

# Mobilizing Faith for Women

Engaging the Power of Religion and Belief  
to Advance Human Rights and Dignity

Report on the June 2013  
Human Rights Defenders Forum

THE  
CARTER CENTER





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One Copenhill  
453 Freedom Parkway  
Atlanta, GA 30307  
(404) 420-5188  
Fax (404) 420-5196  
[www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)

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# Preface

## By Jimmy Carter, Former U.S. President

After World War II, the nations of the world gathered together to form the United Nations in an effort to prevent the kinds of wars and massive violations of human rights that devastated so much of the world during the first part of the century. The U.N. charter asserted that only self-defense in case of imminent attack would justify a decision to go to war. Those same governments also created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The declaration was an affirmation that all people are equal in all aspects of life and have a right to mobilize with others in order to make this promise come true within their own societies. In the decades since, the UDHR and other treaties derived from its principles have served as a global bill of rights, spurring many to press for greater freedom, but this struggle is long and subject to setbacks.

The most notable disappointment in this struggle is that women and girls, half of the world's population, are often not regarded in their society as full people, with rights equal to men and boys. Some of the historic human rights movements, therefore, did not include a focus on the rights of women but rather sidelined this question because of a larger political struggle. This was true in the U.S. civil rights movement, in the South African anti-apartheid movement, and, more recently, during the Arab Awakening. We know also that war and other forms of violence affect women in horrific ways long after the bullets stop flying and that resorting to war instead of diplomacy conveys a message to society that violence is an acceptable way to solve difficult problems. The global prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault, accompanied by weak government responses, shows that society too readily accepts these abuses as a



Tom England

Participants gathered for the 2013 Human Rights Defenders Forum.

normal way of life. This suggests that the twin promises made to humanity in 1948 are being eroded.

While women's rights have advanced in many areas in recent decades, serious challenges remain in almost every nation. Two major factors that still prevent women from enjoying full human rights are the exclusive authority of men in many highly patriarchal religious and belief systems and the overall normalization of violence in society that permeates the family, community, and our foreign policy. The Carter Center convened the 2013 Human Rights Defenders Forum, titled *Mobilizing Faith for Women*, to explore these questions and generate dialogue and action to support those who are struggling to espouse peace and to advance the rights of girls and women, especially in the realm of religion and belief.

One participant asked the question: "If women are equal in the eyes of God, why are we not equal in

the eyes of men?" The courageous leaders who joined us are determined to raise this question and to bring answers to their communities, engaging sacred texts as a source of legitimacy for their work. We were encouraged by the good work that many are doing, but it was also quite striking that entrenched attitudes and beliefs that women are inferior or different in God's eyes are still so prevalent.

I hope that readers will take the time to consider carefully the testimonies of those who gathered at our forum and consider how they might respond to this profound exploration through individual or collective action. The Carter Center and I are grateful to those participants and to all others who have been engaged with us on this issue over a number of years.

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# Executive Summary

## Call to Action

June 27–29, 2013, religious leaders, scholars, and activists joined former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at The Carter Center for the 2013 Human Rights Defenders Forum on the theme Mobilizing Faith for Women: Engaging the Power

**“The abuse of women and girls is the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violation on earth.”**

**—President Carter**

of Religion and Belief to Advance Human Rights and Dignity. Building on earlier forums, which had explored the bases for human rights within religious traditions, participants pursued an ambitious agenda

with the goal of mobilizing religious and political leaders to advocate for the human rights of women and girls. The forum was preceded by a day of workshops that allowed experts to delve deeply into how scriptural interpretation by mostly male religious leadership affects the rights of women globally. President Carter shared his hope that the conference would result in every individual speaking out and marshaling whatever influence they can bring to address the issue of human rights abuses against women.

In his opening remarks, President Carter noted, “The abuse of women and girls is the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violation on earth.” Testimony during the forum supported his assertion that communities of faith and religious leaders have a unique opportunity to make a difference in the fight for women’s equal treatment and freedom from violence around the world. Various faith leaders, advocates, and scholars reported both experiences of human rights abuses against women and efforts to work from within their faith traditions to address such abuses. The participants shared findings and



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Participants listened to Benjamin Warsaw perform a piano selection to open the forum on Friday, June 28, 2013.

recommendations that were synchronous and overlapping across geographic, cultural, and faith traditions. Examining sacred texts and sharing testimony from many countries, participants grappled with the difficult questions that emerge when attempting to reconcile the ideals and practices of religion and human rights principles throughout the world.

**“Religious leaders must stand up and demand that the state invest in the infrastructure needed.”**

—*Mona Rishmawi*

Mona Rishmawi, representative of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, observed in her opening remarks:

The place of religion in our societies and in the state today, particularly in the Middle East, is the determining issue for our future. The issue of women’s rights is the main battleground to determine where the identity of the state is going. If we get women’s rights right, we get everything right. If we do not get women’s rights right, everything will disintegrate.

Rishmawi emphasized human rights as our claims as individuals against the state. She reflected on the responsibility of the state to protect citizens and its failure to do so for women:

The state has not invested in protecting women against violence. Religious leaders must stand up and demand that the state invest in the infrastructure needed—streetlights, police training, and prosecution against violators, among others. The United Nations Human Rights Council has called upon all governments to prioritize such actions.

Finally, she called on religious leaders to stand up and speak out against violence and discrimination against women, as this is clearly contrary to the concepts of justice and human dignity at the core of religion.



Tom England

President Jimmy Carter and Mona Rishmawi from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights opened the 2013 Human Rights Defenders Forum.

## **Responding to the Call: Working from Within**

Participants framed violence against women as a problem that has a detrimental impact on each part of society and on all members of the community: men, women, and children. The issue has deep implications for the daily life and health of community members, mandating that religious and traditional leaders advocate for their communities and pressure the state to deliver on its duty to provide for the safety and security of women. Participants agreed that religious leaders have the power and responsibility to promote peace and human rights, including women’s rights,



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President Carter and Karin Ryan of The Carter Center have worked together on many human rights issues.



Tom England

President Carter greets Molly Melching, founder of the organization Tostan.

from their institutional platforms. The religious leaders in attendance embraced this call, giving examples of work that many are already carrying out and requesting organizational support and training in international human rights frameworks so they may learn to more effectively lobby their governments to address abuses in their respective countries.

Tostan, the Senegalese organization, was represented by former Parliamentarian Bacary Tamba and founder Molly Melching. It was the inspiring story of Tostan's astonishing successes in eliminating harmful traditional practices such as female genital cutting in thousands of villages in Africa that undergirded the dialogue among participants. The foundation of Tostan's success is community-based, consultative approaches championed by religious and traditional

leaders and fostered by many women and men working together in these communities. Through reinterpretation of religious texts and community dialogue, Tostan's transformative outcomes were presented at the beginning of the discussions, demonstrating the potential for engaging religion, rather than avoiding it, as a force for social transformation.

Participants from various countries reported that conservative clergy are generally receptive to promotion of faith-based justice but struggle to bring along their conservative congregations. Leaders cited this issue as a major challenge with which they need scholars' help. Engaging the media, reaching out through online platforms, and communicating in local languages were cited as key tactics for reorienting mainstream religious discourse toward support for women's rights. Working with the religious establishment is possible and essential. As Dr. Salah-eddin Elgawhary of the Biblioteca Alexandrina emphasized, progressive religious interpretation has to come from within the schools of religion for it to be a viable force for change in community practices. Working from within requires understanding local contexts and constituencies.

This point was driven home by Alhaji Khuzaima Mohammed Osman, executive assistant to the National Chief Imam of Ghana, who expressed the difficulty for religious leaders in his context to work

effectively with those who do not appear, according to local standards, to comply with the principles or conduct they espouse. "We find that those human rights defenders who claim they are Muslims are often not living up to certain Muslim expectations, which makes us feel backed against a corner," he said, going on to contend, "This is an issue that needs to be addressed in order to encourage Muslim leaders to engage." This statement led to a robust dialogue with other participants, making it clear that such sensitivities and challenges are serious but can be overcome. Within such contexts, some institutions are making progress. Representatives of the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Dr. Ahmad al-Tayyeb, head of the oldest center of Islamic learning in the world, were eager for collaboration and acknowledged the need for more concerted effort on the part of leaders and institutions. For example, they highlighted their work to consult both religious and secular women's organizations in the drafting of a forthcoming declaration on women's rights and committed to increasing the number of women scholars at Al-Azhar.

**The inspiring story of Tostan's astonishing successes in eliminating harmful traditional practices such as female genital cutting in thousands of villages in Africa undergirded the dialogue among participants.**



President Carter stands with Imam Mohamed Magid, president of the Islamic Society of North America, and Molly Melching, founder of Tostan.

### **Modern-Day Slavery**

Speakers addressed various faith-based efforts to combat human trafficking, which moderator Aaronde Creighton described as similar in severity to the trans-Atlantic slave trade because of the number of



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The National Chief Imam and Grand Mufti of Ghana sent a delegation to the conference. Pictured here with (center) Chief Zanzan Karwor of Liberia are (left to right) Rashidat Muhammed, Chief Sidiq Gimala III, Alhaji Khuzaima Mohammed Osman, and Abdul Basit Rufai.

lives destroyed by the practice. The conversation addressed the role of religious communities, which have tremendous influence in either stigmatizing victims of sex trafficking or serving them. Pastor Paul Palmer of the Atlanta Dream Center also challenged leaders to consider the most fundamental driver of sex trafficking: demand. Pastor Paul lamented: We have not taught our boys and men that we need to honor all girls and women as our sisters. We have failed in religious leadership because we have assumed that this is just what young men are going to go through.

Fulata Moyo of the World Council of Churches

called on religious service organizations that encounter victims of human trafficking not to instruct victims—in one case a young girl who was pregnant—to accept their fate as divinely ordained. Cheryl Deluca-Johnson of Street Grace in Atlanta described efforts to increase criminal penalties for those who purchase sex from minors, which the international community agrees is the most effective way to combat trafficking. In the past, criminalizing the victims has taken up the majority of law enforcement resources. The new consensus asserts that shifting the focus to the arrest and robust prosecution



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(Left to right) Ambassador Abdelrahman Moussa, Dr. Abdel-Dayem Nossair, and Dr. Mahmoud Azab represented the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

of traffickers, pimps, and customers can be the basis of a common movement in which religious leaders, people, and institutions can play a decisive role.

## Normalization of Violence

While our age may not be comparatively more violent, our acceptance of violence and inequality in society is in stark contrast to the rejection of its legitimacy by the global community in 1948. President Carter reminded the forum that with the signing of the U.N. charter the world affirmed a commitment to “regain faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women.” The signatories to the charter agreed on two basic promises: the end of war and the universal attainment of human rights. “As

we have had vividly brought to us in this meeting, both of those promises have been violated,” President Carter reproached, linking the prevalence of violence against women to the widespread approval of violence as a method for resolving differences in society. As illustrated in this report, participants’ testimonies revealed the truth of this claim throughout society. From the battlegrounds of the Middle East to the street corners of Atlanta, participants agreed and shared suggestions about ways communities of faith might help rectify the normalization of violence in society by “normalizing peace” through dialogue and respect for human rights.

In 2000, the international community officially recognized the disproportionate impact of war on women with the adoption of U.N. resolution 1325,

even as we continue to document gender-based violence in conflict and gain unprecedented clarity on the causes and consequences of this aspect of the disparity. Several forum participants shared stories of the grave health and safety conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan following the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of those countries. In particular, the incidence of congenital birth defects implies the use of radioactive munitions in civilian areas, with a pattern that implicates the U.S. military in causing and failing to redress these terrible impacts. Participants testified to the degenerative effects of persistent insecurity on the very fabric of society, community, family, and even self. Iraqi pediatrician Dr. Samira Al-Alaani shared the experience of the women of Fallujah, “Iraq’s Hiroshima,” where couples’ dreams of parenthood have been invaded by fear due to the prevalence of congenital birth defects. Participants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia also testified about the horrific impact on women and girls of the wars that raged in their countries while the world mostly ignored the underlying causes of those conflicts.

**“In 1948, the U.N. charter promised the end of war and the universality of human rights, and both of those promises have been violated.”**

**—President Carter**

President Carter acknowledged the major role of the United States in normalizing war, since in the last 60 years this country resorted to war in almost every altercation rather than relying on peaceful negotiation. He presented the death penalty as another example of using extreme violence as a solution for society’s problems, citing the fact that the United

States is one of four countries that lead the world in numbers of executions. President Carter interpreted the state’s use of excessive violence as tacit approval of the use of violence in society. Mild reaction to violence against women results in the perpetuation of a culture that implicitly and explicitly condones such acts. As Rishmawi discussed, the legal framework for addressing justice for women is very shallow. The preceding are examples of how the state has failed in its obligation to protect citizens who are women. The result is that living with the threat of violence is normal for most women.

## **Religion as a Resource for Women’s Rights Work**

Participants resoundingly dispelled any latent notion there are inherent contradictions between the principles of human rights and religion. Mona Rishmawi cited two verses from sacred text that support this position beautifully. The Bible says: Glory and honor and peace be for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also to the Greek, for God shows no partiality. From the Qur’an, she shared the verse that says: And their Lord responded to them: Never will I allow to be lost the work of any among you, whether male or female. “The Qur’an is clear there are parity and equality,” Rishmawi declared.

Participants explained that positioning religions in opposition to the principles of individual human rights results from the selective use of scripture that ignores its comprehensive message of justice and peace. The often-cited verse on polygamy in the Qur’an—which creates an allowance for multiple wives to address a particular social need of the time but also cautions against potential injustice—is a case of such partial reading, suggested Zainah Anwar.

Sister Simone Campbell of NETWORK and Nuns on the Bus provided an example of the effect of the politicization of religion in the discussion of her advocacy of the Affordable Care Act. She noted that the opposition of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops stemmed from their ideological identification with the singular issue of opposing abortion

and contraception. Campbell described the conflict as “straight politics,” revealing that even the strict separation of church and state in the United States has not exempted religion from being co-opted for political gains. Reframing the issue as one of citizenship, she declared, “As a person of faith in our democratic culture, I expect to use my voice and to be required to use my voice, and our text mandates that I use my voice!”

**“It is incredibly important that we demand that there be space for women’s voices to be heard, because too often those who control policy never have to deal with the consequences of their policies, but women oftentimes do have to deal with the consequences.”**

— *Sister Simone Campbell*

The moral and religious imperative for participation is echoed by the work of Musawah, a global movement for equality in the Muslim family, founded by Zainah Anwar and Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini. They and others asserted that women’s voices and women’s experiences of living Islam—as well as the reality of the condition of women living in Muslim societies—must be sources of legitimacy and authority in defining what religion means. The forum provided the opportunity for representatives of Muslim institutions to publicly commit to including female scholars in their work. Imam Mohamed Magid of the Islamic Society of North America responded to Mir-Hosseini’s call for an inclusive dialogue in which women’s voices are respected equally, stating, “This is not supposed to be a conversation of men only; come

to our next meeting in Cairo [at Al-Azhar] and have a voice.”

## **Building Inclusive Dialogues**

Rishmawi emphatically supported discussions of the relationship between religion and the state, asserting that they are the only way to settle the place of religion in society. However, she underlined that such discussions have been circumscribed by fear of intimidation and fear of reprisal. Indeed, participants shared the very real threat of harm that human rights defenders, especially women, face in contexts such as Afghanistan. In Muslim contexts, human rights defenders have, in some cases, become reluctant to share information about violations inside their own communities for fear of helping outsiders to deride their community, fuel stereotypes, and even bring on foreign intervention. For these reasons, it is vital to work actively to open up public space that is safe for dialogue, as violence threatens to close this space completely, participants warned.

Rishmawi raised the issue that as human beings none of us have a monopoly over the truth and that much of the diversity of human experience has been excluded from shaping our religious and political institutions when authority figures have preserved the mantel of absolute truth. Frances Greaves from Liberia highlighted the importance of establishing safe spaces for revealing such diverse truths, arguing, “To consolidate peace, you and your society must face yourself and face reality.” The participation of women in Liberia’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission paved the way for female representation in Parliament and the election of a female president, women who have fought for and achieved a rewriting of the laws and the narrative around violence against women in Liberia.

Reacting to Al-Alaani’s call for transparency and investigation into the types of weapons used by the United States and coalition forces in Fallujah, Campbell stated: It is incredibly important that we demand that there be space for women’s voices to be heard, because too often those who control policy

never have to deal with the consequences of their policies, but women oftentimes do have to deal with the consequences. The forum was credited as an unusually safe space that allowed deep and, at times, controversial dialogue to occur. The desire for this conversation to be sustained in some form was palpable.

## Contesting Religious Meaning

In his opening remarks, President Carter pointed to male circumscription of women's religious leadership and service to God within religious institutions. He cited the position of some that women are inferior in the eyes of God and suggested that such views are perpetuated through the misuse of sacred texts that have been distorted to justify the dominance of men.

Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza discussed this aspect of religious debate in her remarks:

Throughout the centuries, the Bible has been used both as a weapon against and as a resource for subjugated women. The Bible has been invoked both for and against women's struggles for access to citizenship, public speaking, reproductive rights, theological education, or ordained ministry. Consequently, no serious reform of society in the interest of women's emancipation will be successful if it does not also seek to advance the reform of religion and of sacred scriptures.

Men's perception of women as inferior has been institutionalized as if it were fact. In some cases, it has been confused with divine law and used to excuse both violence and discrimination against women and the failure to protect. Participants reflected that in the early histories of each religious tradition women were integral contributors and respected members of the religious community. President Carter cited the statement of the Apostle Paul from Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Carter referred to Romans 16, where Paul describes half of the heroes of the early Christian church as women apostles and priests. Participants referenced similar stories from the early texts and

traditions of Islam and Judaism, rejecting the notion that patriarchy is core to the faiths themselves.

Participants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan cited the co-opting and politicizing of religion as contributors to conflict. In addition, as Rishmawi asserted, those responsible for implementing human rights protections often use religion as an excuse for their failure. She pointed to the conflation of religion with culture—or ideals with practices, as others framed it—arguing that while the principles of religion may be divine, culture is very much a worldly, human creation. Participants discussed several examples, including female genital cutting and "honor killings," as cases in which religion has been manipulated to excuse acts explicitly contrary to religious values. In Islamic law, any practice that is harmful to the human body is forbidden, and there are heavy (some would say impossible) burdens of proof required for the conviction of adultery. However, people have misused certain texts, removing them from both their historical context and the moral context of the principles of the religion.

**"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."**

**—Galatians 3:28**

Responding to the plenary panel on the liberating possibilities within theology, Jeremy Courtney of Preemptive Love Coalition in Iraq astutely interrogated those gathered, asking how we can reform theology while it is the framework through which many of us understand and live in the world. Mir-Hosseini asserted that we must separate ideals from practice in both religion and human rights. We must be willing to look at realities on the ground

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## Mobilizing Faith for Women

and allow them to “interrupt” our theological and academic investigations, according to Dr. Laurie Zoloth. All participants repeatedly emphasized the power of religion to aid in the pursuit of peace and in support of justice, despite its frequently being co-opted to justify harmful practices and inequalities.

**“We must normalize the possibility for us to say we were wrong, to say we are sorry, and then act to repair what we have broken. If our political leaders won’t lead the way, then at least our religious leaders must come forward.”**

**—Jeremy Courtney**

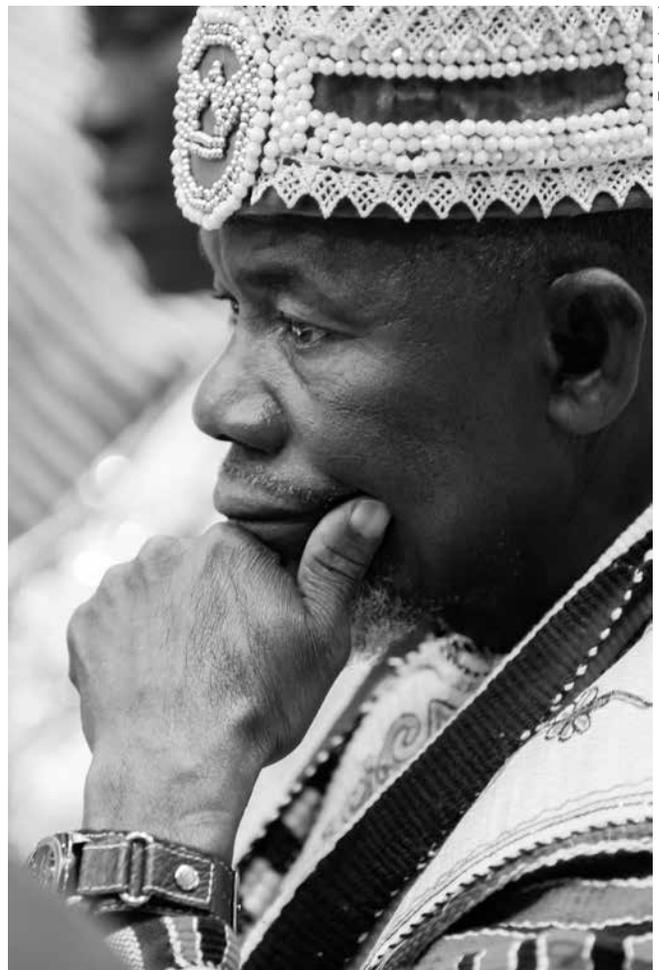
In this report, there are numerous examples of the work being done to promote women’s rights and social justice both inspired by and working through religious mandates. Hauwa Ibrahim, a practicing lawyer in Nigeria, noted that while the law is important in the pursuit of justice for women, humility is an immensely powerful resource for winning over religious and traditional leaders, as their hearts are opened by the stories of women. A number of participants agreed that confrontational advocacy, which has proved effective in pressing governments to change abusive policies, is not effective in the religious context given the profound reach that religious leaders enjoy in the personal lives within their communities. While not deploring robust public advocacy, a balance of approaches was suggested.

Courtney reflected on the lust for revenge after the attacks against the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, that drove him to support the Iraq war, resolving: “If we are to normalize peace, we must normalize humility. We must normalize the possibility for us to say we were wrong, to say we are sorry, and then act



Meilinda Holmes

Participants listen to testimony on the potential of mobilizing faith for women. (Left to right) Larisa Friesen Hall, Palwasha Kakar, Ambassador Abdelrahman Moussa, and Mossarat Qadeem.



Tom England

Chief Zanzan Karwor of Liberia reflects on deliberations.

to repair what we have broken. If our political leaders won't lead the way, then at least our religious leaders must come forward."

Rishmawi described the role religious leaders should play in holding the state accountable for its responsibility to protect, saying: "Religious leaders have a duty to explain the true spirit of religion. They have a duty to explain to people that protecting life is the core of religious values."

### Commitment to Action

The energy throughout the forum reflected participants' recognition of their shared struggle and its power to unite rather than divide. Forming an emergent community of believers who are working to advance human rights for all from within a religious framework, the forum included participants with diverse institutional positions that ranged from leaders of national religious institutions to reform scholars to media and activists. Forum participants resolved that remedying the prevalent disconnect among these institutional platforms was one of the most important mandates emerging from the group's discussions. Dr. Laurie Zoloth invited activists to join the next meeting of the American Academy of Religion and submit requests for research based on what they see needed on the ground.

Furthermore, all participants saw the inclusion of men as allies and partners as vital. In the struggle for women's human rights, men have diverse roles to play. As Shiekh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass of the Tijani Sufi Order in Senegal noted, "Equality between women and men in the Qur'an is clear. I have a suggestion for men: They need to support women by sometimes just being silent." Spoken by a prominent male religious leader who guides many millions of congregants, such remarks have an instrumental value and highlight how both silence and voice need to be

employed strategically by men seeking to advance the cause of social justice for women.

The following pages illustrate the solutions and resources that participants generated through three days of exchange and challenging engagement across faiths, disciplines, and perhaps most importantly, institutional positions. From religious leaders to activists and from reform theologians to community organizers, those present negotiated with empowering and problematic texts and with examples of success and cases of desperate failure. As President Carter concluded in his opening remarks: Child marriage, the physical abuse of women, women's slavery, and genital cutting are all excessive human rights abuses that exist in the world in direct contravention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, in my opinion, in direct contravention of the basic premises of every great religion.

**"Equality between women and men in the Qur'an is clear. I have a suggestion for men: They need to support women by sometimes just being silent."**

**—Shiekh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass**

Participants held fast to the liberating potential of religion and the power of faith to drive the work for women's rights—not only because turning away is not an option for believers, as Zainah Anwar related, but because reconciling religion with the pursuit of women's human rights and dignity is an effective strategy for change.

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# Opening Remarks

## Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter

I can't think of a better way to start the discussion than with the beautiful music by Benjamin Warsaw. I think it brings to all of us the realization that there are things common to all human beings, the beauty of music that transcends artificial barriers between nations and between people. I've been touched by the beauty of this music this morning, as I felt you all have also. It's also a great pleasure to me to be followed on this program by Mona Rishmawi, who was designated many years ago as a hero at The Carter Center, when she represented one of the most courageous efforts I have known around the world to bring peace between the Palestinians, who have been deprived of their rights every day, and the Israelis.

Al-Haq and B'Tselem worked side by side with her. Mona, we are proud to have you here.

**"This morning we are going to be discussing the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violations on earth: the abuse of women that persists in almost every country."**

**—President Carter**



Tom England

President Jimmy Carter opened the 2013 Human Rights Defenders Forum, asserting that abuses of women are the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights abuses of our time.

This morning we are going to be discussing the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violations on earth: the abuse of women that persists in almost every country and for which there is a great aversion among male leaders, and even some female leaders, to admit that it exists, that it is serious and troubling, and that it can and should be addressed courageously. It's not easy to do, as all of you know, particularly those of you who are heroes here, who come from countries where the abuse is so flagrant that it is difficult even to point out the abuse you yourself have experienced.

Our goals today are to educate and mobilize religious leaders and political leaders around the world—and to strengthen and inspire forum participants so that when we go back home we'll all have been given new commitment and inspiration to try to address this evil that exists so prominently throughout the world. We also need publicity—and we have had a number of interviews and have new media present—to let the world be reminded of the abuse of

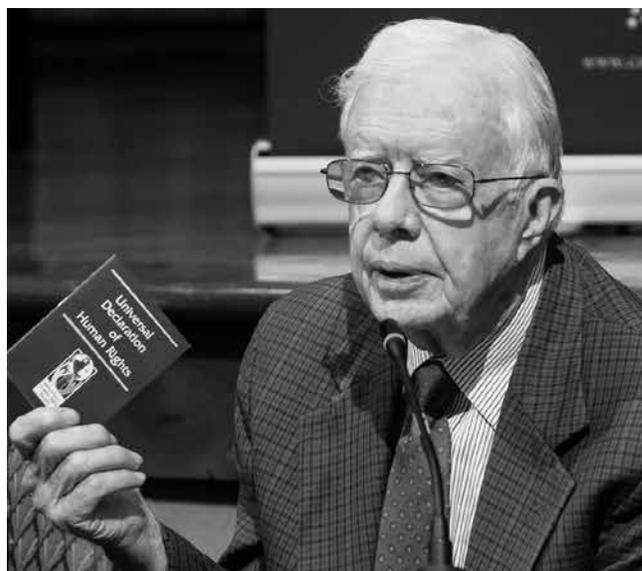
women. In itself, this would be a good result, and it is already being accomplished with this conference.

Also, I think it is good for us to be reminded of the incompatibility between certain religious practices on the one hand—as espoused by religious leaders who try to convince their own fellow worshipers that women are inferior in the eyes of God—and human rights on the other. Many great religious traditions hold an ordination by men that women are not fit to serve God on an equal basis. They are precluded from being priests, pastors, and chaplains, while men are considered to be worthy to hold those positions in the service of God. In some cases, there are even more gross abuses of religious scripture and texts, from the Qur’an and the Bible, including the Old Testament and the New Testament. Singular verses can be extracted and distorted to justify the dominance of men.

**“Article 16 says, ‘Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race ... have the right to marry and to found a family.’ What is the key phrase there? Of full age! We know that girls of 8 or 10 years old in many countries, with the approval of religious or traditional leaders, are forced to marry against their will with no control over their lives at all.”**

**—President Carter**

I have here a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and I would hope that all of you would get a copy and carry it with you. It spells out a commitment that was made back in 1948 by the



Tom England

In his opening remarks, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter emphasized the promises made by the international community in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

countries of the world, led by the wife of our former president, Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the preamble, it points out the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family and the foundation for freedom, justice, and peace in the world. It goes on to say: “Whereas the people of the United Nations have in the charter reaffirmed to regain faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women,” and have determined “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...”

It goes on to point out in Article 2 that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.”

Article 4 says, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude,” and we know there are millions of people in this world who, in effect, are slaves sold by trafficking and that 80 percent of those slaves are women. Of the women sold into slavery, about 80 percent are sold for sexual abuse by men. There

are many articles in the declaration, but I wanted to point out these because they are so important to us gathered here.

Article 16 says, “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race ... have the right to marry and to found a family.” What is the key phrase there? Of full age! We know that girls of 8 or 10 years old in many countries, with the approval of religious or traditional leaders, are forced to marry against their will with no control over their lives at all. We also know that there are some heroes, particularly in Senegal in the area where Tostan works, that have now persuaded 6,000 villages to agree to do away with genital cutting, another severe abuse of girls’ rights. “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.” That’s the husband and the wife; not just the dominant husband.

Article 21: “Everyone has the equal right to take part in the government of his country.” We know that even in the most advanced countries women are deprived of an equal opportunity to serve in their governments. We now have the highest number of women serving in the U.S. Congress in history, and we are up to 18 percent of the members of the U.S. House and Senate.

Article 23: “Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.” The employers of America, looking at the religious ordination that women are not equal, don’t feel constrained to pay women equally for the same work that a man does. In our country, women in the workforce get an average of 77 percent as much as men do.

Article 25 says, “Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance,” and Article 26 states that everyone has the right to education. These are paragraphs from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and every country is sworn to implement these principles of equality in their laws, customs, and treatment of men and women, and they are not doing it. Quite often their excuse for not doing it is that religious leaders say that women are inferior.

I happen to be a Christian, and I read the Bible and teach the Bible every Sunday in my hometown

church. In my church, we have a man pastor and a woman pastor. We have six deacons—half of them are women—and my wife is perhaps the most famous Baptist deacon in the world. But in the Southern Baptist Convention, there is a policy that women cannot be pastors, deacons, or chaplains. At some of the Southern Baptist university seminaries, it is prohibited for a woman to teach a class in which boys are students. We know that the Catholic Church ordained back in the third or fourth century that women cannot serve as priests. They can be teachers or nurses, but they can’t be priests.

**“Another very important global factor that contributes to women’s abuse is the approval of violence as a way to resolve differences in our society.”**

**—President Carter**

This was not the case in the early Christian church. Paul said that there is no difference in the eyes of God between a Jew and a gentile, or between a slave and a master, or between a man and a woman. And when he wrote to the Romans in Chapter 16, he points out the heroes of the early Christian church, almost half of whom were women who were apostles and priests. Later, when men took over, they began to express their opinion, which has now become almost law, that a woman is not equal in the eyes of God. This leads to much of the abuse of women. In marriage, some men consider their wives to be inferior to them and they, therefore, sexually and economically abuse their women almost as slaves. In some countries—Christian, Islamic, and others—the laws preclude women from serving as equals. We know about Saudi Arabia, where a woman has not been given the right to drive an automobile and so far has not been permitted to vote in elections. That

might change in the near future; we hope so. There is progress being made in the world, very reluctantly in most cases, but it's not an all-pervasive change or improvement. The point is that the voices demanding these changes are very few and far between. They are sometimes very timid, because people who speak out are considered to be traitors of the male-dominated political and economic leadership.

