A stylized graphic of a globe, composed of a grid of curved lines forming a dome-like structure. The top half of the globe is light orange, and the bottom half is dark blue. The globe is centered behind the title text.

RELIGION AND PUBLIC POLICY AT THE UN

*“The politics of nations.... can never ignore
the transcendent, spiritual dimension
of human experience.”*

KOFI A. ANNAN, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

A RELIGION COUNTS REPORT

© 2002, Religion Counts

ISBN 0-915365-48-0

Religion and Public Policy at the UN

This publication is the product of Religion Counts, an internationally recognized group of scholars and experts organized to provide religious perspectives in the development of international public policy. Religion Counts has been convened by The Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics and Catholics for a Free Choice. In preparing this report for Religion Counts, the editors drew upon a number of sources, including research conducted by The Park Ridge Center. The work of The Park Ridge Center was directed by Philip Boyle, Ph.D.. Researchers included Gail Glicksman, M. Christy Green, Teresia Hinga, Mieke Holkeboer, Paul Numrich, and Amy Suskind.

Editor: Geoffrey Knox

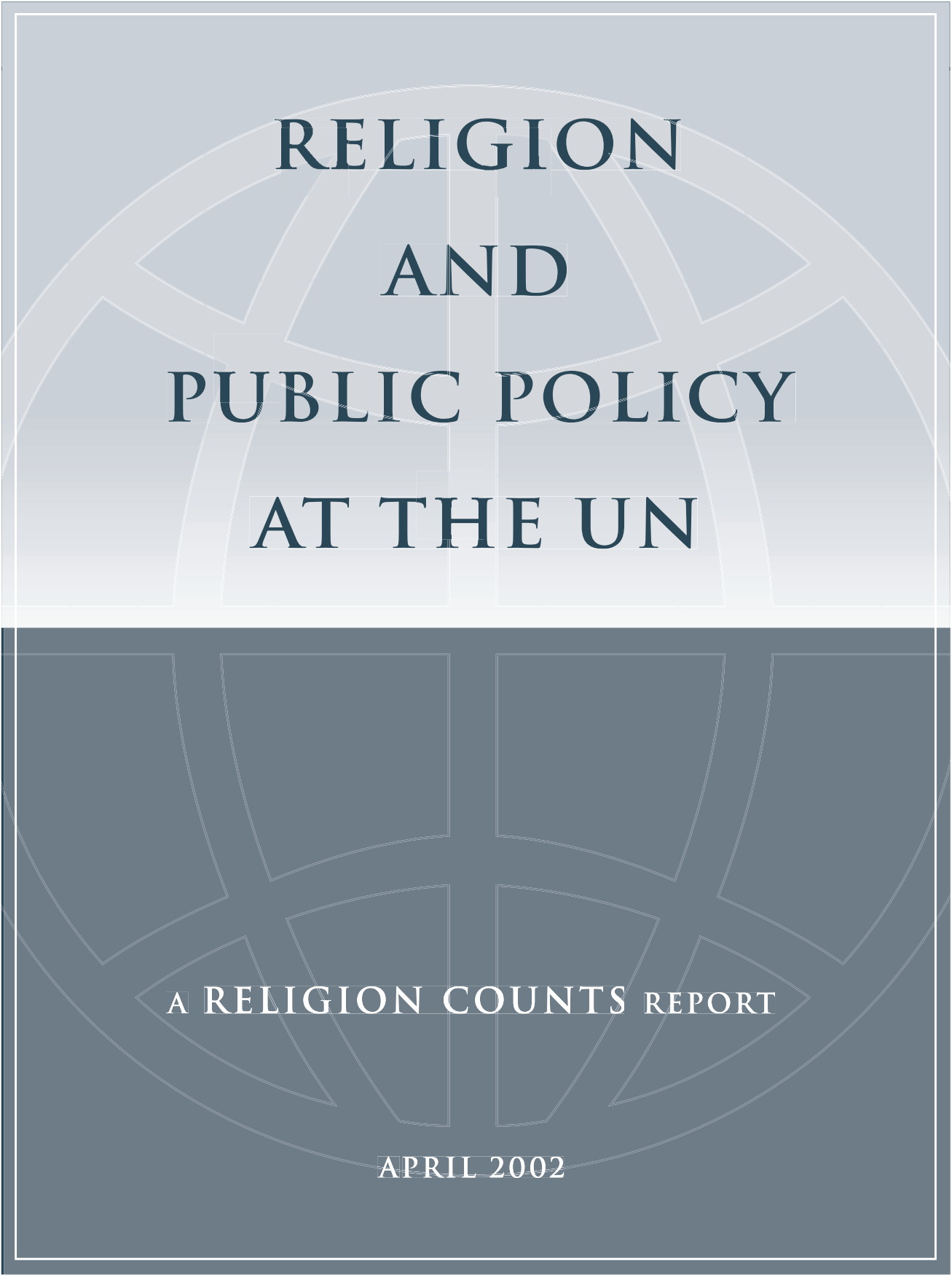
Associate Editor: Stefanie Spina

Copy Editor: Gail Cooper

Design: Hasten Design Studio, Inc.

Printing: Mount Vernon Printing Company

Religion Counts gratefully acknowledges the support of the Better World Fund
for both the research and production of this publication.



RELIGION AND PUBLIC POLICY AT THE UN

A RELIGION COUNTS REPORT

APRIL 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Case Study: The Conservative and Progressive Divide at Beijing Plus Five	9
Religion's Place and Power at the UN	13
Sidebars:	
How Religious Groups Officially Relate to the UN System	14
Types of Religious Groups at the UN	17
Censure or Exclusion of NGOs by the UN	26
Strategies Religious Groups Employ at the UN	30
Principles of Effectiveness for Religious Groups at the UN	37
Trends in Religion and Public Policy at the UN	41
Case Study: Interfaith Efforts at the UN	43
The Future of Religion at the UN	47
Appendices	51
Appendix A—Interviewees	52
Appendix B—Excerpts from the Cairo <i>Programme of Action</i> and Reservations Lodged by Selected Groups	53
Appendix C—The United Nations System: Principal Organs of the United Nations	56
Appendix D—Interaction Between Religious Groups and the UN System ..	57
Appendix E—Glossary	61
Appendix F—Contact Information for Organizations and Groups Mentioned in Text	63
Annotated Bibliography	66

INTRODUCTION

When Religion Counts began its research for *Religion and Public Policy at the UN*, we were frankly amazed to discover that this report would be the first comprehensive analysis of the subject. Perhaps we were naïve, or our own experiences within the religious community led us to believe the positive role of religion was well understood within the UN. We shared former President Jimmy Carter’s perspective that “religion can be a potent force in encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict” while acknowledging along with Carter that “religious differences have often been a cause or a pretext for war.”* As we reflect on current events, from the terrorist bombings of September 11 to the escalating violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories, from the re-emergence of women’s rights in a post-Taliban Afghanistan to the tragedy of countless deaths from HIV/AIDS, the importance of including religious voices and religious wisdom in the quest for international public policy that can save lives and make peace is obvious.

In a small way the contradictions that Carter identifies have been playing themselves out in the United Nations over the last decade. As part of an unprecedented series of international UN conferences on the environment, population and development, women, human rights, and social development, religion has moved to the forefront of UN advocacy. Public awareness of religion at the United Nations also increased dramatically as a result of media coverage surrounding the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and subsequent UN meetings. The charged religious atmosphere that emerged there gave many observers pause to think about religion’s role in international dialogue. As noted in a report entitled *Religion and Public Discourse* by The Park

*No one coming to the UN is neutral.
Everyone comes here with moral
values, ideas they believe in.
The lesbians and the communists
come with moral values, as do those
organizations that come with a
belief in the [traditional] family.
Everyone has a right to be here.*

Leader of conservative “family values” NGO

Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith and Ethics, “people of [religious] conviction shocked each other and a watching world as they clashed over some of the most volatile topics of the day: family planning and the nature of the family; the rights of women; gender and sexuality; and abortion and birth control.” In response to this complicated state of affairs, and desiring to promote a better understanding of the positive role religion can play in public dialogue, Religion Counts was convened as an international representation of scholars, experts, and leaders. Religion Counts has both participated in and monitored religious activity—and civility—at the UN, especially at the five-year follow-up meetings for both Cairo and Beijing.

Three facts emerged from our very first day of field research on religion and public policy at the United Nations: 1) religion is indeed present at the UN; 2) religion’s role at the UN is unclear to many people; and 3) religious individuals and groups at the UN do not have a unified perspective on either the issues

before the UN or the appropriate role of religion in the UN. This report expands upon all three facts as it attempts to find answers to basic questions about religion at the UN. Our hope is that specific UN-related audiences will find this report to be an informative and useful resource—certainly religious groups at the UN, but also secular groups, UN bodies, and government missions that interact with religious groups. Whether one is part of the UN system or wishes to relate to it, this report is designed to enhance one's understanding of religion's role and how it affects public policy at the UN.

Religion Counts seeks to broaden constructive religious participation in the international arena by explaining how religion operates, analyzing the relationship between religious and secular actors, and highlighting “best practices” among religious groups.

In *Religion and Public Policy at the UN* we expanded our usual areas of interest beyond the issues of gender, reproductive health, population, and development (the concerns of Cairo and Beijing) so that readers of this report might understand the religious dynamics at work at the UN no matter what specific issues surface at UN conferences and events. Our goal is to positively enhance religion's voice in the public realm by providing valuable practical information for religious groups and their secular partners in dialogue.

Doing research as part of Religion Counts posed the intriguing challenge of conducting a fair, scholarly, and credible examination of religion at the UN while openly acknowledging that members of Religion Counts are generally more comfortable with a “liberal” or “progressive” point of view. From the beginning we determined to disclose our intentions and relationships up front and to strive for fairness throughout the study. We admit that our scholarship cannot be completely “values-free,” but it can approximate a balanced consideration of our research topic by incorporating a variety of perspectives. As a leader of a self-described conservative “family values” NGO at the UN reminded one of our field researchers, “No one coming to the UN is neutral. Everyone comes here with moral values, ideas they believe in. The lesbians and the communists come with moral values, as do

those organizations that come with a belief in the [traditional] family.” She did not demand that those she defined as lesbians and communists be run out of the UN. “Everyone has a right to be here,” she explained. “That was the principled founding of the UN in the first place.”

Our challenge is the UN's challenge as well, since the UN also has its set of values. We entered the religious ecology of the UN with a point of view, but with the intention of understanding how that ecology functions as a whole, trying to understand the influence of all points of view. We found that a useful way of categorizing and examining the religious groups at the UN today is by distinguishing the ideological stances they take. This approach may be a bit more slippery than focusing solely on their religious identity, but it does reflect the reality of religious activity in the UN arena. Ideological affinities at the UN cut across religious identities, facilitating networking among groups, both religious and secular, in ways that often surprise and confuse “insiders” as well as “outsiders.” We present in this report a “map” of religion at the UN that should ring true to participants of all ideological persuasions and provide guidance for those navigating the UN system.

Research Method

Religion Counts conducted research between the spring of 2000 and the end of 2001, employing several research components. Our first step was to conduct bibliographical and Internet searches to gather information on religion at the UN, and this is when we discovered, early on, that no comprehensive analysis of this subject had yet been done.

We then conducted on-site observations of three major events at UN headquarters in New York City:

- Beijing Plus Five meetings in May–June 2000;
- Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in August 2000; and,
- Preparatory meeting for the General Assembly's follow-up to the World Summit for Children in January–February 2001.

We chose to study two religious NGOs in some depth: the Quaker United Nations Office for its reputation as a model religious actor at the UN, and World Vision International, which commands one of the world's largest NGO budgets for humanitarian service.

Finally, we interviewed nearly 60 expert informants. Their authoritative voices are prominent throughout this report, representing a diversity of viewpoints and experiences with religion and how it affects public policy at the UN. The interviewees were distributed across four categories of organizations: 41% from religious NGOs; 34% from secular NGOs; 20% from UN bodies; 5% from miscellaneous organizations.

We sought diversity of identity among the religious NGOs represented by our interviewees: 48% were Christian, 30% were from other religions, 22% were interfaith.

We also looked for a diversity of interest among the secular NGOs. Just over half of them deal with women/reproductive health, while the rest work on a variety of issues. The heavy representation of women and reproductive health issues stems from the project's special interest in the Cairo and Beijing UN conferences.

We strove to achieve a reasonable balance of gender and racial/ethnic identity among our interviewees: 60% were female; 40% were male; 49% were European and Euro-American; and 51% had a variety of other identities.

We also sought balance in the geographical purview of the organizations represented by the interviewees: 16% were from the North; 20% from the South; and 64% were Global.

We followed standard consent procedures for the interviews and offered interviewees different levels of disclosure in the report. Three-quarters of the interviewees agreed to be identified by name in an acknowledgement section (see Appendix A). One-quarter of the interviewees decided not to be identified in that section and/or by direct quotation by name in the text. One-half declined to be quoted directly by name in the text. This explains the general attributions and masked identities in this report. The high incidence of non-disclosures is understandable and, indeed, symptomatic of the sensitive environment

we had entered, with its potentially volatile confluence of religion and international politics.

This report is divided into five main sections. The opening section—"The Conservative and Progressive Divide at Beijing Plus Five"—is a case study that shows how volatile the mixture of religion with public policy making can be at times. While the events that occurred at these meetings in the spring of 2000 may show extreme examples of behavior by religious players at the UN, we open our report with it to make clear the intensity of interactions among religious and secular NGOs at the UN agencies and the importance of key issues to both sides.

The second section—"Religion's Place and Power at the UN"—examines the history of religion writ large at the UN and then specific religions' involvement from its founding to the present. In the third section, we explore trends in how religion is intersecting with public policy today at the UN. Another case study makes up the fourth section—"Interfaith Efforts at the UN"—which focuses on the August 2000 Millennium World Peace Summit. The final section offers a perspective on the future of religion at the UN.

The Preamble to the UN Charter begins with the phrase, "We the Peoples of the United Nations" UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan entitled his 2000 Millennium Report, *"We the Peoples": The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*. In his report Annan wrote, "Strengthening the UN depends on governments, and especially on their willingness to work with others—the private sector, non-governmental organizations and multilateral agencies—to find consensus solutions." It is our sincere hope that this report will contribute to productive partnerships between and among governments at the United Nations, religious institutions and groups, and other non-governmental organizations. As recent events prove, all the stakeholders of our fragile planet must work together for peace and the well being of all humanity.

*Jimmy Carter, foreword to *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, edited by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

THE CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE DIVIDE AT BEIJING PLUS FIVE

During our first day of field research on religion and public policy at the United Nations, we met an organizer of a conservative forum held during the March 2000 preparatory meeting for the Beijing Plus Five conference to review progress toward goals set out by the 1995 Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing.

"We're doing a study of religion at the UN," we informed the woman after she mentioned the "pro-family" identity of her organization.

"Is there religion at the UN?" the woman responded.

In our field notes we registered surprise at the woman's response, given that the caucus sponsoring the forum included two conservative religious groups. Only later did we catch the nuances of her question. In one sense, "Is there religion at the UN?" is an honest query about the place of religion in a secular organization like the United Nations. But the question also implies criticism of some types of religious participation at the UN, specifically liberal or progressive agendas perceived as "anti-family." These would not qualify as "religious" in this woman's mind. She might even label them "anti-religion."

UN headquarters was experiencing a heavy dose of protocol shock that March 2000, much of it stemming from activity by religious non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Trouble had started even during the accreditation process for the Beijing Plus Five preparatory meeting, with reports that seven conservative anti-feminist groups with ECOSOC status had arranged for over 350 individuals to be accredited, including over 100 men. In one case, a single group, R.E.A.L. Women of Canada registered 60 representatives, thirty of them Franciscan Friars of the

I think a religious NGO has even more obligation to reflect ethical principles in how they work.

Head, Women's Rights NGO

Renewal. Tensions between progressive and conservative NGOs were clearly building.

A few months prior to the Beijing Plus Five meeting, a coalition of conservative groups convened a "pro-family seminar" at UN headquarters entitled "Church, Synagogue, Mosque: Solutions for the Modern Family." Co-sponsors of the event included the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, and the governments of Argentina and Nicaragua.

As our researchers began to monitor activities during the Beijing Plus Five meetings in New York, we saw that both religious camps were well represented at the proceedings. The progressive network included both religious and secular NGOs, including: the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network, the Girls' Power Initiative of Nigeria, Catholics for a Free Choice, the Albanian Family Planning Association, and Ecumenical Women 2000+. This network also sought out sympathetic delegates from the European Union.

The conservative network at Beijing Plus Five consisted of both religious and secular NGOs, including: the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, the World Family Policy Forum at Brigham Young

University, the National Right to Life Committee, Concerned Women for America, the National Institute of Womanhood, Global HAWC (Helping Advance Women and Children) and United Families International. This network sought out sympathetic UN member states, such as Nicaragua and some Muslim countries.

Tensions between the conservative and progressive camps at the UN are always palpable and each camp regularly monitors the other's activities. This mistrust was even more evident at the Beijing Plus Five meetings. We detected a propensity on both sides to objectify the moral status of their opponents. Conservatives prayed that progressives might see the light, while progressives coined a new epithet for their ideological opposites: "B-Gs," for Bad Guys.

Casual observers of the Beijing Plus Five proceedings generally missed the participation of conservative Protestant groups because they tended to use "values" language rather than overtly "religious" terminology in their public forums. Even the word "family" became a hotly contested issue. For instance, conservative groups often used the phrase "family values" to refer to their ideal of the "natural family," that is, a married man and woman with their children. Conservative religious NGO representatives at the March meeting began wearing red or blue buttons that read "Motherhood" or "Family." Progressives groups, on the other hand, advocated that the word "families" be used in the Beijing Plus Five document being negotiated at the preparatory meeting, arguing it is more inclusive of different kinds of families, including single mothers and unmarried couples. Conservatives would sometimes accuse the UN of complicity in progressive deviations from their ideal: "Left-wing activists have been using the United Nations for nearly 20 years to impose their kind of anti-life, anti-family agenda," said the president of Focus on the Family Canada.

Many in the NGO community complained that it was, in fact, representatives of the conservative religious camp who first "crossed the line" with their tactics at the Beijing March preparatory meeting.

The leader of a women's rights group told us how at the March meeting one of her young workers was the victim of physical intimidation by a conservative religious group: "During Beijing Plus Five ... the monks and the friars ... surrounded one of my staff people outside an elevator and prayed over her, I mean, this is not legitimate use of political pressure ... I think a religious NGO has even more obligation to reflect ethical principles in how they work."

"There was a very strong sense they [conservative religious NGOs] had crossed the line among NGOs. The sense they weren't playing fair," one of our sources in the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship (CONGO) told us. "There were times where they were, I would say, self-consciously, intentionally disruptive of caucuses. The disruptive shading into attempts of intimidation, I would say They were doing things that are actually forbidden to all NGOs, such as leaving documents on delegates' desks, which is something that we're really not supposed to do ... and they would do things like that, take people's documents away and throw them out."

A war of headlines began in daily newspapers put out by conservatives and progressives. The progressive NGO daily newspaper *WomenAction 2000* reported on the harassments by conservatives and highlighted a telephone number to call for UN security "in case you face a situation of harassment." The paper went on to state that "An atmosphere in which people are afraid to speak openly at meetings, are observed or attacked outside meetings can easily undermine the international forums for the advancement of women we have worked so hard to make happen."

The conservative religious daily paper, *Vivant!* countered with headlines that "Beijing +5 panelists stress a return to radical agendas," citing "radical feminist themes of sexual 'freedom,' population control, and liberation from motherhood and family." They also ran an article with the headline, "Radical NGOs react angrily to presence of pro-family youth."

CONGO tried to address the range of problems cropping up at the meeting, as one of our sources

explained: “One of the things that we were trying to do then in March was differentiate those [NGOs] that were behaving from those that weren’t. Saying that the vast majority of us were absolutely committed to comporting ourselves appropriately, given the circumstances, clarifying what the rules are with regard to such things as putting papers on delegates’ desk, so people can’t say they didn’t know. We tried to activate various political connections within the UN and within the security department so that they understood what was going on. And there was some response in the sense of, I guess they deployed a few extra security people in plain clothes around. Not so much so that people didn’t do things that were unfair, but so that some of the tactics that were deemed kind of intimidating couldn’t be practiced as regularly.”

There were moments, however, of communication across the religious divide. The leader of a progressive religious group talked of a meeting entitled *Religion: Women’s Liberation, Women’s Bondage* and observed, “Conservative religious groups were very high in presence [at the Beijing Plus Five preparatory meeting] and came to all of the workshops that were being done by Progressive Religionists ... and at one of the meetings women from different faith groups were talking about their perspectives ... an Orthodox Jewish woman, very, very respectful, very family oriented ... a young Buddhist woman who ... has an extremely moderate view on things ... and all of these people who were loaded for bear, who came ready to attack the Radical Feminists and to a certain extent it was clear that they were very shocked by what they heard. It was not what they expected to hear ... at that moment some stereotypes were crushed.”

