

# Roundtable on the Contribution of FBOs to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction



On October 10, 2016, in commemoration of the International Day of Disaster Reduction, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a community-based Buddhist organization, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLIF&LC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), co-organized a roundtable on “**The contribution of FBOs to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**” at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland.

Twenty-two representatives from organizations including FBOs, governments, UN agencies, NGOs and academic institutions were present.

The themes addressed included:

1. **THE ROLE OF FAITH GROUPS IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**
2. **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**
3. **HOW TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP AMONG DIFFERENT ACTORS.**

**Denis McClean** of **UNISDR** remarked that faith-based networks represent an invaluable “spiritual capital.” In Tacloban, Philippines, during the 2013 typhoon that killed 6,000 people, faith institutions were the main providers of support that empowered individuals to find the necessary strength to cope with their loss.

## PARTICIPANTS

M. Mohaghegh and S. Wainwright (IFRC), D. McClean and A. Tsakiridis (UNISDR), J. Riera-Cézanne (UNHCR), C. Arnold (ACT Alliance), D. Suna, P. Rajkumar, F. Moyo and M. Kurian (WCC), A. Hashom (Al-Hakim Foundation), A. Goossens, N. Asai and E. Gazzotti (SGI), T. Kalytta and C. Greyling (World Vision), O. Wilkinson (JLI), I. Herbert (ICRC), S. Wongsinsawat and P. Plangprayoon (Mission of Thailand, Geneva), F. Dino (Earth Charter International), D. Zupka (CERAH), J. Williamson (Islamic Relief).

The Sendai Framework, adopted in 2015, urges us to protect and strengthen the resilience of cultural heritage. Churches can be utilized as refuges before and after disasters occur. In addition, FBOs can operate evacuation centers, disseminate early warning messages, fill the vacuum and cover the lack of personnel without replacing public institutions.

In July 2016 UNISDR launched the “[Sendai Seven Campaign – 7 Targets, 7 Years](#),” an advocacy initiative to encourage the implementation of the Sendai Framework with the goal of saving lives, reducing disaster losses and improving management of disaster risk. Support from civil society is crucial for UNISDR.

**Josè Riera-Cézanne** of **UNHCR** emphasized that the role played by faith leaders, religious institutions and FBOs in providing resilience in the face of hardship and adversity has acquired remarkable recognition in humanitarian communities.

In fact, religious actors often enjoy special trust. They speak to people’s hearts and minds and are able to change attitudes and behaviors. They also play a part in public welfare in places where service delivery and national institutions are weak. Religion also provides a space for important discussions within communities. Churches, mosques and other places of worship often serve as forums for people to talk about what is on their minds and to share messages on matters of interest to the entire community. They can be used to warn of impending hazards, provide safe havens and for relief activities. Moreover, religions often form global networks that are able to reach the most remote parts of the world and to mobilize assets from distant communities. Finally, religions have an influence on social cohesion by providing guidance for human conduct and interaction.

UNHCR offices are already partnering with faith-based or faith-inspired service delivery NGOs, Local Faith Communities (LFCs) and religious leaders. This cooperation is likely to grow in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A key question for UN partners has been how the resources these organizations bring to the table—human, financial and spiritual—can be

better understood and more effectively tapped by all of those working to serve the same communities.

The redlines that could impede cooperation with faith-based actors, if crossed, include behaviors such as antagonism towards or exclusion of members of other faith backgrounds; incitement to violence directed against individuals or communities of another faith; proselytism and pressure to convert as a precondition for continued support; early marriage, gender stereotypes; and stigma and discrimination.



The huge rise in the number of refugees and displaced people in the Middle East has sparked both interest in and concerns about the roles played by faith leaders, FBOs and LFCs in providing protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. This prompted former UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, the incoming UN Secretary-General, to devote his annual Dialogue on Protection Challenges in 2012 to the topic of “Faith and Protection.” This led to the recognition that FBOs are already key players in humanitarian operations and to dispelling concerns and stereotypes of FBOs, particularly in the Middle East.

