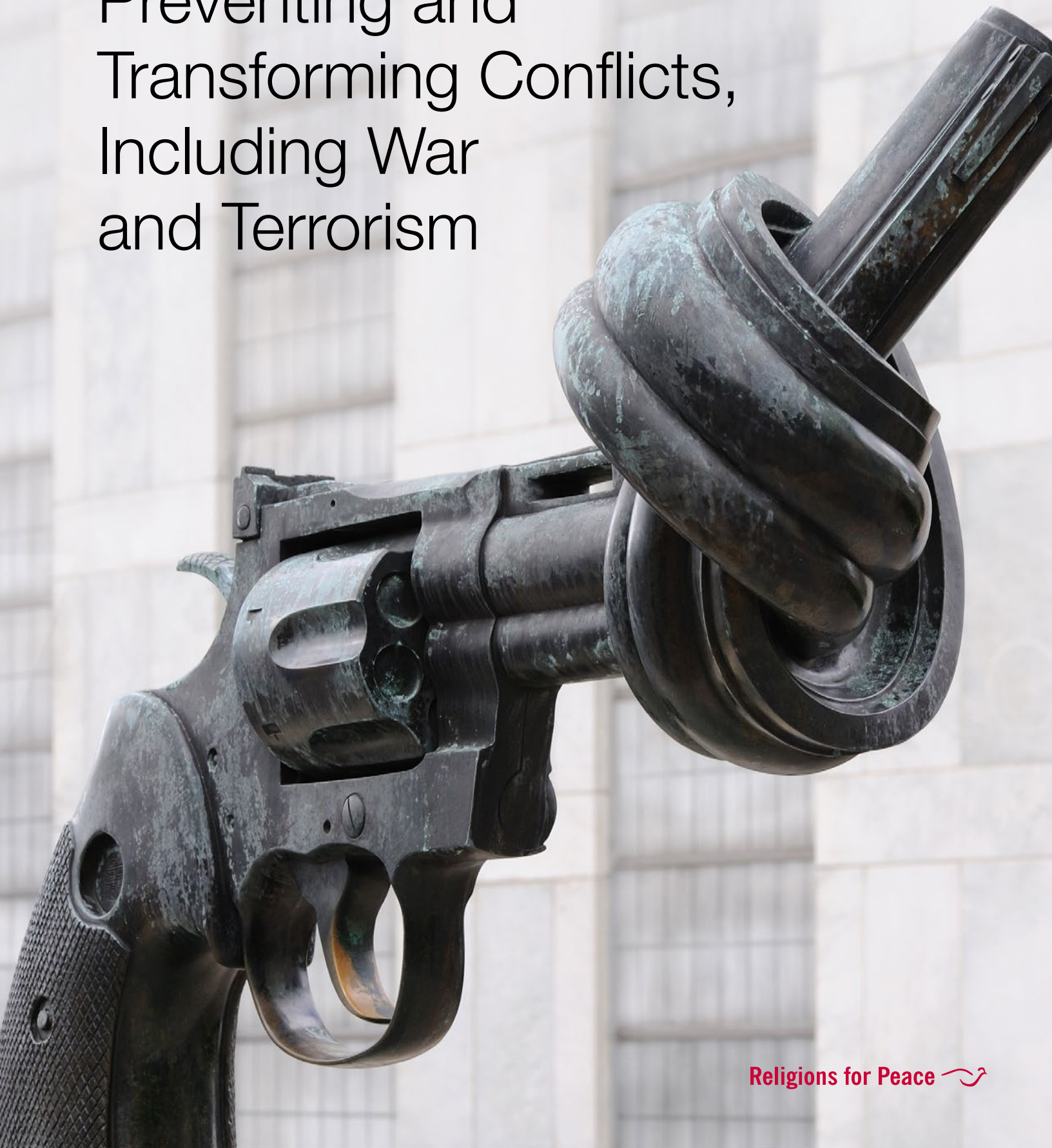
CARING FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE THROUGH

Preventing and Transforming Conflicts, Including War and Terrorism



Religions for Peace

Religions for Peace

Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition bringing together representatives of the world's religious communities who are dedicated to achieving peace. It is a non-sectarian, non-political international organization that is accredited to the United Nations. *Religions for Peace* has national and regional affiliates in 90 countries and Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Networks at the global, regional, and national levels. It takes an inter-religious approach to mobilizing the tremendous potential of religious communities, emphasizing how collaboration and coordination among faith groups enhances their overall impact and ability to contribute to peace and development.

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UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER
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Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

Violent conflict, including wars and terrorist attacks, is the most obvious expression of hostility and intolerance in our world today. In many countries and regions, inequality, exploitation and oppression are also prevalent. These conditions can also be understood as "structural" violence and conflict and can be equally as devastating for many people. The purpose of this Commission Paper is to help *Religions for Peace (RfP)* members and affiliates:

- Identify the types of violent and structural conflict that are evident in their own contexts;
- Consider what religious resources are available to address these problems;
- Decide on the actions, resources and partners required to transform the conflict(s).

STEP 1: ANALYSING YOUR CONTEXT

In order to positively transform any type of conflict, we need to understand the nature and causes of that conflict. However, due to the complexity of many conflicts, this is not a straightforward process. A simple way to better understand the conflicts in your context is to examine three different elements in detail. Collect as much information as possible about:

- **Actors** – Who is involved in the conflict (directly and indirectly), and what is their relationship to one another?
- **Connectors and dividers** – What issues connect actors in the conflict, and what are the issues that divide?
- **Drivers of conflict/drivers of peace** – How are the actors using the dividers and connectors to drive the conflict or bring about peace?[1]

Remember: the reasons for the start and continuation of the conflict are usually highly complex and can change over time. Also understandings of the cause of conflict are often different depending on those with whom you talk. Therefore, it is vital to consult as many different perspectives as possible. Do not be tempted to try and simplify the causes of conflict; the more multifaceted the understanding of a conflict, the better.

