



# WELCOMING THE STRANGER

CONSULTATIONS BY FAITH  
ACTORS IN AFRICA REPORT



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION







# ACRONYMS

CARD	Churches Action Relief and Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMC	Ibrahimia Media Center
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Office of Migration
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MOHDEVS	Moravian Humanitarian and Development Services
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN	United Nations
WUFBON	Western Uganda Faith Based Organizations Network



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## Scriptures on how to relate with strangers

### BAHAI

#### BAHA'U'LLAH, GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHU'U'LLAH, P. 285

Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor and look upon him with a bright and friendly face.

### CHRISTIAN

#### LEVITICUS 19:33-34

"The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

### HINDU

#### TAITIRIYA UPANISHAD 1.11.2

Let a person never turn away a stranger from his house, that is the rule. Therefore a man should, by all means, acquire much food, for good people say to the stranger: 'There is enough food for you.'

### MUSLIM

#### QURAN 4:36

Do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbour from among your own people, and the neighbour who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, the wayfarer, and your servants.

### SIKH

#### GURU GRANTH SAHIB

None is our enemy, none is stranger to us, we are in accord with one and all.

### CONFUCIUS

#### LUN YU 12.2 CHUNG-KUNG

#### (ONE OF SHENG REN STUDENTS ASKED ABOUT HUMANITY (REN))

Sheng Ren said, "When you go abroad, behave to everyone as if you were receiving a great guest. Employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice. Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you. Then there will be no complaint against you in the state or in the family"

### BUDDHIST

#### UDANAVARGA 5:18

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.



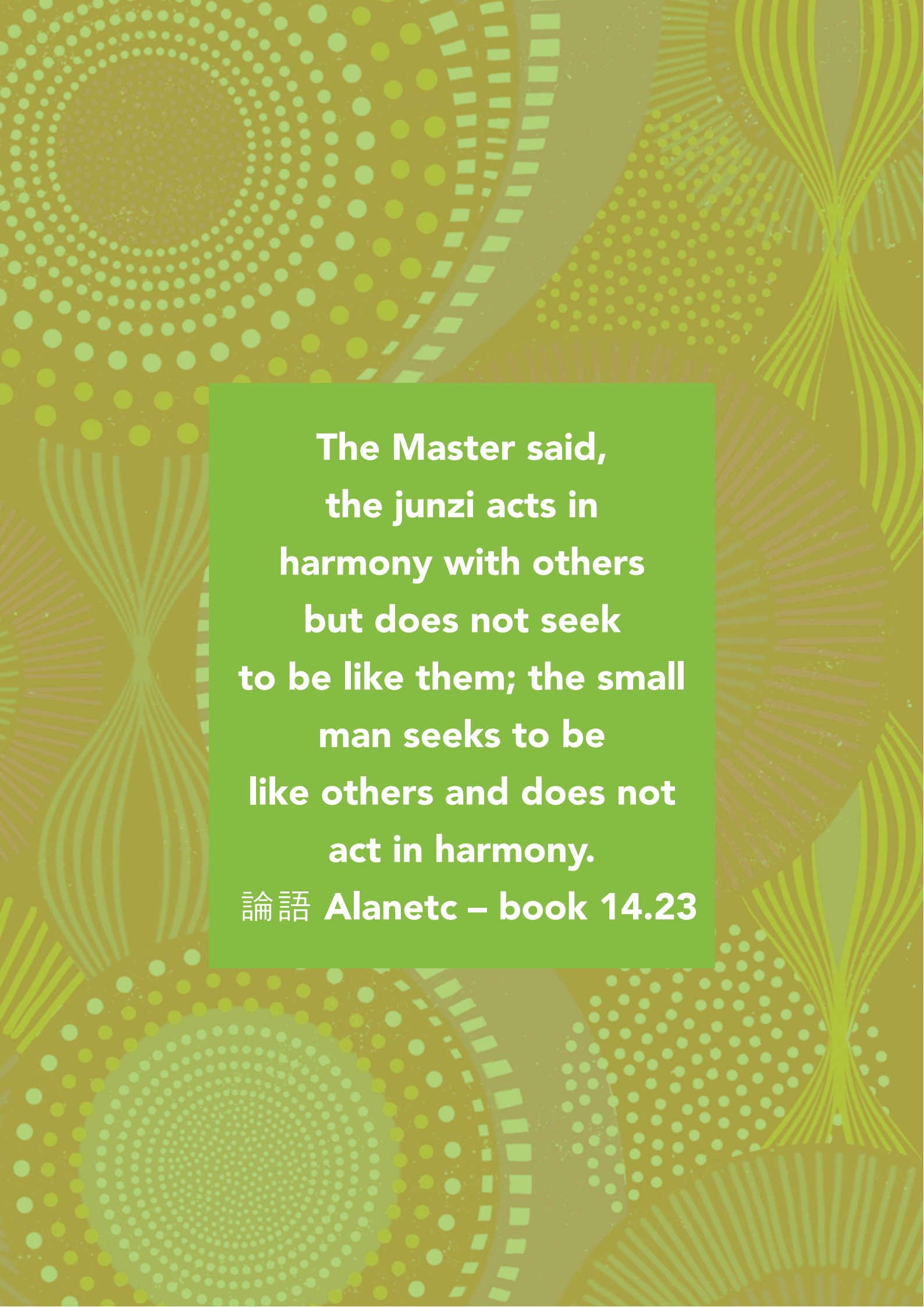
## **UNHCR - WELCOMING THE STRANGER: AFFIRMATIONS FOR FAITH LEADERS**

A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same.

Together with faith leaders, faith-based organizations and communities of conscience around the world, I affirm:

- I will welcome the stranger.
- My faith teaches that compassion, mercy, love and hospitality are for everyone: the native born and the foreign born, the member of my community and the newcomer.
- I will remember and remind members of my community that we are all considered “strangers” somewhere, that we should treat the stranger to our community as we would like to be treated, and challenge intolerance.





