radicalization and extremism in Indonesia.

Form of Worship or Burden? Re-thinking Islamic View of Youth on Environmental Conservation

Author: Arshad Said Athman and Burhanudin Mohamud

Biography: Mr. Arshad Said is a program assistant at the African Council of Religious Leaders- Religions for Peace, working with religious leaders and communities across Africa to build inclusive, peaceful, and just societies. His area of focus is peacebuilding, climate change, and child protection. He is an active volunteer and also a member of the Africa Interfaith Youth Network. He earned his BSc Degree in Architecture and Environmental Sustainability from the University of Nairobi and is currently pursuing further studies in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.

Burhanudin Mohamud is the founder and current Director of Mazingira Alliance, a community based organization that advocates for conservation in Mandera, Kenya. Mohamud is a an environmental activist, evangelist, researcher, and educator who is passionate about community development in regard to sustainable development as well as youth mentorship and empowering marginalized groups. He is also an administrator with Afrikan Youth Network on Empowerment and Transformation (AYNET).

Abstract: This study is aimed at examining to what extent Muslim youth consider environmental conservation as a form of worship and why Muslim-dominated areas remain hotspots for solid waste. The study was carried out in Eastleigh in Nairobi, and Mvita

constituency in Mombasa, Kenya, a predominantly Muslim populated area. Through document analysis and qualitative field research, the study found that areas in this study remained among the most polluted areas in Nairobi and that the Muslim youth in the area no longer considered proper waste disposal and maintenance of environmental integrity as a form of worship. Ultimately the study highlights the need to be role models in each aspect of life. Meanwhile, there is a need to expand awareness of environmental conservation within society.

Youth Engagement with Religious or Spiritual Communities in Social, Political and Economic Activism: A Matter of Historical Mediation of Values

Author: Luciano E. Bizin

Biography: Luciano Ezequiel Bizin serves as a Professor of Introduction to Philosophy, Philosophical Anthropology, General & Economic Ethics, and Catholic Theology II, III & IV and Social Doctrine of the Church, at the Universidad Católica de La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. He also works as a researcher of the UCALP's Socioeconomic Observatory. Luciano is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Religion and Theology (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) seeking to study the relationships between global multireligious platforms and multilateral organizations. He holds a Master's Degree in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, a Bachelor's Degree in Religious Education, and an Undergraduate's Degree in Sacred Sciences. Luciano is a former public servant, Director for Worship (2016-2019), at the Municipality of Quilmes.

Abstract: This paper explores the hypothesis that youth engagement with religious or spiritual communities is fading today in much of the world, despite assumptions that religious and spiritual communities are the quintessential guardians of all religious and moral values among human beings. It focuses on seven models through which communities can employ wisdom and traditional values, to highlight youth engagement processes in socio-environmental, political, and/or economic matters.

At the Intersection of Youth Religiosity and Civic Engagement: An Exploration into Interfaith Youth Activism in Contemporary Society

Author: Eda Molla Chousein, Finn Pierau, Lucy Plummer

Biography: Miss Eda Molla Chousein is an experienced Event Coordinator, and currently working as the Interfaith Youth Network Coordinator at Religions for Peace UK. She holds a Master's degree (HONS) in Events Design and Management from the University

of Westminster with a focus on the role of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sustainable Education. She has implemented national effective interfaith discussions to promote sustainability and climate change issues among youth and has participated in creating new forms of environmental diplomacy. Her interests include researching into SocialAnthropology.

Mr Finn Pierau, is Steering Committee member of Religions for Peace UK Interfaith Youth Network. He wrote his MSc on Buddhism and Sustainable Consumption and has been practicing Buddhism for around two years now. He is currently volunteering on several projects that have focus on social justice and young people in the UK. In his research, he is aspiring to better understand the intersection of religion, spirituality and sustainability.

Miss Lucy Plummer, is Steering Committee member of the Religions for Peace UK Interfaith Youth Network and currently is a masters student at the University of Sussex, UK, completing the MSc Sustainable Development course. She is a Youth Studies graduate, currently conducting research into youth participation in global climate governance. She is a Youth and Climate Activist, and an aspiring social science researcher. She has been a member of the lay-Buddhist organisation, Soka Gakkai international, for the past 10 years.