STEP 2: CONSIDERING RELIGIONS' ROLE IN PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

It is important in religious peacebuilding to not simply assume what might work, but to identify the best activities and methods through a systematic approach. One way to do this is to think about religion as encompassing five interrelated dimensions, and to carefully consider the peacebuilding potential of each in turn.[2]

Religion as a Set of Ideas – What religious sacred teachings, doctrines and narratives can be called on to support tolerance and nonviolence, and prevent and/or transform conflict?

Religion as a Community – How can the collective power of a religious community be used to reinforce group identity and strengthen peacebuilding efforts?

Religion as an Institution – How can religious institutions' authority and resources be used to positively support peacebuilding activities and initiatives? For example, consider the power and influence possessed by male, female and youth leaders; and resources such as funding, labour, communication and media networks, transportation and logistical support.

Religion as a Set of Symbols and Practices – What religious rituals and symbols can be used to promote and support efforts to prevent conflict and build lasting peace?

Religion as a Spirituality – How do the feelings of connection and transcendence that characterise many forms of religious experience inform the ways religious adherents think about peace and conflict?

When considering these religious resources, it is also helpful to think about them in relation to the four different levels at which conflict transformation needs to take place:

- Cultivating the personal skills we need to deal positively with conflict;
- Building respectful and kind relationships across society;
- Changing systems that perpetuate inequality, divisions and conflict;
- Identifying and changing the norms, ethics and morals in a society that initially led to seeing inequalities and injustices as an acceptable part of life.

Once you have identified some possible avenues for intervention, it is important to test your assumptions by interrogating your/each other's ideas in your consultation group/meeting, and working through the logic of the presumed impact of your ideas.

STEP 3: MOBILISING ACTORS FOR PEACEBUILDING

Building on the understandings of conflict and peacebuilding possibilities you arrived at from Steps 1 and 2, Step 3 is about identifying the actors, resources and partners required to implement your peacebuilding plans. Resources required usually include personnel, funding, capacity building and a skills audit.

As members of *RfP,* we are extremely fortunate to be part of an organisation that has over many years built an extensive network of religious actors working tirelessly for peace at global, regional, national and local levels. Many *RfP* members have significant influence within their own networks and/or hierarchies, and with governments, international and multinational institutions, and peacebuilding organisations.

Essential elements of the *RfP* network are the *Religions for Peace* Global Women of Faith Network and the Global Interfaith Youth Network. It is imperative that women and youth are included at all stages of understanding and transforming conflict, and have clearly defined roles.

It is highly unlikely that religious actors can implement and manage the complex and long-term processes involved in conflict transformation alone. Other important stakeholders might include religious organisations, secular peacebuilders, and local, national and international institutions and organisations. After identifying

what you need to do, carry out a skills and resources assessment of your community/organisation. Ask: What gaps do you have, and are there other organisations that can help address these? How might your organisation or institution benefit from this partnership? How might the partnership enhance the impact of your peacebuilding work? What are the possible challenges that partnerships can bring?

CONCLUSION

The *Religions for Peace* World Assembly is an immensely important opportunity for *RfP* members to work together to identify and address the drivers of violent and structural conflict in their own countries and contexts, and to plan for future work for the enhancement of peace, stability, and harmony across the globe.

Your contributions to these worldwide consultations are valued and important for understanding the challenges faced by religious actors across the world today, and for informing *Religions for Peace*'s strategic direction and priorities in the coming years.

Introduction: Objectives of this Commission Paper

Violent conflict, including wars and terrorist attacks, is arguably the most obvious expression of hostility, intolerance and disharmony in our world today. However, in many countries and regions, widespread and acute inequalities, exploitation and oppression are equally as destructive and devastating for many people, and can also be understood as "structural" forms of conflict and violence.

This Commission Paper is concerned with helping *RfP* members and affiliates to identify the types of conflict evident in their own contexts at local, national and regional levels, and to consider ways of addressing these challenges in collaboration with other faith groups, peacebuilding organisations and relevant stakeholders.

The Paper begins with important background information that can help introduce the topic during consultation meetings that will take place at national and regional levels in preparation for the World Assembly 2019. It then goes on to offer practical methods and guidance for analysing your own context, and identifying the most relevant religious assets for addressing the conflicts and challenges in your context.

This Commission Paper will suggest that fundamental to positively transforming all conflicts is a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the conflict, linked with a careful and realistic assessment of what religious resources are available and likely to be effective given competing challenges and influences on the conflict.

Consequently, this Commission Paper is composed of three sections:

1. **Analysing Your Context** – Guiding you in developing a shared understanding of the problems and drivers of structural and physical violence in your particular context;

2. **Religion, Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation** – Ways to consider what religious resources are available to you and most relevant to the problems you want to address;

3. **Mobilising Actors for Peacebuilding** – Consideration of actions, resources and partners required for helping transform conflict in your context, and how best to engage them.

Section 1: Analysing your Context

The first section of this Commission Paper offers background information on contemporary conflict, including religions' roles in driving conflict, and a simple but effective way to systematically understand the problems and challenges in your own context.

THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

It is perhaps self-evident that in order to positively transform any type of conflict, we need to comprehensively understand the nature and causes of that conflict. The logic is simple and used in many other areas of life: the better you understand something, the more likely you are to successfully and positively engage with it. As we shall see below, however, conflicts are rarely straightforward, and a multitude of factors need to be considered.