**The Master said,  
the junzi acts in  
harmony with others  
but does not seek  
to be like them; the small  
man seeks to be  
like others and does not  
act in harmony.**

**論語 Alanetc – book 14.23**





# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & INTRODUCTION**





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), **Faith to Action Network** organised a series of regional consultations with faith actors in the East and Horn of Africa, Southern Africa and Northern Africa regions. The three consultations brought together 78 faith actors to share personal experiences and perspectives, best practices, and recommendations for the inclusion and protection of refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), migrants and returnees in their regions.

Participants joined from Egypt in the North Africa region; Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia in the East and Horn of Africa regions; and Eswatini, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Zambia in the Southern Africa region. Each consultation hosted 15-30 participants (27 from the East and Horn of Africa region, 34 from the Southern Africa region and 17 from North Africa) and was facilitated by a locally selected facilitator who was familiar with the region and context. The consultations were held online using the Zoom platform and lasted 3 hours.

Participants shared insights into the trends and challenges of “Welcoming the Stranger” and offered a diversity of examples of faith-based interventions. Collectively, contributors to the consultations had a wide range of experience in a variety of contexts. Some worked with refugees and IDPs from conflict zones such as Sudan, Syria, North Ethiopia, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and elsewhere. Others assisted returnees from violent extremist groups or human trafficking in Gulf countries, as well as returnees who were economic migrants. Some helped people fleeing climate change and natural disasters. Others helped those forced to migrate due to human rights violations or poverty.

The interventions represented by contributors were equally varied and ranged from humanitarian to psycho-social, from legal accompaniment to peacebuilding with host communities. Some of the interventions resisted conventional silos, integrating peacebuilding into humanitarian, income generating and educational initiatives benefitting hosts as well as refugees or migrants.

Contributors identified **structural barriers** to assisting the “stranger” – such as limited access to services, administrative and political obstacles to legally registering and obtaining identification documents, and delays in family reunification. These obstacles render people more vulnerable to harassment from police or host community members. Funding and capacity constraints lead to overcrowding and degradation of human dignity.

Consultation participants also discussed at length **conflict, identity, mistrust and trauma** dynamics, all of which influence migrant experience. Conflict between hosts and refugees, xenophobia, and the particular stigma and fears affecting people returning from human trafficking or economic migration inform faith actors’ program design and approach to offering aid.

In contexts where there are high levels of mistrust between refugees and host communities, **faith actors are uniquely positioned to tap into the trust that parties put in their faith leaders and use existing faith networks** and religious structures to channel assistance. Religious groups and centers are often the referral point for newcomers – people and other institutions will direct them to faith organizations for initial support. This can become particularly effective when interfaith alliances are formed.



## Recommendations

The consultations generated recommendations for practitioners, researchers, academic institutions, host country governments, regional governmental bodies and the international community. They focused on the need for better collaboration, protection and integration.

As first and last responders to needs of refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), migrants and returnees in their regions, faith actors mobilize institutional and community resources to respond to these needs. Lack of additional financial and technical support was observed as a barrier to responding to future emergencies. Consultation contributors recommended further collaboration among faith actors, as well as among government sector, donor organizations, INGOs and faith communities to develop long-term, comprehensive, collaborative multi-sectoral approaches to tackle issues, identify gaps and avoid duplication of services. They urged host governments and regional bodies to implement and enforce existing protective policies to better safeguard vulnerable migrants from police and border harassment, as well as from xenophobic attacks. They recommended that host governments do more to integrate refugees and migrants into health, education, and economic systems and that the international community support local efforts to involve host communities in development and aid to refugees. Funding for peacebuilding, trauma counseling and psychosocial support is integral to mitigating tensions between hosts and migrants and promoting sustainable self-reliance.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report was made possible by the collaboration and joint efforts of a vibrant and committed team of people throughout Africa. Farida Abdul Basit, Sostina Takure, Zanele Makombe, Bornface Mafwela, Musa Peter Dlamini, Nagwa El Deeb, Yilma Hirpa, Lameck Nkhoma, Rev Moses Atuhare and Youstina Mikhael helped to mobilize the consultation participants in their respective regions and countries. Their networks and understanding of who brought the relevant experience ensured that the consultations were rich in content and learning for all. They also helped after the consultations, facilitating follow-up interviews, checking quotes with participants, and sending additional information as needed.

Lutheran World Federation and GIZ/BMF supported the consultations and are a crucial part of ensuring that the resulting recommendations and insights are shared with a broad, international audience.

Dr Kinyua Hassan Omari, Nagwa El Deeb, and Tamuka Charles Chirimambowa each brought their outstanding facilitation skills along with their understanding of the region to ensure that each consultation drew out the wisdom and experience the participants had to offer.

The team at Faith to Action Network – Judy Amoke, Hezron Masitsa, Tendai Muchada, Peter Munene and Michael Ngara – coordinated the consultations, liaised with regional focal points, read and re-read drafts of the report and case studies. It is only through their diligence and commitment that the consultations were able to be such a success. With their support, Laura Shiplier Chico, developed the consultation facilitation guide and materials, and was the author of this report.

Special thanks to Youstina Mikhael, Salam Sabano, Mabvuto Simbi, Belinda Gondwe, Reverend Moses Atuhare, and Esperande Bigirimana, who provided and shared their personal perspectives and experience, arranged follow-up interviews, sent supporting documentation, reviewed drafts and contributed directly to the development of the case studies included in this report. Passainte Sameh provided excellent translation during the online consultation and interviews.

Lastly, all the participants of the consultations who gave their time and contributed their ideas – they taught us so much, and inspired us to keep working, keep growing and keep touching lives.



## INTRODUCTION

In partnership with Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Faith to Action Network organised a series of regional consultations with faith actors in the East and Horn of Africa, Southern Africa and Northern Africa regions<sup>1</sup>. The three consultations brought together 78 faith actors to share personal experiences and perspectives, best practices, and recommendations for the inclusion and protection of refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), migrants and returnees in their regions.

