faith and peace
Interfaith Cooperation Forum Newsletter

September 2017

The effects of the illegal discharge of toxic industrial waste into the ocean off the coast of Vietnam by the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corp., a transnational corporation from Taiwan: dead fish and the "death" of the fishermen's livelihood. *(Photo from https://revitalizationnews.com)*

Formosa and Environmental Conservation

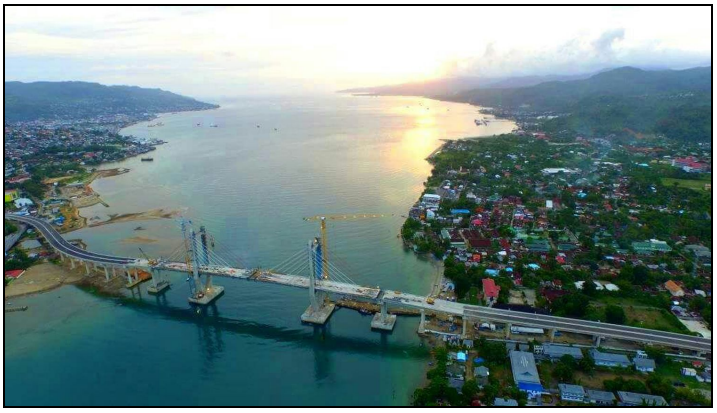
Trinh Hoang Tho

Water pollution created by a Taiwanese corporation in Vietnam has contaminated not just the ocean but has impacted the livelihood of fishermen and their families, resulting in

protests by the people. A number of ways to take action are suggested by the author. **[Read more]**

Traditional Oarsmen and Development

Marvin F. Laurens



Development projects, like the Merah Putih Bridge in Ambon, Indonesia, are generally viewed as a positive change for the community; but in this case, the bridge has displaced the livelihood of more than 100 oarsmen who earned a living by ferrying passengers around Ambon Bay. The author explains how people in the community can respond. **[Read more]**

Interfaith Strengthening Culture

Max Ediger

During a field trip to Central Sulawesi in September, the participants of the 2017 School of Peace (SOP) conducted by Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) in Indonesia heard how Christian and Muslim villagers overcame their mistrust of each other during a time of violence between their communities and forged bonds of mutual respect and cooperation among themselves. **[Read more]**

Is a Clamor for Independence a Punishable Crime?

Philip Setunga

Since the return of Hong Kong to the sovereignty of China in 1997, there have periodically been calls for independence in Hong Kong. These calls have become more pervasive since the pro-democracy Occupy or Umbrella Movement of 2014, especially among the city's youth, and have included the creation of a number of political parties advocating Hong Kong's independence, such as the Hong Kong National Party. It is in this context that the author offers his thoughts about the role of youth in society based on a Christian perspective. **[Read more]**

Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights

As part of a series of international meetings beginning in 2008, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) organized a workshop in March 2017 in Beirut, Lebanon, to discuss the link between the world's faiths and human rights. The Beirut Declaration is the product of the two days of reflection and discussion by the 30 participants.

The report of the workshop is available online at <http://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Press/Faith4Rights.pdf&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1>, and those wishing to add their name to the declaration may do so by sending an e-mail to <faith4rights@ohchr.org>. **[Read more]**

Water pollution created by the illegal discharge of toxic waste into the ocean by the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corp. has resulted in dead fish that has impacted the livelihood of fisherfolk in central Vietnam. *(Photo from www.lifegate.it)*

Formosa and Environmental Conservation

Trinh Hoang Tho

The tragedy of pollution by the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corp. in the Vung Ang Economic Zone in Ha Tinh Province is one of the worst environmental disasters in Vietnam that has affected four provinces in the central part of the country—Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien-Hue. The corporation is backed by the Formosa Plastics Group in Taiwan, which was so clever to choose such a convenient place for their factory near the Vung Ang deep seaport and the Thach Khe iron mines with 3,300 hectares, or 33 square kilometers, for iron and steelmaking. Since the groundbreaking ceremony on Dec. 2, 2012, construction and production have started.

First, fish carcasses were first reported to have washed up on the beaches of Ha Tinh Province. Later in April 2016 a large number of dead fish were found on the coast of Ha

Tinh and three other provinces—Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien-Hue—because of the phosphate and pH levels in the water as Formosa discharged toxic industrial waste illegally into the sea through drainage pipes. Approximately 80 tons of fish had been washed up on shore by the following month.

As a result of this pollution, people cannot go fishing, which brings no income for their families. Children cannot go to school because parents cannot afford the fees anymore. People were consequently getting frustrated and angry. Some protests began in Ha Tinh Province and even spread to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. However, they were soon suppressed.

In May 2017, there were continuous dust explosions that were caused by Formosa's manufacturing plant. A lime kiln exploded because of an equipment malfunction and combustion triggering serious air pollution.