Abstract: Against the background of increasing populism and the dominance of adult-led and adult-centred framings of youth issues and activities, there has been a rise in youth-led activism and youth leadership to address global issues. This wave of youth activism has emerged in various forms; including self-organised environmental movements such as the global school strikes and pro-democracy city shut-downs such as Hong Kong's 2014 Umbrella Movement. Such acts of youth, in the context of social, political, economic and environmental conditions, have put a spotlight on young people's role in meeting the challenges of our time and have brought about a "paradigm shift in the perception of global youth development". The aim of this paper is to explore some of the motivating factors behind this increase in youth leadership on global issues and youth activism from the perspective of religion and faith as influential forces.

Influence of Secular Higher Education on Religious Identity of Emerging Adults: A Case Study in Education City – Qatar

Author: Nahla Mohamed Fahmy

Biography: Nahla Mohamed Fahmy is an aspiring academic and assistant researcher at the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID). She holds a BSc in Biotechnology from the University of Nottingham and a MA in Islamic Studies with a concentration in Comparative Religion and Interfaith Studies from Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). Her main areas of interest include: Religious Identity, Religious

Conflict Transformation and the Role of Education. She hopes to develop her research at the doctorate level in the near future.

Abstract: The paper presents a study that explored changing aspects of religious identities in secular higher education institutions: in a globalized world, how does secularization operate in varying ethnic, social, cultural, and religious contexts and institutions? It focused on Education City (EC) – Qatar and a sample group of young adults between the ages 18 and 29 attending religiously focused and secular institutions. A finding is that for Muslim religious identity, the secular universities were found to strengthen the sample's religious identity.

Religion and Peacebuilding - A Youth Perspective and Vision

Author: Emina Frljak

Biography: Emina Frljak is a Program Coordinator within Youth for Peace (Bosnia and Herzegovina). She is also a member of the International Youth Committee of Religions for Peace since August 2019. Her academic background is in educational sciences, interreligious studies and peacebuilding. Her area of work and interest is peace education, interreligious dialogue and religious literacy. Lately her interest is focused also on using social media for educational and campaigning purposes, with special emphasis on hate speech.

Abstract: A member of the International Youth Committee of Religions for Peace reflects on the intersection of religion and peace. She discusses peace with religion, focusing on living together and interfaith dialogue. The author also shares some of the youth led initiatives within the scope of IYC.

The Role and Reaction of ASEAN Youth: A Case Study of Rohingya

Author: Nur Atika Hairi

Biography: Mrs. Nur Atika Hairi is a PhD student of Sakarya University, Turkey in Political Science and an active member of Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM). She mainly writes & researches the subjects of comparative politics, international relations, and the dynamics of civil society on global issues.

Abstract: This research applies qualitative method and content analysis to examine the ASEAN Muslim youth reaction on the Rohingya crisis as well as studying the role of ASEAN Muslim youth in helping to overcome the ethnic conflict. The reactions of

ASEAN youth were analyzed in this study by recent development as they play an important role in the crisis. Countries that provide assistance to Myanmar's Rohingya refugees in terms of political, social and economy will also be reviewed in terms of its impacts on Myanmar's Rohingya refugees and respective countries. Early analysis indicated that numerous leaders of Muslim youth movement particularly NGOs across ASEAN already cooperate in multiple levels and play a significant role in this issue.

Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith in 21 Century

Author: Nishat Hussain

Biography: Muhammad Nishat Hussain is from Punjab State. He completed his bachelor's degree in 2020, and is currently pursuing a master in business administration.

Abstract: Adolescence is a period of intense ideological hunger, striving for meaning and purpose, and focus on relationships. Many turn toward religion and greater civic involvement, contrasted with others who turn away from religion to join gangs or hate groups or become anti-social in other ways. Adolescents' spiritualty and religiosity can be articulated and engaged, stifled and thwarted, or misdirected. The paper highlights underlying questions about religious and spiritual development that were the subject of a study. The paper also addresses approaches to peace in different world regions and to environmental action by youth, from an Islamic perspective.

Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith Challenges and Opportunities in Albania

Author: Sheldiana Jano

Biography: Sheldiana Jano completed her university studies at the University of Tirana, Faculty of Law and afterwards completed her studies in Professional Master for Public Administration Faculty of Economics at the University of Tirana. Ms. Jano is a lawyer and mediator accredited by the National Chamber of Advocates and the Albanian National Mediation Chamber and has completed numerous trainings in the field of jurisprudence. She served as a member of the Executive Board of the Inter Religious Council of Albania for 3 years. Her expertise in Inter Religious relations also extends to trainings, referrals and conferences held in the framework of the fight against radicalism and violent extremism in the legal framework and humanitarian aid for returned families.

