

Conference

Religion, Conflict and Development in Fragile States

Report Paper

The Hague, 20 November 2008

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Part I Main Conference Learnings

1. Introduction: Four Core Questions

1.1 International Conference Religion, Conflict, and Development in Fragile States (20 November 2008)

On 20 November 2008, the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development and IKV Pax Christi organised a one-day conference in The Hague, the Netherlands called: *Religion, Conflict, and Development in Fragile States*. The Knowledge Centre Religion and Development is a joint initiative of Cordaid, ICCO, Seva Network Foundation, Islamic University Rotterdam and Oikos. IKV Pax Christi is a civil society peace movement.

Four guests from Afghanistan, Great Lakes Region, Palestine and Israel¹ shared their views about the role of religion and religious actors in the context of fragile states with over fifty professionals from the Dutch development and peace building sector.

Two core questions were discussed:

1. *How can religious actors contribute to peace building, development and democratisation in their countries?*
2. *How can Dutch development and peace building professionals locally leverage the constructive potential of religious resources and/or locally reduce the destructive potential of religious resources?*

This conference report presents a summary and analysis of the discussions.

1.2 Dutch NGO meeting (23 June 2008)

At a preparatory meeting in June 2008, 23 Dutch NGO professionals had already shared their situation-specific experiences with religious risks and resources in fragile states. On this occasion, two prior questions were addressed:

1. *How can we characterize the role of religion in fragile states, and how does it compare with the role of religion in more stable contexts?*
2. *Which experiences do Dutch development and peace building professionals have with the risks and resources of religion in fragile states?*

These findings, together with definitions of fragile states and religion, have been summarised in a background paper entitled *Religion in Fragile States: Which side up? Handle with care!*. It served as starting point for the discussions at the international conference. The current report is a continuation of this background document (see www.religion-and-development.nl/?nid=1500).

1.3 Follow-up with Knowledge Forum Religion and Development Policy

As a follow-up to the NGO meeting and the conference, there will be a policy dialogue with Minister Koenders of Development Cooperation in the Spring of 2009. This dialogue will be organised by the Knowledge Forum Religion and Development Policy, in which both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Dutch NGOs participate. The minister, policy advisors and directors of NGOs will discuss the policy implications of the findings from the two prior events.

¹ The invited speakers from Sudan and from DR Congo were unable to attend, due to visa application procedures and a scheduling conflict.

1.4 Report outline

This report contains an analysis of the main conference findings. The analysis is followed by summaries of region-specific presentations and discussions during the conference, which were arranged in four regional focuses. The conference program and a list of participants are also included.

2. Analysis: Focus on Religion in Fragile States

Day chair Lia van Broekhoven

2.1 Fragile states and religion

In fragile states the state either lacks the capacity or does not have the political will to let the state function, to guarantee public safety and to provide for public services.² The international guest speakers at the conference all illustrated how in such situations religious resources provide routes for peace building, democratisation and development. They underscored this observation with examples from their own politically fragile regions.

While religious factors can be part of the problem, at the same time religious resources can also be part of the solution. Religious organisations are often the only structured networks capable of continuing the delivery of basic services, such as health care and education. Moreover, the values, norms and virtues that are kept alive in religious practices and institutions can be sources of social capital and motors for constructive change. In fragile states, significant parts of the population are typically difficult to reach through conventional means, both physically and psychologically. However, it may still be possible to reach these people through the organizational structures and the cultural content of religious institutions and movements.³



These observations underscore the importance of understanding not only how fragile states religion may contribute to political instability, but also how religious resources can help to pave the way towards renewed and effective governance. The findings of this report suggest that actors in the development and peace building sector are well advised to inform themselves in a balanced and situation-specific way about the roles of religion in conflict, peace building, development and democratisation.

2.2 What can religious actors do? Contributions of religious actors to peace building, development and democratisation in fragile states

In answer to the first core question -*How can religious actors contribute to peace building, development and democratisation*- participants in the conference made the following *key observations* during the interviews, presentations and roundtable discussions (for a full report see part II of this conference report).

² See the background paper *Religion in Fragile States: Which Side up? Handle with Care!*, p. 5.

³ See page 6 of the background paper for a working definition of religion, which distinguishes four religious resources: religious ideas, religious practices, spiritual experiences, and religious organisations.

- *Many people in the world view religion as an intrinsic part of society and human life.* Within the social turmoil of fragile states, people often find solace in religion, which helps them to carry on in politically and socially (extremely) challenging situations.
- The awareness of an intrinsic and indivisible role of religion (“religion is everywhere”) is also relevant in the *context of political decision making*. In many fragile states, religion and politics are closely connected. A separation between “church” and state knows many modalities. Western states claim to strictly interpret and handle a division between the religious and the political realm; in many countries however, this is very fluid in daily life.
- In fragile states, clear examples (both situation-specific and general) of *religious actors contributing to peace building, development and democratisation* can be found (see Part II of the conference report).
 - Religious institutions or organisations appear to be institutions or organisations that still *function* in the context of fragile societies. Whereas the state fails to provide basic institutions that can deliver health care, sanitation provisions or education, religious institutions and faith-based organisations play a role in these service deliveries.
 - Based on their legacy of invoking *social trust*, religious actors are often the only ones capable of securing some social cohesion.
 - In political complex and often violent contexts, religious organisations and FBOs can act as *bridges* between different factions, e.g., in processes of reconciliation. In some situations they can or want to act as *countervailing powers*.
 - Religious organisations can play a role in obtaining essential *commitment* of religious leaders to peace processes. In inter- and in intra-religious dialogue religious organisations and religious leaders have a role to play.
- (Traditional forms of) *religious education* offer important and unique channels to reach grass root level in the context of traditional societies, where it is broadly based and government schools have failed to provide qualitatively good education.
 - Religious education also offers possibilities to alter hegemonic religious discourses.
 - Religious education can be a strong tool in processes like emancipation and active citizenship.
- FBOs and religious organisations can be *reliable partners* for Dutch donor NGOs and peace building organisations.
 - Many FBOs or religious civil society organisations have relevant *networks with religious leaders*.
 - These religious leaders must be *authentic and legitimate*. Authentic leaders are not depraved by power; they are not a part of the conflict; they have -grassroots-support; they have a certain authority and influence. As authentic leaders they have or gain a certain credibility vis-à-vis the local community and/or vis-à-vis the partner NGO and/or vis-à-vis the donor NGO.
 - Faith-based NGOs can provide indispensable information important for context analysis.
 - *Trust* is crucial in partnerships. Dutch agents can benefit from trusting upon their partner’s knowledge about the meaning of religion for communities and

community building as well as their estimations of the authenticity and legitimacy of specific religious leaders.