Despite this rare rapprochement, there were new concerns that religious groups in their home countries were attempting to influence what was going on inside the UN. A leading women’s rights activist told us “... they’ve[the Holy See] also used their power in countries, particularly in Latin America and Africa, who are dependent on some of their social services, to put political pressure on governments’ positions. There again, I think that that’s an illegitimate use of the political process by religious power In the

Beijing Plus Five process ... there were several incidents. The one that I know best was the intimidation that they did in Chile around media articles around a woman who was on the Chilean delegation for the Chilean government to the UN ... they had direct attacks on her in the press in Chile. I understand they did comparable things in Costa Rica.”

A battle of flyers began to be played out in the corridors and meetings rooms, as progress on the Beijing Plus Five document being negotiated by member states was slowed by protracted debate on a number of seemingly intractable issues. Conservative NGOs put out a flyer stating, in part:

* * *

THE WEST IS HOLDING UP THE DOCUMENT

If the West would stop pushing homosexual and abortion “rights” on unwilling countries, the document would be done.

* * *

Progressive NGOs countered with a flyer stating, in part:

* * *

The Coalition of NGOs in support of the Beijing Platform for Action includes 260 Organizations headquartered in more than 50 Countries from ALL REGIONS representing women from the vast majority of countries around the world.

* * *

Some in the NGO community feared that these disruptions and ensuing commotion at the Beijing Plus Five preparatory meeting would galvanize delegate opposition to all NGO participation in the meetings; not an idle concern given the historic undercurrent of grudging acceptance of NGOs by some member states. As a UN NGO source told us, “It’s not an easy time for NGOs at the United Nations and I think that there are some member states and member state delegates who would look for these kinds of incidents as an opportunity to make it harder for NGOs to

participate. They're not crazy about being listened to or being watched or being held to account, and they don't like having everybody in the room."

"To disrupt a meeting at the UN is just not what this place is about," a DPI source told us during the Beijing Plus Five conference, whose office was carefully scrutinizing NGO applications in light of the recent commotion. "It runs contrary to everything that we stand for." In other words, more than simple protocol was at stake here.

What had brought tensions to such a height in the year 2000? How had the divide between conservative and progressive NGOs, both religious and secular, become so great at the UN?

In recent decades, traditional religious understandings of gender and sexuality, reproductive health, families, and related issues have been challenged by the development of new contraceptive and reproductive technologies, the rise of feminism and the gay rights movement, and the forces of modernization and globalization. Religious communities have shown great diversity in addressing the challenges of changing times. In the United States, for instance, sexuality remains a hotly contested topic of religious identity. This is particularly apparent in the conflicts over homosexuality that have threatened to split some mainline churches apart in recent years. In the international realm, heated debates have arisen around population, sustained development, and the status of women, most notably at the UN's International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The charged atmosphere at the ICPD in Cairo gave many observers pause to think about religion's role in international dialogue. As noted in a report entitled *Religion and Public Discourse* by The Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics, "people of [religious] conviction shocked each other and a watching world as they clashed over some of the most volatile topics of the day: family planning and the nature of the family; the rights of women; gender and sexuality; and abortion and birth control." The topic of abortion was so contentious that multiple versions

of a single paragraph in the ICPD's *Programme of Action* were debated for days before a consensus was finally reached—yet several national delegations still lodged reservations against it (see Appendix B).

Commenting on a meeting some years later to reflect back on the ICPD, religion scholar Martin Marty wrote, "Some among those who attended the meeting were battle-scarred veterans of the controversial 1994 International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo, where informal alliances between the Vatican and Muslim groups had dominated the debate on reproductive rights and overpopulation. To some, that conference had been a disaster, and they wanted to learn why things had gone so wrong."

"In my experience," writes John Allen, Vatican correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*, reflecting on the conservative/progressive divide over issues of sexuality, "both sides are often prepared to believe the worst about the other, to impute ill motives and to suspect plots, to see their conflict in Manichean terms as a struggle of good against evil. The gap can be so wide as to seem unbridgeable."

The atmosphere seemed less overtly contentious a few months later during the Beijing Plus Five conference in June 2000, despite the obvious presence of the opposing religious camps. UN security and credentialing procedures had been tightened, and the NGO community appeared to police its own ranks. Debate and disagreement continued, but at least civil discourse had been restored for the time being.

RELIGION'S PLACE AND POWER AT THE UN

Religion and religious groups have been involved with the UN since its inception. The drafting of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included contributions from the Commission of the Church on International Affairs, later part of the World Council of Churches. Among the first NGOs present in the formative stages of the United Nations were the Federal Council of Churches (precursor to the US-based National Council of Churches), the American Jewish Congress, and the Synagogue Council of America. At least 15 religious NGOs—10 Christian, 5 Jewish—were granted ECOSOC consultative status in the UN's first four years. In 1957 Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld opened the Meditation Room at the UN, calling it “a place where the doors may be open to the infinite lands of thought and prayer.” The Church Center, built by the Women's Division of the Methodist Church in the early 1960s, faces UN headquarters directly across First Avenue.

Beneath this visible surface and seemingly benign presence lies a more complex and powerful dimension of religion within the UN system. We have seen in the preceding case study the energy generated by progressive and conservative religious forces when brought into UN debates and negotiations. To understand these dynamics and the role that religion truly plays at the UN, one first needs at least a minimal understanding of the definition of religion.

Defining religion: sacred and profane

Religion's expansive vision explains a great deal of religious behavior by individuals and groups,

How does a secular, plural, tolerant entity deal with religious thought and values, which are in many instances less malleable, less tolerant? That is a challenge to the institution, especially when you start getting religions that disagree.

Leader of progressive religious NGO

especially when interacting in a secular institution like the UN. Potentially, religion has something to say about everything because it speaks from an authority that encompasses all things. Some religious groups express this through a “prophetic” concern for social justice, an approach derived initially from the biblical prophets. One former US government official feels that this religious “gadfly” function is crucial in holding governments accountable. Some religious groups weigh in on UN debates with ethical prescriptions grounded in their traditions; others use the language of “salvation” in seeking to save a wayward world; still others hope to foster a spiritual “transformation” of human institutions. Such approaches may offend some people at the UN, but they should not surprise anyone who understands religion.

Definitions and explanations of religion abound, not all of them complimentary. The negative range from Sigmund Freud's calling religion “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity,” destined to pass away as humanity matures, to Karl Marx's labeling religion “the opium of the people.” Sympathetic views

HOW RELIGIOUS GROUPS OFFICIALLY RELATE TO THE UN SYSTEM

The “UN system” comprises the United Nations, an intergovernmental organization of 189 member states, and several organs that derive authority from the UN Charter; plus the UN-related specialized agencies that have their own constitutions (see Appendix C & D). Religious groups must officially relate to the UN system under specific provisions for non-governmental organization (NGO) involvement with the UN system.

ECOSOC STATUS

Many religious NGOs apply for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), a council of 54 member states that makes recommendations to the UN General Assembly on a wide range of issues such as development and human rights. ECOSOC grants NGOs consultative status under three categories:

- **General Consultative Status** is granted to NGOs that work mainly on issues of concern to ECOSOC and that are considered most relevant to ECOSOC’s work. 11% of religious NGOs have General status.
- **Special Consultative Status** is granted to NGOs with less range and relevance to ECOSOC work. 64% of religious NGOs have Special status.
- **Roster Status** is granted to NGOs with limited consultative value to ECOSOC. 25% of religious NGOs have Roster status.

The number of NGOs with ECOSOC consultative status has climbed steadily over the years to nearly 2,000 by the year 2000 (see Figure 1). NGOs often enter into relationship with the UN under one ECOSOC consultative status, then apply to shift to another level. General status, for example, is accorded more value and access than Special and Roster statuses (see Figure 2).

ECOSOC has a standing Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations that reviews new applications and requests for renewal of consultative status and makes recommendations to the full ECOSOC body. General or Special NGOs must submit reports every four years on their activities and contributions to the work of the UN which are considered in requests for renewal of NGO consultative status. Failure to submit a report is a common reason for loss of status.

In practice, the hierarchical boundaries of ECOSOC status become relatively porous. Two religious NGOs often praised for UN work—the Quaker United Nations Office and the Baha’i International

There are many NGOs that come to the UN seeking status here because it gives them an international platform ... My job is complicated by trying to sort out: How do you determine who is really here to work with the United Nations and advance its principles, and who is here to advance themselves and could not care less about the principles, in fact, many of their ideas might be contrary to the inclusiveness and the universality of the United Nations?

UN Department of Public Information Source

Community—have Special, not General, status. One UN expert observed that some Roster-status NGOs wield de facto Special-status influence in their relationship with ECOSOC, and that the fine points of status became irrelevant once a consultation begins.

RELATING OTHER THAN THROUGH ECOSOC

Although ECOSOC provides the most common NGO entrée to the UN system, it is not the only one.

- The United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service assists certain NGOs in their relationships with the UN, focusing on development issues and facilitating NGO participation from the global South.
- The UN Secretariat’s Department of Public Information (DPI) had approximately 1,600 NGOs enter into association with it in the year 2000. Of these, 600 also had ECOSOC affiliation. DPI provides information about the UN and UN activities through publications and briefings. For some religious NGOs, becoming well informed about the UN without attempting to influence it satisfies their interests. Others use DPI information and connections in their efforts to effect change in the UN system; for instance, DPI’s Committee on NGOs holds regular meetings with ambassadors and member-state missions staff.
- Independent working relationships are forged by NGOs with UN specialized agencies and operational programmes outside of either ECOSOC or DPI affiliation. Requirements and expectations vary among these agencies and programmes, providing opportunities for an NGO to find its niche in the system.

ECOSOC NGOs by year, 1946-2000

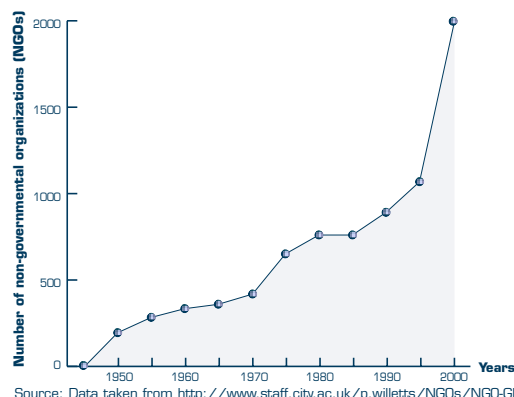


Figure 1

The NGO Statute Provisions for Participation in ECOSOC and Its Subsidiary Bodies

Participation Right	General Status	Special Status	Roster Status
Receive documents for all meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes
Attend all meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes, for meetings within their field
Propose agenda items in Council or in subsidiary bodies	Yes, with an introductory statement and response to the debate	No	No
Written statements (a) in Council (b) in subsidiary bodies	(a) up to 2,000 words (b) up to 2,000 words	(a) up to 500 words (b) up to 1,500 words	If invited by the Secretary-General, the same as Special Status
Oral Hearings (a) in Council (b) in subsidiary bodies	(a) Yes (b) Yes	(a) Yes, if no other body covers the issue (b) Yes	(a) No (b) If invited

Peter Willetts; Chapter 6 – The Rules of the Game: The United Nations and Civil Society. (1999). John W. Foster, with Anita Anand, eds., *Whose World Is It Anyway? Civil Society, the United Nations and the Multilateral Future* (Ottawa, Canada: The United Nations Association in Canada, 1999). See bibliography.

Figure 2

of religion could be cited that are as hyperbolically positive as Freud's and Marx's views were negative. More-neutral observers, however, have examined religion's place in human history, cultures, and societies and identified certain aspects of religion that are useful in understanding religious groups and their behavior at the UN.

Religion's primary object of attention is what sociologist Emile Durkheim called "the sacred," that which a religion considers special, set apart, holy, or qualitatively different from that which it considers ordinary, mundane, or "profane." Other scholars have labeled this object of religion's attention "the Ultimate," "the Absolute," or "the transcendent Reality," terms that reflect religion's conviction of a spiritual realm of meaning and authority distinguishable from the material realm. "Religion is a vision of something which stands behind, beyond, and within the passing flux of immediate things—something real, yet waiting to be realized," philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote in *Science in the Modern World*. Scholars of religion point out that such a spiritual reality is empirically neither verifiable nor falsifiable, but that does not diminish religion's importance as a motivating force for individuals and groups.

Religions express themselves through symbols, rituals, doctrines, holy places, devotional and other types of sacred literature, and structures. These carry great meaning and emotional investment for religious people since they embody their understandings of sacred realities. Religious people may "sacrifice" themselves—a potent, ancient religious concept—wholly devoting themselves to the holy, even unto death, the ultimate sacrifice for the Ultimate. Thus, religious people may defend a doctrine, a pilgrimage site, a book, an institution, or a culture with their very lives.

One NGO leader notes the difficulty this sometimes presents: "It's difficult to negotiate with partners that are sure that they have, not only truth, but truth that's been granted by the deity or deities. It kind of leaves the discussion with no place to go."

It's difficult to negotiate with partners that are sure that they have, not only truth, but truth that's been granted by the deity or deities. It kind of leaves the discussion with no place to go.

NGO Leader

An interviewee who once headed a secular NGO complains that religion is personal and thus should not be politicized at the UN: "Religious values are subjective; beliefs will vary widely. Religious organizations should not be empowered at the UN for this reason." Another interviewee, also from a secular NGO, found fault with perceived political maneuverings by the Holy See at the Cairo Plus Five, judging them unbefitting a spiritual calling.

But religious groups tend to regard such distinctions as arbitrary. As a former government official explains, recalling a Catholic upbringing, the Roman Catholic church is both a spiritual and a temporal institution: "Its political activity comes from the temporal side." We would clarify that religion sees its temporal side—the political—as informed and shaped by its spiritual side. One aspect in many religions is a concern for social justice and peace, and most religions incorporate a social dimension in their teachings that focuses on improving conditions for individuals and groups suffering from poverty, hunger, and other forms of injustice.

NGO expert Peter Willetts explains that, in a broad sense, "all NGOs are political" since "politics includes all attempts to promote ideas, change social practices or affect the allocation of resources in society." In a similarly broad sense, all religions and religious groups are political as well.

Religious participation in a secular institution

Religion is a universal human phenomenon found across times and places. Not all people in the world are religious, but the great majority are, most belonging to the four largest religions: (in order of size) Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Some countries today have an official “state religion,” such as Roman Catholic Christianity in Bolivia, Sunni Islam in Saudi Arabia (where the national constitution is the Qur’an, Islam’s holy book), and Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. Constitutionally secular countries may have a de facto “official” religion that carries great weight in state policy. For instance, a few predominantly Catholic Latin American countries lodged reservations against the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, expressing the view that abortion should be excluded from the ICPD’s definitions of reproductive rights, reproductive health, and family planning. At the same time, other predominantly Catholic Latin American countries supported the Programme of Action without reservation.

Political and migratory dynamics in recent centuries have created many pluralist religious countries where a historic majority religion has been joined by significant minority groups—such as India, with a majority of Hindus, and the United States, with a majority of Christians. Most sociologists have abandoned the once-influential secularization thesis that religion would inevitably recede in importance in all modern societies. Religion continues to play a major role in individual lives, inter-group relations, and international politics.

One high-ranking UN official explains his view that the UN must be “reflective of the totality of human experience in all parts of the world,” which includes religious experience. “I am pretty close to being an agnostic,” he continues, “but I have respect for religion, I have respect for people of faith, I have respect for what they bring to life and to society.”

I am pretty close to being an agnostic, but I have respect for religion, I have respect for people of faith, I have respect for what they bring to life and to society.

UN official

The UN does not promote any one religion in allowing participation by many religions. Neither does the UN promote “religion” per se; rather it accepts it as one worldview among others in the forum of international activity. The UN includes the religious voice without privileging it. “Despite my strong belief in secularism,” explains one of the UN officials quoted above, “I do believe that we have to be liberal when it comes to the registration of non-governmental organizations. And if there are non-governmental organizations which are religious in origin, I think we cannot make that a basis for excluding them.”

Another high-ranking UN official agrees. He points out that religious NGOs “have every right to be in the panorama of the UN, just as much as other NGOs there.” However, this right of participation is contingent: “If they are found to be violating the basic rules of the UN, then of course they have to leave, but otherwise I have not noticed an overabundance of religious NGOs or religious extremism in the UN.” Religions have much to offer the UN, he continues, in that they have codified the fundamental ethics by which people seek better lives. But he is not naïve: “Organized religion has, in fact, been responsible for many wrongdoings in the world”: but, having said that, he thinks that “the power of religion should be harnessed for international peace and security.”

Of course the situation becomes very complex when religious and political structures intertwine, as in the following cases: 1) Judaism and Israel; 2) Islam and Islamic member states of the UN; and 3) the Holy See. As these cases will illustrate, the boundaries

TYPES OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS AT THE UN

The overwhelming majority of NGOs at the UN do not have a religious identity. Of the 2,000 NGOs with ECOSOC status, only 180 (9%) were religious NGOs as of October 2000.

- The largest category of religious NGOs are **Christian**, with **Islamic**, **interfaith**, and **Jewish** groups trailing behind. **Buddhist** and miscellaneous groups are included as “others.” (See Figure 3.)
- **Roman Catholics** have the largest representation among Christian NGOs, followed closely by **Protestants**. Many in the “Others” category are **ecumenical Christian** groups, such as an organization representing the World Council of Churches. (See Figure 4.)

AMBIGUOUS IDENTITIES

The religious identity of a group is not always easy to determine. Ambiguity can be intentional, a strategy to gain a hearing in quarters that might be put off by overt religious language. An organization's title may carry no obvious religious connotation; for example:

- **Covenant House** (a Catholic childcare agency)
- **Habitat for Humanity International** (an ecumenical Christian housing organization)

Ostensibly secular groups may also have religious underpinnings or participate in networks that include religious groups, for example:

- **Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC)**, an officially non-religious, anti-abortion group that has an affiliated “division” called SPUC Evangelicals.

Ambiguity also raises suspicions that religious groups may intentionally hide their true identity and motivations at the UN; for example:

- **The Unification Church**, founded by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, was criticized in a report posted on the Website of the Global Policy Forum, which monitors the UN. The report charges that Unification Church UN activities are facilitated through front organizations and deceptive tactics.

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

NGOs participate in drafting UN documents that do not use religious language. An official of a major Christian development organization spoke eloquently of his faith-based organization's “relationship with the living God,” yet separates his prayer life and biblical motivations from the language his organization uses with people who do not share the same spiritual perspective. Using religious language at the UN, he suggests, has the potential to inflame and may appear judgmental.

Some conservative members of his organization feel that their team at the UN is “hiding its light under a bushel.” He feels, however, that the UN context lacks a suitable language for talking about religion in constructive ways. “There's another biblical metaphor,” he says. “Let your speech be seasoned with salt, let it be good tasting.”

CONSERVATIVES AND PROGRESSIVES

The most visible ideological divide at the UN is between two religious camps:

- **Conservatives**, usually called the “the religious right” and labeled “rightwing extremists” by progressives.
- **Progressives**, usually called “liberals” or “the religious left,” and labeled “radicals” by conservatives.

Many religious groups adopt more moderate or middle-of-the-road positions on particular issues under contention from these two camps. A group may fall into one ideological camp or the other depending on the issue at hand. **The Holy See**, as the institutional authority in the Roman Catholic Church, is considered progressive on many social issues but conservative on sexuality, reproduction, and the family.

**Identities of Religious NGOs With ECOSOC Status
(total religious NGOs = 180 as of October 2000)**

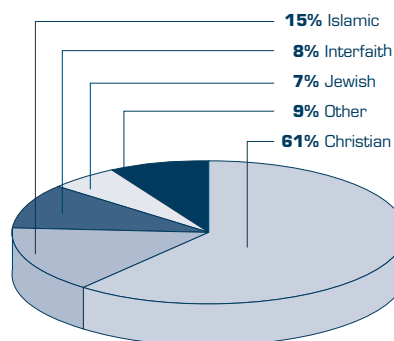


Figure 3

**Types of Christian NGOs With ECOSOC Status
(total Christian NGOs = 109 as of October 2000)**

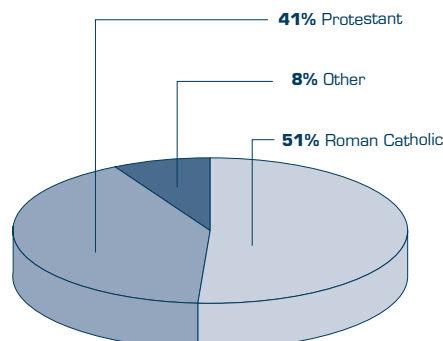


Figure 4

TYPES OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS AT THE UN—continued

ROMAN CATHOLIC NGOS

Both progressives and conservatives can be found in this grouping. The following two groups confront each other on a host of issues, including reproductive health and the status of the Holy See at the UN:

- **Catholics for a Free Choice**, a progressive ECOSOC-affiliated NGO;
- **Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute**, an active conservative presence at the UN though without ECOSOC consultative status.