To entice the company to build its factory in Vietnam, the government levied low taxes to Formosa for importing capital goods, charged it low land taxes and built supporting infrastructure for the factory. For its part, Formosa proudly proclaimed that they created more than 30,000 jobs for the local people.

The Government and Formosa's Responses while the People Struggle

Protests are always viewed now with negative eyes due to an incident in May 2014 when local people in Ha Tinh Province were provoked by some "wirepullers" regarding anti-China issues. Because of the deployment of a Chinese oil rig in the South China Sea, people violently began burning the factory, killing four Chinese workers and forcing 3,000 others to flee the factory. Ironically, the factory was built by a Taiwanese company. Afterwards, the government had to apologize and give the factory compensation for their destroyed property.

In spite of the government's negative views toward demonstrations, people protested in April and May 2016 over their dead fish in Ha Tinh Province. They came with banners—We Need Fish, Not Steel; Formosa, Get Out of Vietnam; Protect Nature. The police made sure the protests did not become violent. However, in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, people who joined the protests were detained by the police.

Meanwhile, the court in Vietnam rejected the fishermen's lawsuit against Formosa, for the people did not have the right to sue the company, according to the court.

After failing to sue the company, people began putting pressure on the government and the factory. They blocked the road and protested again over their losses and for their rights. People now knew the law and were also well organized.

Eventually, Formosa gave compensation of US$500 million, but sadly, not for the people but for the government. Although even this sum of money was not enough to adequately compensate the people for their losses, the government corruptly kept the money and did not compensate the people.

But people kept protesting.

Finally, to support their livelihood, the government gave 400 new fishing boats to the people for offshore fishing since the sea was totally contaminated for 20 miles from the coast. People also received two years of free education and insurance and could receive a loan of up to 100 million dong (US$4,356). Their right to fish in the South China Sea was also protected. Consequently, the issue of compensation was solved.

In my opinion, however, the symptoms of the problem were just solved, not the root causes of the people's crisis.

Summary of the Realities of the People

- People cannot fish in the adjacent sea, leading to a decrease of the amount of "clean" fish they can catch that then involves high costs and equipment for offshore fishing that they lack, resulting in a risk of traditional fishery losses.
- Marine life is being destroyed more and more every day because of uncontrolled sewage being pumped directly into the sea.
- Compensation did not reach the people due to corruption.
- The national court in Vietnam rejected the fishermen's lawsuit against the Taiwanese corporation.
- People are easily misled by many "wirepullers," and their protests become violent.

My Vision for the Future

- Restore the environment and marine life so that the fisherfolk can regain their livelihood
- Ensure the participation of people in policymaking
- Initiate a transparent system so that corruption is minimized

My Action Plan

1. 'Fish Stories' Tour Package

The tour offers tourists a rare look into the life of the local people following the environmental disaster above that struck Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien-Hue Provinces. This idea is not the first one in Vietnam regarding the Formosa issue. However, I want to emphasize the role of the local people as well as the environment in this case compared to the previous tours which focused only on "fish-steel" issues.

From Ha Tinh Province where Formosa Steel Corp. is located, tourists will have an experience to live in local homes in a fishing village near the factory to see the harmonious coexistence between people, the environment and the fish that support their livelihood.

On the next day, the tourists will travel to Quang Binh Province to enjoy the magnificent beauty of nature in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park and spend time with people in the village where people have been affected from eating fish, especially a child who was previously hospitalized due to fish-related food poisoning. Through listening to their stories, tourists will learn the contradiction between how beautiful nature is and how cruelly people are treating it.

On the third day, tourists will have a chance to visit Quang Tri Province and stay once again in local homes and experience a traditional fish market. They will see how people maintain their lives through fishing and how they sustain their traditional occupations.

The last stop on the tour will be Lang Co Beach in Hue, one of the most wonderful beaches in Vietnam. This visit encourages people to protect such a pristine environment from being destroyed, polluted and poisoned.

After the tour, the tourists will be asked about their feelings when seeing the results of how badly people treat the environment and what they will do to keep nature always green, fresh and unspoiled.

2. Stories of Fishermen and Their Families

We will follow the stories of the fishermen in the four provinces above that have been seriously affected by the Formosa disaster by living with the people in the environmentally damaged areas. Through pictures and the stories collected, an exhibition will be designed to raise people's awareness about the issues.

By visiting the exhibition, the guests will read the messages that we want to deliver to them about how people in central Vietnam are suffering due to the pollution, how they love the sea, what are their hopes for a better future and how they teach their next generations to preserve traditional fishing practices. People can also contribute their pictures and messages to call for people's awareness to protect the environment.

3. Thinking Workshop

People still depend a great deal on the sea to maintain their lives. We can spend time with them to learn more about the local conditions and their abilities so that we can subsequently organize a meeting where people can share about what they can do besides fishing.

