

## ISLAMIC RELIEF USA

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### Vatican Remarks - PARTNERSHIP

I want to thank the Vatican and the organizers for inviting us. I must say it is very humbling to be the first speaker after His Holiness the Pope. It has been acknowledged already also that it is International Women's Day.

We are very grateful to have received this invitation. Although I am a representative of Islamic Relief USA and our headquarters is outside of Washington DC, some of what I will be talking about will be on behalf of our larger global family. When the invitation came I subsequently got a request to make a quick stop in Northern Macedonia as they were having a ceremony and wanted a representative to be present. It was a ceremony honoring the work that we have been doing collaboratively with the Mother Teresa Hospital in Skopje and it has been serving the most vulnerable in that community, ethnic Albanians both Muslim and Christian. I made that stop on the way here even though I had to take a red-eye flight to arrive in time, but it was not only amazing to be there to see the work that was being done in that community but actually to learn that Mother Teresa herself was Albanian and had been from Skopje so it really was serendipitous and connected all of this together.

I want to just show you some pictures - today's topic is about Partnership and a lot of yesterday was about how do you 'walk the talk'. I am going to take you on a journey with some photos that hopefully will reflect the mission of Islamic Relief USA. We are a relief organization primarily, although we have moved more into the development sphere over the last couple of decades, and aspire to provide aid in a dignified manner. Yesterday across all the religious and faith traditions we talked about dignity as the crux. We provide our services regardless of gender, race, religion and other factors such as age and disability. We are founded on five fundamental values that we adhere to, both in our staffing and in our programming, which are excellence, sincerity, social justice, compassion, and then finally stewardship - not only how we use our donor money but also how we safeguard the environment. We are the largest Muslim FBO faith-based organization in the world and we have a lot of staff that are not of Muslim background but as long as they can adhere to these these faith values which we consider to be human values. A map of our global footprint illustrates that while we do a lot of our programming ourselves on many continents and across many countries, we also do not have a footprint everywhere nor would we aspire to be everything for everyone and because of that we rely on our partnerships.

One of our major partners that we work with across the globe is Catholic Relief Services and they are implementing partners with CARITAS. To give a quick example we have a current project we are doing also with the Orthodox Church in Serbia giving distribution of cash cards to the refugee population and this also helps the local economy. This picture illustrates locales where we can actually co-brand our partnership and thus you can see the various logos; however there are conditions and political environments where that is not possible and so one of us will be doing actually the implementing work whereas the other will be more in the background. For example we work a lot with Catholic Relief Services again in Latin America because we do not have our own footprint there- Ecuador after the earthquake, Mexico, most recently we are doing some work together in Peru with the Venezuelan refugees. Here they were doing training on hygiene and WASH and resiliency to the communities who had been affected because they have the language competency and the cultural competency. Similarly in Yemen some of that same type of work is happening and again we are partnering but here Islamic Relief is the face because of the linguistic competencies and we are doing work on cholera prevention and again hygiene.

We also have projects that have multi-faith stakeholders; USAID is graciously funding a project that is Catholic Relief, Islamic Relief, and World Vision in Central Africa Republic. This is actually an interfaith peace building project and in the earlier sessions there was the conundrum that got discussed about whether you need peace building before development or development before peace building? These are the types of projects we are doing where we are giving microcredit and trying to empower the communities which will we hope lead to peace building as well.

We have other projects with World Vision and these are with faith leaders working on child protection primarily. Similarly we have projects on gender-based violence with Episcopal Relief and Development. What is interesting about this is it is one of the few that has gotten picked up by the media (Newsweek). There is all this great work that we are doing together and it is not amplified. A challenge for a lot of these projects that are collaborative in nature is to get picked up as positive stories. They love talking about how faith divides communities and how it is a driver in conflict but they are not as friendly when it comes to picking up the positive stories.

One of our biggest partners in a lot of the refugee work is HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. This was actually a recent trip that I just took to Lesvos and Pope Francis helped to humanize this situation for the world, and we have a joint legal aid project. HIAS says they don't serve because the refugees are Jewish (because in this current climate they are primarily Muslim); they serve because they are Jewish and at Islamic Relief we also like to say that the same is true for us.

There are places we can not work because of political considerations so here in Gaza this again was a project implemented by Catholic Relief Services on our behalf and in some of those places where we can not work because of the political climate we will then partner with other NGOs or

the UN humanitarian system. Example are school feeding with UNRWA and we have just started some projects with UNICEF also in in that region doing psychosocial work with the children.

In addition to programming, someone queried what was the value-add of the faith NGOs and the answer was advocacy. We are an organization who like many others was inspired by the Pope's encyclical and we started to do a lot of work on climate change. We had global consultations and pictured you can see some of our staff and our volunteers doing a march in the U.S.. We do a number of publications and research on the rights of refugees and climate change and some of our other policy work, and that is not all always done from our own faith tradition but sometimes it is also done in partnership, for example with Lutheran World Federation.

In closing, I mentioned one of the challenges being media and another challenge is the increased attacks on humanitarian organizations - Central Africa Republic being an example where last year there were over 300 attacks on NGOs and it is an even bigger challenge sometimes for the the Muslim NGOs in these hostile situations. There are additional challenges for the NGOs in the banking sector having issues working in Syria and Yemen and Palestine and other places. Finally, we participate in collecting evidence with JLI (Joint Learning Initiative) and not only you do not hear about the NGOs working together in the media, but there is not a lot of documentation of what they are doing.

After remarks:

Since I have been given the last parole I want to take it back to where we started the day in recognition of International Women's Day. A question was raised and was a challenge to faith traditions on behavior change. For us organizationally at Islamic Relief, we can not speak on behalf of all the diversity in the Muslim world but what we can do is live by the values above and try to bring the faith communities together as we did around climate change where we held global consultations in the North and the South. We are similarly doing the same around our Gender Justice Declaration which we launched last year and we have taken this research and we have had consultations and we have listened to the communities and we have listened to the voices and made modifications. We can not speak on behalf of everyone but we are trying to bring consensus to issues that are big and challenging in the world and that is how we do our part.

I wanted to finish with one of my favorite sayings from the hadith or the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that when you see something wrong in the world and you are witnessing injustice you have three ways that you can act: you can use your hands and you can physically make some kind of change; but if you are in a context or situation where you are not able to do that then you can use your tongue to speak about what is going on; and if really you can not act and use your hands and if you can not use your tongue and say anything then at the very least hold it in your heart.