

Fragile contexts, strong women

The role of religious leaders and faith-based organizations in promoting women's leadership

Concept Note

In the world today, there are dozens of ongoing conflicts and emergency situations. In many of these fragile contexts, women and girls are uniquely affected, facing particular risks and challenges, including trafficking and violence. Women's gifts, insights, and abilities are key to addressing these problems, yet too often they are excluded from participation in leadership and decision-making.

Pope Francis has highlighted women's unique gifts and contributions, noting that "when women can transmit their gifts, the world finds itself more united and more peaceful" (Homily, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, 1 January 2020). Faith and religion often have significant influence on political, social, and cultural norms in many areas, as religions and faith-based organizations are embedded within local communities and form part of the fabric of society. While women's leadership, protection and respect for the human rights of women within religion is sometimes contested, faith leaders and faith-based organizations have in fact played important roles in addressing and overcoming harmful traditional beliefs and practices that disregard women and girls' dignity and undermine their rights. These efforts to promote a more just society in turn foster more inclusive approaches to addressing poverty, violence against women, harmful social practices, conflict and peace building, including through the participation of women in those efforts at all levels of society.

Caritas Internationalis, an international confederation of Catholic charitable organizations, works at the grassroots level in almost every country in the world to respond to conflicts and disasters, hunger, lack of access to healthcare, the needs of migrants, and lack of development—efforts in which women have often played a key role. It is committed to the promotion of women's leadership, recognizing its special responsibility to ensure that women are afforded meaningful participation in decision-making spaces related to peace, security, and humanitarian crises. In line with this, it has prepared a resource for its member organizations and other interested stakeholders entitled *Equality, Encounter, Renewal: A Caritas commitment to the promotion of women's leadership and participation, based on the Holy Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching values and principles*. This publication offers reflections and examples of women's leadership and engagement in its vital work to care for those in vulnerable situations.

Caritas Internationalis' experiences working in local communities offer valuable insights and examples of the role of religious leaders and faith-based organizations promoting women's leadership and meeting women's needs. Its deep reach at the grassroots, national, regional and global levels, working with local churches and religious leaders, enables it to effectively address the feminization of poverty through projects and programs which understand and concretely address the needs of women, girls and communities as a whole.

Speakers:

- H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, *Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations*
- Kerry Robinson, *President, Catholic Charities USA*
- Helen Kezie-Nwoha, *Executive Director, Women's International Peace Center, Cordaid partner*
- Anahit Mkhoyan, *Director, Caritas Georgia*
- Alistair Dutton, *Secretary-General, Caritas Internationalis*
- Brenda Arakaza, *President, Development & Peace, Caritas Canada (moderator)*

Organizers: The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations and Caritas Internationalis.

Attendees are requested to register online at <https://holyseemission.org//19MarchEventCSW68>. Those without UN grounds passes must register by 14 March. The event will be live-streamed via UN WebTV.