- Sometimes it is difficult to choose *whom to talk with* or who to choose as a partner. A religious leader can be (regarded as) peace builder in one context and bogeyman in the other. When there is ambiguity in visions, how much difference in visions between donor and partner is acceptable? Who decides and advises upon what proper religion is and says?
- Religious leaders can also be *counterproductive* in processes of peace building, development and democratisation.
 - Religious leaders can be partisan or corrupted by power; religious organisations can be part of the conflict.
 - A religious leader might be legitimate for some and not for others (Hamas forms a clear example).
 - There might also be the question of neutrality and ability of a religious leader to defend all people and not just the believers of a certain faith.
 - Internal solidarity of a religious community might also function as internal discipline.
 - There might be the question of representativity which is not seldomly connected to ethnicity.
 - Religious communities themselves are often not democratically organised. This might hinder their credibility in their struggle for democracy in other institutions.
 - Faith-based NGOs can provide indispensable information important for context analysis.
- Religion might not be the root cause of conflict, but might have evolved in a cause of its own.
- FBOs and religious organisations regularly play an effective role in local basic service delivery. At the national level, the state is often engaged in the difficult process of rebuilding their 'natural' governmental responsibilities. This can give rise to a field of tension between supporting the (new) state on the one hand, and supporting local NGOs, FBOs and religious organisations on the other hand.



2.3 What can Dutch actors do? Recommendations from participants

The second core question focused on the possibilities of Dutch NGOs in the context of fragile states. *How can Dutch development and peace building professionals locally leverage the constructive potential of religious resources and how can they locally reduce the destructive potential of religious resources?* Guest speakers from the South and from the Netherlands and other participants mentioned the following recommendations that can provide direction for further discussions.⁴

➤ *Try to understand the role of religion*

- In general, this means having ‘*eye for religion*’. It connects to the obvious advice to value the virtues of understanding, trust, respect, and a respectful attitude. It also includes being open to the spiritual strength that people attribute to religion. Some formulate this as showing ‘religious empathy’.⁵
- More specific, it means to *include religion explicitly in context analyses (tools)*. Good *context analysis* with ample attention for the role of religion -besides many other relevant factors- is at the basis of NGO work. Religious actors must be included in a conflict analysis before decisions are made on what kind of support to provide.
- *Knowledge* of each other and *good listening* are at the basis of trust, understanding and relationality. This means showing respect to religion, culture and tradition, asking questions and exchanging views. It also means trying to be aware of sensitivities related to religious and cultural norms and values. It does not mean that a Dutch NGO puts its principles aside or is unaware of its role as donor.

➤ *Try not to essentialise religion*

- Religion can often not be separated from economic, social, ethnic, and political factors.

⁴ Some recommendations are already part of policy strategies and daily practices of some Dutch professional development and peace building organisations.

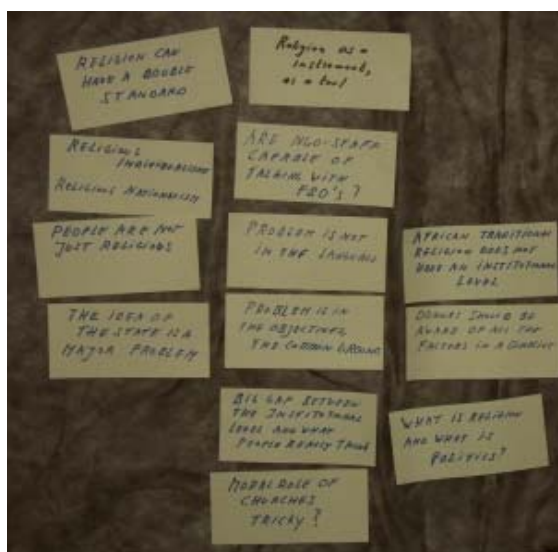
⁵ Note this is not similar to ‘religious sympathy’. It is not necessary to be religious in order to have eye for religion.

- Religious groups are often seen as a block.⁶ Particularly radical groups are often viewed as monolithic. In reality there are different groups and factions, some of which are corrupt and violent, while others are open to discussion.
 - Different factions have different views on what a religion involves (e.g., what is ‘true Islam’ or ‘Jesus’ voice’).
- *Consider religious or faith-based organisations as partners*
- Religious organisations can be reliable partners in empowering civil society. They should not be excluded because they are faith-based. Dutch NGOs can benefit from their networks, for instance with CBOs, and from their expertise regarding the political and social context and factions.
 - Quality, transparency and a human rights perspective of the organisation remain prerequisites of each partnership.
- *Find or connect to a ‘shared language’ and acknowledge when this is difficult, controversial or impossible.*
- Familiarity with a certain symbolic, ethical and/or normative language that finds its roots in the shared religious tradition, can be helpful in discussing sensitive issues. If donor and partner NGOs have the same religious background, they possibly share a ‘language’.
 - Donor and partner organisations that come from different religious and cultural fields do not (automatically) share a symbolic or religious language. This unfamiliarity might give rise to misunderstanding, sensitivity or distrust.
- *Be pragmatic and try to go beyond ideology*
- Pragmatism should be leading when dealing with certain dilemmas. For instance, in some cases it is better to strive for conflict management instead of conflict resolution (Walid Salem).
 - The focus in dialogue should be on practical issues. It can be counterproductive to dialogue along ideological lines. People have their own, valid traditions on which they base on their decisions, world views and ideal form of government.
 - All relevant actors involved in a conflict must be included in peace processes; if not, there cannot be sustainable peace.
 - The principle of separation between church and state knows various modalities. Despite the strong value many Westerners put to a (strict) division between the political and religious realm, religious leaders should not (almost automatically) be excluded from political decision making.
 - Being pragmatic is not similar to losing one’s principles.
- *Strengthen the cooperation between Dutch NGOs and Dutch government, particularly the diplomatic posts*
- Global factors also contribute to the problems of a fragile state. Therefore, local solutions should be linked to a political lobby in the Netherlands. This might imply a double relationship of NGOs with the Dutch government: first, political cooperation based on