Abstract: This paper focuses on Albania, analysing a series of studies by the US Department of State for Religious Freedom in Albania, European Union studies on impact and

engagement of youth in religion in Albania, research in the activities of the Inter Religious Council of Albania, and the personal experience of these activities being also part of the Women's and Executive Board in the Interreligious Council of Albania. It explores key topics of (i) Religion and impact of communism on religious freedom, (ii) Values, region and faith, (iii) Religion and education, (iv) Interreligious Council of Albania, (v) Youth in Interreligious Council of Albania.

The Culture of Encounter and Interfaith Dialogue as the Bases of Building Peace Through Youth

Author: Melody Amal Khalil

Biography: Melody Amal Khalil Kabalan is the President of Islam for Peace Argentina; Regional Body in RFP –IYC Latin America and Caribbean; Co-Founder of Diversity Network, Co-Founder of Laboratory of Religion, Ethnicity in Buenos Aires Legislature, Director of Afifa.org and Ambassador of Jobs for Lebanon Argentina. She is also the responsable of the International Relationship Department at The Halal Catering Argentina hcb.

Abstract: Throughout history we have seen how ethnic, religious and cultural groups have been integrated into spaces of peace building. But it is very recent that young people have the opportunity and tools to demonstrate how through diversity, the richness of their cultures and religious or faith traditions may be harnessed to generate peacebuilding for the world society. In this paper you will be informed about the steps that young people have contributed in the peace building effort in different sectors of the world, their advantages and challenges, focusing on Argentina and Latin America; share the appropriate tools to generate a safe place for youth members where differences enjoy their inherent diversity; and address how youth engagement with religion and faith could be taught from the peaceful traditions of each religion. If we educate the earliest generations on peace, we have more opportunities for dialogue to be a "way of life" and not just a future goal.

Generational and Religious Norms Among Youth in Bangladesh: Impacts of Governance

Author: Sakif Al Ehsan Khan

Biography: Sakif Al Ehsan Khan is a student at Dhaka University. He has facilitated a number of research projects targeted at determining the government's and other stakeholders' efficacy measures. Mr. Khan focuses on national development and youth empowerment.

Abstract: This paper focuses on qualitative research conducted to determine the youth perspective on religious norms, its impact on social behavior, and consequential effects on governance. Researches sought to learn whether religion plays a pivotal role in shaping out government policies or not and how the youth of the majority and minority group of Bangladesh think of certain policies adopted by the government when it comes to religious matters.

The Importance of Peacebuilding for Cabo Delgado Province Against Terrorism – Mozambique

Author: Martin Macondzo

Biography: Martin Macondzo is a young graduate student in International Relations at Universidade Saint Thomas of Mozambique, and had the opportunity to do training with Bank ABSA in Professional, Interpersonal, Financial and Business Skills and, training in Diplomatic practices. He also had the opportunity to work as a Political Analyst on television and as an Assistant and Consultant in Project Management and I am currently engaged in social activism. He also had recently the opportunity to participate on PYPA (Program of Young Politicians in Africa) for an intensive political training. Lastly he had been recently nominated National Chief of International Affairs Department of RENAMO Youth League.

Abstract: The 2017 Mocimboa da Praia armed attack at Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique marks a significant historical moment for the country. It brought unanimous attention to the perpetrators of the attack—their demographic and and their motivations. As a result, vulnerable youth populations came under state scrutiny. This paper argues that in order to understand the complex dynamics that led to the armed attack, a nuanced analysis of the structure of the conflict and violence in Cabo Delgado. In so doing, the paper first briefly chronicles the pre and post-attack complex sociopolitical incidents that show divisive lines and rifts that vie for legitimacy and power. The second half of the paper necessitates the use of religious intervention, combined with other social actions prevent existing terrorism in Cabo Delgado.

Understanding the Islamic Worldview on Ottoman Empire in the History of Nusantara as an Education to Promote Peace and Harmony

Author: Ghazi Abdullah Muttaqien and Husein Zainal Muttaqien

Biography: Ghazi Abdullah Muttaqien is a young Muslim researcher as well as an Activist (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and Pemuda PERSIS), Treasurer of Santri

Diplomacy Academy and Co-founder of Strategic Research Society OIC Youth Indonesia. He also awarded as Ambassador of Youth Muslim Peace in World Muslim Conference 2021 Malaysia . He also was selected as Delegate of Indonesia for Future Leader Congress 2019 Thailand in UNCC Bangkok, WYIMUN 2020 London UK, International Muslim Intellectual Forum 2020 Turkey, International Islamic Daurah Forum 2020 Egypt, and International Symposium 4th ASSIGN Tokyo Japan.