Useful Terms[3]

Attempting to systematically understand a conflict is called **conflict analysis**. This process is often guided by a framework of key questions, or a range of "conflict analysis tools," which help identify who is involved in the conflict and their relationships with each other, what issues are at stake and how the conflict is being sustained.

Some other useful terms used in this Commission Paper:

Actor – Used to refer to a party at any level involved in a conflict or peacebuilding process. This could be an individual, organisation, armed group or even a state institution or multinational body.

Conflict transformation – Sees conflict as an inevitable part of the human condition, which, if handled in the correct way, can be a positive and transformative process. In order for this to occur, the right structures and conditions need to be in place. These include a culture of nonviolence, and the personal and institutional skills and processes needed to manage conflict in a positive, constructive and nonviolent way. Conflict transformation is also focused on addressing the deep underlying causes of a conflict, as well as the more obvious negative effects and outcomes of conflict.

Peacebuilding – Originally conceived in terms of post-conflict recovery efforts to promote reconciliation and reconstruction, it may also include providing humanitarian relief, protecting human rights, ensuring security, establishing nonviolent modes of resolving conflicts, fostering reconciliation, providing trauma healing services, repatriating refugees and resettling internally displaced persons, supporting broad-based education and aiding in economic reconstruction. In this expanded meaning, it also includes conflict prevention in the sense of preventing the recurrence of violence, as well as conflict management and post-conflict recovery. In a larger sense, peacebuilding involves a transformation toward more manageable, peaceful relationships and governance structures—the long-term process of addressing root causes and effects, reconciling differences, normalizing relations, and building institutions that can manage conflict without resorting to violence.[4]

Positive and negative peace – Oppression, discrimination and inequality—even without explicit physical violence—are still forms of structural conflict and violence; this condition is often called "negative peace". Alternatively, "positive peace" is a process and condition that advocates a just and fair society for all and the restoration of relationships after conflict. The Institute for Economics and Peace defines positive peace as the "attitudes, institutions and structures which create and sustain peaceful societies."[5]

Structural violence/conflict – This is systematic injustice or inequality within a society or community, such as racism, ageism, classism, sexism, etc., which may or may not lead to physical violence.

Conflict Trends

It will perhaps come as no surprise that the prevalent types of conflict have changed significantly in the last few decades. Some of the most prominent trends include:

- Interstate conflicts (between nation states) have declined.
- Intrastate conflicts and civils wars (within nation states) have increased.
- The involvement of non-state actors (terrorist groups, militia, private armies, etc.) in conflict has increased.
- Conflict is more internationalized, with greater numbers of external countries becoming directly or indirectly involved in intrastate conflicts.
- Armed conflict maims or kills more civilians and non-combatants than armed fighters.

Conflict Theories

Many attempts have been made to come up with overarching theories and explanations for why different types of conflict occur. Some examples include:

- **Greed** – Actors enter into conflict for profit or material gain.
- **Grievance** – Actors enter into conflict because they are aggrieved at some form of injustice or inequality.
- **Ethnic/religious conflict** – Differences and discord in ethnic and religious identities and cultures drive inter-group conflicts.
- **Resource conflict** – Increasingly, a lack of access to natural resources drives tensions and structural and violent conflict.

Many other factors have also been identified as increasing or decreasing the likelihood of conflict. These include: the form and structure of governance; effectiveness of state security; average age of population; history of past conflicts; conflicts in bordering countries; and even geography—whether a country is mountainous or heavily forested.

In relation to religious involvement in conflict, these factors have been recognised as problematic:

- **Religious nationalism** and the negative effect religious leaders or institutions can have if seen to support state oppression and injustice, or vice versa.
- The negative impact of **religious identity** if used to emphasise divisions and differences in communities and societies.

- **Religious extremism and fundamentalism,** which can lead to religious interpretations that can be used to denigrate co-religionists or those from other faiths, and be used as a justification for persecution and violence.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS

In many cases of violence and conflict, both physical and structural, any number of the above factors may be influencing and sustaining the conflict. As a result it is imperative to undertake a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the nature and causes of conflict.

When attempting to analyse a conflict, we can be relatively confident in assuming two things:

- The reasons for the start and continuation of the conflict are usually highly complex and can change over time.
- Understanding of the cause of conflict is often different depending on the level of analysis (e.g. regional, national, local), and with whom you talk.

Given these two statements, it is important to carry out a **participative and inclusive assessment** in order to understand the conflict fully:

- **Participative:** Where possible, getting actors involved in collecting information means they will care about the process. A highly participative process can be a peacebuilding tool in itself.[6]
- **Inclusive:** Conflict analysis is strengthened by listening to as many different perspectives as possible. Include inputs from a diverse range of actors (religious and non-religious), participants and organizations.

Lastly, do not be tempted to try and simplify the causes of conflict; the more multifaceted the understanding of a conflict, the better.

Analysing your Conflict/Context

Many organisations and actors have devised different ways of analysing conflicts, often called Conflict Assessment Frameworks (CAFs). Matthew Levinger[7] suggests that despite the range of approaches, there are three key elements to most conflicts that must be examined:

1. **Actors** – Who is involved in the conflict (directly and indirectly), and what is their relationship to one another?

2. **Connectors and dividers** – What issues connect actors in the conflict, and what are the issues that divide? It is important to note that not all connectors are positive (e.g. gender-based violence), and not all dividers are negative.