⁶ The reverse happens as well: in various contexts, ‘the West’ is seen as one block.

common interest; and second, a political lobby in order to get more room as a NGO for dialogue with religious dissidents.

- Local partners can benefit from long-lasting relationships with development or peace building professionals. Embassies usually cannot guarantee a long stay of Dutch staff, whereas NGO workers often stay for a longer period in a certain area.
- *Support space for dialogue while taking the limitations into account*
- In order to win their commitment, religious leaders should be involved in peace building activities.
 - Space for *intra-religious debate* must be facilitated. In intra-religious dialogue, theology is a topic of discussion. However, outsiders like Dutch/Western (sometimes Christian) NGOs can hardly facilitate these internal discussions. Only if an organisation is of the same denomination, a Dutch agent could play a role.
 - Space for *inter-religious dialogue* must also be facilitated. In an inter-religious dialogue, one can *not* talk about theology; this would destroy the process. A Dutch NGO might play a role as facilitator.
 - Special attention for inter- and intra-religious dialogue and for religious organisations should not be at the expense of *dialogue with seculars* (in the margin). These are often small human rights organisations.
 - *Dialogue also with people you disagree with.* An NGO cannot continue to exclude radical groups from dialogue; they often are large and have grassroots support.
- *Continue or initiate NGO-based discussions about supporting religious education*
- As religious schools, like Islamic Qur'an schools (*madrasahs*), are community-based provisions that can be the only remaining infrastructure, Dutch NGOs must continue or initiate discussions about fundamental questions, strategies and policy options regarding supporting religious education.



3. Conclusion

“Today, so many things were mentioned that seem so obvious: the importance of context analysis and looking at the role religion plays in a certain society; the importance of getting to know each other, trying to understand each other’s faith and philosophy of life. Hasn’t that been part of the development policies for ages?” a student, intern at one of the participating Dutch NGOs, wondered aloud. The answer she got from the participants in her workshop was: *“Yes, partly it has. But partly it hasn’t!”*

In each development and peace building context, questions can be posed with regard to religion. In fragile states this becomes even more urgent and concrete, since religions, religious institutions and religious organisations are often relevant players at local, regional and national levels in fragile states, where the government is still failing or attempting to resume its responsibilities. Based on their legacy of invoking social trust, religious agents are often the only ones capable of securing some social cohesion. Moreover, in fragile states, conflict resolution, reconciliation, poverty reduction, and democratisation are key aspects of development cooperation and peace building. Religion typically affects all of these efforts, whether as a constructive force or as a source of concern. At the same time, religious actors do not always play a positive role in fragile states. Ethnic, political and religious identities are often interrelated. Context analyses can help to identify those connections.

We observe that religion is *always* a factor in development cooperation and peace building activities. Although we risk labouring an obvious point, we consider it relevant to emphasise that an ‘antenna’ for religion can be vital for Dutch professionals in the development and peace building sector. In its efforts to improve intervention strategies, the Dutch development and peace building sector stands to benefit from more explicit and sustained efforts to understand the impact of religion in the development dynamics of fragile states.

From the cases presented at the conference, it becomes clear how much can go wrong if one does not take religion into account. Ignorant, denying, or anxious attitudes from the West might even trigger serious conflicts which might further weaken the position of citizens in fragile states. The given recommendations provide direction for further discussion and policy implications.

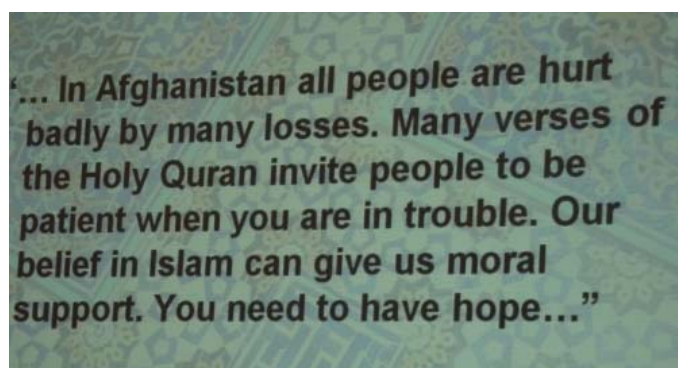
Part II Focus on Four Regions: Case-based Expertise

4. Afghanistan

Presentation:	Drs Martine van Huuksloot (Project consultant and MA student Tilburg University)
Interview:	Dr. Rohullah Amin (Cordaid Afghanistan)
Interview taken by:	Dr. Louke van Wensveen (Knowledge Centre Religion and Development and Oikos Foundation)

4.1. Presentation

Martine van Huuksloot presented a beautifully designed slideshow with quotes from Afghan NGO workers, mixed with photographs taken during her recent research trip to Afghanistan. From her presentation, we can extract the following observations:



Years of war have created lack of trust among Afghans, as well as lack of trust towards the West. The West should not interfere with Islam, tradition and culture. Furthermore, they must respect the Afghan tradition and religion: Islam. Where all other 'systems' have failed to bring hope, belief in Islam gives moral support. "The faith in God is the last thing we did not lose yet", according to one of the interviewees in Van Huuksloot's research.

Nevertheless, Islam is also being misused, for instance by local leaders who loose power.