The world has faced a global migration and displacement crisis over the past decade, with 79.5 million people being forcibly displaced worldwide in 2020, including 26.4 million refugees and 48 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)<sup>2</sup>. In addition, there is an increasing number of migrants who leave their home countries due to poverty and a lack of prospective, oftentimes through irregular and highly dangerous channels which makes them susceptible to life threatening risks. Irregular migrants are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking and forced labour<sup>3</sup>. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities of people on the move, particularly of those

being forcibly displaced<sup>4</sup>. Migration is a very complex issue, and the experiences of people on the move vary greatly across time and space. There are differences in terms of their level of vulnerability and resilience, the degree of informed choice and voice, the degree of trauma, the length and number of displacements, and the availability of voluntary options for their future. Legal and/or political definitions according to which migrants “deserve” protection and asylum status have been shifting against the backdrop of the politicization of migration in different national contexts.

The world has witnessed increasing discrimination, xenophobia, and exclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants during their journeys, upon arrival in receiving countries and/or upon return to their home communities. Conditions often undermine human dignity, whether in transit or upon arrival. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to become victims of human trafficking, forced labour and sexual exploitation during their journeys, making up 74% of the estimated 90,000 cases of human trafficking in 2020<sup>5</sup>. According to the IOM’s Missing Migrants Project, 30,900

Faith to Action Network is a global interfaith network of 110 Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, and Muslim faith organisations in 26 countries in 4 continents. It focuses on issues that faith actors are grappling with, including peaceful co-existence and inclusion. The network combines innovative, evidence- and faith-backed community-based programming with national, regional, and international dialogue and advocacy to influence change at all levels.

1 Countries included Egypt in the North Africa region; Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia in the East and Horn of Africa regions; and Eswatini, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Zambia in the Southern Africa region.

2 The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 2020, Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2020

3 IOM, 2018, Global Migration Indicators 2018

4 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2020, Migration Factsheet No. 6 – The impact of COVID-19 on migrants, Synthesis analysis drawing on IOM’s World Migration Report series

5 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019, World Migration Report 2020



persons reportedly lost their lives or went missing during their journeys from Africa to Europe between 2014 and 2018, with the Mediterranean Sea having seen the highest number of deaths<sup>6</sup>. Those who return to their homes come back traumatized and oftentimes experience further stigmatization by their families and home communities.

Religion has been manipulated by political leaders and populist movements in receiving countries as a tool to justify or push their own agendas and undermine inclusive societies. While many faith communities continue to speak up for positive transformation, inclusive, dignifying and just societies, others have joined the narrative of fear and exclusion, and are themselves using religious language to influence the political discourse. Similar patterns of religious instrumentalisation can be seen in countries of origin. Political and religious leaders have spread myths about migration, driving people to seek greener pastures in “promised lands” abroad, oftentimes through irregular channels despite related dangers and risks. Religion can be both a push and a pull factor in conflicts and migration.

Based on their wide reach and moral authority, faith actors play an important role in raising awareness and framing narratives surrounding migration in origin, transit, and receiving countries. They can relate to people’s faith convictions, which play a major role in both decision making and coping with trauma. Their broad outreach and local connectedness

provide them with the potential to raise awareness on risks surrounding irregular migration in areas with limited access for international organizations or government authorities. In contexts of politicized narratives around migrants and refugees, faith-based actors can build upon their moral authority and credibility to speak up for justice and for welcoming the stranger.

The UNHCR recognises faith actors as being able to “leverage significant social, physical, and spiritual assets<sup>7</sup>”. With their far-reaching networks they are “widely present in all parts of a country,” and “their presence does not necessarily depend on external or international funding. They often remain long after international attention has faded, and funding has declined<sup>8</sup>”. Their positioning also renders them front line responders in times of shock and stress.

From humanitarian support to legal aid, from peace building to negotiating safe passage, faith actors play a broad and varied role. In some contexts, faith actors may have legitimacy on many sides of a conflict, enabling them to cross borders, negotiate with soldiers or access camps. In conflict areas, such as Burundi or the Democratic Republic of Congo, faith actors have been instrumental in readying communities to accept returnees back, sometimes after decades of displacement.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR Partnership Note on Faith-Based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders, 2015 <https://www.unhcr.org/539ef28b9.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid





# METHODOLOGY





Faith to Action Network hosted three online consultations in three different regions of Africa bringing together 78 faith actors from 12 countries<sup>9</sup>. Each consultation was facilitated locally and offered participants the opportunity to share their own lived experience and best practices in “Welcoming the Stranger.” In small groups and larger plenary sessions, they discussed the challenges faced in each context and developed recommendations for improved practice and for international policy makers and donors.

## PARTICIPANTS

Faith to Action activated its networks, working with focal points in each country to identify faith actors who work for the inclusion and protection of refugees, internally displaced people, migrants and returnees.

Participants joined from Egypt in the North Africa region; Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia in the East and Horn of Africa regions; and Eswatini, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Zambia in the Southern Africa region. In each of the three consultations, there were participants who had been refugees themselves and are now working to help others, including people from Syria, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These participants had the unique perspective of having been both the recipients and providers of services.

Participants ranged from faith leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations to individuals connected to a faith organization but working in a secular capacity. Most participants were direct practitioners, but there were civil servants as well as academics and researchers who took part in the consultations

as well. Some worked for government, and one for the UN’s International Office of Migration. Participants were primarily Muslim and Christian, with one participant who practiced the Bahai faith. They worked as volunteers or paid staff in a range of contexts including refugee and IDP settlements as well as helping to integrate newcomers into mainstream society.

Refer to annex 1 which contains the participants names who made this consultation possible.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE CONSULTATIONS

Each consultation hosted 15 - 35 participants and was facilitated by a locally selected facilitator who was familiar with the region and context. The consultations were held online using the Zoom platform and lasted 3 hours.