3. **Drivers of conflict/drivers of peace** – How are the **actors** using the **dividers and connectors** to drive the conflict or bring about peace? For example, one side may be using religious identity to divide communities and incite violence, or a peacebuilding organisation may be working with religious leaders to draw on religious scripture and ritual to bring about community reconciliation after violent conflict.

The way the analysis works is illustrated in the table below. This is an example from a conflict analysis workshop addressing intergenerational tensions over participation in a local youth project.

ACTORS

- Young people
- Parents
- School teachers
- Youth worker

DIVIDERS

- Age
- Tradition of respect for elders
- Ideas about young people's responsibilities
- The importance of the youth project

CONNECTORS

- Family
- Religion
- What's best for young people
- Tradition
- Culture

DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

- Use of traditional ideas and practices to try and control young people
- Ideas about human rights to oppose traditional ways of life
- Young people's unwillingness to understand and respect traditional ways and their elders
- Social media and unrealistic ideas about what young people should be doing

DRIVERS OF PEACE

- Use of traditional methods of mediation and dialogue to help resolve differences and bring family back together
- Role of youth worker to explain to parents the benefits of participating in the youth project

TASK 1

Use the blank Conflict Analysis Table below to identify the actors, dividers and connectors, and drivers of peace and conflict in your own context. Remember the principles of participation and inclusivity – and ideally the analysis should represent as many different perspectives on the conflict as possible.

This can be done in small groups and brought back to a plenary for discussion, or as one larger working group. The process is not about reaching a consensus, but about recognising as many different ideas and understandings as possible.

Conflict Analysis Table:

Use this table to work in groups to help understand the issues and challenges in your own context.

ACTORS	
DIVIDERS	**CONNECTORS**
DRIVERS OF CONFLICT	**DRIVERS OF PEACE**

Section 2: Religion, Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING THEORY

Most of the current theoretical ideas about religious involvement in peacebuilding can trace their roots to Scott Appleby's publication *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (2000).

In his book, Appleby states something that most religious and non-religious people intuitively know: depending on a range of different factors and circumstances, religion can be used either to drive conflict or as a powerful and effective tool for peace.

Appleby and others[8] have recognised several influential factors that help ensure religion manifests as a force for peace. These include:

- **Religious leadership** – In many religions, religious leaders are highly respected and trusted by their followers and communities. They are often seen as custodians and interpreters of sacred texts and practices, and as a result religious adherents may listen carefully to what they say and act upon it. Religious leaders may also have the respect of high-level secular and political leaders. As a consequence, positive and peaceful interpretations of a religion by leaders can make them an extremely effective force for peacebuilding.[9]

- **Religious education/formation** – Religious adherents who are well educated in their own religious traditions are purportedly less likely to be influenced by negative interpretations of religion and incitement to violence. They are more likely to offer strong religiously inspired counter-narratives against violence and extremism, and to be powerful peacebuilding allies.

- **Religious peacebuilders** – It has been convincingly argued (by *RfP* amongst others) that religious actors are most effective as peacebuilders when they remain religious as they promote peace, rather than being simply another group co-opted to support "secular" peacebuilding projects and initiatives.[10] It is the religious ideas and inspiration that make religious peacebuilders different, and often more effective. This will be discussed further on pages 14–16 when exploring the five different dimensions of religion to consider when thinking about your peacebuilding activities.

RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING IN PRACTICE

In practical terms, peacebuilding work that engages with religious actors, or attempts to draw on the influence and/or resources of religion to support and enhance conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes, has increased significantly in the last few years.

Religious leaders are often engaged directly by peacebuilding actors and encouraged to leverage their authority and influence to support peacebuilding, and/or to promote peaceful interpretations of religious scriptures and beliefs to support peace.

Religious institutions and faith-based organisations are also seen as important and influential, and are increasingly engaged by non-faith-based organisations in peacebuilding initiatives as they are often seen as gatekeepers to religious communities and leaders, as understanding religious traditions and motivations and as having trust and respect.

At the grassroots and community level, religious identity and beliefs can help bring people together around a common purpose and understanding, and be a powerful asset for peacebuilding work.

CASE STUDY

Bosnia

Following the Dayton Accords, the *Religions for Peace* Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina (IRC-BiH) worked with the conflicting parties, civil society and government to begin the reconciliation process and build an inclusive and pluralist state. IRC-BiH facilitated communications across religious communities, served as a liaison between the religious communities and the many international NGOs working in the post-conflict environment, and provided a venue for regular engagements with the government. Over time, the IRC's working committees also addressed issues of security and economic development. Among other outcomes, the IRC-BiH advocated for religious freedom and helped to draft the national law on civil society organizations, which eventually passed in 2004 as part of the country's reconstruction.

THE ADDED VALUE OF MULTI-RELIGIOUS COOPERATION

"Multi-religious cooperation for peace is the hallmark of ***Religions for Peace****."*

Religions for Peace is founded on the belief that different religions working together on a common issue are often more effective than religious groups and communities working alone. Religions working together can help:

- Deepen understanding of each other as religious people and individuals, challenging and breaking down negative stereotypes that have been brought about through ignorance and fear;

- Bring different groups in diverse communities together around common issues and challenges, creating strong bonds of solidarity and respect;
- Serve to identify and highlight complementary strengths, making multi-religious groups greater than the sum of their parts;
- Offer efficiencies by pooling resources and strengthening collaboration.

CASE STUDY

Sierra Leone

From the beginning of the crisis in Sierra Leone, the *Religions for Peace* Inter-religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) successfully facilitated communication among various rebel factions, contributing to the rebels' ability to serve as viable parties to the peace process. The IRCSL represented a unified voice of collaboration among the nation's religious communities, which led directly to the conflict's resolution and helped keep society from fracturing. *Religions for Peace*'s vital role during the peace negotiation prepared the IRCSL delegation to be a powerful force for post-conflict peacebuilding, which resulted in a long-term commitment to building civil society in the nation.

