

Faith Leaders Issue Call to End Poverty by 2030

Genie Kagawa
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New York, United States—The World Bank Group, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations for Sustainable Development and a coalition of faith-based and religious organizations co-organized an event at the UN on September 24, 2015, entitled, “Meeting the Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty and Realize the Sustainable Development Goals.” The event, which was held on the eve of Pope Francis’ address to the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly, brought together more than 100 faith leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations, multilateral agencies and government to celebrate the progress made as the Millennium Development Goals came to a close, and to share and discuss a faith-based action framework that is being drafted to strengthen joint advocacy and operational collaboration between faith actors to achieve the SDGs.

In April 2015, over 30 religious leaders as well as heads and representatives of faith-based organizations launched a call to action to end extreme poverty by 2030, “Ending Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative.” Ms. Genie Kagawa of UPF’s executive office and chairperson of The NGO Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns—New York was among the representatives who endorsed the joint statement, which follows this article.

Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative

OUR COMMON UNDERSTANDING

As leaders from diverse religious traditions, we share a compelling vision to end extreme poverty by the year 2030. For the first time in human history we can do more than simply envision a world free of extreme poverty; we can make it a reality. Accomplishing this goal will take two commitments: to act guided by the best evidence of what works and what doesn’t and to use our voices to compel and challenge others to join us in this urgent cause inspired by our deepest spiritual values.

The world has achieved remarkable progress in the past two decades in cutting in half the number of people living in extreme poverty. We have ample evidence from the World Bank Group and others showing that we can now end extreme poverty within 15 years. In 2015, our governments will be deciding upon a new global sustainable development agenda that has the potential to build on our shared values to finish the urgent ask of ending extreme poverty.

We in the faith community embrace this moral imperative because we share the belief that the moral test of our society is how the weakest and most vulnerable are faring. Our sacred texts also call us to combat injustice and uplift the poorest in our midst. No one, regardless of sex, age, race, or belief, should be denied experiencing the fullness of life.



OUR SHARED MORAL CONSENSUS

This is why the continued existence of extreme poverty in a plentiful world offends us so deeply. Our faith is tested and our hearts are broken when in an age of unprecedented wealth and scientific advancement, so many still live in degrading conditions. We know too well that extreme poverty thwarts human purpose, chokes human potential, and affronts human dignity. In our increasingly interconnected world, there is enough that no one has to fight for their daily survival.

Ending extreme poverty will require a comprehensive approach that tackles its underlying causes – including preventable illness, a lack of access to quality education, joblessness, corruption, violent conflicts, and discrimination against women, ethnic minorities and other groups. It will also necessitate a change in the habits that cause poverty – greed and waste, numbness to the pain of others, and exploitation of people and the natural world. It calls for a holistic and sustainable approach that transforms cultures and institutions, and hearts as well as minds.

In too many parts of the world, women and girls are consigned to second class status, denied access to education and employment, and victimized by violence, trafficking, and rape. Until each and every person is afforded the same basic rights, none of us can truly flourish.

We must also state unequivocally that ending extreme poverty without mitigating climate change and combating inequality will be impossible. Climate change is already disproportionately hurting people living in poverty. Extreme inequality, within and between countries, contradicts our shared religious values, exacerbates social and political divisions, and will impede progress. What is needed is a new paradigm of socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

We believe that now is the time to end the scourge of extreme poverty – by restoring right

relationships among people, affirming human dignity, and opening the door to the holistic development of all people. If we were more committed to living these common values, there would be less poverty in the world.

Our shared convictions call us to empower and uplift – not denigrate – those living in poverty, so that they can become agents of their own transformation. We must abandon a politics that too often marginalize their voices, blames them for their condition, and exacerbates extremes of inequality. Now is the time to turn fatigue into renewed commitment, indifference into compassion, cynicism into hope and impotence into a great sense of urgency that we can and will end extreme poverty by 2030.

We commit to working together to end the scandal of extreme poverty. We will act, advocate, educate, and collaborate, both among ourselves and with broader initiative. And we commit to holding all levels of leadership accountable - public and private, domestic and international.

Our approach to this staggering need must be holistic, rooted in the spiritual visions of our respective faiths, and built on a shared recognition of the intrinsic dignity and value of every life on Earth.



Realizing this shared goal will require a revolution in social and political will, as well as new innovations and great collaboration across sectors. We call on international organizations, government, corporations, civil society, and religious communities, to play their essential parts and join with us in this critical cause.

Poverty's imprisonment of more than a billion men, women and children must end. Now is the time to boldly act to free the next generation from extreme poverty's grip.

