

Effectuating Change Through the G20 Process

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I. Introduction

First, let me thank the organizers for inviting me to take part at this important conference. I welcome in particular the opportunity to be again in Türkiye and to reflect on the themes of this conference.

I am here as President of the G20 Interfaith Forum Association.¹ For convenience, I will refer to this organization in my remarks simply as “IF20,” short for “Interfaith 20.” This name is analogous to that of various formal G20 engagement groups that have grown up as a system of stakeholders that bring specialized experience in guiding global processes. This includes groups such as the “B20” for business, the “L20” for labor, the “U20” for urban affairs, the “W20” for women, and the “Y20,” for youth, and numerous others.² The IF20 is not a formal engagement group, but because of the strength of its connection to religious groups, is often treated as a comparable G20 stakeholder. For the past twelve years, our organization has held forum events to contribute to recommendations coming from each year’s G20 Summit. Thus, we held a conference in Istanbul in 2015 when Türkiye was the G20 host country. In addition to each year’s G20 Interfaith Forum, we hold various other events, webinars, communication

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¹ For more information on IF20, see our website at www.g20interfaith.org. The site explains not only our mission and activities, but also our history of working with the G20 process over the past decade plus. Submenus there direct you to our Resource Hub, our Events, Webinars, News, our Viewpoints Blog, working groups such as the Human Trafficking Working Group, and more general information “About” the organization. For more on our mission, see www.g20interfaith.org/about.

² For an overview of engagement groups, see “Sherpa Track, Finance Track, and Engagement Groups: What are the G20 ‘workstreams,’” *The Indian Express*, Friday, Nov. 17, 2023 (News/Explained/Explained Global). The list of formal engagement groups has been expanding over time. By the time of the South African G20 in 2025, the list exceeded 20 groups. Several G20 countries have recommended that IF20 be granted formal engagement group status, but while we have often been treated as the functional equivalent of a formal engagement group, political opposition from some G20 countries to religion-related organizations has limited our access to formal status. This has not been a problem in practice, since most G20 countries have been anxious to work with us.

opportunities, and impact sessions aimed at demonstrating what faith in action can do.³ Our focus has moved beyond “dialogue” to “diapaxis”—that is, to finding ways that various religious communities can not only come to know each other better, but can actually work together in ways that will solve real-world problems.

Our mission is “to provide thought leadership on global public policy questions where religious communities’ unique insights demonstrate how faith can be put into action for the common good. By mobilizing an international network of faith leaders around the G20 process, the IF20 highlights practical solutions to care for the vulnerable.”⁴

Because the United States is the G20 host country this year, we will hold our main Forum this year in my home state, in Salt Lake City, Utah. The opening ceremony will be a combined session with global religious leaders addressing common concerns, complemented by a concert of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The closing session will be held in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Madeleine, and will feature a hand-over to next year’s local organizing chair of IF20 events planned for the United Kingdom: i.e., Lord Russell Rook of the UK House of Lords. He will speak at the Utah Forum, outlining the faith-in-action campaign that is already underway and will be centered in the UK. Between those two events we are planning over twenty substantive sessions that will help focus on ways that religious communities can help identify concrete recommendations and can contribute to actual implementation of broader G20 policies. Priority impact areas will include the fight against hunger, global efforts to reduce trafficking and modern forms of slavery, efforts to advance health care, environmental action on various fronts, religious freedom, and a variety of other areas where G20 policies can advance the common good.

³ See activities “Events” menu on the IF20 website: www.g20interfaith.org.

⁴ For more on our mission statement, go to the IF20 website, click on the “About Submenu” and a brief version of our mission statement appears there. For the full version, see www.g20interfaith.org/mission..

We are conscious that we live at a time of conflict and polycrises. The multilateral order on which we have depended to stabilize and order global economic affairs seems to be unraveling. On every front, global leaders are looking for ways to reorder the landscape in which we live. This includes concerns about global warming, concerns for distribution of water resources and protection of rainforests and other green space that has been a major focus here, and a variety of related issues, such as the debt crisis, women's empowerment, the uncertain implications of the new world of artificial intelligence, and the challenges that will face children and families.

In this context, I want to make one simple point. Whatever new structures emerge to deal with global challenges, it will be a mistake not to involve religious communities in finding answers. The best empirical evidence we have gathered over the past two decades confirms that protecting the freedom of all religious groups holds the key to advancing the common good on many fronts.⁵ Religious communities are more closely involved in the actual issues people face on the ground than any other organizations. Their voices reflect the pluralism of our times, but that pluralism holds the key to peace, social integration, and involves institutions with the most extensive experience in crisis response, peace building, health care, education, poverty alleviation, and countless other vital social needs. Even more importantly, their voices are among the most trusted on earth, and they have the capacity to mobilize social capital at every level,

⁵ See generally Allen D. Hertzke, *Why Religious Freedom Matters: Human Rights and Human Flourishing* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2026); Nilay Saiya, *The Global Politics of Jesus: A Christian Case for Church-State Separation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).; Jonathan Fox, *Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me: Why Governments Discriminate Against Religious Minorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Jonathan Fox, *The Unfree Exercise of Religion: A World Survey of Discrimination Against Religious Minorities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jonathan Fox and Jori Breslawski, "State Support for Religion and Government Legitimacy in Christian-Majority Countries," *The American Political Science Review* 117, no. 4 (Nov. 2023) 1395-1409. DOI:10.1017/ S0003055422001320.

from the global to the local. They remain in place at a time when other institutions require rethinking and restructuring and they can play a vital role in the new social institutions that will crystallize in the near future. They hold vital keys to collaboration in finding productive solutions to many of the polycrises we face. We invite others to join us in exploring how much can be positively accomplished through working with the G20 process in ways that promote not only dialogue and cooperation, but diapraxis and faith in action.