

The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA)

Promoting Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All

Background:

Together with Inner Sense and Earth Charter Netherlands, the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values brought together leaders, experts and activists from a wide range of religious, spiritual and indigenous traditions for the “Wings for Water” Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Water. This Dialogue, which was hosted by the Dutch government, took place on March 21st in the Peace Palace in The Hague, as a pre-event of the international celebrations of World Water Day 2013 on March 22nd. The excellent inputs and presentations from the different leaders and experts revealed that the world’s religions can contribute immensely to the aim of achieving a water-secure world, especially given their capacities to reach large numbers of people. Some 5 billion people worldwide belong to a religious community, according to UNICEF, “their leader’s potential for action is substantial.”¹

The gathering also highlighted several highly-successful faith-based initiatives on water, such as the efforts of:

- Ganga Action Parivar (GAP): a catalyst that brings together the faiths of India to protect and restore the Ganga River. The Ganga is a lifeline for more people than the populations of the United States, Russia and the Netherlands combined, yet every day it is polluted by some 2 billion litres of sewage and 1 billion litres of toxic chemicals, to deadly effect. GAP provides and promotes sanitation, potable water, tree plantations, public awareness programmes and more.
- The Jordan River Rehabilitation Project by Friends of the Earth Middle East. The award-winning project brings together Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders in collaborative action for the rehabilitation of the Jordan.
- The “Islam and Water” education programme supported by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), which is creating water awareness among Muslim communities in several countries.
- The Ecumenical Water Network of the World Council of Churches, which is working with 349 churches and Christian organizations worldwide to facilitate an exchange of information on the world’s water crisis.
- The Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, which is coordinating the activities of the many different Roman Catholic relief agencies.
- BRAC, the world’s largest non-governmental development organization (based in Bangladesh). BRAC has developed a successful curriculum on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for Imams in Bangladesh.
- The All India Organization of Imams of Mosques, the umbrella organization for over 500,000 Imams in India.

As a direct outcome of Wings for Water, the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA) is being formed as the world’s first initiative to bring together the power of the world’s many faiths to save lives and enhance public health by teaching Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) while also providing improved Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) training and facilities. Under the Interfaith WASH Alliance, for example, a regionally-modified version of BRAC’s educational programme and ARC’s Water Schools will be propagated in India through the All India Imam Organization, which will enable its 500,000 Imams to promote WASH and CLTS to millions of Muslims across the Indian sub-continent.

During an informal follow-up meeting in the Dutch foreign office on April 17th, 2013, GIWA’s organizing partners agreed to use the months of May to September 2013 to prepare the public launch of this crucial alliance, which could take place end of September in New York City.

Rationale:

History reveals that in many instances, severe social challenges could only be tackled and finally overcome when religious leaders and their communities weighed in on the causes with all their moral, social and economic capital. Shining examples are the abolitionism-movement, spearheaded by evangelical Christian groups in the 18th and 19th century; the Satyagraha-Movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi, that ended colonialism in India; the Civil Rights Movement, guided by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which put an end to racial segregation in the United States; the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa, which gained its strength and final victory from a massive support by South Africa’s faith communities, including the Anglican Church, headed HH Archbishop Tutu; and more recently the Jubilee

¹“From Commitment to Action,” United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Religions for Peace, February 2010

2000 Campaign spearheaded by an ecumenical alliance that managed to generate much public and political attention for deep relief issues. It is also a hopeful sign that over the past years an increasing number of religious organizations came together at major UN summits on sustainable development and climate change to appeal to the political leaders to do good on their international commitments and bring the world on a sustainable course. At the Rio + 20 Summit in June 2012, faith-based organizations joined forces as an “unofficial 10th major group”. The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance seeks to build on this legacy that underscores that despite ongoing interreligious tensions in some parts of the world, the world’s religions are increasingly realizing that they desperately need each other to jointly create a world of peace and justice where nobody is being degraded. It is this increased readiness of the religions to collaborate that provides a major incentive to create this Global Alliance.

One of the major global challenges of today is the shameful fact that despite all massive economic progress achieved in many parts of the globe in the post WW-II era, over 780 million people worldwide lack access to safe and sustainable drinking water and over 2.5 billion people live without access to adequate sanitation. While the aim of halving the number of people living without sanitation by 2015 has been added to the MDGs in 2002, the MDG on sanitation is among the goals where the least progress has been made. The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance intends to draw inspiration from historical guideposts and modern advances to galvanize unprecedented collaborative action among the world’s religious and spiritual traditions, governments, international organizations, businesses, civil society organizations, indigenous communities and youth, to create a world where improved sanitation and safe drinking water will be in reach of every human being.