CONSIDERING THE RELIGIOUS ASSETS IN YOUR CONTEXT

We know that religions can play an important function in helping to prevent and transform conflicts at all levels. There are many excellent examples of religious peacebuilders and communities playing a multitude of important roles in peacebuilding, from high-level diplomatic negotiation and mediation, to grassroots community reconciliation initiatives.[11]

However, despite the rich resources and influence religions often possess, there are also numerous examples where religion has not been as effective in preventing and/or transforming conflict as would be hoped. Why is this?

One reason is that sometimes religious peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts are devised arbitrarily, and not as the direct result of a careful and systematic analysis and understanding of conflict. It is important in religious peacebuilding not simply to assume what might work, and/or what religious assets are important, but to identify the best approaches and methods through a systematic approach.

The United States Institute of Peace, in collaboration with the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, has recently developed a *Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding: Analysis Guide* for this type of work.[12] The next part of this Commission Paper draws on some of the ideas in this publication.

THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING[13]

Religion has long been associated with having the power, ability and resources to prevent and transform conflict. In order to systematically consider which religious assets might be most appropriate and effective in addressing a conflict, it may be helpful to think about religion as encompassing five interrelated dimensions:

Religion as a Set of Ideas

Religious sacred teachings, doctrines and narratives can be a call to action for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, a moral reference in support of tolerance and nonviolence, and a source of ideas and tools for resolving conflict. This dimension can be particularly powerful when parties to a conflict are from the same religious (or non-religious) tradition and thus share norms, values and culture, in which case the actors are more likely to agree on what a conflict resolution process should look like and the reasons why violence is not desirable.

When actors are from different traditions, drawing on scripture and religious teachings can still be a hugely valuable approach as many religious traditions share common values and ideas. Every religion and culture has its own strategies for resolving conflict, and these should be used wherever possible—although it is important to be aware that there may be some limits to how religious ideas and beliefs about peacebuilding transfer across religious and cultural landscapes.

CASE STUDY

Religion and Genocide Prevention

Beginning in 2015, the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect organized the "Fez Process" with support from the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), the World Council of Churches and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. It consisted of a series of global consultations on the prevention of incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes. More than two hundred religious actors from over seventy countries participated (including many *RfP* members), representing religious traditions, denominations, and minorities—and at least thirty percent of the participants were women. The outcome was an extensive plan of action with detailed recommendations for religious actors, as well as state actors, civil society and media.

http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20Copy.pdf

Religion as a Community

The tendency of religion to reinforce group identity can strengthen peacebuilding efforts. The collective power of a community working for peace can be greater than the individual efforts of its members. Their shared knowledge can help advance understanding of the problems and possible solutions. Their influence can make conflict actors reflect on their actions and increase participation in peacebuilding initiatives.

The evident danger of group identity is that it can lead to negative stereotypes. When religious identity is a factor in conflict, activities aimed at sharing knowledge about different groups' religious beliefs and practices can counteract rumours and misperceptions about the "other" and help prevent the build-up of tensions and violence. Communities that have strong religious identity but weak knowledge of their religion may be at greater risk for radicalization and violence. Religious actors can strengthen religious knowledge in such a way as to increase critical thinking and resistance to radical narratives that promote violence.

Religion as an Institution

Although they vary in influence and complexity, most religions have some form of institutional hierarchy and structure. Institutions give religious leaders legitimacy and authority, as well as material and human resources to carry out peacebuilding activities. Influential religious leaders associated with an institution may be scholars, practitioners and/or local congregants, some of whom will be women and young people—not just official high-level representatives.

Where relationships between different religious groups need to be strengthened, institutions can come together to form inter-religious associations – with *RfP* being an excellent example. These groups can model unity and respect, make joint statements, and take cooperative action to advance peace and harmony. That said, it is important to understand the differences and tensions between and within religious groups, which may be hidden for fear of upsetting relations or provoking retaliation.

Institutions can offer funding, labour, communication and media networks, transportation and logistics to support a wide range of activities. Do not ignore these important practical dimensions of peacebuilding.

Religion as a Set of Symbols and Practices

For some religious actors, what they do is as important as what they believe. The use of symbols and practices in peacebuilding is increasingly recognised as an important part of peacebuilding work.[14] When conflicting beliefs make talking difficult, rituals and icons can serve as a language for connection and renewed understanding during and after conflict. If not used carefully, however, religious symbols and practices can be divisive as they are often closely tied to beliefs that may be challenging. However, there are many examples of new and adapted ritual practices used in a sensitive and inclusive way for inter-religious peacebuilding purposes.

Religion as a Spirituality

The spiritual dimension of religion refers to the feelings of connection and transcendence that distinguish rational thought from religious belief. Katrien Hertog argues that because of its spiritual dimension, religion is particularly relevant to many of the emotional processes that drive conflict or prevent a just and sustainable peace after conflict.[15] She suggests that traditional approaches often ignore this so-called soft dimension of peacebuilding. Consider this argument in your planning. What soft dimensions, such as feelings of insecurity, has your analysis determined to be contributing to the conflict? Think of ways the spiritual dimension of religion can be a source of peacebuilding.

It is important to carefully consider all five dimensions when considering your involvement in a conflict prevention or peacebuilding process.