For example, not only catching fresh fish but also producing dried fish, fish sauce and organic products from fish—these will much improve the value of their products and create more income for them so that their lives will be more stable and their source of income more diversified.

4. Talk Show about the Environment and Roles of the Youth

Experts can be invited to discuss environmental issues and to analyze the Formosa case—how seriously the sea is polluted, how long it takes marine life to recover and thus normalize fishing activities.

People in the polluted areas can also be asked to share about their lives when the sea is contaminated and fishing becomes impossible.

In addition, students either studying environmental conservation or are interested in these issues can be encouraged to talk about their experiences and concerns, sharing knowledge and organizing projects together. In this way, the roles of young people to contribute to environmental conservation can be stimulated.

Trinh Hoang Tho took part in the three-month School of Peace (SOP) conducted by Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) from July to October 2017 near Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She is a student in the Department of Tourism at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Vietnam.

The Merah Putih Bridge in the foreground in Ambon, Indonesia, has impacted the livelihood of more than 100 oarsmen who operated the boats that was the traditional mode of transportation in the bay. *(Photo from https://twitter.com/kemenpu)*

Traditional Oarsmen and Development

Marvin F. Laurens

Ambon Bay has utilized boats for transportation since 1950 by ferrying passengers from village to village, such as from Galala to Poka. Historically, boats have been the traditional and favored means of transportation between the Leitimur and Leihitu areas.

On April 4, 2016, President Joko Widodo inaugurated the megaproject Merah Putih Bridge in Ambon in the province of Maluku that is the longest in the eastern region of Indonesia at a length of more than 1,100 meters that cost the national budget 779.2 billion rupiah (US$57.5 million).

What Kind of Development Do We Need?

The question then arises, Is this the kind of development that people need?

The government just thinks about infrastructure and does not think about human needs. The bridge has been already completed and officially opened. Afterwards, however, the number of oarsmen has been reduced. Consequently, this development project has become a cruel intrusion into the lives of these people who have been marginalized.

Development though should accommodate every person who lives in the communities affected by the project without negatively affecting or discriminating against anyone. Sometimes the government presents many excuses to the people about development; and based on this rationale, the government believes it can proceed with any project it wants and label it as development.

The government though has not offered any alternative way of life to the people who work as oarsmen. The government does not think about them nor does it have any plan for them. In the long term, the oarsmen will simply disappear. Who will take responsibility for their hardship and suffering?

Race against Current Development

How should people race against the government's development—a race to survive against modernization? The decreasing number of passengers naturally affects the oarsmen. The impact though is not just about a lower income, but the number of oarsmen has also been decreasing. Before the bridge, the number of oarsmen was 200; but since 2016, the number has decreased to 30 oarsmen. Thus, the other oarsmen have had to change their profession and find another job as daily laborers or coolies.

Sometime development merely leaves the problem to the people, to the community—problems such as unemployment, low incomes and low esteem among the displaced workers regarding their sense of belonging in the community. Moreover, there are also the problems of development that affect nature—the environmental damage, displacement of the coastal area due to erosion and rising sea levels.

How Should Development Be Done?

Development has to reduce the gap in the community between the upper class, middle class, lower class and poor people, for development has to take into account what all of the

people need and to determine whether it is appropriate to the needs of the entire community so that one doesn't have to ask the question, Is it the kind of development that people need or not?

Development also must not discriminate against the marginalized. The oarsmen are a part of the community even if they are marginalized people who just survive by rowing. Consequently, in this example, development has to accommodate the voices of these people who depend for their livelihood by rowing; development can involve the marginalized people's voices so that they can offer alternatives. In this way, marginalized people can be involved in development decisions and have a role to play in the process—a process that engages the people most affected by development, empowering them and giving them ownership of the process and the outcome.

When people are involved and engaged with development decisions, then alternative possibilities to assist and improve the lives of the people will emerge—alternatives such as capacity-building and, in this case, the utilization of potential bay tourism that benefits the oarsmen. Society can then become aware of this process and can make it a local traditional value for the future.

Responses to Development

We have to raise and foster the awareness of the local people about the potential of these traditional oarsmen as a part of the culture in the Ambon area. Years earlier we began a social media campaign about this case. In one month, we tried to share the stories of the local people that always use this form of transportation. We wanted to maintain the collective memory of the people about their experiences on the boats. Our one-month campaign though was not enough. We thus had to think what was next.

What we decided to do next was that one of my friends who is a lecturer in the Journalism Department at the National Islamic Religion Institute of Ambon tried to persuade his students to make a documentary movie for their final exam about these oarsmen with the title *The Last Oarsman* that shared his experience when using this form of transportation.