Both cultivate relationships with like-minded NGOs (religious and secular) and seek to influence UN officials and member state missions in order to further their respective agendas.

FUNDAMENTALISTS

The term “fundamentalists” has become so loaded as to be generally unhelpful by itself in defining religious groups. A good working definition highlights a key emphasis of the conservative camp at the UN—protecting what they consider the original and correct beliefs of their religious heritage, which they perceive to be threatened by progressive or liberal modern forces.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF FUNDAMENTALISM

(FROM *THE GLORY AND THE POWER: THE FUNDAMENTALIST CHALLENGE TO THE MODERN WORLD*, MARTIN E. MARTY AND R. SCOTT APPLEBY)

Feeling [their] identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, fundamentalists fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past. These retrieved “fundamentals” are refined, modified, and given new expression in institutions and political movements that often move beyond the confines and practices of a given traditional religion in the effort to keep it alive as an authentic way of life for modern people. The fundamentals are taught with great authority; by adhering obediently to them, believers will be able to resist the seductions of the secular world. ... [C]ontemporary fundamentalism is at once both derivative and vitally original. Fundamentalists do not intend to impose archaic practices and lifestyles or to return to a golden era, a sacred past, a bygone time of origins—although nostalgia for such an era is a hallmark of fundamentalist rhetoric. By selecting elements of tradition and modernity, fundamentalists seek to remake the world. Renewed religious identity becomes the exclusive and absolute basis for a re-created political and social order that is oriented toward the future rather than the past. The new world has been foretold in prophecy and unfolds, even now, under the watchful eye of God.

between religious and political structures can be very fluid, which makes many in the UN uncomfortable. Yet political structures always intertwine with some worldview or philosophy, such as secularism and the notion of the “separation of church and state.” The UN system has mechanisms in place that are supposed to arbitrate overweening influences, religious or secular. How well they function is a key question at hand.

Judaism, Israel, and the UN

For some member states of the United Nations, one particular religion is closely associated with national history and with social and/or political life. In Israel’s case, (Orthodox) Judaism serves as the state religion through a set of “Basic Laws” governing key areas of civic and personal life, such as marriage, divorce, and Jewish citizenship status. Although the Israeli government’s cabinet includes a Department of Religions that oversees issues involving several recognized religious groups, including Muslims and Christians, Israel clearly counts as a Jewish state. Moreover, Jews comprise the majority population of only one nation in the world, Israel. Other major religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, have special ties to particular geographical territories, but today their adherents comprise the majority population in several countries around the world, not just one, as in the case of Israel (and India with regard to Hinduism). The close ties between Judaism and Israel have played a major part in Judaism’s relationship to the UN, in increasingly contentious ways in recent decades.

A few months after the state of Israel was established in 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose Preamble refers to “barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind,” a reference largely to the Holocaust, which took the lives of millions of Jews and others in Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II.

From the beginning, both Israel and Jewish NGOs have had a complicated relationship to the UN. Israel

*With one word he [Kofi Annan]
had erased 50 years of exclusion
and denial.*

Member, Jewish NGO

has not been accepted into any of the UN’s regional groupings, which means that it cannot be elected to any of the UN’s main organs. In addition, Israel has been the focus of more investigative efforts than any other UN member state. Jewish NGOs have recently been subjected to special scrutiny in their efforts to secure consultative status with the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). While Jewish NGOs have always been present at the UN, none today has General or Category I ECOSOC status, despite nearly 20 other religious NGOs having been granted that status. As NGO expert Peter Willetts explains, consultative status for Jewish NGOs was not particularly problematic in the early decades. No religious NGOs, Jewish or otherwise, had General or Category I ECOSOC status as late as the mid-1960s. However, when Category I began to expand to include religious NGOs in the 1970s, Israel had become “a pariah state for political rather than religious reasons.”

Jewish women’s NGOs have received ECOSOC status and were very active in the Cairo and Beijing conferences, as well as in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women. An ex-official with the U.S. government told us that the B’nai B’rith Women are active in pushing the US to ratify CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). The International Council of Jewish Women is a member of the NGO committee on religion and sponsors the participation of Jewish women world wide, especially Eastern and Central Europe. The Israeli Women’s Network, a secular group, prepared and presented for Beijing Plus Five a Shadow Report on Women’s status in Israel including comments on religiously based limitations on women’s rights.

The equation of Zionism with racism tells one significant story about the relationship between Judaism and the United Nations. In 1975, through the lobbying efforts of member states supportive of the Palestinian people and through other political maneuverings, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution declaring Zionism to be “a form of racism and racial discrimination.” The wide-ranging nuances of the term “Zionism” both before and since that time have centered on the claim of a special relationship between the Jewish people and the biblical land of Israel, but have also included significant cultural and humanitarian aspects rooted in Jewish tradition. In the case of the 1975 UN resolution, acerbic political conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian positions carried the day.

Despite the fact that the General Assembly officially rescinded the 1975 resolution in 1991, the equation of Zionism with racism has resurfaced periodically in the UN, most recently surrounding the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (WCAR), held in South Africa in 2001. The notion was revisited prior to the conference at both a UN prep-com meeting in Tehran and at a meeting of Arab NGOs, creating anxiety in some quarters that the conference would be taken over by those wishing to reinstate the phrase in an official UN resolution. (After the conference, the head of the Palestinian delegation denied any intent to do so.) Others feared that if the notion of Zionism as racism were left out of the discussions altogether, the notion of anti-Semitism would also be excluded.

Lines hardened as the WCAR unfolded against the backdrop of deteriorating relations between Israelis and Palestinians in the Israeli occupied territories. The delegations from Egypt, Syria, and Iran reportedly insisted that the conference document condemn Israel as a racist state and downplay the importance of both the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. Several days into the conference the delegations from the United States and Israel withdrew in protest, US Secretary of State Colin Powell citing the proposed document’s “hateful language.” In the end, the WCAR’s final document made

no mention of the Zionism as racism issue. It did state that “the Holocaust must never be forgotten” (*Declaration*, paragraph 58) and condemned anti-Semitism as well as Islamophobia and anti-Arabism (*Declaration*, paragraph 61; *Programme of Action*, paragraph 150).

In a December 1999 speech UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for a healing of wounds between the Jewish community and the UN. While Annan spoke of Jewish contributions to the UN since its inception, he also noted that “deep and painful scars remain.” Previously, in a 1998 speech observing the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Genocide Convention, Annan stated that the “Holocaust of the Jews and others” must not be forgotten. A member of a prominent Jewish NGO describes the significance of Annan’s words as follows: “With one word he had erased 50 years of exclusion and denial.” Annan’s outreach to the Jewish community acknowledges not only a painful history but also the ongoing Jewish contribution to UN work, a contribution Annan is cultivating within the context of his vision for UN reform.

The relationship between Judaism and the UN is not likely to escape the effects of certain unfortunate connotations in some minds. Judaism cannot be equated to Zionism in any of its manifestations. Nor is Judaism as a religion equivalent to the political and military policies of the state of Israel. Finally, Judaism includes as much internal diversity as any other major religion, so it cannot be equated to the views and actions of any one group within it.

Islam, Islamic states, and the UN

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on targets in New York City and Washington, D.C., dramatized a reality of the international political scene in recent decades—that Islam, the world’s second largest and perhaps fastest growing religion, has come of age as a major actor in the modern world. But Islam is not a monolithic entity, any more than other world religions. Nor is the “Islamic world” necessarily more

unified than any other interest bloc represented at the UN and other international venues. Nor, it should be stressed, can Islam be equated with violence any more than other religions.

In the aftermath of September 11, Muslims and non-Muslims alike discussed the role that Islamic teachings might have played in motivating the attacks and debated whether such acts legitimately fell within the contours of “true Islam.” The day following the attacks, the secretary-general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an inter-governmental organization with permanent observer status at the UN, denounced the attacks in categorical terms in a press release, stating, “Our tolerant Islamic religion highly prizes the sanctity of human life and considers the willful killing of a single soul as tantamount to killing humanity at large.” The statement continued: “The Islamic world denounced and condemned the perpetrators while sympathizing with the innocent victims, their families, their beloved ones and the entire American people.”

Likewise a September 17th statement from the League of Arab States, also a permanent observer at the UN, expressed “feelings of revulsion, horror and shock over the terrorist attacks,” and cautioned against generalizing from “the nationality and faith of perpetrators” of such acts: “For there is no human grouping, community or society that can be considered exclusively immune against criminal and abnormal patterns of social behaviour.” At a League meeting a few weeks later, senior officials criticized Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of the attacks. The League’s secretary-general noted that bin Laden “does not speak for Arabs and Muslims.”

The United States engaged in a military response to the September 11th attacks, invading Afghanistan and targeting its Taliban government as a complicit partner in bin Laden’s terrorist network. By that time the Taliban had already been ostracized by most of the Islamic countries of the world for its extremist interpretation of Islam. For instance, Muslim scholars and political leaders around the world had protested the destruction in early 2001 of ancient Buddhist

We should prepare ourselves for the dialogue among civilizations and present our glory inherent in the principles of our religion and civilization to the world.

Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of Iran

monuments in the Bamiyan Valley, which the Taliban condemned as “idols.” In 1999 an OIC committee recommended that the OIC should “express the utmost concern over the deterioration of the status of human rights in Afghanistan, especially those relating to women [sic] rights, which has become material for distorting the image of Islam and exercising pressure on all Muslims.”

When Islamic member states act in unison at the UN, they present a formidable bloc. For instance, objections primarily from Islamic countries at the 2001 UN special session on HIV/AIDS succeeded in eliminating language in the final document about vulnerable groups such as homosexual men and sex workers. But Islamic countries do not always act in unison. Governments in the so-called “Islamic world” may be conservative, liberal, or moderate, and these ideological positions may shift with changes in administrations. Saudi Arabia often plays a moderate role in the Islamic world, while Iran has moderated its conservatism somewhat in recent years. UN delegations and coalitions may also contain ideological fault lines within their memberships, such as those that surfaced behind the scenes in the Muslim bloc within the G77 at the Beijing Plus Five meetings in 2000. Apparently a conservative member of one Arab nation’s delegation (itself split between conservatives and liberals) criticized the speech of the minister from another Muslim delegation for its “un-Islamic content.”

The NGO community at the UN also represents a variety of Muslim organizations, as well as ideological

stances vis-à-vis Islam. More than two dozen Muslim NGOs have consultative relationships with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), including the Muslim World League, headquartered in Saudi Arabia, and the World Muslim Congress, headquartered in Pakistan. Secular NGOs also intersect with Islam and Islamic perspectives, such as Women Living Under Muslim Laws, which includes the following statement in its organizational description: “The Network’s name ‘Women Living Under Muslim Laws’ (WLUML) is an acknowledgement of the complexity and diversity of women’s realities in Muslim countries and communities. Our choice of name also recognises that women affected by Muslim laws may not be Muslim, as they may have chosen another marker of political or personal identity.”

The leader of a U.S.-based women’s rights group cited the importance of WLUML’s work, saying, “One of the most powerful things that they have done is, by working across different cultures, to try to demonstrate what is at the core of their message, which is that there is no one set of Muslim religious ways to be They view a lot of what’s being done by fundamentalist Muslim forces as basically political groups using religion to get political power. And the use of religion, as opposed to taking political action out of your religious convictions versus promulgating religious positions in order to get political power ... the question of how is religion being used politically is very important.”

The General Assembly’s resolution declaring 2001 a year of Dialogue among Civilizations provides an interesting case study of Islamic activity at the UN. The resolution itself does not contain the words “religion,” “faith,” “spirituality,” or any such overtly religious terminology. The closest equivalent is found in the phrase “diversity of belief, culture and language,” where “belief” can be interpreted as including religious traditions. On the other hand, the resolution uses the word “values” twice, in the phrases “common values shared by all humankind” and “human values and achievements.” Such values language has become popular at the UN in recent years, but it can be seen as subsuming religion under

a broader rubric, thus minimizing religion’s unique contribution.

Significantly, the initiators of this Dialogue among Civilizations, Iran and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC, an inter-governmental organization of Muslim member states), employed overtly religious language in advocating the idea to the UN. The Tehran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations, formulated at a May 1999 gathering of OIC representatives, includes language compatible with UN ideals about tolerance and respect for cultural diversity, as in the following principle for dialogue: “Genuine acceptance of cultural diversity as a permanent feature of human society and a cherished asset for the advancement and welfare of humanity at large.” Still, the Tehran Declaration begins with an invocation echoing the Qur’an, Islam’s holy book, “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,” and states that the “OIC shall be guided by fundamental [basic] Islamic precepts ... in its quest to promote the culture of dialogue and to engage representatives of other contemporary civilizations in dialogue.”

The religious sentiments underlying the idea of the Dialogue among Civilizations were even more forcefully stated by Iran’s president, Seyed Mohammad Khatami. Writing in a 1999 editorial on the Dialogue in OIC’s magazine, *Al-Mootamar*, President Khatami discussed the place of reason in human knowledge, drawing a distinction between religious and secular people. Both types of people “have equal access to the power of intellect,” he wrote, but the religious person has the advantage of drawing on an additional, higher source of knowledge:

The distinction between these two lies in the fact that the religious man has two books while the irreligious person has one. This means that a religious man has access to more resources which will enrich his knowledge and insight. One who does not believe in God and divine revelations has access only to the book of nature which he should delve into with the power of intellect, while the religious man has not only access to this book which he uses

with the power of intellect to develop his knowledge, insight and philosophy but he has also access to the book of divine revelation and legislation.

President Khatami went on to decry the spiritual bankruptcy of much of the modern world: “Today, the liberalist systems respect freedom, but have parted from spirituality and the spiritual dimension of human life and, therefore, their present life has been filled with ample problems to which the people of the West have declared.” One wonders whether the “liberalist systems” critiqued here include the United Nations, an institution based primarily on Western secular principles. Relying on lessons “brought about by the religion of God,” President Khatami continued, “we should prepare ourselves for the dialogue among civilizations and present our glory inherent in the principles of our religion and civilization to the world.”

The General Assembly’s resolution on the Dialogue among Civilizations avoids all such overtly religious language and sentiments, especially the assumption that a religious worldview in general and the Islamic tradition in particular hold forth the hope of the world’s future. These would be incompatible with the UN’s role as a non-partisan facilitator of dialogue among the world’s various nations, cultures, and religions. The clearly partisan religious motivations that gave birth to the idea of the Dialogue were tempered by the secular parameters of the United Nations system.

The Holy See

The term “Holy See” refers to the “see” or “seat” (from the Latin *sedes*) of institutional authority in the Roman Catholic Church occupied by the Pope and his representatives, whose administrative headquarters are in the Vatican City, an independent territory located in Rome. In 1964 the Holy See was granted permanent observer status in the UN General Assembly as a non-member state, a status it has shared only with Switzerland, which has just voted to apply to become a member state.

For the most part the UN as a whole sees the Vatican as more of a help than a hindrance because only on this certain set of issues [gender, sexuality, and reproductive health] is it a problem. In many other areas it’s a great provider of humanitarian assistance.

Key See Change proponent

Thus the Holy See, although a religious body, differs from religious NGOs, which are limited to consultative relationships with the UN system. As a non-member state permanent observer at the UN, the Holy See does not typically enjoy member-state voting rights, but it does participate in numerous deliberations and activities involving member states and UN bodies. The Holy See has full membership in some UN specialized agencies, on which basis it participates as a state, with voting rights, at many UN conferences. Other entities holding permanent observer status at the UN include the Mission of Palestine, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the Order of Malta. These differ from the Holy See in that they are not considered “non-member state” permanent observers.

Our interviewees were virtually unanimous in identifying the Holy See as a major religious actor at the UN today. The Holy See has been “terribly effective ... in promoting Catholic views, advocating Catholic views, and organizing states that are predominantly Catholic to support those views,” observes a former US government official experienced in UN work. Of course, recognizing the Holy See’s effectiveness does not necessarily entail appreciating all of its goals or methods. Several complain that the Holy See abuses

its UN status and employs obstructionist tactics in UN conferences, especially during debates over proposed wording in conference documents. The same official recalls that “In the Cairo conference they were politically active in securing the support of the Islamic countries and they did that in Beijing as well, and to a lesser extent they did it with all the conferences ... they are a polarizing factor on issues of women and population.” Allies of the Holy See may consider its methods appropriate to its role as “the conscience of the General Assembly,” to quote Austin Ruse, president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute. “The Holy See provides a kind of moral leadership that, really, nobody else has at the United Nations,” Ruse explains.

Archbishop Renato R. Martino, the Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, explains why the Holy See takes such an active part in the international forum and why so many countries seek official contacts with the Holy See: “Political support or material aid they will certainly not expect. What they do seek is what the Holy See, by its very nature and tradition, can offer: orientation and spiritual inspiration that should animate the life of nations and their mutual relationships.”

In 1999 Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), a Catholic NGO with ECOSOC consultative status, launched a campaign to replace the Holy See’s non-member state permanent observer status with NGO status. The “See Change” campaign was dramatized by a contingent that chartered a boat to sail past UN headquarters on the East River during the Beijing Plus Five conference in June of 2000, making the front page of *The Earth Times*, an independent newspaper that covers the UN. The See Change campaign now claims more than 800 endorsing organizations worldwide. Its brochure makes the claim that:

Successfully challenging the Holy See’s status will ensure that only countries decide policy. (This refers to CFFC’s position that the Holy See is not a “state” in the same sense as other countries at the UN.)

*In the Cairo Conference they
[the Holy See] were politically
active in securing the support of
the Islamic countries and they did
that in Beijing as well*

Former US government official

In defense of the Holy See’s current status at the UN, the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute launched its own “Holy See Campaign” in 2000, which now claims more than 4,000 endorsing organizations. “Questions about Holy See statehood are merely the excuse they [See Change] are using for their attack,” claimed Austin Ruse in a March 2000 press conference. “The See Change campaign is really about abortion.” See Change organizers would say that their campaign emerged out of a more general opposition to the Holy See’s views and activities in the related areas of gender, sexuality, and reproductive health. As one of our informants, a key See Change proponent, observes, “for the most part the UN as a whole sees the Vatican as more of a help than a hindrance because only on this certain set of issues is it a problem. In many other areas it’s a great provider of humanitarian assistance. It is often an advocate for human rights in a similar context to the UN. It has certainly taken an approach to development that is a people-centered, poor people’s approach to development. And so in many, many areas it is very helpful to the United Nations.”

Advocates for maintaining the Holy See’s current relationship at the UN claim that should the See Change campaign, initiated by progressives, succeed in withdrawing the Holy See’s non-member state status, it would take away any advantage the Holy See may have thereby for progressive influence at the UN. See Change proponents are willing to live with that and point out that if the Holy See were a permanent observer without non-member state status, it would

have the same advantages as other permanent observers and more opportunity than other NGOs. Frances Kissling writes in a *USA Today* essay, “While the Holy See—the government of the Roman Catholic Church—has made positive contributions through the United Nations to peace and justice, this should not be used to justify granting the status of a state to a religious institution.”

The informant quoted above admits that the Holy See has “limited power” at the UN. At times in the heat of contention, the Holy See’s opponents at the UN may over-estimate its advantages and effectiveness. Though a major religious actor with unique status and significant allies, the Holy See remains one actor among many at the UN.

The UN’s view of religion and religious groups

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has set a tone of appreciation for religion and the work of religious groups at the UN, yet the UN system still harbors a certain amount of ambivalence on this score.

In a 1998 speech at the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, Kofi Annan voiced a thought that may have been in the minds of his audience: “You may be wondering what a Secretary-General of the United Nations is doing in a synagogue, speaking about religion.” “The United Nations is a tapestry,” he offered, “not only of suits and saris, but of clerics’ collars, nun’s habits and lamas’ robes—of mitres, skullcaps and yarmulkes.” Citing Pope John Paul II’s speech to the UN upon its 50th anniversary in 1995, Annan declared that “[t]he politics of nations ... can never ignore the transcendent, spiritual dimension of the human experience.”

Such was also the gist of Annan’s welcoming remarks at the 2000 Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, and it was consistent with the tenor of the dialogue between religious participants and UN officials at that historic meeting at UN New York headquarters. The following year,

The United Nations is a tapestry, not only of suits and saris, but of clerics’ collars, nun’s habits and lamas’ robes—of mitres, skullcaps and yarmulkes.

Kofi A. Annan, UN Secretary-General

upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize (jointly with the UN itself), Annan again lifted up the importance of religion and religious values: “In the 21st Century, I believe the mission of the United Nations will be defined by a new, more profound awareness of the sanctity and dignity of every human life, regardless of race or religion.” Invoking the word “sanctity” in such a statement imputes a religious value to human life beyond the philosophical and political connotations of the word “dignity.”

Just as Kofi Annan has wooed the international business community to join UN initiatives and to help fill the shortfall of waning member state dues, he has made significant overtures to religious communities, calling on them to support and strengthen the work of the United Nations. Such overtures should not be viewed as simple gestures of spirituality divorced from their political context and Annan’s larger plan for UN reform, but they do bespeak religion’s increasing role in the evolving UN system.