The Five Dimensions of Religion as Sources of Violence and Conflict

It is also important to remember when carrying out your analysis that all five dimensions can be and have been used to justify physical and structural violence and conflict. For example:

- Negative and distorted interpretations of **religious ideas and beliefs** have been used to justify terrorist acts and extremist ideologies by members of numerous religious traditions.
- **Communal identity** is often emphasised and used to create "in" and "out" groups, and perpetuate fear, hatred and division in societies and communities.
- Throughout history, **religious institutions** have been complicit in creating and sustaining inequality and oppression in societies, and within and between religious traditions.
- The oppression and/or attempted annihilation of another religious tradition or group usually involves the destruction or proscription of **religious symbolism**: for example, the demolition or appropriation of religious buildings and sacred sites, and prohibition of religious dress and ritual practice.
- A distorted and irreligious sense of **spirituality** and a belief in "doing God's work" has often been used to motivate extremists and terrorists to commit violent atrocities.

CASE STUDY

Myanmar

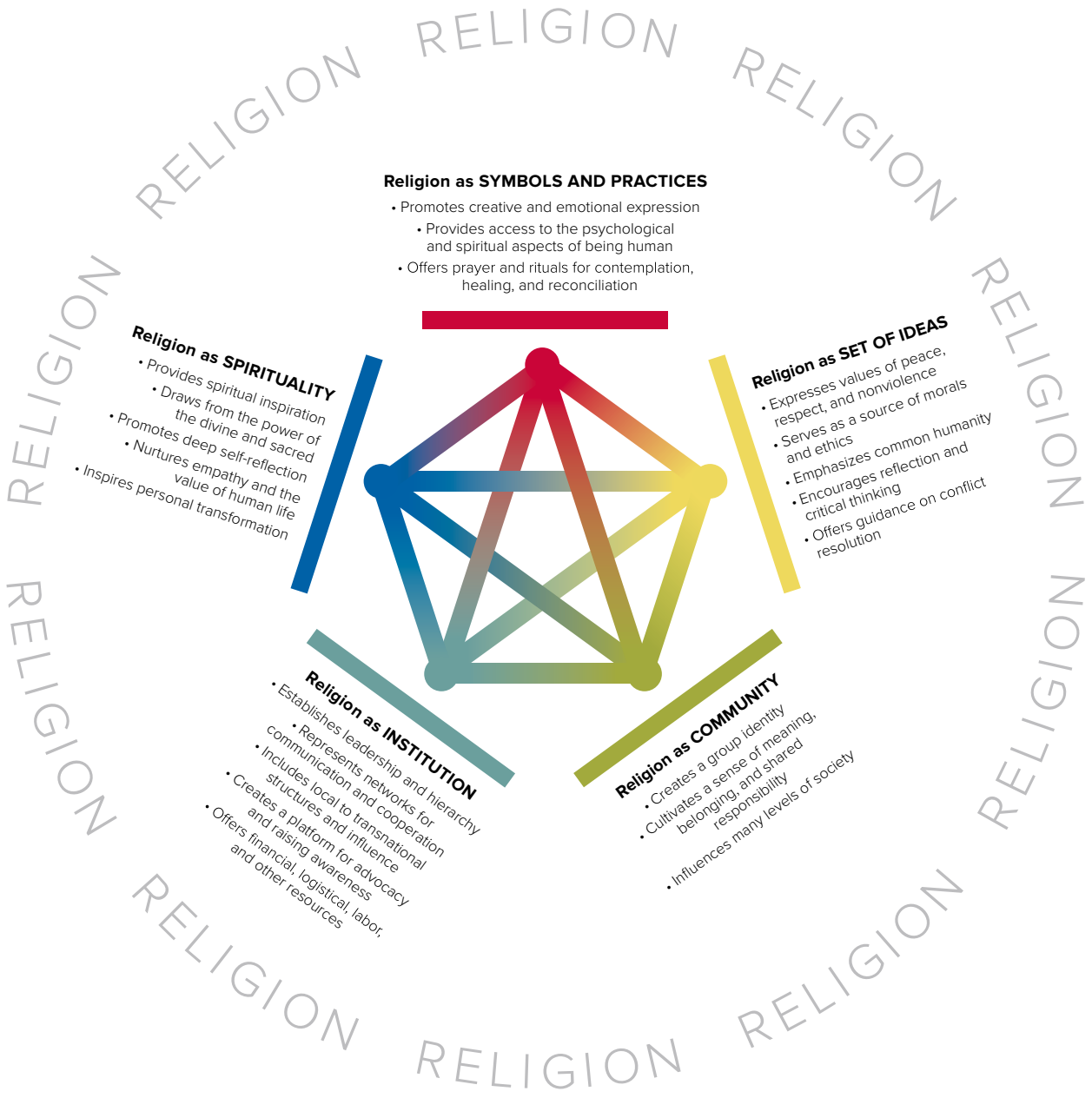
In Myanmar, *Religions for Peace* has developed a multilevel, multi-stakeholder approach to supporting efforts to end violent conflicts, including decades-long conflicts between the military and armed ethnic groups, and the deadly clashes between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslims.

At the diplomatic level, a high-level multi-religious delegation has met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and government ministers, delivering the "Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar"—a call from a joint delegation of Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Hindu leaders for peace and development. The government has publicly acknowledged the critical role religious leaders play in transforming people and conflict, and pledged to support future *RfP* work on dialogue and multi-religious cooperation.

