



# UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

## High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 12-13 December 2012

### Faith and Protection: A Concept Paper

#### Introduction

The fifth High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges is scheduled to take place on 12-13 December 2012 in Room XVII at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. This note sets out the concept for the theme selected by the High Commissioner for 2012: ***Faith and Protection***.

#### Background

Most religions share core values that are of key importance for the protection of persons of concern to UNHCR. Faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have remained valued UNHCR partners since its establishment. Around the globe, local religious communities<sup>1</sup> are on the front lines of conflict and acute displacement crises, often being the first providers of life-saving protection and assistance. They are strong advocates for respecting human dignity and empowering vulnerable people who are in the margins of our societies. Moreover, they often play a key role in initiating or supporting efforts to resolve disputes and consolidating peace from the community to the national level. In summary, they are hands-on local actors and respected members of civil society. Yet at the same time, discrimination and persecution motivated by religious intolerance<sup>2</sup> continue to present difficult protection challenges.

#### Objectives

This Dialogue will principally:

- Explore how the right to seek and enjoy asylum and the protection of stateless persons are reflected in religious values and traditions.
- Identify practical ways for UNHCR and other actors to better engage with religious leaders and communities to help protect and assist refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons, and to improve protection space.
- Consider developing specific principles of partnership for cooperation between UNHCR and religious communities.

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<sup>1</sup> In "Partnering with religious communities for children"(2011), UNICEF defines local religious communities as encompassing local worship communities (e.g. churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, etc.); denominational leadership (e.g. bishops, clerics, ayatollahs, lamas); scholars, theologians and religious educators; mission workers; youth faith or inter-faith groups, women of faith networks, faith-based or faith-inspired organizations; denominational, ecumenical and intra-religious institutions, umbrella organizations and networks; and inter-faith institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that: "*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.*"

## Participants

The Dialogue will bring together spiritual and community leaders of a range of creeds, in addition to State, NGO, and IGO participants, as well as individual experts. Through a mix of plenary and roundtable discussions, it will foster a focused exchange of views on the values and operational themes set out in the next section.

## Potential areas for cooperation

Given the consonance between religious values and protection principles, the following themes may lend themselves to treatment through the dual lenses of values and potential advocacy/operational support.

<b>Examples of values</b>	<b>Examples of potential advocacy/ operational focus</b>
<b>Provision of sanctuary and refuge to those at risk of harm or in need of sustenance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mobilizing public and political support for asylum and protection principles</li><li>• Challenging restrictive admission policies</li><li>• Mobilizing host communities to provide support for refugees and IDPs</li></ul>
<b>Protecting the most vulnerable, building resilience and empowering local communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support for asylum-seekers, refugees and IDPs with particular vulnerabilities (e.g. people with disabilities, survivors of torture, female-headed families, and children)</li><li>• Advocacy in support of refugee settlement and third country resettlement, and mobilizing receiving communities in resettlement countries</li></ul>
<b>Respect for human life and dignity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rescue at sea</li><li>• Combating xenophobia, racism and religious intolerance</li><li>• Advocating for alternatives to detention of asylum-seekers and refugees</li><li>• Promoting access to justice</li></ul>
<b>Family and social cohesion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting family reunification</li><li>• Advocating for birth registration of children as a means to avoid statelessness</li><li>• Advocating for gender equality in nationality laws</li></ul>
<b>Peace and harmonious relations within and between communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting durable solutions, in particular reintegration of returning refugees and IDPs, through conflict resolution and reconciliation</li></ul>

## **Structure of the Dialogue**

### Half-day preparatory session – morning of 12 December 2012

Building on the positive experience of the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Challenges for People of Concern to UNHCR in Urban Settings, which was preceded by a half-day meeting with Mayors, this Dialogue will be preceded by a half-day preparatory consultation with a limited number of spiritual and community leaders, as well as experts in inter-faith dialogue. This invitation-only meeting will be held in the morning of 12 December 2012.

The preparatory session will enable an initial exchange of views on the various connections among religious values, asylum and humanitarian principles; the engagement of religious communities in humanitarian work; and potential means of strengthening collaboration between such communities and UNHCR. The exchange of views will set the stage for the participation of religious and community leaders and their senior advisers/staff during the full Dialogue, notably in the roundtable sessions.

### The Dialogue: Plenary and Breakout Session

The Dialogue will commence in a plenary session in the afternoon of 12 December 2012.

The core of the Dialogue will occur in three roundtable sessions organized on 12 and 13 December 2012. A background document to inform these discussions will be shared with participants in due course.

The preliminary themes<sup>3</sup> of the roundtables are as follows:

- **Roundtable 1:** Engagement on asylum and protection of stateless people: Identification of areas for cooperation and action (for example, mobilizing public support for asylum; combating xenophobia, racism and religious intolerance; promoting family reunification; promoting birth registration; etc.).
- **Roundtable 2:** Engagement on durable solutions: Identification of areas for cooperation and action (for example, support for return and voluntary repatriation; partnership in the reintegration of returning refugees and IDPs; initiatives relating to conflict resolution, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence; support for resettlement; and support for local settlement; etc.).
- **Roundtable 3:** What has been the experience of religious communities and faith-based organizations in their partnership with UNHCR? Is there a need to develop specific guidance on such partnership?

In keeping with tradition, the only formal outcome of the Dialogue will be a Chairman's Summary delivered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at the close of the Dialogue.

UNHCR Headquarters  
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<sup>3</sup> Themes will be refined as preparations progress.