

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

Harmony in a World in Crisis

Working together to achieve peace, gender equality, mental health and wellbeing, and environmental preservation

FEBRUARY 3, 2023
10:00AM – 12:30PM

CONFERENCE ROOM 1 | UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS | NEW YORK, NY

CONCEPT NOTE

OBJECTIVE

In 2010, the UN General Assembly passed a Resolution proposed by King Abdullah of Jordan (A/Res.65/5) establishing the first week of February each year as World Interfaith Harmony Week to be observed by meaningful programs and initiatives to promote harmony among the world's faiths. The United African Congress (UAC) and Give Them a Hand Foundation (GTAH) responded to the call in 2012 by assembling faith leaders from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist faith traditions for an interfaith dialogue at the UN seeking common ground to attain harmony among the faiths and promote a culture of peace. Commemoration events have been organized annually, on related themes, and including other faith traditions. We plan another such event this year.

OVERVIEW

In a world beleaguered by a multitude of daunting challenges, the need for global solidarity and cooperation in meeting these challenges together has never been greater. As we slowly and cautiously emerge from a three-year nightmare caused by the worst global pandemic in

a century, we have come to realize that we are all in this together. The threat of this pandemic, which has already claimed close to 7 million lives globally, is still with us, as variants continue to emerge and recovery is ongoing. The long-term mental and physical consequences of the pandemic are notably vast, but yet to be fully understood and properly assessed.

According to the World Bank, extreme poverty in 2022 affects 685 million people, 8.5% of the world population. In the Horn of Africa, prolonged drought contributes to acute malnutrition in 5.7 million children. Ever-increasing destructive incidences of epic floods, earthquakes, wildfires and hurricanes are some of the acute stressors, all interrelated, impacting our ecologically damaged planet.

A future pandemic is almost certain, and the natural catastrophic events are likely to continue and exacerbate poverty, adversely impacting the health and wellbeing of peoples around the world and accentuating already-existing inequities, unless climate change and other stressors are addressed with the urgency these issues deserve. These are some of the themes we will explore this year.

The WIHW mantra, “Love of Good, Love of Neighbor”, is not only a slogan but a plea and an existential imperative to ensure our survival as a species. Faith leaders play a critical role in sharing this message and offering hope. The teachings of various faiths and a collective belief in the essential goodness in all of us, exhort us to be our brother’s/sister’s keepers and to be good custodians of our planet. As the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu eloquently said, “We are each made for goodness, love, and compassion. Our lives are transformed as much as the world is when we live with these truths.”

BACKGROUND

The United African Congress (UAC) and Give Them a Hand Foundation (GTAH) were among the first of civil society organizations to respond to the General Assembly Resolution’s call on governments and civil society to observe the first week of February as World Interfaith Harmony Week by holding an interfaith dialogue at the UN in 2012. The theme that year was *The Diaspora - A Force for Positive Change*, citing immigrant communities from areas of conflict living side by side in the United States in peace and harmony. Our UN sponsor that year was the Permanent Mission to the United Nations of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

In subsequent years, our long-time partners joined us as co-sponsors. They are the Nusantara Foundation, Buddha Light International Association (BLIA), International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) and UNSCR. Our group is multi-faith and multi-cultural, reflecting the

true spirit and objective of the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Our UN Mission sponsors in various years have been Ethiopia, Jamaica, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Bahrain, Morocco and the Holy See.

We have been participating every year with an interfaith program under our overarching project name, Building Bridges across Boundaries, with a different theme as a subtext that addresses a relevant issue specific for that year. In addition to the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu faiths, we have included the participation of African and Native American spiritual leaders representing indigenous belief systems. Last year, we were joined by a representative of the Holy See and the Unitarian Universalist Association as participants.

Our 10th year anniversary participation last year was devoted to honoring the Reverend Desmond Tutu, with the theme entitled, *The Pivotal Role of Faith Leaders to Promote Solidarity, Human Rights, and a Culture of Peace to Combat Stigma and Conflict during the Pandemic Recovery*. The themes of our past participations are chronicled in a document and can be found at the United Nations website at: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/interfaith-harmony-week>.

LOGISTICS

This year we plan an in-person event at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. After 2 years of building closings due to the pandemic, we are excited to celebrate this important event again in person.

Main Sponsor
The UN Mission of the
Republic of Sierra Leone



Partners