Afterwards, we used art based on the people's stories. Through music, poetry, painting and theater performances, we shared every story of the community of those who had struggled

and suffered as a result of this development. Thus, every local person could see what happened in the community. We learned through this process that various expressions of art can make people aware about local issues and can motivate them to respond.

We also have to think about education too, about how education can connect to the local traditional values in the community. We have made some plans and strategies to involve students to learn more about this local wisdom so that they will have a good understanding about their local traditional values. In the future, we plan to organize some workshops in the schools by using art as tools for transformation for the children. Children have a lot of curiosity, so we can easily engage with them and impart the local wisdom and values to them to benefit the community and maintain its traditions.

Marvin F. Laurens participated in Interfaith Cooperation Forum's (ICF) 2017 School of Peace (SOP) that was held near Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He lives in Ambon in Indonesia's Maluku Province, working as a musician, freelance event organizer and the operations manager of Paparisa Ambon Bergerak (Common House for Young Creative Community in Ambon).

The SOP participants learned from the villagers of Malitu in Indonesia's province of Central Sulawesi how people of different faiths can live peacefully together even in an area of the country that has witnessed violence between Muslims and Christians.

Interfaith Strengthening Culture

Max Ediger

The village of Malitu rests in a small valley in the mountains near Poso on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. It is an indigenous village with a population of both Christians and Muslims. The first Protestant church in the Poso area was built here in 1933. The church still stands, although a new church has been built and is now used for worship services.

In 1998, the Poso region experienced severe conflict between Christians and Muslims with many buildings burned, including churches and mosques, and hundreds of people killed. Malitu was also attacked, and all the houses were burned. The villagers fled into the surrounding jungle where they stayed until it was safe to return. While hiding in the jungle, the Muslims and Christians met. At first, they were afraid of each other, but then they understood that both groups were facing the same danger, so they decided to come together for mutual protection—mutual respect that they maintain even today.

Now they have rebuilt the village and are determined that there will never be conflict between the Christian and Muslim members of the community again. As Christians and Muslims have intermarried, most people have relatives of a different faith, making it easier to live in harmony.

The participants of the 2017 School of Peace (SOP) had the privilege of having a homestay for one night in the village, hearing the stories of the people and experiencing their warm hospitality.

We arrived while they were celebrating their thanksgiving. Every household was busy preparing food and other special items for the festival. Early in the morning our group was escorted to the village center by village leaders and a group of traditional dancers. There we were treated to a wonderful welcome ceremony, including gifts, dancing and music. The morning ended with a traditional meal that the villagers had been preparing the previous night.

As the day moved toward noon, visitors from surrounding villages began to arrive to join the festivities. Every house had tables of food ready, and visitors could move from house to house, chatting and enjoying dishes of local vegetables, pork, beef, bat and other delicacies.

In keeping with their commitment to express respect and openness to those of other faiths, each house had prepared two tables of food. One contained halal food for all Muslim visitors. The other table contained pork for Christians and people of other faiths.

This experience shows us how much we can learn from marginalized indigenous communities who know how to be open and loving to all people. It was a very special experience for SOP 2017.

Max Ediger is the coordinator of Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF). SOP, which is ICF's main program, was held for three months this year near Yogyakarta, Indonesia, beginning on July 15.

Protesters use umbrellas to shield themselves from the police's use of tear gas and pepper spray to disperse them during demonstrations for genuine democratic reform in Hong Kong in 2014, spawning the name Umbrella Movement. *(Photo by Bruce Van Voorhis)*

Is a Clamor for Independence a Punishable Crime?

Philip Setunga

The Esteem for Youth in the Old Testament

Christians who have read the illuminating passage from the Book of Joel are familiar with the prophetic gifts from Yahweh to God's people and in particular to the youth: "After this, I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams and your young people see visions" (Joel 2:28).

According to many commentators, the prophet, faced with a people on the verge of starvation following an attack by locusts on their agricultural products, held out this promise that Yahweh will not allow their destruction. Moreover, on a note of hope, he prophesized a situation where the elders will dream dreams while the young will have their visions. This view, of course, is subject to interpretation, but one point is clear: under the power of Yahweh, people will begin to dream of a world freed from this form of suffering and that the youth will be envisioning a future that is different from the present.

And in the New Testament

Peter, addressing the believers in Jerusalem and Judaea, echoed the same sentiment when he said that, “in the last days, the Lord declares, I shall pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, your old people dream dreams” (Acts 2:17).

In fact, the idea of the young “prophesying” and “seeing visions” is a recurrent theme in the Scriptures. Therefore, this notion is not to be dismissed as being of little significance. The outpouring of the Spirit is seen in the Church as being associated with “renewing the face of the earth.”