The Southern Africa region consultations were originally planned to be held physically in South Africa. However, Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions and mitigation measures required adapting to a virtual consultation.

Faith to Action Network developed an in-depth facilitator’s guide and accompanying power point presentation to support the local facilitators, with the understanding that each facilitator had the freedom to adapt the material to the group and context. The facilitator’s guide included:

- an overview of the background and purpose of the consultations
- guidelines for creating a safe space for dialogue in an online format

<sup>9</sup> 27 from the East and Horn of Africa region, 34 from the Southern Africa region and 17 from North Africa.



- a checklist and instructions for preparing for the consultation
- a sample agenda and facilitation instructions for the recommended content
- relevant resources on the theological framing and the Global Compact on Refugees

The specific agenda of each consultation was contextualized and tailored to participants, but all consultations included the following content:

### Welcome and Introductions

Opening Prayer(s) or Blessing

Participant Introductions

Theological Framing (just in East and Horn of Africa)

### Background: Why this Consultation

Purpose of the Consultation

Introduction to the Global Compact on Refugees

### Lived Experience – Stories of Struggle, Perseverance and Hope

Small Group discussion – Context,

Challenges and Successes

Report back to Plenary

### Shaping the Future

Recommendations for Improving Practice

Recommendations for the International Community

### Closing

Evaluation in Chat Box

Closing prayer

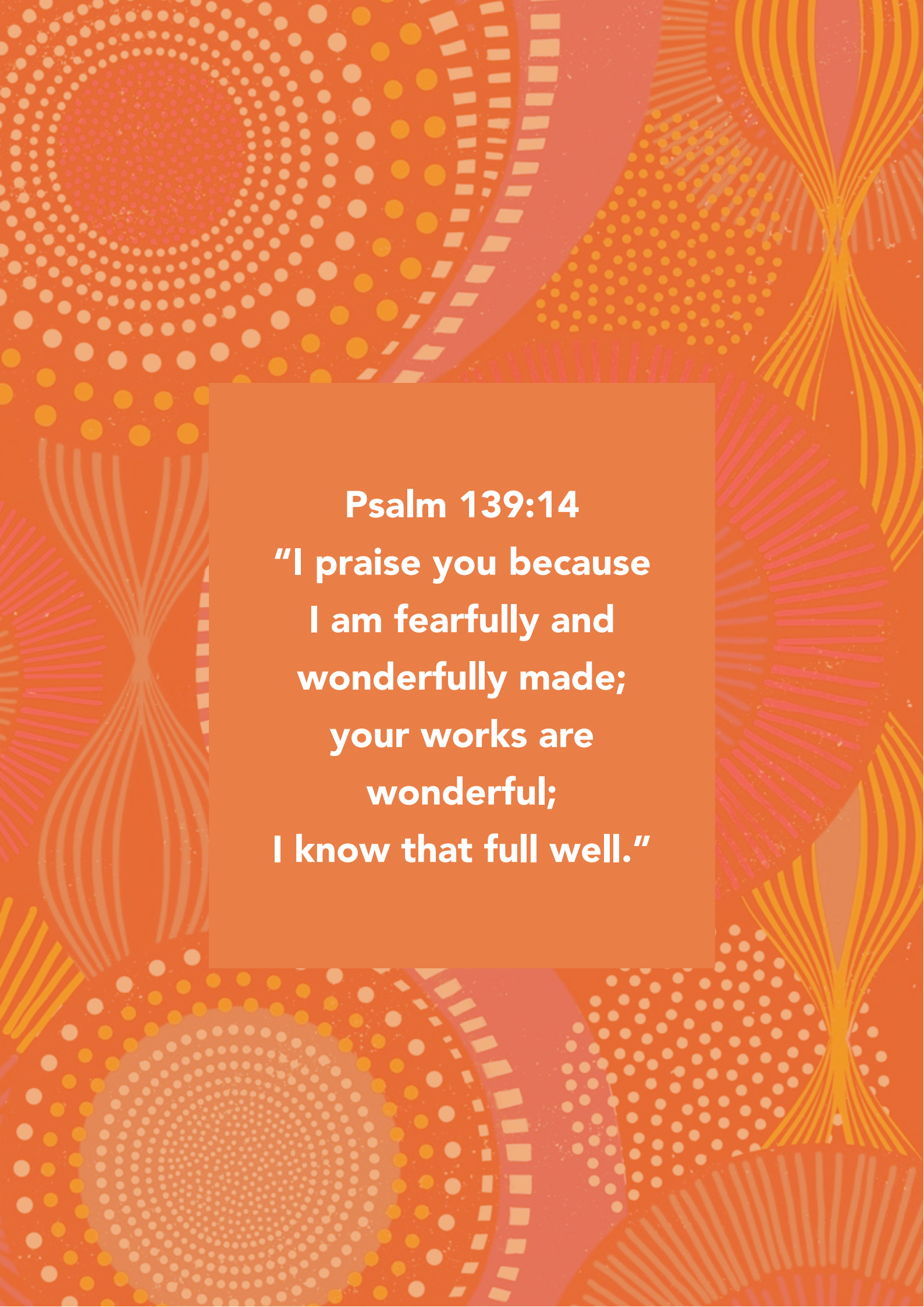
## LIMITATIONS

Hosting online consultations have the benefit of being able to bring together people from multiple countries at a fraction of the cost. This enabled a rich exchange of information from a broad variety of contexts and experience. However, connectivity issues at times meant that some participants were dropping off and reconnecting throughout the sessions, which impeded their ability to fully contribute.

Not every consultation accurately reflected the religious diversity of the region in which it was taking place. This was particularly true in the Southern Africa region, in which almost all participants were Christian, and it proved challenging to mobilize Muslim, Bahai or representatives of other faiths. The Eastern and Horn of Africa region had the most diversity with an equal distribution of Muslims and Christians, and one member of the Bahai church also present.