Vision

The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance envisions a water-secure world in which universal access to safe and sustainable drinking water and improved sanitation will be accessible to all by the year 2025.

Aims and Objectives:

- Mobilize religious leaders, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and through them the large number of people who belong to a religious community to help achieve the MDG on Sanitation.
- Encourage religious leaders to play an active role in appealing to local government to fulfil their responsibilities in providing access to sanitation, safe drinking water, and garbage disposal.
- Actively participate in the global consultations on the MDG’s successor, the Sustainable Development Goals, which constitute a core element of the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda.
- Save the lives of millions of men, women and children by enabling faith-based organizations to engage in Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) Programmes and WASH training, while also providing sanitation facilities, improved access to water and sanitation, as well as more pristine aquifers.
- Significantly reduce child mortality rates due to unsafe drinking water, deplorable sanitation and poor hygiene (a leading cause of childhood deaths, taking the lives of one child every 15 seconds)².
- Significantly improve the situation of girls and women, who suffer the most from the deprivation of nearby safe water and enclosed sanitation facilities.

Tasks and Activities

1. Documentation and Networking:

- Provide an international platform for FBOs that are working on WASH, facilitate a sharing of knowledge and experience and scale up their activities by bringing them together with governments, businesses and donor agencies
- Document good practice models of faith-based engagement on WASH and “mainstream” these good examples among religious institutions through the creation of curriculum, videos and instructional graphics alongside the capacity building of faith-based WASH trainers and leaders.
- Inspire local partnerships between UN field agencies, aid agencies and religious institutions on WASH and CLTS
- Document what our world’s sacred texts and spiritual leaders say about water and sanitation and make those quotations and words of wisdom available educationally to large audiences.

2. Awareness-Raising and Advocacy:

² "Goal: Ensure environmental sustainability, " United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), <http://www.unicef.org/mdg/environment.html>, Accessed May, 2013

- Tap into the numerous existing interreligious networks to engage religious leaders and their communities in a global awareness-raising campaign that highlights the sanctity of water as a common theme among the diverse religions and promotes access for all to clean water, sanitation and hygiene.
 - Engage FBOs in advocacy work at the UN, facilitate interreligious meetings and side events at important international conferences related to water and sanitation, such as World Water Week in Stockholm and the 2013 UN MDG Review Summit in New York.
 - Formulate a strong and unified message from the world's religions for the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda.
- 3. Education and Project Implementation** (*through project partners in selected target countries*)
- Inspire, scale up and help implement regional Interfaith WASH Alliances, such as the Interfaith WASH Alliance, India, developed by Ganga Action Parivar and the India Heritage Research Foundation, in collaboration with many partners.
 - Bring the successful model and experience of the Indian Interfaith Alliance to other selected target countries, such as Indonesia
 - Scale up best practiced educational programmes, such as the “Water School” Programme of the Alliance on Religion and Conservation (ARC)
 - Conduct a series of seminars in Muslim countries specifically on Muslim women and WASH issues. These seminars will lead up to the World Muslim Leadership Forum in June 2014 in London.

Membership and Management Structure

The GIWA will be developed as a non-hierarchical network of equal partners collaborating on issues concerning water, sanitation and hygiene. Faith-based organizations, relief agencies, communities of all religious and spiritual traditions and interested NGOs working on WASH are invited to join the Alliance. Governments, International Governmental Organizations and businesses are encouraged to become strategic partners. Members and partners are invited contribute to GIWA's formation by contributing strategic advice, expertise, and seed funding for the conceptual design and the launch the Alliance. Supporting organizations are also encouraged to help the GIWA to make some progress on the ground by supporting several selected pilot projects that will demonstrate the kind of interfaith collaboration on water and sanitation that the Alliance envisions to encourage.

Building on the facilitating role it played during the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Water, the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values will oversee the conceptual development of the Global Alliance. The Institute will do so in close partnership and consultation with the Dutch foreign ministry, Ganga Action Parivar in India, Inner Sense in the Netherlands, the Ecumenical One World Initiative in Germany and other organizational partners. The partnering organizations will develop a Board of Directors and denominate staffing patterns, and will bestow an international GIWA executive team with the operative management.