**“When we accept war as a legitimate way to resolve disputes—or when we excessively use violence as a punishment for crimes—it says that violence is acceptable. That’s another factor that hurts women, because they are most affected by violence.”**

**—President Carter**

Another very important global factor that contributes to women's abuse is the approval of violence as a way to resolve differences in our society. We in this country have been guilty of almost constant warfare for the last 60 years: beginning in North and South Korea and going on to Vietnam, then into Bosnia-Herzegovina, and more recently, Iraq and Afghanistan. In between, in almost every country where there has been an altercation, we have decided to go to war instead of negotiating peacefully to resolve disputes. Some countries still permit the horrible use of execution, of the death penalty. No Western European country has the death penalty,

and only one country in Eastern Europe, Belarus, does. Canada doesn't have it either, but the United States does. Our country is one of four nations on earth where there are the most executions. When we accept war as a legitimate way to resolve disputes—or when we excessively use violence as a punishment for crimes—it says that violence is acceptable. That's another factor that hurts women, because they are most affected by violence.

I think almost every family around here is aware of this problem. When I was governor of Georgia, we had a houseguest who was raped, and she told Rosalynn and me about her abuse. We encouraged her to name her abuser, but when she talked to the prosecuting attorneys in DeKalb County, they strongly encouraged her not to do so, to let her rapist go free rather than submit her to the inevitable derogation of her character and the abuse of the trial that might be forthcoming. In the great universities of Atlanta today, it is standard policy not to prosecute male students who have raped women; this needs to be corrected. Atlanta, of which I'm very proud, is also one of the central trading posts for trafficking in slavery of women.

We've made some progress, but the progress is halting and quite often pursued without enough courage and commitment. I hope that one of the results of this conference will be for every one of us, individually, to speak out forcefully and use whatever influence we can marshal to bring about improvements in the treatment of women. It grieves me very deeply to see this continue, and I'm very proud of those of you who are heroes in your own countries. Child marriage, the physical abuse of women, women's slavery, and genital cutting are all human rights abuses that exist in the world in direct contravention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, in my opinion, in direct contravention of the basic premises of every great religion.

## Mona Rishmawi, Representative of Navi Pillay, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights

Thank you very much, President Carter, for the stimulating and fascinating presentation. It is very, very hard to take the floor after you. I must say I am extremely touched and very moved to be in the presence of President Carter. I was here 24 years ago as young Mona Rishmawi. I met President Carter and Mrs. Carter, who I'm extremely happy to see again, and, of course, Karin, to receive the Human Rights award with another organization, a very good Israeli organization called B'Tselem. The award resulted in a lifelong friendship between me and my best friend in the world, Zahava Gal-On, the Israeli who received the award then. At the time, it was not really common to recognize Palestinian talents; it was actually very unusual. President Carter made a courageous move in acknowledging us and our work at the time we most needed it. I think, like many people and human rights defenders in the world, we owe a lot to him for that recognition.

I am here today as a U.N. official, representing the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, who really wanted to be here but can't because she is in Vienna commemorating the 20th anniversary of our office. I would like to again acknowledge President Carter, who came to the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna and battled—along with 2,500 other human rights defenders—for the creation of that office. He personally came to the meeting and lobbied the U.S. government and the U.N. secretary-general to convince them to take a positive position on the creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to be the voice of victims. Without him, I don't think we would have an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and we are extremely grateful for that. Since then he has been working with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with all the high commissioners, who have been to The Carter Center, working on the promotion of human rights and standing up for human rights defenders, an issue

that President Carter has championed throughout his career.

Today's purpose is to look at faith, women, and human rights. Let me share with you some remarks that come from my own experience: my background as a woman raised in Middle Eastern countries, having lived most of my life in Palestine and Egypt, where I studied and for which I have a strong affinity because half of my family is Egyptian. I now live in



Tom England

In her opening remarks, Mona Rishmawi, representative of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, called on religious leaders to speak up and hold the state accountable for its obligation to protect women.

Switzerland, so I am one of those who belongs to every place in the world, and my comments today come from that experience.

The place of religion in our society is a big topic. It has always been there, but today we see it as a determining issue for our future. Everywhere I go, particularly in the Middle East, I see the issue of women's rights as the main battleground on which to determine the direction of the state. If we get women's rights right, we get everything right. If we do not get women's rights right, I think everything will disintegrate, and we will have a real problem. Discussions about the role of religion in the state, especially in cultures like ours, are appropriate. I have no problem with the discussion; actually it is a very good discussion provided it is a discussion in which people raise their views without fear of intimidation, reprisal, or being mocked on television and in the media. This is fine; we have to settle these issues in our society. We have to settle the place of religion in the state, and the only way to go about it is to discuss it. There is no other way; we have to discuss it. But if fear and intimidation enter the picture, we will run into problems.

We are all human beings; nobody has, I would say, monopoly over the truth. We are not God; we are just his servants. We are not God, so we cannot pretend to be God and be the only ones who know the truth. Let me share two verses from the Bible and the Qur'an that say the same thing. The Bible says, "Glory and honor and peace be for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek, for God shows no partiality." God loves everybody. In the Holy Qur'an, an even clearer verse that is extremely nice says, "And their Lord responded to them: Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, whether male or female." The Qur'an is very clear: There are parity and equality there.

Allow me to say a few words about where I think the discussion stands today. We have a total imbalance in our legal system with regard to women's issues. When it comes to protection against violence, we have very shallow frameworks. When it comes to promoting practices that could lead to discrimination,

we have ample rules. It is a fact that violence is a normal way of life for many women. It is a sad reality. When you walk in the streets, the hassle and harassment you get from the age of 2 or 3 are incredible. If you walk into a police station, the story that President Carter told is the story of many women throughout the world. If you speak about your abuser, you are mocked and are accused of being immoral. The law enforcement agents don't work to protect you; they work against you; the system works against you. Often, the streets are dark, and women cannot walk for fear for their safety. Many girls even fear going to the bathrooms in schools because they cannot be protected from violence. Violence against women, and girls more profoundly, is a normal way of life for many people. The state has invested very little until now toward addressing this problem.

**"I don't see why religious leaders are not standing up; why religious leaders cannot say, 'For God's sake, hassling women in the streets is a sin; it's against human dignity.' That is what we need. There is nothing in any religion that says you can hassle women in the streets."**

**—Mona Rishmawi**

Human rights are our claims against the state. As a human rights person, I put a lot of emphasis on the state. I don't see why religious leaders are not standing up; why religious leaders cannot say, "For God's sake, hassling women in the streets is a sin; it's against human dignity." That is what we need. There is nothing in any religion that says you can hassle women in the streets. Why are people not standing up to say this has to stop? Why aren't we working toward

better infrastructure where the streets are lit, where people can walk in safety, where public transportation is safe? We've heard the story of the rapes that just took place in India. They convened an excellent commission. The late Judge Verma made incredible recommendations, but the state put them aside and did something else. Why would they do that when he has outlined exactly what needs to be done? The state needs to take these obligations seriously and treat women as equal parties. Religious leaders have a big role to play because this is not a question about culture. This is a question about honoring every human being in the country.

**“Women’s rights are about you and me: our boys and girls, our children, our future. It’s about our outlook on the world not only today but 30 or 40 years from now. Where do we want to be?”**

**—Mona Rishmawi**

Violence against women is an area in which religious and community leaders need to invest much more because it's about everybody and not one part of society only. President Carter told us why they don't do that: because they actually think women are inferior and that protection really isn't necessary. When you look at someone as less than a human being, then the abuse is fine. It's actually a joke. When boys talk about what they tell girls, other boys laugh. Within the family, the community, and the religion, these have to become taboos. The human rights system utilizes integrative approaches, but for some reason it is difficult to implement them. For example, the U.N. Human Rights Council just endorsed recommendations to address the issue of safety and security for

women through the enactment of adequate legislation; instruction and training of law enforcement officials to take action to protect women; and investing in infrastructure such as public transportation, sanitation facilities, street lighting, and improvements in urban planning. Community leaders and religious leaders have to look at this and find ways to bring these issues into the mosques, churches, and villages, because these are the things that will make a difference in the daily lives of people.

The problem is that the investment is not there; the investment is in conflating two notions that I think should be kept separate: culture and religion. Religion comes from the divine; it comes from God. Culture comes from us; let's not confuse that. Culture is us. The divine we cannot change, but we absolutely can change culture! It comes with our progress: Some norms that were adequate at a certain stage don't serve their purposes anymore.

The problem is that in the area of women—because women are the weakest in society—culture and religion often are confused. In the past in Egypt, they managed to prevent female genital mutilation in public hospitals, and there was a religious *fatwa* that the ban was in line with religion. When they realized that girls die from these practices, suffering throughout their lives and when pregnant, the state took measures. That was very positive, but the state can do much more in this regard. For example, I don't think any religion is in favor of “honor killings.” If anything, religion would limit honor killings, because it says in cases of adultery you need a certain standard of proof. The issue is that people believe this is their tradition. But how can religion accept for a life to be taken on the basis of a suspicion? Culture and religion get conflated, and the state colludes with laws that actually give lenient sentences for these offenses, police who don't investigate, and the community that covers it up. This is where we need to invest. Religious leaders have a duty to explain the true spirit of religion. They have a duty to explain to people that protecting life is at the core of religious values.

These practices of violence and oppressive culture

lead to one result: Women fear to be part of the public space. Tell me which country today can afford to have half its society unengaged in its economic and political life? In a time of economic oppression, in a time where competition over influence is so high, we need every part of the society to play its role. Women don't feel protected to play the role they need to play: They protest and group themselves in organizations, but the majority of women still fear to be in the streets and in public places and are harassed at work and paid less. To remedy these problems and aggression, the state needs to do much more, and religious and community leaders have a bigger role to play than they are playing right now.

Let me conclude by saying I don't think women's rights are only an issue of women: Women's rights are about all of us. Women's rights are about the dignity of every person. Women's rights are about you and

me: our boys and girls, our children, our future. It's about our outlook on the world not only today but 30 or 40 years from now. Where do we want to be? If we want to be confined as our people were 1,000 years ago, that's a choice. We can make that choice, but it has a price. If we want to go backward, that's a choice. If we want to go forward, that's another choice. And if we choose to go forward, we have to make different decisions today to bring everybody on board to respect the dignity of every human person.

We all have things that we can do within our sphere of influence. President Carter has showed the way. Throughout his career, he has done whatever he can within his sphere of influence in whatever position he was sitting. He has lived for his convictions. I think it is important that one lives for his or her convictions and moves things forward with a vision of where we want to be in the future.

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## Panel I

# Aligning Religious Life with Equal Dignity and Human Rights

**Moderator: The Rev. Dr. Andrea White**

**Panelists: Bacary Tamba, Zainah Anwar, Sister Simone Campbell**

The panel *Aligning Religious Life With Equal Dignity and Human Rights* at the Carter Center's 2013 Human Rights Defenders Forum addressed the need for greater connection between the wonderful messages of equality in our sacred texts and the realities of women's lives in the world. Panelists shared their experiences and challenges working in three different corners of the world: Bacary Tamba from Senegal, national coordinator for Tostan and former parliamentarian; Zainah Anwar from Malaysia, founder of Sisters in Islam and Musawah; and Sister Simone Campbell from the United States, founder of NETWORK and the Nuns on the Bus movement. Moderator Rev. Dr. Andrea White of Emory University opened the discussion by quoting feminist theologian professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: "Readers of sacred texts need to learn how to claim their spiritual authority to assess both the oppressive as well as the liberating imaginations of the particular text and their interpretations."

**"If men and women are equal in the eyes of God, why are we not equal in the eyes of men?"**

**—Zainah Anwar**

The panelists discussed what it means to engage texts in this way as a method for pursuing justice and equality. "If men and women are equal in the eyes of

God, why are we not equal in the eyes of men?" asked Zainah Anwar of Sisters in Islam as she addressed the forum. Why is there a disconnect between the messages about justice in our sacred texts and the realities of women's lives in our world? Indeed, how

### Rereading Polygamy

The Qur'anic verses on polygamy [QS 4:3] say: And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry women of your choice, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then marry [only one] or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].

When rereading the sacred text from a feminist perspective, we are driven to ask why one part of this verse has become a popular reference as a source of law to justify men's rights to polygamy, while the recommendation to avoid injustice by marrying only one woman is ignored. Sheikh Mustapha Ibrahim of Ghana illustrated the need for open deliberation on matters of religion that are inclusive of women's lived experiences. While declaring that "we all agree that Islam is very clear; we are all equal before Allah Almighty," he demonstrated the sensitivity religious leaders develop when they target something they consider a tenet of faith. He justified polygamy on the basis of historical context, relating how Islam enforced limits and conditions on marriage when, at the time of the revelation, war and conflict left many women widowed with limited economic opportunities and no state protection, and he asserted the belief that polygamy was intended to be in the interest of women.

religious texts are understood is pivotal in shaping the practices, traditions, and laws of societies around the world. While inspiring altruism and the pursuit of social justice, sacred texts also are used to justify violence and discrimination. How can we encourage inclusive scholarship and interpretation that honor the central message of justice in the world's major faiths and traditional belief cultures? For, as Anwar remarked poignantly, "God is not God, if God is not just."

**"God is not God, if  
God is not just."**

**—Zainah Anwar**

## **Text and Love to Share: Rereading Sacred Texts for Women's Rights**

Anwar founded Sisters in Islam to work for a women's rights framework within Islam in Malaysia by leveraging the just and empowering messages present in the sacred text. Musawah, which she co-founded with Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, is a global movement seeking to work for equality and to expand this approach to other Muslim contexts. While acknowledging the important role for religious leaders in changing social norms, she highlighted the prevalence of cases in which religious leaders have aided unjust policies and authoritarian regimes, justifying oppression on religious grounds. The Qur'an is considered the word of God, and thus Islamic law is often defended as



Tom England

Mona Rishmawi (right) listens to Sister Simone Campbell of NETWORK share the story of the struggle of American Catholic sisters to carve out space for faith-driven social justice activism within their religious context.

infallible. However, as Anwar asserted, “This is a constructed myth, a myth that must be broken,” for this law is based on specific understandings and has been determined by human interlocutors.

Anwar and her colleagues are practitioners of “Islamic feminism,” which—although a highly contested and often-rejected label—attempts to describe efforts to reread the Qur’an through a feminist or gender-sensitive lens. Instead of depending on “what men said it said,” Anwar and her colleagues started asking rights-based questions of the text. They found that the text is very liberating. The Qur’an has many messages of justice and compassion, of men and women with equal rights and responsibilities before God. Then, they questioned, “Why should

### Living Polygamy Today

Zainah Anwar referenced a study that Sisters in Islam conducted with over 1,000 husbands, first and second wives, and children of polygamous marriages, which found that polygamy’s negative emotional, social, and economic impact was felt by all family members and lasted for decades. The testimony of Ella Musu Coleman, an activist from Liberia, illustrates these experiences: One wife, who was in a traditional polygamous marriage, shared with Coleman that while she was working very hard to support the entire family—brushing the trees, cutting the harvest, selling it in the market—her co-wife was doted on. After learning about her rights in a workshop with Coleman’s organization, the woman asked her husband to support her with the farming. The reality today is that polygamous marriage tends to impact families negatively. “Even men are miserable,” Anwar related. Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass of Senegal emphasized that polygamy is permissible but not obligatory and that it is subject to stipulations that should ensure it is mutually desired and socially beneficial. The just intent of religious doctrine is being lost in practice and sometimes deliberately abrogated with the misuse of excerpts of sacred text.



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Zainah Anwar of Sisters in Islam speaks about reading the Qur’an with a feminist lens.

men’s messages, men’s experiences, and men’s realities define how we should live our faith?” Realizing the overwhelming domination of pro-patriarchal interpretation, Sisters in Islam asserts that women’s voices and women’s experience of living Islam—as well as the actual impacts of the law on women—must be a source of authority and legitimacy in defining what religion means and how law is articulated.

Realigning religious life with the divine messages of justice and equality can be achieved by creating a culture of public debate on matters of religion and the meaning of equality. Sisters in Islam started this debate in Malaysia. “We were just eight women. How did we open 1,400 years of patriarchy based on religion? We did this by using the media. We started by writing letters to the editor on contentious issues,” she related. “We need to share with the public that there are diverse opinions within Islam, diverse interpretations in religion. If Islam is going to be used as a source of law in public policy, there has to be public discussion and debate; public law must be open to public debate.” Male religious leaders are often insulated from the realities facing women and

are slow to recognize and admit the abuses happening within their own communities. Yet when faced with the facts, they can be powerful allies in aligning practice with the ethical message of justice inherent in all religions. “Many feminists reject religion because they believe that religion is inherently unjust and patriarchal. Religion is not a source of change and liberation,” said Anwar. “But, as a believer, that is not an option for me. I need to reconcile my faith and my feminism.”

### Standing Between God and the People: Re-examining Religious Authority

Public debate can upset the status quo in religious institutions that are traditionally hierarchical. As Campbell related, “Public action creates internal tension.” Women’s perspectives are often formed by community-level experience, as caregivers to loved ones, organizers of charity, and deliverers



Dr. Mahmoud Azab discusses the position Al-Azhar has taken to encourage protection of the rights of youth, women, and minorities, given the more central role of religion in politics since the Egyptian Revolution began in 2011.

of humanitarian relief. Campbell shared how her organization, NETWORK, leveraged the grassroots authority derived from the historic role of Catholic sisters in setting up the first health care systems in the United States. The organization was founded to advocate for systemic change, responding to their bishop’s call “to move from doing charity to doing justice.”

The U.S. health care system founded by women is now controlled by men and serves more to generate profits than health. In 2010, NETWORK was involved in supporting the health reform bill before the U.S. Congress, citing the fact that more than 52 million people in the country living without health care is immoral. Though the Catholic Health Association also supported the bill, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops came out in opposition, causing what media called the first such public political divergence within the Catholic community.

Campbell’s experience confirms Rishmawi’s assertion that the real fight is about culture, not faith. “Catholic bishops have become ideologically identified with the so-called pro-life movement in our country—which is actually more like pro-birth than pro-life,” she said. While the bishops objected on the grounds that the bill will allow federal funding of abortion, Campbell and others did not read that meaning in the bill. She argues, “It was straight politics.” The bill passed, and the Affordable Care Act is now law.

In 2012, the Vatican censured NETWORK—along with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the association of leaders representing the majority of Catholic sisters in the United States—accusing them of refusing to promote church doctrine that opposes abortion and gay marriage but rather promoting “radical feminist themes.” Campbell’s response was, “What an honor!” While the notoriety came as a shock, she was able to turn the moment into a resource for their mission. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious had to carry out difficult work with the leaders of their faith, so NETWORK, as an organization not directly connected to the Vatican, took up the public mantle, giving them space for that work. This leveraging

Tom England

of relative institutional positions allows them to “stand where people are and move the mission as far as possible.”

**“Joy is released when we touch the pain of our time.”**

**—Sister Simone Campbell**

Determined not to allow the rift with the bishops to interfere with NETWORK’s larger mission, Campbell created Nuns on the Bus, a road trip across the country to draw attention to the larger issues where there is common agreement between the sisters and the bishops. The bus tour focused on “comprehensive common sense [and] compassionate immigration reform” and then on speaking out against Congressman Paul Ryan’s proposed budget, which slashes services for the poor. The sisters were aided in this effort by a letter from their bishop declaring that the Ryan budget failed the basic moral test. In reflecting on the importance of standing with the oppressed and marginalized in society, Campbell lifted the hearts of the participants, saying, “Joy is released when we touch the pain of our time.” It was a statement that reverberated with many for the rest of the conference. In conclusion, Campbell offered that “women’s leadership has surprising things happening to it in my faith tradition” and, “As a person of faith in our democratic culture, I expect to use my voice and to be required to use my voice, and our text mandates that I use my voice”!

## Mainstreaming Male Alliances

Inclusive public discourse and the empowerment of women in spheres of leadership are central to the reorientation of religious institutions to promote women’s rights and social justice for all. As Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass recommended, “Men need to support women in the issue of equality by sometimes just being silent.” With men occupying



Tom England

Sheikh Mustapha Ibrahim, a member of the delegation of the National Chief Imam of Ghana, discusses the effect of polygamy on families today.

the most powerful positions in government, business, and religious institutions the world over, active alliances are key and, at times, need to take the form of consciously leaving space for women to lead. Tamba, a former parliamentarian and national coordinator for Tostan in Senegal, reflected on the futility of juxtaposing men and women: “This is a fight for humanity. It is a problem for all of us human beings to change.” No man exists in a vacuum, nor does a community exist independent of its female members, insisted Tamba. Tostan operates on the principle that the welfare of women, mothers, wives, and sisters impacts community well-being, a common value that often subordinates individual rights. Through dialogue and education, Tostan has helped communities redefine women’s rights as a central aspect of community health, eliminating the practice of female genital cutting on that basis.

Women are often equally implicated in the perpetuation of harmful practices such as female genital

cutting. Tamba shared that at first his work against the ancestral practice was strongly opposed by his community, which reprimanded him, saying, “Stop talking about that; you are a man; it is none of your business. This is holy; we cannot discuss this”! Even his family begged him to stop his advocacy, afraid of people’s wrath. Yet, he continued with conviction that came from knowing that there is no passage in the Bible or the Qur’an that mandates female genital cutting. Tamba emphasized the importance

**“Men need to support women in the issue of equality by sometimes just being silent.”**

*—Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass*

of education to redress ignorance, arguing, “All religions will be well-practiced if people are educated.” His work, he says, “stirs up the earth”: The ground is the spirit of the people, and personal conviction activates change.

Tamba articulated three types of norms—social, legal, and personal—emphasizing the potency of individuals who make choices based on personal moral conviction. This sentiment is reflected in his own choices. When questioned on the motivation of men to work against what can be viewed as their own male privilege and about his own motivation to take the risk in pursuing social change, Tamba responded, “I do this because I believe it is a problem for everyone, men and women.”

As Mona Rishmawi, representative of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, asked in her opening remarks, “Why is it that religious leaders



Ella Musu Coleman, seated next to Chief Zanzan Karwor, shares her organization’s efforts to empower women to assert their rights within polygamous traditional marriages in Liberia.

Tom England



Tom England

Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass reminds the group that polygamy is not an obligation in Islam and should only be permitted under certain conditions that guarantee the rights of women entering into such marriages.

cannot stand up for women and say violence is a sin?" Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, an Islamic scholar and co-founder of Musawah, asserts, "Religion is not free from power, and culture is not free from power. When we speak about religious leaders, they are a product of their culture, and this culture is patriarchal. Patriarchy existed long before the coming of religion."

Mir-Hosseini and Imam Mohamed Magid spoke about the challenge of confronting the common perception that human rights has become a tool for promoting Western interests. The international community's mild response to the aggressive wars and abuses perpetrated by the United States in pursuit of

the "war on terror" has led to an erosion of the legitimacy of the human rights mandate. Tamba reminded the group that "anywhere you find war, rights are trampled," and since decisions to go to war are made by men, it is men who must make a greater effort to seek peaceful ways of resolving conflicts.

**"Religion is not free from power, and culture is not free from power. When we speak about religious leaders, they are a product of their culture, and this culture is patriarchal. Patriarchy existed long before the coming of religion."**

**—Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini**

There are positive examples of leadership within religious institutions. President Carter commended the involvement of the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, the historic center of Sunni religious learning in Egypt, in advocating for full freedoms in Egypt's Constitution and pushing forward a declaration on women's rights. In these efforts, the Grand Imam has collaborated with Pope Tawadros of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church, civil society, women's rights organizations, and activists, respectively. President Carter stated, "The Grand Imam is under tremendous pressure from more conservative forces in his faith, but he is courageous."

## **Opening Space, Removing Violence**

Space for inclusive, public debate on the relationship among social norms, public policy, and religion is imperative. Yet media around the world, which are more interested in conflict than in positive stories, are left to frame the discussion. Part of the problem

is that women, and also men, are afraid of entering politics and being in the public eye. As Ritu Sharma, president and founder of Women Thrive Worldwide, shared, “The other side has guns, zeal, and power. They will use violence.” She illustrated how real the fear is for women, from activists in Afghanistan and Iraq who receive threats every day to those who fear backlash from news media if they speak out on controversial issues in the United States. Campbell, while traveling the country with Nuns on the Bus, found that “while all faiths tell us ‘fear not,’ society is controlled by fear—fear of the other, fear of attack.” Sharma responded, “Yes, scripture talks to power, but when power has a gun, how do we strengthen, protect, and inspire our nonviolent movements to stand strong in the face of the zealous, radical movements on the other side?” Anwar highlighted the importance of opening the space for public debate before it is completely closed by violence in places such as Pakistan and Afghanistan where “death awaits you.” Every time Sisters in Islam is publicly attacked, they use it as an opportunity to widen public awareness on those controversies, eventually garnering a huge public constituency and public resonance to their work.

Rishmawi contended that “it will all be sorted out the moment violence is finished.” In the meantime, human rights defenders exhibit extraordinary bravery driven by their faith. Exemplifying this, Campbell said, “My heart has broken for people who have experienced injustice. And when my heart is broken, what is fear to me? Living for me, in a Christian context, is living out the Gospel. Jesus was all about going to places where people ache and hurt, so how can I not? Too often we focus on the fear and less on the need. Faith is always about walking, willingly, into trouble.”

**“Yes, scripture talks to power,  
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and inspire our nonviolent  
movements to stand strong in  
the face of the zealous, radical  
movements on the other side?”**

**—Ritu Sharma**

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## Panel II

# Trafficking as Modern-Day Slavery

**Moderator: Aaronde Creighton**

**Panelists: Pastor Paul Palmer, Dr. Fulata Moyo, and Cheryl Deluca-Johnson**

The panel Trafficking as Modern-Day Slavery: People of Faith Arise focused on the responses of religious communities to human trafficking, in particular of women and children for sex. “The issue of human trafficking is one that concerns every country on earth, and Atlanta, in particular, is a major hub because we have the busiest airport in the world,” Karin Ryan of The Carter Center stated in her introduction, drawing the link between the global

significance and local resonance of this problem.

The panelists, Pastor Paul Palmer, founder of the Atlanta Dream Center; Cheryl Deluca-Johnson of Street Grace; and Dr. Fulata Moyo of the World Council of Churches discussed how they each have used the resources their faith offers, both personal and communal, to guide their work.

Moderator Aaronde Creighton of Street Grace opened the session by transporting us to Goree Island, an infamous point of departure for African slaves in Dakar, Senegal, where President and Mrs. Obama visited recently: “A photographer captured an image of the Obamas at the ‘door of no return.’ Many people



Tom England

Aaronde Creighton, moderator of the panel Trafficking as Modern-Day Slavery: People of Faith Arise, listens as Fulata Moyo of the World Council of Churches gives her remarks.

think there is no contemporary trafficking problem and that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was the end of large-scale human trafficking. Today, at any one time, there are approximately 2.4 million victims of human trafficking worldwide. According to the United Nations, this is a \$32 billion criminal enterprise. Victims, 75 percent of whom are women and girls, are treated as products and commodities. Many, unfortunately, have walked through their own door of no return.” The dehumanization of women and the problematic expressions of masculinity that facilitate these issues were themes that ran throughout the forum. Participants emphasized that religious leaders have a responsibility to defend the most downtrodden among us, and they engaged in a discussion of the faith-based resources that each has used in their work. Creighton declared, “If there was ever an opportunity for the faith community to come together and end modern-day slavery, it is now.”

**“If there was ever an opportunity for the faith community to come together and end modern-day slavery, it is now.”**

—Aaronde Creighton

### **Scripture As a Manual for Daily Life**

Moyo, leader of the Women in Church and Society program of the World Council of Churches, works on developing understandings of scripture and theology that will help member churches take part in raising awareness against the dehumanization of women. She related the origins of her intimate relationship with the Bible, which started with her childhood in Malawi: “My mother did not have much education, but she had a Tumbuka translation of the Bible next to her pillow. The first thing she did every day was read the Bible. Seeing how it influenced her decisions

over and over again, I realized that to her the Bible was contextually an African book. It was a manual for daily life. It answered her questions.” Moyo, who had never identified with Christianity because as a child of her father’s third wife she was not accepted by the church, explained that when she became curious about the book, her mother told her to read it for herself. As a result, Moyo had to take her own meaning from the text, a lesson for which she is grateful.

This interaction of an individual with the text—the reader relating the author’s experience to his or her own life—is “contextual Bible study,” the brainchild of liberation theology. Moyo shared an experience that helped her see the potential and the need for working with the scripture. In Thailand, during a group visit to a center for women and girls who have been rescued from trafficking, she met a young girl who was pregnant. She had been abused by three successive men who had first promised her transportation. The emptiness in the girl’s gaze haunted Moyo. Those ministering to her were teaching the value of forgiveness that they understood from scripture, without listening to what she felt or needed.

Moyo was troubled by this, believing that the girl needed compassion and support rather than insensitive religious lessons. She believed that using the methodology of contextual Bible study, alternative scriptural understandings that resonate more strongly with individuals’ experiences can be generated. During Bible study following this visit, the group read the book of Ruth as a text on the trafficking of women and girls, asking questions about the deprivation that leads women to risk their lives to become victims of trafficking. A participant reflected that Ruth and Naomi were two women who suffered from deprivation. They were so deprived that Naomi instructed young Ruth to “lay at the feet of Boaz,” according to the scripture, which in Hebrew means to offer oneself for sexual relations. Naomi could be seen not unlike the traffickers—especially the women who facilitate trafficking—because most of them are also very desperate, and they feel that they have no

choice but to use someone else. This is an example of the powerful relevance of scripture to the lives of the suffering.

There is a powerful message of love at the center of the faith traditions. Palmer spoke about the inspiration and sustenance he gains from his reading of this message in scripture. The Bible says, “They will know you by your love for one another—not just loving others in the faith world, but loving the unlovely.” This principle drives the work of the Out of Darkness program at the Atlanta Dream Center founded by Palmer. The group goes to neighborhoods and befriends those who are being sold on the street for sex, which Palmer sees as an opportunity to reach into a world that seems destitute. He says, “I am an advocate not only for women and boys in the sex industry, but for everyone who seems to have been forgotten.” He emphasizes the need to take immediate action as individuals when needed to redress the

plight of humanity. He concluded, “It is a duty of all of us as Christian leaders to suffer the consequences, to step into uncomfortable situations. As Sister Simone Campbell said, ‘Some people and some things are worth dying for. If you have to step into danger because you have a call from God and a duty to love others, so be it.’”

### Preaching to Perpetrators

Moyo ended her remarks with the questions, “Do you have Ruths and Naomis in your community, and what are their stories?” and “As a faith community, what do you do about their stories?” The answer is that perpetrators and victims are in all of our communities. Deluca-Johnson shared how in her experience, people in the United States tend to think their communities are insulated from such problems. However, the data shows that buyers are often from affluent communities. This finding helped the Atlanta coalition devise



Tom England

Aaronde Creighton (left) of Street Grace introduces Pastor Paul Palmer and Cheryl Deluca-Johnson.

strategies to crack down on demand through more severe criminal penalties for pimps and customers. The example she presented was that in 2000, the criminal penalty for selling a 12-year-old child was only a \$50 fine and a misdemeanor. Through collaboration with religious communities, the Georgia law was changed in 2011 to increase the penalty to potential fines up to \$100,000 and up to life in prison for anyone who would traffic a child.

Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite asked, “What are the most compelling passages and principles on which religious leaders can preach, because the buyers are in our pews and our congregations on the weekends.” She said that the inclination to blame and shame is not, in her experience, an effective strategy. “Buyers do not wake up and think they want to go out and buy children. They start with something else, perhaps pornography or their own abuse as children,” Palmer responded, indicating that this is a broader struggle against abusive expressions of masculinity.

**“It is a duty of all of us as Christian leaders to suffer the consequences, to step into uncomfortable situations. As Sister Simone Campbell said, ‘Some people and some things are worth dying for. If you have to step into danger because you have a call from God and a duty to love others, so be it.’”**

**—Pastor Paul Palmer**

Uncontrolled lust was identified as a struggle for which our society and religious leaders have failed to prepare men. Panelists cited examples of ways the objectification of women has become culturally

acceptable. In workshops preceding the open forum, delegates explored in depth the question of masculinity and the oppressive masculine customs that our society has accepted as inevitable. Molly Melching said that though everyone would say they are against sex trafficking, it is accepted on some level and excused, using the fallacy that men are “just like this.” Citing this as a failure of religious leaders, Palmer asserted, “We have not taught men that we need to honor women as our sisters. We have failed in religious leadership because we have assumed that this is just what young men are going to go through. Take a stand and say ‘No more.’”

