

**President's Advisory Council  
on Faith-Based and Neighborhood  
Partnerships**

---

**A New Era of Partnerships:  
Report of Recommendations to the President**

Publication of this document was coordinated by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships with support from the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Special thanks to Joshua DuBois, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and Mara Vanderslice, Deputy Director and Coordinator of the President's Advisory Council.

# Inter-Religious Cooperation

## Members of the Taskforce

**Archbishop Vicken Aykazian**, Immediate Past President, National Council of Churches; and  
Legate, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

**Anju Bhargava**, President, Asian Indian Women in America;  
Founder, Hindu American Seva Charities

**Nathan J. Diament**, Director of Public Policy, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America

**The Reverend Wesley Granberg-Michaelson**, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America

**Bishop Mark Hanson**, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor**, Northland, A Church Distributed

**Dr. Ingrid Mattson**, President, Islamic Society of North America

**Dalia Mogahed**, Senior Analyst and Executive Director, The Center for Muslim Studies, Gallup

**The Reverend Otis Moss, Jr.**, Pastor Emeritus, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church

**Dr. Eboo Patel**, Founder and Executive Director, Interfaith Youth Core

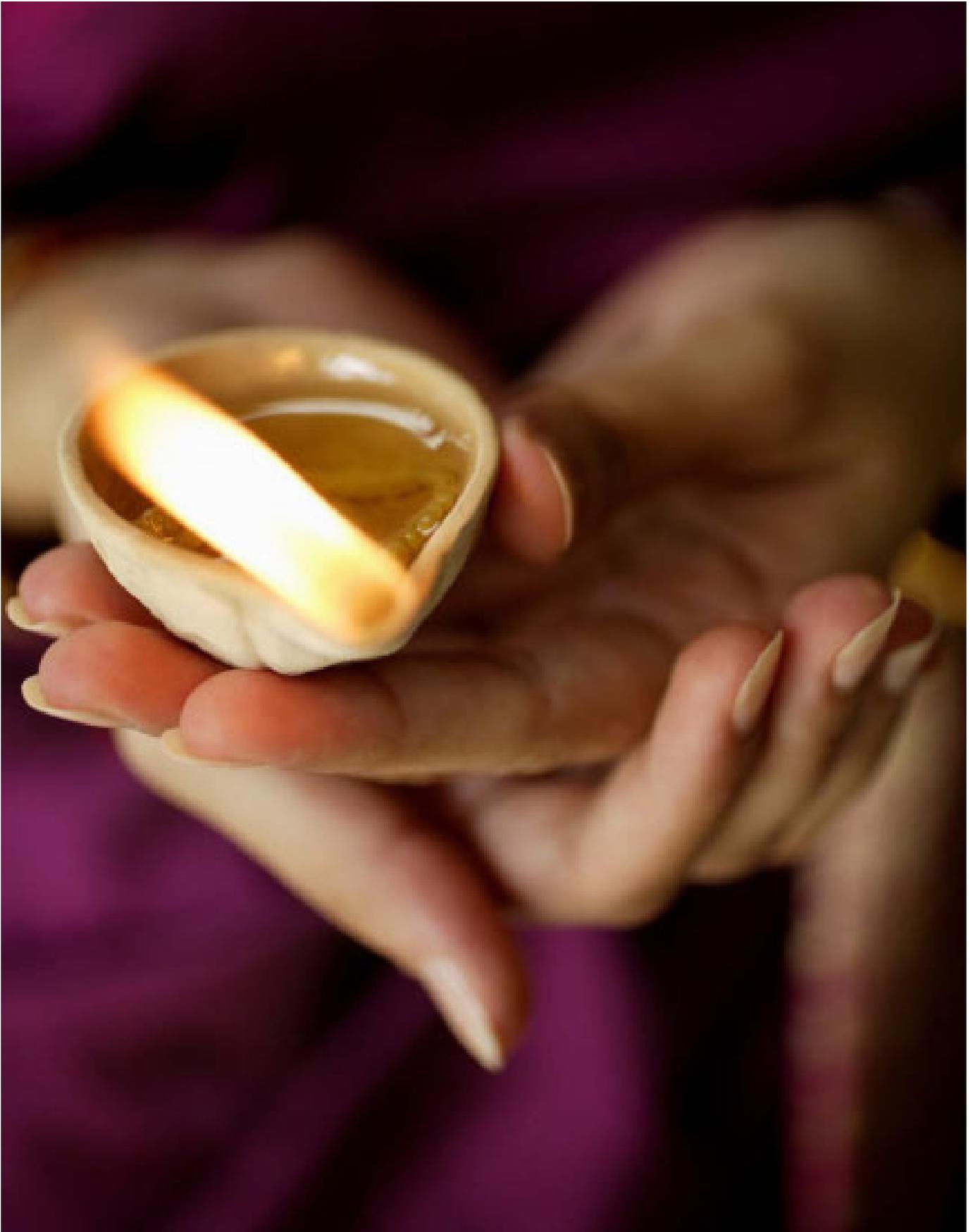
**Rabbi David Saperstein**, Director and Counsel, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

**James D. Standish, JD, MBA**, Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty,  
Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters

**Dr. William Vendley**, Secretary General; and

**The Reverend Donald "Bud" Heckman**, Director for External Relations, Religions for Peace

**Miroslav Volf**, Director, Yale Center for Faith and Culture



# Inter-Religious Cooperation

---

## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Government seeks to treat all of its citizens equally and to honor the human rights of all persons around the world, religious and nonreligious. The U.S. Government currently partners with a wide range of secular entities to achieve its domestic and international objectives. The Federal Government also recognizes that religiously affiliated persons, communities, specialized agencies, and multireligious bodies can be vital partners in both domestic and international affairs.

In many areas of the world, religious communities have the best developed, largest, and most enduring social infrastructures. Further, they can be among the most credible and reliable partners.

A key to advancing productive partnerships between the U.S. Government and religious communities lies in respecting their different identities and clearly discerning their overlapping interests for advancing concrete action for the common good. Respecting both points can help greatly in the development of fruitful partnerships between the U.S. Government, religious groups, and other civil society partners.

The U.S. Government often employs a multistakeholder approach to partnerships, which can include partnerships among governmental, civil society, and business groups for common objectives. Multistakeholder partnerships can also include numerous distinct religious communities, their related specialized agencies, and interreligious organizations, willing to work together to address specific concrete challenges.

Major advantages of a multistakeholder approach to partnerships that involve religious communities, their specialized agencies, and multireligious organizations include: having a clear focus on the common good; conforming to constitutional, statutory, and regulatory frameworks; and drawing on the impulses for the common good anchored deeply in a variety of religious and or other civic philanthropic motivations.

When religiously affiliated persons, communities, their specialized agencies, and multireligious organizations work together in multistakeholder partnerships, they understand themselves as engaging in “interfaith service,” working for the common good, even while maintaining the unique religious identity of each participating partner.