Even so, a latent ambivalence about religion’s place in the constitutionally secular United Nations system remains. Some voices today reject religion’s right to a place at all, but these seem less prominent than those who laud religion’s role and those who simply do not know what that role should be. Not only do the various actors composing the vast UN system hold widely varying views of religion and religious actors, but the UN as an institution is grappling with large questions about its own identity and philosophy that impinge on the place accorded religion and the work of religious

CENSURE OR EXCLUSION OF NGOS BY THE UN

ECOSOC status can be suspended or revoked if an NGO receives government funding with the intent to subvert the UN, engages in political acts against a member state, or fails to make a substantive contribution to ECOSOC's work. ECOSOC's standing Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations reviews all applications and renewals of consultative status. In cases of censure or exclusion, religion may be only one factor in a complex situation. Politics can play a role in the exclusion or censure of NGOs by the UN, and politics can turn against a religious NGO as easily as any other type of NGO. Examples include the following:

- **The International Planned Parenthood Federation's** application for ECOSOC consultative status was rejected in the 1950s due to opposition from some Catholic member states, but was accepted in the 1960s despite an increase in the number of nations—Muslim as well as Catholic—that might oppose this group's views on population policy. General public sentiment about population issues had changed over a decade.
- **Human Life International**, a Catholic anti-abortion group, was denied ECOSOC status in the 1990s, but not merely for the expected religious or political reasons—it had showed itself at odds with UN programs and goals. "The factor that probably tipped the decision against Human Life International," writes NGO expert Peter Willetts, "was that it had campaigned in the United States against children collecting money for UNICEF."
- **Hadassah**, Women's Zionist Organization of America, applied for consultative status, but in January 2000 the standing committee considered it and decided to take no action. Hadassah's representative had explained that the organization embodies a non-political, humanitarian form of Zionism dedicated to the ideals of Judaism, democracy, and human rights, and has a distinguished service record in the areas of health and education, including a working relationship with the Palestinian Authority. The observer for Palestine objected that she had never heard of a non-political, humanitarian form of Zionism and contended Zionism is a political doctrine of exclusivism. The observer from Syria also objected, claiming that Zionism is based on the notion of ethnic superiority. The representative from the United States reminded the committee that a 1975 General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism and racial discrimination had been rescinded by a 1991 resolution.

In January 2001, after pressure from the US delegation, the committee voted to recommend Hadassah for consultative status and this was later granted. Hadassah's experience illustrates a pattern in ECOSOC's Committee on NGOs of close scrutiny of and even some hostility toward organizations with the words "Israel," "Zionist," or "Jewish" in their names. The Israel Women's Network and the Women's International Zionist Organization have been subjected to treatment similar to Hadassah's.

[The ECOSOC Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations] is a gatekeeper committee. It gets to say who's in, and it gets to harass NGOs that are troublesome, and can even throw them out.

Veteran UN human rights worker
(citing perceived political motivations
and abuses of the committee's function)

- **The Islamic Centre of England**, an organization that provides religious, social, and educational services for various Muslim constituencies, applied for ECOSOC consultative status in January 2000. Several committee members inquired about its finances. The Russian delegate expressed concern over the group's fund-raising efforts for needy persons in Chechnya, asked whether the group recognized Chechnya as a part of the Russian Federation, and requested details about the channels through which aid would flow to Chechnyan recipients. The group's representative responded that political boundaries are not taken into consideration in requests for aid. The committee decided to take no action on the application.
- At the same meeting, the committee recommended **Admiral Family Circle Islamic Community**, a New York-based group that promotes self-development in the African-American community, for Special consultative status, Category II. Admiral Family Circle had applied for Roster status, but the committee felt that the group's potential usefulness in certain areas of ECOSOC concern warranted the higher status.
- **Christian Solidarity International (CSI)**, a Christian human rights organization, had its ECOSOC status revoked in 1999 upon complaint from the government of Sudan that CSI had allowed the head of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army to speak under its auspices before the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. According to an ECOSOC press release, the Sudanese government "charged that the NGO's actions constituted both a threat to the sovereignty and national security of Sudan and a flagrant violation of the regulations governing the relationship between the United Nations and NGOs."
- **Christian Solidarity Worldwide**: In 2000 the application for Roster status by another NGO, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, was also opposed by Sudan, whose representative to ECOSOC's Committee on NGOs called the organization a "hate group" and suggested that it had ties to Christian Solidarity International (CSI denies any such ties). The representatives from Lebanon and the Russian Federation also opposed Christian Solidarity Worldwide because of the group's charges of religious persecution within those countries.

NGOs. The UN is finding its way in a world where civil society plays a much larger role than in the past, and religious NGOs comprise a significant portion of today's civil society. Moreover, the UN must now accommodate unfamiliar religious views and groups, especially from conservative circles that once avoided the UN. The religious ecology of the UN is more diverse than ever before, and UN agencies and officials can no longer assume that everyone they interact with agrees on the ground rules of interaction.

The lessons learned from the drafting and adoption of the General Assembly's 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief still hold today. As UN scholar Benjamin Rivlin explains, religious NGOs had for many years advocated the adoption of a specific UN declaration about religious freedom to supplement the minimal attention granted this issue in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent UN statements. The 1981 Declaration was finally adopted after some two decades of discussion in the Commission on Human Rights, a "long, torturous path," according to Rivlin, that "provides insight into understanding the difficulties inherent in forging a common approach to religious freedom at the United Nations." At that time, opposition to the Declaration came from Islamic and Soviet bloc countries, for respectively different reasons, while most Third World countries showed indifference to the issue. The actors and the motivations may be different today, but latent ambivalence about religion and religious issues can still be found in the UN system.

Obstacles facing religious groups at the UN

Potential obstacles may arise internally within a group or may be placed in a group's path by UN structures and attitudes. Such obstacles may or may not stem from a group's religious identity per se—secular and religious NGOs face many of the same barriers at the UN.

Bureaucratic constraints impinge on the work of all NGOs at the UN. "[A]s the UN grows both in numbers and diversity, so also do its bureaucratic tendencies," observed Pei-heng Chiang in the book *Non-Governmental Organizations at the United Nations*, published 20 years ago. This often creates NGO frustration over inflexible procedures and institutional inertia. Lack of proper credentials will stop you at the entrance to UN headquarters; a misplaced confirmation letter will keep you out of a special session of the General Assembly. The wheels of the UN grind at a slow, diplomatic pace. "One weakness of NGOs," NGO expert Peter Willetts explains, "is that they have an impatience with bureaucratic processes that seem irrelevant to their issue area." Obviously such processes, annoying as they may be, are not irrelevant to effective NGO advocacy at the UN.

For some, NGO impatience with UN bureaucracy is seen as a virtue, not a vice. One former foundation program officer spoke of his foundation's support of NGOs' involvement in the UN: "I think it was that the organization was affording itself the opportunity to 'ratchet up' the profile of NGOs at the United Nations and to try to give regular people an opportunity to have an impact on what goes on here." Because NGOs are often in more direct contact with the people affected by UN policies, they bring a different sense of urgency to issues being debated at the UN. A source within DPI pointed out active NGO involvement in "many of the social equity campaigns ... [such as] as civil society campaigns designed to put pressure on governments to forgive debts for developing countries. You would find a heavy influence of religious NGOs in those."

Certain aspects of the UN system may affect some NGOs more negatively than others, presenting potential obstacles to full participation. Simple lack of resources may inhibit a group's advocacy of its views; for instance, the inability to send representatives to a UN conference or to maintain an office with adequate staffing at UN headquarters in New York or Geneva. Language facility (or lack thereof) can also make a

difference. Despite simultaneous translation of discussions about UN documents, for instance, the text being debated and projected onto the screen is in English, putting non-English speakers at a disadvantage. Moreover, the parliamentary and diplomatic processes governing UN deliberations may be unfamiliar to some NGOs from cultures favoring other types of group dynamics.

Attitudes and biases at the UN can also pose obstacles to NGO participation and effectiveness. Since its early years the UN has included an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the consultative arrangements for NGOs, including calls for scaling back NGO privileges. The notion that the UN is a “club” of member states and UN bodies leaves the NGO community as the odd player out: “They tend to ‘suffer’ the existence of NGOs when they need them and otherwise dismiss or ignore them as either nuisances or of little consequence,” observes Pei-heng Chiang. Moreover, “The overall image of NGO representatives at the UN . . . tends to be distorted and predominantly negative.” NGOs clearly play “a second-class citizen role in the UN context,” complains one informant from a secular reproductive rights NGO. An official of an important liaison organization between the NGO community and the UN system bemoans the history of condescension toward NGOs, whose representatives were dismissed in earlier years as “those ladies with tennis shoes.” The official also mentions, “there’s always a concern that the behavior of isolated NGOs will feed into a certain negativity on the part of many member states regarding NGOs at the UN, and it exists.” Given such views it is not surprising that NGO criticism of member states or UN bodies is often unwelcome.

There are, however, religious NGOs who put considerable effort into improving relations with the UN. The liaison organization’s representative spoke of “an incredibly valuable partner to us in working on just the general NGO–United Nations relationship and that’s the Lutheran World Federation. They’ve been very ‘nose to the grindstone,’ concrete in participating in various meetings and strategizing and really helping to think through on a very constructive basis what are

the options for confronting some of the negativism . . . and some of the challenges that occasionally get thrown up in the way of NGOs.”

Generic anti-NGO biases can be compounded by anti-religion biases as well, or by ideological preferences. The comments of Austin Ruse, of the conservative Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, are instructive on the latter point. “There is no ‘The UN,’ he explains. “There are many UNs.” For religious groups, “it depends upon where you go in the UN, and it depends upon your position. For instance, left-leaning religious groups will find great favor at UNFPA, but orthodox believers can’t get their phone calls returned Left-leaning religious groups will find great favor with the European Union, but orthodox believers will not. So, it depends upon who you are and where you go.” When asked where right-leaning organizations might get a hearing in the UN system, Ruse replied, “We’re a minority here, not only in our numbers but also in the places that want to hear our message. We find that most of our friends are in the developing world within the General Assembly, and we have very few friends in the UN bureaucracy.”

Whether Ruse is correct in the specifics of his appraisal, his general point appears well-made—that relationships between religious NGOs and elements of the UN system vary depending on the ideological proclivities of both parties. The UN may be able to remove certain bureaucratic obstacles to NGO participation. Anti-religion biases may diminish throughout the UN system. The UN may even reverse the historic undercurrent of dissatisfaction with NGO consultative arrangements. But it is unlikely that NGOs, whether secular or religious, will ever be able to avoid playing the game of ideological networking, which sometimes includes accepting the fact that certain doors are closed to them. Even so, in the constantly shifting international arena, doors that once were closed may open up as new players, with different ideological proclivities, enter the scene.

Religion at UN headquarters and conferences versus UN operations in the field

Situations at the national level can affect UN operations, both in the countries and at UN headquarters. For instance, UNFPA's work with NGOs in the field depends upon government approval and facilitation. UNFPA found its work hampered in one country whose government disliked the *Programme of Action* adopted at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. Religious movements or trends in the countries, such as the recent rise of religious conservatism in the US and religious reforms throughout the Islamic world, can have ripple effects throughout the UN system. These sometimes result in seemingly “strange bedfellow” arrangements, as in the working relationship around family issues between the Organization of the Islamic Conference, an inter-governmental umbrella organization representing more than 50 Islamic member states, and conservative Christian groups in North America like the World Family Policy Forum (Latter-day Saints, or Mormons) and the Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society (non-denominational).

Religious groups often advocate their official stances at UN headquarters and conferences. These may include fundamental doctrines and general ethical principles that allow little room for negotiation. Many religious groups tend toward conservatism at this level of interaction with the UN system.

Practical conditions in the field, however, may create disjunctions between official stances and local behavior. One UN official—a practicing Roman Catholic—pointed out that the Roman Catholic Church is institutionally conservative on sexuality, yet Catholic clergy in many countries take progressive stances on sexuality-related social problems; for instance, supporting the use of condoms as a means of halting the spread of HIV/AIDS. (The Catholic Church bans condom use and all methods of contraception other than periodic abstinence.) Cooperation between UN programs and religious groups appears

I realized that sex education is needed by parents, church workers, as well as our young people. Our congregations are not as holy as we would like to believe them to be.

Lutheran pastor, Papua New Guinea

smoothest at the level of addressing local social problems.

We learned of many successful joint ventures between UN programs and religious groups in the field. These tended to hinge on the mutual goodwill and cooperative dedication of local religious leaders whose parent institutional bodies might not always agree in principle or ever meet at UN headquarters and conferences. A remarkable case comes from Papua New Guinea, a nation facing serious health and other crises as it emerges from social isolation. The first case of AIDS in Papua New Guinea was reported in 1987; today an estimated 10,000–20,000 people carry HIV and are projected to develop AIDS in the next 5–10 years. Sexual violence, substance abuse, and illegal abortions have all increased.

A partnership of seven Christian denominations, including the Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, and the Assemblies of God, took the initiative to work closely with UNFPA and Margaret Sanger Center International (a secular NGO) in developing a manual entitled *Christian Family Life Education: A Resource Guide for Working with Parents in Papua New Guinea*. “The manual has become our best friend,” says a Lutheran pastor who has shown outstanding leadership in the effort, “because it has all the answers regarding reproductive health and sexuality and is written in simple, clear English [I]t also includes biblical references within the PNG [Papua New Guinea] context.” Another pastor comments on the practical realities that motivated the effort: “I, too, joined because I realized that sex education is needed

STRATEGIES RELIGIOUS GROUPS EMPLOY AT THE UN

Religious groups come to the UN for a variety of reasons and, depending on their goals, engage in various activities. While some wish only to be informed about international issues, others are determined to make a difference in international affairs. In the former case, attending Department of Public Information briefings may suffice; in the latter case, partnering with a UN agency may be imperative.

Strategies of religious NGOs are very much like those of their secular counterparts. They come informed on an issue or set of concerns (e.g., child soldiers, the family, women's rights) and educate, advocate, and network with other NGOs and UN member states. During major UN conferences and the preparatory sessions leading up to them, religious NGOs work for their perspectives and language to be adopted in UN documents and actions.

All religious groups bring religious motivations to their UN work, but their strategies may differ greatly. Consider two groups who both seek peace as a goal.

The **Sri Chinmoy** group follows the teachings of its Indian spiritual teacher and is officially named "The Peace Meditation at the United Nations." Their Programmes for Peace include:

- Meditation sessions twice a week for UN delegates, staff and NGOs;
- Concerts;
- Silent "peace walks" in the UN garden carrying the Preamble to the UN Charter;
- Annual 18-mile "peace run" ending at UN headquarters; and,
- Interfaith prayer breakfasts "during which Ambassadors, UN officials, and religious leaders express their own vision for peace."

A researcher visited a Sri Chinmoy meditation session during field work at the Beijing Plus Five meetings at UN headquarters and reported:

I noticed three white women standing outside Conference Room C, all dressed in Indian sari-type garb, softly singing. There was nothing posted on the door, but I saw several similarly dressed women enter. I asked one about it, who said this was a Sri Chinmoy meditation session. I entered and saw at least 75 people in seated meditation before a simple altar/table set-up. Most were white baby-boomers, mostly women (dressed in the sari garb), the men dressed in white pants and shirts. Not a word was said while I was there.

The **Quaker United Nations Office** (QUNO) representing the peace church tradition in Western Protestantism, draws its inspiration and strategies from the Religious Society of Friends, a movement originating in England in the 1600s. QUNO's UN work "emphasizes a patient, consensual, step-by-step process in moving toward peace and justice" characteristic of the Friends heritage. Current issues of concern include small-arms proliferation, peace building in conflict-ridden and post-conflict areas around the world, and financing of global development programs. Their strategies include:

What was remarkable about the Quaker organization was their unobtrusiveness, their desire to allow the dynamics of the meeting to take place, leading to a good result without firstly trying to impose their own beliefs on those who are there. There was a certain transparency and an integrity about that process.

UN official

- QUNO's briefing papers on issues, which are highly regarded in UN circles;
- Annual "State of the UN" report from a Quaker perspective; and
- Informal, off-the-record meetings at locations like Quaker House in New York City and Mohonk Mountain Hotel outside the city, which bring diplomats together with UN and NGO representatives in an attempt to arbitrate conflicts and work toward consensus solutions.

The Quakers' approach tends to "disarm" combatants, to "bring the parties who are parties to the conflict into the same room into the same discussion." However, it may take many sessions and much patience to reach resolution on hotly contested issues. At a Quaker House lunch meeting, we observed some of these tensions following an extremely critical verbal report on the human rights situation in one country given by an NGO representative:

The ambassador [of the country in question] spoke up at this point. He was clearly perturbed but kept calm. He said he did not agree with most of Ms. R's points, that her approach is dangerous and her information misleading. She was not accurate and very biased, he said. What is the starting point for discussing the situation in his country, he asked. The government recognizes the human rights problems, but the origin of the problems was the opposition who ruined the country initially, not the current government. He said he is willing to talk with her about many things, but not about her misinformation.

Which is the most effective strategy for attaining peace? Certainly for specific conflicts, the Quaker approach is more effective, although it offers no magic remedy with 100 percent effectiveness. However, many religious groups would say that the contentious nature of humanity will change only when a critical mass of individuals are transformed through spiritual strategies like those of Sri Chinmoy.

by parents, church workers, as well as our young people. Our congregations are not as holy as we would like to believe them to be.” Such realistic assessments of the lives of religious people “on the ground” can lead to practical, cooperative efforts to address their needs.

Constituencies and accountability of religious NGOs at the UN

In a heated moment during a meeting off-site from UN headquarters in New York City, an NGO field representative excoriates the government of a UN member state for not acting in the best interests of its citizens. The member state’s UN ambassador and his aide on human rights are in attendance at the meeting. The aide responds sharply: “It is easy to say that governments should be accountable, but to whom are the NGOs that accuse us accountable?” Indeed, some in the UN’s NGO community have asked the same question. As an official of a secular environmental NGO at the UN suggests candidly, “There is almost no screening of NGOs at the UN, . . . almost anyone can get a badge and walk in and weigh in at the table. The question is, who is speaking for whom? Whom do any of these people represent?”

The suggestion that there is almost no screening of the NGOs at the UN might seem implausible to others who have found the admission process labyrinthine and even problematically politicized. Whatever one’s opinion of the UN screening process, the question of NGOs’ constituencies is among those that the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs considers in evaluating NGOs seeking a consultative relationship. In a 1996 resolution ECOSOC set out several principles regarding the consultative relationship between the UN and NGOs, including that an NGO “shall have a democratically adopted constitution . . . [and] shall have a representative structure and possess appropriate mechanisms of accountability to its members, who shall exercise effective control over its policies and actions through the exercise of voting rights or other

It is easy to say that governments should be accountable, but to whom are the NGOs that accuse us accountable?

Human rights aide, UN member state

appropriate democratic and transparent decision-making processes.” These principles express the UN’s interest in fostering democracy in its activities. Just as member states are expected to voice the concerns of their citizenry rather than those of special interests, so too NGO voices must demonstrate that they represent the voices of substantive constituencies that will enhance rather than skew or distort the conversation of international civil society at the UN. Critiques about NGO accountability should be tempered with equally strong critiques of non-representative governments—needless to say, not all member states at the UN represent the best interests of their citizens.

Further complexities arise when posing questions about accountability for religious NGOs at the UN. For whom does a religious NGO speak at the UN? For example, does a denominational office at the UN represent the views of the denomination as an institution or of the denomination’s membership? If the latter, does it represent a consensus of members or a faction? What about an organization that uses certain terms in its title? Given the hierarchical structures in Catholicism, some have expressed dismay that an organization like Catholics for a Free Choice would use “Catholics” in its title, since they claim its beliefs and actions are at odds with both the US Conference of Bishops and the Vatican. Supporters of Catholics for a Free Choice argue that the majority of Catholic people in the world share its views and using the word “Catholic” is legitimate. And yet the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs is not concerned with whether, in addition to supporting UN aims, a religious NGO reflects a hierarchical religion’s official positions, but

only whether it can demonstrate that it speaks for and is accountable to its meaningful portion of civil society.

Religious NGOs share the needs of other NGOs to balance their work at the UN with the interests and political aims of their constituencies and supporters. Indeed, an official of a religious NGO at the UN remarks on the challenges of networking, which often require setting aside the immediate objectives of one's organization for the greater network's purpose. Even as networking might be part of one's religious mission at the UN, the tensions of balancing network partners of conflicting worldviews with the specific aims and beliefs of a religious constituency may require, in addition to a strong self-understanding, some real finesse. For denominational offices at the UN or other offices with related institutional affiliations and commitments, there are often real pressures not to move beyond the consensus of the larger body on controversial matters such as those concerning women, children, and development. One staffer of a mainline Protestant denominational office at the UN expresses a feeling of being caught between a constituency base supportive of gender justice and a more politically conservative institutional base that exerts control over the UN office by removing vocal feminists from time to time.