At the grassroots level, a number of projects and programmes have built the capacity of *RfP* members, and supporting dialogue and multi-religious activities have deepened understanding and brought communities back together after violent conflict. Evaluation evidence has shown that the projects have had a profound and positive impact on many participants, especially women, and have helped build peace and reconciliation in the project areas.

https://rfp.org/religions-for-peace-multi-religious-delegation-meets-with-daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-to-deliver-the-letter-to-the-peoples-of-myanmar/

An overview of the dimensions and applications of religious peacebuilding
(taken from Frazer & Owen 2018)



FOUR LEVELS OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION[16]

When attempting to positively intervene and transform a conflict, it might be helpful to think about the four different levels at which conflict transformation needs to take place. Whilst comprehensive transformation and peacebuilding needs to address all four levels, this is an unrealistic expectation for most projects or initiatives. Therefore you might consider where your existing resources and assets can be most suitable for intervening, and which resources and/or skills you need to add.

LEVEL OF TRANSFORMATION	CHARACTERISTICS
Personal	Cultivating self-awareness and helpful responses to conflict. Developing personal communications skills and abilities to respond positively and constructively to conflict, and help transform conflict in a skillful and just way.
Relational	Building relations across all areas of society, enhancing lines of communication and trust. Respecting diversity and difference, and welcoming everyone as individuals worthy of respect and kindness.
Structural	Changing the societal systems that perpetuate inequalities such as racism, classism and sexism. Helping develop fair and just societal and institutional systems and equal opportunities for everyone in society.
Cultural	Identifying and changing the norms, ethics and morals in a society which initially led to structural inequalities. Challenging ideas and beliefs that inequalities and injustices are an acceptable part of life, and advocating for change.

RELIGION AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Combining these two concepts can offer a systematic approach to identifying how religious actors and resources can tackle the underlying causes of conflict identified in Section 1.

TASK 2

Work through the Religion and Conflict Transformation Table below, carefully thinking about the challenges, which levels need transformation, and which of the five dimensions of religion are relevant to each in your particular context.

Be as specific as possible when filling in. For example, identify specific religious leaders to carry out tasks, or specific religious scriptures that might address reconciliation. The more detailed the table, the more useful it will be for informing a practical project/initiative.

Develop one table for each of the conflict drivers you think most relevant, or you are best placed to address. As with task 1, this can be done in smaller groups or as part of a larger group discussion.

Religion and Conflict Transformation Table

CONFLICT DRIVER/ PROBLEM	(Write conflict driver here...)			
	PERSONAL	**RELATIONAL**	**STRUCTURAL**	**CULTURAL**
IDEAS (sacred teachings, doctrines, ethics, morals and values)				
COMMUNITY (group resources and support)				
INSTITUTION (formal structures, leaders and organizations)				
SYMBOLS AND PRACTICES (lived visible manifestations of religion)				
SPIRITUALITY (sense of connectedness to the divine)				

TESTING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Now that you have identified some possible avenues for intervention, it is important to test your assumptions by taking into account broader issues and competing pressures in your context. A simple was of doing this is by interrogating your/each other's ideas in your consultation group/meeting, and working through the logic of the presumed impact of your ideas. For each assumption in your project ask yourself:

"If I do **x** is **y** really likely to happen?"

For example, if religious leaders identify and disseminate texts on reconciliation, will this bring the conflict actors back together after conflict?

If the answer is no, or you are not sure, then you may need to think about your ideas more carefully.

When doing this, it is also important consider the competing influences and pressures on religious leaders, communities and organisations in relation to conflict and peacebuilding.

For example, whilst an idea or initiative might seem reasonable and self-evident, are there legal or political pressures, or risks for religious actors becoming involved in a peacebuilding process? Does ethnic identity trump religious affiliation in this particular conflict, meaning that religion may not be as influential as might be hoped? Has religious identity been amongst the drivers of conflict, and therefore are actors likely to respond positively to further involvement at this point in time?

It is imperative to be self-analytical and honest about the likely impact of your ideas – if not, you will likely embark on a project or initiative which will have much less impact than desired, and waste precious resources.

RELIGIOUS ASSETS FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Since its inception, *Religions for Peace* has recognised and worked tirelessly to reduce the catastrophic threat to the planet brought about by nuclear weapons. The hugely impressive *RfP* youth initiative Arms Down! collected over 20 million signatures supporting the abolition of nuclear weapons from 140 countries, and was recognised by H.E. Mr. Sergio de Queiroz Duarte, the United Nations Secretary-General's High Representative for Disarmament. *RfP* is also very proud to be an international partner of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which won the Nobel Peace Prize for its work in 2017.

For the purposes of this Commission Paper, nuclear weapons and disarmament can be perceived, analysed and addressed in ways similar to those for any other structural and societal conflicts. Use the Conflict Analysis Table to consider the main challenges in your context in relation to nuclear disarmament, and use the Religion and Conflict Transformation Table to consider the main areas of transformation you can realistically engage in with your available resources, and—if resources are not currently available—what you need and how you will get it.

CASE STUDY

Nuclear Disarmament

Religions for Peace has consistently challenged the moral legitimacy of security strategies that rely on the use or threat of nuclear weapons. With one voice, spoken from our various traditions of faith, we have worked in unity to raise awareness among people and advocate to governments that nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction are immoral and criminal, and that stockpiling such weapons with the intent or threat to use them erodes the very foundation of moral civilization.

Section 3: Mobilising Actors for Peacebuilding

Ideally, peacebuilding would take place at the local, national, regional ad global levels simultaneously, in a coordinated and interconnected programme. However, this scale of peacebuilding is often beyond the capacity of most actors and initiatives, and building just and sustainable peace is usually more of an accumulation of smaller incremental projects and initiatives.

Building on the understandings of conflict and peacebuilding you have gained from Sections 1 & 2, Section 3 of this Commission Paper concerns itself with identifying the actors, resources and partners required to actualise and implement your peacebuilding plans.