Husein Zainal Muttaqien is a Head of The Faculty of Hadith at STAIPI PERSIS GARUT. He also working as overseas lecturer in Muhammadiyah Islamic College Singapore and as a member of Dewan Hisbah PP Persis Council. He is alumni of Islamic University of Medina, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and graduate from Post- Graduate program in University of Ibnu Khaldun Bogor. Right now, he is a Ph.D Candidate of Religious Studies and Comparative Religion Program in State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

Abstract: Islam, as the largest religion in Nusantara, has a big role to shape the civilization and society. According to several historical sources, Nusantara is a former name of Indonesia derived from Javanese language *Nusa* (island) and *Antara* (other). Though Islam is not the first religion that arrived in Nusantara, the process of Islamization through the spread of an *Islamic Worldview* by the trader, Ulamas and Islamic missionaries (*muballigh*) rooted from the Middle East, India, and Turkey (Ottoman Empire) made Islam the fastest growing religion in Nusantara. An Islamic worldview is the vision of reality and truth that appears before our mind's eye revealing what existence is all about. The objective of this research is to promote Islam as a peaceful religion among youth to combat Islamophobia. Qualitative methods are used in this research paper to get a better understanding of the issues by focusing solely on the theoretical framework.

Revisiting Christian Spiritual Activities: Humanitarian, Environmental, and Social Engagements

Author: Krit Niramittham

Biography; Dr. Krit Niramittham is a Thai pianist, music educator, and independent scholar, whose research interests include music education and Christian theology. He holds Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Piano Performance from Conservatoire de Lausanne in Switzerland. He achieved a Doctoral Degree in Music Education from the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He also studied Christian theology at Singapore Bible College, TCA College, and Bangkok Bible Seminary.

Abstract; This paper explores Christian spirituality, focusing on lived faith through humanitarian works, creation care, and social issues. It seeks to encourage dialogues between

Christians and people from different faiths, advocating for the youth of this generation to live out their moral and religious values to advance their societies practically, positively, and peacefully. The paper focuses on five topics: (1) rest: the goal of life; (2) relationships: the essence of life; (3) roles: the duties of life, (4) restoration: the renewal of life, and (5) realization: the meaning of life—implications and conclusion.

Religious Institutions response to the Changing Youth Dynamics and How the Engagement Influences the Youth World View

Author: John Kennedy Odhiambo

Biography: John Kennedy O. Akoko is a graduate from Catholic University of Eastern Africa with a Masters Degree in Peace studies and international relations. He works for Shalom Center for Conflict resolution and Reconciliation (SCCRR) based in Nairobi, Kenya. He previously taught in the department of social sciences at Kibabii University for over 3 years. He is interested in issues relating to peace, security, governance and development with great passion for youth empowerment through talent building, entre-preneurship, leadership, and academic excellence.

Abstract: This paper focuses on the changing dynamics of youth roles in peacebuilding, environmental, and humanitarian activities, drawing on Kenyan experience. How do youth regard religious institutions or the world in general and how is that changing? The Catholic Church is losing many young people by the end of their college years and may be losing its relevance in influencing young people's behavior. Young people may be finding better coalitions to work with. The paper uses secondary data on youth, religion, and the researcher's experience to explore how engagement with religious institutions has positively or negatively influenced their perceptions about the world

Green Islam and Re-Imagination of Khalifa: Eco Politics and Muslim Youth Movements in South India

Author: Sadique PK

Biography: Dr Sadique PK completed his PhD and M.Phil. From English and Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad. At present, he is working as an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Development Education and Communication, NISWASS Bhubaneswar His academic interests include Development Studies, Citizenship Studies, Social Movement Studies and Critical Theory.

Abstract: This paper looks at the ways in which Muslim youth movements after the 1990s have responded to the ecological and democracy crises in India by invoking their own faith resources as a claim to belonging and social performance. The paper therefore tries to understand the attempt by the South Indian Muslim youth organization, Solidarity Youth Movement, to engage in environmental discourse by radically reinterpreting their ideological standpoint in response to changing social processes.

Peace Journey: Interreligious Dialogue For Peace (Introduction to an Interreligious Dialogue Tool Through Game)

Author: Muhammat Sabar Prihatin

Biography: Muhammat Sabar Prihatin is a graduate student at Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He studies at the Centre for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) program. He also teaches Islamic Studies and Character Education at SMP and Pesantren Bumi Cendekia, Yogyakarta. He is interested in Interreligious Dialogue and Peace issues.