External forces affecting religious participation at the UN

No organizational system, no matter how large and complex, is impervious to external forces. As an inter-governmental body, the United Nations is influenced in varying degrees by domestic situations within its member states; as a global organizational system, the UN system is affected by social, economic, cultural, political, and other developments across an increasingly interconnected world. Thus Jewish participation at the UN is informed by politics in the Middle East as well as in the United States; Muslim participation by dynamics across the Islamic world as well as within specific Muslim countries. An increasingly vocal Christian conservatism in the United

States has changed the landscape of the UN's NGO community in recent years and also influenced the relationship of the US government to the international body. Globalization and the end of the Cold War have brought forth a new pluralism that informs religious participation at the UN.

Strategists in the religious community have learned that effecting change at the UN requires a multi-pronged approach extending well beyond attendance at UN conferences. At least two general strategies are employed outside the UN in an attempt to influence the UN—one political, the other media-related.

The conservative religious movement in the United States, for instance, has been especially effective in mobilizing political activists at the grassroots level. As the groups in this movement have turned their attention to the UN, particularly on matters of the family and women's rights, their advocates have met with sympathetic congressional leaders and staffers, who in turn carry these concerns to the State Department. As an administration puts together strategies and delegations for UN conferences, such congressional influence is borne in mind.

The selection of NGO representatives for US delegations can be especially important when a new administration comes into office in the time between interrelated prep-coms and conferences (e.g., the Clinton administration chose the delegation for the Earth Summit in 1992). As the newly appointed Bush administration evaluated its delegation to a World Health Organization meeting, it passed over some usual attendees from the American Nurses Association and the American Public Health Association, opting instead for "private-sector advisees" more in line with the administration's views on hot-button health issues like abortion, including a lobbyist from the conservative International Right to Life Federation. Moreover, within the first month of Bush's presidency, the second prep-com for the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children took place. President Bush was informed too late that the Global Health Council, a group not in line with some of the new administra-

tion's policies on children, had been selected for the US delegation. In response, the administration added the religiously and politically conservative Family Research Council to the delegation.

Television, the print media, and the Internet are important sources of information—sometimes misinformation—in ways that affect religious participation at the UN. Religious actors are becoming increasingly sophisticated about creating and influencing networks through these forums, as well as influencing editors and writers within UN bureaus and agencies and in the major news outlets outside of the UN. The 1994 ICPD in Cairo was a learning experience for many religious NGOs on how critical working with the media can be in delivering your message to a wider audience. As the head of a progressive religious NGO put it, “we knew the eyes of the world and particularly the eyes of the press would be on the Cairo meeting and ... controversy is what the press loves and ... as part of that controversy, most of the press wants to cover all sides of the story and so, since the Vatican is going to get coverage, we would be ... the other side of the story.”

Indeed, the extensive worldwide media coverage of the Cairo conference, focusing on the pitched battle between progressive and conservative camps and religious and secular NGOs over the issues of unsafe abortion, sexuality education, and the definition of “family,” gave new prominence and attention to the role that religion plays in international policy making at the UN.

As for the Internet, email alerts and web site content are increasingly used for building and mobilizing global constituencies and reaching sympathetic voices among those unfamiliar with UN issues and perhaps unlikely to visit UN headquarters or attend UN meetings. In addition, groups can offer web links to other organizations with similar concerns, thereby building networks of like-minded constituencies. Finally, the conservative Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM) has hit upon a formula of a weekly fax to its constituents, UN officials, and other interest-

We knew the eyes of the world and particularly the eyes of the press would be on the Cairo meeting.

Head, Progressive Religious NGO

ed parties. C-FAM does not have consultative status at the UN, yet it delivers its concerns directly into the UN system via fax.

Personal beliefs and individual commitments

We asked our interviewees, “What formative experiences or perspectives have brought you to where you are now?” We were surprised by many powerful, personal testimonies in response, from both religious and secular individuals. Below are some stimulating excerpts with specifically religious content, chosen to add a personal flavor to some of the major themes in this volume: social justice, conservative Christian advocacy, peacebuilding, religious diversity, and interfaith activity. We see here religion's powerful motivating force, even for individuals who have taken a secular turn in their UN work. (Some editing has been done for readability.)

- I am a product of the Methodist Church. My father was a doctor and was going to be a medical missionary; my mother was a social worker. So I was raised in a family that believed in activism, social responsibility, that your purpose in being here is to contribute to the world you're in, specifically from a religious perspective and very much in the social gospel tradition of Methodism. ... And so it was really out of all of that that I developed my sense of what it means to be an engaged person in the world, and I think it's still very informative to my own involvement and my sense that this is not only a good life to lead, but

a fulfilling life to lead. I no longer do my work through a religious framework; I'm part of a secular movement. But I still see what I would call values and issues in the human rights context as very resonant with religious values. (Charlotte Bunch, Center for Women's Global Leadership)

- [Regarding the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders:] That's been a very difficult process. One day I'm going to write a book on that. I have the title—it's called "The Road to the Summit." But really, a few people will be very critical in the whole aspect of the Summit's development. But it all began with a conversation between Mr. Ted Turner and Kofi Annan. At that meeting, Mr. Ted Turner said to the UN Secretary-General, "If you want peace in the world, Kofi, you should bring the religious leaders of the world to the UN and make them sign a commitment of peace." He said that more as a call to action, that it's religious leadership who must affirm and show the leadership and lead the people into a process of peace That's how it began. I was called in immediately after this and [Turner] said, "Bawa, you know the Secretary-General will support this thing." I said, "This is a great idea and I'd love to do it." I said, "I've been ready for this for many lifetimes. I'd love to work on it." (Bawa Jain, Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders)
- Some of my earliest memories in life are political memories. Riding on the back of a jeep shouting political slogans for a mayoral candidate when I was seven years old in Columbia, Missouri. Asking my father when I was eight or nine, "What is foreign aid?" Politics has always been a first love. Then I spent many years in business. I thought at the time that I was wasting my time. I didn't like being in business, and left that about six years ago to do politics and to do religion One day quite by accident I met a young lady who

I believe that with this feeling of care for others we try to take up as much as possible to support the UN and do whatever we can at the UN and through our movement.

Hiro Sakurai, Soka Gakkai International

was representing a group that wanted to provide seed money for pro-life, pro-family people to open up a permanent presence at the UN, and at the moment she said that, everything crystallized. It was at that moment, I mean it was like hearing a bell ring, and I told her that maybe I was the person to do that, and six weeks later I was doing it, having never done any pro-life work and never been really to the UN. I was uniquely unqualified for the work, but my many years in business and my intense interest in religion and politics gave me advantages that have quite helped out in the founding of this group. I mean we are really believing and practicing Catholics. This group was founded under the patronage of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, which was a vision of the Blessed Mother to a French nun named St. Catherine Laboure. Everything that we do is, we believe, under her protection, under her patronage. (Austin Ruse, Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute)

- I have to go back to the time I decided to join Soka Gakkai, which was 1988. I had a friend, a Soka Gakkai member, who constantly came to me, really worried about my future and so forth. Finally I was so shocked by his actions, you know, and started feeling care for others. It's very simple, but the care for others struck me so much that I decided to join. I just simply wanted to become a person like him. And that was the beginning of

my Soka Gakkai movement. Actually I feel that this care for others applies to many other levels, from an individual level to something like the UN and more international matters. I believe that with this feeling of care for others we try to take up as much as possible to support the UN and do whatever we can at the UN and through our movement. (Hiro Sakurai, Soka Gakkai International)

- I grew up in the south, in Atlanta, and so the only version of Christianity I knew was really more of a conservative evangelical faith The part of the gospel that always touched me was Jesus' ministry to the oppressed and marginalized of society. Even though I come from a very privileged place in society, I think I always felt that way because I didn't fit in, and so I really identified with that message I was just a very idealistic kind of person, and after college went into the Peace Corps and served in Belize, Central America. I was just kind of blown away there, my whole world view changed, because I had grown up with a picture of Central America that involved communists knocking on our back door, but when I went to Guatemala for language training and traveled around Central America by bus, I saw a whole different picture of what was happening there. I was furious that I'd been so deceived.

So when I got back, I had decided all along to go to seminary because I was so inspired by this Jesus-of-the-poor kind of figure, and it wasn't until seminary that I really got the language to describe what my faith actually was—when I was exposed to liberation theology and feminist theology. My experience in Belize really sensitized me to the situation of women—that coupled with coming back to seminary and experiencing misogyny in that environment, and realizing how strong it still was in the United States. Then I decided to get a Master of Divinity along with a social work degree and focus on community organizing. (Jennifer Butler, Ecumenical Women 2000+)

- I had a kind of revelation some years ago when I was asking, "Why is it that I have spent my adult life opposing war and trying to build alternative institutions and alternative understandings?" And the thought came to me in that moment that I had lost my dad for three years in World War II and I didn't want any other children to lose their dads.

It was while doing a writing exercise in a writing workshop. We were all asked to write a little short story based on porches, so that was the common element. The instructor read a couple of things from novels that were scenes on porches. So I wrote about the porch at my grandparents' house where my mother and I lived during the war and the day—we didn't have a phone—when one of the neighbors came running over to my mother and said, "You have to come, you have to come. It's about Vic." My mother went streaming down the road to this other house and I sat in the window just by myself. All I could think of was that my dad had died My mother came back and she was just bawling. "He's home, he's in St. Louis." She hadn't known where he was. As far as she knew he was in Europe. He had decided in his own wacky way that he wasn't going to tell her until he got really close, and then it was like, "I want you to come over here."

Then I saw him. I don't know if it was the next day or the day after that. When he left I was three and when he came back I was six. For a boy that was a critical time. He was a stranger to me and I still remember the awkwardness in the backyard of his driving up in the car and he was in his uniform. The whole neighborhood gathered, the word spread up and down the little farms, and they were all coming to the big party. And he gave me two six-guns, you know, double holsters, so I was very happy with that, but he didn't know how to deal with me and I didn't know how to deal with him and there was, I don't know whether you would call it an estrangement or not, but there was a distance between us all the rest of our lives that I think we could never quite make up.

And it wasn't that I ever felt unloved, because I knew how important I was to him, but it was difficult for us to deal with each other. (Jack Patterson, Quaker United Nations Office)

Individual impact on a religion's effectiveness at the UN

Navigating the terrain of the virtual UN at www.un.org gives an inkling of the immensity of the actual UN. Can an individual make a difference in religion's effectiveness in such a vast system? Or is one person at the UN like one "hit" on the UN's website—logged in but inconsequential?

We began our research with a social bias; that is, with the assumption that groups, not individuals, are the exclusive units of agency for religion at the UN. We set out to examine the "ecology" of religion at the UN, to uncover the role religion plays in the interrelationships of UN bodies, government missions, NGOs, and related groups in the UN "ecosystem." We have not completely abandoned this social bias—we still believe that groups are the primary units of agency at the UN—but we discovered that individuals play an important part in that agency.

In saying this we are not merely subscribing to a "great person" theory of influence. To be sure, the UN has seen its share of great figures with religious sensitivities, if not exclusively spiritual motivations. Secretaries-General Dag Hammarskjöld (1953–1961), a Lutheran, and Kofi Annan (1997–present), an Anglican, are often mentioned in this regard. Money affects the work of the UN, especially in this era of lagging US financial support, so businessman Ted Turner's \$1 billion contribution in 1997 made things happen. Turner's underwriting of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders three years later facilitated face-to-face dialogue between representatives of the world's religions and key UN bodies, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization;

Personalities matter. Bureaucracy is not king. The personal touch is vital in all UN negotiations.

Ambassador Juli Minoves-Triquell of Andorra

and the United Nations Development Programme. In his Summit keynote address in the UN's General Assembly Hall, Turner, who once considered becoming a Christian missionary, appealed to all religions to seek the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, the cultivation of peace, and an end to grinding poverty—all fundamental goals of the UN.

But the role of the individual in religion's effectiveness at the UN extends far beyond secretaries-general and wealthy patrons. We saw it in the people we interviewed and heard about it in the stories they shared. We came away with a clear sense that effective religious NGOs are driven by effective religious people who individually embody the principles we outlined earlier, especially integrity and reliability, practical knowledge and skill, and the virtues of patience and perseverance. When one interviewee pointed out that a particular NGO was no longer effective at the UN because of a recent change in leadership, we were impressed with the importance of individuals.

Vignettes about effective people in the trenches of the UN are numerous. One will suffice to prove the point. In listing the lessons learned from years of seeking an international agreement on the use of the oceans, two members of the Neptune Group concluded that even in a bureaucratic and high-profile world, "ordinary people . . . can contribute significantly to human betterment." Here "history was made more by determined, resourceful people—including people in particular NGOs and in particular governments and international institutions—than it was by the largely abstract structures and processes that contemporary social scientists emphasize as part of their often admirable effort to build 'theory.'"

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVENESS FOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS AT THE UN

Discussion of strategies and effectiveness raises the question, How can religious NGOs make a practical difference in the extraordinarily complex UN system, especially given their merely consultative status? In answer, several principles can be identified.

Become indispensable to the work of the UN.

Why should a member state or a UN body pay attention to you? Because you have the expertise, experience, information, resources, connections—whatever they need. Perhaps you can clarify the facts of an issue under debate, offer advice on language in a document, or facilitate operations in the field. Like any large organization, the UN can recognize valuable consultants and partners. One high-ranking UN official had no trouble listing both useful and troublesome religious groups, singling out the Holy See as exceptionally amenable to his department's work. In the same breath he named another UN body that probably views the Holy See as less than helpful in its work. Thus this first principle can be refined to state: Become indispensable to particular areas within the overall work of the UN.

Establish a reputation for absolute integrity and reliability.

Trust counts for a great deal, even in the arena of international politics. Not only must the UN find you indispensable, it must find you trustworthy. Your facts must be consistently accurate, your work in the field above reproach. Especially in the human rights arena, the UN depends greatly upon information supplied by NGOs. Felice Gaer, of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, an organization closely allied with the American Jewish Committee, has written that the UN's Commission on Human Rights relies "almost exclusively upon NGO information" in its work in 10 human rights areas, including religious intolerance, freedom of expression, violence against women, and contemporary forms of racism.

Be willing to rise above self-serving or narrow goals.

Recognize that member states and UN bodies typically serve their own self-interests, but they do not necessarily want to serve yours. Abandoning your narrower goals may open the way to greater accomplishments. We asked our interviewees to identify the key religious actors at the UN today. After the Holy See (whose status as Permanent Observer is unique), two groups stood above the rest: Quakers and Baha'is. These faiths share some common traits that may explain their high regard in UN circles. Both hold basic tenets consistent with UN ideals—for Quakers an end to war and conflict, for Baha'is the establishment of a peaceful and equitable world. Both seek to build consensus on issues by engaging all concerned parties. Perhaps most important, both operate as facilitators rather than partisan advocates.

Usually our focus has been not so much on positions, but on process. ... There's nothing inherently wrong with groups being very forthright, expressing their perspectives, positions, views on issues, and entering into a debate on those issues. But we have felt that the real show is not winning on particular issues here, but rather strengthening the capacity of the institution to resolve the kinds of problems that need to be resolved if the world community is to be a community.

Jack Patterson, Quaker UN Representative

Learn the ropes.

You cannot succeed in a system without knowing its procedures and mechanisms. The UN's formal structure takes time to learn. Its informal structure, through which much of the real business gets done, takes more time and its successful navigation depends on cultivating the other principles listed here. Working the hallways and dining areas of UN headquarters may accomplish more than attending formal meetings, many of which may be closed to NGO participation. Networking also increases the chances of success—the UN is, after all, a consensus-based system. Effectiveness requires more than mere presence—insightfulness and skill are needed as well. As Helena Cook generalizes in an essay on Amnesty International in the book, "The Conscience of the World": "To be effective at the UN, NGOs must be opportunists, able to seize on the unexpected and make the best use of an unforeseen event."

Develop the virtues of patience and perseverance.

Complex organizations move at a snail's pace. A victory at one UN conference may suffer a setback at the five-year follow-up. Important decisions sometimes devolve upon the only people left in the room at the end of a marathon session. The Neptune Group, self-described as "a constantly changing collection of NGO representatives" that networked several religious and secular NGOs, invested years in successfully pursuing an international agreement on the use of the oceans. If you are not committed long-term, and if you demand major changes immediately, you will probably not be effective at the UN.

An observation by Ambassador Juli Minoves-Triquell of Andorra, published in Wilfrid Grey's book *UN Jigsaw*, is well-taken. "Before I came to the UN," the ambassador explains, "I knew all about its structures. But actually working in it and being a part of its life has made me see how strong the personal factor is in all the UN does. Personalities matter. Bureaucracy is not king. The personal touch is vital in all UN negotiations."

We reiterate that groups are the primary units of religious agency at the United Nations. The Holy See, the Quaker United Nations Office, the Baha'i International Community, and others represent significant institutionalized presences at the UN. Yet their effectiveness at any given time in the workings of the UN system is at least partly contingent on the abilities of the individuals they field there. When we asked our informants to identify the major religious actors at the UN, they first named groups, but then very quickly followed up with the names of key individuals in those groups.

One such key individual explains how he works the diplomatic angles to further the work of his religious NGO: "We hold luncheons or seminars or other kinds of events ... to which people, diplomats, members of the Secretariat, other NGOs are invited. All of that is building the connections, and I would say a very large amount of what goes on is informal. Some of my best contacts are made on the street from recognizing someone from some other event or reception or whatever, reintroducing myself, and talking about some very current event or process coming forward. One thing builds on another." He continues about how he sometimes gets what he needs from UN or missions staff people: "They will at times be reluctant to share information formally. For example, recently member states received an advance copy of a document related to this upcoming preparatory committee [meeting].... So I phoned the mission of the chair and said, 'Can I have a copy of this, could NGOs have a copy of this?' He said, 'Oh, my ambassador's not in. He won't be in until Monday. I can't give this out. I'm sure it will

become available soon.' He wasn't unfriendly, and I understood, he doesn't have the instruction to do it. He can't do it. Then I phoned somebody in the Secretariat. In that case they said, 'Oh, well, you know it's not here, it's for member states.' And then the guy said, 'But, you know, if you come over I'll give you a copy.' That's how things go. He also said to me, 'But please only share this part of it, but not that part because that part you shouldn't know about.'"

The question of religion's real contribution to the UN

A thoughtful, high-level representative of a major UN agency asked us if there is any evidence that religion has ever made a positive contribution to the UN or its work. Raised in a religious Jewish family, he explains that he himself is not religious. His professional experience encompasses humanitarian work in Africa and Latin America and humanitarian policy work at UN headquarters in New York City. He was formerly employed by an influential human rights NGO.

Asked what he would like to know about religion at the UN, this officer had some penetrating questions. In addition to wanting evidence for positive religious contributions to the UN's work (and wondering if there is any), he wanted to know about the role of religious leaders as their work intersects with UN policy and UN efforts on the ground: "Before religious leaders tell others how to behave," he inquired, "are they prepared to consider the harmful role played by religion in fomenting war, ethnic hatreds, and genocide?" "At what point," he probed further, "will religious leaders start to become serious advocates against HIV/AIDS, including, when necessary, advocating for condom use?"

These questions cannot be written off as those of a secularist hostile to religion. Rather, they seem to reveal a desire for serious engagement, a call for religious actors at the UN to be sober about the relationship between their religious commitments

and the forces of violence and death that the UN opposes. “Could the UN be made a better place with the moral values of religions?” he asks rhetorically, and answers: “Unquestionably.” It is the divisiveness of the religions he finds problematic, a divisiveness he seems to encounter increasingly in policy conversations at UN headquarters.

Despite the call for constructive engagement, this line of questions seems to reveal despair about religion’s potential positive contributions to UN efforts. And yet this person had already answered his own questions, with significant optimism, in our interview with him some months earlier. Indeed, in that interview he offered many accounts of religious actors that he has worked alongside at UN headquarters and in UN-affiliated operations in the field whom he found to be highly effective in promoting the human rights and peacemaking aims of the UN.

Of his work in Africa he recounted that “some of the most wonderful people I worked with were missionaries and priests and church activists.” He described the “moral influence” of a council of churches in Africa and its importance in facilitating an environment for UN operational work. And from his humanitarian work in Latin America he recalled that “some of the most courageous human rights activists were activists from the church.” He added that in those circumstances many secular activists worked through the church because they recognized it to be a channel for effecting change. As for his experiences of religion at UN headquarters, he instanced the work of the Quakers and the way in which the effectiveness of their leadership at the UN on eliminating small arms trade and the use of child soldiers grows out of the Quakers’ pacifist religious tradition.

In providing examples from his own experience, this UN representative answered his own question about whether there is any evidence that religion has ever made a positive contribution to the UN or its work. He is not ignorant about religious contributions to the work of the UN; in fact, his interview revealed a nuanced understanding of religion’s roles in both

Could the UN be made a better place with the moral values of religions? Unquestionably.

Representative, UN agency

conflict and conflict resolution. What his question revealed is rather his own fears about religion’s worst-case scenarios, a fear that contributes to the ambivalence about religion sometimes reflected in UN agencies and conferences, where religious points of view do not always harmoniously converge with one another or, more importantly, with UN aims. For the challenge this poses to religious actors who wish to bring their values and traditions to bear on the UN, the question needs to be asked and answered perpetually.