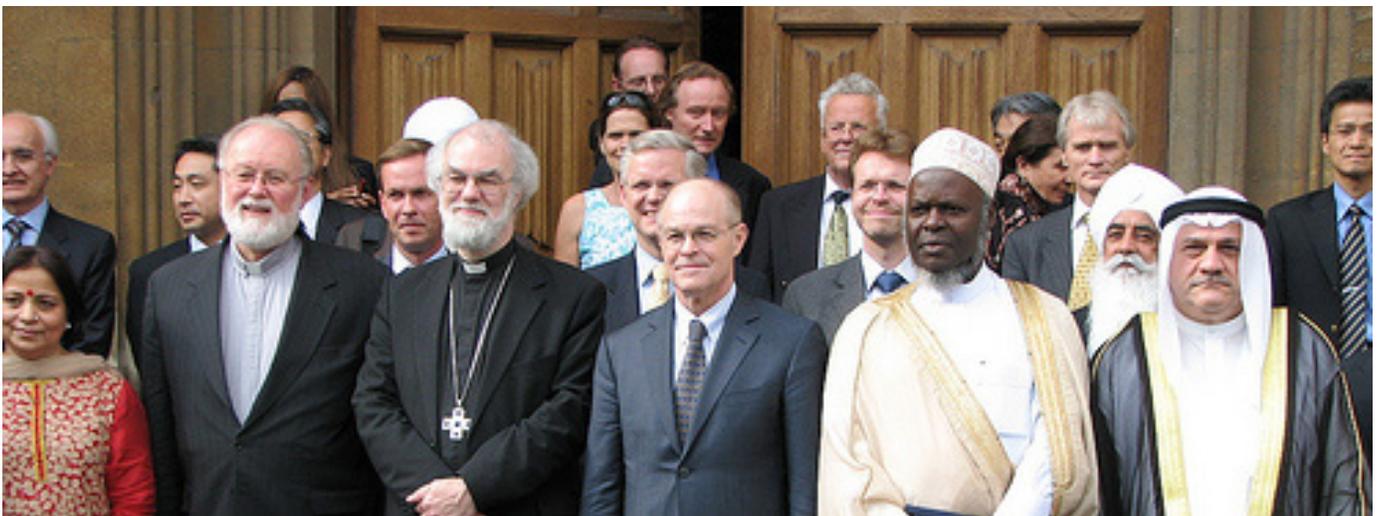
This disciplined approach to multistakeholder partnerships that include these religiously affiliated actors—in addition to advancing concrete projects—can also greatly foster social cohesion and help transform sectarian tensions into habits of collaboration based on mutual respect.

All participants in multistakeholder approaches to the common good are important. As noted above, the Federal Government partners with a variety of secular entities in many effective multi-sector arrangements, and those partnerships certainly should continue. The focus of this report, however, is to explore some of the unique benefits and opportunities presented by partnerships between the U.S. Government and religiously affiliated actors.

For the purpose of this report, interreligious cooperation refers to activities and projects that draw participants from more than one faith tradition, denomination, spiritual movement, or religion and often include secular participants and organizations, as well. These efforts are aimed at increasing understanding and cooperation among such groups. This document uses the terms “interreligious,” “multifaith,” “interfaith,” and “multireligious” interchangeably.

It is important to note the emphasis President Barack Obama gave in his Cairo speech to improving U.S. relations with “the Muslim world.” This report has a section emphasizing this important goal, even while upholding and encouraging the overall objective of religious inclusivity and the broader goal of working across religious lines with all people—religious and nonreligious—to foster understanding and encourage cooperation. The ever-greater religious diversity within the United States is a national asset that can be coordinated by principled multireligious and multistakeholder partnerships with the U.S. Government to build a healthy culture of pluralism, marked by respect for distinct religious communities, active and positive relationships among them and nonreligious communities, and a commitment among all groups to build a healthy, diverse, and shared society. In addition, all proposals made in this report must be implemented in accordance with constitutional, statutory, and regulatory frameworks, including the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Finally, it is recognized that all U.S. Government funding must be predicated on achieving secular results. Such funding must be awarded based on neutral performance-based criteria and must be open to faith-based and non-faith-based entities on equal terms. The recommendations below should be read in accord with these principles.



---

## OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### *The Role of Religion and Global Affairs:*

**Recommendation 1:** Include multireligious partnerships among the partnerships in which the U.S. government engages, and equip U.S. agencies related to international affairs for those partnerships.

**Recommendation 2:** Partner with faith communities and other organizations that work across faith lines to expand respect for religious pluralism and freedom of religion or belief.

### *Advancing Multireligious Cooperation:*

**Recommendation 3:** Increase partnerships with interreligious councils and women of faith networks to advance peace building and development.

**Recommendation 4:** Initiate a public campaign to scale and strengthen global and domestic program partnerships with Federal agencies that increase dialogue and service between people from diverse faith-based and secular groups to build understanding and serve the common good.

**Recommendation 5:** Host a White House roundtable to foster multireligious partnerships to advance interfaith service, peace building, and development.

### *Engaging Muslim Communities:*

**Recommendation 6:** Establish ongoing communication between the White House and the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities at the Department of State and Muslim American community groups on global Muslim engagement efforts.

**Recommendation 7:** Hold townhall meetings around the country including representatives from the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and faith-based and community groups to discuss citizen concerns about civil liberties.

**Recommendation 8:** Utilize the expertise of faith- and community-based organizations to train education and media professionals on Islam and Muslim communities.

### *Integrating and Valuing America's Religious Diversity*

**Recommendation 9:** Through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and relevant Agency Centers, direct U.S. Government agencies to work to engage the rich diversity of American religious communities in partnerships to strengthen the common good in America.

**Recommendation 10:** Through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and relevant Agency Centers, direct U.S. Government agencies to work to engage the rich diversity of American religious and cultural communities in partnerships to provide aid, development, and other services overseas to advance peace and justice abroad.

**Recommendation 11:** Help build social cohesion by supporting efforts to ensure that Americans have opportunities to understand America's increasingly diverse religious society.

---

## THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Religion is abused by extremists using religion to incite violence and hatred, by unscrupulous leaders manipulating sectarian differences for their own ends, by those seeking to exploit victims of poverty and to violate human rights, and by instances in which media scapegoats religion in situations of conflict.

Religious communities should be engaged to help achieve solutions for peace, security, human development, and respect for fundamental human rights that undergird these solutions. Multireligious cooperation is a useful method of engagement, because it builds public cooperation and focuses on the common good. In order for religious communities to work together, they must be able to operate freely in society. This report includes recommendations for both broadening multireligious cooperation and enlarging the region in which religious pluralism is permitted to exist freely.

No government, non-profit organization, or foundation can coordinate the assets of religious communities by itself. Religious communities must convene their own forums of multireligious cooperation to help unleash the potential of their respective and combined assets, which are spiritual, moral, and social. Although religious communities are the principal convenors of themselves, government may also serve as a convenor for certain purposes. In these engagements, the partners must guard against the manipulation of religion, the marginalization of those who decline to participate, and the undue expansion of the role of government in interfaith dialogue. To advance potential partnerships between the U.S. Government and religious communities, this document outlines a series of recommendations for U.S. Government agencies.

Two existing U.S. governmental entities with expertise and capacity that may be relevant to implementing these recommendations are the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.<sup>1</sup> The professional staff of these entities, the Commission's members and, when appointed, the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom have substantial knowledge of the role religion plays in societies around the world, the means of fostering interreligious cooperation in diverse cultures, and the U.S. Government's existing initiatives and infrastructure in the field. The required annual International Religious Freedom report has also nurtured a corps of foreign service officers who have developed strong connections with religious communities in countries across the globe.

### ***Key Principles, Orientations, and Assumptions***

The following working assumptions inform the recommendations below:

1. It is important to honor the distinction between the identities of religious communities and governmental agencies.<sup>2</sup>
2. Religious communities have significant experience, expertise, and capacity in peace building and development, including the delivery of health care, education, social service, and emergency assistance.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Both the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom were created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that multireligious organizations are not technically religious in identity; they are public organizations with religious constituencies.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote number 3 on page 75.