In this complex, politically sensitive and often violent context, Afghan NGO workers try to work as intermediates between local communities and Western donor organisations. Here, they find themselves in a difficult position. It is difficult to earn the trust of local communities and convince them of the good –human rights based- intentions of donor NGOs which are not against Islam. And it is difficult to convince donor NGOs that time is needed to invest in building relationships and trust.

The Afghan NGOs reach out to local communities, also in very traditional or remote areas, by linking their work to Islamic values and connecting to belief and traditions as an integral part of community mobilisation.

Local NGOs see education –also (in connection to) Islamic education, as an important tool for progress, emancipation and a certain autonomy or independence from the strong influence of (tribal) religious leaders.

Van Huuksloot's presentation ended with the quote of an Afghan NGO worker: "... Foreigners should stop thinking everyone who is wearing proper Islamic clothes is Taliban..."

4.2 Interview

In Afghan society, the connection with Islam is important, as well as the impact of tradition. At both moments, there is a strong influence of religious and tribal leaders. In the interview, Dr. Louke van Wensveen asked Dr. Amin if he distinguishes between ‘scriptural Islam’ and ‘folk religion’. “As a medical doctor”, she asked, “what do you advise people when you see that they put their trust into amulets with a Qur’anic text instead of washing their hands to avoid falling ill?”



In his answer, Dr. Amin made a distinction between ‘real Islam’ and ‘tradition’, but he does not want to be too rigid in this towards the local communities. Education forms an important channel to reach people, also religious education. The only space one has is via the *madrasahs*. There one can reach people; there they should learn to accept that there are different interpretations and plurality of opinions.

In the workshop in the afternoon session, Van Wensveen asked Amin if he could also work with community-based expressions of popular religion, such as local saint worship and pilgrimages to shrines. Especially women tend to be very involved in such practices. Amin answered that such practices are part of culture, but they are not religious. “We do not support them, but neither should we stop such cultural practices too hastily”. The point Van Wensveen brought up consequently is that by definitions of religion used in the field of comparative religion, this implies that Cordaid’s current policy in Afghanistan is *de facto* to favour one form of religion (‘puritanical Islam’) over another (‘popular religion’).

The ability to link with Islam and tradition is something donors cannot do, despite good intentions. Dr. Amin advised to leave this to the partners in Afghanistan. They speak the language necessary to reach out to the Afghan communities.

4.3 Advices

Dr. Amin gave several advices to the Dutch agents gathered at the conference:

1. “We have our own values, traditions and commitments. International organisations, who want to work with us, must realise that.”
2. You should be aware that religion is everywhere. Don’t try to look for a religion or try to avoid it, because religion is everywhere.
3. There is a high esteem for knowledge in Afghanistan and Islam. So knowledge and thus education should be a focus for NGOs. That is important for empowerment; also learning to read Qur’an, because then you can learn about religion yourself. Then you are more or less independent from certain mullahs.
4. Dutch agents have to be aware of their lack of knowledge of Afghan society. Their position of bringing ‘expertise’ as Dutch NGOs might be unrealistic. One must listen to the Afghans themselves. E.g. no anxiety when hearing the word ‘madrasah’.

4.4 Round table session

In the afternoon session, the working group continued the discussion with Dr. Amin. He pointed at the process how religion becomes sensitive when politicians use it as a tool. In the history of

Afghanistan, this has come up several times. Political disrespect of religion by political leaders like the example of King Amanullah at the beginning of the 20th C., or pro-Soviet leaders in the 1980s, has sparked religious political activism of the Afghan people against the King and of the Mujahideen against the Soviets respectively. However, political leaders of these religious activist movements became corrupted by power as well. Again religion was used as a tool. The Taliban stepped in the power vacuum that existed in the factional power struggle between Mujahideen, a weak government and unsuccessful peace efforts of the UN. The Taliban tried to implement sharia. In the beginning, they brought safety to certain regions. However, not all ethnic groups supported the Taliban. ‘The ethnic card’ was played out.

But one can also try to play ‘the Muslim card’, by focusing at Muslim values and taking responsibility as a Muslim for society. This can be done through education. This must not be aimed at selective groups only. Van Huuksloot: “The Taliban were Muslim students. In Islam, all people are equal, but you can distinguish yourself through knowledge. Then you can achieve a different social position. Knowledge is power. The Taliban used knowledge of Islam for their own purposes –up to a point. There are, for example, also strong democratic values in Islam. The Taliban is not about the knowledge of Islam itself, but about the *use* of that knowledge. Education of more people is therefore the only peaceful solution. Through knowledge, people can have their own Islamic response to the Taliban.”

At this moment, it is at grass root level that things can be changed, not at the high level of national government. Local initiatives to education people are important examples of this approach.

The group then discussed the problematics of supporting the building of *madrasabs* with ‘Dutch money’. “The Dutch parliament would question why we are building madrasahs’, according to a Dutch NGO-participant.

The discussion continued on different types of religious actors. Several observations were made here. The support of the Mullahs by their communities should not be neglected (e.g. they receive food from their communities). This does not mean that they are *all* supported by their communities, or that they are autonomous or independent. Some are controlled by the Taliban (on threat of exclusion). The discussants realized that there is not just one kind of Mullah or Talib within Afghanistan. Some groups within the Taliban are corrupt and violent, others are open to discussion.

Other religious leaders, like Sufi leaders, seem not to be in the spotlight as possible allies of Dr. Amins organisation “since they are mainly focused on learning and recitation”.

Finally, the group discussed the position, perspective and possibilities of the Dutch, i.c. Christian NGO (like Cordaid). Dr. Amin explained that at grass root level, people cannot fully understand what it means that your work for Cordaid. “Therefore, our associates say that they work for ‘an international organization’. Otherwise, they cannot do their work. Mostly, Cordaid works through other organisations, with a focus on providing technical support for community services.” Good cooperation between local and Western NGOs is important. Amin agreed: “Local organisations expect international support. But if international organisations want to do their jobs better, they should not impose their ways on the local organisations.”