**“We have not taught men that we need to honor women as our sisters. We have failed in religious leadership because we have assumed that this is just what young men are going to go through. Take a stand and say ‘No more.’”**

**—Pastor Paul Palmer**

Imam Magid highlighted that Islam is strong on this issue, with verses of the Qur’an designated against any abuse or exchange of money in sexual relations. The Islamic prohibition on sexual relations outside of marriage and focus on controlling one’s sexual impulses can be seen as strategies for confronting the problem of uncontrollable lust. However, the focus on strict control of sexuality has been frequently targeted as a driver of sexual harassment and misconduct by youth. This position reveals the societal assumption that men do not have self-control and cannot control their lust. As a society, we need to resurrect awareness that lust is not the same thing as love.



Tom England

Pastor Paul Palmer of the Atlanta Dream Center speaks about the failure of faith leaders to address the uncontrollable lust that drives men to buy sex.

## Strategies for a World on Fire

The work that many of the participants do is highly controversial in many religious communities. As an example, Ruth Messinger noted the projects the American Jewish World Service runs to support sex workers as part of its anti-trafficking campaign. “We have to answer ethical questions about how we can support this,” Moyo responded. “We live in a world of such disparity that the only commodity some women have is their body. If we cannot change that disparity, then we have no option but to be on the streets with those women as well as with women who are in the pews.” As Messinger stated, “The world is burning,” and in such a context people make decisions they would never make if they had true choices.

**“We live in a world of such disparity that the only commodity some women have is their body. If we cannot change that disparity, then we have no option but to be on the streets with those women as well as with women who are in the pews.”**

—Fulata Moyo



Tom England

Fulata Moyo of the World Council of Churches explains a powerful example of how sacred texts can be read to help us understand and address deprivation and dehumanization of women.

Imam Magid illustrated the global scope of human trafficking, drawing the connection to the “legalized trafficking” of the Middle East, where the freedom of foreign workers is in the hands of their employer and sponsor. Residence laws in many countries enable the employer to hold the employee’s passport, restrict their movement, and deport them at any time. These workers enter a country legally but are often sexually, physically, and psychologically abused by those who employ them, with little to no recourse to the law for

protection. Refugees are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking and abuse, and host countries are reluctant to prosecute their own citizens for abuses. “I have seen children rescued as victims of war, only to be abused by those who were supposed to protect them,” Imam Magid related, calling for legal reform to enable the prosecution of those who victimize refugees. Deluca-Johnson advised thinking of legal reform as a part of a holistic process to change social norms, because laws should reflect the ethics of society.

The delegates agreed that bringing together broad coalitions of faith communities requires focus on narrow issues of agreement. This strategy is powerful, for it allows groups divided by doctrine to collaborate on shared imperatives. As an example, Larisa Friesen Hall of Sojourners cited the coalition of evangelicals that came together around immigration reform: “A

surprising group initially came together on a narrow issue, and eventually we were able to expand to address a broader issue.” Similarly, Street Grace has been able to mobilize many churches around the narrow topic of domestic minor sex trafficking, achieving success by making sure the language used did not dishonor or alienate any church who wanted to collaborate. There are competition and politics among faith-based organizations, but by forging unlikely partnerships we can open the possibility of dialogue about those differences and find common cause. “The only opponents we have are men and women who are buying sex with children and with adults as well,” Creighton said, concluding the panel with a quote from 18th century abolitionist William Wilberforce: “You may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say you did not know.”

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### Panel III

# The Normalization of Violence and Impact of War on Women

**Moderator: Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite**

**Panelists: Claudia Furaha Nfundiko, Frances Greaves, Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani, and Jeremy Courtney**

The Normalization of Violence and Impact of War on Women panel explored examples that illustrate how violence has been accepted as normal in society. Challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,



Tom England

Imam Mohamed Magid reflects on ways religious institutions and leaders can pressure their governments to uphold human rights laws.

Liberia, and Iraq were presented by panelists Claudia Furaha Nfundiko of the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Frances Greaves, founder of Voice of the Voiceless in Liberia; Iraqi pediatrician Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani; and Jeremy Courtney, founder of the Preemptive Love Coalition. Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and professor of theology at Chicago Theological Seminary, moderated the discussion in which participants from many countries added examples of insights, drawing important connections about the impact of war and militarization across regions.

Thistlethwaite began by describing a “just peace” concept developed by Christian theologians, later developing into a global interfaith book outlining 10 steps that increase peace, reduce violence, and promote justice. The courageous work of the panelists, she suggested, exemplifies such practices. Thistlethwaite said, “This I know from decades as a peace activist: that violence loves the lie. It calls war security. It calls missiles peacekeepers. It calls the battering of women submission or God’s will. In the “just peace” practice, we must say, ‘No, you are not telling the truth. The truth about war is that it has an exacerbated impact on women. Militarism is undeniably a women’s issue, as it is an issue for all those who profess peace.’”

The panel was brought together to discuss the normalization of violence and war in our society, yet what emerged was a dialogue that delved into the deepest recesses of human nature, examining the role of trust and truth, humility, and forgiveness. Both state and individual violence were examined, along with the role of the individual in taking a stand against both. Advocating for peace does not



Tom England

(Left to right) President Carter, Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite, Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani, and Jeremy Courtney hear reactions to the presentations of the panel *The Normalization of Violence and the Impact of War on Women: How to Normalize Peace and Human Rights*.

require special skills or expert knowledge but simply conviction, as the extraordinary life work of these human rights defenders illustrates. The moderator quoted Nelson Mandela, someone who grew up under normalized violence himself, who said that “a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying,” introducing the speakers as those who just keep on trying.

## The Impact of War on Women

As a stark example of the untold impact of war on women, Al-Alaani, a pediatrician at Fallujah General Hospital in Iraq, testified as a witness and messenger from “Iraq’s Hiroshima,” as she described it. Al-Alaani illustrated the crisis facing her city, relating the story of Fallujah’s mothers: Women in Fallujah have different educational levels and different ideologies, but they all share the same fear: congenital malformation.

**“Sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war, and the bodies of women are considered open for use and abuse.”**

**—Claudia Furaha Nfundiko**

“Due to the wars, death, blood, sanctions, and poverty, people in Iraq have not had a chance to educate themselves and become enlightened. In such a society, the mother suffers the blame, either explicitly or implicitly, for bearing a malformed child.” Fourteen percent of newborns in Fallujah are born with various kinds of congenital birth defects, she said. She indicated that research has shown high numbers of birth defects have been caused by the use

of depleted uranium munitions during the assault on her city, creating over half of the already high infant mortality in Fallujah. The result, she said, is “the dream of being a mother turning into a nightmare.”

**Incredulous that her country has earned the label “rape capital of the world,” Nfundiko related that the beautiful culture and diversity of the Congolese people are being manipulated to fuel the war instead of being valued for its richness.**

Claudia Furaha Nfundiko declared that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “Sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war, and the bodies of women are considered open for use and abuse.” She shared that rape has touched entire communities, targeting men and boys also, but mostly women, who risk pregnancy and ostracism for both themselves and their “children of the enemy.” Incredulous that her country has earned the label “rape capital of the world,” she related that the beautiful culture and diversity of the Congolese people are being manipulated to fuel the war instead of being valued for its richness. Untapped by the Congolese people due to lack of infrastructure and functioning governance, the natural abundance of the Congo is being exploited by corrupt officials, militias backed by U.S. allies—including neighboring Rwanda and other nations—as well as by foreign corporations, some of which have become complicit in financing the war economy. Nfundiko called on faith leaders to act, citing how women from different faiths and religious organizations have come together to appeal for peace. While the Catholic Church, the largest religious institution in the country, has initiated programs to

assist victims of sexual violence in three of the provinces, much more is needed. She asserted, “It is time for religious leadership to take a stand and advocate for justice and peace.”

## Truth Telling

Frances Greaves, founder of Voice of the Voiceless, detailed the role women played in bringing an end to the Liberian civil war and the work of her organization and others to ensure the inclusion of women in the peace-building process. Greaves emphasized the importance of their participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for changing attitudes about sexual violence. The truth is often uncomfortable, she suggested, but “to consolidate peace, you and your society must face reality,” she insisted. In Liberia, Greaves worked to raise the voices of women so that they could testify about the gruesome acts of violence that were perpetrated against them and other members of Liberian society.

**“To consolidate peace, you and your society must face reality.”**

**—Frances Greaves**

We must empower people to tell their own truths, for as Pewee Flomoku of the Carter Center’s Liberia program remarked, “We who speak on their behalf will not always be around to speak for them. They must have the opportunity and platform to speak for themselves so their voices are heard forever.” The institutional incorporation of gender justice, so vital to the healing of Liberian society—from health provisions for survivors of sexual abuse to legal reform on issues like rape and inheritance to political participation—was possible only because women successfully rewrote a narrative that had excused and normalized sexual violence in society by sharing their own stories. It is an incomplete victory in that much that Liberian women have worked to change has yet

to be set into law, but it is an example of what can be achieved through inclusive peacebuilding.

Calling for transparency, Al-Alaani exemplified the strength of individuals who speak truth to power, whatever their position may be: “On behalf of the women of Fallujah, I call on the U.S. and U.K. governments to disclose information regarding all types of weapons used during the occupation and to take the necessary measures to protect the right to life and health of the Iraqi people if an environmental contamination is found.”



Tom England

Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani, a pediatrician at Fallujah General Hospital, details the rise in congenital birth defects following the Iraq War.

Palwasha Kakar, a women’s rights activist from Afghanistan, responded by revealing they are witnessing similar systemic health problems in her country. Al-Alaani’s response was to say that logically the same impacts of war would be experienced in Iraq and Afghanistan because these two wars were conducted by the same nations. Sister Simone Campbell, whose organization brought a delegation of Iraqi women to speak before the U.S. Congress, articulated that space for women’s voices to be heard is vital, “because too often those who control policy never have to deal with the consequences of their choices, but women do.” John 8:32 says: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” We need to hear the truth about the violence perpetrated by, and in, our own societies.”

### Normalizing Peace: Building Trust with Humility

In times of war and conflict, as many scholars have examined, outsiders are often considered enemies, and societies tend to hold on to conservative traditions



Tom England

Jeremy Courtney, a founder of the Preemptive Love Coalition, asserts that humility is necessary for the normalization of peace, calling on religious leaders to guide us in the absence of moral leadership by our politicians.



Alhaji Khuzaima Mohammed Osman, executive secretary of the National Chief Imam of Ghana, reacts to the panel on the Normalization of Violence and the Impact of War on Women, calling it a “moment of truth.”

and identities, defending them with intensified vigilance. The weight of this societal regression falls disproportionately upon women, who often represent the identity and projected dignity of the community. This irony was discussed by the group: that wars waged in the name of promoting human rights and democracy may have the opposite effect of entrenching outworn and repressive cultural practices.

Courtney shared that in Iraq “everyone distrusted everyone, it seemed, at the height of the conflict, making every interaction open to suspicion and fear.” Yet, with dedicated effort, people can overcome fear to build relationships and plant the seeds of trust.

Courtney related a story of what he calls “preemptive love.” A father was forced to place his ailing daughter in the hands of a surgeon from another sect, and “the enemy doctor,” the doctor who never should have been trusted, saved her life. The father had

taken a risk against all odds and walked into enemy territory to love his daughter. The surgeon had taken a great risk to dislodge one of his own people and provide surgery for an outsider. Through necessity, driven by love, they were able to see the truth about the other and achieve “forgiveness, reconciliation, and a normalization of peace.” Campbell responded to Al-Alaani’s story by committing to do what she can to raise awareness about the aftermath of the war in Iraq, saying, “When your heart breaks on behalf of someone else, what is fear?”

“How do we normalize peace? The corollary question is ‘How can you eat an elephant?’ Answer: One bite at a time. One step at a time,” Courtney asserted. He acknowledged the desire for revenge he felt following the attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, and how that led him, as many others, to support a war of aggression that devastated the

**“If we want to normalize peace,  
we have to normalize humility.  
We have to normalize the ability  
to say we were wrong.”**

**—Jeremy Courtney**

lives of millions of Iraqis. “If we want to normalize peace, we have to normalize humility,” he said. “We have to normalize the ability to say we were wrong.” Religious leaders from Ghana and Senegal were deeply moved by this statement, recounting their challenges when speaking about human rights within their own communities because of the suspicion that it represents a Western concept, imposed from the outside. The expressions of humility and truthfulness about the impact of America’s wars would go a long way to build trust and open the hearts of others in the

effort to build a universal movement for human rights and peace, they said.

Calling the forum “a moment of truth,” Alhaji Khuzaima Mohammed Osman reacted to this call for acknowledgment and acceptance of responsibility, sharing that many in Muslim communities are reluctant to reveal “glaring facts” about the impact of military intervention and counterterrorism policy for fear of being labeled terrorists. The use of drones is a clear example of the disastrous impacts, which Mossarat Qadeem described as including not only the loss of civilian lives but also the spread of fear and increased radicalization. President Carter expressed his agreement, condemning the use of drones as “counterproductive.”

Distilling the collective sentiment of these assembled believers, Courtney appealed to religious leaders as “the people who should be leading this conversation above all else, for if our religious communities can’t lead the conversation on this, then our religion is absolutely worthless to us.”

## Panel IV

# From Local to Global: Connecting Religious Study, Action, and Advocacy

**Moderator:** Ritu Sharma

**Panelists:** Imam Mohamed Magid,  
Professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,  
and Dr. Laurie Zoloth

In the final session of the 2013 Human Rights Defenders Forum, *From Local to Global: Connecting Religious Study, Action, and Advocacy*, forum participants attempted to capture the essential ideas, relationships, and commitments that had emerged in the preceding days of robust exchange, profound storytelling, and call to action. The panelists were Imam Mohamed Magid, president of the Islamic Society of North America; professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Kristen Stendahl Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School; and Dr. Laurie Zoloth, president-elect of the American Academy of Religion and a professor at Northwestern University. Inspiring and expansive in their scope, the panelists reflected on the momentum generated by the forum and sought to reaffirm the commitment to purpose that binds

the forum participants and their work to each other. Moderator Sharma began the conversation by issuing a challenge to the room, asking, “What are you going to do when you leave here today?”

## A Commitment to Work from Within

The importance of working from within—as well as across different faiths and together with secular organizations and structures—cannot be overemphasized. Magid began by relating that “the challenge for a religious leader is to be able to address this issue in the language that their community understands,” suggesting that leaders should begin by working with their own colleagues, leaders, and activists on the ground in their own communities. By forging a united voice of activists and religious leaders through translating concepts and language for the local context, communities can overcome superficial differences and create space for grappling with some of the more difficult issues, including problematic sacred texts.



President Carter and Mona Rishmawi listen to professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza present on feminist theology during the panel *From Local to Global: Connecting Religious Study, Action, and Advocacy*.

Magid argues that instead of always and only turning to friendly texts, religious leaders and scholars must address those texts that have been misused through discussion and examination of alternative interpretations. As Susan Thistlethwaite suggested, the forum workshops produced vibrant analyses of sacred texts that can be the beginning of a body of work used in future trainings on religious foundations for women's rights.

**Disadvantaged and disillusioned youth are looking for messages of justice and meaning to guide them, and in the absence of compelling messages of peace and justice, youth will gravitate toward those who give them answers and potential for redressing the injustices in their lives.**

Participants noted that religious leaders are often privately supportive of their work but face real difficulty in bringing along more conservative congregations. In many cases, the tone of interpretations or translations of scripture and educational materials is determined by those with the most institutional resources. For example, due to extensive subsidies from Saudi Arabia, a relatively conservative interpretation of the Holy Qur'an has become the most widely available version. Though the Qur'anic Arabic text remains consistent—as Muslims believe it to be the literal word of God—human interlocution embedded in translation word choice and, most significantly, in annotations that relate to interpretation and historical context dramatically influences the reading of the text. Palwasha Kakar stressed the importance

of making available progressive writing and videos in local languages, declaring that the conference had convinced her to publish her work in Afghanistan, despite the real threat such exposure could cause. While tools and resources are part of the solution, respectful and inclusive discourse is vital. As Dr. Salah-eddin Elgawhary of the Biblioteca Alexandrina pointed out, “Discussion should bring forward progressive interpretation of the relevant scripture without attacking the opposite point of view. Religious interpretation has to come from within.”

Engaging with youth was highlighted as especially important considering the youth demographic bulge in many societies around the world. The need to bring forward positive religious interpretations and messages in a way that reaches youth was acknowledged as especially important in an age when violent and extremist voices are actively appealing to youth on the Internet. Disadvantaged and disillusioned youth are looking for messages of justice and meaning to guide them, and in the absence of compelling messages of peace and justice, youth will gravitate toward those who give them answers and potential for redressing the injustices in their lives. Sharma asked: “How do you engage young people—young leaders, both men and women—in redefining Islam for them and putting it in the context of justice for all, including women?” Participants gave various suggestions, from virtual imams and mentorship programs to a conference of university chaplains on the issue. Chief Zanzan Karwor of Liberia summed up the need for leadership that is inclusive of women and youth: “Take time before you talk and consult with youth, women, and your people before you take action. If you don't consult with your people before you take action, you have a problem.”

### **Encouraging Accountability and Transparency in Religious Leadership**

There was a consensus around the need to invest in and train leaders and for those in authority to lead their communities with courage. Several times, participants reminded others of the dangers of hypocrisy

to erode the moral authority of religious institutions, leadership, and activists. Joséphine Ngalula related how Catholic priests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have engaged in political activity that legitimizes the undemocratic system, which is perpetuating the conflict and grave human rights abuses occurring in the country. She appealed for religious leaders to uphold the moral standards they espouse.

As Alhaji Khuzaima of Ghana noted, the perception of ethical integrity is critical to effective collaboration with religious communities: We want to believe that defenders of human rights live up

to the principles they have set up. When we meet those who claim they are Muslims and are defending human rights, and when we find that they are often not living up to Muslim expectations, we feel backed against a corner.

Quite controversially, Muslim women not covering their hair was cited as an example, reinforcing the point that perceptions of conformity with religious mores are often the measure, even with traditions that are highly contested within the religion, such as the hijab in Islam. The principle of working within is worth reiterating here. In Ghana, it is difficult for religious leaders to work with those who appear impious based on the expectations of that community. This is a reality of collaboration; while leaders may understand the complexities of different practices, they often feel they have to conform to certain expectations.

### Key Approaches

- Translate this discussion for our local contexts and into local languages.
- Beginning with our colleagues, religious leaders and activists should work together to raise a united voice.
- Build partnerships within community and consult with community members.
- Include women scholars in conversations about reforming jurisprudence and theology.
- Build the capacity of religious leaders to engage the political system and do grassroots mobilization for human rights and nonviolence.
- Promote progressive interpretations without attacking the opposing view.
- Expand focus to include duties and responsibilities toward women, as opposed to a sole focus on rights.
- Insist on justice; don't just advocate.
- Find common value to enable interfaith and interdenominational work.
- Always work to advance nonviolence in all areas of life—from the home to law enforcement to foreign policy—and link this idea with the advancement of girls and women.
- Expose journalists, policymakers, secular activists, and diplomats to the linkages between religion and human rights.

**Individuals with religious authority have a duty to ensure that religious communities are upholding their own principles of equality and justice for women and men alike.**

Working with leaders to develop greater awareness and acceptance of diverse expressions of faith and piety is the way to shift cultural norms toward greater inclusiveness. Progressive Islamic scholars and activists vigorously contested this statement, and it was agreed that continuing the conversation in the future is necessary and desirable in order to make progress. It was noted that the emergence of these issues demonstrated that participants are being deeply honest about what lies ahead in reconciling human rights with religion, once again returning to the importance of proceeding with truthfulness and humility.



Melinda Holmes

Ritu Sharma (left) moderates the panel From Local to Global: Connecting Religious Study, Action, and Advocacy with Imam Mohamed Magid and Dr. Laurie Zoloth.

Magid highlighted the need for transparency about violence within communities and accountability of religious leaders for their conduct. Individuals with religious authority have a duty to ensure that religious communities are upholding their own principles of equality and justice for women and men alike. He gave an example of a declaration that was signed by imams after they participated in trainings on domestic violence: “The challenge was to get this signed declaration in front of every mosque, so that when a man or a woman walked in, they would see it, making our private talk public.” Such visible support for the rights of women and other marginalized groups is incredibly powerful. Even subtle gestures like introducing the community to members working to prevent and redress abuses constitute important emotional support from leadership and can open up public discussion about difficult issues that are often kept silent.

The need for cross-disciplinary learning was repeatedly made clear. Dr. Sita Ranchod-Nilsson stated, “It is important to invest in building the relationships between scholars, activists, and religious leaders,” noting that “we share goals of social, gender justice, and human rights, though our benchmarks along the way may be different.”

Participants expressed the need for religious leaders to be trained in human rights and in ways to leverage

their own civic rights and leadership platforms to pressure those with political power to address abuses. Ruth Messinger articulated this recommendation: “Train religious leaders about how to mobilize others, how to move outside the top-down approach of preaching. Not every religious leader knows how to get people together to move on an issue.” Yet, there are powerful bases for social justice activism present in the texts and traditions of the Abrahamic faiths. Fiorenza asserted that we must not simply advocate but must insist on justice. Relating the story of the Persistent Widow from Luke 18:1–8, Fiorenza said, “She battered the judge, the unjust judge, until he got tired of her and gave her justice,” explaining that the common reading of this text shifts the emphasis away from demanding social justice and toward quiet resilience and prayer. It is always dangerous when this shift takes place. Justice is too easily forgotten in religion.”

**“We need to focus on duties rather than only on rights, roles, and responsibilities.”**

—Palwasha Kakar

## Building Partnerships and Coalitions

Participants emphasized the reciprocal relationship between rights and responsibilities that is often understated. As Zoloth declared, “I believe there are no human rights without human duties.” In societies in which humility is emphasized in community relations, the language of rights-based advocacy can be perceived to clash with local values. “We need to focus also on duties rather than only on rights, roles, and responsibilities,” asserted Palwasha Kakar, a women’s rights activist from Afghanistan. Reclaiming the language of dignity for justice and empowerment of women is necessary for, as Fiorenza related, “In my Roman Catholic context, dignity is used against women’s rights.” If a woman is dignified, it is often said, she would not behave in a certain way. But, as Sharma noted, this is not a characteristic limited to religious institutions. “We’ve seen this at work in U.S. politics—the difference between respecting women and empowering women. Those with power have often used language to deny equality in practice

by focusing on equality in principle,” she said. Others worry that a focus on duties instead of rights contributes to a view that a person can forfeit his or her fundamental rights if he/she does not behave according to social norms. All agreed that rights and duties should be addressed together as foundation of community well-being.

Part of working in diverse contexts is learning to frame issues differently for different people without losing hold of principle. The normative sensibilities of groups vary widely depending on their lived realities and exposure to various legal and intellectual regimes. “Different arguments work for people coming from different liberal and conservative backgrounds,” Larisa Friesen Hall shared, and “research on messaging and how we frame our arguments has been really helpful. I think we need to expand this research to include ways we frame the ideas from this conference for different audiences.” Rashidat Muhammed, a women’s rights activist from Ghana, reminded, “With such a rich combination of people, we should share what we are doing in our own countries, using indigenous



Melinda Holmes

Imam Mohamed Magid listens as Dr. Laurie Zoloth discusses the benefits of scholarship that is interrupted by stories from the field and is responsive to the informational needs of activists.

methodologies to bring peace into the lives of our communities.”

Participants agreed that an expansive list of stakeholders—including law enforcement, judges, and teachers—should be at the table when women’s rights and human rights are addressed. “Partnership in the community is key,” Magid shared, challenging those present to “go back home and think about the partnerships we can create.” Building coalitions with secular activists and organizations is one of these imperatives. Friesen Hall reflected on the importance of bringing in secular sisters to tell them that faith communities are the most organized groups in the world. “If we don’t engage them, we are missing out on a huge opportunity,” she said. From activists to journalists to diplomats, the religious illiteracy of thought leaders was highlighted as a major challenge to engaging in such coalition-building. Training on the complexities of religious life was called for to encourage responsible reporting, conduct, and policy and to encourage openness of secular actors to the liberatory possibilities of religion.

## Connecting Activism and Academia

Karin Ryan and Fulata Moyo asserted that a “methodology of human dignity” can redress such subversion of rights. Arguing that awareness of the U.N.’s human rights system can engender greater accountability by utilizing investigators and periodic review systems, Ryan pointed out that “sometimes religious communities are unconnected from and even unaware of this

**“We need to create a new jurisprudence, a new knowledge of human rights and women’s rights. This needs to be done by women themselves, on the ground.”**

**—Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini**

### Action Items

- Write open letters to your community.
- Convene university chaplains.
- Create virtual clergy and reach out through social media.
- Partner with religious journalists.
- Train secular journalists, law enforcement, teachers, diplomats, and activists how to navigate religion.
- Create a human rights certification for clergy.
- Establish council of religious leaders for human rights.
- Create YouTube channels and videos in local languages.
- Establish a think tank for debating scriptural interpretations.
- Publish a series of scholarly works on social justice and women.
- Reform curricula in seminaries and schools of theology.
- Establish awards for young scholars of feminist studies in religion.
- Create a bibliography or clearinghouse of resources on this topic.
- Establish a people’s request for proposals to enable activists to direct scholarship.
- Research different ways to frame our arguments for different audiences.

framework.” Magid emphasized the importance of documents that go beyond declarations, documents forged with the buy-in of religious authorities, which can be used to hold nations and religious leaders accountable. Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini asserted that to expand the legitimacy of such regimes, “We need to create a new jurisprudence, a new knowledge of human rights and women’s rights. This needs to be done by women themselves, on the ground.” Religious scholars spoke about the need to transform the scholarship for a new generation of leaders. The

interaction of scholars and activists is a vital part of Zoloth's "theology of interruption." By engaging with the stories of activists, the scholarship is disrupted and forced to reconcile text and tradition with lived experience.

One proposed mechanism to connect activists and academics is to develop a "people's request for proposals." Conservative organizations have shaped policy through targeted research, and by creating a channel for activists to direct research toward the issues people face on the ground, religious scholarship can be responsive and relevant to ongoing social justice struggles. Fiorenza called for the creation of a think tank to conduct and collect such research, including a continuation of the work of the forum: debating scriptural interpretations and exploring

religions in terms of justice for women, which always includes justice for men.

This call to continue the conversation was reframed by those who are threatened in their local contexts due to the conduct of their work. Mir-Hosseini articulated, "This has been an unreal safe space. We share the same values, and we can speak our minds. Tomorrow we go back to our own worlds, and we will be pulled by other forces. I want this safe space to endure." The participants overwhelmingly echoed this wish to convene again, to continue the conversation. The forum was "a conversation about having a conversation," Mir-Hosseini described, "and now we need to have the real conversation."

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# Presentations

## Molly Melching, Founder and Executive Director, Tostan, Senegal

Good morning, everyone! My name is Molly Melching — but in Senegal, my Wolof name is Sukkeyna Njaay. I'm here with Bacary Tamba from Tostan, and I'd like to give you a brief presentation about what's happening in Senegal and the seven other countries in which Tostan is working.

Tostan's mission is "dignity for all." We seek to empower African communities to bring about sustainable development and positive social transformation based on respect for human rights.

Today I would like to invite you to go back with me to Senegal to share the story of a village where Tostan has worked, a village representative of many of the communities where we work in eight African countries. It's a community in which 15 years ago

there was no electricity, running water, school, or health center. And it was a place where no adult had been to school. The main values of this community were — and still are — peace, family, and community well-being. They use religious scripture — Senegal is 94 percent Muslim — so it was very important for them to follow the teachings of Islam to achieve their goals. They were also following customs and traditions (beliefs of their parents and ancestors) that they felt would help them achieve peace as well as family and community well-being.

**In the African villages where we work, it is so important to be part of the group, to be part of one's extended family and social network. No one would ever dare to do something that would stand out or go against the group.**



Courtesy of Tostan

Marième Bamba, a solar engineer and Tostan facilitator, works to electrify communities, including her home village.

I want to introduce you to Marième Bamba, a member of that small community in Senegal. She was a participant in the Tostan program who had never previously attended school. She could not read and write in her own language or in French. She had never played an important role in community decision making. She had undergone the traditional practices of her parents and her ancestors, female genital cutting, and she was married when she was only 14 years old and had her first child at 15.

To really understand Marième, we must understand

the entire community in which she lives. She is part of a larger, well-knit community that shares the same traditional and religious beliefs important to everyone. In the African villages where we work, it is so important to be part of the group, to be part of

**Tostan's staff is 99 percent African. In each country where we work, we train coordinators, supervisors, and facilitators from that country to implement the Tostan Community Empowerment Program in people's own language and adapt the content to local realities.**

one's extended family and social network. No one would ever dare to do something that would stand out or go against the group. Marième would never have dared to refuse to obey her family. And beyond Marième's village, she has relatives and people who matter to her family and to her community who live in other villages, both near and far. Because Marième is of the Bambara ethnic group and her grandparents came to Senegal from the neighboring country of Mali, some are as far away as Mali. These traditions are shared not only by Marième, her family, and community but by many communities of the same ethnic group who hold similar beliefs.

So what happened when Marième became educated? What happens when people go through the three-year comprehensive Tostan Community Empowerment Program—not in French but in a national language they speak and understand very well?

Let me explain that people often think that Tostan only works on the issue of female genital cutting, but

that was not even an objective of our organization when we started implementing our education program 22 years ago. Our main goal was to provide information in national languages to people who had been denied education. There were so many problems in remote rural communities because people lacked good information: problems related to governance, health, hygiene, child protection, the environment, and economic growth. When we started, there were few good comprehensive education programs in national languages—only basic literacy learning. People desperately needed good information to make important decisions about their future. Tostan provided that information, and the classroom became a forum for dialogue around possibilities for change based on new knowledge and exchange of experiences. The program constantly evolved over many years, with feedback and input from village participants from all over Senegal and eventually from the other seven countries where we currently implement our program.

Tostan's staff is 99 percent African. In each country where we work, we train coordinators, supervisors, and facilitators from that country to implement the Tostan Community Empowerment Program in people's own language and adapt the content to local realities.

During the first year of the program, we introduce a five-month module on democracy, human rights, and problem-solving. Participants first discuss their vision for the future of their community as well as their deeper values and priorities. As in Marième's village, most communities cite peace, family, and well-being as major goals for the community. They then discuss certain guiding principles that are important to helping them achieve these goals. It is within this context that Tostan presents human rights and responsibilities to stimulate dialogue around their guiding principles for moving forward. We use large poster boards with colorful drawings to present each human right in a way that will stimulate in-depth discussion.

Participants come to consensus around the importance of these human rights and responsibilities, and during the next module on problem-solving,

they discuss how to best change practices that might violate these human rights within their community.