Abstract: Indonesia is religious diverse with six recognized religions and hundreds of registered religions, which contributes to rich beliefs, but also has potential for religiously based conflicts. There have been an increase in religiously motivated violent incidents such as terrorism, radicalism cases from year to year in some areas of Indonesia, illustrating that intolerance, irrespectiveness, and extremism exist. Studies have shown that interreligious dialogue can decrease fear, suspicion, and prevent misunderstanding. This paper introduces an interreligious dialogue tool "Peace Journey" as an educative game that can increase its participants' knowledge about religious diversity in Indonesia, as well as promote them with tolerance, respect, and peace.

Advocating Peacefully for Civil Liberties As a Young Person Using Non-Confrontational Methods

Author: Shameer Rishad

Biography: Shameer Rishad is the Founder-Convenor of Javed Abidi Foundation (JAF) which is a think tank working in the area of disability rights advocacy. He is also the Youth Chairperson of Religions for Peace (RfP) India and a member of the RfP Asia & the Pacific Interfaith Youth Network (APIYN) under RfP Asia. As a youth activist he wishes to facilitate journeys of young people so they can effectively act as agents of change in society.

Abstract: This paper highlights India's large young population: approximately 600 million, with more than 65% of the Indian population under 35 years of age. Youth challenges are closely linked to peace and to development and the key mission of India's peace workers is to work with youth proactively and strategically to protect them from dangerous messages which could poison their minds. Young people need to acknowledge their privilege and understand the relationship between rights and responsibilities; non-confrontational approaches can allow them to become champions of human rights t and take forward the agenda of peace.

Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith in the 21st Century

Author: Riaz Rivat

Biography: Riaz Ravat is the Secretary General of Baraza – a German based NGO dedicated to the international promotion of peaceful thinking, religious and cultural tolerance and understanding among nations. Riaz is an experienced interfaith practitioner in the UK who works with a wide range of public and community organisations and he is Advisor to a number of other bodies. Riaz was honoured by HM the Queen in 2013 for "services to interfaith understanding".

Abstract: Transcultural and interfaith dialalogue among youth in the present day is key to developing a more cohesive and peaceful society. Baraza e.V. is a non-profit that is dedicated to promoting global peace and understanding across various cultures and faiths in Europe. Additionally, Baraza's global network uniquely understands and teaches that faith can coincide with more secular agendas promoted by the government and corporations. Baraza's global projects and initiatives intend to promote a more international mindset and reach large audiences from parents, educators, youth, stakeholders, and community leaders.

Freedom of Peace Speech: A Case Study Combatting Islamophobia

Author: Hira A. Siddiqi

Biography: Ms. Hira A. Siddiqi is a strategic communications expert. She earned her MPhil Degree of Peace & Conflict Studies from National Defence University Islamabad. She is working in development sector of Pakistan from last ten years while serving various Government, Corporate & non-profit organisations. Thematically, she mainly works for peacebuilding, women empowerment, skills development, climate change, livelihood and education in Pakistan.

Abstract: The paper explores issues around hate speech and actions to counter hate speech in society and culture. Hate speech affects vulnerable groups but also has an impact on international affairs. The paper emphasizes religious, ethical, moral, and values-linked issues involved in regulating freedom of speech. It explores how the privilege of freedom speech can be misused against Islam and its followers.

Youth Engagement with Religion for Global Peace in the 21st Century: An Islamic Perspective

Author: Ridwan Ullah

Biography: Md. Ridwan Ullah, interested in interreligious dialogue and peace issues, refugee crises resolution & participated in various youth engagement, interfaith, peace programs at local, national & international platform, is a teacher, researcher & columnist. He earned his M.Phil Degree on Reflections of Islamic Civilization in Bangladesh from The Theology & Islamic Studies Faculty of Islamic University, Kushtia-Bangladesh. He writes & researches on comparative religion, youth engagement with religion & faith, impacts of Islam to build a sustainable peaceful world.

Abstract: The paper argues that the engagement of youth with religion and faith matters for world peace in the 21st Century. Even if people ignore earthly laws, in the eyes of Islam, man is always in the sight of Allah so he must be accountable for any wrongdoing, whether open or in secret. It concludes that if the indomitable power of the youth cannot be engaged with religion and faith, injustice will never disappear from the world.

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