This does not mean that the role and vision of the local organisations is always unproblematic. There are problems like corruption. But here religion can or does play a role: “If you are a Muslim, you are honest”. This is an appeal of accountability as Muslims to the community. Furthermore, Islamic and Dutch values are the same when it comes to corruption. Afghan and

Dutch colleagues can talk about this with each other. Many things are working quite well, much of it through mosques, but there is a difference with what *we* want for accountability, a Dutch NGO worker brought up.

5. Great Lakes Region

Presentation: Mark van Dorp (consultant of Duvilla)
 Interview: Mutua Mulonzya (FECCLAHA)
 Interview taken by: Prof. Dr. Frans Wijzen (Radboud University Nijmegen)

5.1 Presentation

Mark van Dorp introduced the second regional focus: Sudan.⁷ In the Sudanese context, conflict and religion are closely linked: Muslim versus Christian and animist beliefs was a key trigger to the North-South conflict. However, Van Dorp does not see religion as a root cause. Major root causes centre around political power games, access to economic wealth, and social and cultural marginalization of non-Arab groups. Religion was used as a ‘mobilizing factor’ by the leaders on both sides of the conflict.

Mark van Dorp zoomed in at the key role of churches in the peace process between North and South Sudan. As churches are generally seen as neutral and peace-minded, several church leaders have been able to play a crucial mediator’s role between the Khartoum government and the SPLA leadership.



In Southern Sudan, in the past there was a strong dominance of Muslims, although they were a minority. Christian holidays were not celebrated. Also the ‘sharia’ was implemented in Southern Sudan. Generally, the Christian faith was not respected which increased the sense of marginalisation among many southerners.

Under the leadership of Secretary General of the New Sudan Council of Churches, Dr.

Haruun Ruun, NSCC has implemented a grassroots people to people effort to unite and reconcile many of the ethnic groups in Southern Sudan (People to People peace process). One of the key outcomes was the Wunlit Conference which led to a peace accord between two of the main Southern factions, the Dinka and Nuer people.

Since the peace agreement was signed in 2005, it seems that the situation has been totally reversed. Muslims have increasingly become marginalized and are not respected to the extent that some mosques have been burned. Other religious faiths are also coming in. They sometimes preach against the Muslim faith.

⁷ To the organisation’s regret, Ms Joy Kwaje from Sudan was unable to attend, due to visa application procedures. She was invited by ICCO to share her views on the contribution of religious actors in Sudan to development, peace building and democratisation from her perspective as coordinator of the Sudan Council of Churches’ Women’s Program.

A clear sign that Christian churches have become assertive is the fact that churches are being built in many different places in the South, even where there are virtually no people. This may well be the expression of trying to delimit a Christian sphere of influence in the South as it were trying to shield the region from Muslim influence.

Finally there is also a trend that new churches are created as split offs from mainstream churches. These split offs are often ethnically based, which in turn may cause conflicts in the future.

There are also positive interventions by the churches. In 2006, the Yambio conference brought together representatives of 5 Southern states (governors, church leaders, traditional chiefs). This led to a peace declaration and a cessation of hostilities. Van Dorp showed part of a documentary film made at this conference.

According to Mark van Dorp, Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) traditionally play a key role during conflicts in the provision of basic services (health, education). In a post-conflict setting, the challenge is to reorient themselves and increase the focus on peace and justice issues. This should include reconciliation between different ethnic groups, peace education, awareness raising of the rights and responsibilities. Van Dorp pointed at the crucial importance of including religious actors in a conflict analysis before any decision is made on what kind of support to provide, because they can either be peacemakers or potential spoilers.

In struggles for economic growth and dealing with natural resources, stewardship is very important. He argued that FBOs are well placed to play a role in the sustainability debate in post-conflict countries. They have extensive networks of local communities and from an ethical-religious point of view; they have the responsibility to stand up for social and environmental issues (e.g. environmental awareness raising, climate justice, land rights etc.). In booming post-war economies like Juba (Sudan), Freetown (Sierra Leone) or Luanda (Angola) most actors are not very much concerned with sustainability. There is a huge opportunity for FBOs to fill in this gap.

As an example he mentioned the African Church Leaders statement on climate change and water. One of the recommendations from this statement: “Recognize the role of the churches and other civil societies including other faith communities in order to adequately respond to and support local efforts to adapt to the adverse consequences of climate change – particularly at community levels.

5.2 Interview

In the interview between Frans Wijsen en Mutua Mulonzya, it was this *responsible role* of church organisations *and* their regional network of *legitimate* or *authentic* religious leaders that came to the fore.

Mutua Mulonzya is a representative of FECCLAHA, the Fellowship of Christian Churches in the Great Lake Region and Horn of Africa. FECCLAHA has two key approaches: the first is an interfaith approach in the Horn of Africa. And second a platform Ecumenical Forum which brings together the Christian religious leaders in the Great Lakes Region, to be able to pay solidarity visits.

Mulonzya argued that a regional network of legitimate religious leaders is a very powerful tool. In FECCLAHA’s peace building work they would like to engage with *authentic* religious leaders, who do not have a political agenda.

Referring to the Kenyan post-election conflict, Mulonzya pointed at the complicated relation between religion and ethnocentrism. Here, religion was used in political power structures. Managing a mediation process by genuine, authentic religious leaders in Kenya has been very important. Furthermore, an interfaith approach gave credibility to religious leaders.

5.3 Advices

Mutua Mulonzya had two advices to Dutch agents gathered at the conference:

1. “[As FECCLAHA] we have the knowledge to organise meetings, make up documents, or give technical support of meetings between religious leaders’ networks, local leaders and ‘warlords’. However, this is costly. Dutch actors could support us financially.”
2. “We need to be aware of the sensitivities. Dutch agents can use us to leverage. Dutch agents should talk to FECCLAHA, because we know what happens on the ground. We have a network to connect (to) people.”

5.4 Round table session

The Great Lakes region must deal with problems that have both local and global dimensions, like exploiting natural resources.