---

- 
3. Multireligious cooperation should focus on harnessing this experience, expertise, and capacity and, at the same time, respect the distinct roles of religious communities and governmental agencies.<sup>4</sup>
  4. All efforts should operate within established principles for multireligious cooperation that have garnered wide acceptance among the world's religious communities:
    - a. Respect religious differences, and act on deeply held and widely shared values.
    - b. Preserve the identity of each religious community.
    - c. Honor the different ways religious communities are organized.
    - d. Support locally led multireligious structures.

As the President seeks to scale up multireligious cooperation as a mode of action for the common good, we offer the following principles and orientations as a guide:

- Place a premium on multireligious engagements based on shared principles that can enable each participating religious community to work on common goals.
- Identify and evaluate existing multireligious organizations led by representatives of the religious communities as potential partners for action programs, and encourage new organizations to become involved in the field.<sup>5</sup>
- Consider building the capacity of established multireligious organizations, and similar organizations with relevant expertise and capacity, to implement needed projects.
- Seek partnerships with existing international multireligious organizations, and similar organizations with relevant expertise and capacity, if national multireligious organizations do not exist.
- Acknowledge the transnational character of many religious communities, and advance coherence in partnership objectives on the global, regional, national, and local levels.
- Advance multistate and multisectoral partnerships in support of multireligious cooperation for peace and sustainable development as a way to both advance the scale and maintain the independent identity of multireligious action.
- Focus on building multireligious partnerships as a priority in countries where religion is a major feature of social contract, is subject to misunderstanding, and has a significant potential to advance the common good.
- Ensure that all steps taken to promote multireligious cooperation are within the parameters of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and other relevant constitutional and legal provisions.

---

<sup>3</sup> Religious communities often have (1) a clear mission and message and a traditional orientation toward peace and the promotion of respectful human relations; (2) a permanent historic and widely spread presence in society at large and in local communities in particular; (3) legitimacy that enables them to make clear and courageous statements during crises and speak with authority to issues of common concern; (4) the largest social networks, reaching from the smallest village to capital cities and beyond; (5) trusted and integrated communication networks to help reach larger numbers of individual followers; and (6) moral and spiritual traditions that have great authority among their adherents and relevance for peace and human well-being.

<sup>4</sup> Multireligious cooperation aligns diverse communities around common goals based on shared values, highlights complementarities for action among diverse communities, provides for efficiencies in training, and equips religious communities for public partnerships .

<sup>5</sup> Religious communities should be engaged through their own representatives – leaders, outstanding persons, grassroots congregations, and other organizational manifestations – in the work of building interreligious structures on every level, local to global. In this approach, religious communities are acknowledged as the main agents of multi-religious cooperation, with each religious community maintaining its own voice and unique identity while working to achieve common goals.

---

**Recommendation 1: Include multireligious partnerships among the partnerships in which the U.S. Government engages, and equip U.S. agencies related to international affairs for those partnerships.**

The Administration should include multireligious partnerships among the partnerships in which the U.S. Government engages and should equip U.S. agencies related to international affairs for those partnerships.<sup>6</sup> Toward this end, the Advisory Council recommends that the Administration request appointment of senior staff for multireligious engagement in each of the major agencies handling international affairs. It also urges President Obama to direct each agency to establish portfolios related to multireligious engagements and to call for the creation of both intra-agency and interagency working groups on multireligious engagement. Policy reviews should be open to an analysis of religious factors, including the potential impact of multireligious cooperation for key objectives and initiatives. And the Council urges the Administration to direct the Foreign Service Institute, military service academies, and chaplaincy training programs to adopt new curricula that systematically include course material about religions, relevant international laws that protect the rights of religious and nonreligious people, and methods of engaging multireligious partnerships in building the common good. Such government engagement with religious communities should be aimed at promoting secular goals such as achieving peace and security, not promoting either religion generally or particular religions.

***A.) Appoint senior-level staff for multireligious engagement.***

The President should request the appointment of senior staff for multireligious engagement in each of the major agencies tasked with international affairs, including the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Security Council (NSC), and the Department of Defense. Internationally, Senior Officers for Multireligious Engagement and Community Partnerships should be assigned in key embassies (in accord with criteria above) in order to support field cooperation with religious partners.

To successfully engage multireligious partnerships in achieving peace, security, human development, and respect for fundamental human rights, dedicated staff needs to be in place in U.S. Government agencies. The potential for multireligious cooperation will not be systematically addressed unless appropriate agency staff is appointed to intentionally focus on the power of multireligious cooperation.

***B.) Establish multireligious portfolios.***

The President should direct each agency to establish portfolios related to multireligious engagements that span the work of policy development, through the implementation of diplomacy and development programs.

The intentional effort to further encourage multireligious engagement can be strategically successful only with staff being assigned, portfolioed, and interconnected in U.S. Government agencies.

---

<sup>6</sup> References throughout this section of the report to “multireligious” partnerships presume that they will be one form of partnership among many partnerships, including those with secular entities, through which the Federal Government pursues its foreign policy interests. Also, the recommendation calling for the addition of staff and policy emphases on multireligious perspectives assumes that similar secular emphases are already present in these agencies and will be ongoing. For example, senior staff in Federal agencies focused on international affairs already is tasked with engaging with a wide variety of secular communities (see part A of Recommendation 1).

---



***C.) Constitute intra-agency and interagency working groups for multireligious partnerships.***

The President should call for the constitution of both intra-agency and interagency working groups on multireligious engagement. These working groups will recommend policy related to multireligious partnerships. They will facilitate the sharing of information, advance policy coherence across agencies, and foster synergy of action. A high-level interagency task force should be directly linked to the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Cooperation within and between the staff of different agencies charged with multireligious engagement can facilitate a coordinated strategic advancement of multireligious partnerships. Linking the agencies with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships through a high-level task force can advance coordinated policy and implementation of multireligious partnerships.

***D.) Coordinate policy efforts with regards to multireligious perspectives.***

The President should direct that policy reviews be open to an analysis of religious factors, including the potential impact of multireligious cooperation for implementing key objectives and initiatives. Public diplomacy strategies and protocols should be developed that promote engagement with religious communities and their leaders through multireligious coalitions.

Religious communities are integral to human societies. They are among the oldest and largest social networks, and their contributions in education, health, and social services represent a sizeable portion of all such efforts. Policy analyses that do not take into account multireligious capacities can risk missing the positive potentials for action of multireligious cooperation and—in the absence of positive engagement—enhance the risk that others will attempt to misuse religious communities for narrowly sectarian or political interests.

***E.) Improve training on world religions and multireligious cooperation.***

The President should direct the Foreign Service Institute, military service academies, and chaplaincy training programs to adopt new curricula that systematically include course material about religions, relevant international laws that protect the rights of religious and nonreligious people, and methods of engaging multireligious partnerships in building the common good.

Religion informs the values and actions of many people around the globe, and faith-based institutions make a significant contribution to the delivery of health care, education, and social services. Therefore, it is necessary that U.S. Government personnel understand the religious traditions of the people with whom they are interacting. Further, religious communities are potential partners for the delivery of basic services, brokering peace and creating stable societies. U.S. personnel must have a working knowledge of the best means to engage religious communities.