The Zoom platform enabled simultaneous Arabic to English translation for the North Africa region. The participants conversed in Arabic, and the translation enabled Faith to Action staff and the rapporteur to follow the conversation. However, occasionally the translation or technology did not work as smoothly, and simultaneous translation was not available in small groups. This limited the English speakers from fully following the content. This was mitigated by follow-up interviews and detailed notes from the Arabic-speaking facilitators.





**Psalm 139:14**  
**"I praise you because**  
**I am fearfully and**  
**wonderfully made;**  
**your works are**  
**wonderful;**  
**I know that full well."**





# FINDINGS





Participants shared insights into the trends and challenges of “Welcoming the Stranger” and offered a diversity of examples of faith-based interventions. This section examines the major themes that cut across the three regions. After laying out the varied contexts in which participants work, and the types of interventions they employ, this section looks at the structural barriers that exist for migrants as they attempt to access services, and at the underlying conflict, identity issues and mistrust that are exacerbated by these structural realities.

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

A number of participants expressed discomfort with the term “stranger,” while others used it often as it is a broad and more inclusive and encompassing term than “refugee” or ‘migrant.’ Some suggested using the phrase “Welcoming our Neighbor.” As one participant said:

“How we call things matters. Having myself been subjected to xenophobic attitudes, I read the phrase “Welcoming the Stranger” with significant loathing. The title “Stranger” introduces the problem of “Othering” fellow humans. I also find it so strange that the Governments officially call foreigners “aliens”! Great care must be taken when naming things in explosive and volatile situations. In a context where violence, murder, drug peddling, rape, and all social ills are attributed to the stranger/alien, it is imperative for us to create language that challenges and changes people’s thought patterns and practices. I argue that in the Biblical times, like in Matthew 25:31-40, the noun ‘stranger’ had positive connotations unlike in current days. In our context, the word stranger creates a divide between “us” and “them”. Use of words like ‘brother’, ‘sister’ ‘neighbour’ or ‘fellow Africans’ is preferable because they build bridges over chasms created by ‘strangerhood’. As ‘fellow Africans’ together we then need to be addressing the underlying drivers that force people to flee their own homes, these include political conflict, political violence, corruption, and systemic poverty. Together, we need to work on developing systems, structures, partnerships, and networks of solidarity at local, national, regional, and international levels.”

**Dr. Douglas Dziva, South Africa**

In this paper, the term “stranger” is used in quotes, with an acknowledgement of both the spiritual resonance of the term as well as the discomfort it causes.

## A BROAD RANGE OF CONTEXTS

Collectively, the participants had a wide range of experience in a variety of contexts. Some worked with refugees and IDPs from conflict zones such as Sudan, Syria, North Ethiopia, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and elsewhere. Others assisted returnees from violent extremist groups or human trafficking in Gulf countries, as well as returnees from economic migration or armed groups. Some helped people fleeing climate change and natural disasters (like famine, flooding, mudslides and cyclones). Others helped those forced to migrate due to human rights violations or poverty.



## A VARIETY OF FAITH-BASED INTERVENTIONS

The interventions were equally varied and ranged from humanitarian to psycho-social, from legal accompaniment to peacebuilding with host communities. Some of the interventions resisted conventional silos, integrating peacebuilding into humanitarian, income generating and educational initiatives by including hosts as well as refugees or migrants.

Participants made the point that simply assisting migrants is addressing a symptom rather than the root cause; many talked about playing a role in preventing the conditions that drive people to move or flee to begin with through anti-corruption campaigns, poverty mitigation and peacebuilding in conflict areas. There were examples also of settled refugees in Egypt, Uganda, and South Africa offering help to newcomers or to the community at large. Some organizations were gifted at not merely viewing refugees as beneficiaries, but also at looking for their strengths and their skills and enabling them to contribute what they could to their church, mosque, or neighborhood.

Table 1: Interventions by Consultation Participants

<b>Humanitarian Aid</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Food security in camps</li> <li>• Hygiene and startup kits</li> <li>• Clothing</li> <li>• Sanitary supplies</li> </ul>	<b>Peacebuilding &amp; Social Cohesion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community dialogue</li> <li>• Peacebuilding training</li> <li>• Countering violent extremism</li> <li>• Community sports days</li> <li>• Fun days for children</li> <li>• Invitations to attend matches</li> <li>• Joint income generation with host communities &amp; refugees</li> </ul>	<b>Legal Assistance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration with UNHCR</li> <li>• Registration with government</li> <li>• Accessing documentation</li> <li>• Accessing services</li> <li>• Know your rights campaigns</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up schools in camps</li> <li>• Early childhood education</li> <li>• Primary and Secondary schools</li> <li>• Vocational training</li> <li>• Scholarships</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Integration into host schools</li> <li>• School breakfast and lunch</li> <li>• School supplies</li> <li>• Language classes</li> <li>• PSHE education</li> </ul>	<b>Psychosocial Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Social reintegration of human</li> <li>• Trafficking returnees</li> <li>• Women's solidarity groups</li> <li>• LGBTQ+ solidarity groups</li> </ul>	<b>Protection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child protection</li> <li>• Albino services and protection</li> <li>• LGBTQ solidarity groups</li> </ul>



Economic Empowerment	Spiritual Support	Advocacy and Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business startups</li> <li>• Income generation activities</li> <li>• Farming and Agriculture</li> <li>• Livestock management</li> <li>• Link with job opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spiritual counseling</li> <li>• Sermons of hope and inclusion from faith leaders</li> <li>• Educating faith organizations on migrant needs</li> <li>• Inclusion in mosque/church activities</li> <li>• Awareness raising for faith</li> <li>• Leaders on human trafficking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic research</li> <li>• Countering human trafficking</li> <li>• Through lens of gender justice</li> <li>• Lobbying to classify Xenophobia as hate crime</li> <li>• Campaigning against police</li> <li>• Harassment</li> <li>• Advocacy for basic rights</li> </ul>

“Some of us are driven by experience. So when we start using our experience of pain, our experience of going hungry and going that long distance, we are able to help in bridging that gap from now to later. And that “Later” what does it look like? It is sustainable – where you have successful projects that are sustainable, empowering, helping and in response. When our brothers and sisters are empowered, in turn, they start being part of building the community. They start responding positively to the economy of the country, the economy of the region. So, they start living out their love as being economically viable parts of the community.”

