*Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals*

*Listening to the cry of the earth and of the por*

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**Sustainable Development and Sustainable Peace**

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**To my Father**

### 1. Introduction

Sustainable Development and Sustainable Peace are impossible to separate. Different scenarios can show us diverse possibilities that can be negative, passive, or proactive, depending on the relationship between Peace and Sustainable Development.

Armed conflicts and disasters are a clear demonstration of negative scenarios connected with steps back and unsustainable societies. On the contrary, when there is no armed conflict or disaster, the scenario is better, nevertheless, this condition is not enough for achieving sustainable development and sustainable peace.

When there is a proactive construction in a coherent, consistent and durable context, and social, economic, and environmental issues are considered in an integrated perspective, more possibilities for achieving sustainable peace and sustainable development will arise because there is no way of achieving peace if people have no access to development in a sustainable way. Most of the challenges to minimize the violence and war crisis are related with poverty and the fight over natural resources. Causes of poverty include basic needs unfulfilled and the fight over access and management of natural resources, their distribution and the bad control of their negative impact exploitation.

Religions and faith- based organizations are key to promote and foster the agenda of Sustainable Development and Sustainable Peace. They have an invaluable ethical and practical scope that can foster and accelerate sustainable decisions.

The Interreligious dialogue is itself a value of deep cohesion to better live and build together a sustainable future leaving no one behind. It is time to continuing

the process of building together upon the basis of positive roadmaps that are directly connected with agenda 2030. *Laudato Sí* is a clear milestone in this context, as well as documents such as Jewish LENS Investment Network, The Green Patriarch, the Athens Declaration, Confession of Accra, Lutheran WF resolution, World Council of Churches, ISESCO Action Plans, among others.

In this presentation I will consider firstly, some information about armed conflicts and disasters in the World; secondly, I will analyze the concepts of sustaining and sustainable peace. Afterwards, I will consider key aspects of sustainable peace, and I also point out specific experiences. Finally I will invite you to continue with this dialogue, building a better present and future together.

### 2. *Information about conflicts and disasters in the World*

**Violent conflicts have resurged in recent years,** with human, social, economic and environmental deep impacts. "*Violent conflicts today have become complex and protracted, involving more non-state groups and regional and international actors,* **often linked to global challenges from climate change to transnational organized crime**."[2]

"*More than 1.4 billion people, including half of the world's extremely poor people, live in fragile and conflict-affected settings. The number is forecast to grow by a staggering 82 percent by 2030. Around 244 million people are on the move, with 65 million people in our world being forcibly displaced.*"[3]

**Natural resources are vital for livelihoods** and generally they are also commodities, and when there is no adequate management and benefit sharing of them, and the communities are not involved in the decision-making processes of their related business operations, tensions and conflicts can escalate into violence, or contribute to aggravate pre-existing conflict dynamics.[4]

According to the UNISDR and CRED Report, "*disaster-hit countries reported direct economic losses of US$2,908 billion of which climate-related disasters accounted for US$2,245 billion or 77% of the total. In terms of occurrences, climate-related disasters also dominate the picture, accounting for 91% of all 7,255 major recorded events between 1998 and 2017. Floods, 43.4%, and storms, 28.2%, are the two most frequently occurring disasters. During this*

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[2] *United Nations; World Bank. 2018. Pathways for Peace : Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.*"

[3] UNDP. 2017. Sustainable development and sustaining peace: Two sides of the same coin. 20 Jul 2017 by Magdy Martínez- Solimán & Oscar Fernández-Taranco, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2017/7/20/Sustainable-development-and-sustaining-peace-Two-sides-of-the-same-coin.html"

[4] *UN DPA and UN Environment. 2015 Natural resources and Conflict, a guide for Mediation practitioners. https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/UNDPA_UNEP_NRC_Mediation_full.pdf*

*period, 1.3 million people lost their lives and 4.4 billion people were injured, rendered homeless, displaced or in need of emergency assistance. 563 earthquakes, including related tsunamis, accounted for 56% of total deaths or 747,234 lives lost."* [5]

Last year, UNESCO published an article called *Climate change raises conflict concerns.* It considers that settled human societies have never experienced current rate of climate change and that If we carry on with current climate change scenario, it will bring severe impacts on our fundamental resources that we depend on for our survival and security, particularly food and water. Many regions around the world are already suffering from increased state fragility and security problems as a result.[6]

