

Vatican conference on Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals

7-9 March, Vatican City

Remarks by Dr. Adama Dieng, Under-Secretary-General and United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

I thank the organizers, and His Eminence Cardinal Turkson for inviting me to this very timely conference. It is within the premises of this Holy City that Pope Paul VI coined the notion of integral development. I cannot but start by quoting Pope Francis who said in his powerful Address of to the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, on 25 September 2015, that: “A holistic approach to the development of the human person covers all aspects of life: social, economic, political, spiritual, cultural and personal and it extends to all persons. It must be rooted in ‘the right to life and, more generally, in what we could call the right to existence of human nature itself’”.

From the onset, I would like to take the opportunity to remind us all that the SDGs are a set of 17 goals, midwifed by the United Nations with 193 governments, to identify and measure sustainable social development.

The SDGs are much more comprehensive than the MDGs, in that they include human rights and peace and security considerations, and are applicable for all countries.

Implementation of the SDGs therefore, also contributes to the implementation of the three pillars of the United Nations, namely peace and security, human rights and development.

Furthermore, the implementation of the SDG is also essential to prevent atrocity crimes, by which we mean genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

I wish to emphasize that no region is immune from atrocity crimes. Violence does not come out of the blue but is usually the end result of a process that has included deeply rooted and systematic marginalization of, and discrimination

against groups of people based on their identity - including their religious identity.

I cannot but stress that the SDGs' are everyone's business. Therefore, a durable and comprehensive implementation thereof can only happen through partnership between the various actors involved. It is in this context, that the longstanding partnerships between the United Nations and religious actors, is quintessential.

Allow me also to further stress that by saying religious 'actors' we deliberately include women, who are leaders through their service, whether in the social spheres, or on the frontlines in conflict situations.

Partnerships within the United Nations

Last year we lost our brother Kofi Annan (may his soul rest in peace). Referring to the work of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development, I would first and foremost pay tribute to Kofi Annan's legacy of setting up a UN system wide infrastructure to specifically serve the partnerships aspect of the nexus between religion and development, in 2008.

As reaffirmed in 2015 by UN SG Ban Ki Moon, the UN Interagency Task Force is a vehicle to "inform and coordinate partnerships within the UN system and with governmental and non- governmental partners on the intersections between religion and the SDGs".

It is worth highlighting the fact that the UN Interagency Task Force's founding members were several women Under Secretary Generals (UNESCO, WHO, UNIFEM now UN WOMEN, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA) and has been mostly served by women professionals from across the UN system. Today the Task Force has grown to encompass 20 UN system members.

My Office has worked with the UN Interagency Task force on Religion to accomplish a great deal. Below are just some of the collaborative partnership achievements of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development:

Trained over 500 UN system staff from across the UN system, and 400 faith-based organization partners from all religions and regions.

Advised and provides ***systematic support*** to UN system partnership flagship efforts like the Plan of Action;

Provided ***input to hundreds of policy briefs, statements, and research, on the intersections between religion, sustainable development, and peace and security*** - in major UN languages;

Launched, at the 2018 UN General Assembly, the first ever ***Multi Faith Advisory Council***, composed of the ***Chief Executive Officers of 40 global faith-based organizations working on all aspects of the SDGs***.

Also, the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion continues to

Compile and operate a ***Directory of almost 600 faith-based and faith-inspired organizational partners*** working with the UN at national, regional and global levels;

Produce an ***Annual Report documenting the efforts of U.N. system entities on partnering*** with religious actors on all aspects of development, peace and security and human rights.

Partnership within the Fez Process and the implementation of the Plan of Action

The UN Task Force on Religion became fully engaged with my office in 2014, after my office launched the first Global Framework for Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. Given the role identified for religious leaders and actors as important to all efforts to prevent atrocity crimes, my office was determined to launch a global process to catalyze a global multi-religious movement for genocide prevention.

To that end, the Fez Process started with a Global Conference in Morocco followed by a series of consultations in various regions of the world with religious leaders and actors from different faiths and denominations. A total of 232 religious leaders from 77 countries took part in these consultations.

The Fez Process resulted into the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, which includes options religious leaders and actors can consider implementing to prevent and counter incitement to violence in situations at risk of atrocity crimes.

The Plan of Action is based on a unifying commitment to promote peace, understanding, mutual respect and the fundamental rights of all people. These include the rights to freedom of religion and belief, opinion and expression, and peaceful association.

In addition to recommendations for religious leaders and actors, the Plan of Action includes recommendations for States, civil society and the international community. A full and comprehensive implementation of the Plan of Action can only happen with everybody's support.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres urged the widest possible dissemination and implementation of the Plan of Action, which he said, "can help to save lives, reduce suffering, and realize our shared vision of peaceful, inclusive and just societies in which diversity is valued and the rights of all individuals are protected".

The implementation of the Plan of Action was discussed at a meeting that took place in Vienna in February 2018 and attended by more than 200 people, including some 150 religious leaders and actors and over 50-member states. This meeting resulted in the identification of short and medium-term priorities for implementation, including: establishing a Global Steering Committee and regional coordination committees; and prioritizing initiatives with focus on education.

To follow up on the recommendations of the Vienna meeting, in the next two years we will be implementing the Plan of Action in various world regions. Implementation thereof is in line with the SDGs, in particular with SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 16 (peaceful, inclusive and just societies) and SDG 17 (partnership to achieve the goals).

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I reaffirm my belief in the partnership between the Catholic Church and the United Nations to implement the SDGs. I also invite the Holy See to support the United Nations, as well as ***other faith actors*** to jointly realize multi-religious collaborative efforts to ensure the realization and sustainability of the whole of the UN's pillars. I remain available to discuss with the Catholic Church leadership how best to shape this partnership in line with international human right standards and the respect of dignity for all.