**Reverend Lerato Pitso, South Africa**

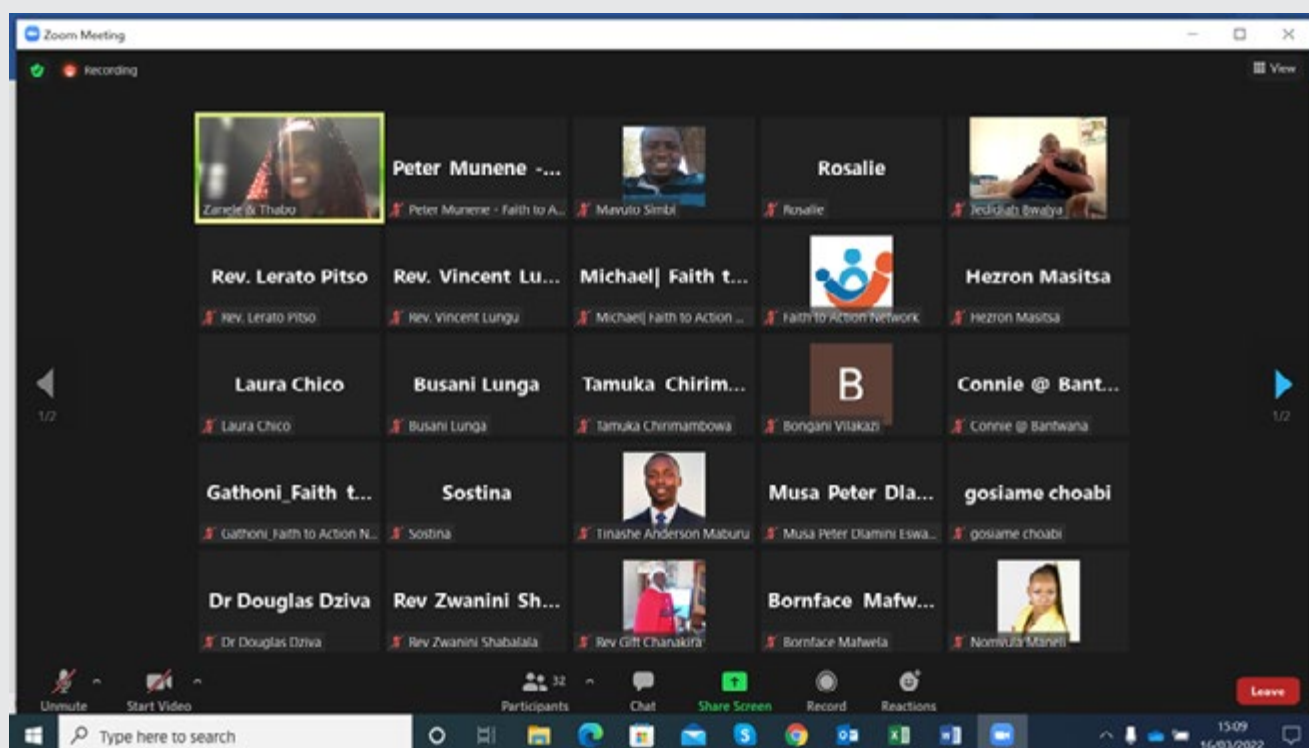
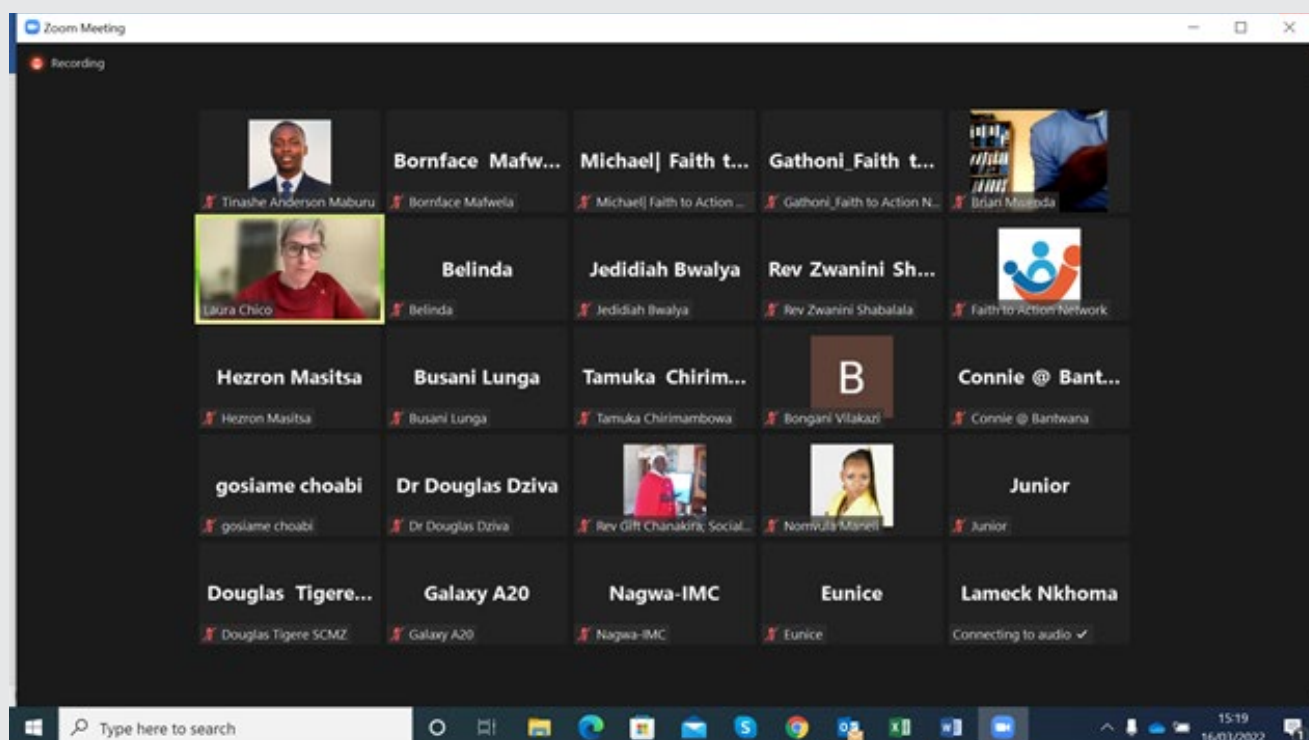
## STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO ASSISTING THE “STRANGER”