**Climate change leads to increase the likelihood of conflict**. Adverse climate conditions contribute to socio-economic disparities and hunger as they undermine household livelihoods in affected areas. In this way, the impacts of climate change accelerate forced migration and deteriorate existing social and political tensions between communities, which in turn increase the risk of conflicts. The risk can also be amplified as people seek to move away from food and water scarce regions to more favorable areas.[7]

### 3. *What is Sustaining Peace and how it is related with Sustainable Development?*

Sustaining peace, a concept endorsed by the UN General Assembly and Security Council, *"should be broadly understood as **a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society,** ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at **preventing** the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development, and emphasizing that sustaining peace is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the Government and all other national stakeholders, and should flow through all three pillars of the United Nations engagement at all stages of conflict, and it all its dimensions, and needs sustained international attention an assistance".* [8]

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[5] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), (2017). Economic Losses, Poverty & Disasters 1998-2017. [online] Available at: https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/61119 [Accessed 22 Feb. 2019].

[6] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), (2018). Climate change raises conflict concerns. [online] Available at: https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/climate-change-raises-conflict-concerns [Accessed 22 Feb. 2019].

[7] The Center for Climate and Security, (2017). Epicenters of Climate and Security: The New Geostrategic Landscape of the Anthropocene. P.105.

[8] *UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/262. Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture.*

Consequently, Sustaining peace is directly related to stop vicious cycles of violent conflict, with emphasis in a preventive and long-term perspective.[9]

A High-level dialogue on **Building Sustainable Peace for All** took place in January 2017.[10] It analyzed the synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace, and its main conclusions were as follows:

- *Sustaining Peace and Sustainable Development Agenda are strongly linked and mutually reinforcing, to the extent that neither can be achieved without the other.*

- *Sustaining peace and sustainable development processes must be driven by national and inclusive ownership that recognizes the needs and contributions of all segments of societies, including women and youth.*

- *To sustain peace effectively and establish and enabling environment for sustainable development, preeminent attention must be accorded to conflict prevention, to addressing the root causes of conflict, to ensuring the rule of law and strong and accountable institutions, to the effective management and equitable distribution of resources, as well as to the protection of human rights.[11]*

### 4. Key aspects to build Sustainable Peace

The 2030 Agenda is a platform and an integral tool for peacebuilding processes, and the following are key aspects related to it*:*

### 4.1. Prevention and Peacebuilding

Conflicts are part of our lives and societies. Any change that may disrupt our status quo can also create antagonistic perspectives, and the **cardinal challenge of every society is to navigate the conflict peacefully. Prevention** is directly related to addressing risk factors before escalating into violence. "*Preventing entry and relapse into a cycle of conflict holds the potential to save lives and avoid the immense losses in human and economic capital that accompany conflict—and safeguard considerable development gains. It is also cost-effective: according to a background paper commissioned for this <u>Pathways to Peace</u> report, targeting resources toward just four countries*

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[9] *UNDP. 2017. Sustainable development and sustaining peace. See ut supra.*

[10] See UN High Level dialogue on "Building Sustainable Peace for All: Synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace" 24-25 January 2017. Summary of Key Messages and Observations. https://www.un.org/pga/71/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2015/08/Summary-of-the-High-level-Dialogue-on-Building-Sustainable-Peace-for-All.pdf

[11] *This also demands enhanced collaboration and partnerships, uniting the efforts of all stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels, including a reformed UN delivery system, impervious to silos and able to operate as one*

*at high risk of conflict each year could prevent $34 billion11 in losses. In comparison, spending on peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in 2016 was $8.2 billion and $22.1 billion, respectively.*[12]

### 4.2. Strengthening Transparent, Inclusive, and Accountable Institutions.

Political cultures supporting the Rule of Law through citizen participation, accountability, and checks and balances, are key to display higher levels of peace, development, good governance and transparent institutions. In this regard, tools for ensuring access to information and public participation into the decision- making processes, inclusivity of vulnerable groups, indigenous free prior and informed consent, as well as access to justice are crucial. In addition, tools related with new technologies linked to information and communication and data science are not only key to measure SDGs progress, but also can contribute to accelerate 2030 Agenda implementation.

### 4.3. Empowering women and youth for peace and sustainable development.

Considering the importance of supporting women and youth leadership in peace and development processes, inclusivity and participation, ensuring access to education with a gender equality perspective, in order to build more resilient societies.