Respect and trust are very important in dialogue. Religious organisations can be countervailing powers.

The group discussed the position, perspective and possibilities of the Dutch, i.c. Christian organisations.

It was argued that when Catholic organisations work with Catholic partner organisations, or Christian organisations with other Christian organisations, one runs the risk of missing many groups who share similar values, but who do not call themselves religious. So look at pluriformity and representivity.

If the church plays a role in peace building, because its voice is credible, legitimate and authentic, because they can reach a considerable number of people, and because they have a moral message (important to prevent conflict) –what, then, can Dutch NGOs do? The participants discussed how they should equip churches to help them play this moral role and build social cohesion?

Religion in Africa is everywhere, you cannot ignore it. The South-African member of the Advisory Council of the Knowledge Centre argued that it is not a problem when a Dutch NGO worker is no religious. *But* religion should somehow be in all levels; the Dutch NGO staff needs to have a feeling with it. The question is if, in Dutch NGOs, (enough) people have this feeling.⁸

One should not only be aware of the role of institutionalised Christian and Muslim faith. One must also look at African traditional religion. According to the South African scholar there is a big gap between the church language and the way people think, act and live. He advises to go back to the ground level of African traditional ceremonies and rituals

People are not just religious –the moral can go into various directions. Hutus and Tutsis are both Catholic.

⁸ In the handout Religion and Development this is called *religious empathy*.

6 Palestine and Israel

Presentation: Teije Donker (Clingendael)
 Interview: Walid Salem (director of Panorama (Palestinian Center for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development in East Jerusalem) and Yohanan Tzoreff (researcher in Jerusalem Institute for Policy and Civil Administration)
 Interview taken by: Bert Schüssler (PKN Wassenaar-Zuid)

6.1 Presentation

Teije Donker took a political approach in looking at religion and fragility in the Palestinian context: “Everything takes place in a political framework”. There are clear intersections of religion and fragility in the Palestinian Territories and its relation to Israel: religion and politics are intertwined. For instance, religious discourse is used in politics, religious sites are part of the struggle, there is an active role of the state in religious institutions and there is the internal Palestinian division (Hamas & Fatah).

Donker argued to be aware of the role of religion, and the impact of religion at various personal and political worldviews. He advised to be pragmatic in policy implementation. Pragmatic, because problems are political, so the solution should in the end be political too. Thus, religion can better be seen as a resource than as an institution.

At the same time, a ‘non-political’ religious approach to contemporary problems in the occupied Palestinian territories is ineffective, because religious leaders are bound by political structures in the conflict. Invitees to gatherings are drawn from a specific group of religious leaders in the official positions, other groups are neglected; this is a political choice.

These neglected groups are Islamist organisations like Hamas a PIJ (Palestinian Islamic Jihad). It is, however, important to foster contacts with them. They are at the intersection of fragility and religion. They provide services at local level. And they have local legitimacy. They very much exist within the authentic Islamist circles.

So, although there have been numerous inter-religious dialogues, the fact that these groups are not taken on board creates a bias in inter-religious dialogues, which has to be addressed, although this is difficult.

For Dutch NGOs this offers possibilities and challenges. Donker recommends to try to really engage with as many actors on the whole scale –e.g. with Islamic charitable organisations. One has to be aware of the limits here. For example, Islamist groups will not participate in a Jewish-Islamic-Christian dialogue. Secondly, he advises to focus on service delivery and to continue attempts to reach out to Islamic welfare organisations. And thirdly, he recommends a focus on *practical* issues in dialogue, since people have their *own* valid traditions. To make this point, he quoted Maurits Berger: ‘Walk their walk, don’t talk their talk’ in addressing these authentic religious leaders.

6.2 Interviews

Reverent Bert Schüssler asked the two guests from Jerusalem if they share this insightful analysis. The Israeli Yohanan Tzoreff agreed that we are indeed at the beginning of the development towards pragmatism. He explains that in orthodox Jewish thinking, the way of thinking about religious hegemony is very strong. This is also clearly visible in most religious education. His institute has developed projects to change this discourse in religious education.

Walid Salem (East Jerusalem) also sees that many Palestinian Islamic groups (there are about 90 organisations) that are ready for dialogue, including parts of Hamas.

“Is it worth to use the tool of religion in our approaches?” Schüssler asked Salem and Tzoreff. According to Walid Salem, both yes and no can be answered to this question. Yes, because it is important to include religious groups. At the basis of peace must be that there is equal access for each religious person to all religious sites. But related to extremism, his answer is no. He argues that extremism must be seen as a *symptom* of sickness. The sickness itself is indeed political: the problem of territories and power.

Tzoreff put his finger at a sore spot: “The problem of the Oslo agreement was that ‘God was not included’ in the agreement.” In the Oslo agreements, religious people were not involved and therefore both parties had a hard time conveying the agreement to the larger public. Religion exists, we cannot ignore it. People experience religion as a shelter: in a weak national structure, religion gets more power.



Rev. Bert Schüssler interviewing Yohanan Tzoreff (l.) and Walid Salem (r.)

6.3 Advices

1. It is important to have political *and* public support for solutions. Religious leaders can play a role when they are committed to the peace process.
2. *Timing* is important; e.g. holy sites –when do you try to solve it? These are hard issues; maybe they should be dealt with in a later stage. So it is important to involve *all* religious actors, but in a *later* stage of the process perhaps.
3. The speakers advised to be very *pragmatic*: when there is an opportunity for cooperation, *take it*, e.g. even with a radical group (without ignoring power relations).
4. For sustainable peace, it is important to include *all* the actors (e.g. Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood) in the process.
5. Second track diplomacy is very important (NGO’s secret negotiations etc.). It can support the primary process.
6. It is important that there is discussion *within* the religions (e.g. concerning views of territory): perhaps NGOs can facilitate dialogue low-key.
7. NGOs can bring people together on a neutral ground (in the Netherlands).
8. It is important to promote *non-discriminatory education*
9. Knowledge is of major importance: we must let people to know each other.
10. We are in a *global* world, not North versus South; this means that we should move from advice to partnership and analyse and approach together.