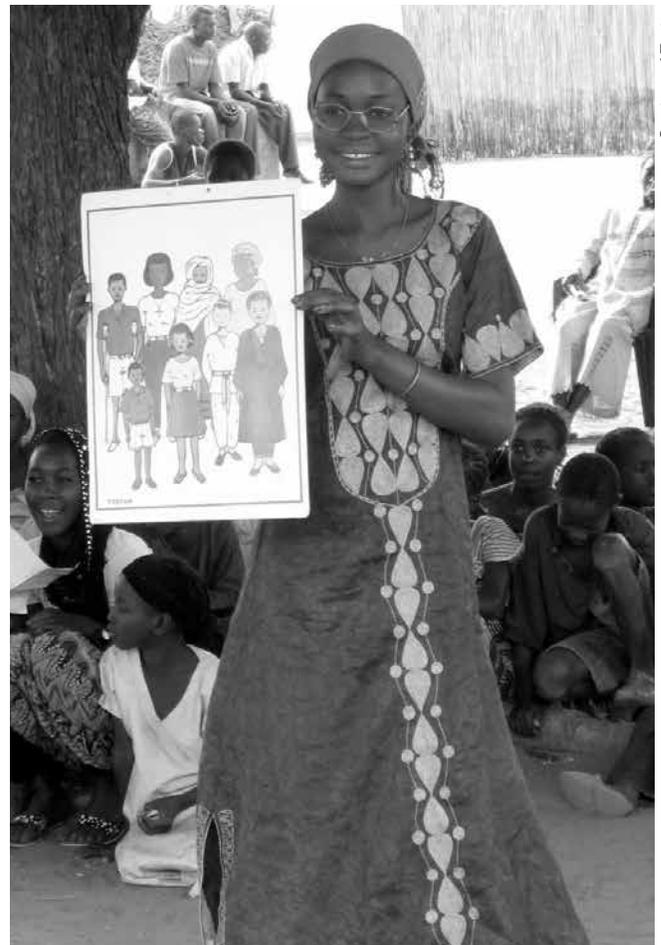
Participants learn that they have a right to peace but also the responsibilities related to this human right. Peace resonates deeply with participants, because the aspiration for peace is so important and is so embedded in most African languages. All greetings revolve around peace. Phrases any foreigner learns immediately if he or she wants to fit in upon arriving in the community include: “Peace be with you!” “Are you in peace?” “Peace only!” “Is your family in peace?” “I pray that you will always be in peace.” “May God grant you much peace.” Within the context of the discussion on the human right to peace, we ask what African ancestral wisdom and religious teachings would say about this human right, and people agree that the religious text and traditional teachings always call for peace and well-being.

**Within the context of the discussion on the human right to peace, we ask what African ancestral wisdom and religious teachings would say about this human right, and people agree that the religious text and traditional teachings always call for peace and well-being.**

When participants examine certain deeply entrenched customs as part of the study of ways they can promote peace, they begin to realize that many of their practices are not leading to the goals they are seeking. Critical in this process is that people realize that it is not the custom or practice that counts most but rather the contribution that custom will make to achieving the goal of peace and well-being of people

in the community. In other words, these traditions are not seen as an end in themselves but rather as a means to a more important end. If it is deemed not to contribute to their deeper aspirations, why would they perpetuate the practice?

As they receive more information, many people realize that customs they thought were obligations of their religion are not. This often comes as a surprise to women who have left the reading and interpretations of the Qur’an to the men in the community. When they question religious leaders, they realize for the first time that practices such as female genital cutting are not even mentioned in the Qur’an, let alone considered an obligation. The more information the participants receive and the more they open



Thanks to the human rights work of Tostan, the small village of Keur Simbara, Senegal, has abandoned the practice of female genital cutting.

up about experiences, the more they feel empowered to take action for change.

**We have found that inclusion of everyone who matters is so critical to bringing about sustainable change.**

The program not only incites social empowerment, it also leads to economic empowerment during the following years of the program. In order to improve health, the environment, and their economic

conditions, people need literacy and numeracy skills as well as leadership and management skills.

Tostan uses empowering pedagogical methods to support the learning process. Women rehearse in the classes so that they feel comfortable speaking out in public. They even require that the men let their voices be heard. This is not about excluding men but is about promoting participation and rights for all people: men, women, and children. By including men, everyone becomes involved in building a society that is more just and equitable where there are peace and well-being for all.

Tostan teaches literacy through SMS texting because we found that this is what people wanted to learn and realized this was a wonderful way for participants to practice and use their new literacy skills.



Courtesy of Tostan

“Tostan” means “breakthrough” in Wolof. This human rights organization, based in Senegal, promotes a three-year, nonformal education program to help rural communities create their own vision for development.

They aren't going to be reading novels (we don't have many of those in national languages), but almost everyone now has a cell phone. They just didn't know how to do SMS texting. So Tostan developed a special module so participants could learn to navigate the phone and write messages to friends and family both near and far. Evaluations have found that this method has greatly improved literacy skills.

We also give value to all those African traditions that are positive and bring people together through song, poetry, and theater. The methods actively engage everyone and get even the shyest learner to discuss issues in a lively way. Classes are fun, so women love to attend after a hard day of work. They can express themselves for the first time, and gradually they learn to speak out, often for the first time. The oral tradition works because it is what people do best. We start where they are, using culturally familiar ways of learning and promoting community conversation around issues that most people have never before discussed publicly—issues such as female genital cutting, child marriage, domestic violence, and sexual abuse.

The strategy for sustainable behavior change used in the Tostan model is what we call “organized diffusion.” Because our participants are part of much larger social networks, the knowledge they learn and the changes they want to make must go beyond the classroom if the change is to last. Even if the class made certain decisions together, those would certainly be met with much resistance if participants promoted new behaviors upon leaving the classroom. So students start with a classroom discussion and then adopt another learner when they return home—a co-wife, sister, brother, husband, or maybe the religious leader or village chief. They talk about what they have learned in the classroom and then reach out even further through community events to share discussions that have taken place. After this, they travel to other villages to share what they have learned with even more of their friends and relatives.

Bacary Tamba spoke about his experience as the diaspora coordinator for Tostan. He went to share new information with relatives and people of his

ethnic group, Diola, living in different countries in Europe. Tostan realized that if people in communities made important decisions without including family members in the diaspora, those relatives could become upset when they find that traditions they left behind had been changed in their absence. We have found that inclusion of everyone who matters is so critical to bringing about sustainable change.

**Previously, female genital cutting was an expected practice for all daughters. If a girl was not cut, she was sanctioned by the community: rejected, marginalized, and ostracized. It was unthinkable for a mother not to cut her daughter. Now the community announces that as of that day, no girl will be cut in the future.**

Participants also hold intervillage meetings where representatives from interconnected communities and the diaspora come and discuss issues. During these meetings, they often decide to hold a “public declaration” to end practices like female genital cutting and child marriage. This is a critical event, because it is the moment when people collectively and publicly acknowledge that the expectations of the community have changed. Previously, female genital cutting was an expected practice for all daughters. If a girl was *not* cut, she was sanctioned by the community: rejected, marginalized, and ostracized. It was unthinkable for a mother not to cut her daughter. Now the community announces that as of that day, no girl will be cut in the future and if she is, there will be sanctions enforced by the community.

I want to emphasize that the results of our education program go far beyond ending female genital cutting. By using a holistic program, we are taking into consideration the deeper concerns of the communities and their goals for better governance, education, health, the environment, and economic growth. We introduce and allow people to discuss and find solutions that help achieve the well-being that people who live in remote and isolated rural areas are so desperately seeking.

**Religious leaders speak out during these ceremonies and relate Islam's point of view, emphasizing that it is not a religious obligation.**

We have achieved results in the community participation of girls and women who now are able to speak out with confidence and become engaged in issues previously too taboo to even mention. We have seen an increase in birth registration, which is so important for citizen participation, because one cannot vote, obtain an ID card, or go to school without a birth certificate. We see improved hygiene and

health; successful income-generating projects; and environmental improvement activities that include composting, waste separation, and use of wood stoves. Hundreds have built latrines, because they have learned about germ transmission and understood latrines are necessary for preventing health problems.

Communities have also ended child/forced marriage—a common practice in many ethnic groups in Africa. All over Senegal, the community management committees established during the Tostan program have stepped in to negotiate with parents who try to take their daughters out of school, often as early as 12 or 13, to marry. One girl is Oumou Djibou Diallo, whose parents wanted her to marry at 12 but were dissuaded through community pressure. They allowed her to stay in school, and when she took her exam at the end of the year, Oumou was not only first in her school and region, she was the number-one student in all of Senegal. She was given a scholarship to attend the prestigious Mariama Ba High School for Girls on Gorée Island and has succeeded in all her exams. She is today a wonderful advocate for ending child marriage in Africa.

Tostan participants have held many declarations for abandonment of female genital cutting in Senegal, Guinea, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Somaliland, Puntland, and Djibouti. We know that declarations do not mean 100 percent compliance. We know that not every member of every community



Courtesy of Tostan

The village of Sinthiou Maleme Pano announced the abandonment of female genital cutting with this ceremony.



Courtesy of Tostian

Women learn how to cook chapati with a solar oven. They report that when it is sunny, they cook their meals easily without getting dirty or inhaling smoke. In addition, they spend less money on firewood, and fewer trees are cut down.

who attends the public declaration abandons on that day. This is only part of the process, but we have learned that it is an essential part because it is a social norm, a question of reciprocal expectations and sanctions. When there is a social norm in place, it is necessary to build a critical mass toward change over time. The declaration is a way of saying “today we are publicly declaring that a great majority of people believe that this is no longer a good thing to do.” Religious leaders speak out during these ceremonies

#### Results in Marième’s Village

- Total abandonment of female genital cutting
- One hundred percent vaccination
- Construction of school
- End of child marriage
- Solar power and SMS technology that aids economic development

and relate Islam’s point of view, emphasizing that it is not a religious obligation.

I want to congratulate the participants here today from Al Azhar University, because we sent village participants to Egypt to meet with them. After their discussions, they returned to Senegal and traveled near and far, spreading the message that leading authorities of Islam told them that it was all right to abandon this practice. That was extremely important to everyone. We feel the momentum is building and that female genital cutting will soon be a thing of the past, even within our generation. We really believe we are on the way.

What happened when Marième and others in her community became educated? In the photo of her, she is in front of the health hut that the villagers themselves constructed. The community sent a participant to be trained as a health worker. Vaccination is now 100 percent, and health has greatly improved. Participants have constructed a school with five

classrooms for their children. They have ended female genital cutting and child marriage, and evaluations have shown that the abandonment is 100 percent in this village. They also have solar-electrified their village.

Marième was chosen to travel to India to train. Her husband told me, “If I hadn’t been through the Tostan program, I would never have allowed her to go so far away.” She went for six months to Barefoot College, became a solar engineer, and came back and trained others in her community. Together, they put up 50 solar units in her village.

When I went to visit, Marième said, “Molly, you must come to the next village with me and see the unit I installed in their church. Even though we are Muslim, our village decided to donate a solar unit for their church because we believe that nobody should discriminate because of religion.” That is not all they have accomplished. A team of Tostan participants from five neighboring villages traveled to 148 other communities to speak with their relatives, explaining why they had abandoned female genital cutting and

child marriage. This is what is so powerful about this whole process: It is the people themselves who are leading this movement. They have received new information, and they are spreading the information to others who matter to them. They are fulfilling their important goals of peace, family, and community well-being.

Marième’s granddaughter will not be married at 14. She is going to school, she will finish school, she won’t get pregnant at 15, and she will be allowed to travel and work wherever she likes.

At Tostan, we believe and have seen that change is possible within one generation, not just in Senegal but in all the African countries where we are working.

I’m pleased to open this seminar by reaffirming the power of education. Through education, grassroots dialogue, and collective and inclusive action—using the guiding principles of human rights and human dignity for all—we will be able to achieve positive change in our world more quickly than we ever could have dreamed possible.

## Bacary Tamba, Tostan

In 1983, I was chosen as the youngest person ever to represent the Jola-Fonyi ethnic group of the Ziguinchor area in Senegal in the Senegalese National Assembly. A good representative, when elected, is one that has in mind the defense of one's constituency, the population that has elected you to be its eyes, ears, and voice. Thus, as a member of Parliament, for five years I defended the communities that had elected me to govern on their behalf.

After serving in the National Assembly, I met with Molly Melching of Tostan in 2000, and we discussed my intention to bring Tostan to Casamance. At this time, there were serious challenges to implementing Tostan's model in Casamance, because it was an area with an active rebellion and many land mines. Casamance is an area from which people had fled, taking refuge in bordering countries such as The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Guinea, and in the capital of Senegal, Dakar. So it was difficult for a nongovernmental organization to be established in Casamance, but I had a conviction. And as President Carter once said: It is necessary that we know what we want and we know where we want to be. As a Jola-Fonyi, I was trying to save my people from all of the evils from which they were suffering. I was also trying to save all my sisters: the women, who were

facing enormous difficulties. I decided it was necessary to go straight to Tostan to work on these issues.

Each time Tostan enters a community, they conduct a study at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the program. We know that in each locality there are other nongovernmental organizations that have intervened and failed, perhaps because of ancestral habits or practices that slow down change. Thus, it is necessary to consider any previous cases in detail. At the end of each project, we must evaluate and be accountable to the people on the ground.

**Aawde means to stir up the earth to prepare it for sowing. Thus, we stir up the earth. The ground we stir up is the spirit of the people. We make them want to come back. We question them about their lives and their being but also their participation in the development of human rights, because they have human rights, though they might not know it yet.**



Tom England

Bacary Tamba of Senegal speaks about mobilizing personal conviction to change social norms and end harmful practices such as female genital cutting.

We started with 20 centers in an area near Casamance and Bounkili, working with Tostan's Community Empowerment Program. The program builds community capacity toward positive social transformation for the development of communities with respect to human rights. Know that wherever war breaks out, someone's right was not respected. If people are educated, all the religions—Islam, Christianity, and all others—will be practiced

properly. I will borrow from the Islamic tradition, which emphasizes learning to know oneself, to study, and to possess knowledge in order to learn how to respect others and oneself.

The community empowerment program is delivered in two modules: *Kobi*, focused on preparation through discussion, and *Aawde*, focused on learning and developing skills. It is necessary to know in order to plant. *Aawde* means to stir up the earth to prepare it for sowing. Thus, we stir up the earth. The ground we stir up is the spirit of the people. We make them want to come back. We question them about their lives and their being but also their participation in the development of human rights, because they have human rights, though they might not know it yet.

**This is organized diffusion:  
creating a snowball effect  
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There are many rights, and imagine what these rights will do in the community. The first is the right to life. If each person has the right to life, then how can someone give himself or herself the right to kill? We know that the circumcision of a young girl is usually due to ignorance. Customarily, no one will know how the girl feels. Because these were the social norms of the society, the family would think they are doing what is good for the girl and for the community, so the girl can later find a husband. If one breaks down the standards of communities, one finds three types of standards: social, administrative (laws that say this and that), and personal conviction. (Because

I believe it is moral, I will marry only one woman, despite prevailing social standards to the contrary. This is my personal choice.).

People gain understanding through education, and science has brought change and progress. We understand that education is also a right, necessary not only for the boys but also for girls. We did our best to register the maximum number of girls in school and to ensure they remained there. For future equality, women need to be able to earn diplomas, to balance the diplomas earned by men. To achieve parity in capacity, women must gain the knowledge that will enable them to take the places that men have occupied in their stead: to become ministers, directors, and anything else they want to be in life. For these reasons, people should be educated.

Addressing the right to hygiene and health also makes it possible for pregnant women to visit private clinics in the hospitals for pre- and postnatal testing. After childbirth, this right should give the child access to vaccinations, and a birth certificate will enable the child to obtain a national identity card, passport, and other legal documents, which are necessary for full exercise of citizenship.

We at Tostan believe that education is in the interest of the community and that teaching should not stop in the classes. Teaching reaches beyond the walls of the school through several methods: A person from the class agrees to take a few people from the village and teach them what was taught that day in the class. Teachers are allowed to teach the courses in public places, in the village centers. Finally, we have what is called community management, which continues the program after the Tostan training is complete. Community management makes it possible for Tostan to move into other villages that do not have the program and to share it with others. This is organized diffusion: creating a snowball effect and allowing the program to spread. As we are not able to be everywhere, we want to share our knowledge with the entire population of a village or locale where Tostan is established.

Female genital cutting is an ancestral tradition with over 2,000 years of existence; to remove this

practice from the culture is not easy. It is necessary to speak with the parents and the community, because women from surrounding villages come to find husbands. Our children leave the village to study elsewhere, and our wives leave the village to work the weekly markets, carrying with them all this news. They will discuss it with everyone, and I think this will wake up people's consciences and the decision making will be easier afterward. In Casamance, speaking about circumcision was taboo.

**Nowhere in the Qur'an is it written that it is necessary or permitted for women to be forced to be cut. I have not seen it. Islamic scholars are present here: If you see at the time of Abraham (that one called with the first audience), there was no request that his wife get circumcised. The Prophet Muhammad had four girls and was not requested to require them to be circumcised.**

When I started with Molly [Melching] in Casamance, I was told: "Bacary, stop! Do not speak any more about circumcision! You are a man and that is not your business. If you continue, your belly will swell and you will die because that is a taboo subject that one must not speak about. Stop; leave this job because people are threatening you!" Though they threatened me, I said to myself that God is the referee of all, because nowhere did I see in a Holy Book, nowhere in the Qur'an is it written that it is necessary or permitted for women to be forced to be cut. I have not seen it. Islamic scholars are present here:

If you see at the time of Abraham (that one called with the first audience), there was no request that his wife get circumcised. The Prophet Muhammad had four girls and was not requested to require them to be circumcised.

What is the result of Tostan's program in Casamance? During the period of rebellion in Casamance, no one was secure because people did not know who was a rebel and who was not. When people speak to each other, it makes them stronger. People who came to the class and learned together managed to build mutual trust. The second result was within the families that learned to maintain their hygiene and health. The community dealt with many health issues, like checking the water quality and cleanliness. The results are peace and health.

I do this because I believe that this is a problem for everybody, men and women; not just for women. I know change is possible. The reason behind my actions was that injustice prevailed: Female genital cutting had become a social standard, and thus it was forced. If you did not wish to circumcise your daughters, the community would judge you and your family negatively. When I had my daughters, who are college students now, I was not convinced that it was necessary to continue to live with the community's habits or rules. I said "No!" One has to follow one's beliefs and fight against injustice. This is why I looked to meet people who have the same beliefs, the same philosophy and ideology. In my search, I found Tostan. Now, three of my daughters have gotten married without being circumcised. My two daughters, 8 and 10 years old, who still live with me are not circumcised. My granddaughters also are not circumcised. I have taken my role as a pilgrim, because I was named the national coordinator of the diaspora for Tostan. I will find my brothers who are in Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, and the United States to discuss this with them: that our ancestral habits that they believe in, which we believe are the recommendations of our religion, are not any longer reality. It is necessary that one make a good judgment and think through these practices based on reason. This is how to fight for justice.

## Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani and Jeremy Courtney, Preemptive Love Coalition

### Jeremy Courtney

In the middle of the Iraq war, my family and I moved to the country in a context of pervasive distrust. Everywhere we looked there was distrust: Everyone distrusted someone. There were Shia militia setting up impromptu checkpoints, pulling Sunnis out of their cars and killing them on the spot. There were Sunni reprisals. There were Arab terrorists blowing up bombs in Kurdish cities. There were Kurdish encroachments onto other Kurds and Arabs. There was widespread violence across contested cities like Mosul and Kirkuk. Everyone distrusted everyone it seemed, at the height of the conflict.

It was in this context that I was sitting in my hotel one day working on my laptop, and the tea guy, who had been a friend and a connection over the previous months of my working in that lobby on my computer, approached me and said, “Sir, Mr. Jeremy, you’ve

been coming here for some time now. Can I ask you a favor?” I said, “Sure, go ahead.” And he said, “I have a cousin. He’s about my age, and he had a little girl a few years ago. She has a huge hole in her heart, and there’s not a hospital left in Iraq now that is equipped to save her life from the bombings and the sanctions and everything that has happened. All the doctors have fled the country. You’re an American, and you’ve come here to help. Do you think can you help me?”

My initial response was not heroic. There was nothing unexpected about it. It was a very typical response in a lot of ways. I said, “No, I can’t help. I don’t know anything about that. I don’t know anything about children who have heart defects. I don’t know anything about what it would take to take a child out of the country for surgery. I don’t have any expertise in this.”



Jeremy Courtney listens as Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani, a pediatrician at Fallujah General Hospital, details the rise in congenital birth defects following the Iraq War.

With a great deal of humility—because he could have easily blasted me—he showed me that all it would take was to try; that trying would be enough for his family. So I agreed to meet with the father, and a couple of days later the father rounded the corner of the hotel with his little 6-year-old girl in tow. As that little girl turned the corner and I saw her, I was a goner. I thought about my own little girl, and that was it: There was nothing left to discuss. As Sister Simone Campbell said, “When your heart breaks on behalf of someone else, what is fear?” The fear that I would mess this up, the fear that I didn’t have the expertise required to help this family, was gone. Suddenly, I had a broken heart for this family and their child with a broken heart, and I wanted to jump in to try and help.

**Today, I am here among you as a messenger from Fallujah, or let me say, as a very close witness of the Iraqi Hiroshima. I have decided to tell today the life stories of the mothers in my city: aware of who did what, who encouraged, who kept silent, and who paid.**

I took the files and began knocking around to friends, contacts, and colleagues to try to see what I could do. The more I dug into this issue, the more I realized that it wasn’t just this one girl. I heard Kurds saying that it was Saddam Hussein’s chemical weapons that had played some role in drastically increasing the number of children in the city of Halabja who are born with these types of birth defects. The more I investigated and the more I learned, I actually saw American soldiers raising their hands saying, “My wife just gave birth to a child, and

we have no history of cancer in our family and our child has cancer. We have no history of heart disease in our family, and our child has heart disease. We have no history of birth defects, and our child has a grotesque birth defect.”

Following those stories and those soldiers and the story inside Iraq, I became aware of the research and the work of Dr. Samira [Al-Alaani]. Over time and through a lot of connections, serendipity, and God’s providence—I believe God brought us together—I was able to respond to some of the research that she was issuing out into the world. She was calling for attention, saying, “This is what we are experiencing here in Fallujah in the wake of the war;” never making claims about causality, being careful not to point the finger or claim scientifically that she knew what was going on, but issuing numbers, reports, and photos, and saying, “Here, this is what we’re seeing; you draw your own conclusions.” Now I will hand over briefly to Dr. Samira, and then I will respond to what she is saying.

#### **Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani**

First, *salamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh*, the greeting of Islam that means “Peace be upon you with God’s mercy and blessing.” Ladies and gentlemen, this year, 2013, marks the 10th anniversary of the 2003 Iraq war. Since the invasion, the occupying U.S.–U.K.-led coalition forces and the Iraqi authorities have failed to fulfill their obligation to protect people’s right to life and health, with devastating results for Iraq’s people. Grave human rights violations, against international law, have been reported during and after the Iraq war. Most of the alleged violations have not been properly investigated, nor have their perpetrators been brought to justice.

As a consequence of the use of inhuman, indiscriminate, and toxic weapons, many people have been killed, and many are still suffering physical harm without any reparations. Moreover, the devastating effect of the conflict will continue to victimize innocent children and infants who were not even born before or during the war and occupation.

Today, I am here among you as a messenger from Fallujah, or let me say, as a very close witness of the Iraqi Hiroshima. I have decided to tell today the life stories of the mothers in my city: aware of who did what, who encouraged, who kept silent, and who paid. I am a pediatrician, and I have worked in Fallujah since 1997. The story started in 2004 and has continued in a tragic series of events every single day until this moment. The mass use of dirty weapons in a city crowded with people has caused congenital malformations.

**On behalf of the women of Fallujah, I would like to call on the U.S. and U.K. governments to disclose information regarding all types of weapons used during the occupation and to take the measures necessary to protect the right to life and health of the local people if a pollution problem is indicated.**

Women in Fallujah have different educational levels, different ideologies, and different ages, but they all share the same fear: congenital malformation. In the hospital where I serve, about 14 percent of the newborns come to life with various kinds of malformations. About 5 percent of children die during their first year of life, with about 55 percent of those deaths being due to congenital malformations. With such a high rate of malformations, an integrated chain of social and psychological consequences has appeared and evolved to become a barrier between every couple and their dream to become parents one day.

As a part of Iraq, my city's people never have had a proper chance to learn, educate themselves, and get

enlightened, due to the wars, death, blood, sanctions, and poverty. In such a society, the mother suffers the blame either explicitly or implicitly for giving birth to a malformed child. This is what women in my city are going through every day: the dream of being a mother turned into a nightmare. Personally, I have witnessed the daily pain of watching children with no future and no hope in life. As a physician, I feel the pain. What about the mothers of those children? They would obviously die with every tear while they watch their sons' and daughters' tragedy with absolutely no recourse. The democracy of war has affected every one of us with no exception. Some have been killed, some orphaned, some widowed; some have cancer, some got malformed newborns, some lost their livelihood and became homeless. The least impacted person has become psychologically unstable and worried with fear of the future.

On behalf of the women of Fallujah, I would like to call on the U.S. and U.K. governments to disclose information regarding all types of weapons used during the occupation and to take the measures necessary to protect the right to life and health of the local people if a pollution problem is indicated. Finally, on behalf of the director of Fallujah Hospital and myself, I greatly thank Ms. [Karin] Ryan, His Excellency President Carter, and Mr. Jeremy Courtney for offering me the chance to share with you in this forum, to illustrate some facts and the experiences of the people I represent. I hope this forum will be a new start to make a suitable solution for the problems in Fallujah.

### **Jeremy Courtney**

With this as the backdrop of what we are dealing with in Iraq right now, I want to offer that in such darkness, there are responses that are possible. One of the questions posed to us was: What can we do to normalize peace? The corollary question is: How can you eat an elephant? The answer is, "One bite at a time: one step at a time." Sometimes we can overthink these things—we can try to go too far in normalizing peace. One of the things we have to do if we want to normalize peace is to normalize humility.

We have to normalize the ability to say we were wrong. And the people who should be leading that conversation above all others, if our politicians won't do it, are our religious leaders. We were wrong. We can't brush it under the rug, choose not to comment, and then sit on our hands when Syria comes along because we have some kind of deep guilt inside. We must say forthrightly, "We were wrong."

The normalization of humility certainly must be one of the steps to take to normalize peace. The corollary is the normalization of forgiveness. We have to have a setting, a venue, and a set of relationships in which we can forgive another; in which we can say, "I hear you say that you were wrong, and I forgive you." Again, if our religious communities can't lead the conversation on this, then our religion is absolutely worthless to us.

**We have to have a setting, a venue, and a set of relationships in which we can forgive another; in which we can say, "I hear you say that you were wrong, and I forgive you."**

So we began saying we were wrong. Not me as a lone white guy trying to represent all of America, but with something that I have actually learned from and seen modeled in President Carter himself: speaking personally about my own lust for blood in Iraq, my own lust for retribution against Muslims in the wake of 9/11—speaking from that position of acknowledging I was wrong, I wanted this war in Iraq on some level. I wanted this Christian aggression against Muslims on some level, and now I see what I voted for. Now I see what I've asked for, and I was wrong. As I look into the face of your child, I see I was wrong, and I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I say that again to all of my Muslim brothers and friends here,

and I say that again to you, Dr. Samira, as an Iraqi colleague and friend.

We were doing that as we began working in various communities across Iraq. As we began to seek to respond to this congenital birth defect crisis now plaguing the country, we began hearing many repeat choruses of: "I can't go to *that* city with my child and seek treatment. *Those* people hate my people, *those* people killed my people." I can't seek medical treatment from an American medical team because it's the Americans who caused me to be in this situation in the first place. But parents will do crazy things when they're desperate, and sometimes parents who had no other choice would take the risk of placing their Shia child in the hands of a Sunni doctor, or placing their Sunni child in the hands of a Shia doctor, or placing their Kurdish child in the hands of an Arab doctor, or placing their Arab child in the hands of an American doctor.

I'll close with a story of a little girl named Khadija. I remember sitting with her father on the eve of her surgery, and her father, Mathi, said to me, "Please, Mr. Jeremy, send us somewhere else. Don't send us to *those* people, *those* people hate us, if we go to *that* city to *those* people, they'll kill us! Please just send us out to Iran or somewhere else, don't send us to *those* people." And I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Mathi. This is all I've been able to work out for you. If you want Khadija to have surgery, you're going to need to trust me. You're going to need to take this step with me." A couple of days later, Khadija had her surgery against all odds. She'd been rejected by a number of other programs, she wasn't supposed to get this surgery, and she wasn't supposed to live. She was 16 years old, and if she didn't get this surgery now she would never get married, she would never be able to have children; her heart would have failed her. And the enemy doctor, the doctor who never should have been trusted by Mr. Mathi, saved her life. He performed an impossible surgery and saved her life.

When I met up with Mathi again, the first thing he said to me was, "Walla, Mr. Jeremy, he was such a Muslim!" For those of you who don't understand the nuance of that: Suddenly that guy wasn't the

“other” anymore, the enemy; suddenly he was a Muslim just like Mathi. Mathi had come to see him in a totally different light as this doctor had saved the life of his daughter. The enemy monikers were gone as we all engaged in what we call “preemptive love.” Mathi had engaged in preemptive love on behalf of his daughter: He had taken a risk against all odds and walked into enemy territory to love his daughter. The surgeon had taken a great risk to love

me, to dislodge one of his own people to take in and provide surgery for an outsider. All across the board, we saw expressions of “Wow, he’s just like me,” of forgiveness, reconciliation, and a normalization of peace. I don’t think that peace is a destination or a binary state, on or off. It’s a discipline, and in that moment we were in peace, because we were flexing our peace muscles, we were exercising them. We call it “preemptive love.”

## Frances Greaves, Voice of the Voiceless

When I attended the previous conference at The Carter Center on this subject, it was an eye-opener for me in the work that I do with women, and I want to thank President and Mrs. Carter for this opportunity. What I learned here is valuable, because we work to ensure that women in the church get information from policy documents, which they do not have access to otherwise.

The women of Liberia played a major role in bringing stabilization and an end to civil war in Liberia. The initiative taken by these women has healed Liberian women and caused many others to come to our country to emulate the work we did. As a result, there is a documentary called “Pray the Devil Back to Hell.” It shows what women can do if they are together.

**Many women had serious health problems resulting from the war. Some still had bullets and shrapnel from the war, and I had to make sure that these women received the assistance they needed.**

During the days of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), I worked with an organization called the Women’s NGO Secretariat to raise the voices of women to testify about the gruesome acts committed against them during the second civil war. Many women had serious health problems resulting from the war. Some still had bullets and shrapnel from the war, and I had to make sure that these women received the assistance they needed. It was also my job to ensure that these women infused their thoughts into the final recommendations of the TRC.

The TRC process was a reality check for all

Liberian women. We declared: Never again! Never will we permit ourselves to sit and let the men make the decision for us to be dehumanized and defamed and to become subjects and objects of sex. In the peace efforts, women, again, did not sit down. We asked ourselves what we wanted to do to ensure that women’s voices continue to be heard. Among the initiatives we took during the transitional government was to make sure that women were represented in all the three facets of government: the executive, legislative, and judiciary.

During that time, we had three women representatives and more than 60 men in the legislature. But those three women fought, and during that period,



Tom England

Frances Greaves shares the gains Liberian women have won and discusses ongoing challenges to the consolidation of peace in Liberia.

two pieces of legislation came into being through the support of Liberian women: the Act on Rape, to criminalize rape, and the Inheritance Rights Bill. Women in indigenous marriages finally could acquire rights to the property they had gained collectively with their husbands. Prior to that law, women were chattel, and it was often said that women could not own property. Though it has been an ongoing struggle, for the first time in 2005, there were 14 women representatives in the national legislature. It was all because of the efforts of women who said our voices needed to be heard.

Since then, many actions have been taken and many commissions have been created in Liberia in which women are major players. For example, there are two women in the Governance Commission; the Anticorruption Commission is headed by a woman; the vice chair of the Law Reform Commission is a woman; and the Land Commission, National Election Commission, and several others have women representatives.

All these processes have helped consolidate the peace. However, the consolidation of peace also comes with facing yourself and facing the reality of what it is that you must not do to avoid resorting to

violence anymore. Last week in Liberia, the national reconciliation process was officially launched, after almost 10 years of brainstorming and about five years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report. The report had called for prosecutions of responsible officials, and so it had been tabled. The 2011 elections almost resulted in political violence, so the reconciliation process was restarted. The women of Liberia continue to consolidate peace.

With all the gains, Liberia has not yet taken legal affirmative action for women. Having the first female president in Africa, we took an initiative last year to go to Senegal to find out how they had been able to acquire 40 percent representation by women in the Parliament. What a disgrace when the Senegalese women told us, "Why would you come to us when you have Africa's first female president?" So we decided to "tie our lapas" as we say in Liberia and go back and take initiative. We are in the process of popularizing a document that will enhance women's participation in all facets of government to ensure that when women's voices are heard, things that happened to us throughout the 14 years of our civil crisis will not be repeated.

