



PRESS RELEASE

March 15, 2017 | Launch Platform “Gender Equality and Religion for the Gender Responsive Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Building on the recognition established at the 60th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) of the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in addressing the needs of women and girls - especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization –this year’s CSW featured an event launching a global Platform on “Gender Equality and Religion”, hosted at the Canadian Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

UN Women, on behalf of the UN’s Interagency Task Force for Religion and Development (UNFPA/UNIATF), together with UK-Aid/ DFID and the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) collaborated on this seminal new initiative.

This platform will aim to bring together religious and traditional leaders, leaders of faith based and civil society organizations, as well as gender and development experts to unpack how achieving gender equality can be pursued from within a religious lens and explore how such an approach that integrates both gender equality and faith as a basis guides the implementation of the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from eradicating poverty, to health, environment, and peace and security. In her welcoming remarks, Ms. Patricia Peña, Director General at Global Affairs Canada, affirmed “the value of a platform on gender equality with multi-religious actors for the realization of the SDGs”.

Ms. Lakshmi Puri, the Deputy Executive Director and UN Assistant Secretary General, UNWomen, emphasized that this Platform “is a first step towards a common, transformative, cultural and social framing for gender equality bringing together governments, faith community and gender equality activists to jointly advocate, promote progressive standards, build knowledge and movements for women’s empowerment and gender equality as a prerequisite to the full realization of women’s human rights and for the gender responsive implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable development. Today’s launch represents a concerted effort to build a collective interfaith narrative of gender equality and women’s empowerment”.

Speaking to the value of the Platform, Ms. Laura Londen, Deputy Executive Director and UN Assistant Secretary General, UNFPA, noted the importance of “engaging not only ordained men but also female religious and community leaders together to jointly advocate for women’s empowerment and gender equality as a prerequisite to the full realization of the SDG agenda as a whole”.

Ms. Ina Krisnamurthi, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations, noted that “religious leaders play an important role in the daily life of the majority of people, and it is in cooperation with religious leaders that the Indonesian government worked on a number of successful development initiatives, such as the promotion of fathers in childcare”.

Ambassador Martin Shearman, Head of Development and Human Rights at the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations underlined the UK’s commitment to co-lead the effort of realizing this Platform, while noting the historic benefits of cooperation with religious actors and institutions in his own country. “The distinct features of religious actors are trust, legitimacy and



outreach throughout the society, particularly their ability to reach people who cannot be reached through conventional means thus crucially contributing to the overarching prerogative of “Leave No One Behind”.

Mr. Ulrich Nitschke, head of the secretariat of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) spoke to the importance of tackling topics which are ambivalent and sensitive in the framework of development cooperation and religion. Given that comprehensive of gender equality, “it is not only desirable but necessary to have a mechanism which brings governmental, inter-governmental as well as faith-based civil society organizations together”.

Today’s initiative aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 and 17, which call on ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere by 2030, covering all areas of discrimination in law, policies, and practices.

Representatives from different faith traditions also affirmed the value of a Platform which would contribute to the building of knowledge on the intersections between gender equality and diverse faith traditions, as well as lived experiences of women worldwide.

Speakers included Ama Sri Karunamayi from the *Sri Mathrudevi Vishwashanthi Ashram Trust* (SMVA Trust), Ms. Isabel Phiri, Deputy General Secretary of *World Council of Churches (WCC)*, Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative to the United Nations of the *Baha’i International Community*, Rabbi Burton L. Visotzky of the *Jewish Theological Seminar*, Ms. Fadilah Grine, Director of Social and Family Affairs in the *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, Ms. Claire Paine the Global Coordinator of *Side by Side* and representative of *Act Alliance* and Venerable Yifa of *Buddhist Woodenfish Foundation*.

Speakers emphasized that the Platform should be interreligious, gender balanced and consist of actors from multiple faiths. The main goals for the platform include providing a space for exchange, learning, knowledge sharing and debate which will function as a hub for lessons learned as well as respective policy advocacy. Approaches should be inclusive of sensitive issues (like SRHR or LGBTI rights), the Platform should seek to foster both interreligious dialogue as well as partnership with non-religious actors; re-examine the role of media and Information and communication technology. Ms. Azza Karam, UNFPA / UNIATF, as moderator of the session, emphasized that “no vision for the platform will work without the necessary resources and inputs, thus all participants are called upon to get involved in moving the vision of the platform into concrete action”.

Rabbi Burton Visotzky noted that the “Arc of history is long, but it bends towards gender equality”. Ms Phiri added that the questions the Platform could deal with should encompass those of “gender justice”. Echoing these sentiments, Ms. Bani Dugal added a note of caution about the plethora of platforms and the need to secure actual deliverables, while Ven. Yifa and Ama Sri Karunamayi shared an aspiration that such a Platform could convene men and women of faith committed to gender equality and social justice, across regions and religions. Fadilah Grine and Claire Paine both emphasized how the collaborative engagement for women’s empowerment can not only be of critical relevance for advocacy, but would also enhance accountability towards the achievement of the SDGs.