ENDORSERS:

- Actalliance**, General Secretary, Dr. John Nduna
- American Jewish Committee**, Intl. Dir. of Interreligious Affairs, Chief Rabbi David Rosen
- American Jewish World Service**, President, Ms. Ruth Messinger
- Anglican Alliance**, Joint Executive Director, Rev. Rachel Carnegie
- Bibliotheca Alexandria**, Founding Director, Dr. Ismail Serageldin
- Baha'i Intl. Community**, Principle Representative. to the UN, Ms. Bani Dugal
- Buddhist Global Relief**, Chairperson, Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi
- Bread for World**, President, Rev. David Beckman
- Caritas Internationalis**, Secretary General, Mr. Michel Roy
- Catholic Relief Services**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Carolyn Woo
- Church World Service**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Rev. John McCullough
- Community of Protestant Churches of Europe**, President, Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf
- EcoSikh**, Board Member, Mr. Suneet Singh Tuli
- Forum for Peace in Islamic Societies**, President, H.E. Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah
- Indigenous People Ancestral Spiritual Council**, President, Priestess Beatriz Schulthess
- Islamic Relief Worldwide**, Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Mohamed Ashmawey
- Islamic Society of N.America**, Off. of Interfaith & Community Alliances Dir., Dr. Sayyid Syeed
- Interfaith WASH Alliance**, Co-Founder, H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji
- Joint Distribution Committee**, Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Alan Gill
- Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue**, Director, Rabbi Dr. Burt Visotzky
- Muhammadiyah**, President, Dr. Din Syamsuddin
- Organization of African Instituted Churches**, General Secretary, Rev. Nicta Lubaale
- Religions for Peace**, Secretary General, Dr. William Vendley
- Rissho Kosei-Kai**, President-Designate, Rev. Kosho Niwano
- Religious Action Center**, Director, Rabbi Jonah Pesner
- Sojourners**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Rev. Jim Wallis

Salvation Army, General, General Andre Cox
Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, General Secretary, Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne
Universal Peace Federation, President, Dr. Thomas G. Walsh
World Council of Churches, General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit
World Evangelical Alliance, Secretary General and CEO, Bishop Efraim Tendero
World Relief, President and Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Stephan Bauman
World Vision International, President, Mr. Kevin Jenkins
Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Grand Mufti, H.E. Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje
Parliament of the World's Religions, Executive Director, Dr. Mary Nelson
Integrated Research Ltd; The Charitable Foundation and the Institute for Economics and Peace,
Founder & Executive Chairman, Mr. Steve Killelea
Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley CA, Rabbi Menachem Creditor
Union for Reform Judaism, President, Rabbi Rick Jacobs
Rabbinical Assembly, Executive Vice President, Rabbi Julie Schonfeld
Islamic Relief USA, Mr. Anwar Khan

**UNITED NATIONS
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
MESSAGE TO THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT:
“MEETING THE MORAL IMPERATIVE TO END EXTREME POVERTY”**

New York, 24 September 2015

It is a pleasure to convey warm greetings to the faith leaders and others who have gathered at this milestone moment. I thank the co-sponsors -- including the World Bank Group and the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations for Sustainable Development -- for bringing people together in this way.

You meet as Muslims across the world commemorate the Eid al-Adha, Jews have just observed Yom Kippur, and people of all traditions eagerly await tomorrow's appearance of His Holiness Pope Francis in the United Nations General Assembly. I offer best wishes to all in this season of contemplation and celebration.

There are moments in history when our humanity fills us with hope and courage; when our common understanding of the challenges we face is matched by an even stronger determination to overcome; when we discover our common spirituality and values, and build a shared vision of where the future must lead. We are at such a moment today -- and we must seize it.

Tomorrow marks the formal adoption tomorrow of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Building on the remarkable gains made over the past 15 years under the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, the new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals will guide us in finishing the job while working more deeply and broadly towards a future of dignity for all.

The new agenda is comprehensive, reflecting the complexity of today's world. It is integrated, taking into account the links among the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It is rooted in human rights, and with its connections to justice, institutions, inclusiveness and resilience, the agenda can help to prevent conflict and instability.

The 2030 Agenda is the culmination of the most open consultative and policy-making process in UN history. I thank all of you for contributing your voices and views, including through your statement in April of this year, in which you stressed the need to turn “indifference into compassion”.

I urge you, as faith leaders, to use your enormous influence as bridge-builders, as proponents of the universal values that connect all faiths and traditions, and as role models who speak out against hatred. At a time of rising extremism and discrimination against migrants and refugees, that role is more important than ever.

Without exception our faiths call on us to reduce inequality and reach out to those who are furthest behind. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges to do just that. Your engagement and support will be crucial. I look forward to continuing our partnership as we strive to meet the crucial test of implementing this new agenda. Working together, we must eradicate poverty and leave no one behind.