Thus, the believing community, right through its existence, ascribed a role of being visionaries to the youth; they are enshrined with the task of creating a new form of society. It is somewhat unfortunate that most of the church functionaries continue to be persons other than the young. Even John in his first letter (1 John 2:14) speaks of the admiration for the youth for the contribution that they can make by overcoming that which is evil or that which is unacceptable. Therefore, the Church, as one of its principle tenets, recognizes the role of the youth in the formation of a new society.

A popular Sri Lankan singer, Nanda Malini, has this lyric in one of her songs: “If envisioning a new world is a punishable crime, what purpose then the law of the country, the judiciary and the judges serve?”

The question is plain and simple: Is society destined to be the same for all ages to come however great and grandiose the present-day achievements are or the past may have been? Our past may be great, but we are not going to live in the past. The past cannot be

our future. It can serve only as a steppingstone to embark on a future to be designed by the people of the time or the youth of today.

Can we put the young into molds however comprehensive, progressive and all-encompassing they may be? Is it up to us to decide on the future of the generations to come, or has that to be a joint project with no inhibitions?

Given the developments that have been taking place in China, both the published and unpublished reports are bound to generate suspicion, fear and apprehension. Faced with these paradoxes, it is normal for the youth of the country, particularly in Hong Kong where there has been transparency and accountability to a considerable extent, to envision a society where they have a greater say.

The last governor of Hong Kong in the 1990s, Chris Patten, who was quite attentive to the emerging situation in the territory, thoughtfully suggested “dialogue” with the youth as a way forward. The youth are the stakeholders of the future and need to be involved in the discussion when decisions are made that concerns their future. Why is there is so much resentment, threats of repression or even to “kill mercilessly” when issues can be openly debated and resolved?

A Phenomenon That Is Too Familiar

Most of us, either as youth or the parents of youth, have witnessed the phenomenon of “unrest.” It is recognized largely as a passing phenomenon related to the physical and emotional changes occurring in the person. It is an urge to assert one’s own identity, not simply as the son or daughter of so and so, but purely and simply as someone with their own rights and dignity. Failure to recognize this development of the person can lead to serious repercussions in the family and even in society.

Given this physical phenomenon, it is for society to recognize it as a driving force for creative change in society. This process does not mean an outright condemnation of the past but rather a declaration of the drawbacks in all aspects of society that need adjustment, reform or even transformation since societies are not formed for all of eternity. Societies are in the process of formation, re-formation and rejuvenation for the benefit of the generations to come. Consequently, according to our Christian tradition and

belief, the youth are inspired by the Spirit to be in the vanguard to effect the changes that are necessary.

Punitive Action Can Have Undesired Consequences

It is a too familiar sight that families end with catastrophic consequences where domestic issues between adults and youth have not been addressed amicably. Where adults in a family have reacted too negatively to the clamor for greater understanding and recognition from the youth, there have been unwanted consequences. This illustration equally applies to the larger community where punitive action might have the opposite effect of prevention or quiet loyalty and silent obedience. It would not be surprising if the recent judgments in Hong Kong on some democrats and youth, such as the imprisonment in August of three young leaders of the Umbrella Movement for six to eight months, generate more sympathy and a tendency for imitation.

In such a context, the elite in society have to be more magnanimous and conciliatory in accommodating the youth and listening to their real concerns, which include the increasing interference by mainland authorities in Hong Kong's affairs, the fear of greater control in the community after 2047 when the "one country, two systems" model of governance is scheduled to end unless it is extended, etc. The more these topics are seen as taboos and beyond any discussion leading to a common understanding, the chances of dissent and of separation become more and more accentuated.

It is time to take the youth in society seriously as they are going to be the masters of their own future society. Let us pave the way for a desired democratic, free society based on the rule of law crafted in consultation with them. Hong Kong is blessed with youthful dreamers that deserve avenues for creative expressions instead of suppression. Let the Spirit that guides us all encourage the youth to envision a society that sustains the dignity of all people and of the entire Creation.

Philip Setunga is a former staff member of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in Hong Kong.

Minority religious communities in Asia too frequently are the targets of some radical members of the majority religious community within a country, such as Hindu extremists in India threatening the country's Muslims and Christians. The Faith for Rights Declaration seeks to minimize and eventually end these threatening encounters. *(Photo from www.fides.org)*

Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights

"There are as many paths to God as there are souls on Earth."

—Rumi[1]

1. We, faith-based and civil society actors working in the field of human rights and gathered in Beirut on March 28–29, 2017, in culmination of a trajectory of meetings initiated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),[2] express our deep conviction that our respective religions and beliefs share a common commitment to **upholding the dignity and the equal worth of all human beings**. Shared human values and equal dignity are therefore common roots of our cultures. Faith and rights should be mutually reinforcing spheres. Individual and communal expressions of religions or beliefs

thrive and flourish in environments where human rights, based on the equal worth of all individuals, are protected. Similarly, human rights can benefit from deeply rooted ethical and spiritual foundations provided by religions or beliefs.