---

**Recommendation 2: Partner with faith communities and other organizations that work across faith lines to expand respect for religious pluralism and freedom of religion or belief.**

The President should direct U.S. Government agencies to identify and fund entities with expertise in both building respect for religious pluralism and expanding freedom of religion or belief as defined in international law.<sup>7</sup>

Further, the U.S. Government should partner with entities with relevant expertise, to analyze the effectiveness and possible means of improving current U.S. efforts to expand freedom of religion or belief.

***Background and Explanation:***

President Obama raised religious freedom as one of his priorities in the Cairo speech, stating “[f]reedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together.” Similarly, Secretary Clinton stated on October 26, 2009, that “[r]eligious freedom provides a cornerstone for every healthy society. It empowers faith-based service. It fosters tolerance and respect among different communities. And it allows nations that uphold it to become more stable, secure and prosperous.”

One reason to promote multireligious cooperation is to lessen tensions among religious communities and thereby reduce religiously motivated violence. But a number of societies that present serious security threats to American interests are also societies in which religious repression functionally prevents significant multifaith cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

The first step in executing significant multireligious projects in repressive nations is, therefore, working with partners to ensure respect for the existing religious diversity within those societies and to advance religious pluralism. Religious pluralism is defined as respect for distinct religious and nonreligious identities, active and positive relationships between different religious and nonreligious communities, and a commitment across religious lines to building a healthy, diverse, and shared society.

While freedom of religion or belief is a necessary precursor to robust religious pluralism, and while robust pluralism is necessary before substantial multireligious cooperation is possible, there is significant interplay among the three. Multireligious cooperation is a substantial means through which societies achieve religious pluralism and religious freedom. A high level of religious pluralism and religious freedom is a central component of a stable civil society. It minimizes tensions among religious communities, reduces religiously motivated violence, and increases the stability of diverse societies.

Research shows that creating networks of engagement among different religious communities in civil society is a factor in preventing violence among those communities during times of tension.<sup>9</sup> It also prevents religious prejudices from turning into violence that can impact geopolitical relations. Therefore, multireligious approaches are essential to expanding religious freedom and to building respect for religious pluralism, which are both necessary in order to achieve substantial multifaith cooperation.

---

<sup>7</sup> See Article 18 of the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 18 of the *United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*.

<sup>8</sup> See U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Countries of Particular Concern*, [http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1456&Itemid=59](http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1456&Itemid=59), and the Department of State, *2009 Report on International Religious Freedom* (available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/index.htm>).

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale University Press, 2003).

---

## ADVANCING MULTIRELIGIOUS COOPERATION

Interfaith<sup>10</sup> coalitions and organizations provide unique capacity to achieve critical U.S. objectives in three principal ways:

- First, by bringing together people of faith and of goodwill, individuals and entities can build knowledge and respect for one another. This multireligious cooperation builds social cohesion and helps replace sectarian tensions with mutual respect.
- Second, there is a moral and social imperative in religious and civic traditions to help others. Building on this impetus to help achieve U.S. Government objectives in the fields of aid, development, health care, and other social infrastructure goals makes functional sense.
- Third, as in many areas of the world, where religious communities have well-developed social infrastructures already in place and the credibility and reliability to partner effectively with government, they should be invited to work with government, just as similarly situated secular communities would be.

### **Recommendation 3: Increase partnerships with interreligious councils and women of faith networks to advance peace building and development.**

The Department of State, USAID, and the NSC should engage in consultations with representatives of religious communities, multireligious organizations, and other community organizations to discern relevant religious factors and contributions in relationship to conflict resolution and peace building. Particular attention should be given to those areas shaped by religious legacies and having special importance for regional and global security, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Israel and Palestine. Consistent with the President's aspiration, expressed in his Cairo speech, to move beyond stalemate, the Middle East conflict is one in which cooperation between diverse religious leaders, particularly Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious leaders, can play a vital role in constructively moving that conflict toward resolution.

The Department of State and USAID should develop partnerships with national, regional, and global interreligious councils and new multireligious organizations to engage in peace building, ranging from conflict prevention, to conflict transformation, to social reconstruction. They also should engage regional, national, and global interreligious women's networks on these issues, as well as on the issues of trauma healing and gender equality. The capacity building and resourcing relevant to these partnerships should be a priority.

U.S. Government agencies, such as USAID, the Department of State, and others that undertake critical global development issues—including specifically eradicating malaria and addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic—should scale up partnerships with national, regional, and global interreligious councils and women of faith networks.

The Federal efforts that focus on women—such as the White House Council on Women and Girls, the Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues, the USAID Global Partnership Initiative, and others—should engage regional, national, and global interreligious women's networks to advance development on all fronts, particularly poverty

---

<sup>10</sup> For this report, "interfaith" refers to activities and projects that draw participants from more than one faith tradition, denomination, spiritual movement, or religion and that often include secular participants and organizations. These efforts are aimed at increasing understanding and cooperation among such groups. This document uses the terms "interreligious," "multifaith," "interfaith," and "multireligious" interchangeably.

alleviation, including microfinance; education of female children; maternal and child health; and addressing forms of violence against women.

***Background and explanation:***

Religious communities and multireligious organizations are too often sidelined or altogether dismissed as potential partners in development and peace-building initiatives. As long as relevant constitutional and legal rules are respected, the separate roles and identities of religious communities and governments are upheld, and clear expectations are outlined about the functional role of religious communities in the delivery of services, religious communities can then offer tremendous social, moral, and physical assets to efforts in development and peace building.

Women are disproportionately affected by issues related to the development and peace building. They also possess unrealized and unrecognized potential to affect change for the common good in these arenas. One of the most common ways that women already substantively contribute is through religious communities and multireligious alliances.

### **Hindu American Seva Charities**

<http://www.hinduamericanseva.org>

Hindu American Seva Charities (HASC) was formed in May 2009 to mobilize Hindu Americans, temples, ashrams, and spiritual centers to expand their ongoing community service, promote development of sustainable service centers, and mobilize the first national services participation in President Obama's United We Serve Summer of Service Campaign. Over 120 Seva Centers in temples and ashrams responded to the President's clarion call to serve. Thousands of volunteers undertook over 1,300 humanitarian seva projects, and almost all were interfaith.

The primary objectives of HASC are to:

- Support and encourage millions of Hindu Americans to volunteer to build and strengthen all American Communities through seva/community service programs nationally and at grassroots levels; and
- Provide broader exposure and promote development of coalitions and partnerships of Seva Centers (Community Service Centers that are standalone or part of temples) to accomplish common goals and address community needs.

The primary focus of the seva projects conducted coast to coast during the summer of 2009 was:

- Poverty reduction (622 events) through soup kitchens in local churches, fundraising walk-a-thons, holiday meals, building homes, shoes and clothing drives, care packages and free hotel/motel rooms for U.S. soldiers, prison correspondence outreach, educational forums on home foreclosures and stimulus package strategies for survival, and other activities;
- Coordination of 407 health events for uninsured Americans held primarily on August 1 and 2, 2009. This comprehensive health fair offered medical screening provided by physicians, nurses, and individuals. It also included health awareness presentations developed for the service campaign by medical students;
- Environment and greening projects by youth who cleaned and cleared roadsides, beaches, and parks and planted trees in the community;
- Education development efforts including filling backpacks with school supplies for low-income children; and
- Interfaith dialogues to improve understanding. For example, the Siva Vishnu Temple in Washington, D.C., hosted a discussion in which each faith (Christian—Presbyterian, Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist, and Quaker; Jewish, Sikh, Jain, Muslim, Buddhist, Baha'i, and Hindu) addressed its role on fasting and feasting.