### 4.4. Building Resilience: The Early Recovery Approach.

Resilience is key to face preventively conflicts and disasters, considering both the hard (example: infrastructure works) and the soft aspects (example: participatory & community processes of adaptation plans) of its building process. According to UNDP Crisis Response Unit (former- BCPR)[13] "*Disasters can become opportunities for sustainable development. For this to happen, recovery must go beyond replacing or repairing damaged infrastructure, and address the root causes of unsustainability and risks. While responding to the most urgent needs of the affected population, all opportunities for change must be taken advantage of in order to achieve the sustainability of the recovery efforts and set the foundations for a new kind of development going forward*"[14]

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[12] See *United Nations; World Bank. 2018. Pathways for Peace. Cited ut supra. Preventing entry and relapse into a cycle of conflict holds the potential to save lives and avoid the immense losses in human and economic capital that accompany conflict—and safeguard considerable development gains. It is also cost-effective: according to a background paper commissioned for this report, targeting resources toward just four countries at high risk of conflict each year could prevent $34 billion11 in losses. In comparison, spending on peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in 2016 was $8.2 billion and $22.1 billion, respectively.*

[13] See UNDP Crisis Response Unit. https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/crisis-response/past-crises.html

[14] See UNDP Learning from Experience to Plan for Recovery. Systematization of recovery cases in Ecuador.

### 4.5. Migration: a sustainable approach.

A sustainable development perspective and approach of Migration is central, which requires to focus on tackling the drivers and root causes which lead people to leave their home countries, be it poverty, inequalities, climate change, violent conflicts or governance-related. *As Achim Steiner highlightedregarding UNDP approach, "These efforts also closely tied with the way we work with humanitarian partners to the bridge urgent, life-saving response with recovery and development needs to strengthen resilience and longer-term prospect."[15]*

### 4.6. The Management of Natural Resources for Peace and Sustainable Development.

Effective natural resources management and equitable sharing can mitigate risks of tensions and conflicts, in order to achieve societal stability and peace. Many good practices and positive examples at a community level on the territory show that sustainable management is possible, but the challenge is to get to scale fast. Nevertheless, poverty and its generally related obstacles for an adequate access to water, land, and energy and the increasing pressure from unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and the necessity of guaranteeing food security, are examples of current challenges that should be improved to promote peacebuilding and Sustainable Development. In this context, **the triple benefit approach** is related to the integrality of Agenda 2030, considering its social, economic and environmental axes, sustainable production and consumption with a system of incentives towards a constant improvement. Resource and energy efficiency, ecosystem services value, access to basic services, climate action, a just transition for decent Jobs, and an active citizenship are the center of the reduction of future social, environmental and economic costs and then, poverty.

## 5. Religions and faith-based organizations in the process of building sustainable peace and sustainable development

As mentioned at the beginning, religions and faith-based organizations have a key role regarding Agenda 2030. Their scope involves not only individual ethics, but also community and institutional decisions that are crucial in order to achieve sustainable peace and development. Interreligious dialogue is a milestone for peacebuilding and sustainability. Behavioral changes, as well as positive leaderships contribute to a peacebuilding platform.

The following are examples of the work that religions and faith-based organizations are doing, and, as mentioned before, they are only specific examples of an enormous every day effort.

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[15] Achim Steiner, January 21st 2019 https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/speeches/2019/statement-to-the-first-regular-session-of-the-undp-executive-boa.html

The **Interreligious alliance for Latin America and the Caribbean**, created in 2014, aims at promoting the involvement of faith-based organizations to contribute to SDGs prioritizing the reduction of inequality in and between the countries of the region. The strategic scope of this alliance encompasses: religious communities and faith-based organizations, governments, private sector, civil society organizations and regional/international organizations. Since then, this alliance has been actively working at different *fora*, including fruitful participations at the UN High Level Political Forum and the G20 (Interfaith 20) giving more visibility to the faith-based work and its synergies and importance regarding the interaction with different actors and initiatives.[16]

The **Zug guidelines** are an example of interreligious action for sustainability. The Zug meeting brought together over forty different faith investment funds from eight religions, including Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Shinto, and a number of faith investment advisory organizations. To attend the meeting each group had to set out its faith guidelines moving from core beliefs through assets to negative screening and then finally what the faith wanted to invest in to make the world a better place. The Zug guidelines (2017) describe investment criteria and strategies of the different religious perspectives to support the creation of a sustainable world. They were also designed not just for the institutional funds but also to enlighten what each believer is encouraged to do with their wealth to make a better planet in accordance with the core beliefs and teachings of their faith.