11. We must analyse religion in relation to the conflict with Israel; we must analyse religion in Palestinian society.

6.4 Round table session

The afternoon session continued about a certain paradox in the approach to involve religious leaders in the political process, while it is argued that it is about power and politics and not about religion. But in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, religious and political issues can probably not be separated. But it does make a difference if you see the occupation as a political or as a religious conflict.

The guests brought up that religious leaders can play a role in convincing their followers to give public support necessary to come to a solution. There is ample evidence, Yohanan Tzoreff stated, of compromises between Muslims and non-Muslims, Jews and non-Jews.

Dialogues must be set up with links to reality, often this is not the case.

Walid Salem's basic argument was that religious leaders should address religious issues, not secular ones. Yohanan Tzoreff agreed that religious sites are an important issue, but that this discussion should be left and taken up at a later stage of the negotiation process. It is a task for both governments to decide on. Based on this discussion, it was concluded that *timing* is an important issue with regard to the involvement of religious actors. What needs to be addressed early and what can wait because it gets too complicated? Who should be involved in an early stage and who should be involved later on? It was agreed that the issue of religious sites is important, but not a key priority at this stage.

As part of practical contributions to peace, Tzoreff affirmed that it is important that religious groups and their leaders are recognized as a part of society and have to be 'in the game'. Religion is not a political party; it is a belief of people that can be in all parties. This can foster *pragmatic* cooperation between religious groups, or different parties. An NGO worker argued that religion can also be a power to help people to move: "that is the role of religion we need", enabling people to be open to one another. However, the group realized that it is hard to find examples of religious groups that played a positive role in the conflictuous context of Israel and Palestine. It was mentioned that religious teachers tend to emphasize the otherness of another religion. Tzoreff pointed at the difference between religion and religious teachings, the latter are a matter of interpretation. It is generally agreed that it is necessary to invest in religious education that is non-judgmental or discriminatory. This can be a start to invest in religious groups in a constructive and positive way. Reconciliation on a micro level is important.

Walid Salem pointed at the different *stages* that can be recognized in conflict and peace building and emphasized that it is necessary to discuss the role of religion in this framework, where Palestine and Israel are moving from transition to transformation. When it comes to a solution all religious acts are political as well, and that has to be taken into account.

Coming back to the issue of timing when addressing religion in the process, it was agreed that while the issue of religious places must be dealt with at a later stage, it is *now* the time to involve religious leaders.

Walid Salem: "It is not the time for conflict resolution, but for *conflict management*." He explained how it is important to be careful with who you bring to the table, since inviting only one party is easily understood as dividing between powers. When Israeli's or the international community want to deal with Hamas this has to be taken into account, as empowering one party over the others does not contribute to conflict management.

An important recommendation for the Netherlands and the EU is to contribute to facilitating *second track diplomacy*. Tzoreff gave the example of a religious person in the Knesset, who communicates with Hamas leaders upon his own initiative and in an informal way. From the inside information that is given in this process it is clear that there are documents within Hamas that argue in favor of recognition of the Israeli state. Until today, however, this hasn't been conveyed in any official statement. The result of the initiative of this member of the Knesset is that the two parties meet and engage in a dialogue.

The involvement of political actors such as the Netherlands and the EU should be very low-key, but they could support the organization of dialogue meetings. Moreover, the NL and the EU could prevent Israel from blocking such platforms for internal dialogue, for example by organizing these meetings outside of Israel as was done recently in Turkey. The start of the second track should be with NGOs and only in later stage reach officials. Meetings should be organized around common interest issues. Furthermore international NGOs could invest in creating local networks and stimulate civil society cooperation.

A final question that came up was what the Dutch government could do towards the Israeli government. The group did not agree fully on this. Tzoreff pointed at the sensitivities within the Israeli government towards European countries because of the aid they channel to the Palestine territories. There are internal political divisions, with the left being more inclined to trust Europe than the right. An NGO worker stated that the injustice towards the Palestinians cannot be ignored and should be addressed by the Dutch government in its bilateral relationship with Israel. Yohanan Tzoreff did not deny this, but advised the Dutch government to cooperate with Israeli organizations that share this idea.

7. Guatemala

7.1 Presentation and round table

As an extra round table workshop, Wendy Tyndale, member of the Advisory Council of the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development, kindly accepted our request to introduce the situation in Guatemala, one of the nine fragile states identified by Minister Koenders' in his policy statement on fragile states (see background paper).

Wendy Tyndale (freelance consultant and former Coordinator of the World Faiths Development Dialogue) has recently returned from a two-year stay in Guatemala. According to the definition, Guatemala can be called a fragile state, which lacks the political will to let the state function properly and has a high level of corruption, a severely low level of safety, public health, a very powerful army and a highly organised crime network. Multilateral relations (with the Worldbank and the EU) and bilateral relations (with US) are possible. USAid is very present. Guatemala is partner in the MDGs.

The Catholic Church is traditionally deeply embedded in society. Furthermore, there is a great presence of Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Despite their great presence, also among urban migrants who have lost their traditional village networks, they are less powerful than the Catholic Church, since they are much dispersed. The Catholic Church has more institutional power than the Evangelicals and is more involved in dialogue with the government. There is also a huge mixture or syncretism with traditional Mayan culture and religion.



Tyndale explained that in this failed state, Guatemalteeks trust religious leaders far more than politicians. Religion provides moral support, hope and energy. Individual leaders have power in the community and can be involved in conflict resolution, both locally and nationally. Tyndale illustrated this by telling the story of a nun who played an important role in negotiations about water and land between the government and a local community. As a religious person she was the right person to do this: she had the authenticity that people trusted. Furthermore, she is more involved and attached to the process because she stays in the area while NGO workers come there for only a couple of years. She knows the people and is fully aware of their spiritual and religious rules.