Resource Identification

In order to put a peacebuilding initiative into action, you will need to identify where the resources will come from. Resources usually include personnel, funding, knowledge and expertise, skills and capacity, and partners or stakeholders. Filling in the Resource Identification Table below might help you to clarify what resources are needed for your peacebuilding plans.

PROJECT ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES		
	Existing	**Required**
PERSONNEL		
FUNDING		
KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE		
SKILLS AND CAPACITY		
PARTNERS/ STAKEHOLDERS		

DRAWING ON THE *RFP* GLOBAL NETWORK

RfP has over many years built an extensive global network of religious actors working tirelessly for peace. *RfP* has organisations and affiliates at global, regional, national and local levels, with extensive reach into societies around the world. It also has a history of significant success in building multi-religious platforms for conflict prevention and transformation.

RfP also brings together members of the world's great religious traditions, many of which have their own networks and/or hierarchies that can be utilised and mobilised for conflict transformation and peacebuilding activities. In addition, many *RfP* members and organisations have existing relationships with governments, international and multinational institutions, and peacebuilding organisations.

These relationships and networks mean that religious groups, and *RfP,* can have a substantial role in peacebuilding. Drawing on *RfP* networks can help create networks of peace across the world, and recruit and mobilise religious actors to help realise peacebuilding plans. Collaboration with affiliates from other countries and regions is a fundamental dimension of *RfP's* work, is strongly encouraged at all levels, and is an important resource that should be considered as part of your peacebuilding efforts.

WOMEN AND YOUTH NETWORKS

Essential elements of the *RfP* network are the *Religions for Peace* Global Women of Faith Network and the Global Interfaith Youth Network.

A "network of networks", the *Religions for Peace* Global Women of Faith Network brings together diverse women of faith to promote their leadership, coordinate strategies and pool resources and capabilities for cooperative action for peace. The Global Women of Faith Network consists of more than 1000 religious women's organizations at the national and regional levels in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. Similarly, the Global Interfaith Youth Network, led by the International Youth Committee (IYC), is composed of regional committees and networks that bring together youth to confront some of our most urgent challenges— building peace, ending poverty and protecting the Earth.

It is well documented that women and youth are often disproportionately affected by conflict, and their experiences of violence and conflict differ in many ways to those of men. There is also increasing evidence that women and youth play very specific and important roles in peacebuilding processes.[17]

Therefore it is imperative that in understanding and transforming conflict, the voices and perspectives of women and youth are prominent in the conflict analysis process. More desirably, if the context and culture allows, women and youth should have central and clearly defined roles in all peacebuilding efforts.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP

Despite the significant influence and resources possessed by religious actors in many contexts, it is highly unlikely that religious actors can implement and manage the complex and long-term processes involved in conflict transformation alone.

Furthermore, no person is "just religious"; individual and group identities are complex, and in situations of conflict those identities are often affected by a range of competing religious, social, economic, political and personal factors and pressures. As a result, a multifaceted and multi-stakeholder approach is usually required for sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation.

A multi-stakeholder approach has been shown to enhance effectiveness through the sharing of knowledge and resources; avoiding duplication of efforts; enhancing networks and contacts; training and capacity building; and modelling cooperation and friendship, amongst other things. Other stakeholders might include religious organisations; secular peacebuilders; and local, national and international institutions and organisations.

Creating effective partnerships requires careful consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of your own and other organisations. The Resource Identification Table should have helped you identify the gaps and needs you might want a partner organisation to help address.

The following questions may also be useful when trying to consider which partners might be most appropriate to work with:

- What is the mission of the agency or organization? Does it align with the mission of your own congregation/institution/peacebuilding plans?
- Has the organization worked collaboratively with other organizations in the past? If so, how did they get on and how might multi-religious collaboration be different?
- Does the organization have the necessary resources/skills/expertise required to help address the problems you have identified? If so, what are they?
- Specifically how might your organisation or institution benefit from this partnership?
- What are the possible challenges that can be anticipated?[18]

Considering these questions should help you identify appropriate partners with which you can form strong, collaborative and mutually beneficial relations. Non-religious and institutional peacebuilders are increasingly looking for religious actors to fulfil donors' funding criteria, so it is important to be sure that potential partners are not looking merely to instrumentalise your religious identity or assets, but will treat you as a full and respected partner, and respect your religious traditions, ideas and beliefs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The *Religions for Peace* World Assembly is an immensely important opportunity for *RfP* members to work together to identify and address the drivers of violent and structural conflict in their own countries and contexts, and to plan for future efforts to work for the enhancement of peace, stability and harmony across the globe.

Experience and evidence show that conflict can only be prevented and transformed when the causes are fully understood, interventions are tailored to the specific context and meticulously planned, and approaches are multifaceted and supported by a variety of stakeholders.

Religious actors and assets can often play a significant role in transforming conflict and helping bring communities and societies back together after violent conflict, and in addressing structural discrimination and oppression. However, it is important that the leveraging of religious assets, and the mobilisation of religious actors, is informed by careful consideration and planning.

This Commission Paper has hopefully helped you in this process. Guided by the three sections in this Paper, you are hopefully in a position to prepare an informed and succinct report to be received at the regional and international levels. It might comprise:

- A brief introduction to your country/context;
- Drivers of conflict and peace and your main challenges/strategic priorities;
- Your most relevant religious strengths/assets for addressing conflict;
- A brief assessment of resources, both existing and required;
- A summary.

Please be assured that your contributions to these worldwide consultations are valued and important for our understanding of the challenges faced by religious actors across the world, and for informing *Religions for Peace*'s strategic direction and priorities in the coming years.

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Endnotes

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