**Recommendation 4: Initiate a public campaign to scale and strengthen global and domestic program partnerships with federal agencies that increase dialogue and service between people from a diversity of faith-based and secular groups to build understanding and serve the common good.<sup>11</sup>**

The Council proposes that the administration seek to achieve the following goals by the end of 2012:

**On 500 U.S. college campuses:**

- The President should allocate already appropriated funds within the Department of Education or Department of Health & Human Services, to provide the necessary financial incentive to stimulate campus/community partnerships through service projects that bring people together across different religious and secular lines.
- The White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships should convene a gathering of senior university officials and members of the private/philanthropic sector to make concrete commitments to advance university/community interfaith service partnerships.<sup>12</sup>
- The Department of Education with the Department of Housing and Urban Development should create a joint fund to implement innovative student programming focused on cultivating service partnerships between people from a diversity of faith-based and secular groups with organizations that have a strong track record of service initiatives (e.g., Habitat for Humanity) to increase dialogue and service.

The Secretary of Education should undertake a major initiative, including financial incentives, to promote policies on university campuses that specifically encourage respect for religious diversity and multi-religious cooperation. Such policies should address all aspects of institutional life including mission, housing, student life, and staffing.



**Muslim Americans Answer the Call**

<http://www.muslimserve.org>

Muslim Americans Answer the Call (MAAC) was launched June 2009 in response to President Obama's call for interfaith service projects as a part of the United We Serve Initiative. Muslim Americans are "Answering the Call" by responding to the President's challenge to all Americans to help our Nation recover from the economic crisis. MAAC also means responding to the millions of Americans in need, who have been hit hard by layoffs and foreclosures or who do not have affordable health care and education. Finally, "Answering the Call" refers to responding to what Muslims believe is their faith's call to serve God by serving others. After a summer of hard work, the campaign achieved more than 3,600 individual days of service, 93% of which were completed in cooperation with another faith-based community. The result of this national effort, MAAC, was more than 3,600 individual daylong service projects, touching the lives of thousands of Americans in need.

The primary objective of MAAC is to:

- Encourage and empower every Muslim American to serve humanity, especially the millions of Americans in need.

To facilitate Muslim Americans' full participation in this important effort, MAAC responded by:

- Creating [www.MuslimServe.org](http://www.MuslimServe.org) to call all Muslim Americans to serve their country by setting a goal of 1,000 service projects nationally; and
- Participating in volunteer projects centered on health care, for example, community health care screenings; education (e.g., Life In Books); the environment, such as Green Ramadan; and community renewal, such as Day of Dignity.

<sup>11</sup> From here on, these programs will be referred to as "interfaith service projects."

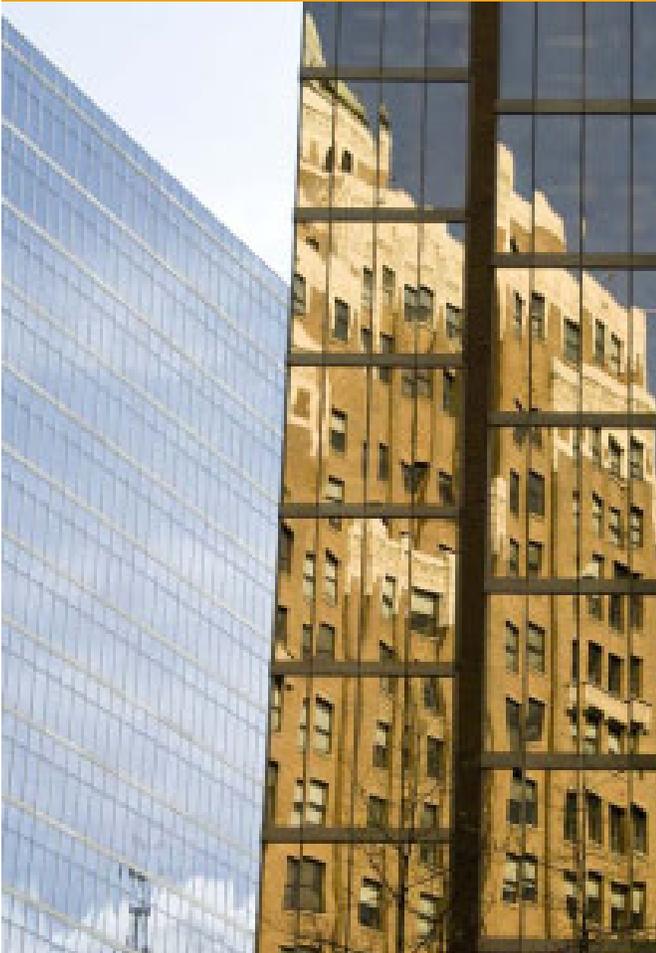
<sup>12</sup> As their name suggests, these public-private partnerships are focused on community service, such as spending time with senior citizens in a nursing home, painting the walls of a YMCA, and making blankets for refugee children. These partnerships are not aimed at promoting either religion generally or particular religions, but rather at building understanding and cooperation between diverse groups.

## Project Downtown

<http://www.projectdowntown.org/chapters/orlando/>

Organized in partnership with the Corporation for National Community Service, Project Downtown in Orlando, Florida, was launched in response to President Obama's call for interfaith service projects as a part of the United We Serve Initiative.

Project Downtown is an effort in which the Muslim Students Association joined with evangelical college students from Northland Church, a local Hillel, and the Hindu Students Association to serve the homeless. Students distributed weekly food and clothes and provided housing assistance and job facilitation while spending time with and learning about one another. Students worked together to sort clothes, assemble hygiene kits, and pack brown bag lunches for the homeless in Orlando on September 6, 2009. Approximately 150 homeless people were provided clothing, hygiene kits, and food.



### In 40 U.S. cities:

- The White House and the Corporation for National and Community Service should coordinate a gathering of city-based religious leaders, community foundations, and Federal and State Faith-Based Directors to launch scaled interfaith service programs in 40 cities that will be operational by the end of 2012.
- Program directors at the relevant service initiatives should incorporate program components that increase involvement of faith-based groups in existing national service initiatives such as AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America programs to leverage the social capital that exists within these communities.

### At 25 U.S. Embassies:

- The Department of State should conduct international speaking tours through the Department's Office of Public Diplomacy with cohorts of diverse American college students focusing on America's example of religious pluralism and cross-cultural understanding. These programs should be used to create forums for interreligious dialogue, while inspiring grassroots support of interfaith service.
- The Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) should develop a robust international exchange and training program focused on young people. This program will provide emerging leaders with the understanding and skills needed to implement and/or create projects that increase dialogue and service between people from a diversity of faith-based and secular groups for building understanding and serving the common good. ECA should further network young interfaith leaders globally through social networking tools and conferences to reinforce successes and share best practices.

- The President should ask Congress to increase levels of government funding for Embassies and Consulates to sponsor international interfaith service programs and coordinate programs that strategically align with foreign policy goals.
- USAID should instigate and coordinate meaningful service initiatives that bring together diverse constituencies in areas where religious conflict is a concern, such as interfaith Habitat for Humanity builds.
- The President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and other high-level representatives should visit and host high-profile interfaith service projects, which would provide both symbolic meaning and a demonstration of concrete action.

