

Network of Global Agenda Councils

Discussion highlights on Faith

at the Summit on the Global Agenda, Dubai, United Arab Emirates 7-9 November 2008

This reflects work that is still in progress. It will continue to be updated and revised.

The views expressed here emerged from the Council meeting and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Economic Forum or those of all the Council Members.

1) What is the state of the world regarding religion and what should be done to improve it?

Religion Matters

Religion is high on the global agenda. The claim that religion would inevitably decline with modernity – the core of the secularization thesis – has been proved wrong. Today's global challenges of war and peace, democracy and human rights, and economic and social development all have an important religious dimension.

Faith is often part of the problem; tensions among religious communities can impede international cooperation, political stability, social cohesion and economic growth. But it is also potentially part of the solution: these communities are often among the most important forces mobilizing around core values such as human dignity, solidarity and social responsibility.

More than 80% of the world's population identifies with a religious tradition. The ethical resources of faith communities – a source of transcendent values – and their social influence are underutilized resources in building coalitions for positive change. Religious traditions prioritize human flourishing, a core value for the creation of a durable and legitimate global economic and social order.

The Global Agenda Council on Faith proposes that religion can contribute in three key areas in the following ways:

For business...

- The current global economic crisis extends beyond markets. It is also a crisis of confidence and a failure of values of transparency, integrity and the public good.
- Religious traditions are reservoirs of ethical resources. Each tradition has its own perspective, but all speak to core values of economic and social life.
- Dialogue among religious, political and business leaders can engage differences and highlight the shared values that inform the emerging global economic order.
- Educational institutions and the media should place more emphasis on the role of values alongside material forces in economic life.

For society...

- Globalization has spurred an exchange of ideas, including values of individualism and equality often in tension with established social norms and cultural practices.
- Religious responses to globalization vary, from defensive reaction to positive embrace. Key issues include: gender, multiculturalism and the role of the media in shaping perceptions.
- Leaders and citizens should develop new strategies for dialogue and cooperation that engage religious and cultural differences in building their societies. Secular leaders and citizens must make more room for faith-informed discourse in the public sphere.
- This dialogue must be carried on within religious communities as well as with secular actors. The value of respect for difference is often underdeveloped among people of faith.

For conflict prevention and peacebuilding...

- The world's faith traditions embrace the values of reconciliation and peaceful conflict resolution, even where they accept recourse to violence in defence of human freedom of dignity.
- Violence in today's world has many roots, including economic resentments, ethnic hatreds and political grievances. Religious passions are often a contributing factor.
- Through the promotion of interfaith dialogue and concrete peacebuilding activities, faith-based organizations can promote the negotiation of differences.
- Education at all levels is a critical tool. It can promote religious literacy and a fuller understanding of what unites and divides the world's religious traditions, making the political exploitation of religious differences more difficult.

2) What should be done to improve the state of the world on this issue and by whom?

Next steps for the Global Agenda Council on Faith over the next year

- 1) Housekeeping tasks
 - a) Disseminate results of the Summit for input from absent Council Members
 - b) Approve new name and promote brand and prestige of the Global Agenda Councils
 - c) Determine the future configuration of the Council to be more representative
- 2) Explore spiritual capital and educational resources for:
 - a) Business
 - b) Society
 - c) Conflict prevention and peacebuilding

This exploration is to be conducted via:

- a) An inventory of institutional research capacities around faith and the global agenda
Consultation with other Global Agenda Councils regarding areas of engagement of religion and possible strategic partnership; circulation of a document for comment. The Councils to include are:
 - Corporate Governance
 - Human Equality and Respect
 - Future of Governments
 - Future of the Middle East
 - Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
 - b) Possible consultation with government and business, also on areas of engagement and making religion a strategic partner
- 3) Report (content to be determined by the results of the consultation)
 - 4) Promotion of multi-faith educational materials for the Forum community