## Claudia Furaha Nfundiko, Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace

I am really very happy to speak before this imposing assembly to tell you a little about what has happened in my country with regard to the normalization of violence against women. For more than a decade, my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), has been the victim of an unprecedented civil war. My country has fabulous flora, fauna, and natural landscapes, which are a gift from God. The population is ready to invest in the landscape for a lasting peace. Rich by our natural resources, this gift is not exploited by the population but torn away by invisible hands. The area is like a virgin among monsters. Arable lands, lakes and rivers, historical sites, and folk dances—all or almost all of this natural and cultural landscape is being irretrievably lost. Wars often are orchestrated by the multinationals and militias supported by foreign governments that build their fortunes with innocents' blood. Forced, violated, tortured, robbed, and killed, the populations are victims because their country has a wealth that nobody can deny. The country's cultural and



Tom England

Claudia Furaha Nfundiko reports from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, urging people of faith and religious leaders to pressure for an end to the war in that country in which women, families, and communities are facing the devastating consequences of the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

ethnic diversity, which should be a source of pride and an asset as it is in the Americas, is instead one of the causes of the war. The population is poor: In the country of gold mines, the population cultivates vegetables. They have no houses to sleep in. The roads are not maintained.

Congo, as you know, has earned the label “rape capital of the world.” The consequences of this war are innumerable to the people. Without being exhaustive, we can list some of the violations: loss of human life, extreme poverty, permanent handicaps, proliferation of light arms, targeted assassinations, burning and destruction of villages, massacres of the civilian population, captivity of women, internal displacement, human capacity flight, and environmental destruction.

Since the beginning of the war, violence against women and children in the eastern DRC has become pervasive. Indeed, sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war. The bodies of women have become another battlefield for the attackers. It is the war within the war, because it is strategic and the results

**The population is poor: In the country of gold mines, the population cultivates vegetables. They have no houses to sleep in. The roads are not maintained.**

have proved it effective. Amnesty International reports that the conflict in eastern DRC has resulted in tens of thousands of women and girls becoming victims of systemic rape and sexual assault by armed groups.

Women and girls have been attacked in their homes, in the fields, and wherever they conduct their daily activities. Many have been raped on several occasions or were victims of several assailants.

Others have undergone sexual torture, including the introduction of objects into the genitals. In many cases, armed groups have used women and girls as sexual slaves. Young boys also have been victimized. Rapes were sometimes accompanied or followed by physical abuse, torture, or murder. Acts are often made publicly, in front of the victim's family members and children. Some women have become pregnant without knowing the father of the child due to cases

**In the name of Congolese women, I launch a call for the solidarity of all religions to influence change in our country with regard to women's rights and peace.**

of mass rape. These poor children are born without love and without a sense of belonging, not even to their mothers who guard their lives. The community ostracizes them because they are regarded as the children of the enemy.

Now I would like to look at the role of the Catholic Church in this matter. It is a recent phenomenon to speak about sex acts on church premises. Speaking about rape is taboo because it relates too closely to sexuality; yet rape touches communities. Rape was used in a general and a systematic way as a weapon of war, as a tactic of destruction and dismantling of the family unit, which has the effect of destabilizing the whole community. Courage was required to speak about rape in the community, despite the taboo. In the face of the suffering of the population—and considering the undeniable atrocities that were being committed—the Catholic Church, through its Commission on Justice and Peace, has not remained indifferent.

The church understood that the role of the community was important and determinant in realizing the vulnerability of its members and assuming responsibility for the victims. Since 2008, the church has developed a protection and reintegration program in three of the 16 areas in eastern DRC that were touched by this plague of sexual violence: Bukavu in Itikivou, De Kassongo in Maniema, and Bougna in Eastern province. These programs combat the marginalization and stigmatization of victims through assistance directed first toward their psychological, medical, and legal needs and then toward reintegration into their communities. The initiative is followed up and supported by an activity that generates financial returns: The projects contribute to victims' reinsertion into a protective environment within the community and, thus, reduction of their vulnerability.

What role did the Congolese woman play in the request for peace? Faced with all the problems described above, Congolese women were extremely invested in putting an end to these atrocities, particularly because this issue affected everyone in society and, therefore, was beneficial for all. In the face of this phenomenon, many women's associations were born. Civil associations reached out to women and children to bring peace and reconciliation. This outreach was conducted with and by women with goals to provide comfort, inform themselves, teach, and establish a culture of peace based on U.N. resolution 1325. Women coming from various religious confessions have mobilized to protest the war and organize women's boycotts, prayers to seek peace and only peace, and meetings with women of other countries under attack, such as Uganda and Burundi. They hope to make heard their wishes, petitions, and letters of denunciations, with the goal of reaching the United Nations and those who can influence a return to peace. In the name of Congolese women, I launch a call for the solidarity of all religions to influence change in our country with regard to women's rights and peace.

## Zainah Anwar, Sisters in Islam and Musawah

We have talked a lot about the importance of working with religious leaders and the important role of those leaders to bring about social changes. I agree, but in some contexts, such as in the United States and especially in Muslim societies that are very patriarchal and conservative, religious leaders actually play a leading role in opposing social change. They join hands with the patriarchs and authoritarian governments to justify why there cannot be equality between men and women; why there cannot be law reform. They justify this in the name of Islam, in the name of God.

Many people forget that in many Muslim-majority countries, Islam is the direct source of law in public policy. The alliance between religious leaders, who uphold patriarchal and discriminatory understandings and practices of religion, and authoritarian governments is very often perilous for women's rights. Many Organization of Islamic Cooperation governments still maintain reservations about the U.N.'s human rights' treaties. A recent report shows that when

**We want our own voices to be heard, instead of the voice of the religious authorities or scholars with whom we work. These are the voices of women's rights activists who want changes in our society and in our lives.**

questioned why there cannot be changes in their law and practices to comply with the treaties' obligations, the most common answers were: because the laws in our countries are divine law; it is God's law, therefore, it cannot be changed as it is infallible. This is a constructed myth, a myth that must be broken both in national and international spheres.

I want to share the work of Sisters in Islam and Musawah, through which women are taking ownership of their faith and asserting their rights to define what it means to be living Islam on a daily basis as well as the role of faith in public policies. What makes us different is that since our beginning in 1989, Sisters in Islam has engaged religion from a rights perspective, long before it became fashionable to do so. Also different in our societies is that we want our own voices to be heard, instead of the voice of the religious authorities or scholars with whom we work. These are the voices of women's rights activists who want changes in our society and in our lives. We want to take the lead, to engage in public space and public debate on matters of religion that affect us as women.



Tom England

Zainah Anwar of Malaysia speaks about the work of her organizations to create public debate that is inclusive of women's realities on religious matters.

Working with scholars is extremely important because it provides us with knowledge that encourages us to speak out and challenge the religious authority, the patriarchs, and autocrats in government. It also has encouraged us to challenge the justification for men and women having different rights in Islam, because too often this means that in the substance and practice of the law, women have inferior rights.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini said yesterday that Islamic feminism is the unwanted child of political Islam that has emerged as a response to the failure of our religious leaders to engage with the realities of our life and their use of Islam to justify their control over women. I grew up with the belief that God is just and Islam is just. I always understood that the different treatment of my brother and me at home was due to culture and tradition, not religion. As an adult confronted with issues of domestic violence, polygamy, marital rape, obedience, and all forms of inequality in the private and public spheres—which are justified in the name of Islam—I was outraged. For me, God is a simple article of faith: God cannot be God if God is unjust. I could reject my religion as many feminists have done, because they believe that religion is inherently unjust and patriarchal and that there is no hope in religion. For them, religion is not a source of change and liberation. But as a believer, that is not an option for me. I need to reconcile my faith and my feminism.

We decided to return to the Qur'an. Even though we had learned the Qur'an since we were young, we never understood it except through what men said it said. We decided to reread the Qur'an, to look at it with different eyes, from different experiences. We asked feminist questions, rights-based questions, of the text. For us, this was a liberating experience. We found in the text many messages of justice and compassion and of the companionship of men and women “being each other’s garment”—of men’s and women’s equal rights and responsibilities before God. And we asked: If men and women are equal in the eyes of God, why are we not equal in the eyes of men? Why should men’s meanings, experiences, and realities define how we should live our faith? As we studied the text, we questioned why there is a

disconnect between the wonderful messages in the Qur'an and the realities of women’s lives here in Muslim societies.

When we discussed the issue of polygamy, it was the first time many of us realized that although the Qur'an says, “... marry women of your choice, two or three or four,” the Qur'an continues saying, “But if you fear you will not be just, marry only one ... that will be suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice” [4:3]. Who decided that the first part should be the source of law, public policy, and practice that is considered a divine right in Islam, and who decided that the part about marrying only one to prevent injustice should not be the source of law? Why is it that one-half of the verse has become a source of law and the other part is silenced?

**I could reject my religion as many feminists have done, because they believe that religion is inherently unjust and patriarchal and that there is no hope in religion. For them, religion is not a source of change and liberation. But as a believer, that is not an option for me. I need to reconcile my faith and my feminism.**

After discovering so many wonderful verses in the Qur'an, we decided that we did not want to keep quiet and had to share this knowledge. We deliberately strategized to create a culture of public debate on matters of religion and assert that women’s voices and experiences of living Islam, the impact that women feel under the law, must be a source of authority and legitimacy in defining what religion

means. How did we do this? We were just eight women. How did we open 1,400 years of patriarchy based on religion? We did this by using the media. We started by sending letters to the editor responding to contentious issues about religion: polygamy, domestic violence, hijab, etc., to argue with different interpretations and understandings and to share with the Muslim public the existence of diverse opinions in Islam, diverse interpretations in religion.

We started engaging with the public on the basis that if Islam is to be used as a source of law in public

policy, there have to be public discussion and public debate about it. Public law must be open to public debate. It really began with us trying to create that public space. The greatest impact is that 23 years later, whenever matters on religion come up, the media comes to us, women come to us, and others come to us. They recognize us as a source of authority, even though traditionally we are not recognized as such. Understanding religion as a public issue, a moral issue, is extremely important for bringing about the changes we want to see.

## Fulata Moyo, World Council of Churches

Good afternoon. I am Fulata, and want to start from my name. I was born *fulata*, which means I was born feet-first. By the time I was born, I was the youngest. My mother was in her 40s, but when my first sister was born, my mother was 18 years old. She was the third wife to my father. She was married as a third wife to escape the stigma of being divorced at age 16 from her first husband. She did not have much education, but one thing I remember about my mother was that every day she had a Bible next to her pillow. This Bible was the Tumbuka translation, one of the languages in Malawi, and every morning she would read the Bible before she did anything else. I became very curious about this book, so one day I asked her, “What is in this book?” She said, “Read it for yourself! I thought that you go to school!” I was not sure. I really wanted to read it, but because curiosity had the better part of me, I started sneaking to read the book.

**Our work has been focused mainly on ways to influence certain understandings of scripture and theology in a way that will help our member churches take part in raising awareness about the dehumanization that is so much a part of human trafficking.**

As I read it over and over again, I discovered that I didn’t identify very much as a Christian because, as the third wife’s children, we were not baptized and, therefore, not accepted as proper children of my father. Thus, I was not very interested in this religion. But seeing how the Bible influenced my mother’s

decisions over and over again, I realized that to her the Bible was contextually an African book that was like a manual for daily life; it answered her questions. I don’t know how at that time. I am so grateful to my mother that she encouraged me to read it myself, because it meant that I had to really try to find meaning in it myself.

I’m starting from there because I want to address its effect on my work with the World Council of Churches on the issue of trafficking of women and girls. Our work has been focused mainly on ways to influence certain understandings of scripture and theology in a way that will help our member churches take part in raising awareness about the dehumanization that is so much a part of human trafficking. The Bible is one of the sources of theology we have used.



Tom England

Fulata Moyo discusses how she learned to derive her own meanings from the Bible after seeing that her mother referred to it as a manual for her daily life.

I have found that using the Bible is very important, and one experience four years ago especially brought this home for me. I started at the World Council of Churches in 2007, and I am responsible for the program on Women in Church and Society. We have focused mainly on addressing violence against women by working with women and men. Three years ago, I was in Thailand for a meeting. With a team of 30 people, I was taken to a center where they keep women who have been rescued from trafficking. There are so many young women who are trafficked through the borders of Thailand. One particular girl was 14 years old and eight months pregnant. She was looking at me as I was walking toward her, and it was like I could not see her, in her face and in her eyes; she was not in her body. It was like I was meeting a body that didn't have a life in it.

It haunted me for a long time, and then I started talking to the people running this ministry, taking care of these young women, young girls, actually. I asked one of the leaders, "What do you do? How do you deal with these girls?" She said, "We teach them the Christian principles of forgiveness, because most of them have been trafficked and then abused sexually." This 14-year-old girl was abused by three men who promised to help her and give her transport, and she didn't even know who the father was. They said, "We have taught her the value of forgiveness and that she should embrace the baby as a gift from God." Looking at the girl, it was clear to me they had not even listened to her. They had not engaged this girl even to ask her, "What are you feeling? What are

your questions?" I thought then that it is so important how we read scripture and how we interpret these kinds of things.

The day after, we had a Bible study and the person we were working with was using contextual Bible study methodology, which is a brainchild of liberation theology. She read from the book of Ruth. She read it as a text on trafficking of women and girls. She raised issues about the deprivation that actually makes women risk becoming victims of trafficking and how when she looks at the book of Ruth, she sees Ruth and Naomi as two deprived women. They are so deprived that, although in the Bible it shows that Naomi and Ruth had a good relationship, at the end of the day Naomi had to use young Ruth to be able to recover the possibility of their livelihood. She instructs Ruth to go and "cover the feet" of Boaz, which in the Hebrew textual tradition I am told, has sexual implications. If it was about love or partnership, Naomi should have been the one marrying Boaz, as they were the same age. The Bible study leader said that for her, Naomi was not unlike the traffickers, the women who are mediators, because most of them are also so desperate that they have to use someone else. Reading the text in that way was very helpful but raised several questions. In contextual Bible study, you allow the context of the reader to interact with the context of the writer. Two questions raised were: Do you have Ruths and Naomis in your community, and what are their stories? And as a faith community, what do you do about their stories?

## Cheryl Deluca-Johnson, Street Grace

My journey into women’s issues began with President and Mrs. Carter, when I marched for the Equal Rights Amendment many years ago in South Georgia. It changed the focus of my life and, ultimately, led me here. I am director and CEO of an organization called Street Grace, which began as a collaboration of churches that learned about the issue in Atlanta of domestic minor sex trafficking. We use this term to distinguish it from international sex trafficking that also occurs here. In our society—in our affluent, influential society here in the United States—we have this idea that we do not have these issues and problems. Yet, in my home state, the state I am proud to share with President and Mrs. Carter, hundreds of children will be trafficked to thousands of men.

**One person doing one thing, one time, in the life of one person—in our case, a child—can change their life forever.**

Atlanta has been listed by the FBI as one of 14 cities where domestic minor sex trafficking is a major problem. I love this city, and this is not the way I want it to be recognized. The good news is that we are also beginning to be recognized at a national level for the work we are doing to combat trafficking through successful collaboration. I am going to talk specifically about collaboration around advocacy.

Street Grace’s mission is to lead people, organizations, and leaders on a comprehensive path toward ending domestic minor sex trafficking. It begins with awareness. If you don’t know that something is happening, then there is nothing you can do about it. The awareness that has been raised at this forum has been phenomenal. If we don’t give you any way to

do something about it after you are aware of an issue, you will simply be frustrated. So the second step is empowerment. Once you have been empowered, we want you to do something about it. That is why we have 52 community partners with volunteer opportunities that support the lives of children so everyone can become engaged. Someone said earlier that one person doing one thing, one time, in the life of one person—in our case, a child—can change their life forever.

I am going to talk about the importance of social change, and the indicator I am going to look at



Tom England

Cheryl Deluca-Johnson presents the collaborative strategies Street Grace has employed to combat domestic minor sex trafficking in Georgia.

is legislation: the way that laws can be changed in support of the outcomes we want. But we have to begin with the community, and that would take collaboration.

Collaboration is always challenging. We understand that there are competition and politics among faith-based organizations, and we said that we would not become involved in that. There is a range that includes small and large churches—and the issues important to their congregations differ. So we created a form where all of them would have a voice, to make sure that the language we used would not dishonor any church that wanted to join with us.

When we had research that showed that the solicitations to buy minor children for sex came from affluent suburbs, we found more interest and participation from those churches. We didn't blame anybody. We just said, "Look. This is what's happening." When we first started talking to churches in affluent neighborhoods, they would tell us, "That is not our problem, that doesn't happen here." Being able to demonstrate that the problem is real and in our midst was important.

With those lessons in mind, we started to collaborate with other groups; first with religious institutions. We found that being narrowly focused was the key. There are many issues that divide us. We decided to unite around this issue, because our common doctrine says that we are to serve the least among us. To me, this means that rescuing the children who are trafficked for sex is something we can do together. We decided not to discuss doctrines other than how we could overlap on this one issue.

We then went to our peer organizations (for example, the Atlanta Dream Center) and others that had a similar mission. We build collaboration by looking at how we overlap; not at our differences. We need people to serve directly: We always need to serve the victims, as some groups do. But if we only do that and never go after the buyers, then this will never end. I am a big believer in rescuing victims. I am the mother of six children, including four adopted children and two out of foster care. I believe in rescue. But we need work at all levels, and we need to

focus on prevention.

One of our major initiatives is changing the law. As a faith-based organization, we decided to partner with government and legislative entities. This did not start as well as I would have liked. When I first asked legislators about four years ago if they knew that Georgia had been identified by the FBI as a major hub of domestic minor sex trafficking, they said, "No, but we have other things on our agenda." So I decided that I would just keep showing up. The first year, 50 people came to lobby; then 150. This past year, we brought 765 citizens to the Capitol to talk about this issue. Finally, this effort has paid off.

**When we had research that showed that the solicitations to buy minor children for sex came from affluent suburbs, we found more interest and participation from those churches. We didn't blame anybody. We just said, "Look. This is what's happening."**

In 2000, the penalty in the state of Georgia for someone who sold a 12-year-old child was \$50 and a misdemeanor. We thought it sensible to change this law so that anyone under the age of 18—generally considered a child in the United States—would be considered a victim if they were trafficked in sex. We thought that would be a simple law to pass. My logic was that the frontal lobe doesn't develop the executive skills to make decisions until 20 years old; our law reflects that understanding. A 16-year-old in the state of Georgia cannot consent to sex: Legally, they are not allowed to have sex. The law also states that they cannot legally enter into financial contracts until age 18. Yet we were putting 12-, 13-, and 14-year-olds in juvenile prison for prostitution.

When I testified before the legislative committee, I

laid out that reasoning and got this question: “You’re telling me that there is not a single child who is doing this to get an iPad, get their nails done, get their hair done?” I said, “That is not what is going on; nobody would choose this.” They said, “You’re telling me that no child has made this choice?” I said: “Yes, they have made a choice. And it is like us standing on the sidewalk watching someone jump from the sixth floor of a building. We look at them and think that this is a dangerous choice—this is going to hurt and probably kill them. What we don’t know—that the person jumping knows—is that the building is on fire and they are making the choice that they think will

cause the least harm in their lives. As a society, we have allowed that building to burn.”

In 2011, we passed a new law that changed the penalty to life in prison and a \$100,000 fine for anybody who trafficks a child. This is the result of collaboration between faith-based and community organizations and government officials. We also partner with the Georgia Department of Education to educate all the teachers in Georgia on this issue. Our men’s group has also partnered with the attorney general to put out public service announcements about this issue. This is collaboration.

## Pastor Paul Palmer, Atlanta Dream Center

I moved to Atlanta from a different country: California. I grew up in good home, became a hippie, and came to Christ during the Jesus movement in the '70s. My life has been forever changed. I am an advocate not only for women and boys in sex trafficking, but for anybody on whom the world seems to have turned a blind eye.

**We go with roses and handwritten cards: We look for some prophetic word to give them about how beautiful they are, how their dreams of childhood are just out of reach, and how we want to help them reach those dreams.**

Today, I want to speak on the subject of the sex trade. The Atlanta Dream Center, which we began 10 years ago, has seven umbrellas for those in need, and one is for those in sex trafficking. This program is titled Out of Darkness and has three buckets. The first is the outreach aspect, which we call Princess Night. We go to local areas and make friends with those who are being sold on the street. It is somewhat risky in the minds of the world, but once you're there it is a free opportunity to reach into a world that seems to be destitute—a world where they can't trust men or women—and we come in with a simple gesture of love. I would like to state this as a scripture if I may: The Bible says, "They will know you by your love for one another." That isn't referring to us just loving one another in the faith world but to loving the unlovely. If you have ever been unlovely and someone has loved you, it captures your attention. It will arrest you, and that's what happened to me.

That's what drives me to love the unlovely: those we drive past and ignore, those we're afraid of because we don't understand their plight. We go home and pray that somebody will make a difference in their lives. Well, I thank you for praying, because you have caused me to strive to help those.

With our Princess Night ministry, we go out certain nights every week, and we do this consistently. Our goal is to be there whenever we are needed. We go with roses and handwritten cards:



Tom England

Pastor Paul Palmer argues it is a duty of religious leaders to step into uncomfortable situations to address the plight of humanity, as he outlines the work of the Atlanta Dream Center to combat sex trafficking.

We look for some prophetic word to give them about how beautiful they are, how their dreams of childhood are just out of reach, and how we want to help them reach those dreams. Only women get out of our vehicle; the men stay in the car for support. If the “boyfriend” — the pimp in this society is called a boyfriend—is close by, we will not engage the woman. We know that she would be hurt, possibly beaten, for wasting time with us. Once we see that she is free and alone, we engage her with a rose and tell her that she is beautiful and that we have a gift for her. If she responds, we take time to pray with her and ask about her dreams and desires.

We have a 24-hour hotline. We have 12 phones with that number, and whoever answers the phone is obligated to rescue that girl within a 90-minute period. Sometimes it is hard for the women to get away from their boyfriends, so we try to get there in that window.

**Atlanta is the number-one city in the world for the sex trafficking of children. One major reason is our massive airport: easy transportation in and out. In a day’s time, you can travel just about anywhere.**

Once a woman calls, that brings us to the next bucket of our organization, Out of Darkness. Out of Darkness is our rescue organization. They would rescue that girl. We send one man and one woman, never a man alone as there is a fear of men in this trade. We always send a woman to comfort, and she does the speaking. They take them for a meal, sometimes they go shopping if they need appropriate clothing, and they take them to Solomon House.

Solomon House is a transitional home where trafficking victims are taken for 14 to 21 days. There we

take care of all their legal problems. We have a law firm on staff that will go to court for them and release them from any warrants as they go through our programs. Once we take them into our safe house, we greet them with a life partner or mentor. Partners are usually couples, because we want to show them that all men are not bad; that some men actually have a heart for women in a pure way, desiring nothing from them except their best interests. They become life partners, meeting weekly or every 10 days. They take them out to get their hair and nails done and buy them clothing or maybe a special meal. This is carried out through a yearlong program that trafficking victims enter into after their time at Solomon House is over.

This is where we are today with human trafficking in Atlanta: Atlanta is the number-one city in the world for the sex trafficking of children. One major reason is our massive airport: easy transportation in and out. In a day’s time, you can travel just about anywhere. You can find the statistics just about anywhere (they differ depending on who is doing them), but even if there were just one person, this ministry would not close its doors until we took care of that one.

In Matthew 25, Jesus said, “When I was hungry you fed me, and when I was naked you clothed me,” and they asked, “Jesus, when did we see you naked or hungry,” and he responded, “When you have done this unto the least of these, you have done it to me.” I am grateful for group efforts, to the majority of you who are working to change the law. We need that; we need the laws changed. I am thankful for those who are setting up safe houses and the like. But as in times of war, there are victims who are screaming while we sit around the table conducting peace talks, and they are screaming for somebody to help. During times of disaster, we have committees come together while there are people who are starving and wounded and bleeding. I want to encourage you, not only as a group but as individuals, to fight this plight against humanity. You are capable. You may not go into the ‘hood or on the streets where these women are being exploited, but you can be a voice. You don’t have

to wait for a council to end or to have a committee with something drafted to present to your legislatures or your state or religious leaders. I believe it is a duty of all of us as Christian leaders to suffer the consequences, to step into uncomfortable situations. As Sister Simone Campbell said when we were talking

about personal endangerment as the result of our work: Some things and some people are worth dying for, and to risk your life and step into danger because you have a cause and a call from God and a duty to love others—so be it.

## Sister Simone Campbell, NETWORK

I want to share how our public actions have created internal tension. My organization, NETWORK, was founded 41 years ago in Washington, D.C., by 47 Catholic sisters who responded to a letter from our bishop. It said we should change from doing charity only; that we must do justice and work for systemic change. So we started working to change the laws that cause suffering among our people.

I have been the leader of NETWORK since 2004. Our first encounter of being publicly challenged by our Roman Catholic Church leadership was in 2010. There was an effort to change the health care system in the United States so that more people could have access to affordable care. Currently, we have over 52 million people who do not have health care; it is a scandal, it is immoral, it is wrong. This fight was a political battle, but in the end this bill is being passed and our Catholic Health Association came out in favor of it. I was helping them by writing a letter in support of the bill; we circulated the letter to ask Catholic sisters and congregation leaders to sign it.

**For me, the problem with the Catholic bishops is that their staff has become ideologically identified with the so-called pro-life movement in our country—which is actually more like pro-birth than pro-life.**

What you may not know is that Catholic sisters helped create the U.S. health system in the first place—ironically, the system is now controlled by men, since they found out there is money in it—so Catholic sisters have authority in the issue of U.S. health care reform. I thought we could go public, using the media, if we had 20 signatures.

Unfortunately, we only had 48 hours to do this. We got 58 signatures; I was deeply humbled and honored by this. What you need to know is what happened when our letter was ready to be published: Our U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops came out opposing the bill. I was told by a lot of media that it was the first public divergence within the Catholic Church on such political issues. But we won: We got the bill passed.

For me, the problem with the Catholic bishops is that their staff has become ideologically identified with the so-called pro-life movement in our country—which is actually more like pro-birth than pro-life. They said that the bill would allow federal funding to pay for abortion, which was different



Tom England

Sister Simone Campbell discusses the role of politics in religion and the desire for a clear faith voice she found while touring the United States with Nuns on the Bus.

from my reading of the bill. Nobody agreed with the bishops' reading of the bill. It was straight politics. This example ties in with Mona Rishmawi's remarks this morning that the real fight is about culture and not faith. Culture is a struggle between monarchy and democracy. As a person of faith in our democratic culture, I expect to use my voice and to be required to use my voice, and our text mandates that I use my voice. You do not bury your gifts; you use them.

In 2012, the Vatican, which was not happy with our diversity of thought, issued a censure of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the organization of the leaders of most Catholic sisters in the United States who had signed our letter. They named our organization as a problem. They said that we were promoting "radical feminist themes" and that we worked too much for people and poverty. What an honor. First, it was shocking, but I knew that because NETWORK is not directly connected to the Vatican, I could be public. My sisters at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious had to do difficult work with the leaders of our faith, so I worked publicly and tried to give them the space to do that hard work.

I needed help, which came to me in prayer, to deal with this notoriety. I realized this moment was a resource for our mission; media is the resource for our mission. My organization was too small, so I invited my colleagues to help. As a result, in March 2012 we went on a Nuns on the Bus trip across the country. We traveled to speak against the Republicans' proposal and to lift up our sisters whose amazing work would be decimated by it. The important thing was that our bishop had sent a letter saying that Paul Ryan's budget failed the basic moral task, so when we were on the road in public, we were standing with our bishop. By using that moment, we were standing where people were and moving forward the mission as far as we could.

This year, we were on bus tour for three weeks for immigration reform—6,800 miles and 58 events in

three weeks. It was speaking out for a comprehensive common sense, compassionate immigration reform. Yesterday, we celebrated that the bill got out of the Senate with 68 votes, which was huge. Our work in immigration reform helped. Day before yesterday, we brought over 10,000 cards we collected during our trip to senators, demanding that they vote for it.

I found that there are people in our country so hungry for a clear faith voice, hungry not for punishment, but for coming together, for community. People from many other countries speak so wonderfully about community: My country has lost that sense, and this helps me to figure out ways to recover it.

I found my society is controlled by fear: fear of the other, fear of attack—but all faiths tell us to fear not. For me, Nuns on the Bus is a tremendous gift: to be able to say, "fear not," to stand up for truth, to be who we are, and also to travel the country and have a good time, because there is a piece of joy. Joy is released when we touch the pain of our time. Nuns on the Bus is like *manna*, food for hungry people who were wandering in the wilderness of the unknown, who didn't know where they were going, who were very frightened, but can be fed. Being fed with *manna*, they are nourished. The good news is that when the *manna* is no longer necessary, it will be gone. So at this moment we try to lift up and feed hungry people; within that, we stay faithful. Surprising things have happened to women's leadership within my faith tradition.

What has made me unafraid is that my heart has been broken for people who have experienced injustice. And when my heart is broken, what is fear to me? Because it is all about mission: Living for me in the Christian context is living out the Gospel. Jesus was all about going to places where people ache and hurt, so how can I not? Too often we focus on the fear and less on the need. After meeting many people as I toured on the bus, I cannot be silent. Even though it is scary, faith is always about walking, willingly, into trouble.

## Remarks of His Eminence Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, National Chief Imam and Grand Mufti of the Republic of Ghana (Presented by Letter)

In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate. Praise be to Allah for His guidance. Peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad, his family and his companions, and followers, until the Day of Judgment.

His Excellency President Jimmy Carter, representatives of His Eminence Sheikh Al-Azhar, esteemed delegates, brothers, sisters, and colleagues: I send you all the greeting of Islam: May peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you. It is with great delight and pleasure to be represented at this forum organized by The Carter Center.

**A clear boundary must be placed between the Islamic traditions and provisions and the customs and cultural traditions of some communities that have no foundation in Islam.**

This forum is a unique opportunity to discuss the family and the role of men and women in society. I am confident that the participating scholars will discuss the subject in an appropriate way, seizing this golden opportunity to correct misperceptions about the Islamic principles as they relate to the place of women in Islam and their rights and duties.

A clear boundary must be placed between the Islamic traditions and provisions and the customs and cultural traditions of some communities that have no foundation in Islam. For example, I would like to emphasize that Islam never condoned the idea of harming a woman, whether a mother, a daughter, or a wife. Immorality, criminality, and corruption have become accepted ways of life in African society and

elsewhere, with women as the primary victims. This state of affairs demands a call for the eradication of such attitudes and practices that continue to undermine a just and righteous society.

Dear brothers and sisters, there should be no need to explain the treatment of women and their legal status: If compared throughout the successive ages, the wisdom of Islamic teachings with regard to the rights and duties of women is clear. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the ideal and best example in this regard, as in all else, as were his wives (peace be upon them) who served as role models for other women. Islam recognized the full humanity and dignity of women, as they honor the whole human race.

Women are the children of Adam and Eve. God says: "O humankind! We have created you from a male and a female" (Qur'an 49:13). God states in His Qur'an: "Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam" (17:70) and made woman a partner to man in this humanity, implying equal and reciprocal rights and obligations while taking in account their different biological and physical capacities. In the Hadith narrated by Ahmed, Abi Dawud, and AlTurmithi, it states: "Women are the equal partners of men." Islam forbids ridiculing women, as God says: "O ye who believe! Let not one people deride **another** people, who may be better than they, nor let women **deride other** women, who may be better than they" (Qur'an 49:11). If contempt between women is forbidden, then contempt of a man to a woman is rather more strongly forbidden.