***Background and Explanation:***

In Cairo, President Obama laid out a vision for a new beginning with Muslim communities around the world, one based on mutual respect and common action on shared goals. Currently, interfaith service initiatives that exist in Federal agencies are ad hoc and scattered. It is imperative to have a coherent and scaled strategy in which the U.S. Government makes a concrete commitment to catalyzing and strengthening interfaith service programs through Federal agencies.

The President and other senior Administration officials should emphasize the importance of both interfaith engagement and service, two important priorities of his Administration. An emphasis on these two important priorities also would also provide a model of action and engagement for others to follow.



---

**Recommendation 5: Host a White House roundtable to foster multireligious partnerships to advance interfaith service, peace building, and development.**

The President should direct the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to host a conference to draw attention to the emerging field of multireligious cooperation and the unique potential for new partnerships—between government, multireligious organizations, and the secular and religious private and philanthropic sectors—in order to advance the common good.

***Background and Explanation:***

The President has the unique ability to raise awareness of the importance of interfaith cooperation, both in society in general and in efforts to achieve specific U.S. goals at home and abroad. Bringing together faith leaders, secular civil society leaders, and government leaders and underscoring the important role that interfaith cooperation plays in achieving these goals will encourage those leaders to form bonds and begin talking about how they can work together. Further, a high-profile roundtable could underline that interfaith proposals, including joint proposals between secular NGOs and faith-based NGOs, are welcome. The net result of the event will likely be a significant rise in proposals by interfaith groups, which, in turn, will likely result in more funding of qualified interfaith projects.



**Interfaith Youth Core**

<http://www.ifyc.org>

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) seeks to make interfaith cooperation a social norm—a world where individuals have positive relationships across the lines of faith and an appreciative understanding of the diverse traditions in our society; mosques, churches, and synagogues have regular interfaith exchanges and engagements; college campuses support interfaith student councils; and cities have annual days of interfaith service. Too often, religion is a barrier of division or a bomb of destruction. IFYC believes faith can be a bridge to cooperation, strengthening our civil society and promoting the common good for all.

Civil rights leaders and environmentalists built transformative movements in the 20th century. IFYC believes that interfaith leaders will build the movement for interfaith cooperation in the 21st century.

Since 2002, IFYC has worked on 5 continents and over 150 college and university campuses, reached over 75,000 people with the message of interfaith cooperation, trained 10,000 interfaith leaders, and worked with partners including the White House and Her Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan.

The primary objectives of IFYC are to:

- Change the public discourse about religion from one of inevitable conflict to one of cooperation and religious pluralism;
- Nurture and network a critical mass of emerging interfaith leaders; and
- Partner with cities and college campuses to become models of interfaith cooperation.

---

## ENGAGING MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

President Obama identified improving U.S. relations with “the Muslim world” as a key foreign policy imperative during his Presidential campaign. He reaffirmed this commitment during his inauguration address when he said, “To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect.”

Fulfilling a campaign promise, President Obama gave a historic address to Muslims around the world in June 2009 when he launched a new phase in U.S.-Muslim relations from Cairo, Egypt. President Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2009 for these and other diplomatic efforts, demonstrating the impact of his outreach efforts on America’s international image.

Several important initiatives, led by the White House, are underway across government to move this key Presidential agenda item forward. These include programs to promote entrepreneurship, student and scholarly exchange, partnerships to eradicate disease, as well as programs to increase women’s education in Muslim majority societies. We fully support these vital efforts.

What follows are areas in which faith- and community-based organizations can make the biggest contribution to the efforts already underway. The outcomes within these recommendations will signal, both domestically and internationally, the highest ambitions of a society, where Muslims are welcomed as equal actors in the shared national life. It is critical to note that these goals are part of an overall objective of protecting the equal rights of people of all faiths and no faiths and working across religious lines to foster understanding and encourage cooperation.

As recognized above, those who work in the U.S. Foreign Service must be informed about religious communities and ideas as well as nonreligious communities and ideas. We simply cannot understand our Nation or our world without understanding religion. Because religion has sometimes been overlooked in this sphere, we call for it to be given greater consideration. More specifically, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, it has become clear that Muslim communities and ideas have not been given adequate attention in foreign service work. Thus, we call for providing Foreign Service Officers with more information on Islamic traditions and for fostering increased engagement with Muslim communities as well as implementing other efforts to ensure that the increasing religious and cultural diversity present in America is appropriately recognized and valued.

Finally, it is also important to note that the Council recognizes the debate within U.S. foreign policy regarding whether to strengthen some religious groups (and their expressions) that reject the efforts of other religious groups to offer a religious justification for violence and terrorism. Such policy agendas and related actions raise controversial and complex constitutional issues, ones that courts have only rarely addressed and the Supreme Court of the United States has never considered.<sup>13</sup> This set of recommendations does not join those issues. Where these recommendations propose that the Government undertake educational efforts about religion, for example, they are limited to proposals that call for objective teaching about religious groups and their ideas, not efforts to promote acceptance of theological precepts or to press for adherence to any faith.

---

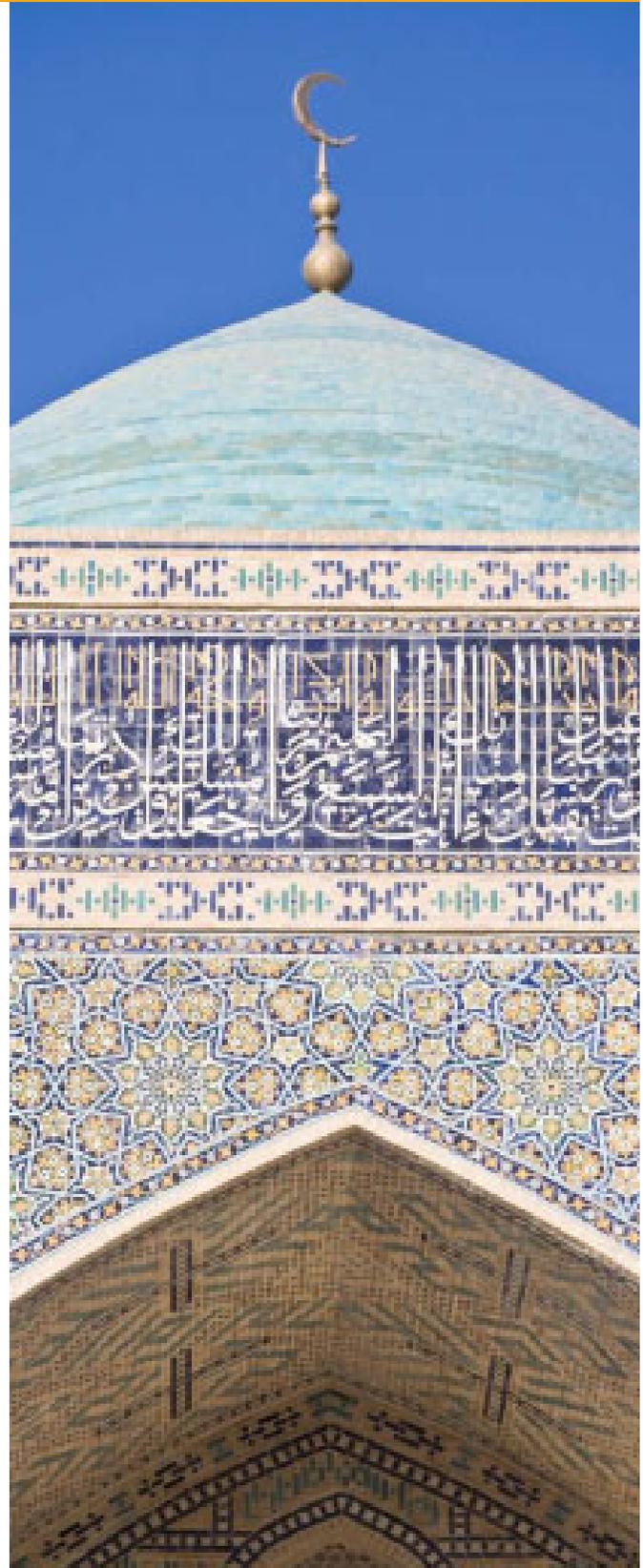
<sup>13</sup> See *Lamont v. Woods*, 948 F.2d 825 (2d Cir. 1991).