TRENDS IN RELIGION AND PUBLIC POLICY AT THE UN

Religion is not new to the UN. But new and important trends have appeared in recent years. There is clearly an increased religious presence at the UN. The increase in the number of religious NGOs at the UN today rides the crest of the NGO wave generally. Religious voices multiplied and strengthened as global civil society matured in the 1990s following a general lull during the Cold War years. Many of our sources point to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, popularly known as the “Earth Summit”) and the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) as important milestones of increased religious NGO participation at the UN. UNCED attracted an unprecedented number of NGOs generally, while the ICPD featured an ideological polarization of religious camps that continues today, as we saw in the opening case study on the Beijing Plus Five meetings.

For many years religious participation at the UN was heavily Christian and Jewish, and largely Western in orientation. Today non-Judeo-Christian, non-Western religions and various interfaith efforts have greater representation at the UN. The Baha’i International Community is an especially active new presence, for instance. Soka Gakkai International, a Buddhist group focusing on peace, disarmament, relief efforts, human rights education, and the environment, has UN liaison offices in both New York City and Geneva. Eastern and indigenous religions gained more visibility through participation in the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in 2000.

Today, many religious groups are willing to enter into cooperative efforts across historical, doctrinal,

When the Islamic states get their back up on something, they get their way, . . . for instance [with regard to] sexual orientation If you can't get the Muslims on your side on something like that, then you lose.

Conservative Catholic activist

and ritual divisions in order to attain desired goals. This may include dialogue for the sake of increased mutual understanding, networking to effect social change, or joining forces in order to address shared moral concerns. Eight percent of the religious NGOs with ECOSOC status are interfaith organizations, including the World Conference on Religion and Peace, the Temple of Understanding, and the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders. Seven percent of the Christian NGOs with ECOSOC status are ecumenical organizations, including the Church World Service and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches.

The Values Caucus, an informal network of religious and secular NGOs, is another example of a group that cross-cuts religious identities. At the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, the Values Caucus drafted language that made its way into the Summit’s final document through the US delegation. The Values Caucus intentionally steered clear of overt religious terminology during the

Summit, because, as one participant explains, they knew they would get farther talking ethics instead of theology. Yet, as one highly-placed UN official points out, the Social Development Summit's document has "a much more explicit reference, not just to the issue of values, but even to the issue of spirituality than most UN documents typically do."

One of the most important trends in recent years is the rise in Islamic influence, especially through member states that have either constitutional or de facto Islamic identities. Whereas other non-Judeo-Christian religions exert relatively more or less influence on the business of the UN, Islam has clearly arrived as a major actor. As one conservative Catholic activist explains, "When the Islamic states get their back up on something, they get their way, ... for instance [with regard to] sexual orientation If you can't get the Muslims on your side on something like that, then you lose."

The influence of mainline Protestantism at the UN, however, has declined steadily over the years, some notable exceptions being the Lutheran World Federation, the Quaker UN Office, and the Anglican Consultative Council. Ongoing contention over Palestine and Israel and the lingering equation of Zionism with racism have dampened UN support in some Jewish quarters. A number of Catholic NGOs representing the interests of their own constituencies have entered the scene, whether religious orders like the Franciscans, the Loretto Sisters, and the Maryknolls, or lay organizations like Catholics for a Free Choice and the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute. The increased participation of conservative Protestant groups in the UN is somewhat surprising given long-standing distrust, even animus, toward the UN in such circles.

Several key issues are pressing in the eyes of religious groups at the UN today, including a continuing concern for social justice and peace. Social justice includes the areas of human rights, hunger, poverty, development, health, and the environment. Many religions have a social component to their ethical teachings that applies to the plights of individuals

and groups suffering under unjust conditions. Groups with a significant social justice component include the Loretto Community and the Center of Concern, both Roman Catholic, and the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonite Central Committee, both Protestant.

Religious groups often link social justice with peace concerns, arguing that peace is jeopardized by social injustices. Peace efforts include disarmament and conflict resolution, but they go beyond the mere concern for ending active strife among groups and nations. Religious people sometimes invoke the Jewish concept of *shalom*; that is, the hope for a wholeness of human existence in which people can prosper to the fullest extent possible. Some see this as best accomplished through the avenues of social justice and active intervention in conflict situations. The World Conference on Religion and Peace uses terms like "conflict transformation" and "social well-being," and the efforts of many religious groups around the world focus on the reconciliation of offended parties. Other religious groups seek the spiritual transformation of individuals and thereby eventually of the whole world, as exemplified by the World Peace Prayer Society's campaign to spread the simple prayer "May Peace Prevail on Earth."

The two case studies we present in this publication illustrate key aspects of religion's role in the United Nations system today and may portend religion's future role there. In the first case study, we tracked escalating tensions between conservative and progressive religious camps regarding a constellation of controversial issues. In the second case study, we focus on growing interfaith efforts towards religious cooperation and unity, though such efforts have not always met with complete success. In both cases religious groups have fostered networks within the NGO community and the UN system. Religion's Achilles heel, as well as its potential for positive contributions, shows through here.

CASE STUDY: INTERFAITH EFFORTS AT THE UN

A high-profile, much publicized interfaith gathering took place in New York City in August 2000. The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders assembled some 1,000 representatives and numerous unofficial observers from many of the world's religions just prior to the UN's own Millennium Summit of heads of state and government. The Millennium World Peace Summit was not an official UN-sponsored event, although it convened at UN headquarters for two of its four days and organizers worked closely with Secretary-General Kofi Annan's office in planning the event.

Bawa Jain of the Interfaith Center of New York, a veteran of the interfaith movement, served as the Summit's secretary-general. Businessman and staunch UN supporter Ted Turner served as honorary chair and provided much of the financing through his UN Foundation and Better World Fund. Maurice Strong, secretary-general of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (the "Earth Summit") and senior advisor to Kofi Annan on UN reform, was a key organizer of the event. In his remarks Strong cited the 1992 Earth Summit and the 1972 UN Conference of the Human Environment as precursors to the Millennium World Peace Summit, opining that the world's political leaders were not yet ready for such a gathering of religious and spiritual leaders in those days.

The list of partner and advisory groups included the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, the National Conference for Community and Justice, United Religions Initiative, and several other interfaith organizations. As Jain tells the story, the Summit grew out of a conversation between Turner and Annan. "If

*If you want peace in the world,
Kofi, you should bring the religious
leaders of the world to the UN
and make them sign a commitment
of peace.*

Ted Turner, businessman and UN supporter

*For the first time in the history of
the United Nations, we turned this
great hall into a sanctuary where
we offered prayers from the diverse
traditions of the world's faith
communities.*

Bawa Jain, Interfaith Center of New York

you want peace in the world, Kofi," Turner remarked, "you should bring the religious leaders of the world to the UN and make them sign a commitment of peace."

The Millennium World Peace Summit intended to go beyond other interfaith gatherings that merely seek to bring religious and spiritual leaders closer together in a spirit of mutual understanding and harmony. This event emphasized the consistency between the moral foundations of the world's major faiths and the ideals of the United Nations, particularly in the areas of conflict, poverty, and the environment. The religious traditions and the UN have a "common mission," Jain

says. In his mind the UN provides the perfect venue for bringing political and religious leaders together to address the world's problems jointly. "The United Nations can never be the same again," Jain stated during an address in the UN's General Assembly Hall. "Just the mere presence of all these religious leaders will in itself have a transformative process in the future work of the United Nations." He continued: "For the first time in the history of the United Nations, we turned this great hall into a sanctuary where we offered prayers from the diverse traditions of the world's faith communities. I believe those prayers will have a lingering effect."

During his introduction to Kofi Annan's address to the Millennium World Peace Summit, Bawa Jain made three specific requests of the UN:

- Establish a council of religious and spiritual advisors to the UN;
- Convene a UN summit of religious and spiritual leaders every ten years; and
- Create a department of religious affairs in the UN secretary-general's office.

Annan did not respond to any of these requests in his address. Instead he discussed the importance of religion in individual lives and social contexts, and thanked the world's religious and spiritual leaders for their support of the UN's work. This exchange clarifies Annan's support of the Millennium World Peace Summit—consistent with his overtures to business interests, civil society groups, and others, Annan here reached out to another constituency that could support his efforts at UN reform and revitalization. Summit organizers made much of Annan's personal faith. Although that may have factored into his support of the Summit—Annan is a practicing Anglican Christian—it certainly was not his only motivation.

Several UN bodies were represented in Summit proceedings. Fewer in number than either organizers or delegates, the UN officials seemed to be genuinely sincere idealists, uninterested in self-promotion or opportunism, hopeful about the possibilities of posi-

tive interaction with the world's religious and spiritual leadership. Speakers included representatives from these UN agencies:

- Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA);
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and,
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

DESA's Under-Secretary-General Nitin Desai asked that dialogue be infused with the willingness to listen and be persuaded, and a genuine attitude of tolerance for religious differences. A message of tolerance from religious authorities duty-bound to uphold their respective positions, he pointed out, would be far more powerful than the same message from secular liberals from whom we expect a tolerant attitude.

UNESCO's representative shared an African proverb from his homeland, its point not lost on an audience painfully aware of religious strife in the world today: Why do the branches in the forest fight each other when their roots are kissing each other? A spiritual dimension can be found at the heart of UNESCO and the UN as a whole, he added.

UNDP's Mark Malloch Brown suggested that the UN faces a moment of opportunity, personified by Kofi Annan's visionary leadership. For Brown, who recalled the idealistic 1970s and a subsequent loss of a sense of mission, the UN "suddenly has new wings."

Participants at the Millennium World Peace Summit

Many Summit delegates reportedly found the UN venue an attractive incentive to make the trip to New York. In fact the United Nations appeared to sanctify the gathering rather than the reverse, pronouncements notwithstanding. Sitting in the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations can be a dizzying experience. Unfortunately, self-promotion and opportunism

became all too obvious among the religious and spiritual delegates. Many seemed all too eager to share the spotlight, which may explain the appearance of unscheduled speakers throughout the four-day event. “Endless ‘speechifying’ and sermonizing numbed both my brain and my spirit,” wrote an observer from Religion News Service. Embarrassing verbal skirmishes and other incivilities abounded. The issue of proselytization fueled the Summit’s key flashpoint—indigenous peoples from around the world demanded that Christians and Muslims leave them alone; Hindus decried perceived Catholic conversion campaigns linked to poverty reduction work in India.

The Summit also seemed to attract many sincere interfaith idealists who expressed dismay at the uncivil tenor of much of the affair and the proselytizing tones (and undertones) throughout. A Latin American Protestant prelate’s plenary prayer exemplified such tones by invoking the God of all people, those who know Him and those who do not yet know Him. On the other side of the coin, at one point a Reform rabbi criticized the purported linkage of conversion with poverty reduction that had incensed some delegates earlier: “Take care of your own soul and someone else’s body,” he advised everyone, “not your own body and someone else’s soul.”

At its conclusion the Millennium World Peace Summit presented Secretary-General Annan with a document entitled “Commitment to Global Peace” which echoes many sentiments of the general interfaith movement. What set the Summit apart from such interfaith gatherings as the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago (1993) and Cape Town (1999), and even from the conferences of religious and political leaders organized by the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival, was its direct link to the UN. As several sources told us, the Millennium World Peace Summit succeeded in bringing the UN and the world’s religions closer together for the potential betterment of all. The presence of so many prelates in the General Assembly Hall marked a historic moment for both the UN and the world’s religions in that it dramatized the relationship between international politics and religion.

*It’s all symbolic of the same thing:
This is the time. There’s this huge,
spiritual opening happening right
now on this planet.*

**Observer at Millennium World
Peace Summit**

A new opportunity for religion?

Those who might dismiss the Millennium World Peace Summit as a mere passing “parade” of sacred dignitaries, full of pomp but signifying nothing substantive, would do well to consider the assessment of one noted expert in global public religion who explained that parades may carry symbolic significance that should not be discounted out of hand. The Summit symbolized the growing presence of religion and religious groups at the UN. Several interviewees noted a change in the atmosphere at the UN, a new openness to religion, although not all are convinced that the change has been for the better. The UN remains a secular institution and at times manifests a certain ambivalence about religion and the increased religious presence in recent years. Still, our sources generally sensed that this is an unprecedented time for religion at the UN.

Much of this sense of a new opportunity for religion at the UN can be credited to Secretary-General Annan. Yet the new openness to religion and religion’s potential contributions to the UN’s work preceded Annan. Today more religious groups are more active at the UN than ever before. In large measure this reflects a maturing global civil society. Maurice Strong is correct in saying that the World Peace Summit could not have happened in 1972 or even 1992. But the impetus for this Summit also stems from increased popular interest in religiosity and spirituality worldwide, including increased interest in interfaith ventures. Not surprisingly, some we interviewed see a transcendent meaning here. In commenting on the importance of

the reopening of the UN Meditation Room and the staging of the Millennium World Peace Summit at the UN, one person opines, “It’s all symbolic of the same thing: This is the time. There’s this huge, spiritual opening happening right now on this planet.”

The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders has maintained an ongoing organizational identity since that historic August 2000 event. A steering council is addressing the practical details of forming a permanent council of religious and spiritual advisors to the UN. The Summit has collaborated with the World Economic Forum, an NGO funded by 1,000 major corporations, on a religious initiative regarding global economic issues, and with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to produce a book, *Sacred Rights: Faith Leaders on Tolerance and Respect*, in preparation for the 2001 World Conference Against Racism. The Summit is also planning a World

Conference of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders to be held at the UN’s Geneva headquarters in August 2002. Quoting from its planning document, “The [2000] Millennium World Peace Summit set the ball in motion; the events of September 11th [2001] gave new urgency to the need for interreligious cooperation. The [2002] World Conference of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders will help provide a missing piece—the critical contribution of women in promoting nonviolence and in healing communities in conflict.”

Whether the long-term working partnership with the United Nations envisioned by Summit leaders materializes will depend largely on continued investment in the UN by a critical mass of the world’s religious and spiritual leaders, as well as concrete evidence that the UN can benefit from the relationship.

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION AT THE UN

The case studies of the conservative/progressive divide and increasing interfaith efforts at the UN illustrate religion's Achilles heel; that is, its propensity for discord and conflict, which alienates many in the UN system. Our researchers encountered a fair share of complaints about religious participation at the United Nations. Implied in many of these complaints was a criticism oft-repeated outside of UN circles as well: Why is there so much divisiveness and infighting among religious groups? Why can't religious groups agree with each other, or at least cooperate on common goals? If religion is supposed to be about peace, harmony, and love, then why is there so much religious conflict? One UN official perceives in UN circles an endemic cynicism about religion attributable to religion's record of complicity in conflicts around the world. Moreover, he expressed deep frustration over recent religious contentiousness at UN headquarters in New York City: "I get so annoyed by some of the nonsense here," he told us.

Such criticism has serious ramifications in the context of the United Nations because that institution is committed to establishing peace, harmony, and cooperation, if not love, in the world. If the religions of the world cannot show themselves allies in this task—in fact, if the religions represent a counter-productive force—then why should the UN welcome them at all? Wouldn't it be better to exclude religious groups from the international arena, at least until they can show themselves worthy of the invitation and useful to the task?

Religions united in pursuit of United Nations ideals—is this a realistic expectation? Is it a fair expectation?

The reality is that a very large proportion of the world's population does derive its values from religious beliefs.

UN under-secretary

The political structures are necessary but insufficient. They have all been insufficient to address the kinds of problems to which we are committed.

Head of a major interfaith NGO

Religious groups are not the only divided constituency at the UN. Obviously, the United Nations exists only because nations are not united. The United Nations serves as a forum for conflict resolution, negotiation, and compromise among the world's "Divided Nations." This divisive reality has not dampened the UN ideal—indeed, it called forth the ideal historically and continues to motivate idealists today.

The term "United Nations" originated in global conflict as the self-designation of the Allied powers during World War II. Their 1942 Declaration of the United Nations, signed by 26 nations, was a statement of war, not peace—of unity only in opposition to the nations of the Axis enemy. The Dumbarton Oaks

Conference in 1944 and the Yalta Conference in February of 1945 laid significant groundwork for the establishment of the eventual United Nations organization later in 1945, but were restricted to the inner circle of Allied leaders, who hammered out compromises on Security Council and general membership matters.

Despite its ideal of global unity, the United Nations from the beginning was not “united” enough even to agree upon whom to invite into their midst. The original member states of the United Nations included the 26 nations of the 1942 Declaration, 20 other nations that later declared for the Allied side in World War II, and a few other Allied-friendly nations. Admission to this international club was restricted in the early years—fewer than one-third of the applicant nations were admitted between 1946 and 1950. Admission rested on a two-thirds majority vote of member states and concurrence by the permanent members of the Security Council, which resulted in serious deadlocks over certain applicant countries. As the Cold War deepened, the chill affected the atmosphere both within and outside the UN. Needless to say, global unity is equally elusive in the post–Cold War era.

Obviously the nations have never been completely united at the United Nations. Neither will we find unity among the NGOs at the UN, whether within their own ranks or in their dealings with the nations. NGO participation in the UN system has increased dramatically in recent years, and the UN has come to rely on many NGOs to provide valuable information and expert advice and to carry out tasks in the field that could not be accomplished as efficiently otherwise. Yet the NGO community has its ideological, political, and other fault lines just like the international community. Observes a UN official: coordinating the efforts of the notoriously independent NGO community is “like herding cats” (cited in Weiss and Gordenker, *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*).

Moreover, many NGOs are at odds with the governments of the nations in which they operate.

But the disunity and tensions surrounding the NGO community at the UN cannot be attributed inordinately to religion. Less than ten percent of the nearly 2,000 NGOs with ECOSOC affiliation have a primarily religious identity. It would appear that all parties are equally complicit in the disunities plaguing the UN, yet religious groups may attract more than their fair share of criticism. Perhaps this stems from residual hostility in some individuals regarding their own religious upbringings; perhaps it is a reaction to religion’s claim to authoritative and putatively unitary truth—whatever it is about religion, it attracts severe criticism when its disunity shows.

Acknowledging the human propensity for disunity and discord places religion in proper perspective. Sociologically speaking, religious groups do not differ from secular groups or governments, so we should not expect any more unity among them than among the others. Philosophically, we can identify something broadly construed as the “religious worldview” which differs from other worldviews such as materialism or humanism, but we should not expect any more agreement among religionists than we find among materialists (e.g., Marxist versus philosophical) or humanists (e.g., scientific versus existentialist). Thus we cannot exclude religion from the United Nations because it does not have a united constituency or speak with a unified voice. There would be no UN if these were the criteria for membership or participation.

Neither will arguments that religion should be aloof from “playing politics” or that it is a purely personal matter hold any weight when we consider religion’s role at the UN. This would compartmentalize religion, placing restrictions on its purview that religion itself finds unacceptable and that are not required of other areas of human thought (like philosophy) or comparable social entities (like governments). The human enterprise has both social and personal aspects and is always subject to the dynamics of power politics. All of this potentially falls under religion’s purview since religion’s purview encompasses all things human. From Hebrew prophets like Amos to neo-orthodox

Protestant theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr, from the ancient Hindu law books called Dharma Shastras to today's socially engaged Buddhists—religions have always spoken to social and political realities.

Of course religion is not content to speak only of social and political realities. To use its own categories, religion brings a transcendent perspective to bear on such mundane matters. Religion speaks to the realities of this world from the vantage point of a transcendent or ultimate reality, which may lie outside of the mundane or reside at its deepest recesses (depending on the religious tradition in question). In its own self-understanding, religion represents universal truths and absolute standards. This can become problematic in dialogue, both amongst religionists themselves and between religionists and non-religionists. Still, such stalemates need be no more frustrating than those caused by other dogmatic ideologies. The functional outcomes of obstinacy need not be distinguished according to underlying motivations, whether religious or secular.

Religion's high estimation of itself—in fact, the highest, given that religion represents the “ultimate”—does not translate into a call for special privilege at the UN. Nor should it. The leader of a women's rights organization put it bluntly, “I think that religious groups' being engaged in the political process is useful, legitimate, and should be happening, but I don't think that religion should have a privileged position.”

To a large extent the ground rules for participation at the UN mirror those of the US federal government. In neither case is there any “establishment” of official religious positions. The UN avoids promoting any one religious group by allowing participation by many religious groups. Neither does the UN promote “religion” per se. Rather, it recognizes the major role religion plays in the world—in individual lives, inter-group relations, and international politics—by granting it a place at the discussion table. Religious NGOs participate on an equal playing field with other NGOs at the UN. Religious NGOs have every right to representation in the larger NGO community as long as they abide by the same rules as everyone else.

The UN requires unity among the religions only to the extent that they support UN ideals and follow UN protocols. The disruptions during the Beijing Plus Five meetings in March 2000 caused a stir among UN authorities, but not only because the disruptions were linked to religious individuals and groups. Affiliation with ECOSOC, which affords significant entrée into UN decision-making circles, can be suspended or revoked if an NGO receives government funding with the intent to subvert the UN, engages in political acts against a member state, or fails to make a substantive contribution to ECOSOC's work. The religious identity per se of an offending NGO is irrelevant here, unless religious identity becomes intertwined with politics, either through actions of the NGO or in perceptions by the UN.

