

# Faith-based actors explore ways of ending extreme poverty and advancing SDGs

30 September 2015

**The moral imperative to end extreme poverty and advance proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was the focus of an event on 24 September at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York City, United States.**

It was attended by organizations as diverse as the WCC, ACT Alliance, American Jewish World Service, Baha'i International Community, Eco-Sikh, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Religions for Peace and World Vision International and was co-sponsored by the WCC, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion Development, the World Bank and several other, multi-religious organizations.

The event brought to public attention the call to action, a joint statement titled [\*Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative\*](#) – launched in April and signed by 39 leaders from major world religions and heads of global faith-based organizations. The joint statement indicates the need to “act, advocate, educate and collaborate to empower and uplift those living in poverty, so that they can become agents of their own transformation.”

The event mobilized a cross-section of faith-based and religious organizations to find tangible ways to realize sustainable development goals and the end of extreme poverty. The meeting strengthened collaboration between faith-based organizations, governments, the UN and the World Bank Group.

At the meeting, the [\*Faith-based Action Framework to End Extreme Poverty\*](#) was introduced to an audience of more than eighty representatives of faith-based organization. Participants further committed themselves to the Moral Imperative call and affirmed the Action Framework. An afternoon session brought together members of the entire community, including both multilateral and faith organizations, devoted to working together to end extreme poverty.

Multilateral representatives at the meeting included Thomas Gass, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs; Mahmoud Mohieldin, Corporate Secretary and President's Special Envoy, World Bank Group; Luiz Loures, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director, UNAIDS; David Donoghue, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations; Azza Karam, senior advisor, Culture, United Nations Population Fund and coordinator, UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development; and Adam Taylor, lead, Faith Initiative, World Bank Group.

Faith communities in attendance included Global ONE, Society of Jesus, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Baha'i International Community, World Vision, Organization of African Instituted Churches, International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV or AIDS (INERELA+), Church World Service, American Jewish World Service, Christian Aid, ACT Alliance, World Council of Churches, Caritas Internationalis,

Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, World Evangelical Alliance and Religions for Peace International.

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, WCC representative to the UN, celebrated the affirmation of the Action Framework to End Extreme Poverty: “It is an inspirational document, which allows religious leaders and faith-based organizations to come together at regional and national levels to work collaboratively on concrete actions to address issues of extreme poverty and inequalities. It is an opportunity to engage faith communities in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.”

The Statement:

## **Ending extreme poverty: A moral and spiritual imperative**

Over 30 leaders from major world religions and heads of global faith-based organizations today launched a clarion call to action to end extreme poverty by 2030, a goal shared by the World Bank Group.

### [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 fifteen 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 task 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 to ensure 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 marginalizes 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 greater sense of agency 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 initiatives. 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 greater collaboration across sectors. We call on international organizations, governments, 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.