**Recommendation 6: Establish ongoing communication between the White House and the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities at the Department of State and Muslim American community groups on global Muslim engagement efforts.**

As one of the country's most diverse and educated faith communities,<sup>14</sup> Muslim Americans offer policymakers an invaluable cultural and religious brain trust on which to draw when engaging Muslims globally. Muslim Americans model a concept President Obama has repeatedly emphasized: Islam and America are mutually enriching, not mutually exclusive.<sup>15</sup> Like many other Americans, the majority of U.S. followers of Islam say religion is an important part of their daily life. At the same time, Muslim Americans are actively engaged in public life with others who largely do not share their faith. Their active participation in the United We Serve summer of service, with more than 3,500 Muslim-led multifaith service projects,<sup>16</sup> is but one example.

President Obama has also committed to working for women's literacy and education, another area in which Muslim Americans can be especially helpful. Muslim American women are among the most educated women in America, and Muslim Americans are unique in boasting no gender gap in the number of people with a college education.<sup>17</sup> This achievement offers an example to other global communities that may struggle with women's education and stands as an example of faith reconciled with modern life.

Policymakers are urged to make full use of this valuable national resource. The Federal Government has a long and rich tradition of reaching out to a variety of religious and nonreligious communities to tap their best ideas, engage them in public service, and listen to their concerns. As part of this process, it should ensure that it reaches out to American Muslim communities.



<sup>14</sup> President Barack Obama, Cairo, June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009

<sup>15</sup> [www.MuslimServe.org](http://www.MuslimServe.org)

<sup>16</sup> *Muslim Americans: A National Portrait*, Gallup March 2009

<sup>17</sup> Pew Research Center

---

**Recommendation 7: Hold townhall meetings around the country including representatives from the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and faith-based and community groups to discuss citizen concerns about civil liberties.**

Engaging Muslim communities around the world will necessarily include engaging the millions of Muslims who are also Americans.

According to surveys,<sup>18</sup> the majority of Muslim Americans (53%) say that being a Muslim in the United States since 9/11 has been more difficult.<sup>19</sup> When asked to identify the most important problems facing the group, respondents identified discrimination and “being viewed as a terrorist” near the top. One in four say they have been victims of discrimination as a Muslim in the United States.<sup>20</sup> In addition, research shows that Muslim American young people (ages 18 to 29) in particular are significantly less likely than their peers to be classified as “thriving” despite a relative economic advantage,<sup>21</sup> though the data are not conclusive on the cause of this disparity.

Prejudice is like a cancer, it spreads, negatively impacting other groups and endangering America’s civic fabric. For example, a recent Gallup survey shows important links between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

This research also shows that 43 percent of the American public admits to feeling at least some “prejudice” toward Muslims—9 percent say they have a “great deal of prejudice,” significantly more than was expressed toward any other faith group studied.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, though self-reported anti-Muslim prejudice is more common, self-reports of prejudice toward Jews is the variable most strongly associated with expression of “a great deal” of prejudice toward Muslims.<sup>23</sup> Though some see Muslims and Jews as representing competing loyalties in the Middle East conflict, prejudice toward Jews predicts not solidarity with, but disdain for Muslims, again underscoring the importance of multifaith partnership.

While self-reported prejudice does not equal discrimination, these data suggest that to engage Muslim Americans, government agencies and Muslim Americans, in partnership with other faith communities, must engage in greater dialogue.

By aggressively seeking to reduce bias against Muslim Americans, Federal agencies are not simply protecting the freedom and dignity of one group of Americans but ensuring freedom and dignity for all Americans.

Some non-Muslim Americans, including Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Buddhist Americans, also have experienced civil rights violations in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.<sup>24</sup> After September 2001, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice noted that Arab, Muslim, Sikh, and South-Asian Americans, as well as people who were perceived to be members of those groups, had been the victims of “increased numbers of bias-related assaults, threats, vandalism and arson.” Accordingly, the Civil Rights Division launched an initiative “to work proactively to combat violations of civil rights laws” against these Americans. Its initiative is aimed at reducing the incidence of these bias-related assaults, threats, vandalism, and arson as well as prioritizing cases involving discrimination against these Americans in

---

<sup>18</sup> Pew Research Center

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> Gallup and the Muslim West Facts Project, *Muslim Americans: A National Portrait*, March 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Gallup and the Muslim West Facts Project, *Religious Perceptions in America: With an In-Depth Analysis of American Attitudes Toward Muslims and Islam*, January 2010.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> Khyati Joshi, *The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism in the United States*

---

employment, housing, education, access to public accommodations and facilities, and other areas. After September 2001, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice noted that Arab, Muslim, Sikh, and South-Asian Americans, as well as people who were perceived to be members of those groups, had been the victims of “increased numbers of bias-related assaults, threats, vandalism and arson.”<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the Civil Rights Division launched an initiative “to work proactively to combat violations of civil rights laws” against these Americans.<sup>26</sup> Its initiative is aimed at reducing the incidence of these bias-related assaults, threats, vandalism, and arson as well as prioritizing cases involving discrimination against these Americans in employment, housing, education, access to public accommodations and facilities, and other areas.

The Council recommends that the Department of Justice continue this emphasis and work with the Department of Homeland Security as well as faith-based and community groups to hold townhall meetings to discuss citizen concerns on civil liberties.

**Recommendation 8: Utilize the expertise of faith- and community-based organizations to train education and media professionals on Islam and Muslim communities.**

In a historic speech in Cairo last summer, President Obama stated, “The interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart.” The Cairo speech, intended to begin a new phase in U.S.-Muslim relations, emphasized the need for mutual respect and understanding. The President’s statement reflects that studies have shown what Muslims around the world most want from the West in order to improve relations—to be respected as equals. Likewise, similar studies have shown that Americans also say that to improve relations with Muslim communities, the latter must better understand and accept Americans.<sup>27</sup>

Bridge building across communities will therefore require a range of efforts not only from heads of state, but also from citizens. We believe that citizen education—initiated and implemented by citizens—is the first step to engagement. Muslims around the world have a great deal to learn about America. The Department of State’s Public Diplomacy efforts and exchange programs are vital to addressing this need. Where American faith-based and community groups can best contribute is by educating their own constituents. The majority of Americans say they know little or nothing about Islam.<sup>28</sup>

To move forward on the President’s goal to forge a new relationship with Muslim communities around the world based on mutual respect and mutual interests, the National Endowment for the Humanities,<sup>29</sup> as well as other government agencies, should invest in and support programs that utilize the reach and expertise of faith and community-based organizations in educating our own citizens about Muslim societies.