2. We understand our respective religious or belief convictions as a source for the protection of the **whole spectrum of inalienable human entitlements**, from the preservation of the gift of life, the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, belief, opinion and expression to the freedoms from want and fear, including from violence in all its forms.

- *"Whoever preserves one life is considered by Scripture as if one has preserved the whole world" (Talmud, Sanhedrin, 37,a).*
- *"Someone who saves a person's life is equal to someone who saves the life of all" (Qur'an 5:32).*
- *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and with your entire mind and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).*
- *"Let them worship the Lord of this House who saved them from hunger and saved them from fear" (Sourat Quraish, verses 3–4).*
- *"A single person was created in the world to teach that if anyone causes a single person to perish he has destroyed the entire world; and if anyone saves a single soul, he has saved the entire world" (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5).*
- *"Let us stand together, make statements collectively and may our thoughts be one" (Rigveda 10:191:2).*
- *"Just as I protect myself from unpleasant things however small, in the same way, I should act towards others with a compassionate and caring mind" (Shantideva,* A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*).*
- *"Let us put our minds together to see what life we can make for our children" (Chief Sitting Bull, Lakota).*

3. Based on the above, among many other sources of faith, we are convinced that our **religious or belief convictions are one of the fundamental sources** of protection for human dignity and the freedoms of all individuals and communities with no distinction on any ground whatsoever. Religious, ethical and philosophical texts preceded international law in upholding the oneness of humankind, the sacredness of the right to life and the corresponding individual and collective duties that are grounded in the hearts of believers.

4. We pledge to disseminate the **common human values that unite us**. While we differ on some theological questions, we undertake to combat any form of exploitation of such differences to advocate violence, discrimination and religious hatred.

- *"We have designed a law and a practice for different groups. Had God willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you. So compete with each other in doing good. Every one of you will return to God, and He will inform you regarding the things about which you differed (Qur'an 5, 48).*
- *"Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch" (Bahá'u'lláh).*

5. We believe that freedom of religion or belief does not exist without the **freedom of thought and conscience** which precedes all freedoms, for they are linked to human essence and his/her rights of choice and to freedom of religion or belief. A person as a whole is the basis of every faith, and he/she grows through love, forgiveness and respect.

6. We hereby solemnly launch together from Beirut the **most noble of all struggles, peaceful but powerful**, against our own egos, self-interest and artificial divides. Only when we as religious actors assume our respective roles, articulate a shared vision of our responsibilities and transcend preaching to action, only then we will credibly promote mutual acceptance and fraternity among people of different religions or beliefs and empower them to defeat the negative impulses of hatred, viciousness, manipulation, greed, cruelty and related forms of inhumanity. All religious or belief communities need a resolved leadership that unequivocally dresses that path by acting for the equal dignity of everyone, driven by our shared humanity and respect for the absolute freedom of conscience of every human being. We pledge to spare no effort in filling that joint leadership gap by protecting freedom and diversity through "faith for rights" activities.

- *"We perfected each soul within its built-in weakness for wrongdoing and its aspiration for what is right. Succeeds he or she who elevate to the path of rightness" (Qur'an 91, 7–9).*

7. The present declaration on Faith for Rights **reaches out to persons belonging to religions and beliefs in all regions of the world** with a view to enhancing cohesive, peaceful and respectful societies on the basis of a common action-oriented platform agreed by all concerned and open to all actors that share its objectives. We value that our declaration on Faith for Rights, like its founding precedent, the Rabat Plan of Action on

incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (October 2012), were both conceived and conducted under the auspices and with the support of the United Nations that represents all peoples of the world and is enriched by U.N. human rights mechanisms, such as special rapporteurs and treaty body members.

8. While numerous welcomed initiatives attempted over time to link faith with rights for the benefit of both, none of these attempts fully reached that goal. We are therefore convinced that **religious actors should be enabled**, both nationally and internationally, to assume their responsibilities in defending our shared humanity against incitement to hatred, those who benefit from destabilizing societies and the manipulators of fear to the detriment of equal and inalienable human dignity. With the present Faith for Rights Declaration, we aim to join hands and hearts in building on previous attempts to bring closer faith and rights **by articulating the common grounds** between all of us and to **define ways in which faith can stand for rights** more effectively so that both enhance each other.

- *"Mankind is at loss. Except those who believe in doing righteous deeds, constantly recommend it to one another and persist in that vein" (Qur'an 103, 3).*

9. Building on the present declaration, we also intend to **practice what we preach** through establishing **a multilevel coalition**, open for all independent religious actors and faith-based organizations which genuinely demonstrate acceptance of and commitment to the present Faith for Rights Declaration by implementing projects on the ground in areas that contribute to achieving its purpose. We will also be charting a roadmap for concrete actions in specific areas to be reviewed regularly by our global coalition of Faith for Rights.