God made women worthy of worship, the acceptance of obligations, and closeness to God. God directed the divine message to women as it was directed to men. For their obedience, God grants a reward that will not be denied, just as men will not be denied reward for their obedience; obedience is not a virtue in women alone. Furthermore, God made people of each gender fully responsible for their own

work, emphasizing woman's personality and a respect for her unique existence. God says, "I will allow not the work of any worker from among you, whether male or female, to be lost. You are from one another" (Qur'an 3:195).

Your Eminences, all Muslims recognize that this principle was first present in God's will before it was revealed in God's message, for the first person on earth to believe in the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was Khadija (God bless her). In addition, as the Holy Qur'an was assembled in one book, the sacred text was guarded by a woman, Hafsa, mother of the faithful (God bless her). With many honors bestowed and earned by them, Muslim women lived respected and proud among women of other commu-

**The first person on earth  
to believe in the Prophet  
Muhammad (peace be upon him)  
was Khadija (God bless her).**

nities who did not believe in Islam. In Islamic law, it is stated that women should have the right to fully own property and to personally administer their property as they wish, without consultation by anyone, whether a husband, father, or any other designated guardian. While it is commanded in Islam to provide women a dowry upon marriage, it is considered a woman's whole and own property, and it is prohibited for a husband or a guardian to take anything from it without her consent. In choosing a husband, a woman's opinion and consent must be taken before the marriage. Muslim from Abu-Huraira narrates that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "A previously

married woman must not be given in marriage until she is consulted, and a virgin must not be given in marriage until her permission is granted." When the people asked, "How will she express her permission?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "By keeping silent (when asked her consent)." Thus, if a woman or girl objects to a marriage, it is not allowed to go forth.

In pre-Islamic Arab society, it is known that women were not given any inheritance. Islam protected for women their share of inheritance; as God says, "There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property be small or large—a legal share" (Qur'an 4:7).

The context of the revelation of the inheritance verse, as narrated by AlTurmithi, Abi Dawud, Ibn Maja, and Al-Daraqutni from Jaber Bin Abdullah, is that the wife of Saad Bin Rabi said, "Messenger of God, Saad died and left two daughters and a brother; his brother took all of what Saad left. They (the daughters) will not marry without money." He (the Prophet) did not answer her that session. So she returned and said, "Saad's daughters?" The Messenger of God (peace be upon him) said, "Send for his brother," so he came. He (the Prophet) said to him, "Give his daughters two-thirds and his wife an eighth, and what remains is yours."

Your Excellencies, before concluding I want to thank His Eminence Sheikh of Al-Azhar and the honorable scholars for their contribution to the world, and Africa in particular, through sending scholars, imams, and doctors and offering scholarships and other programs that the children of this continent need. I also want to thank The Carter Center for inviting us to participate in this conference. I hope it will be repeated. May peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you all.

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# Working Groups Report

## **Sacred Texts and Women's Rights: Women's Struggles in Religion for Self-Affirmation, Recognition, and Dignity**

Presented by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Laurie Zoloth, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini

Religious leaders, scholars, activists, and experts participated in four working groups divided into four topic areas: physical integrity (including violence and harmful practices), family law, access to education and economic participation (including human

**Interpreting texts, written or oral, in such a way as to enhance the rights of women is simply critical for securing the rights of women.**

trafficking), and public and political participation (including religious and political leadership). Working group moderators were Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Andrea White, Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, and Ritu Sharma, respectively.

Facilitator Seana Steffen set up processes that helped the working groups accomplish a range of outcomes—from reflection into the impact of scriptural interpretation on the rights of women to exploration of strategies effective in making fundamental shifts toward greater respect for human rights, case studies, and ideas for future work and collaborative approaches. Alison Boden worked closely with each of the four moderators to capture the results of these discussions. All participants agreed that more time should be allotted to these discussions and that only the surface has been scratched. Therefore, continued

collaboration and a widening of the conversation are main recommendations that emerged from the forum as a whole.

### **Text Study**

Sacred and normative texts have tremendous authority, legitimacy, and power to establish norms for communities and families. Interpreting texts, written or oral, in such a way as to enhance the rights of women is simply critical for securing the rights of women.

Some texts are problematic in the ways they are interpreted to ensure women's rights. They are interpreted in ways that subordinate and disempower women or deny them the enjoyment of specific, particular human rights. For example, Ephesians 5:22 ff. says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord ..."

Other texts are wonderfully supportive, promoting the idea of women's value and worth, human equality, and their natural entitlement to every human right that has been articulated by the global community. For example, Qur'an 49:11–12 says, "O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them."

Some texts can be interpreted either way. The same text can be interpreted as meaning that women are secondary in value and rights, or it can be interpreted as supporting full equality of worth and rights. For example: Genesis 3, in which the serpent convinces Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Was Eve a sinner and a fool and should womankind be subjugated because of her, or was she the most intelligent member of the whole new order of creation?

The groups looked at what words of the texts said on their surface, on what the texts might say

under the surface, on what the text does not say. Some Muslim women scholars (for example, Asma Barlas) like to say, “The text does not deny,” meaning that what the text does not say is unacceptable for women leaves everything else quite acceptable for women—and that’s a lot!

Some participants noted that while words like “equality” don’t show up in sacred or normative texts (they weren’t concepts that existed in ancient societies in the way they are used today), this doesn’t mean the modern notion of equality isn’t supported by the text.

**We must start with the guiding principles of a religious or spiritual tradition and then establish how certain textual interpretations or practices subvert them. Religions do not endorse violence, for instance, so we need to point out when violence is actually done in the name of being faithful to a text.**

In some cultures, rights-denying interpretations come about because of an incorrect projection of current word-usage. For instance, some Kenyan Christian communities practice female genital cutting because the New Testament says that Mary was a virgin. They believe that virginity is secured through genital cutting, and since the Bible says Mary was a virgin, clearly Mary had undergone cutting. If Mary, the mother of Jesus was cut, their daughters certainly are going to be as well. There is no biblical scholar, historian, or anthropologist who would say that women in ancient Semitic society underwent genital cutting. Male circumcision was critical; there was

no female equivalent. Kenyan Christians are trying to educate pastors and families as to the different uses and meanings of the simple word “virgin” and that there is no biblical mandate for female genital cutting.

The groups looked at what the texts might mean more broadly—what different contexts they could apply to. The groups also considered the social and historical contexts in which the texts were first recorded, what the purpose of the teaching was at that time, and what the purpose might be now, in a very different era of human history.

Some of the groups noted that an asymmetry of power is already noted in the text, with an implicit or explicit summons to the reader to redress that, to promote justice. Participants highlighted mandates in the sacred texts to protect the vulnerable in any situation; to identify with the oppressed; and to “maintain” the rights of the poor and oppressed, suggesting that they have those rights (already) inherently.

The groups discussed the need and the responsibility to challenge misunderstandings that have become norms and to highlight liberating and empowering interpretations.

Frequent observations that can be found across the selected texts:

- Women being ordained to pursue knowledge, develop intellect and inquiry, and question
- Women questioning, even in the face of authority, just as men question
- Equality before the law
- Equality before God; therefore, equality with men
- Women’s faith mandate to pursue knowledge, pursue what is the truth

## Strategies

- There is an overarching need to decouple harmful practices from sacred texts and teachings. This decoupling can be called “values deliberation.” We must start with the guiding principles of a religious or spiritual tradition and then establish how certain

textual interpretations or practices subvert them. Religions do not endorse violence, for instance, so we need to point out when violence is actually done in the name of being faithful to a text.

- The effectiveness of humility and nonconfrontational communication was highlighted, in addition to discussions about “interruptive” voices of women, which some might view as confrontational. Both approaches are necessary, depending on the circumstances.
- Also discussed was the necessity of using language that is accessible and acceptable to those whose minds one wants to change (e.g., sometimes saying “mother, sister, daughter” instead of “women”). Some urged refraining from using the word “feminist” if it will be heard in a negative light. The concept here is that it is important to build relationships, whereupon trust can lead to expanding understanding and, eventually, to expanding and inclusive language.
- The groups discussed the importance of relying on a person or institution with the religious authority and the community respect to affirm that a harmful practice or interpretation is not consistent with the religion’s history, ethics, or texts. The example was given of an imam from Senegal traveling to Al Azhar in Egypt to hear from religious authorities there that female genital cutting is not an Islamic practice but rather a cultural one. This approach can prevent naysayers from holding out.
- It is important to use existing networks for sharing information and changing habits. Everyone has networks, even the village beggars.
- Changes in interpretation need to begin within communities, not from without. Finding (or creating and/or training) allies within communities is a necessary first step for those who wish to see changes to interpretations and the resulting enhancement of women’s rights.
- Community, community, community. Successful work for changed interpretations and practices needs to acknowledge and use the fact that many people

simply don’t act in isolation but in relationship to family members, civic community, and ethnic community, not to mention religious community.

- It is critical to identify the “prompt,” as one group called it—the deeply held need or ethical conviction in a local person that will summon them to action. Organizers might call it their “self-interest.” What will make a person become involved in change, in reinterpretation? Sometimes it is their own bodily integrity; sometimes it is that of those they love most; sometimes it is the simple desire to live as faithfully as possible, living in accordance with the religion’s accurate intentions and meanings and a desire to live in greater accordance with their religion’s ethical mandates.

**It is important to distinguish between using religion and engaging religion. The use of religion manipulates it to fit a desired end. Engagement with it, and with other practitioners or leaders, opens the way to dialogue and transformation.**

- There is a need to get people to rethink things that they have always assumed are natural and inevitable because they are all they have ever known (e.g., pain and suffering for women in childbirth or intimate relations). We all defend what we know to be natural and inevitable (in this case, genital cutting) without learning what is behind it that is constructed and responsible and what is human agency.
- Stories and narratives about real people are the most powerful tool. Human interest and compassion respond to the joys, sufferings, and real experiences

of real people. Stories create empathy and can begin the process of breaking the silences on taboo subjects.

- It is important to distinguish between using religion and engaging religion. The use of religion manipulates it to fit a desired end. Engagement with it, and with other practitioners or leaders, opens the way to dialogue and transformation.

## Case Studies

- One participant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo shared her experience organizing training sessions for clergy and for women on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and linking the language of the UDHR to scripture.
- A number of participants spoke about bringing women together across religious lines to talk about shared experiences, such as sexual violence.
- One participant went to the compound of the Taliban in her area and used Qur'anic verses and arguments to negotiate the release of two young women who had been taken by the group, telling them they should do no harm to people who were working for the betterment of humanity. Her organization now has the support of the Taliban for their work.
- One participant arranged to meet with the mullahs who were criticizing her publicly for statements she made on a radio program about the lack of Qur'anic references to stoning. She chose to act in the most religiously and culturally expected way, declining to sit in an available chair but rather sitting on the floor and using the language of deferential respect to their authority. She earned the result she hoped for: They ended their opposition to her religious interpretation of the Qur'an's absence of support for stoning.
- Other participants and their organizations use the public space of letters to the editor in various publications and other public relations strategies to do critical education of female and male readers on

issues related to women's rights. Again, different strategies for different contexts.

## Opportunities for Working Forward and Working Together

### *Ideas for Curriculum Development*

- Train seminary/religious schools on how to preach and deal with difficult texts and how to understand and address patriarchy
- Develop high school curricula on textual interpretation and women's rights
- Introduce a women's rights curriculum into existing educational institutions and projects
- Teach Arabic to boys and girls in schools (in Muslim countries where the national language is not Arabic) so they can read texts for themselves
- Change the policies by which academic credit is awarded so that practical experience in working for women's rights is included (a more praxislike model)
- Offer online courses on women's rights and religious practice
- Provide anti-violence training for those preparing for ordination

### *Publishing*

- Create an information clearinghouse on who is doing this work—the various nongovernmental organizations, religious communities, etc., for information-sharing and collaborations
- Publish, in any format, helpful sermons on women's rights
- Publish on the development of masculinities in boys and men
- Encourage people who have access to the technology to publish their stories on the Web related to religious membership and women's rights
- Publish the Islamic Declaration on Women's Rights, with translations into multiple languages

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## Mobilizing Faith for Women

- Create a book of best practices
- Provide collections of stories of courage in advocacy for women's rights in religious communities
- Publish a gender-sensitive edition of the Qur'an and other religious texts that have not already been reimagined in this light
- Distribute movies and videos that can tell stories most effectively and convey information to those who can't read
- Publish training manuals
- Publish translated advocacy tools from the United Nations into the concepts and theologies of religious communities
- Publish documents that come out of this conference

### **Convening**

- Bring together area clergy for training on women's rights and textual interpretations
- Plan meetings that permit scholars and activists to work together in a nonconfrontational setting, teaching them how to partner on women's rights
- Request that The Carter Center and the American Academy of Religion convene an annual gathering of scholars interested in these issues
- Convene experts on how advances in science can improve advocacy for women
- Bring together both secular and faith-based advocacy organizations to increase the power of their partnerships
- Convene people on mental health and women's rights in Iraq postwar

### **Advocacy**

- Request public declarations on women's rights from leading religious institutions (Al Azhar)
- Have the international community hold others accountable for the agreements to which they willingly have become a party (e.g., the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework)
- Advocate for admitting more women into institutions of formal religious education

- Cultivate partnerships with village leaders
- Translate disadvantage into opportunity, as one participant said. Know more about how our advocacy for and with others can teach them to turn their disadvantage into opportunity or how those of us not disadvantaged can be a support or advocate in that process
- Use digital formats so that the tons of good work can be more accessible
- Integrate religious leaders into shadow-reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; request help with data collection and dissemination to treaty bodies in Geneva
- Advocate to hold religious leaders and communities accountable to the Women's Convention and other instruments

### **Programming Collaborations**

- Mentor community-based collaboratives (i.e., Tostan training center in Senegal)
- Ask academic departments, activists, and faith-based organizations to partner to share wisdom and action plans
- Partner with the United Nations for religious literacy; provide instruction to U.N. staff so that they can better partner with faith-based organizations and advocate for religious women's rights

### **Recognition of Leadership**

- Put an intentional spotlight on women who live authentically, religiously, and empowered with all human rights as religious authorities in and of themselves; can be achieved through convening well-publicized gatherings and offering a platform for women leaders
- Give internationally recognized prizes to religious leaders who do good work in this area

### **Some Next Steps**

- Write national action plans for training faith and community leaders to combat violence against

- women, including measurable recommendations and deadlines for action
- Establish a collaborative process on human trafficking based at The Carter Center, where various stakeholders can gather and examine best practices
  - Ask the World Council of Churches and The Carter Center to organize regional forums, such as this forum, where discussions can be organized across sectors, cultures, and religious communities
  - Establish a working group for an international conference/workshop/seminar to bring together organizations with Al Azhar, Musawah, etc. Could possibly be held at the Biblioteca Alexandrina in Egypt and could start a new conversation on an Islamic jurisprudence of human rights and translate the idea of human dignity into legal norms and laws within an Islamic framework. Would also hope the conference could create a new curriculum

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# Plenary Panel

## Sacred Texts and Women's Rights: Women's Struggles in Religion for Self-Affirmation, Recognition, and Dignity

### Professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Good morning, it is a great honor to be here. I am grateful to Karin Ryan of the Carter Center's Human Rights Program for inviting me to this important conference and for her and her associates' work preparing for it. I am especially appreciative that we heard the story of Tostan before we go to a different story, namely the story about a woman in the New Testament.

To approach our topic, sacred texts and women's rights, I want to share some reflections as to how scripture can be a life-giving word that sustains justice for women and radical democratic equality rather than a monument of stone inculcating the inequality of women and anti-democratic mindsets in the name of God. After only sketching these questions in a short run-through, I want to focus attention on a story in the New Testament, in order to place a biblical story of a woman's struggle for her rights in our midst and to see what texts do to such struggles. I will approach this question from a critical feminist perspective.

### **Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.**

Since the "f-word" is still, or again in most of the world, a dirty word, I hasten to explain how I understand it; I have a bumper sticker formulated by Cheri Kramarae and Paula Treichler, which, tongue in cheek, states: "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people." This definition alludes to the democratic assertion that women are people and insists that women are fully entitled and responsible citizens in society and religion. At the same time,

this bumper sticker definition ironically emphasizes that at the beginning of the 21st century, feminism is not yet a common-sense notion: That women are people and fully entitled citizens is still a very debated and controversial issue. In short, this bumper sticker definition of feminism as a radical notion that women are people underscores that feminists' struggles for full citizenship rights are ongoing and that we do not yet live in a postfeminist world, as is often asserted. This bumper sticker assertion that women are people positions feminism within radical democratic movements and discourses that argue for the rights of all the people who are women. According to this political definition of feminism, men can practice feminism, just as women can be anti-feminists. Thus, I don't define feminism in terms of gender.

This brings us to the problem of male-centered language in which the scriptures are written and translated. Christian scriptures are written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, which, like English, are also male-centered languages. In such kyriocentric—lord or elite male-centered—languages, women are subsumed under elite masculine-type language, such as "president," "chairman," and so on. In order to lift into consciousness the linguistic violence of such elite masculine-type language, I use wo/man/she/female with a slash as inclusive and do not use "man" as it is usually done, in an inclusive way. I suggest whenever you hear me talk about wo/men, you understand it in a generic sense.

English is a wonderful language: You can't do it in German or in Spanish, but in English you can say "wo/men" includes "men," "s/he" includes "he," and "fe/male" includes "male." To use "women" in such a generic fashion as an inclusive term invites men in the audience to participate in the commonplace experience for wo/men that demands that we must always

think twice, if not three times, to adjudicate whether we are meant by so-called generic terms—such as humans, men, slaves, Americans, or brothers—that are deeply inscribed in sacred scriptures. Since according to Ludwig Wittgenstein the limits of our language are the limits of our world, such a change of language pattern, which sounds trivial, is a very important step toward the realization of a new feminist consciousness when reading sacred scriptures and other religious or cultural texts.

Moreover, reading the Bible for justice or women's rights, one cannot afford to engage in a purely apologetic or purely academic reading. Rather, by making feminist discourses on kyriarchal prejudice central to the exploration of sacred texts, we are able to attend both to the kyriarchal politics of otherness and subordination inscribed in scriptures and to their visions of justice and well-being. Throughout centuries, the Bible has been used both as a weapon against and a resource for subjugated wo/men. The Bible has been invoked both for and against wo/men's struggles for access to citizenship, public speaking, reproductive rights, theological education, or ordained ministry. In these often bitter debates and struggles, the opposing parties continue to cite religion not only for and against wo/men's full participation in religious leadership but also for and against the full citizenship of free-born wo/men; the emancipation of enslaved wo/men; colonized wo/men; the equal rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people; or against economic and reproductive rights of poor wo/men and their children.

Consequently, no serious reform of society in the interest of wo/men's emancipation will be successful if it does not seek also to advance the reform of religion and of sacred scriptures. Since all reforms are interdependent, one cannot change the law, education, or other cultural institutions without also attempting to transform biblical religions. If one believes that we can neglect the revision of biblical religion because there are more pressing political issues at stake, one does not recognize the impact of religion on society and especially on the lives of wo/men who treasure scripture as a resource in their daily struggles. In

sum, I argue here that it is necessary to contextualize the analysis of sacred texts and women's rights in a critical feminist inquiry that seeks to understand and transform kyriarchal religious structures inscribed in sacred texts. This not only perpetrates dehumanizing heterosexism and gender stereotypes but also other forms of women's oppression such as racism, poverty, religious exclusivism, ageism, or colonialism.

**No serious reform of society in the interest of wo/men's emancipation will be successful if it does not seek also to advance the reform of religion and of sacred scriptures. Since all reforms are interdependent, one cannot change the law, education, or other cultural institutions without also attempting to transform biblical religions.**

In a second step, I will try to exemplify such a critical feminist interpretation and look at a biblical text with you. As an example of a kyriocritical feminist interpretation, I want to focus attention on the story of the Persistent Widow in Luke 18:1–8 as one of the few stories of justice in the New Testament that can be interpreted as an argument for wo/men's rights. Scholars debate whether this story is a Lukan compositional creation or a Lukan redaction of an older story, which might go back to Jesus. The meaning of the story in the Gospel of Luke is quite clear: It is a story about the practice of persistent prayer. In its Lukan form, the judge becomes a God figure and the parable reasons “from the lesser” (the judge) to the

greater (God). If the judge reacts to the pestering of the widow, how much more will God respond to the prayers and outcries of God's people?

In Luke's redaction, the story of the woman is used to inculcate the admonition to prayer. It is very clear that this Lukan text draws a problematic kyriarchal image of God by likening God to the unjust judge who only gives in because he is pestered. Scholars sense this problem when they try to explain why the parable speaks in such a negative fashion about God. Most importantly, when read in a situation of violence against women, the Lukan version does not empower women to resist such violence but encourages us to pray harder so that a male God will come to our rescue. It fosters a spirituality of quietism that accepts violence and, in typical feminine fashion, waits for the all-powerful man to come to one's rescue.

**The plight and courage of the woman fighting for her rights come best to the fore in an intertextual reading of the story. Like the social system represented by the unjust judge, so also social systems of our time do not want to give justice to battered, jobless, pregnant, or poor women but seek to vindicate their adversaries.**

The story has a contrary meaning, and functions quite differently, if it is read against the grain of the Lukan meaning. If one pares away the Lukan interpretation in verse one and verses six through eight, a different story emerges. In this story, the two characters, the judge and the widow, are drawn

as opposites. The judge is clearly marked as unjust, because he is said to "neither fear God nor respect people." The widow is defined not by her gender but by her actions; she is characterized as tirelessly insisting on justice. "She kept coming to him, asking for justice against her adversary." Nothing is said about why she had to approach the judge over and over again, and no reasons are given as to why he refuses her demand. The story climaxes with the judge saying to himself: "I will grant her justice, so that she may not give me a black eye"—a literal translation that also can be translated as "bruise," "batter down," or "wear me out"—by her nonstop coming. The soliloquy of the judge is a typical sentiment of those who act violently. The judge blames the woman for "battering" him, although she only seeks her rights and vindication, whereas he acts violently by denying justice to her.

Most scholars try to make sense out of the story by reading it in kyriarchal gender terms: assuming that the widow was poor, helpless, without any male support, and in danger of becoming destitute. The claim is that she only had two choices left: to stay in her former husband's house and do menial work or to return to her father's house. Moreover, they argue that at the time women could not appear in court by themselves: That the widow herself appears alone before the judge, therefore, means she has no male guardian or relatives left. However, the text does not portray the widow either as poor or as lacking male protection. She is characterized as independent, resourceful, and assertive. As Jewish feminist scholars such as Tal Ilan and Judith Romney Wegner have pointed out, although Jewish women's participation in public life was heavily circumscribed, three types of women—the emancipated daughter, the divorcee, or the normal widow—were considered to be legally autonomous persons. In Judith Romney Wegner's words, I quote, "No man has a legal claim on a woman's sexuality. The system always treats her as a person both in sex-related and other matters."

By arguing against the standard interpretation of the widow as poor and destitute, I do not want to deny that just as today, so also in the first century,

many widows lived in poverty and dire straits. Rather, I want to point to the pitfalls of this argument: Not all Jewish widows were poverty-stricken and needed male support, since widows could own property, live independently, and inherit their husband's estate if they were so designated in his will. The book of Judith portrays such a wealthy and independent widow.

To see the woman of the parable first of all as a victim of the social system overlooks that she acts as an assertive member of the community. Moreover, such a reading keeps women in violent home situations from recognizing and identifying the powers and resources for resistance and survival still available to them. The story works because of its stark opposition and sparse characterization: It is a widow at the center of the action. The widow is characterized as bold, assertive, and persistent; she has suffered injustice and will not rest until she gets her rights. Justice must be done. She won't be silent and tolerate injustice. She is trying to ensure that justice prevails, but in her view, the cause of justice and her side of the case are identical. If the judge supports her and favors her side in the case, then justice will prevail. In contrast, the judge, who as an official of the court should represent justice, is pictured as representing injustice. In the end, the judge gives the woman her due, not because he is convinced of her rights but because he wants

to get rid of her. He is a representative of a corrupt justice system that claims to defend rights and laws but in actuality undermines and perverts them.

The plight and courage of the woman fighting for her rights come best to the fore in an inter-textual reading of the story. Like the social system represented by the unjust judge, so also social systems of our time do not want to give justice to battered, jobless, pregnant, or poor women but seek to vindicate their adversaries. Just like the courageous and persistent widow of the parable, wo/men who suffer from domestic violence and sex trafficking reach out again and again for justice and help. Yet, whether their story will have a happy ending and they receive their rights depend also on our interpretation of sacred texts and religious teachings. For instance, if we teach the Lukan redaction of this story, wo/men will be exhorted to pray and internalize the image of an unjust G\*d. Consequently, they internalize the image of an unjust G\*d and will not have the courage to defend their rights but pray instead. The interpretation of sacred texts needs to enable women to stand up against the powers of dehumanization and for their rights and human dignity by demanding justice and well-being. We need to do everything we can so that the powers of religion are no longer used to justify the dehumanization of wo/men but inspire wo/men to stand up for their rights in religion and society.

## Dr. Laurie Zoloth

I want to thank the two previous speakers: Molly [Melching], for a stunning and beautiful example of how empowerment looks and works in the lives of individual women, and the great teacher of us all, Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza, for the way a beautiful textual example can enliven us. I want to begin by speaking both conversationally and academically. I want to make four points and then talk about them in a more careful way. The four points I want to make are these:

First, although I'm a huge fan of human rights and am incredibly happy to have been invited to represent my university and the American Academy of Religion here, I have a quarrel with the term "rights" because I believe that rights are not freestanding but are always correlative and need to be seen in relationship to correspondent and correlative duties. When we think of rights—the right to life, the right to food, the right to health—we always have to think of our obligation to feed, to plant, to heal, and to teach. We have duties that are correlative that enable the rights, and we need to speak of such duties, particularly in the first world, where our duties are the very limits of our freedom

Secondly, I have a quarrel with the term "sustainability." I know we are fond of the term "sustainability," but I think it's not nearly determined enough. I want us to move from a world that is "sustained"—because it's sustained in injustice, sustained in oppression, as it stands now—to a world that's full and abundant, one of "hospitality." So moving from "sustainability language" to "hospitality language" is one of the tasks for the world as we face a crisis of enormous, unthinkable proportions, as our climate changes, and as scarcity deepens the poverty so long a part of our horizon. We need something better than a sustained world: We need a world in which the stranger is welcomed and where the marginalized and the lost become the honored guests.

The third point I want to make is about the centrality of interruption; the necessity to have a conversation and the necessity to interrupt each other, which I hope will be the themes of this

conference. The centrality of interruption—as opposed to the centrality of the trajectory of going forward in speech—means we have to hear the voice of the one who is outside the central discourse: We need to hear the voice of the excluded, of the one who bears the narrative of difference, of the women whose voices need to crowd into our texts and our policies.

**Now to read the Hebrew scripture is to read the powerful call for justice. To accept the duties of the covenant means to understand that the text calls us toward an inescapable and fundamental responsibility for the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized—too often women.**

Finally, I'd like to talk about the need for translation and for the generosity that translation implies. As an academic, I want to suggest that the way we have taught at universities is incomplete, because we haven't taken seriously the need for total translation of scripture into activity, into action. It follows my insistence on the necessity of going beyond a call for rights into a description of our duties. I want to begin with a text, the haftorah for Yom Kippur. It is read at the end of the fast on the holiest day of the Jewish year. The haftorah passage—the reading from the prophets that follows the reading from the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible—begins by suggesting that all the fasting that the community has done until now has been wrong, because the fast is incomplete without the call for justice. So says Isaiah:

No, this is the fast I desire [not the one you've been doing]: to unlock the fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin. Then shall your light burst through like the dawn and your healing spring up quickly; your vindicator will march before you, and the presence of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then, when you call, the Lord will answer and when you cry he will say: *Hineni*, here I am.

Now to read the Hebrew scripture is to read the powerful call for justice. To accept the duties of the covenant means to understand that the text calls us toward an inescapable and fundamental responsibility for the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized—too often women. In this text, the usual call and response of the Hebrew Bible are reversed, because unlike the many stories when God calls and human beings then struggle to say, “Here I am, *Hineni*,” in the Isaiah text of the haftorah, God is present, *Hineni*, only after human beings act with justice and compassion toward the vulnerable. Because I believe in human duties and the rights correlated with duties, I believe that scripture can allow us to understand that our duties and moral actions have to come first and that they are prior to the building of a just world. Act first, act righteously, says scripture, for faith is the first act of ethics.

How does this work for teachers? When one is teaching theology, one is teaching translation. For when one engages the texts with our students, the moral gesture has already begun. Theology is an orality, an encounter interrupted by urgencies and with arguments by friends. This argumentative quality is largely not for its own sake but because of the essential quality of conversation itself. And because the premise to speak about God, in Jewish thought, is always to speak *with* God, Jewish theology is both talk “just between us,” and it is also talk of “justice between us,” because the deepest longing is to move across and between God and self and to include a move between the self to the other—as the action

of theo-politics. So the first act of theology is an ethical one, because it is to speak and to yearn for a listener. Theology is always the act of both speaking out of, and speaking to, and speaking for scripture. Speaking—and thus transporting and taking the text to the other—saying, “See?” Theology is the act of translation, which is the act of perfect welcome to the other stranger: His text or mine, it is yours, I give it to you.

**I believe that scripture can allow us to understand that our duties and moral actions have to come first and that they are prior to the building of a just world. Act first, act righteously, says scripture, for faith is the first act of ethics.**

Speech about scriptural text is always moral activity, an invitation into the tent of welcome; it's always a generosity and a dispossession, a not-possession—the act of power in which one is also invisible, in between, discerning and judging among words, names, and signs—which is, of course, the first human activity, Adam's act in Genesis, naming the things of creation. In this way, theology also exists in open and empty spaces when something is needed and lacked. Furthermore, theology has a theo-political economy: It is a mediation, and it is a command about what it means to have, and then to give up, freely. It must involve discernment, judging, and justice. To be “just between us”: Is the word really a secret for us, kind of a possession? “Just between us,” *roh hinenu*, each of us in our own language, in our own inner worlds? Yet thinking of theology as translation implies a generosity, a hospitality (even perhaps an optimism), and a fundamental principle

of what it means to have a thing. Ought this not be the case that theology is intrinsically and structurally optimistic? I'm going to suggest that theology is "just between us," and try to present the fact that while all these claims that theology must be just, and intimate, and other-regarding, it's always a matter of a collective, of a community of meaning, which is in its very core revelation a translation to a social whole. Thus, translation is this fundamental theme, and if that's the case, how we speak to each other is central.

**To understand this moment—to slow it and reflect on the encounter of ethics and on what is occurring—means that each separate self can understand that the plight of the other is only a breath away from one's own plight. That reversibility makes ethical encounter possible and makes it decent.**

Another text: In the Hebrew scripture, the Torah is given to the Jews, who are assembled, several times. Sometimes they accept it and sometimes they reject it. But the last time it's given is in Deuteronomy, right before they go into the land. After it's given, a separate command is made: Take this text, take this Torah, and build a big wall, a stone edifice, and write the words of everything that I've said, says Moses in Hebrew scripture, on these stones. And here is the text: "After that they brought the stones, built an altar, and plastered it with plaster. And they inscribed thereon all the words of the Torah in 70 languages," as it is said very plainly.

Let's spend some time on this text, for it gives such a powerful and vivid image of a public theology. Look

at the work and the energy of the people: bringing huge stones, maybe rolling them, lifting them, so they are firmly placed one wide slab across the next one; drawing the sand, the water; making plaster and taking it to hand and smoothing to make a white blank face on which to write carefully each and all the words of the Torah, in language after language after language 70 times. Does each one step up to whisper the translation to the scribe? The letters are black against the white, very plain. Anyone can see and read them, women and men, with a shock of familiarity. "There is my language up there, my words." Surely the Torah is translated at that moment, and surely it's intended to be so. Surely, the "as told to me and I tell it to you" quality of revelation is an act of translation. But let me note that the translation is always a choreographed event in time and place. There are always at least three: the speech act of saying or text, then a person who transmits this or transforms it to another language, and then a receiver of the newly created chosen saying. In justice theory, it's that entrance of the third that sets in motion the need for justice beyond charity or generosity. For the moral agent in question, you who listen or who read are interrupted by the need to choose: Which stranger takes precedence? How much is given and why? Who is right and who is wrong in their claim?