We interviewed two UN under-secretaries-general, neither of whom identified religious conviction as central to their professional lives. Both welcomed the participation of religious NGOs at the UN. One of them explained that the UN benefits from broad “ecumenical” participation, that is, representation from both religious and secular groups who share common ethical ground. “The reality is that a very large proportion of the world's population does derive its values from religious beliefs. It's a good sign. It's inevitable that the role of these groups in the work of the UN would expand, because that's where people derive their values from.”

Many of our informants stressed the importance of the ethical conscience that religions bring to the table of international dialogue. A former insider in US government circles appreciated the “gadfly” role played by religious NGOs coming out of the social justice tradition. The head of a major interfaith NGO suggested that religion's positive contribution to the UN derives from a “felicitous” partnership between political and civil societies: “It's built on frank recognition that the political structures are necessary but insufficient. They have all been insufficient to address the kinds of problems to which we are committed.”

In other words, heaven help us all if the world's ethical conscience is delegated to governments. A notable

book on the influence of the NGO community at the UN is entitled “*The Conscience of the World*.” Religious NGOs, as part of the larger NGO community, have much to contribute in this regard. As one of those UN under-secretaries-general puts it, the religions have codified the fundamental ethics by which people seek better lives. To cite the comparative religion scholar Huston Smith, the world’s religions contain “the winnowed wisdom of the human race.” Of course they also contain a good deal of foolishness, but, as Smith notes, we need not dwell on that side of the story. “Probably as much bad music as good has been composed in the course of human history,” says Smith, “but we do not expect courses in music appreciation to give it equal attention.” The same holds true for religion’s contribution to international dialogue.

“For all the problems that have appeared when public discourse includes religious themes,” wrote Martin Marty in reflecting on the larger implications of the Cairo conference on population and development, “it is also clear that the texts and traditions of faith communities have much to offer by way of including calls for effecting social justice, working toward healing, and provoking profound thought.”

South Africa made the difficult transition from apartheid to democratic governance by seeking a “sufficient consensus” among the affected groups as to what constitutes a decent society. Reaching a sufficient consensus at any level, including the international arena represented by the United Nations, requires full representation at the negotiation table. The voices of religion, discordant and divided as they may be, must be included in the discussion or the resulting consensus will be insufficient.

FIVE FACTS ABOUT RELIGION AT THE UN

- **Religion will remain a critical part of the UN.** Religious groups and sentiments have been present at the UN since its inception, and it is highly unlikely that the UN would ever adopt an officially anti-religion attitude. The integral role religion plays in human cultures and societies virtually guarantees it a place in the deliberations and work of the United Nations. The religious ecology may change, but there will always be religious entities in the UN environment. Whether the recent trajectory of increasing religious participation continues is subject to many factors, including the fortunes of the global civil society movement and UN sentiments about NGO participation generally.
- **Religion will insist on adding a distinct dimension and voice at the UN.** Not to do so would be to forfeit a fundamental prerogative that religion claims for itself; namely, to speak to all issues authoritatively and imperatively. No topic on earth is considered off-limits in religion’s purview, and thus no topic before the UN is exempt from religion’s scrutiny. The hot-button issues on religion’s radar screen may change, but religion’s radar will always be up. The current stridency from some religious quarters at the UN may either diminish or increase, but religious voices will continue to speak.
- **Religion will never be monolithic and will remain diverse.** Fears in some quarters about an eventual global religion are unfounded. Universal religion is as unlikely as universal government or universal philosophy. Even today’s so-called world religions—that is, those with adherents from many nations and peoples—comprise a tremendous diversity, even inconsistency, of beliefs and practices. Although religion generically adopts a spiritual perspective, the various religions do not agree on a common understanding of “spirituality” nor do they speak with a unified voice when applying a spiritual perspective to the material world.
- **Religious networking will continue but defy predictability.** Despite religion’s inherently multiform expressions, like-minded religious groups tend to seek each other out for their mutual benefit. Religious networking—both among religious groups and between religious and secular groups—will probably always characterize religious participation at the UN. Seemingly “strange bedfellow” arrangements may continue to be made for specific issues, although their long-term stability and chances for broadening are questionable. For instance, one wonders how much common ground there is between conservative Christian and Muslim groups outside of certain shared concerns about families, sexuality, and reproductive health.
- **The UN cannot afford to ignore or fail to engage with religion.** Religion can be a positive or a negative force, but it will always be a force to be reckoned with. Religion at the UN will be what religious groups and the UN make of it. In other words, religion at the UN is no different from religion anywhere else in the world. As it cannot be ignored anywhere in the world, it cannot be ignored in the world’s most important global venue—the United Nations.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interviewees

The following individuals agreed to an acknowledgment of their interviews for this project. The organizations listed here serve identification purposes only. No individual or organizational endorsement of *Religion Counts* is implied.

Rashidah Abdullah, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women

Amir Al-Islam, Medgar Evers College

Lucille Atkin, Margaret Sanger Center International

William Baker, International Association for Religious Freedom

Charlotte A. Bunch, Center for Women's Global Leadership

Jennifer Butler, Ecumenical Women 2000+

Amparo Claro, Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network

Peggy Curlin, Centre for Development and Population Activities

Sally Ethelston, Population Action International

Dennis Frado, Lutheran Office for World Community

Felice Gaer, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights

Françoise Girard, International Women's Health Coalition

Betty Golomb, World Union for Progressive Judaism

Katherine Hall-Martinez, Center for Reproductive Law and Policy

Yoshitaka T. Hatakeyama, Rissho Kosei-kai

Paul Hoeffel, United Nations Department of Public Information

David Jackman, Quaker United Nations Office

Bawa Jain, Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders

Luke Jalsevac, Life, Ethics, Educational Association

Melinda Kimble, United Nations Foundation

Frances Kissling, Catholics for a Free Choice

Nikoo Mahboubian, Baha'i International Community

Afaf Mahfouz, CONGO

Clovis Maksoud, Center for the Global South

Katherine Marshall, World Bank

Thomas Merrick, World Bank

Deborah Moldow, World Peace Prayer Society

Gayatri Naraine, Brahma Kumaris of the United Nations

Jack T. Patterson, Quaker United Nations Office

Kusumita P. Pedersen, St. Francis College

Elizabeth C. Reveal, United Nations Foundation

May Rihani, Academy for Educational Development

Austin Ruse, Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute

Frederick T. Sai, Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences

Hiro Sakurai, Soka Gakkai International

Matthew Scott, World Vision International

Leni M. Silverstein, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

Robert F. Smylie, Presbyterian United Nations Office

Jose Romero Teruel, Pan American Health Organization

Kathleen Todd, Church World Service

Farah Usmani, UNFPA

William F. Vendley, World Conference on Religion and Peace

APPENDIX B

Excerpts from the Cairo *Programme of Action* and Reservations Lodged by Selected Groups

Out of 179 countries signing on to the Cairo *Programme of Action*, only 17 countries lodged reservations. The portions of the Programme that caused contention and the reservations lodged are given below:

Excerpts from the Cairo Programme of Action:
The International Conference on Population and Development, convened by the United Nations in Cairo in 1994, issued a Programme of Action on global social, economic, and environmental issues. The Programme included 15 guiding principles and several detailed chapters on a variety of topics. Some religious and national groups took issue with aspects of the Programme's statements on sexuality, reproductive health, and the family, excerpts of which are reprinted here.

Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes. The human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, are priority objectives of the international community.

(Principle 4, Programme)

Everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States should take all appropriate measures to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, universal access to health-care services, including those related to reproductive health care, which includes family planning and sexual health. Reproductive health-care programmes should provide the widest range of services without any form of coercion. All couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so.

(Principle 8, Programme)

The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exist. Marriage must be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses, and husband and wife should be equal partners.

(Principle 9, Programme)

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and

women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant. In line with the above definition of reproductive health, reproductive health care is defined as the constellation of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive health and well-being by preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases.

(Paragraph 7.2, Programme)

All countries should strive to make accessible through the primary health-care system, reproductive health to all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015. Reproductive health care in the context of primary health care should, inter alia, include: family-planning counselling, information, education, communication and services; education and services for prenatal care, safe delivery and post-natal care, especially breast-feeding and infant and women's health care; prevention and appropriate treatment of infertility; abortion as specified in paragraph 8.25, including prevention of abortion and the management of the consequences of abortion; treatment of reproductive tract infections; sexually transmitted diseases and other reproductive health conditions; and information, education and counselling, as appropriate, on human sexuality, reproductive health and responsible parenthood ...

(Paragraph 7.6, Programme)

In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. All Governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental

organizations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women's health, to deal with the health impact of unsafe abortion as a major public health concern and to reduce the recourse to abortion through expanded and improved family-planning services. Prevention of unwanted pregnancies must always be given the highest priority and every attempt should be made to eliminate the need for abortion. Women who have unwanted pregnancies should have ready access to reliable information and compassionate counselling. Any measures or changes related to abortion within the health system can only be determined at the national or local level according to the national legislative process. In circumstances where abortion is not against the law, such abortion should be safe. In all cases, women should have access to quality services for the management of complications arising from abortion. Post-abortion counselling, education and family-planning services should be offered promptly, which will also help to avoid repeat abortions.

(Paragraph 8.25, Programme)

Reservations Lodged by Selected Groups to the Cairo Programme of Action: Several religious and national groups lodged reservations about Programme statements on sexuality, reproductive health, and the family. Some Roman Catholic nations and the Holy See objected to any implication that abortion is an acceptable practice or that alternative family configurations should be considered equally valid to heterosexual marriage. Some Muslim nations registered objections to practices that violate the Islamic Shari`ah, the divinely intended "way" for human beings.

As far as reproductive rights, reproductive health and family planning are concerned, we wish to express reservations, as the other Latin American countries have done: we should never include abortion within these concepts, either as a service or as a method of regulating fertility.

(Representative of El Salvador, Programme, p. 150)

The delegation of Kuwait would like to express its support for the Programme of Action, including all its positive points for the benefit of humankind. At the same time, we would like to put on record that our commitment to any objectives on population policies is subject to their not being in contradiction with Islamic Sharia or with the customs and traditions of Kuwaiti society and the Constitution of the State.

(Representative of Kuwait, Programme, p. 152)

[The Dominican Republic] accepts the content of the terms “reproductive health,” “sexual health,” “safe motherhood,” “reproductive rights,” “sexual rights,” and “regulation of fertility” but enters an express reservation on the content of these terms and of other terms when their meaning includes the concept of abortion or interruption of pregnancy.

We also enter an express reservation on the term “couple” where it refers to persons of the same sex or where individual reproductive rights are mentioned outside the context of marriage and the family.

(Representative of the Dominican Republic, Programme, p. 157)

Together with so many people around the world, the Holy See affirms that human life begins at the moment of conception. That life must be defended and protected. The Holy See can therefore never condone abortion or policies which favour abortion. The final document . . . recognizes abortion as a dimension of population policy and, indeed of primary health care, even though it does stress that abortion should not be promoted as means of family planning and

urges nations to find alternatives to abortion. . . . With reference to the term “couples and individuals,” the Holy See reserves its position with the understanding that this term is to mean married couples and the individual man and woman who constitute the couple. The document, especially in its use of this term, remains marked by an individualistic understanding of sexuality which does not give due attention to the mutual love and decision-making that characterize the conjugal relationship.

(Representative of the Holy See, Programme, pp. 161–62, 164)

There are some expressions that could be interpreted as applying to sexual relations outside the framework of marriage, and this is totally unacceptable. The use of the expression “individuals and couples” and the contents of principle 8 demonstrate this point. We have reservations regarding all such references in the document.

We believe that sexual education for adolescents can only be productive if the material is appropriate and if such education is provided by the parents and aimed at preventing moral deviation and physiological diseases.

(Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Programme, pp. 164–65)

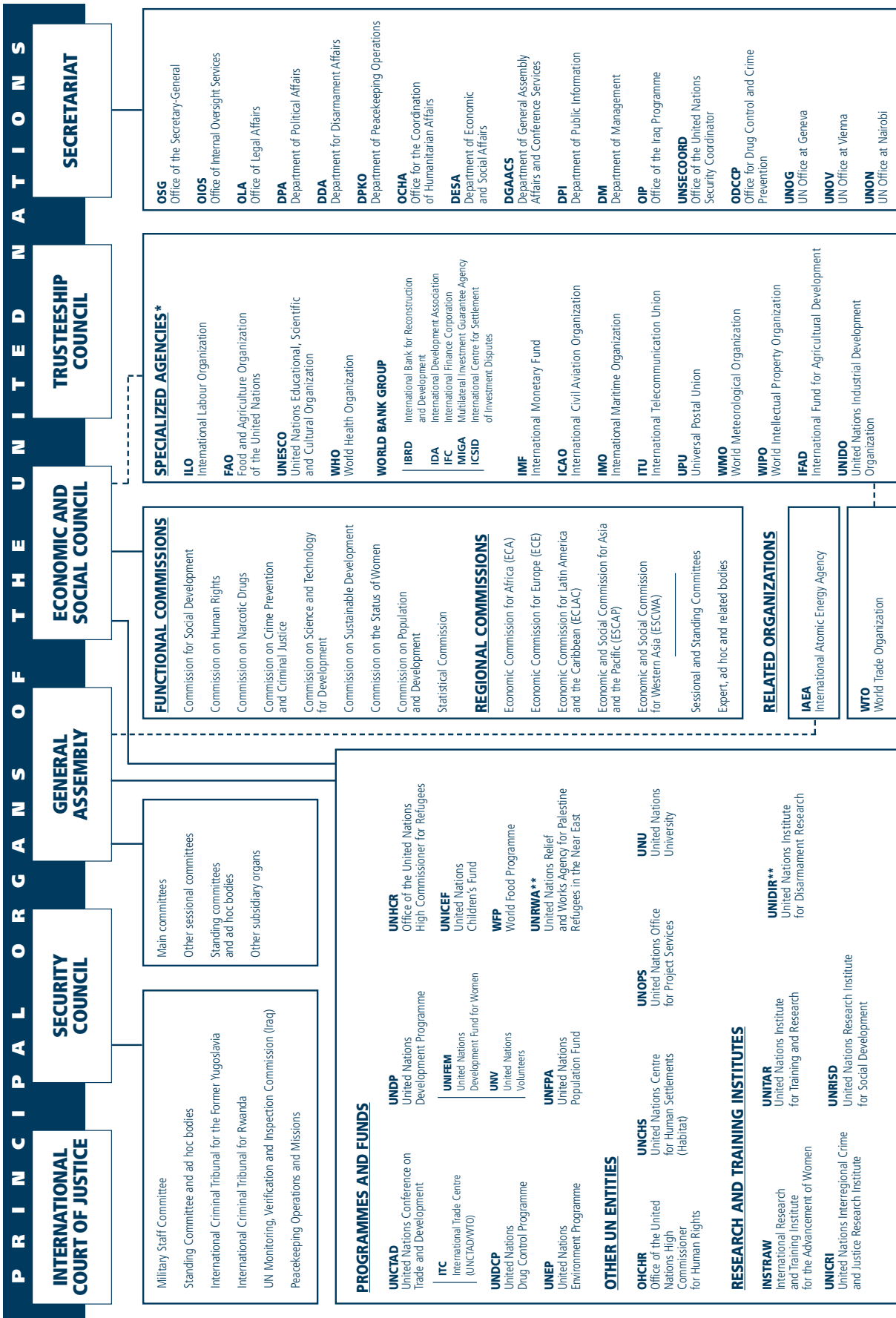
Source

Programme of Action Adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994 (United Nations Population Fund, 1996).



UNITED NATIONS

The UNITED NATIONS system



* Autonomous organizations working with the United Nations and each other through the coordinating machinery of the Economic and Social Council.

** Report only to the General Assembly.

Published by the United Nations
Department of Public Information
DPI/2079 – March 2000

APPENDIX D

Interaction Between Religious Groups and the UN System

Selected examples of religious groups and organizations interacting with the UN system. Religious NGOs featured here may interact with the UN system at other points besides these examples. Also, such interaction may often involve networking among several NGOs and UN bodies. Quotations below are taken from *Basic Facts about the United Nations* (DPI, 1998).

Security Council. “The Security Council has primary responsibility, under the Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security Under the Charter, all Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council.” At the request of the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), the mission of Sweden hosted an informal meeting for member states of the Security Council at which NGOs presented information about peacekeeping and small arms reduction. One year later a Security Council working committee contacted QUNO to arrange a consultation with those same NGOs regarding security issues in Africa.

Peacekeeping Operations and Missions.

“Peacekeeping operations, which are authorized by the Security Council, are a crucial instrument at the disposal of the international community to advance international peace and security.” In 1992–1993 the United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) assumed peacekeeping duties in Cambodia, including oversight of the first-ever democratic national elections. Soka Gakkai International, an international Buddhist group that originated in Japan,

donated 300,000 radios to UNTAC for distribution to the people of Cambodia in order to inform them about the elections.

United Nations Environment Programme. “As the principal body in the field of the environment, UNEP sets the global environmental agenda, promotes coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development in the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate of the global environment.” UNEP has worked with the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment since 1986 to explore the environmental implications of the world’s religious traditions. A joint publication, *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action* (2000), integrates environmental data and religious perspectives.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). “The General Assembly in 1993 established the post of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as the United Nations official with principal responsibility for United Nations human rights activities. The High Commissioner is charged with promoting and protecting the enjoyment by all of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.” The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, an organization closely allied with the American Jewish Committee, joined other NGOs in lobbying for OHCHR’s creation and co-convened an expert consultation in 1995 to evaluate the High Commissioner’s first year in the position.

United Nations Population Fund. “Established in 1969 at the initiative of the General Assembly, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the largest multilateral source of population assistance to developing countries.” UNFPA works with Islamic NGOs in many countries on gender and reproductive health issues. UNFPA has supported the International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, as well as a research project to produce a book entitled *Family Planning in the Legacy of Islam*.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR’s “mandate is to help the world’s more than 20 million people who come under its concern. They include refugees, as well as certain groups of people displaced within the borders of their own country.” The World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), a major interfaith organization dedicated to peace and conflict transformation, has worked with UNHCR on numerous occasions, including the difficult Vietnamese “boat people” crisis in the 1970s. The Boat People Project, initially directed by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, illustrated both the promise and the dilemmas of religious participation in such relief efforts. For a critical self-reflection on the Boat People Project by WCRP’s first secretary-general, Homer A. Jack, see *WCRP: A History of the World Conference on Religion and Peace*. For an appreciate evaluation of WCRP’s many peacemaking efforts, see R. Scott Appleby’s *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*.

United Nations Children’s Fund. UNICEF, “the only United Nations organization dedicated exclusively to children, works for child protection, survival and development within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” In March 2000 World Vision International, a Christian relief and development organization, co-coordinated a three-day consultation at UNICEF headquarters on the Security Council’s request for a report on children and armed conflict. Input from this and subsequent meetings

contributed to the drafting of Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s report to the Security Council in July 2000. “We felt like we had a reasonable level of input into [that] report,” said World Vision’s policy officer. “We didn’t agree with every aspect of it, but we felt like our voices had been listened to by-and-large. When the Secretary-General released his report, we could identify phrases and ideas that had come out of the NGO group.”

Commission on the Status of Women. “The Commission on the Status of Women, made up of 45 Member States, examines women’s progress towards equality throughout the world, prepares recommendations on promoting women’s rights in political, economic, social and educational fields, and addresses problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women’s rights.” This commission convened the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The Baha’i International Community provided input in a working committee on the conference’s *Platform for Action* document regarding the distinction between the words “equality” and “equity.” This distinction proved helpful in dialogue with Islamic participants. In the Baha’i view, which historically developed out of a Shi’ite Islamic context in Persia (now Iran), an inheritance does not have to be equally divided to be equitably distributed.

Commission on Population and Development. “The 44-member Commission on Population and Development (originally known as the Population Commission) provides guidance to the United Nations population programme. Its tasks include advising ECOSOC; preparing studies on population issues and trends; integrating population and development strategies, policies and programmes; and providing population assistance.” This commission convened the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, which, for the first time, called upon governments “to address unsafe abortion as a leading cause of maternal mortality and a ‘major public health concern.’” Although the ICPD’s

Programme of Action document rejected abortion as an acceptable method of family planning, some Roman Catholic nations and the Holy See registered objections to the inclusion of abortion in discussions about reproductive health and population policy.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. “UNESCO was created in 1946 to build lasting world peace founded upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind. Its areas of work are education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture and communication.” In February 2001, UNESCO awarded its Felix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Price to the Community of Sant’Egidio, a Roman Catholic NGO, “in recognition of its contribution to the resolution of conflicts in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa and Latin America.” Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that the group exhibits a “genius in establishing dialogue and mediation,” while scholar R. Scott Appleby points to Sant’Egidio’s “impressive record of social service, ecumenical and political networks, and interfaith collaboration.” On another front, in March 2001, UNESCO’s director-general requested that the Islamic Taliban government of Afghanistan suspend its destruction of ancient Buddhist statues within its borders and meet with a delegation of Islamic leaders and religious authorities opposed to the Taliban’s actions. The delegation included a representative of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, an inter-governmental body of more than 50 Islamic countries with observer status at the UN. The intervention was unsuccessful.