From this broad foundation of lived experience, participants in the three consultations reflected on the themes, challenges, and barriers to hosting and/or assisting refugees, migrants and returnees. The structural barriers – such as lack of access to services, funding restraints, difficulty in securing government-issued identity papers, and government policy – present a backdrop against which other tensions and conflicts play out in communities where there has been an influx of refugees, IDPs or returnees.

“I entered Uganda when I was alone and left my family behind. I was still a child. I looked and looked for them, until I heard where they were... I tried to connect and do a family reunion...but it took six months to be with my parents. During that time, I would reach on any office that was working on my issue, they would only tell me to wait. Refugees meet challenges of not being heard. Secondly, of not getting a proper explanation. Because someone, if you don’t explain to him, you’ll find that he will say you are not working on him, why are you not working on him... Someone has to explain to you that because of this and this, we are doing this, so be patient.”

**Emmanuel Irafasha, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Uganda**







## Access to services

Across all three regions, participants complained of delays to services as well as limited access to even the most basic of assistance, including health care and food. Sometimes migrants can't access services because they are undocumented or do not have legal status in their host country, they do not know services for them exist, or because the process of getting legal documentation is so lengthy. Language differences can exacerbate delays when people cannot express themselves clearly without the assistance of translation. Many refugees are coming from conflict zones, and have had long and painful journeys, bringing with them their own cultures and values—so even if they are offered services in some cases they may be slow to accept help. This is where faith organizations have an advantage: consultation participants in every region observed that often people are more inclined to trust faith leaders than government officials or secular NGOs.

Delays in family reunification or the provision of alternative childcare arrangements can have knock on effects. In Kenya, for example, Somali children who are separated from their families are often taken in by other refugee families as foster children. But when they can't take care of them, it is not uncommon for young girls to be forcibly married to older men or subjected to different forms of sexual violence<sup>10</sup>.

To combat this, some faith organizations, mosques, and churches are helping new arrivals with their registration and accessing identification documents. They run awareness campaigns for faith groups to educate people about the services available.

## Conflict with government systems

Signatories to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention are obligated to protect refugees. However, many vulnerable migrants do not meet the stringent definition of "refugee" or have long waiting periods in overcrowded camps where they seek to be registered. Laws and policies are not always enforced, and there are many who fall beneath the radar of official policy. Countries have varying policies around encampment versus integration, having a significant impact on migrants' ability to become self-reliant in their host countries.

Police harassment of migrants happens across all regions. When migrants have no legal standing in their host country, this makes them particularly vulnerable to police beatings, demands for bribes and arrests. It also makes many migrants more reluctant to seek assistance through official channels, even when they do have the legal right to be there. Consultation participants referred to this as "violating the violated."

Some faith organizations have partnered with legal aid agencies to advocate for migrant and refugee rights. One group organizes a 'Know Your Rights campaign' for new arrivals to help not only with access to services but also to combat police harassment and human rights violations. Some have brought key stakeholders together to advocate for basic rights and freedom from police harassment for all migrants. Those working with human trafficking returnees have been working to dismantle trafficking rings, but it proves difficult because of a reluctance on the part of survivors to testify against family or friends due to fear of backlash.

<sup>10</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, "A network to stop early marriage" <https://kenyasomalia.lutheranworld.org/content/network-stop-early-marriage-131>



In each context, faith organizations need to navigate the local laws and legal constraints in order to provide help. In Egypt, for example, evangelism is not welcomed, and so when the Coptic Church wanted to organize humanitarian aid delivery to a large group of refugees of different religions, they had to arrange for home delivery because calling a large inter-faith group to their church would arouse suspicions.

### Funding and capacity constraints

Funding constraints mean that the numbers of vulnerable people are usually higher than the funding received, or the funding is project-based and not sustainable over the long-term. This was true for a vibrant two-year long children's program integrating Syrian children into Egyptian society. It had huge success, but now the project has ended – no follow-up with the children is possible, nor is further work with them as teenagers or with their younger siblings. So, though the gains made were considerable, something is lost.

Overcrowded refugee settlements – one example in Malawi that was built for 10,000 and now has over 50,000 – leads to environmental degradation, poor health, and insecurity. Faith actors may be able to meet some immediate needs, but they are not always skilled in advocacy. For example, in Zimbabwe there are communities being displaced but, as one consultation participant said, “the church is quiet.” Although there are examples of religious institutions speaking out against human rights violations and corruption<sup>11</sup>, consultation participants agreed that there is a need for increased collective ecumenical action and skill building to determine the best way to protect the community.



When strangers come, there is always suspicion. People will not just welcome any stranger in their midst, because you never know, maybe he is a thief, has bad intentions. In northern Malawi, they take the stranger to the pastor or village headman. Traditional and religious leaders are supposed to welcome strangers in our context.