Timeline: Formative Phase, June to October 2013

In its formative phase, the GIWA executive team will take on the following tasks and activities:

- Develop a working Board of Directors and denominate staffing patterns
- Draft A GIWA Concept Paper, to be distributed widely to solicit feedback, input and engagement from a broad range of potential partner organizations including: religious communities, interfaith organizations, faith-based charitable organizations and relief agencies, UN agencies, governments, businesses, civil society organizations focussing on water and sanitation and youth organizations.
- Produce a GIWA 3-Year Plan, outlining the core activities of the Alliance and key benchmarks and milestones
- Create a Comprehensive Fundraising Plan that highlights innovative funding options on water-related projects and rural water development.
- Develop and launch a promotional website that provides an online platform for faith-based organizations that are working on WASH and connects them to international institutions working on these issues
- Formally launch the GIWA at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA
- Begin development of GIWA curriculum and programmatic interventions for use in the field
- Participate in key international events and meetings that enable the formation of lasting networks and partnerships

Operational phase, November 2013 to December 2016

In its operational phase, the GIWA will execute the tasks and activities outlined above, especially:

- Prepare and launch a global outreach campaign to raise awareness on the global water and sanitation challenges among religious communities and faith-based organizations
- Solicit commitments and action projects from faith-based organizations to improve the situation of men, women, and children who are lacking access to water and sanitation, to enforce the human right to water and sanitation on a global scale, and to use the remaining time until September 2015 to make progress on realizing the MDG on sanitation
- Provide strategic advice and assistance for the realization of these commitments and projects
- Gather and prepare tool-kits, curriculum and materials that can be adapted to diverse cultural and religious contexts to help religious communities engage in Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) Programmes and WASH training and make these available free of charge
- Facilitate the participation of faith-based organizations in central international events on water, the MDGs and the Post 2015 UN Development Agenda and encourage dialogue about a joint advocacy strategy including shared goals and policy recommendations, and this way helping the religions to speak in a strong and unified voice on these crucial issues

THE LAUNCH OF THE GIWA IN NEW YORK CITY END OF SEPTEMBER 2013

During the Wings for Water follow-up meeting, the Dutch foreign office suggested that GIWA should be launched in New York City end of September where several important events will be taking place, including the opening of the General Assembly's 68th session on September 17, the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit, September 19th to 20th, the International Day of Peace on September 21st, as well as the UN General Assembly's special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals on September 25th. This event is expected to review progress on the MDGs and to set a course for formulating its successors, the Sustainable Development Goals.

The planned event will be organized as part of the successful series of multi-stakeholder dialogues organized by Inner Sense, Earth Charter Netherlands and the Soetendorp Institute including Wings for Rio + 20, Wings for Earth Charter, and most recently Wings for Water that all were held in The Hague and saw the participation of high-level leaders from many different fields of society. The event will make strategic use of the important international gatherings taking place in New York City to bring together 80 – 100 leaders from governments, the United Nations, civil society, business, interfaith and religious leaders, indigenous communities and youth. It will be hosted by the above mentioned partners of the "Wings" conferences, the Ganga Action Parivar and a coalition of Interfaith Organizations in New York City such as the Temple of Understanding. New York City has been chosen as the location for GIWA's launching to demonstrate its strong connection to the United Nations and the important contribution to the UN-led international processes on water and sanitation, especially in the MDG / SDG framework.

The aims of the event are:

- To share good practice examples of faith-based projects and initiatives on water and sanitation,
- To draw up a strategy for engaging the world's religions and all people of faith in collaborative action for providing universal access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation.
- To celebrate the launch of the GIWA and adopt a 3- Year Plan
- To expand GIWA's membership and broaden its base of support among governments, UN organizations, business and youth organizations

It is the aim of the GIWA empower every group of religious and spiritual people to start their own activities and projects on WASH and engage in an unprecedented collective action towards the realization of the MDG on water and sanitation, and to bring a spirit of inspiration, collaboration, compassion and hope into existing networks and planned international events on WASH. As Rabbi Soetendorp writes about the MDGs: *"I believe with complete faith that our spiritual traditions must and will answer the challenge and together help immensely to reach these goals. We are called by the All Merciful One to sanctify time, and devote the remaining two years, every hour, every second to the alleviation of misery, to the provision of water, sanitation, health, food, education and peace."*

Budget:

Minimal seed funding required to prepare and launch the Alliance, June to October 2013: 50.000 € + additional funds for the pilot projects (separate budgets are being prepared); a more detailed breakdown will be provided upon request.

Donations received so far:

- 6.000 € from the Ecumenical One World Initiative, Germany raised in small-scale individual donations

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