The Catholic Church played a role in ending the civil war. It still plays a role in supporting the peasant movement, which stands up against landowners in order to achieve more civil rights. "Without the Catholic Church there would not be peasant movements". This power can also have a negative impact, for example when priests refuse to let evangelicals participate in the peasant movement because of their religious conviction.

The Catholic Church also plays a role in the protest against injustice in the mining sector. In this mining protest, it was very trustful that the Catholic Church joined instead of politicians.

There are also negative aspects regarding the role of the Catholic Church. It condemns corruption, but does not act very much. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church is very male-dominated. There is a low level of competence and qualification among many church workers. This applies especially to the Evangelicals who can work in those churches without any education. Church workers do things for which they are not capable. It should be added that church workers are mostly very inspired and brave, considering the fact that they are underpaid.

Another negative aspect is the enormous power that the Catholic Church has. This power has both negative and positive consequences. Dialogue with Evangelicals or other denominations is difficult. This can be a pitfall for NGOs when trying to cooperate with churches. The Church might not be willing to accept money from NGOs and might only want to stick to its own programme.

The power of the Church also disempowers the population. The Church can offer things that local religious leaders cannot provide and vice-versa. In addition it should also be noted that on local level religious leaders do not always follow the policy of the Catholic Church strictly. This can both have negative and positive consequences.

The churches own a lot of money. This gives them even more power; it also makes them vulnerable for corruption when people get far more money than they can deal with.

Tyndale advises NGO workers to ask people to explain them their religious convictions and institutions. This offers people a chance to analyse their situation and inform the NGO worker. For NGOs it can be important to rely on the information from religious leaders.

For example, when a house was burned down, the NGO workers thought that the most important thing was the house that got destroyed, but they overlooked the importance of the 'maze' that was also burnt. For the owners it was important to have a reconciliation ritual for the maze that was destroyed, before rebuilding the house. This is an example of Mayan religion, which can be easily overlooked: because of the low level of institutionalisation it is less present than Christianity.

NGOs can face problems because they are inspired by different values and they also show these values.

For instance this comes across when working with women, because they are considered as second class citizens, a concept which isn't denied by church. It takes a long time to

change these perceptions and it is doubtful if this change can be achieved without paying attention to the religious values of people.

When you use religion as part of the strategy in development aid you might gain better results. In addition to this specific situation it might be useful to work with bible texts where women are seen as valuable when talking about the position of woman in discussion groups; especially when evangelicals are participating, because they rely heavily on the bible.

It is essential to implement projects through local organisations and individuals that people trust; you cannot do it as an outsider. Religious leaders have the authenticity, authority and trust that an outsider lacks. NGOs should therefore be open to work with religious leaders and organisations, although this is a delicate issue. When NGOs try to cooperate with religious institutions, they should keep in mind what consequences this has for their position in society. For example, the Evangelical Church is divided and creates islands of huge internal social cohesion, but no social cohesion with other groups (either Evangelical or not). This has impact on the way of choosing the right partner, because when working with a certain Evangelical Church it is almost impossible to work with another one. In the Catholic Church this is not a problem; however, NGOs should notice to choose the best partner for a project instead of the easiest one to work with.

It is possible to ignore religion in the development strategy, and many NGO workers do ignore religion. In practice however, it will always come across even in projects that only seem to focus at non-religious issues, like improving the economic situation of woman.

Such as the project with hens: the hens where being brought to the market, and the earlier the better price they would get for them. But the women wanted to ritually bless the hens. The consequence was that they where late at the market. In this situation economic values clashed with religious values. The best way of coping with this situation is pragmatic, when you let the women be in charge, one of them will come up with a pragmatic solution. They would for instance bless the hens the day before going to the market.

To take religion into account in both strategy and analysis will strengthen the project.

Another example of a project where religion seemingly does not have any influence is micro credit. Micro credit seems to empower women, but it is crucial to be aware of the religious conviction of a woman. Religion is such an important part of a woman's identity, that one cannot empower them without taking religion into account. Tyndale tells about a specific project where woman where asked what the most important person was in their lives, only one woman mentioned her son, the other ones answered 'Jesus Christ' or "The Virgin Mary".



NGO workers should be aware of the fact that spiritual, and religious foundations do affect social relations, cultural identity and communal identity (and the other way around). They form part of people's decision making processes whether they are aware of it or not.

Immaterial goals are a lot harder to achieve. They also will take more time. A pitfall is the time pressure in projects. It is very difficult to get things done within a time table. So in social empowerment a long-term approach should get adopted.

Guatemala working group

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ms M. de	Wit	
ms N. de	Zwaan	CMC Mensen met een Missie

Conference program (Museum for Communication, The Hague)

- 9.00 *Coffee and tea*
- 9.15 Welcome by day chair Ms Lia van Broekhoven
- 9.20 Opening by Mr Jan van Doggenaar (director ICCO)
- Focus 1: *Afghanistan*
- 9.40 Presentation on Afghanistan by Ms Martine van Huuksloot
- 10.10 Interview by Ms Louke van Wensveen with Mr Rohullah Amin (Cordaid Afghanistan)
- 10.30 *Short coffee & tea break*
- Focus 2: *Sudan, Congo, Great Lakes Region*
- 10.45 Presentation on Sudan by Mr Mark van Dorp (Duvilla)
- 11.05 Interview by Mr Frans Wijzen with Mr Mutua Mulonzya (FECCLAHA, Great Lakes Region)
- Focus 3: *Palestine and Israel*
- 11.45 Presentation on Palestine and Israel by Mr Teije Donker (Clingendael)
- 12.05 Interview by Mr Bert Schüssler with Mr Yohanan Tzoreff (Israel) and Mr Waled Salim (Palestine)
- 12.40 Rounding up by day chair
- 12.45 *Lunch*
- 13.45 Round table sessions (Great Lakes Region, Afghanistan, Palestine and Israel, Guatemala)
- 15.30 *Short coffee & tea break*
- 15.45 Plenary session with reports from the round table session
- 16.15 Policy recommendations
- 16.45 Closing session
- 17.00 *Drinks*

Fact sheet

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