World Bank Group. “The World Bank is a group of four institutions The common goal of all four institutions is to reduce poverty around the world by strengthening the economies of poor nations.” In 1998 the World Bank began an ongoing consultative relationship with the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), an interfaith organization spearheaded by the Anglican Church that applies religious perspectives to the issues of poverty and development. At the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in 2000, the World Bank Group’s

liaison with the WFDD explained that the World Bank is expanding its work with religious groups since they often have a greater reach than secular groups and their concern for poverty is consistent with the World Bank’s goals. She asked religious leaders to take a stronger advocacy role in the areas of poverty and development.

International Monetary Fund. “IMF’s main financial role consists of providing temporary credits to members [i.e., member states] experiencing balance-of-payments difficulties.” A broad coalition of religious groups joined a movement in the 1990s called Jubilee 2000 advocating debt relief for the world’s poorest nations. When the IMF and World Bank met in Prague in September 2000, Jubilee 2000 submitted a petition with 24 million signatures from 166 countries, earning recognition by the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Among the supporters of the Jubilee 2000 movement in the United States are two groups coming out of the Roman Catholic tradition of concern for peace and social justice, the Center of Concern and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. The concept of the Jubilee year was taken from the biblical Book of Leviticus, which called for relief of the poor’s economic plight.

Office of the Secretary-General. “The Secretary-General is described by the Charter as the ‘chief administrative officer’ of the United Nations. The Secretary-General is, of course, much more than that. Equal parts diplomat and activist, conciliator and advocate, the Secretary-General stands before the world community as the very emblem of the United Nations and of the values embodied in the Charter.” Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s office supported the 2000 Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, held for two of its four days at UN headquarters in New York, but it did not officially sponsor the Summit. In his remarks at the Summit, Annan pointed out that the core values of the world’s religions are “the same values [that] animate the Charter of the United Nations and lie at the root of our search for world peace.” Addressing the religious

and spiritual leaders gathered in the General Assembly Hall, he continued: “Your presence here at the United Nations signifies your commitment to our global mission of tolerance, development, and peace. For that we must all be profoundly grateful.”

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“The mandate of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to strengthen coordination among the United Nations bodies that provide assistance in response to emergencies.” Lutheran World Federation (LWF), an international organization representing 124 member church bodies from the Lutheran tradition, collaborated with OCHA and other NGOs and UN bodies to assess the situation in Angola following an attack on a provincial capital in May 2001. LWF then coordinated distribution of non-food relief items in six Angolan provinces under an agreement with OCHA and the European Community Humanitarian Office.

APPENDIX E

Glossary

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted 1979), a UN treaty on the equality of women with men in many areas of public and private life; the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women monitors the Convention's implementation.

Church Center: located across the street from UN New York headquarters, built by the Women's Division of the Methodist Church in the early 1960s.

CONGO: Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, an NGO umbrella organization that advocates for the participatory rights of the NGO community.

Conservatives: one ideological camp among religious groups, sometimes referred to as the "religious right," including fundamentalists; opposed to "progressives."

Consultative status: status held by NGOs in relationship with the UN system; for instance, ECOSOC grants three categories of consultative status—General (Category I), Special (Category II), and Roster.

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 1989), a UN treaty on children; the Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors the Convention's implementation.

Denomination: a religious body comprising many local congregations and other groups that share a particular tradition; for instance, the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention are the largest Christian denominations in the United States.

DPI: UN Department of Public Information; among other responsibilities, works regularly with NGOs through a relationship called "association"; in 1999–2000, nearly 1,600 NGOs were associated with DPI.

ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council, the UN body charged with overseeing a great deal of the UN's work that intersects with NGO activities; in October 2000, nearly 2,000 NGOs were affiliated with the UN through ECOSOC consultative status.

Ecumenical: shared elements, dialogue, or cooperation among diverse groups within a religion (usually with reference to Christianity).

Family values: term used by religious conservatives to refer to a constellation of family norms considered "traditional," such as heterosexual monogamy, the husband's authority in spousal relationships, and parental authority over children.

Fundamentalists: those in the conservative religious camp who wish to protect certain beliefs and practices of their religious heritage that they perceive are threatened by progressive or liberal forces.

G77: stands for “Group of 77,” a coalition of mostly developing nations that now numbers more than 77; the name arose in contradistinction to the G7, the seven most developed nations of the world.

Holy See: the seat of institutional authority in the Roman Catholic Church with administrative headquarters in the Vatican City, Rome; granted non-member state permanent observer status at the UN in 1964.

Holocaust: usually refers to the systematic genocide of Jews under Nazi rule in Europe during World War II.

ICPD: the UN’s International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994.

Interfaith: shared elements, dialogue, or cooperation among religions.

Member states: countries whose governments have ratified the UN Charter, currently numbering 189.

Mission: term for a member state’s or other group’s permanent delegation at the UN.

Network: technical term for NGO coalitions and alliances at the UN.

NGO: non-governmental organization; voluntary, non-profit group, distinguished especially from governments and intergovernmental organizations.

Plus Five: review of progress toward the goals set out by a UN conference, taken five years after the conference.

Prep-com: preparatory committee meetings for a UN conference.

Progressives: one ideological camp among religious groups, sometimes referred to as “liberals”; opposed to “conservatives.”

Religious: having to do with religion, whose primary object of attention is “the sacred,” that which a religion considers special, set apart, holy, or qualitatively different from that which it considers ordinary, mundane, or “profane.”

Secular: non-religious, though not necessarily anti-religious.

Shalom: Jewish concept expressing the hope for a wholeness of human existence in which people can prosper to the fullest extent possible.

Shariah: the legal tradition of Islam; from an Arabic word meaning “way or path,” referring to the divine law given by Allah (God).

UNCED: 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, popularly known as the “Earth Summit.”

United Nations: member states and the various organs that derive authority from the UN Charter.

UN system: the United Nations plus the UN-related specialized agencies that have their own constitutions.

Zionism: complex modern movement claiming a special relationship between the Jewish people and the biblical land of Israel; has included political, cultural, and humanitarian aspects.

APPENDIX F

Contact information for organizations and groups mentioned in text:

Admiral Family Circle Islamic Community,
Phone: 212-870-2940

Albanian Family Planning Association,
Phone: +355-42-51-475,
Email: fpa@albaniaonline.net

American Jewish Committee, www.ajc.org

American Jewish Congress, www.ajcongress.org

Amnesty International, www.amnesty.org

Anglican Consultative Council,
www.anglicancommunion.org

Baha'i International Community, www.bahai.org

Better World Fund, www.betterworldfund.org

Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute,
www.c-fam.com

Catholics for a Free Choice,
www.catholicsforchoice.org

Catholic Voices, see www.catholicsforchoice.org

Center of Concern, www.coc.org

Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, www.crlp.org

Center for Women's Global Leadership,
www.cwgl.rutgers.edu

Christian Solidarity International, www.csi-int.ch

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, www.csw.org.uk

Church of the Brethren, www.brethren.org

Church World Service, www.churchworldservice.org

Community of Sant'Egidio, www.santegidio.org

Concerned Women for America, www.cwfa.org

Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions,
www.cpwr.org

Covenant House, www.covenanthouse.org

Earth Times, www.earthtimes.org

Ecumenical Women 2000+, www.ew2000plus.org

Family Research Council, www.frc.org

Focus on the Family Canada, www.fotf.ca

Franciscans International, www.franintl.org

Girls' Power Initiative of Nigeria, see
www.iwhc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page&pageID=325

Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival, www.oneworld.org/globalforum

Global Policy Forum, www.globalpolicy.org

Habitat for Humanity International, www.habitat.org

Hadassah, Women's Zionist Organization of America, www.hadassah.org

Holy See, www.holyseemission.org

Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society, www.profam.org

Human Life International, www.hli.org

Interfaith Center of New York, www.interfaithcenter.org

Interfaith Partnership for the Environment, see www.unep.org

International Committee of the Red Cross, www.icrc.org

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, www.ifrc.org

International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research, Al-Azhar University, **P.O. Box 1894, Cairo, Egypt**

International Planned Parenthood Federation, www.ippf.org

International Right to Life Federation, **Phone: +39-6-39387704**

Islamic Center of Long Island, <http://bloom.mit.edu/agakhan/usmosques/ny4.html>

Islamic Centre of England, www.ic-el.org

Israel Women's Network, www.iwn.org

Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, www.ajc.org/www/jbi

Jubilee 2000, www.jubilee2000uk.org

Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network, www.reddesalud.web.cl/ingles.html

Life, Ethics, Educational Association, www.lifesite.net/atw

Loretto Community, www.lorettocommunity.org

Lutheran World Federation, www.lutheranworld.org

Margaret Sanger Center International, www.ppnyc.org/services/msci.html

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/OFFICE/office.htm

Mennonite Central Committee, www.mcc.org

Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, www.millenniumpeacesummit.com

Mission of Palestine, www.palestine-un.org

Muslim World League, www.arab.net/mwl

National Conference for Community and Justice, www.nccj.org

National Institute of Womanhood, **Phone: 301-657-6250**

National Right to Life Committee, www.nrlc.org

Organization of the Islamic Conference,
www.oic-un.org

Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and
Ethics, www.parkridgecenter.org

Quaker United Nations Office,
www.afsc.org/quno.htm

REAL Women of Canada, www.realwomenca.com

Religion Counts, **Phone: 202-332-7820**,
Email religioncounts@earthlink.net

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York,
www.ny-archdiocese.org

See Change campaign, www.seechange.org

Sovereign Military Order of Malta, www.smom.org

Sri Chinmoy: The Peace Meditation at the United
Nations, **Phone: 718-739-4332**

Society for the Protection of Unborn Children,
www.spuc.org.uk

Soka Gakkai International, www.sgi.org

Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding,
www.tanenbaum.org

Temple of Understanding,
www.templeofunderstanding.org

Unification Church, www.unification.org

United Families International, www.worldfamilies.org

United Nations, www.un.org

United Religions Initiative, www.uri.org

Women Living Under Muslim Laws, www.wluml.org

Women's International Zionist Organization,
www.wizo.org

World Conference on Religion and Peace,
www.wcrp.org

World Council of Churches, www.wcc-coe.org

World Economic Forum, www.weforum.org

World Faiths Development Dialogue,
www.wfdd.org.uk

World Family Policy Center,
<http://worldfamilypolicycenter.org>

World Family Policy Forum,
www.fww.org/events/wfpforum.htm

World Muslim Congress, **Phone: +91-52-277737**

World Peace Prayer Society, www.worldpeace.org

World Vision International, www.wvi.org

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mia Adjali and Deborah Storms, eds., *The Community of Nations* (New York: Friendship Press, 1995). Describes mainstream Christian participation in the first 50 years of the United Nations, with particular attention to the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies.

R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000). Examines religion's propensities for both violence and nonviolence. Includes some useful analysis of religious NGOs and the United Nations.

Basic Facts about the United Nations (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1998). Clear and detailed self-description of the UN system.

Pei-heng Chiang, *Non-Governmental Organizations at the United Nations: Identity, Role, and Function* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981). Though dated, a solid source on the relationship between the UN and NGOs.

Anick Druelle, "Right-Wing Anti-Feminist Groups at the United Nations," Institut de recherches et d'études féministes, Université du Québec à Montréal. May 2000.

Julie Fisher, *The Road from Rio: Sustainable Development and the Nongovernmental Movement in the Third World* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993). Description of grassroots support organizations.

John W. Foster, with Anita Anand, eds., *Whose World Is It Anyway? Civil Society, the United Nations and the Multilateral Future* (Ottawa, Canada: The United Nations Association in Canada, 1999). Informative analytical resource on the intersection of civil society and the United Nations. Chapter 6, "The Rules of the Game," by Peter Willetts, offers practical advice on NGO participation in the UN system. For further information on NGO consultative status at the United Nations, see <http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/NGOS/ngo-home.htm>

Amy L. Girst and Larry L. Greenfield, "Population and Development: Conflict and Consensus at Cairo," *Second Opinion* 20,4 (April 1995): 51–61. Report of Park Ridge Center activities surrounding the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994).

Edward J. Gratsch, *The Holy See and the United Nations 1945–1995* (New York: Vantage Press, 1997). Sympathetic overview of the Holy See's relationship with the UN.

Wilfrid Grey, *UN Jigsaw: An Easy Reader about Life and Work at the United Nations* (New York: Vantage Press, 2000). Readable vignettes of UN activities. Religious topics and groups are sprinkled throughout the volume.

Rosalind W. Harris, "Voices at the United Nations: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations," *Social Education* 58,7 (November/December 1994): 420–421. Written by the former president of CONGO, this arti-

cle briefly explains the role of NGOs in voicing concerns at the UN and in implementing UN policies at the local level.

Homer A. Jack, *WCRP: A History of the World Conference on Religion and Peace* (New York: World Conference on Religion and Peace, 1993). Detailed description of the history and work of a major interfaith organization at the UN, written by its first secretary-general.

Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). The purpose of this book is to help fill a telling gap in the literature and to provide insights that will enable policymakers and others to comprehend and reinforce the positive contribution that religious or spiritual influences can bring to peacemaking.

William Korey, *NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Curious Grapevine* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Describes the role of NGOs in sensitizing the world to violations of the UN's Declaration.

Riva Krut, "Globalization and Civil Society: NGO Influence in International Decision-Making" (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, April 1997). This report "examines the achievements, tensions and limits of NGO action in global governance," recommending a civil society approach characterized by wide citizen participation through non-governmental, voluntary, and community-based organizations.

Ralph B. Levering and Miriam L. Levering, *Citizen Action for Global Change: The Neptune Group and the Law of the Sea* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999). Story of the perseverance of the Neptune Group, a coalition of NGOs that networked with several religious and secular NGOs in advocating an international law on the use of the oceans, finally

accomplished at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III, 1973–1982).

Rainer Lingscheid, "From Consultation to Participation: Non-Governmental Organizations and the United Nations," *Ecumenical Review* 47,3 (1995): 307–311. Brief but helpful analysis by the director of the World Council of Churches' UN Liaison Office of the growing participation of NGOs in UN activities.

Farouk Mawlawi, "New Conflicts, New Challenges: The Evolving Role for Non-Governmental Actors," *Journal of International Affairs* 46,2 (Winter 1993): 391–413. Analyzes the unique strengths and limitations of NGOs as they play an increasing role in international mediation, drawing on numerous examples of successful efforts (many by religious NGOs).

Robert McClean, "UN Report: People Power and the Economic Agenda," *Christian Social Action* 7 (February 1994): 36–37. Written by a UN specialist from the United Methodist Church, this article explains (and advocates) the growing NGO influence on UN conferences and policies.

"NGLS Handbook," United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, available at www.unsystem.org/ngls/documents/publications.en/ngls.handbook/index.htm. Helpful information for NGOs wishing to relate to the United Nations system.

"Religion Counts: The Rome Statement on the International Conference on Population and Development" (Religion Counts, 5 January 1999). Statement of support for the ICPD's *Programme of Action* from an interfaith meeting of scholars, experts, and leaders facilitated by The Park Ridge Center and Catholics for a Free Choice.

Religion and Public Discourse: Principles and Guidelines for Religious Participants (Chicago: The Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics, 1998). Recommendations for civil discourse

in the public arena, published in response to the contentious religious participation at the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994).

Benjamin Rivlin, "Thoughts on Religious NGOs at the UN: A Component of Global Civil Society," in Peter Hajnal, ed., *Civil Society in the Information Age: NGO's, Coalitions, Relationships* (London: Ashgate, forthcoming). Scholarly analysis of religious NGOs in the UN system written by the director emeritus of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Sacred Rights: Faith Leaders on Tolerance and Respect (New York: Millwood Publishing, 2001). Book prepared by the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in preparation for the World Conference Against Racism, Durban, South Africa, 2001.

Serving the Human Family: The Holy See at the Major United Nations Conferences (New York: Path to Peace Foundation, 1997). Primary documents from ten recent UN conferences, from the World Summit for Children (1990) through the World Food Summit (1996).

"Survey of Activities of Religious NGOs at the United Nations 1998–1999" (Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations). Most recent biennial report from an umbrella group representing some of the religious NGOs at the UN. Includes contact information, mission/purpose, activities/programs, and miscellaneous other details about 56 religious NGOs.

Eileen Tugum-Kolma, "Pastors Preach Population, Change Lives," *Populi: The UNFPA Magazine* 27,2 (September 2000). Story of successful partnership of several Christian denominations, UNFPA, and a secular NGO in developing a family curriculum in Papua New Guinea.

"The United Nations after 50: The Role of Religion in Shaping Its Future," Proceedings of the 22nd Annual Symposium on Politics and Ethics (Washington: The Luther Institute, 1996). Includes some insightful pieces about religious NGOs, e.g., by US Senator Paul Simon, Betty Golomb of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, and Joe Volk of the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Thomas G. Weiss and Leon Gordenker, eds., *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1996). An "analysis of the interface between nongovernmental organizations and the world organization [the UN]." Includes theoretical perspectives plus case studies from the areas of human rights, humanitarian aid, the environment, AIDS, and women.

Peter Willetts, ed., *"The Conscience of the World": The Influence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the UN System* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1996). Outstanding analysis of the history, status, roles, and influence of NGOs at the UN. Chapters present case studies in the areas of global finance, the environment, women's rights, children's rights, and human rights generally. Religious aspects are mentioned at times.

www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/NGOS/ngo-home.htm. Section of Internet homepage of Peter Willetts that includes useful information on NGOs and the UN.

RELIGION COUNTS MEMBERS

Rev. Rose Teteki Abbey, M.Th. Presbyterian, Ghana
Denise M. Ackermann, D.Th., Anglican, South Africa
Zainah Anwar, Muslim, Malaysia
Mehmet Aydin, Ph.D., Muslim, Turkey
Sheila Briggs, M.A., Roman Catholic, USA
Ani Choying Drolma, Buddhist, Nepal
Musa W. Dube, Ph.D., United Methodist, Botswana
Asghar Ali Engineer, D.Litt., Muslim, India
Iyá Sandra Medeiros Epega, Candomblé, Brazil
Farid Esack, Ph.D., Muslim, South Africa
Rev. Larry Greenfield, Ph.D., Baptist, USA
Rita M. Gross, Ph.D., Buddhist, USA
Sahar Hafez, Ph.D., L.L.B., Muslim, Egypt
Elfriede Harth, Roman Catholic, Germany,
Colombia/France
Riffat Hassan, Ph.D., Muslim, Pakistan/USA
Teresia Hinga, Ph.D., Roman Catholic, Kenya/USA
Shamsul Islam, M.A., Muslim, India
June Jacobs, Jewish, United Kingdom
Rabbi Steven B. Jacobs, Jewish, USA
Sandhya Jain, Hindu, India
Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Ph.D., Muslim,
Afghanistan/Canada
Azza Karam, Ph.D., Muslim, Egypt/USA
Frances Kissling, Roman Catholic, USA
Chung Hyun Kyung, Ph.D., Presbyterian, Korea/USA
Rabbi Amy Levin, Jewish, USA
Yuchen Li, Buddhist, Taiwan
Joanna Manning, M.Th., Roman Catholic, Canada
Rev. James Martin-Schramm, Ph.D., Lutheran, USA
María Consuelo Mejía, M.A., Roman Catholic,
Colombia/México

Philomena Mwaura, M.A., Roman Catholic, Kenya
Maria José Rosado Nunes, Ph.D., Roman Catholic,
Brazil
Sa'ida Anwar Nusseibeh, Muslim, Jerusalem/
United Kingdom
Laurence J. O'Connell, Ph.D., S.T.D., Roman Catholic,
USA
Anthony Padovano, Ph.D., S.T.D., Roman Catholic,
USA
Rev. Gustavo A. Parajon, M.D., M.P.H., American
Baptist, Nicaragua
Rosemary Radford Ruether, Roman Catholic, USA
Suwanna Satha-Anand, Ph.D., Buddhist, Thailand
Arvind Sharma, Ph.D., M.Th., Hindu, India/Canada
Rabbi Henry Sobel, Jewish, Brazil
Awraham Soetendorp, Jewish, The Netherlands
H. Sudarshan, M.D., Hindu, India
Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, M.A., Buddhist, USA
Rev. Carlton Veazey, M.A., Baptist, USA
Ashok Vohra, Ph.D., Hindu, India
Isaac Wüst, Roman Catholic, The Netherlands
Ven. Yifa, Ph.D., Buddhist, Taiwan

RELIGION COUNTS

1436 U Street, NW • Suite 305 • Washington, D.C. 20009, USA
tel +1 (202) 332-7820 • *fax* +1 (202) 332-8150
email religioncounts@earthlink.net