

FAITHS IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS: THE TIPPING POINT IN WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ARMED CONFLICT.

THURSDAY 12TH MARCH 2026, 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM EDT

American Arbitration Association, 150 East 42nd Street, 17th Floor, New York
Hybrid Event, [Registration Required](#)

 CSW70 SIDE EVENT

Armed Conflict as the New Normal:

Over the past year, the number of active armed conflicts worldwide has risen to historically high levels. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), there were 61 active state-involved conflicts in 2024 – the highest total recorded since 1946. Some broader monitoring tools counting non-state conflicts and other forms of armed violence list well over 110 conflicts globally. Conflicts range widely – some are long-running, others newly emerged; some dominate headlines (major wars), others are “low-intensity” but still deadly and destabilizing.

That surge in conflicts and accompanying atrocities affects women and girls disproportionately. A recent report shows that in 2024, about 676 million women – roughly 17% of the global female population – lived within 50 kilometers of a deadly conflict. According to the UN Security Council Report (S/2024/671) issued in September of 2024, for many, this proximity meant exposure to violence, displacement, loss of livelihoods, disruption to health/education, and extreme insecurity. Moreover, in conflict-affected contexts, women and girls face heightened risk of sexual violence, exploitation, forced displacement, and severe constraints on their rights.

Access to justice for women and girls in conflict zones is often deeply problematic. Despite the scale of gender-based harm, their participation in formal peace negotiations – or in justice processes – remains minimal. For example, in 2024, out of the vast majority of peace processes globally, 9 in 10 had no women negotiators, and women made up only a small fraction of mediators. According to [UN Women](#), even when violations occur – such as rape, forced displacement, trafficking, or other rights abuses – survivors often face enormous barriers: social stigma, fear of retaliation, collapse or inaccessibility of justice institutions, and lack of gender-sensitive legal frameworks. The practical result is that many abuses go uninvestigated, unpunished, and unacknowledged.

The Faith-Based and Secular Humanitarian Landscapes in Conflict and Atrocities Settings:

There are an estimated 10 million NGOs worldwide, and at least 40,000–75,000 of these operate internationally (INGOs or NGOs with cross-border activities). Several studies find that faith-based organizations (FBOs) are a very large slice of that international universe: one widely cited estimate is that over 33% of all INGOs are faith-based, while U.S. and Canadian data suggest roughly 40–60% of international development NGOs are faith-based. Put simply: at least tens of thousands of faith-based NGOs exist globally, and many of them work on humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding agendas in fragile and conflict-affected states.

The UN's Global Humanitarian Overview for 2024 targeted around 180–190 million people in need across 70+ countries – the majority of those needs driven by armed conflict and political violence. A recent mapping of humanitarian organizations found that about one quarter of them (~24%) describe faith as a guiding value, and another ~4% are explicitly religious institutions (churches, mosques, etc.). If we apply that conservative 20–25% faith-based share to the ecosystem of NGOs active in major UN-coordinated responses (which typically involves thousands of organizations across those 70+ crisis countries), a very cautious lower-bound would be 2,500–5,000 faith-based NGOs directly active in conflict or severe crisis settings at any given time – and a plausible working range is somewhere in the low five figures (roughly 5,000–10,000) once you include national and regional faith-based NGOs that don't show up in all global datasets.

The numbers above mostly capture formal NGOs that plug into the international humanitarian “system.” Which means that they under-count the dense web of local faith communities, religious charities, women’s groups, and peace committees that act as de facto NGOs in war-affected areas but never register as such internationally. The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities and related work on “hidden peacebuilders” shows that local faith actors are systematically under-mapped yet heavily present in humanitarian and peacebuilding work. If you include these local faith-based actors who provide aid, protection, and mediation in conflicts from South Sudan to Syria to Colombia, you are almost certainly looking at many thousands more. So the honest, defensible statement is: we can document several thousand faith-based NGOs working in settings of conflict and atrocities, and it is very likely that the true global figure is in the low tens of thousands.

Two questions to be discussed:

- What difference do partnerships between faith-based and secular actors make to facilitating access to justice for women and girls in conflict and atrocity contexts?
- Why and how can diverse governments and the United Nations support such partnerships to create the tipping point in current efforts to ensure women and girls survive conflicts and atrocities and are integrated into mediation and peace-making efforts, with dignity and resilience?

This side event will spotlight innovative, multi-faith and civil society partnerships that are helping women and girls access justice in settings of armed conflict and atrocities. It will bring together policy-makers, interfaith leaders, and practitioners to explore inclusive reforms and legal empowerment strategies which include UNDP’s mental health and psychosocial support models and praxis; UN Office of Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect (including The Fez Plan of Action and the UN Strategy on Hate Speech); and actual experiences of faith-based NGOs serving women and girls to access justice in armed conflict and atrocity settings around the world.

Objectives

- Share evidence of successful gender justice initiatives co-driven by faith actors partnering with other civil society entities, UN system entities and governments.
- Encourage UN-government-civil society partnerships which both respond to and showcase intersectional changes in conflict, genocide and atrocity settings.
- Showcasing future strategies and planned partnerships for post conflict and post genocide/atrocity justice and reconciliation work planned.

Preliminary Agenda

Co-Moderators:

Dr. Azza Karam, Occidental College/Kahane UN Program & Lead Integrity, & **Ms. Irene Anena**, ACT Uganda Forum

Welcome and Opening Remarks:

- **Mr. Chaloka Beyani**, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide
- **State Secretary, Ms. Laura Rissanen**, State Secretary to the Minister of Social Security, Finland

Collective video intervention from diverse faith actors in conflict contexts around the world (5 minutes)

Followed by an Interactive Dialogue including:

- **Ambassador Ms. Elina Kalkku**, Permanent Representative, Mission of Finland to the United Nations
- **Mr. Rudelmar Bueno de Faria**, ACT Alliance General Secretary
- **Ms. Zinat Ara**, Director General, Department of Women Affairs, Bangladesh
- **Rev. Mark E. Fowler**, CEO, Tanenbaum, Center for Interreligious Understanding
- **Dr Christine Schliesser**, Lead Integrity
- **Mr. Hope T. Chichaya**, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Advisor, FCA South Sudan & **Mrs. Lilian Musoki**, Humanitarian Response Manager, FCA Uganda
- **Mr. Mark Ross**, Director of IMUNA (Model UN Education)
- **Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi**, Executive Director, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

Respondent:

- **Ms. Binalakshmi Nepam**, Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples, Gender Justice and Peace.

Followed by Interventions from the Floor and Closing Remarks