**Dinesh Suna** of the WCC's **Ecumenical Water Network** shared good practices of the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), a member of ACT Alliance and the WCC. In 1999, the Orissa Cyclone killed more than 10,000 people in India. CASA was involved in the process of community-based disaster preparedness and mitigation and played a proactive role in raising awareness in the community. A disaster mitigation task force was created, and more than 50 cyclone shelters were built. CASA were present in the community for at least ten years (1999–2009), building its resilience to future disasters, as opposed to the hit-and-run approach, which gives rise to disaster tourism.

**Christophe Arnold** of **ACT Alliance** shed light on the role played by faith leaders in the Ebola response. During the crisis, one of the main challenges was the high level of stigma and fear caused by information from medical experts. People didn't believe that burial practices were a major factor in spreading the disease. The role of faith leaders in replacing fear with messages of hope was crucial. As they had the trust and respect of their local communities, the faith leaders could easily reach local communities. This changed the pervading negative narrative that Ebola could not be cured, and the situation was brought under control with some basic changes in burial and other practices.

**Olivia Wilkinson** of **JLIF&LC** shared evidence-based on LFCs and religious engagement in humanitarian response (see [jliflc.com/whs](http://jliflc.com/whs)). LFCs overcome vulnerability through the strength of their established community networks and their ability to use this sense of community to build resilience.

The spiritual context of disaster should not be ignored, as it is an important part of understanding risk perception. Through engagement with LFCs these perceptions can be better understood and help strengthen the relevance and appropriateness of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) interventions.

For instance, in the Philippines, the training of local pastors in preparedness and risk reduction was a key component in overcoming a sense of vulnerability within communities. Following Typhoon Haiyan, many local pastors were highly involved in leading preparedness and risk reduction efforts in their local communities. The training involved reflection on their experience, intertwined with technical knowledge from DRR, scriptural learning and inspiration to provide a holistic conception of DRR.

**Nobuyuki Asai of the SGI** spoke on SGI's efforts on the ground and the role of LFCs in disaster response activities. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011 and the Kumamoto Earthquake in April 2016, the Soka Gakkai in Japan accommodated thousands of people in its community centers and provided relief supplies. One truck with relief supplies left a neighboring prefecture for affected areas just one hour after the Kumamoto Earthquake occurred, and the promptness of the response was very helpful for affected communities.

Many SGI members voluntarily engaged in relief activities and in supporting people taking shelter at both Soka Gakkai centers and other community centers. People affected by the earthquake reported that these centers were particularly welcoming because of the care provided by SGI members to all individuals without any distinction. These SGI members were able to respond swiftly to the disaster due to ties built with their local communities through their daily religious practice.

**Sasiwat Wongsinsawat** of the **Permanent Mission of Thailand to the UN in Geneva** remarked that although FBOs are not mentioned directly in the Sendai Framework, the key role of civil society was underlined. Churches, mosques and Buddhist temples are among the oldest institutions that have ties with communities, and they can protect people and reduce suffering.

In the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, the monks and nuns of the Buddhist temples displayed leadership, gave news about missing people and turned temples into shelters, giving relief and psychological support on issues such as the understanding of

life and death. After the 2011 earthquake in Japan, the Thai Buddhist temple near Narita International Airport provided support and was also used as a storage and distribution center.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For FBOs

- Work actively to remove the belief that disasters are punitive.
- Create a network among FBOs, finding local partners and developing a common language to achieve the same objective.
- Ensure that places of worship are prepared to respond to disasters.
- Improve the role of faith leaders as communicators by training them on a regular basis on how to communicate with people about DRR.
- Ensure that faith leaders work on standards to be mutually accountable.
- Keep the right level of “visibility” in order to avoid the influence of bigger interests.

### For Secular Actors

- Enhance “faith literacy” and take off the secular lens in terms of social reforms and values.
- Engage with LFCs to reduce vulnerability.
- Build on assets already present within LFCs.
- Support LFCs with local DRR activities.
- Listen to and take into account the voices of local faith actors, especially women, who are often the most affected by crisis and disaster.
- Maximize the contribution of FBOs by “using” their spiritual capital.

### For All Actors

- Build meaningful and fruitful operational partnerships among secular organizations and with faith-based actors through active and open dialogue.
- Facilitate discussions by bringing to the table UN agencies, FBOs, governments, international organizations as well as business and private sector representatives who are engaged in meaningful projects.
- Hold regular forums to enhance mutual learning by sharing evidence, good practices and programs to support developing the tools to grow together.