---

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division, *Initiative to Combat Post-9/11 Discriminatory Backlash* (available at [http://www.justice.gov/crt/legalinfo/nordwg\\_mission.php](http://www.justice.gov/crt/legalinfo/nordwg_mission.php)).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (Gallup Press, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Gallup and the Muslim West Facts Project, *Religious Perceptions in America: With an In-Depth Analysis of American Attitudes Toward Muslims and Islam* (forthcoming November 3, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> One such example is the “Bridging Cultures” program being introduced by the National Endowment for the Humanities, referenced by Chairman Jim Leach in a speech at the Press Club in November 2009: “I have proposed that the NEH in concert with the state humanities councils initiate a ‘Bridging Cultures’ program aimed at enlarging our understanding of America’s diverse cultural heritage and the history, language, and art of other societies.”

---



## INTEGRATING AND VALUING AMERICA'S RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In his inauguration speech, President Obama acknowledged the growing religious diversity of the American people,<sup>30</sup> and recognized their contributions to our society. President Obama said: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth. ..."<sup>31</sup>

The patterns of immigration in the past several decades have brought many new peoples of faith into the United States. This immigration has broadened and deepened America's already rich religious and cultural diversity. New communities of the world's religions have established themselves with greater numbers, and many of them are developing social structures that could be valuably engaged in the service of the common good. As an example, the Dharmic traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism) have been an appreciable part of the American religious landscape since the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act.<sup>32</sup> As another example, religious communities rooted in Africa, South and Central America, the Middle East, and the Pacific have also grown substantially in the United States in the last four decades.<sup>33</sup>

All American religious communities are in principle welcome to engage in partnerships with the American government to advance the common good, if they meet the related requirements of doing so. Some faith communities have a long history of partnerships with governmental agencies and have acquired a broad knowledge of the opportunities and requirements for these partnerships. Other religious communities that desire partnerships do not yet have such experience and knowledge. Many of these communities have deep reservoirs of personal commitment, significant expertise, and economic and social capital for advancing the common good.

It is in the U.S. national interest to ensure that the diversity of American religious communities is fully participating in civic life and engaged in partnerships that deliver social services in America and abroad. Efforts to help the growing diversity of religious communities to engage in partnerships can help to advance the common good.

<sup>30</sup> President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, January 21, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Anju Bhargava, "U.S. Community-Building in a Dharmic Environment," *Wall Street Journal*, July 28, 2009, World section (available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124875466922186053.html>).

<sup>33</sup> Harvard University, *The Pluralism Project* (available at <http://www.pluralism.org>).



**Recommendation 9: Through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and relevant Agency Centers, direct U.S. Government agencies to work to engage the rich diversity of American religious communities in partnerships to strengthen the common good in America.**

Therefore, the Advisory Council makes the following recommendations:

1. Provide education and training on America's evolving religious and cultural diversity and its relevance to advancing the common good in America to U.S. Government Offices of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, for example in the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Education, and the Corporation for National and Community Service.<sup>34</sup>

This effort would include arranging for major conferences and follow-on activities focused on helping relevant U.S. Government agencies and officials to understand the diversity of American religious and cultural communities and to map out their potentials for partnerships in serving the common good.

2. Take concrete steps to advance partnerships that can utilize the expertise and resources in America's diverse religious communities in partnerships designed to enhance civic participation in America. These efforts should include appropriate outreach and technical assistance and capacity-building support to new groups who do not yet have established partnerships with the U.S. Government.
3. Encourage community-building through interfaith collaboration with intermediaries to leverage the talent of the religious communities currently not participating in service opportunities.
4. Work to ensure that governmental chaplaincy services employ personnel who reflect the religious diversity of the men and women they are charged with serving.
5. Encourage institutions of higher learning to document and communicate the growing American religious and cultural diversity and related social service capacities.

***Background and Explanation:***

Immigration, particularly in the last four decades, has significantly broadened and deepened America's already rich religious and cultural diversity. When properly engaged in partnerships through increased civic outreach, these diverse communities can provide valuable services and add considerable value to the U.S. society.

---

<sup>34</sup> Federal agencies can reference the following report, a case study on teaching about religious diversity in an American public school (available at <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?id=16863>><http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?id=16863>).



**Recommendation 10: Through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and relevant Agency Centers, direct U.S. Government agencies to work to engage the rich diversity of American religious and cultural communities in partnerships to provide aid, development, and other services overseas to advance peace and justice abroad.**

Therefore, the Advisory Council makes the following recommendations:

1. Provide education and training on America’s evolving religious and cultural diversity and its relevance to advancing the common good abroad to Offices of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, for example, in the Department of State, USAID, and consulates/embassies across the world.

This effort would include arranging for major conferences and follow-on activities focused on helping relevant U.S. Government agencies and officials to understand the diversity of American religious groups and to map out their potentials for partnerships in serving the common good beyond America’s shores.

2. Take concrete steps to advance partnerships that can utilize the expertise, resources, and transnational connections in America’s diverse religious and cultural communities in partnerships designed to advance peace and development. These efforts should include appropriate outreach and technical assistance and capacity-building support to new groups who do not yet have established partnerships with the U.S. Government.

***Background and Explanation:***

In order to further U.S. foreign policy objectives, specifically in the areas of global diplomacy and development, particular attention should be given to advance partnerships utilizing the cultural and faith-based expertise of Americans with global ties. This effort should include forming partnerships with interreligious, intercultural, women’s,<sup>35</sup> and youth networks, particularly where they have a transnational character.

The existing expertise, resources, and talents in communities with cultural, language, and religious ties to other nations can be engaged in peace building and development. USAID’s Global Partnership Initiative states, “Although Diaspora community engagement with home countries is sizeable, the developmental potential for this group remains largely untapped. USAID recognizes that by not engaging with this community, we are missing out [on] an opportunity to increase our development impact significantly.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> USAID, Women in Development (available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/cross-cutting\\_programs/wid/](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/)).

<sup>36</sup> USAID, Diaspora Engagement: Remittances & Beyond (available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_partnerships/gda/remittances.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_partnerships/gda/remittances.html)).



**Recommendation 11: Help build social cohesion by supporting efforts to ensure that Americans have opportunities to understand America’s increasingly religiously diverse society.**

Therefore, the Advisory Council makes the following recommendations:

1. As part of this effort, the National Endowment for the Humanities<sup>37</sup> should increase funding opportunities through its “Bridging Cultures” program for faith and community-based groups to train American educators and media professionals about world religions in a respectful way. The “Bridge Builders” program is aimed at enlarging understanding of America’s diverse cultural heritage and the history, language, and art of other societies.
2. In addition, the Administration should find other avenues to encourage community building and interfaith collaboration at the grassroots level with faith- and community-based organizations to foster social cohesion.<sup>38</sup>

***Background and Explanation:***

A major virtue of American society is its respect for religious differences. Thus, it is important for the American public to increase its basic literacy about the religious communities. Interfaith and cross-cultural awareness and collaboration at the grassroots level build healthy communities and reduce incidence of prejudice, bias, and conflict. Bridge building across communities will require a range of efforts and must be based on mutual respect and interests. The “Bridging Cultures” program is aimed at enlarging understanding of America’s diverse cultural heritage and the history, language, and art of other societies.

<sup>37</sup> Chairman Jim Leach’s speech on “Bridging Cultures” (available at <http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/speeches/11202009.html>).

<sup>38</sup> Julie Teresa Quiroz, *Together in Our Differences: How Newcomers and Established Residents are Rebuilding American Communities*. Washington, DC: National Immigration Forum, 1995 (available at <http://www.gcir.org/node/400>).