From the perspective of the wisdom and business of religions, the faiths play an important role and have great impacts on social, environmental and sustainable development issues. Each religion has been working towards greater vision of the meaning of life and provided human beings with fundamental wisdom. The faiths also own approximately 8% of the habitable land and 10% of the world's total financial investment. It is estimated that about three trillion US dollars of investment money are mobilized among the eight faiths mentioned above and their organizations in environmental and sustainable development projects.[17]In 2019 a new organization FaithInvest was launched to assist the world's religions in channeling their investments into pro-active investing. The SDGs have been an inspiration though they are not the core reason why the faiths are now doing this. That has come from a reawakening of the coe values of the great faiths.

I would also like to mention **the experience of Colombia**, where recently UNDP together with the government and leaders from religious organizations reaffirmed their commitment to work for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, considering the role of religious leaders as peace builders.

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[16] See Act Alliance, Cáritas América Latina y el Caribe, CELAC, CLAI, CREAS, The Lutheran Word Federation, Religiones por la Paz, World Vision. http://creas.org/alianza-interreligiosa-latinoamericana-agenda-2030/

[17] See The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, (2017). The Zug Guidelines. P.5-p.11. http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/ZUG_Guidelines_to_FCI_2017.pdf

Since 1991, Colombia has guaranteed and protected the right to freedom of religion and faith by establishing relevant legislations. Accordingly, the government included religious entities and their organizations in the National Development Plan 2014 – 2018. The religious sector was recognized as a living force of the society, key actors in peace-building and development of the country, particularly in social, cultural and educational aspects, through new holistic working initiatives. Furthermore, the Ministry of interior organized interreligious capacity building dialogues for youth and women, security and risk prevention workshops for religious leaders and peace advocate meetings to generate positive transformative actions. During the process the Ministry has reached out to more than 4000 religious leaders and participants representing their religious entities and organizations. This public policy has also opened up opportunities to reinforce intersectoral and interinstitutional interaction in Colombia.[18]

In addition, I would like to mention an ongoing **experience in Argentina**. Currently at UNDP Argentina we are working together with the government and religious organizations on an initiative that works on both the doctrine and the territorial action of religions and of faith-based organizations. First, it analyzes the methodological and theological fundamentals of the different faith perspectives that are directly linked with sustainable development. It is important to point out that the research reveals that doctrine of the different religions present common grounds with Agenda 2030. Secondly, it quantifies the contributions of main actions of Faith based Organizations to Agenda 2030, including their territorial impact. This initiative aims at nourishing the identification of good practices to accelerate the implementation of the Agenda and to build a first dynamic platform to exchange experiences in order to scale them up, and also to have a methodological approach to share it with other countries in the Region.[19]

## 6. Closing words

I would like to reaffirm the important role of religions and faith- based organizations in the active construction needed to achieve sustainable Peace, in a holistic consideration of 2030 Agenda, not only in relation with SDG 16 related to strong institutions and inclusive societies, but across all 17 goals.

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[18] See United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (2018). Congregaciones religiosas le apuestan a los ODS. [online] Available at: http://www.co.undp.org/content/colombia/es/home/presscenter/articles/2018/12/13/congregaciones-religiosas-le-apuestan-a-los-ods-.html?fbclid=IwAR1ZkWLOSPqQjBsRwTkssLoTjJ7jTwtknzy57EyThPQcu9CMeKUdIK38lu8 [Accessed 22 Feb. 2019] See also Ministry of Interior Colombia, (2017). Politica Pública de Libertad Religiosa y de Cultos de Colombia. P.8-p.12, p.40.

[19] See. Secretaria de Culto, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales, Presidencia, República Argentina, CREAS (member of Act Alliance) & UNDP . *Fundamentos del accionar de las Organizaciones Basadas en la Fe (OBF) y las comunidades religiosas: Su contribución a la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible.* Ongoing research.

As our Secretary General mentioned: *"Promoting social cohesion, so that diversity is seen as a benefit rather than a threat, is investing in sustaining peace. As societies become more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious, people must feel that their identities are valued, even as they feel a sense of belonging to the large community"*[20]

Finally, I would like to remember a conversation with a wise senior friend, Mr. Mamoru Kamya, a survivor or Hiroshima. While talking about the concept of faith, he told me that for him, the image of faith was the day after the bomb when he could see different churches and creeds working together for the reconstruction. Thank you very much, Peace be with you.

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[20] Antonio Guterres, January 24th 2017.
 https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/01/guterres-highlights-importance-of-recognizing-the-links-between-peace-and-sustainable-development/