The entrance of the third suggests a structure in which choice is required to restore and stabilize the world. For it cannot be made stable merely by sacrifice or by conquest—not when there is the entrance, the interruption of the third. Thus, thinking of translation means we have arrived at the moral location of justice. Theological ethics and ethical theology not only require interdisciplinary and interfaith considerations, but they are always interrupted—meaning that when I speak of "otherness," the herky-jerky of translated speech, that is always interrupted to explain to the other, for an ethical theology is an interrupted discipline.

I have argued this at the structure of applied ethics in particular. We are always interrupted academics in thinking about theory, or structure, or authority by

the work. As we just saw, that is the whole point of such thinking. Our thinking is stopped, and started again and again, as the cases and the people of the cases—the women we just saw—asked for our attention and help and corrected us when we picked up our text, and they become part of our analysis. In contemporary ethics, this is like the complex world in which we see in the Torah and the Talmud, always being interrupted by the need to adjudicate the case, as the one Elisabeth just showed us, which comes in from the marketplace.

**Should we be teaching one another a basic concept: What does this text mean to you? It is about meaning, the deepest meaning that is a thing worth teaching.**

I also want to make a profound claim about the act of love that teaching is, if it is truly teaching. We must love the stranger we teach. We see this gesture as a moral gesture across defended terrain. In religions, the boundaries we struggle with are not geographical. They're temporal, linguistic, and cultural, and because of that, I think they may be even more defended. In the world of teaching, the complex relationship between text, community, and practical reason is at stake. How do we think about how to live a good life and then how do we do it? Thinking and arguing and argument are all that academics have in our moral community. We have to think ourselves into the position of the other; that is the moment of ethics. To understand this moment—to slow it and reflect on the encounter of ethics and on what is occurring—means that each separate self can understand that the plight of the other is only a breath away from one's own plight.

That reversibility makes ethical encounter possible and makes it decent.

All of us live in some kind of a hypertext modernity in which many intense, rapid, and powerful paths and languages emerge at once—in which the language of theology, redemption, miracle, and resurrection are taken from us and claimed by science, especially the biological sciences. I argue that argument over the semiotics of scriptural texts, as we just did, becomes the way that the rabbis allow us to reread them and thus to transmit the Torah. That is the way that antiquity gets translated into modernity.

In the academy, we are faced with a loss of our power. In fact, it sometimes seems to me that the theological language is the only language that is left against the power of the marketplace, which has taken up against all the other languages. There has been a sweeping victory for accountancy, the organizing principle of the market. What appears to matter most are units of things you can buy. They are measured by weight and size. We are asked in the university to do outcome studies, in which students rate us by number. They rate their happiness with our class and the amount of pleasure they have from how a professor uses her audiovisual equipment. We judge one another by the amount of money we are paid, which we are paid in recognition of the amount of money we bring to our universities with grants or football tickets. We are directed by excited faculties of computer science to use the enormous arena of the Internet to create large classes, and we measure students in the tens of thousands. We can now teach a whole crowd of people and never even see their faces.

One can “have” students this way—having as in possessing many great things—and one can produce knowledge this way, as in producing a great many parts of a larger thing: the syllabus, the documents, the handouts. What seems to matter is the volume of people who can be processed through a class. I'm an American, and thus Jacksonian democracy does have its appeal. Yet we are called on to wonder what it is to teach if you cannot see their faces, cannot be interrupted by them, cannot sit with them. In the last

100 years, we've divided knowledge into parts or units and counted their worth, which is to say we have used engineering as a way of understanding the world and observational science as a way of knowing the real as a series of organizations of the smallest part. But ought this to be the case for us now? Or should we be asking a different question about wholeness, communities, and power? Should we be teaching one another a basic concept: What does this text mean to you? It is about meaning, the deepest meaning that is a thing worth teaching.

A final note about practice: In the last five years, along with working on teaching scripture, I've been thinking about teaching in my modern American university. At this very moment, I feel that teaching humanities is at most risk, both about what we teach and how we teach. Therefore, I've been directing a program at my university that uses scriptural reasoning methods in an intensive yearlong seminar on ethics for students who apply for this undergraduate program. They study text and moral philosophy together, and then they research their actual place, a small city in midwestern America. They think about how the text suggests they might make it better, a little bit better. It's a simple question, they think. In their junior year, I make them go abroad, because

they need to know that America's big towers are not the only way to build communities or to live on the earth. In their senior year they come back, and they see whether text, theory, and energy are enough to make the world a better place.

This year, they planted a new fruit orchard in our city with and for the poorest ward of our city. They also created a greenhouse on our campus, where the poor of our city can have a corner of the rich university land, so to speak, to grow a crop to sell. It is hard work, because the poor of the city are very busy people, and they sometimes are discouraged and don't respond to emails nearly fast enough for my students. And at every single possible turn, the owners of the land resist them. They fail, my students, and they try again. For if Jewish scripture teaches anything, it surely teaches how you get up after you have fallen. The things they've built aren't massive: a small greenhouse, a small orchard. It's not online, it's right there by the canal; 70 trees, one for each language. We translate text into this action. What I am looking for, I tell them, is "e-learning": enduring, emplaced. It's the final act of translation of our text, I believe—Hebrew to English, the text into act, the Torah again into making the world.

## Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini

I always enjoy listening to theologians, but I am an anthropologist, and I am afraid that my presentation is going to be very down to earth. I would like to talk about the politics of religion, gender, and state. I want to make the claim that we are at the threshold of a new phase in these politics, both locally and globally. One of the important features of this new phase is that it starts by unmasking the global and local power relations and the structures within with which women have to struggle for justice and equality.

In the Muslim context, this struggle for equality is as much theological as it is political. It is hard, and sometimes futile, to decide where theology ends and politics start. It is really impossible for me to separate them from one another. In the last two decades of the 20th century, we saw a major confrontation between political Islam, on the one hand, and feminism and human rights, on the other. Later I will define what I mean by political Islam. This confrontation made

very clear and transparent the intimate link between theology and politics. The link has been inherent in the Muslim legal tradition, but not everybody recognized it. Now, though, it is exposed in front of us, and many Muslim women feel it in their bones. As a result, we see the emergence of new voices and new forms of activism that no longer shy away from engagement with religion as well as activist Muslim women who are reclaiming their faith and are speaking in the name of their religion. Musawah, the organization that Zainah Anwar and I founded, is one of those voices.

**We are at the threshold of a new phase in these politics, both locally and globally. One of the important features of this new phase is that it starts by unmasking the global and local power relations and the structures within with which women have to struggle for justice and equality.**

Another important feature of the new phase, especially when we look at Muslim legal tradition, is that, while at the beginning of the 20th century women were the passive subject of debates and law reforms, when we reached the end of the 20th century, they had actually become the actors and are involved in the debates about legal change and law reforms.

Let me start with what I see as two major turning points in the relations among religion, gender, and politics in recent years. One of these turning points was in 1979, the year when two critical events occurred. First, the adoption of the Convention



Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues the importance of including women scholars in debates about scriptural interpretation.

on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) put the issue of women's rights and gender equality at the heart of international human rights law. Even though the issue had been there before, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in other conventions, CEDAW gave it a new international legal mandate and also helped to create a transnational feminism. In the Muslim context, in the 1980s we saw the emergence of women's nongovernmental organizations. Women had been active from the beginning of the 20th century in organizations but not in nongovernmental organizations, not in getting funding from outside their own governments. We also see the transplantation of new ideas and a global feminism as well as the start of a new conversation.

**Political Islam came with the slogan of "return to Shari'ah," but what we got, in practice, was a return to premodern, patriarchal, and tribal interpretations of Islamic law.**

Also, political Islam gained its biggest success in the form of the popular revolution in Iran in 1979. The 1979 revolution in Iran turned into a near-dictatorship, not that different from the monarchy it replaced, but let's not forget that it began full of hope and promise; political Islam then was more or less unknown. What really made the Iranian revolution was not a demand for a return to the premodern interpretations of Shari'ah but popular support for change, for justice, for democracy: Different forces came together to topple the shah's regime, which had the full support of the United States.

What we then witnessed in the 1980s was really a confrontation between two "isms." One is political Islamism. We know now after 34 years what it is

about, but in the 1980s it was still a promise—a promise of justice, a promise of democratization, and a promise of independence—and many women joined political Islam because religion is the essence of justice for them. Political Islam came with the slogan of "return to Shari'ah," but what we got, in practice, was a return to premodern, patriarchal, and tribal interpretations of Islamic law. Shari'ah is the essence of justice for Muslims; in Muslim belief, it is the revealed law as found in Islam's sacred texts. Shari'ah literally means "the way," but what we get from the Shari'ah is always an interpretation of these texts by the community of scholars. Different interpretations led to the different schools of Islamic law: the Sunni 4, Hanafi, Shafei, Maliki, Hanbali; and the Shia. At the time these schools of law emerged, as with other premodern systems of law, the notion of gender equality was not inherent to the conceptions of justice. In the earlier part of the 20th century, we witness the reform and modernization of legal systems and laws. In all areas of law—with the exception of family law—Islamic jurisprudence, or *fiqh*, was replaced by new laws inspired by Western concepts.

Thus, 1979 is important because we see the return of premodern Islamic legal concepts; we got the *hudud* laws in Pakistan, which didn't come through a popular revolution but through a coup d'état, using Islam as an ideology. In Egypt, we had the abandonment of certain legal reforms, and in Iran we had the abandonment of the 1967 family law reforms. The 1980s also saw the expansion of the human rights discourse, the emergence of international women's nongovernmental organizations, and a growing confrontation between Islamism, or political Islam, and international feminism. By the end of the decade, however, new feminist voices emerged among Muslim women, aiming to reclaim their faith and the justice they knew to be inherent to Islam, from the Islamists who, they felt, were distorting their religion. In my writing I have characterized these new feminist voices as the unwanted child of political Islam, unwanted because the political success of the Islamists in countries like Iran actually brought home to Muslim women what it means to live in a so-called "Islamic

state.” Political Islam also achieved power at a time of unprecedented literacy, when women themselves could read the sacred texts and recover and reclaim the voice of justice. Many women came to distrust the dominant patriarchal interpretations of the texts.

**So in the new, post-9/11 era, advocates of both Islamism and feminism have had to come down from their high ideological positions and to moderate their claims. They have had to acknowledge that gross injustices have been carried out in the name of both Islam and women’s rights, that we need to separate ideals from practices.**

The second turning point came in the aftermath of 9/11/2001. The illegal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were both justified partially in the name of women’s rights and human rights. Remember, political Islam oppressed people in the name of Islam, but invasion and violence now were done in the name of women’s rights and human rights. Of course, that has a history in the colonial era, so it is not new. In the new century, we see the failure of political Islam, unable to deliver justice, and at the same time human rights and feminism unable to deliver, unable to protect. It is then that the gaps between the various ideals and practices become clear: There is a gap between the ideals of Islam and what is done in its name; also there is a gap between the ideals of feminism and human rights and the practices of their proponents.

So in the new, post-9/11 era, advocates of both Islamism and feminism have had to come down from

their high ideological positions and moderate their claims after looking at the realities on the ground. They have had to acknowledge that gross injustices have been carried out in the name of both Islam and women’s rights, that we need to separate ideals from practices, that we must not compare the ideals of Islam with Western practices and the ideals of feminism with Muslim practices. This new realism shifted the debates about Islam and feminism to a new level, where an honest and constructive dialogue became possible. It is in this context that Muslim women who were committed to seeking justice in Muslim contexts came to the conclusion that they had no other choice than to bring Islamic, feminist, and human rights principles together and to try to build a new discourse from within Islam. This opened a new way for engagement and a meaningful dialogue between Muslims and feminists.

However, true dialogue is only possible when the two parties treat each other as equals and with respect; otherwise, it would be the dialogue of the deaf. To enter a dialogue, we must be ready, first, to listen to the other’s argument and secondly, to change our own position if appropriate. Muslim feminists are having another rather different dialogue with the insiders, the power holders and leaders within the Islamic tradition, many of whom see feminism as a Western idea, alien to Islam, an extension of colonial policies, to be rejected. In many Muslim contexts, “feminism” is a bad word. The moment you say, “I am a feminist,” you are seen as having betrayed your own tradition. I insist on using the term, because feminism is part of the 20th century political realities. It is a consciousness and a movement started in the West. In Muslim contexts, feminism came on the back of colonialism, and that is why Muslims have a very troubled relationship with it. However, the new generation of Muslims doesn’t have the baggage that my generation has. They are global citizens and can claim both feminism and Islam together.

There is no magical cure for the painful wounds of the past and the present, but there is always a way to begin to address them. We must learn the art of addressing the past without being its victims. For me,

it is here that the feminist voices and the scholarship in Islam have something to offer, because they are also addressing the past, which has been patriarchal. Let's face it: Muslim legal tradition, like any other legal and premodern tradition, was patriarchal. Feminist voices in Islam are important because they enable us to look at our troubled relationship with religion and to re-examine the dogmas. In the 20th century it has become clear that the complete privatization of religion is not going to happen. Religion is now back in the public space, as the Arab Spring has made clear. The theory that religion should be private and kept out of politics isn't an option, at least in the Muslim context.

I think it is important to ask what it means to be secular, religious, or feminist. I believe we have to rethink some of our concepts. In feminism there is a saying that the personal is political. I want to add that the theological is political. Theology is much too important to leave to the theologians. We must engage in it; women must engage with it and ordinary people as well.

This is the background from which Musawah, the global movement for justice and equality in Muslim family, came into being. What we in Musawah are doing is a constructive engagement with religion.

Musawah sees religion not as a source of oppression but of liberation, not as an obstacle but a source of inspiration; we aim to insert women's voices into the production of religious knowledge. I strongly believe this is what went wrong with the Muslim legal tradition. When Islam started, at the time of the Prophet, women were there in the public space and played a role in the creation of the Muslim *ummah*. One of the main sources of Islamic law is Hadith literature, the sayings of the Prophet. Women are among the main narrators of the Hadith and its signs. Yet by the time Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*, emerged, 150 years after the death of the Prophet, women had been silenced. Male authorities—as they consolidated their control over both religious interpretation and political affairs—denigrated women's intellectual abilities, declared them to be too emotional and devoid of rationality, and put them aside from politics and public space. Consequently, women's interests have never been reflected in the law. Men talked for them as their protectors and guardians. But as we all know, there is always a link between protection and domination: The very person who protects can also dominate. In fact, this is one of the main projects we have initiated in Musawah: a reconsideration of the notion of male authority in Muslim legal tradition.

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# Acknowledgments

The organization of the Human Rights Defenders Forum is a huge challenge, and it requires a great deal of effort from Carter Center staff, our wonderful partners, and new friends who step up to help in important ways. First of all, the staff of the Human Rights Program appreciates deeply the inspiration and leadership provided by President and Mrs. Carter, who are the heart and soul of this initiative. They have called on us to create an extraordinary gathering where profound ideas and action plans can be explored and put in motion. Human Rights Program staff members Erin Crysler, Sam Jones, Erika Lee, Karin Ryan, and Jacqueline Segal all feel deeply honored to have been able to contribute to this process. Erika Lee deserves special mention for her efforts to arrange travel and logistics when the forum venue was changed from Cairo, Egypt, to Atlanta with only six weeks' notice. Our gratitude also goes to our intern, Melinda Holmes, and graduate assistant, Sara Williams, and to Kristin Christakis for their tremendous contributions.

Most of all, our gratitude goes out to every participant of the 2013 forum as well as those who attended the previous forum in 2011, which laid the groundwork for this latest gathering. Their courageous and effective work to advance human rights and bring the true meaning and power that derives from religion and belief into the service of justice inspires us deeply, and we are privileged to call them friends and colleagues.

All of the departments at The Carter Center played a pivotal role in the realization of the event. We would like to thank our colleagues in Development, Events, Executive Offices, Facilities Managements, Finance, and Public Information for their tireless efforts to make the event a success and for their good humor, especially this year, when there was so little time to prepare.

The forum would not be possible without the generosity of our donors. We would like to thank the governments of Switzerland and Ireland for their commitment to supporting human rights defenders and their specific contributions that made the 2013 forum a reality.

We have a particular word of thanks for Secretary of State John Kerry and his colleagues, who are too many to list, that made truly extraordinary efforts to ensure that our guests from many countries could receive visas to enter the United States with very little lead time. The rich forum discussions were a result of their determination to ensure that many voices would be able to contribute to this vital conversation.

We cannot possibly list all those who contributed to the forum, but the following individuals deserve special mention: Omaima Abou Bakr, Lance Alloway, Bishop Mouneer Anis, Zainah Anwar, Mahmoud Azab, Randall Bailey, Alison Boden, Hillaire Campbell, Deanna Congileo, Jeremy Courtney, Aaronde Creighton, Joseph Cumming, Beth Davis, Joseph Dimitri, Ebie DuPont, Peewee Flomoku, Lauren Gay, Jeff Gringer, Deborah Hakes, Ambassador Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif, Shaimaa Hellal, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Itonde Kakoma, Alhaji Khuzaima Mohammed Osman, Karin King, Anne Kruger, Andrew Lentz, Molly Melching, Maya Morsy, Courtney Mwangura, Abdullahi An-Naim, Abdel Dayem Nosair, Alessandro Parziale, Ambassador Anne W. Patterson, Patricia Rafshoon, Sita Ranchod-Nillson, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Pamela Scully, Ismail Serageldin, Ritu Sharma, Kim Sitzler, Seana Steffen, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar H.E. Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Al Tayyeb, Irini Thabet, Susan Thistlethwaite, Angela Ullmann, David Wade, Andrea White, Lisa Wiley, Elijah

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## Mobilizing Faith for Women

Zarwan, Laurie Zoloth, and the entire consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. We would like to thank the following individuals who made tremendous sacrifices to reach the Atlanta gathering but faced insurmountable obstacles caused by

the venue change: Elizabeth Aya, Mouhamed Cherif Diop, Birima Fall, and Shiekh Ali Al Khafaji.

Melinda Holmes and Karin Ryan were responsible for drafting and editing this report.

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## Appendix A

# Agenda

THE  
CARTER CENTER



### **Mobilizing Faith for Women**

*Engaging the Power of Religion and Belief To Advance Human Rights and Dignity*

**Friday , June 28 , 2013**

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 9:30 A.M.        | Piano Selection, Benjamin Warsaw   |
| 9:40 A.M.        | Welcome and Introductions, Karin Ryan  |
| 9:50 A.M.        | Opening Remarks, Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter  |
| 10:15 A.M.       | Remarks, Mona Rishmawi, Office of the U.N. High Commissioner of Human Rights   |
| 10:35–11:00 A.M. | Overview from Working Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alison Boden</li></ul>  |
| 11:00–11:25 A.M. | Break  |
| 11:30–12:15 P.M. | <i>Panel I</i> -Aligning Religious Life With Equal Dignity and Human Rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moderator, Andrea White<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Bacary Tamba</li><li>o Zainah Anwar</li><li>o Simone Campbell</li></ul></li></ul> |
| 12:15–1:00 P.M.  | Discussion of Panel I  |
| 1:15 –2:15 P.M.  | Lunch  |

- 2:30 –3:15 P.M. *Panel II*-Trafficking as Modern-Day Slavery: People of Faith Arise
- Moderator, Aaronde Creighton
    - o Cheryl Deluca-Johnson
    - o Pastor Paul Palmer
    - o Fulata Moyo
- 3:15 –3:45 P.M. Discussion of Panel II
- 3:45 –4:15 P.M. Break
- 4:15 –5:00 P.M. *Panel III*-The Normalization of Violence and Impact of War on Women: How To Normalize Peace and Human Rights
- Moderator, Susan Thistlethwaite
    - o Samira al-Alaani Abdulghani
    - o Jeremy Courtney
    - o Claudia Furaha Nfundiko
    - o Frances Greaves
- 5:00–5:45 P.M. Discussion of Panel III

**Saturday, June 29, 2013**

- 8:30 A.M. Breakfast; Chapel Lobby
- 9:30–10:15 A.M. *Panel IV*-From Local to Global —Connecting Religious Study, Action, and Advocacy
- Moderator, Ritu Sharma
    - o Imam Magid
    - o Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza
    - o Laurie Zoloth
- 10:15–11:30 A.M. Concluding Discussion and Forum Debriefing

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## Appendix B

# Biographies

### Delegate Biographies by Country

#### Afghanistan

##### **Palwasha Kakar, The Asia Foundation**

Palwasha Kakar is the director of women's empowerment and development at The Asia Foundation. She has deep experience working with women's issues and gender in Afghanistan, specifically with regard to engaging traditional culture and local communities in development processes. This experience, along with her extensive knowledge of women in Islam and the interaction of gender, politics, and religion, allows her to speak authoritatively on the role of religion in women's rights.

#### Botswana

##### **Musa W. Dube, University of Botswana**

Professor Musa W. Dube is a scholar of the New Testament at the University of Botswana. Her research interests include feminist, translation, HIV/AIDS, and gender studies. Her community engagement has been largely in the area of HIV/AIDS and gender issues. She has worked with the World Council of Churches on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS and gender in academic and faith-based programs Africawide and trained trainers for the same. Professor Dube is the founder of Talitha Cum: Association of Women in Faith, which seeks to document, research, analyze, and train women of faith in various issues of their concerns. Professor Dube has published widely, and she is an internationally sought speaker who has given talks in about 30 countries. She is an active member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

#### Democratic Republic of the Congo

##### **Claudia Furaha Nfundiko, Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace**

Claudia Furaha Nfundiko leads the advocacy programs related to the prevention of and fight against sexual and gender-based violence for the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace (CEJP) in Bukavu, South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her work includes expanding services to the children of victims of rape, who are often marginalized in their communities. CEJP is an initiative of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, with the goal of serving the cause of justice in society through the light of the gospel.

##### **Joséphine Ngalula Kabeya, Forum de la Femme Ménagère (FORFEM)**

Josephine Ngalula Kabeya is the president of the Congolese organization Forum de la Femme Ménagère (FORFEM) that works to promote and defend women's rights. She is an expert in women's socio-economic development and has been a leading human rights defender in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1994. Ngalula is a focal point of the Carter Center's Alert and Protection System in Kinshasa, and FORFEM has been a member of the Human Rights House for many years. She holds a master's degree in political science and public administration.

##### **Mambo Zawadi, Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix Intégrale**

Mambo Zawadi is the program coordinator of Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix Intégrale (Women's Solidarity for Peace and Integral Development—SOFEPADI). Since 2003, she has

worked to protect women's rights, specifically through awareness-raising campaigns and shepherding survivors of sexual violence through the judicial process.

## Egypt

### **Sheikh Dr. Mahmoud Azab, Al-Azhar**

Dr. Mahmoud Azab is adviser to the Grand Imam for interfaith dialogue and professor of comparative languages at Al-Azhar University. Al-Azhar University is among the world's oldest universities and is the foremost seat of learning in Sunni Islam. Al Azhar is led by Grand Imam Ahmed Muhammad Ahmed el-Tayeb. The 2011 Egyptian Constitution stipulated that Al-Azhar be consulted on matters of Shari'ah, to which legislation must comply. Dr. Azab was delegated to represent Al-Azhar at this forum.

### **Sheikh Dr. Abdel-Dayem Nossair, Al-Azhar**

Dr. Abdel-Dayem Nossair is adviser for scientific research to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. A mosque and a university that teaches both religious and modern scientific subjects, the scholars and imams of Al-Azhar have traditionally been sought from afar for their expertise in all areas of Islamic law and history. Dr. Nossair was delegated to represent Al-Azhar at this forum.

### **Ambassador Abdelrahman Moussa, Al-Azhar**

Ambassador Abdelrahman Moussa is adviser for international affairs to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. He is the former assistant minister of foreign affairs and served as an ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Poland and the Czech Republic. Ambassador Moussa served as director of security and strategic organizations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was delegated to represent Al-Azhar at this forum.

### **Dr. Nevine Saad, Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt**

Dr. Nevine Saad is a psychiatrist at the Maamoura Psychiatric Hospital in Alexandria, as well as the founder and head of the St. Joseph Counseling Center at the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria,

Egypt, which provides marriage and family counseling to Coptic families. Through her practice, she deals frequently with cases of female abuse and domestic violence.

### **Dr. Marilyn Ekladios, Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt**

Dr. Marilyn Ekladios is an adjunct professor at Nova Southeastern University, where she teaches graduate courses in public policy. She is also a member of the faculty of the Family Ministry Program, an affiliate of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, a diaspora community of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church, where she teaches courses on contemporary issues. As the editor in chief of the Mighty Arrows Magazine, a diocesan publication, she oversees the journalistic reporting of current events in the Coptic community and in the world. She is also the coordinator of the St. Verena Resource Ministry, a collaboration and network of social service professionals.

### **Dr. Salah-eddin Elgawhary, Biblioteca Alexandrina**

Dr. Salah-eddin Elgawhary is a principal adviser at the Biblioteca Alexandrina in Egypt. He has previously worked with the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and other organizations of the United Nations and has advised governments of both Egypt and the United States. His work is currently focused on issuing a selection of modern Islamic classics as part of efforts to establish a Center for the Studies of Islamic Civilization and Contemporary Islamic Thought at the Biblioteca Alexandrina.

### **Dr. Maha Ibrahim Ghanem, Biblioteca Alexandrina**

Dr. Maha Ghanem is director-general of Tanta University Libraries and adviser to the Biblioteca Alexandrina. Dr. Ghanem is an expert in children's literature and in library and information sciences and works with several organizations in Egypt concerned with the rights of children and women.

**Dr. Riham Bahi, American University in Cairo**

Dr. Riham Bahi is an associate professor of international relations in the faculty of political science at the American University of Cairo. Her research interests include Islamic feminism, global and transnational aspects of political Islam, and U.S. relations with the Muslim world. Dr. Bahi's work includes papers on Islamic and secular feminism and Muslim women's movements.

**Ghana**

**Chief Sidiq Gimala III, National Council of Muslim Chiefs**

Chief Sidiq Gimala III leads the delegation from Ghana of His Eminence Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, National Chief Imam and Grand Mufti of the Republic of Ghana. Chief Sidiq Gimala III is acting president of the National Council of Muslim Chiefs in Ghana.

**Sheikh Mustapha Ibrahim, Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services**

Sheikh Mustapha Ibrahim is chairman of the Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services and SONSETFUND and is also a key member of the advisory board of His Eminence the National Chief Imam of Ghana.

**Alhaji Khuzaima Mohammed Osman, Islamic Peace and Security Council**

Alhaji Khuzaima is executive secretary of the Islamic Peace and Security Council, charged with implementation of the National Chief Imam's Peace and Security Project. The organization is working to sustain and maintain peace and security through collaboration with law enforcement and work within the Muslim and Zongo communities in Ghana. Alhaji Khuzaima is personal assistant to the National Chief Imam of Ghana.

**Rashidat Muhammed, Answarudeen Women**

Rashidat Muhammed is a human rights activist in the Muslim community in Ghana and co-founder

of Answarudeen Women. She is a member of the delegation of the National Chief Imam of Ghana.

**Abdul Majeed Abdul Mumin, Assistant, National Council of Muslim Chiefs**

Abdul Majeed Abdul Mumin is assistant to Chief Sidiq Gimala III, acting president of the National Council of Muslim Chiefs. He is a member of the delegation of the National Chief Imam of Ghana.

**Abdul Basit Rufai, Assistant, National Council of Muslim Chiefs**

Abdul Basit Rufai is assistant to Chief Sidiq Gimala III, acting president of the National Council of Muslim Chiefs. He is a member of the delegation of the National Chief Imam of Ghana.

**Iran**

**Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Musawah**

Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini is a legal anthropologist and activist, specializing in Islamic law, gender, and development. She works with the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality and is a founding member of Musawah Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family. She has held many professorships and fellowships and is an author, film director, and commentator on Iranian affairs and women in Islam, with expertise on the role of male authority in Islamic family law.

**Iraq**

**Sheikh Ali Abed Naem Al-Khafaji, Islamic Gathering for Reform and Peace**

Sheikh Ali Al-Khafaji is the secretary-general of the Islamic Gathering for Reform and Peace in Iraq. As one of Iraq's most prominent voices, Sheikh Ali pursues reconciliation and demonstrates interdenomination, interethnic, and interfaith peacemaking. Sheikh Ali promulgates that theology would strengthen the recognition of human rights, including women's and children's rights. He also spearheads initiatives in orphan care in 16 provinces in Iraq.

### **Jeremy Courtney, Preemptive Love Coalition**

Jeremy Courtney is co-founder and executive director of the Preemptive Love Coalition in Iraq, which trains Iraqi heart surgeons and nurses in the skills necessary to treat the prevalence of heart defects in children, a terrible consequence of the recent conflict. Jeremy's vision is driven by his Christian faith; both he and his wife, Jessica, see their work as a way to strive in pursuit of the Christian mission of healing and love.

### **Dr. Samira Al-Alaani Abdulghani, Fallujah General Hospital**

Dr. Samira Al-Alaani is a pediatrician at Fallujah General Hospital and part of the Preemptive Love Coalition who has firsthand experience treating the birth defects brought on by the war in Iraq. She has documented the increase in rates of birth defects in Fallujah, reporting an astonishing 37 anomalous births in one three-week period in her hospital alone.

## **Liberia**

### **Frances Greaves, Voice of the Voiceless**

Frances Greaves is the founder of an interdenominational women's organization in Liberia called Voice of the Voiceless, which was involved in working with women who testified at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), providing medical referral for war victims of sexual and gender-based violence and infusing women's views into the final recommendations of the TRC report. She has previously served as project coordinator and consultant on women's issues with numerous organizations. She is now vice chairwoman of the board of directors of an umbrella organization that brings together over 75 women's, community, and faith-based nongovernmental organizations.

### **Ella Musu Coleman, National Traditional Council of Liberia**

Ella Coleman is assistant secretary-general for social services at the National Traditional Council of Liberia. Previously, she has served as a member of

the Task Force for Free and Compulsory Primary Education in Liberia, encouraging young people, especially girls, to go to school. Mrs. Coleman also has served as a community coordinator assigned in West Point township under the Forum for African Women Educationalists, encouraging girls to go to school and monitoring students on the various campuses to ensure safety from sexual harassment. In addition, she works to educate women from traditional communities on their rights and responsibilities.

### **Chief Zanzan Karwor, National Traditional Council of Liberia**

Chief Zanzan Karwor is national chairman of the National Traditional Council of Liberia and the country's head Zoe (spiritual leader). In 2012, the Liberian National Legislature created the independent National Council of Chiefs and Elders, of which Chief Karwor is also chairman. The function of the new council is to help preserve positive aspects of Liberia's traditional culture, to assist the government in achieving sustained peace and reconciliation, and to provide independent advice on national issues. The Carter Center has partnered with the National Traditional Council at national and local levels for the past four years in a dialogue on issues related to custom and the rule of law, including women's rights and traditional practices, and has supported the council at national and local levels to resolve disputes and improve local governance.

### **Pewee Flomoku, The Carter Center**

Pewee Flomoku is a Carter Center program officer and native Liberian who is now helping to coordinate the Liberia justice project. The project is focused on strengthening the rule of law in Liberia through partnering with grassroots civil society organizations.

## **Malaysia**

### **Zainah Anwar, Sisters in Islam and Musawah**

Zainah Anwar founded Sisters in Islam 25 years ago in Malaysia to advocate for a women's rights framework within Islam and is also a founder of Musawah,

a global movement focused on equality within the Muslim family, launched in 2009. As a Muslim and a feminist, she sees her faith and the Qur'an as an asset in the struggle for social justice, arguing that oppressive Muslim practices are a perversion of the true message of Islam.