10. To achieve the above goal, we pledge as believers (whether theistic, non-theistic, atheistic or other[3]) to fully adhere to **five fundamental principles**:

a. Transcending traditional interfaith dialogues into **concrete action-oriented Faith for Rights projects at the local level**. While dialogue is important, it is not an end in itself. Good intentions are of limited value without corresponding action. Change on the ground is the goal, and concerted action is its logical means.

- *"Faith is grounded in the heart when it is demonstrated by deeds" (Hadith).*

b. **Avoiding theological and doctrinal divides** in order to act on areas of shared interfaith and intrafaith vision as defined in the present Faith for Rights Declaration. This declaration is not conceived to be a tool for dialogue among religions but rather a joint platform for common action in defense of human dignity for all. While we respect freedom of expression and entertain no illusion as to the continuation of a level of controversy at different levels of religious discourse, we are resolved to challenge the manipulation of religions in both politics and conflicts. We intend to be a balancing united voice of solidarity, reason, compassion, moderation, enlightenment and corresponding collective action at the grassroots level.

c. **Introspectiveness** is a virtue we cherish. We will all speak up and act first and foremost on our own weaknesses and challenges within our respective communities. We will address more global issues collectively and consistently after internal and inclusive deliberation that preserves our most precious strength, i.e., integrity.

d. **Speaking with one voice**, particularly against any advocacy of hatred that amounts to inciting violence, discrimination or any other violation of the equal dignity that all human beings enjoy regardless of their religion, belief, gender, political or other opinion, national or social origin or any other status. Denouncing incitement to hatred, injustices, discrimination on religious grounds or any form of religious intolerance is not enough. We have a duty to redress hate speech by remedial compassion and solidarity that heals hearts and societies alike. Our words of redress should transcend religious or belief boundaries. Such boundaries should thus no longer remain a free land for manipulators, xenophobes, populists and violent extremists.

e. We are resolved to **act in a fully independent manner**, abiding only by our conscience while seeking partnerships with religious and secular authorities, relevant governmental bodies and non-state actors wherever Faith for Rights coalitions are freely established in conformity with the present declaration.

11. Our **main tool and asset is reaching out to hundreds of millions of believers** in a preventive structured manner to convey our shared convictions enshrined in this Faith for Rights Declaration. Speaking up in one voice in defense of the equal dignity of all on issues of common challenges to humanity equally serves the cause of faith and rights. Human

beings are entitled to full and equal respect, rather than mere tolerance, regardless of what they may believe or not believe. It is our duty to uphold this commitment within our respective spheres of competence. We will also encourage all believers to assume their individual responsibilities in the defense of their deeply held values of justice, equality and responsibility towards the needy and disadvantaged regardless of their religion or belief.

- *"People are either your brothers in faith or your brothers in humanity" (Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib).*
- *"On the long journey of human life, faith is the best of companions" (Buddha).*

12. We aim to achieve this goal in a concrete manner that matters **for people at the grassroots level** in all parts of the world where coalitions of religious actors choose to adhere to this declaration and act accordingly. We will support each other's actions, including through a highly symbolic annual Walk of Faith for Rights in the richest expression of our unity in diversity each 10th of December in all parts of the world.

13. Articulating through the present declaration a common vision of religious actors, on the basis of the Rabat Plan of Action of 2012 and follow-up meetings, would provide the tipping point for **disarming the forces of darkness** and would help dismantle the unholy alliance in too many hearts between fear and hatred. Violence in the name of religion defeats its basic foundations—mercy and compassion. We intend to transform the messages of mercy and compassion into acts of solidarity through intercommunal social, developmental and environmental faith-based projects at the local, national, regional and global levels.

14. We **fully embrace the universally recognized values** as articulated in international human rights instruments as common standards of our shared humanity. We ground our commitments in this Faith for Rights Declaration first and foremost in our conviction that religions and beliefs share common core values of respect for human dignity, justice and fairness. We also ground these commitments in our acceptance of the fact that "**everyone has duties** to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible."[4] Our duty is to practice what we preach, to fully engage, to speak up and act on the ground in the defense of human dignity long before it is actually threatened.

- *"Oh you believers, why don't you practice what you preach? Most hateful for God is preaching what you don't practice" (Qur'an 61:2–3).*
- *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8–9).*

15. Both **religious precepts and existing international legal frameworks** attribute responsibilities to religious actors. Empowering religious actors requires actions in such areas as legislation, institutional reforms, supportive public policies and training adapted to the needs of local religious actors who often are one of the main sources of education and social change in their respective areas of action. International conventions and covenants have defined key legal terms, such as genocide, refugee, religious discrimination and freedom of religion or belief.[5] All of these concepts have corresponding resonance in different religions and beliefs. In addition, numerous declarations and resolutions[6] provide elements of religious actors' roles and responsibilities that we embrace and consolidate in this Faith for Rights Declaration.

16. We agree as human beings that **we are accountable to all human beings** as to redressing the manner by which religions are portrayed and too often manipulated. We are responsible for our actions, but even more responsible if we do not act or do not act properly and timely.

- *"We will ask each of you about all what you have said and done, for you are accountable" (Qur'an, Assaafat, 24).*
- *"Every man's work shall be made manifest" (1 Corinthians 3:13).*

17. While States bear the primary responsibility for promoting and protecting all rights for all, individually and collectively to enjoy a dignified life free from fear and free from want and to enjoy the freedom of choice in all aspects of life, we as religious actors or as individual believers do bear a distinct responsibility to **stand up for our shared humanity and equal dignity of each human being** in all circumstances within our own spheres of preaching, teaching, spiritual guidance and social engagement.

- *"Whoever witnesses an injustice or wrongdoing should change its course by his hand. If he or she cannot do that, then by their words. If he or she is unable to do that, then by their hearts. This would be the weakest of acts of faith" (Hadith).*

18. **Religious communities, their leaders and followers** have a role and bear responsibilities independently from public authorities, both under national and international legal instruments. By virtue of Article 2 (1) of the 1981 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, "no one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on the grounds of religion or belief." This provision establishes the direct responsibilities of religious institutions, leaders and even each individual within religious or belief communities.

19. As much as the notion of effective control [7] provides the foundation for the responsibilities of non-state actors in times of conflict, we see a similar legal and ethical justification in the case of religious leaders who exercise a **heightened degree of influence over the hearts and minds of their followers** at all times.

20. Speech is fundamental to individual and communal flourishing. It constitutes one of the most crucial **mediums for the good and evil sides of humanity**. War starts in the minds and is cultivated by a reasoning fueled by the often hidden advocacy of hatred. Positive speech is also the healing tool of reconciliation and peacebuilding in the hearts and minds. Speech is one of the most strategic areas of the responsibilities we commit to assume and support each other for their implementation through this Faith for Rights Declaration on the basis of the thresholds articulated by the Rabat Plan of Action.

21. Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, or ICCPR (Article 20, Paragraph 2), States are obliged to prohibit any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. This includes **incitement to hatred by some religious leaders in the name of religion**. Because of the speaker's position, context, content and extent of sermons, such statements by religious leaders may be likely to meet the threshold of incitement to hatred. Prohibiting such incitement is not enough. Remedial advocacy to reconciliation is equally a duty, including

for religious leaders, particularly when hatred is advocated in the name of religions or beliefs.

22. The clearest and most recent guidance in this area is provided by the 2012 Rabat Plan of Action,[8] which articulates **three specific core responsibilities of religious leaders**: (a) religious leaders should refrain from using messages of intolerance or expressions which may incite violence, hostility or discrimination; (b) religious leaders also have a crucial role to play in speaking out firmly and promptly against intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech; and (c) religious leaders should be clear that violence can never be tolerated as a response to incitement to hatred (e.g., violence cannot be justified by prior provocation).

Endnotes

1. All quotations from religious or belief texts were offered by participants of the Beirut workshop in relation to their own religion or belief and are merely intended to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

2. OHCHR organized related international meetings, expert seminars and regional workshops, including in Geneva (October 2008), Vienna (February 2011), Nairobi (April 2011), Bangkok (July 2011), Santiago de Chile (October 2011), Rabat (October 2012), Geneva (February 2013), Amman (November 2013), Manama (2014), Tunis (October 2014 and April 2015), Nicosia (October 2015), Beirut (December 2015) and Amman (January 2017).

3. See U.N. Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22 (1993), U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, para. 2.

4. Article 29, Paragraph 1, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

5. These include the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948); Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984); Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989);

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006).

6. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981); Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992); Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programs (1994); UNESCO Declaration on Principles of Tolerance (1995); Final Document of the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination (2001); Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (2007); United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007); The Hague Statement on "Faith in Human Rights" (2008); Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality (2009); Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 on Combating Intolerance, Negative Stereotyping and Stigmatization of, and Discrimination, Incitement to Violence and Violence against, Persons Based on Religion or Belief (and Istanbul Process, 2011); Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (2012); Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes (2014); Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015); and the Fez Declaration on preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes (2015).

7. Under certain circumstances, in particular when non-state actors exercise significant/effective control over territory and population (e.g., as de facto authorities), they are also obliged to respect international human rights as duty bearers (see U.N. Docs. CEDAW/C/GC/30, para. 16; A/HRC/28/66, paras. 54–55).

8. See U.N. Doc. A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, annex, appendix, para. 36.

Interfaith Cooperation Forum

#52C Street 123, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

#6F-23 Waterloo Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, Hong Kong