## Nigeria

### **Hauwa Ibrahim, Harvard Divinity School and Aries Law Firm**

Hauwa Ibrahim is visiting lecturer on women's studies and Islamic law at Harvard Divinity School. She is also senior partner at Aries Law Firm in Nigeria, which she founded there to continue to work for women's rights from within the Shariah court system and where she has tried over 150 cases. She has written the book on advancing women's and human rights within the Islamic court system: "Practicing Shariah Law: Seven Strategies for Achieving Justice in Shariah Courts", published this year.

## Pakistan

### **Mossarat Qadeem, PAIMAN Alumni Trust**

Mossarat Qadeem works with religious and tribal leaders from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan to counter extremism. She founded PAIMAN Alumni Trust, a nonprofit group promoting socio-political and economic empowerment for marginalized Pakistanis. With PAIMAN, she established the country's first center for conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Her on-the-ground experience contributes to her knowledge in political processes and international standards for political inclusion, civic education, and women's leadership in Islam.

## Senegal

### **H. E. Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass, High Representative of His Eminence Sheikh Ahmed Tijani Ibrahim Niass, Tijani Sufi Order**

H.E. Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijani Niass is the high representative of H.E. Sheikh Ahmed Tijani Ibrahim

Niass, spiritual leader of the Tijani Sufi order of Islam, one of the largest sects of Islam in West Africa, with an estimated 50 million followers.

### **Sheikh Muhamed Chérif Dioup, Tostan**

Sheikh Muhamed Chérif Dioup is an Islamic rights specialist and Child Protection Program officer at Tostan in Senegal. He has deep understanding of Islam and Islamic education and has been active in advocating for better regulation of Islamic schools while supporting their important role in society.

### **Molly Melching, Tostan**

Molly Melching is the founder and executive director of Tostan, named for a Wolof word meaning "breakthrough," whose mission is a product of her vision to achieve sustainable development through respecting and empowering local communities. Molly has gained international recognition thanks to the outreach work of grassroots communities to abandon female genital cutting and child and forced marriage in Senegal, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, and Guinea after having participated in the Tostan program. Molly has been honored for her expertise in nonformal education, human rights training, and social transformation.

### **Bacary Tamba, Tostan**

Bacary Tamba is national coordinator of the diaspora for Tostan, as well as regional coordinator of Ziguinchor. Founded in Senegal in 1990 to promote an innovative approach to development involving community empowerment through indigenous language and learning methods, Tostan's model has now spread to programs in eight countries and 22 languages in Africa. It has been widely recognized for its success in addressing the practice of female genital cutting and has been endorsed by figures such as former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

## Somalia

### **Birima Fall, Tostan**

Birima Fall is the national coordinator of Tostan's Community Empowerment Program in Somalia.

Tostan's program in Somalia has made considerable strides, working with the community, the culture, and the religion in beginning to reduce the practice of female genital cutting.

## Switzerland

### **Dr. Fulata Moyo, World Council of Churches**

Dr. Fulata Moyo is program executive for Women in Church and Society with the World Council of Churches. In this capacity, she coordinates the council's work around the globe with regard to women. She is a theologian, historian, activist, and academic in the areas of gender and HIV/AIDS. Her work and interests have focused on gender and ecological justice and sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS.

### **Mona Rishmawi, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Mona Rishmawi is chief of the Rule of Law, Equality, and Nondiscrimination branch of the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). She has held many different positions throughout the U.N. system and has established herself as a leader in the field of human rights law over more than two decades, with roles such as legal adviser to the OHCHR and senior human rights and gender adviser to the special representative of the U.N. secretary-general in Iraq, Sergio Viera de Mello.

## United States

### **Jimmy Carter, 39th President of the United States and Founder of The Carter Center**

President Jimmy Carter served as president from Jan. 20, 1977, to Jan. 20, 1981. Significant foreign policy accomplishments of his administration included the Panama Canal treaties, the Camp David Accords, the treaty of peace between Egypt and Israel, the SALT II treaty with the Soviet Union, and the establishment of U.S. diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. He championed human rights throughout the world. In 1982, President Carter became a university distinguished professor at

Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., and founded The Carter Center. Actively guided by President Carter, the nonpartisan and nonprofit Center addresses national and international issues of public policy. Carter Center fellows, associates, and staff join with President Carter in efforts to resolve conflict, promote democracy, protect human rights, and prevent disease and other afflictions. Through the Global 2000 programs, the Center advances health and agriculture in the developing world. It has spearheaded the international effort to eradicate Guinea worm disease, which will be the second disease in history to be eliminated.

### **Rosalynn Carter, Former First Lady and Founder of The Carter Center**

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter has worked for more than four decades to improve the quality of life for people around the world. Today, she is a leading advocate for mental health, caregiving, early childhood immunization, human rights, and conflict resolution through her work at The Carter Center. A full partner with the president in all the Center's activities, the former first lady is a member of the Carter Center board of trustees and co-founder. She created and chairs the Center's Mental Health Task Force, an advisory body of experts, consumers, and advocates promoting positive change in the mental health field.

### **Karin Ryan, The Carter Center**

Karin Ryan is senior adviser in the Carter Center's Human Rights Program. She works with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Mrs. Rosalynn Carter on a range of issues, including assisting their efforts on behalf of victims of human rights violations through personal interventions with heads of state. She has represented the Center in many international negotiations, including the International Criminal Court, the human rights of women, the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and, most recently, on the establishment of a U.N. Human Rights Council.

### **Dr. John Hardman, The Carter Center**

Dr. John Hardman is president and CEO of The Carter Center, providing leadership to achieve the Carter Center's commitment to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health. He is an active participant in the Carter Center's program initiatives, including election monitoring in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; Ethiopian public health training; global development strategies and conflict resolution efforts; and agriculture programs aimed at improving food production in Africa and North Korea.

### **Larisa Friesen Hall, Sojourners**

Larisa Friesen Hall is chief advancement officer for Sojourners, whose mission is to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world. Hall represents Sojourners around the country and is the founding chair of Sojourners' organizational task force to develop intercultural competency. She also leads strategic planning for Sojourners' Women and Girls Leading on Faith and Justice Initiative. Hall has completed studies in international business and economic development from Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. She also participated in International Business Institute, a rigorous study program of class sessions, government lectures, and corporate visits spanning 10 European countries.

### **Imam Mohamed Magid, Islamic Society of North America**

Imam Mohamed Magid serves as president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and as executive director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society. He has a long history of commitment to public service through organizations such as the Peaceful Families Project, Annual Twinning of Mosques and Synagogues, Fairfax Faith Communities in Action, Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington Assembly, and the Buxton Interfaith Initiative. Imam Magid strives to create and foster dialogue and increase understanding about Islam.

Part of his work with the Buxton Interfaith Initiative included forging a partnership with Rabbi Robert Nosanchuk, then leader of the Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation in Reston. Both men were recognized by the *Washingtonian* as 2009's Washingtonians of the Year for building bridges between their faith communities. He continues to provide good counsel for the Muslim community through his regular contributions to ISNA's magazine, *Islamic Horizons*, as well as a speaker and leader of discussions on imminent issues facing the Muslim American community.

### **Ruth Messinger, American Jewish World Service**

Ruth W. Messinger is the president and executive director of American Jewish World Service (AJWS), an international development organization providing support to more than 200 grassroots social change projects in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Ms. Messinger is also a visiting professor at Hunter College, teaching urban policy and politics. Prior to assuming her position at AJWS in 1998, Messinger was in public service in New York City for 20 years. She served 12 years in the New York City Council and eight years as Manhattan borough president. She was the first woman to secure the Democratic Party's nomination for mayor in 1997.

### **Dr. Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University and the American Academy of Religion**

Dr. Laurie Zoloth is president-elect of the American Academy of Religion, the leading body responsible for fostering excellence in religious teaching and scholarship in the United States. A professor of medical humanities, bioethics and religion, and Jewish studies at Northwestern University and director of the Center for Bioethics, Science, and Society, Dr. Zoloth is a leading Jewish scholar who looks at the relationship between science, ethics, and religion.

### **Sister Simone Campbell, Nuns on the Bus**

Sister Simone Campbell is a religious leader, advocate, and activist working to promote systematic

change in the public policy arena. In addition to serving as executive director of NETWORK, a Catholic organization lobbying for social justice, she is also an attorney and poet. She is perhaps most well-known for the letter she wrote to Congress in support of health care reform and helping to organize the Nuns on the Bus tour of the United States after American nuns of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious were chastised by the Vatican for their feminist views and activism.

**Dr. Alison Boden, Princeton University**

Dr. Alison Boden serves as dean of religious life and the chapel at Princeton University. Her writing and teaching interests have focused on such topics as human rights and religion, religion and violence, religion in the academy, and a variety of social justice issues. She has authored a book titled “Women’s Rights and Religious Practice” and is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.

**Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Harvard Divinity School**

Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is the Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School and has done pioneering work in biblical interpretation and feminist theology. Her teaching and research focus is on the question of biblical and theological epistemology, hermeneutics, rhetoric, and the politics of interpretation as well as on issues of theological education, radical equality, and democracy. Fiorenza is a co-founder and co-editor of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. In recognition of her work, she has received numerous honorary doctorates and awards. Her most recent book is “Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist Theology.”

**Reverend Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite, Chicago Theological Seminary and the Center for American Progress**

Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and a professor of theology at Chicago Theological Seminary, as well

as its former president. She was ordained a minister of the United Church of Christ in 1974 and is an author and biblical translator. Thistlethwaite is now at the vanguard of the new area of public theology, an online columnist for *The Washington Post*, and media commentator on matters of religion and faith.

**Ritu Sharma, Women Thrive Worldwide**

Ritu Sharma is the president and co-founder of Women Thrive Worldwide in Washington, D.C. Sharma is a coalition-builder, political strategist, communicator, and motivational speaker, as well as a co-convenor and principal of the Women, Faith, and Development Alliance and the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network. She serves on the board of the U.S. Global Leadership Center, the Pax World Women’s Advisory Council, and the Advisory Council of Men and Women as Allies.

**Dr. Seana Steffen, The Restorative Leadership Institute**

Dr. Seana Steffen is the founder and executive director of the Restorative Leadership Institute. She formerly served on the faculty at the University of Colorado at Boulder as the founding director of INVST Community Studies, where she designed and delivered award-winning leadership curriculum focused on developing a more just and sustainable world. In public service, Steffen co-founded Explore Expeditionary Learning School, which received the first Colorado Commissioner’s Choice Award for Getting Results, and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, the first rural regional youth corps in the country and a recipient of White House recognition for positive change in the Southwest.

**Bani Dugal, Baha’i International Community**

Bani Dugal is the principal representative of the Baha’i International Community to the United Nations. As part of the community of international nongovernmental organizations at the U.N., she has served as the president of the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief and as a facilitator and adviser to numerous nongovernmental organization

committees within the U.N. system. Prior to being appointed principal representative, Dugal served as director, Office for the Advancement of Women, at the Baha'i International Community. Before she relocated to the United States in 1988, she practiced law before the Supreme Court of India.

## Atlanta

### **Dr. Randall Bailey, Interdenominational Theological Center**

Dr. Randall Bailey is the Andrew W. Mellon Distinguished Professor of Hebrew Bible, Area I, at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. His work is focused on ideological criticism and how race, class, gender, sex, and power intersect in the Bible text. The Interdenominational Theological Center is a Christian, ecumenical, graduate professional school of theology.

### **Dr. Ann C. Kruger, Georgia State University, College of Education**

Dr. Ann Kruger is an associate professor at Georgia State University's College of Education. Her research interests include discourse analysis and development of social cognition. She has published on cultural learning and the learning of culture and, most recently, on the mimetic theory of religion and culture.

### **Cheryl Deluca-Johnson, Street Grace**

Cheryl Deluca-Johnson is the executive director of Street Grace, a faith-based organization in Atlanta, Ga., dedicated to ending sex trafficking of minors in Atlanta and eventually the United States. Ms. Deluca-Johnson has been responsible for the overall development of the organization's mission and priorities and is the organization's main representative in the public arena.

### **Aaronde Creighton, Street Grace**

Aaronde Creighton is a member of the board of directors of Street Grace and a professional management consultant specializing in leadership and organizational development.

### **Pastor Paul Palmer, Atlanta Dream Center**

Pastor Paul Palmer founded the Atlanta Dream Center with his wife, Patty, after following their faith and trust in God to move to Atlanta from California, where they originally found their faith and began their ministry. The Atlanta Dream Center is a faith-based nonprofit located in the Old Fourth Ward, one of downtown's most vulnerable neighborhoods. The center has had a huge impact on the community with its message and community outreach programs.

### **Dr. Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, Institute for Developing Nations at Emory University**

Dr. Sita Ranchod-Nilsson is director of Emory's Institute for Developing Nations (IDN), a joint project started in 2006 with The Carter Center. She leads IDN in working to build a community of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who are committed to working together to fight global poverty. IDN supports multiple projects with a gender focus, from transitional justice in sub-Saharan Africa to gender-based violence and rule of law in Liberia, as well as health initiatives. Ranchod-Nilsson's previous research and experience as a professor and fellow have focused on gender politics, nationalism, and the state.

### **Dr. Dianne Diakité, Emory University**

Dr. Dianne Diakité is an associate professor of religion and African-American studies at Emory University. Diakité has theological training, with a research focus on African and diaspora religious cultures and is a former Fulbright scholar. She has authored numerous books, articles, and essays on African religion, the formation of religious culture, and womanist theology.

### **The Rev. Dr. Andrea White, The Candler School of Theology at Emory University**

Dr. Andrea White is an assistant professor of theology and culture with the Candler School of Theology at Emory, specializing in constructive Christian theology, womanist theology and perspectives, and postmodern religious thought. White has authored several books on these subjects, has held several research fellowships, and is an ordained American Baptist minister.

**Dr. Elizabeth Bounds, The Candler School of Theology at Emory University**

Dr. Elizabeth M. Bounds is an associate professor of Christian ethics with the Candler School of Theology at Emory. She has authored and edited numerous books and articles, including “Coming Together/Coming Apart: Religion, Modernity, and Community” (1997) and “Welfare Policy: Feminist Critiques” (1999). Her interests include peace-building/conflict transformation, restorative justice and the prison system, democratic practices and civil society, feminist and liberation ethics, and transformative pedagogical practices.

**Dena Blank Kimball, Kendeda Foundation**

Blank is an independent philanthropic consultant. Formerly, she served as the vice president of network support of Teach For All, the vice president of alumni affairs and the deputy vice president of admissions for Teach for America, and as the executive director of GirlVentures in San Francisco, a nonprofit organization with a mission to inspire adolescent girls to develop and express their strengths. Dena was the founding chair of American Jewish World Service’s Global Circle. She specializes in the curriculum development, management, strategic planning, and development of nonprofit organizations focusing on youth.

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## Appendix C

# Declaration

*We Can't Wait: We Must Mobilize Religion and Belief to Advance Women's Rights*

**Declaration of the Carter Center's Human Rights Defenders Forum  
June 27-29, 2013**

We gather at The Carter Center at a moment when violence against women and other gender based violations of human rights are prevalent in every part of the world. We urgently call on all believers to work individually and within their communities to take action toward full equality, justice, and human dignity for all.

We gather to consider how engagement with our respective communities of faith and belief can bind us in a common effort to work for human rights, dignity, and wellbeing for women and men. Two years ago The Carter Center first convened a gathering to explore how religion and belief can be mobilized effectively to this end. Today, we have furthered this goal by exploring how sacred texts and their application in communities around the world can achieve a vision in which all of God's creatures, girls and boys, women and men, can live with dignity, mutual respect, and in full equality.

### ***The Power of Text***

The world's religions contain a wealth of wisdom in their sacred texts, traditions, and practices that are an enormous source of knowledge for good. Their ongoing interpretation and practice are a source of joy, wisdom, and courage for both individuals and communities. While they provide the foundation for and the moral obligation to protect human dignity, they also are often interpreted and applied in divisive and oppressive ways. Therefore, long before Enlightenment philosophers branded the secular concept of "human rights," the idea of rights was rooted in our many religious texts and traditions.

### ***Leadership***

Religious leaders are often charged with being the custodians of religious teaching, and they have been the ones to communicate and exemplify these textual and traditional groundings for our duties toward one another.

Throughout history, men have largely served as leaders and guardians of religious communities, assuming the responsibility and authority of interpretation, juridical power, and the application of sacred text in daily life. Women and girls' equal participation in religious life, including their engagement with sacred texts, must be understood as crucial.

It is imperative we do this, not only to reclaim the insights of half of our communities, but because we see the unfinished task as deeply harmful. We come together because we see appalling conditions of inequality, violence, and injustice that too many women face daily. If we

are to expand the circle of dignity to include every human being within and among the world's religions and traditions, textual and practical wisdom must consider women's voices. We are confident in the boundless capacities of our texts and traditions, for we know that religious traditions and teachings contain the wisdom to challenge the way the world is structured. We believe that in the teachings of religions can be found the courage to imagine the world as just, peaceful, and abundant.

### *The Challenge*

The scourge of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence in the home, in public spaces, and in warfare and other forms of State-sanctioned violence, should not be accepted as a normal fact of life. Human society has evolved in many ways, and we must chart a path to nonviolence in all our affairs if we are to progress. In every part of the world, horrifying incidents should challenge faith communities to address how brutality can occur, and how faith communities and leaders can confront this failure of private and public morality.

- After World War II, the nations of the world formed the United Nations with the commitment to advance peace and human rights as global norms. In parallel, ecumenical efforts have been waged to respond to the dehumanization of war. Despite these important developments, violence is becoming increasingly normalized. Nations and groups have too often chosen to wage war in place of dialogue to resolve conflicts; societies often resort to violent forms of punishment for crime in place of rehabilitation and compassion.
- As a result of conflict within societies and between nations, religions, and other groups, fear has led many communities to turn inward, to yearn for an imagined past which reinforces regressive norms and honors the most conservative textual interpretations. Fear can lead to rejecting ties with others and can thwart progress, rational arguments, or emerging scientific insights.
- Around the world, women and girls often do not have adequate access to health care specific to their bodies and their needs, including reproductive care, too often leading to preventable illness and premature death. Women and girls who bear children face particular risks and, for far too many, pregnancy is laden with risk and tragic loss.
- Legal, social, and cultural norms applied to girls and women often do not offer adequate protection from violence or inequality in the family and in society, and leaders in the community best placed to advance reforms fail to challenge these situations and often

even support them.

- In countries where religion is a source of law and public policy, particular interpretations of sacred text can lead to discriminatory and unjust rules which are presented as divine law, infallible and unchangeable; women's efforts at law reform to achieve equality and justice are demonized as an attack against religion or sacred text itself.
- With the growth of global trade and international travel, the proliferation of human trafficking threatens the lives of millions of victims of this pernicious form of slavery.
- Lack of access to education and independent economic opportunities feminize poverty and lead to premature marriage and trafficking of females, preventing women from realizing their God-given potential and from contributing their innate talents to society.
- Girls and women are often excluded from leadership in religious, political, and other public roles, further marginalizing and subjugating them.

### ***Reason for Hope***

While these facts disturb us, we know that when religious and traditional communities and leaders, individuals, and associations take concerted action great progress is made.

Although the protection of human rights is fundamentally an obligation for the State, the influence of religion, tradition, and culture is so strong that they must be engaged if we are to address these problems. Human rights organizations have historically neglected a vast array of potential allies by disregarding the importance of faith, while religious institutions have not recognized the divine foundation of what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls us to do. A profound opportunity exists for mutual recognition of the fundamental compatibility of human rights principles and moral values.

### ***The Call***

We call on people of faith to place the well-being of women and girls at the center of their understanding of moral duty. Women and men must work as equal partners to build a more just world.

To that end:

- We call on individual believers and faith communities to advance universal human rights and equal dignity for all and to reject violence and stigmatization of victims. Men in particular have a moral duty to prevent and combat all forms of violence, as they bear the majority of the responsibility for these acts.

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## Mobilizing Faith for Women

- We call on religious and traditional authorities to guide their communities to align their spiritual and social lives with the promise of universal human rights, duties, and human dignity and to focus on religious traditions and texts that support this task.
- We call on our colleagues in the human rights community to reach out to and engage people of faith as they bring religious wisdom and lived traditions to the task of supporting the dignity and full equality of women and girls.
- We call on all people and governments to commit themselves to peaceful resolution of conflicts, to avoid war while pursuing universal human rights.

In conclusion, there is no incompatibility between devotion to religion or belief and the pursuit of universal human rights and dignity. In fact, we believe sacred texts and the living traditions of our faith communities are the richest source of vision for a world in which human rights are fully honored. We resolve to strive together to achieve reciprocity among all people and to honor our moral obligations to each other through mutual respect and concerted action.

## Appendix D

# Statistics

### MOBILIZING FAITH FOR WOMEN: THE CHALLENGES THAT PERSIST

#### FAMILY

#### LAW AND NORMS

##### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

*One out of three women experience violence, in 85% of cases the woman's husband or partner is the perpetrator.<sup>i</sup>*

*One third of the world's countries have no legislation against domestic violence.<sup>ii</sup>*

##### FEMICIDE

*Globally, 38% of female murder victims were killed by their intimate partners.<sup>iii</sup>*

*In Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States, between 40 and 70 percent of female murder victims were killed by their intimate partners.<sup>iv</sup>*

##### EARLY MARRIAGE

*Over 60 million girls worldwide are child brides, married before the age of 18, primarily in South Asia (31.3 million) and sub-Saharan Africa (14.1 million)...*

*Women who marry early are more likely to be beaten or threatened, and more likely to believe that a husband might sometimes be justified in beating his wife.<sup>v</sup>*

#### PHYSICAL INTEGRITY

##### SEXUAL ASSAULT

*Up to 76% percent of women, varying by country, say they have experienced sexual assault, but less than 11 percent reported it.<sup>vi</sup>*

*In the U.S. it is estimated that one in every five women will be raped before leaving college.<sup>vii</sup>*

*The first sexual experience of some 30 percent of women was forced.<sup>viii</sup>*

*Worldwide, up to 50 percent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16... An estimated 150 million girls under the age of 18 suffered some form of sexual violence in 2002 alone.<sup>ix</sup>*

##### FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

*Approximately 100 to 140 million girls and women in the world have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting, with more than 3 million girls in Africa annually at risk of the practice.<sup>x</sup>*

##### ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

*While statistics vary by country and national wealth, through out the world women and girls face inadequate access to healthcare, including that specific to their requirements, leading to disproportionate levels of preventable disease and death among women.*

**MOBILIZING FAITH FOR WOMEN: THE CHALLENGES THAT PERSIST**

**ACCESS TO  
EDUCATION  
AND  
ECONOMIC  
PARTICIPATION**

**LITERACY AND SCHOOLING**

*Two out of three illiterate adults are women. Three out of five youths lacking basic reading and writing skills are young women.*<sup>xi</sup>

*In the United States, 83 percent of girls aged 12 to 16 experienced some form of sexual harassment in public schools.*<sup>xii</sup>

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

*It is estimated there are 12.3 slaves in the world today, with less than 1% of those identified.*<sup>xiii</sup>

*Women and girls are 80% of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked across national borders annually, with the majority (79%) trafficked for sexual exploitation.*<sup>xiv</sup>

*The average entry age of American minors into the sex trade is 12-14 years old.*<sup>xv</sup>

**PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND  
RESOURCE ACCESS**

*Women comprise, on average, 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries. If they had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30%.*<sup>xvi</sup>

*In developing countries for which data are available, between 10 percent and 20 percent of all landholders are women.*<sup>xvii</sup>

**LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT**

*The average pay gap between women and men is 10-30%.*<sup>xviii</sup>

*53% of women work in vulnerable employment.*<sup>xix</sup>

*Between 40 and 50 percent of women in European Union countries, and 30-40% across Asia, experience some form of sexual harassment at work.*<sup>xx</sup>

**PUBLIC  
AND  
POLITICAL  
PARTICIPATION**

**REPRESENTATION**

*In 2012, there were 17 female heads of state.*<sup>xxi</sup>

*Globally, women occupy 18% of parliamentary seats.*<sup>xxii</sup>

*Only 28 countries have exceeded 30% women's representation in national parliaments.*<sup>xxiii</sup>

*Women constitute no more than 13% of any police force.*<sup>xxiv</sup>

**SUFFRAGE**

*There are countries where women still have no right, or only limited right, to vote.*<sup>xxv</sup>

**PEACE BUILDING**

*Since 1992, women have constituted less than 8% of peace process negotiating delegations and less than 3% of signees.*<sup>xxvi</sup>

**MOBILIZING FAITH FOR WOMEN: THE CHALLENGES THAT PERSIST**

**THE  
DISPROPORTIONATE  
IMPACT OF  
WAR AND  
MILITARISM  
ON WOMEN**

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND  
HEALTH HAZARDS**

*Women are exposed to toxic chemical weapons and environmental contamination during and after war and from military activities.<sup>xxvii</sup>*

**DISPLACEMENT AND  
POVERTY**

*Women and children are the majority of war refugees; widows of war are displaced, disinherited, and impoverished; and poor women and children lose government services to the prioritization of military spending.<sup>xxviii</sup>*

**REINFORCING VIOLENT  
MASCULINITIES**

*There were an estimated 26,000 cases of sexual assault in the U.S. military in 2012.<sup>xxix</sup>*

**SOCIETAL RETRENCHMENT IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT**

*Under pressure from conflict, societies tend to retrench into conservative cultural and religious positions, often reinforcing detrimental power structures. The psychological concept of “large-group regression” has been applied to explain this phenomenon, which has become ubiquitous in recent years, resulting from fear of the “other”.<sup>xxxii</sup>*

*War and conflict perpetuate this retrenchment and do not make the world a safer place, as is reflected in the fact that terrorism has increased by more than four times over the last decade plus of war.<sup>xxxiii</sup>*

**RAPE AS A WEAPON OF  
WAR**

*Rape is being used as a weapon of war in Syria: 80% of those targeted are women, resulting in the death of 18% of victims, and is a major cause for the flight of hundreds of thousands of refugees.<sup>xxx</sup>*

*It is estimated that at least 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while approximately 250,000 to 500,000 women and girls were targeted in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, at least 200,000 cases of sexual violence, mostly involving women and girls, have been documented since 1996: the actual numbers are believed to be far higher.<sup>xxxi</sup>*

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**MOBILIZING FAITH FOR WOMEN: THE CHALLENGES THAT PERSIST**

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- <sup>v</sup> UNICEF. 2005. *Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice*. New York, United Nations.
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- <sup>vii</sup> National Institute of Justice. *Sexual Assault on Campus: What Colleges and Universities Are Doing About It*. 6-7.
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- <sup>ix</sup> UNFPA. 2003. *UNFPA and Young People: Imagine 2003*. UNFPA, New York.
- <sup>x</sup> Ibid
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- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xviii</sup> UNWOMEN, 2012.
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- <sup>xx</sup> UNWOMEN, 2013.
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## Appendix E

# News Coverage

### June 23, 2013

“Jimmy Carter: A Sunday interview.” *Swampland* (blog). Time magazine.

“President Carter Says Catholic Church Should Ordain Women; All Religions Should Promote Gender Equality.” *Huffington Post*.

“Jimmy Carter Links Catholic All-Male Priesthood to Human Rights Abuse.” *The Deacon’s Bench* (blog). Patheos.

### June 24, 2013

“Your Daily Jolt: Jimmy Carter Says Bans on Ordination of Women Are Green Lights for Discrimination.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

“Jimmy Carter Has Met the Enemies, and They Are Catholics.” *Catholic World Report*.

“Does Jimmy Carter Want to Change the Way God Thinks?” *Catholic Culture*.

“Seib & Wessel: What We’re Reading Monday.” *Wall Street Journal*.

“Morning Briefing.” *National Catholic Reporter*.

“Jimmy Carter: Catholic Church Should Ordain Women Priests.” *The Inquisitr*.

“Jimmy Carter Says the Catholic Church Should Man Up and Ordain Women.” *msnNOW.com*.

“Carter Center to Host Mobilizing Faith for Women Conference.” *Examiner.com*.

### June 25, 2013

“Pope Jimmy Carter.” *NYPOST.com*.

“Melinda Gates: 5 Questions for Tostan’s Molly Melching.” Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. *Impatient Optimists* (blog).

### June 27, 2013

“Women, Faith, Rights Forum Set: Carter Center Will Discuss Faith Community’s Role.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

“Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter Says Some Religions Sexist.” *Reuters*. Also *The Star* and *TVNZ OneNews* on June 28.

Interview with Karin Ryan. All News 106.7.

### June 28, 2013

President Carter and human rights defender Zainah Anwar, interviewed by Suzanne Malveux, *Around the World*. *CNN*.

“President Carter Defends Paula Deen.” *CNN Newsroom*. (mentions Human Rights forum)

“Human Rights and Religious Leaders Call for Action Toward Full Equality and Human Dignity for All.” The Carter Center. (Press Release)

“Carter: Many Religious Leaders Have Failed Women.” *Associated Press*. Also published in the following outlets and more than 20 others:

*Huffington Post*

*ABC News*

*Politico*

*The Grand Island Independent*

*Washington Times*

*The Record*

*Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*

*The Baxter Bulletin*

*Trib Total Media: TribLIVE*

*Sky News Australia*

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## Mobilizing Faith for Women

*Herald Sun*

*The Advertiser*

*The Portland Press Herald*

*Marietta Daily Journal*

*Calhoun Times*

*The Vancouver Sun*

*ABC Channel 5 News*

*Philly.com*

*CathNews*

*The West Australian*

*Newsmax*

*Athens Banner-Herald: Online Athens*

*WTOC Channel 11 News*

*New Straits Times*

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“Jimmy Carter: Women’s Plight Perpetuated by World Religions.” *Associated Press*. (Video Package)

“Carter: Baptist Group Diminishes Roles of Women.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution PolitiFact Georgia*.

“Jimmy Carter Blames Religion for Global Mistreatment of Women.” *The Blaze*.

### June 29, 2013

“Jimmy Carter Says Religion Harms Women.” *Examiner.com*.

“Jimmy Carter’s Craven Critiques, Part 1: World’s Religions Share Blame for Women’s Oppression.” *News Busters*.

### June 30, 2013

“Jimmy Carter: Christianity Mistreats Women as Much as Islam.” *Breitbart*. Also *FOX Nation*.

“Religiösa ledare anklagas för kvinnofientlighet.” *DN.se*. (Sweden)

### July 1, 2013

“Religion and Human Rights: An Interview With President Jimmy Carter.” (part one). *Religion News Service*.

“Religion and Human Rights: An Interview With President Jimmy Carter.” (part two). *Religion News Service*.

“Carter Center Conference Mobilizes Faith Groups to Advance Women’s Rights.” The Carter Center. (Video Package)

### July 2, 2013

“Carter Errs in Comparing Religions.” *Opelika-Auburn News*.

“What Carter Said.” *Patheos*.

“Carter Says Faith Still Used Against Women.” *The Christian Century*.

### July 3, 2013

“Carter Says Faith Used Against Women.” *Associated Baptist Press*.

“Words of Wisdom.” *Marshall Independent*.

### July 5, 2013

“Carter: World Religions Perpetuate Women’s Plight.” *Associated Press*. Also *The Times and Democrat*.

“Voices of Faith Challenge Violation of Women’s Rights.” *World Council of Churches*. Also *Ekklesia* on July 8.

### July 7, 2013

“Speaking Truth.” *Education Week*.

### July 8, 2013

“Mobilizing Faith for Women.” *Rejuvenate magazine*.

“Inspiration.” *Rejuvenate magazine*.

**July 9, 2013**

“Carter Trips Over Details of Gender Wage Gap.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution PolitiFact Georgia*.

“Jimmy Carter: Educate Religious Leaders to End Flagrant Abuse of Women.” *Huffington Post*. (includes AP video of President Carter’s remarks)

**July 11, 2013**

“Devout Christian Jimmy Carter Calls Out the Use of Religion to Attack Women’s Rights.” *PoliticusUSA*.

**Aug. 19, 2013**

Airing of President Carter’s opening remarks and the panel on human trafficking. *Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasters*.





THE  
CARTER CENTER



One Copenhill  
453 Freedom Parkway  
Atlanta, GA 30307  
(404) 420-5100 • Fax (404) 420-5145

[www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)