That happened to me in 2012. I was then ministering a congregation... and there were a lot of people coming from Ethiopia and Somalia through Tanzania. They had problems because the police in Tanzania beat them and took their passports. People sent them to me. I welcomed them, gave them food, shower. Then people came to me and said, no, you shouldn't have welcomed them because it's against the law. If the police hear, you will be in trouble. So, we needed to find a way to help them to go.”

**Rev. Dr. Mwawi Chilongozi - Malawi**

## CONFLICT, IDENTITY, AND MISTRUST

### Conflict with host communities

Across all three regions, there are problems of resentment and mistrust between the “stranger” and host communities. In contexts where there is already extreme poverty, conflict arises over limited resources. This is exacerbated by policies and funding streams that are perceived to privilege refugees over host communities or internally displaced people (IDPs). For example, in Uganda where there is annual flooding, IDPs cannot access aid in the same way as refugees. There is resentment from host communities

<sup>11</sup> Chingono, Nyasha, “Catholic bishops in Zimbabwe speak out for first time on human rights abuses.” <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/aug/24/catholic-bishops-in-zimbabwe-speak-out-for-first-time-on-human-rights-abuses-mnangagwa> (August 2020)



when “strangers” are allowed to run small businesses. In many contexts, there is a perception that they are stealing business opportunities. Disparate aid to refugees leads to bullying, harassment, attacks and rapes of people perceived to be foreigners. Businesses can be vandalized.

Many of the consultation participants design their interventions to mitigate this conflict and to promote social cohesion between hosts and refugees or returnees. For example, participants have reached out to host community religious leaders to promote messages of welcome. They have hosted community dialogues with leaders from both within refugee settlements and the host community. One settlement in Malawi, after lobbying from local village elders, has implemented guidance that 40% of aid beneficiaries should come from the host community. A children’s project in Egypt included half Syrian and half Egyptian children, as well as half Syrian and half Egyptian adult facilitators. One innovative project by Churches Action Relief and Development in Malawi includes a process where local people loaned land to refugees for one year to farm and in return they were invited to participate in educational and sustainable livelihood schemes.

### **Racism and the crisis of identity**

Just as in other parts of the world, racism plays a role in how people are welcomed in Africa. One consultation participant in South Africa said, “If you are White or Indian, you get a better welcoming than a Black person in South Africa, even FROM a Black person. We are not welcoming to especially Africans... even though we are Africans.”

Xenophobia has risen sharply in South Africa, with political rhetoric scapegoating refugees and asylum seekers. It is increasingly common for foreigners to be threatened, harassed, sexually exploited, and even brutally murdered. Many receive substandard treatment in schools and health facilities.

In Egypt, it is common for gangs who run street begging operations to force children to pretend to be Syrian to garner sympathy and aid, making it difficult for faith-based organizations to differentiate and know who to help.

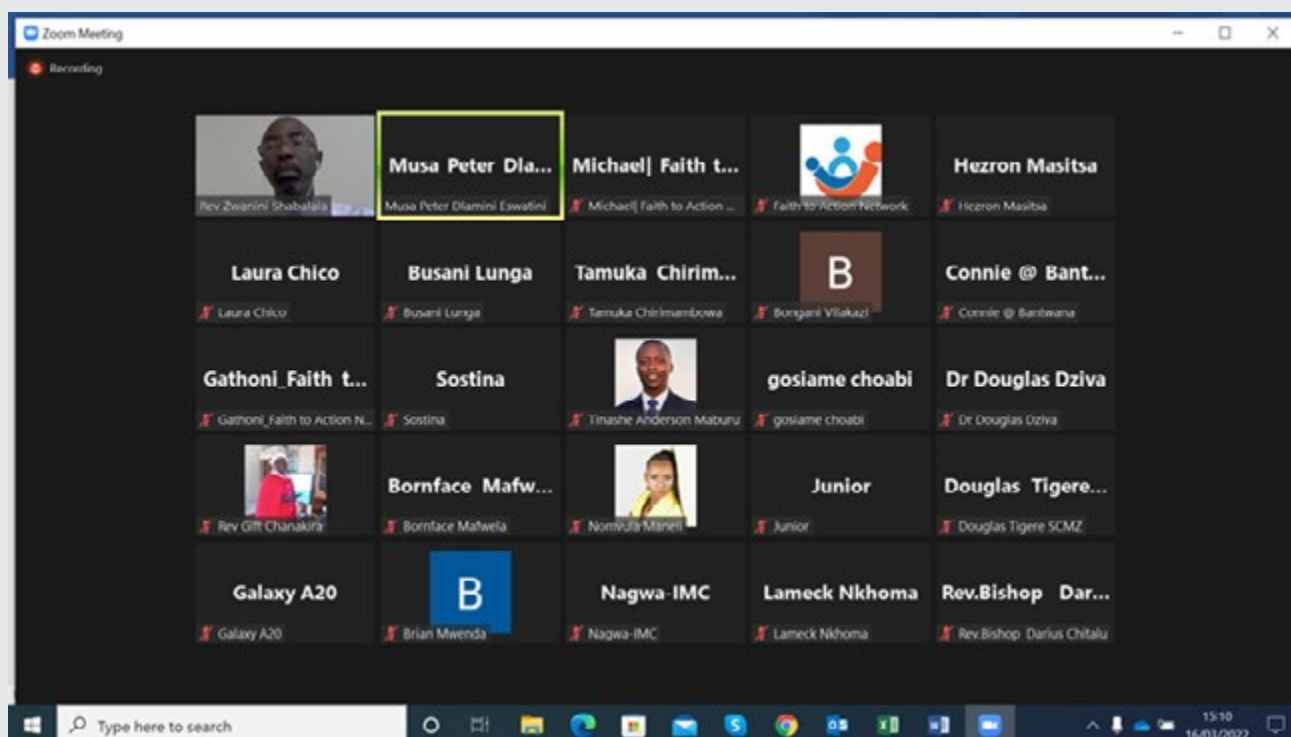
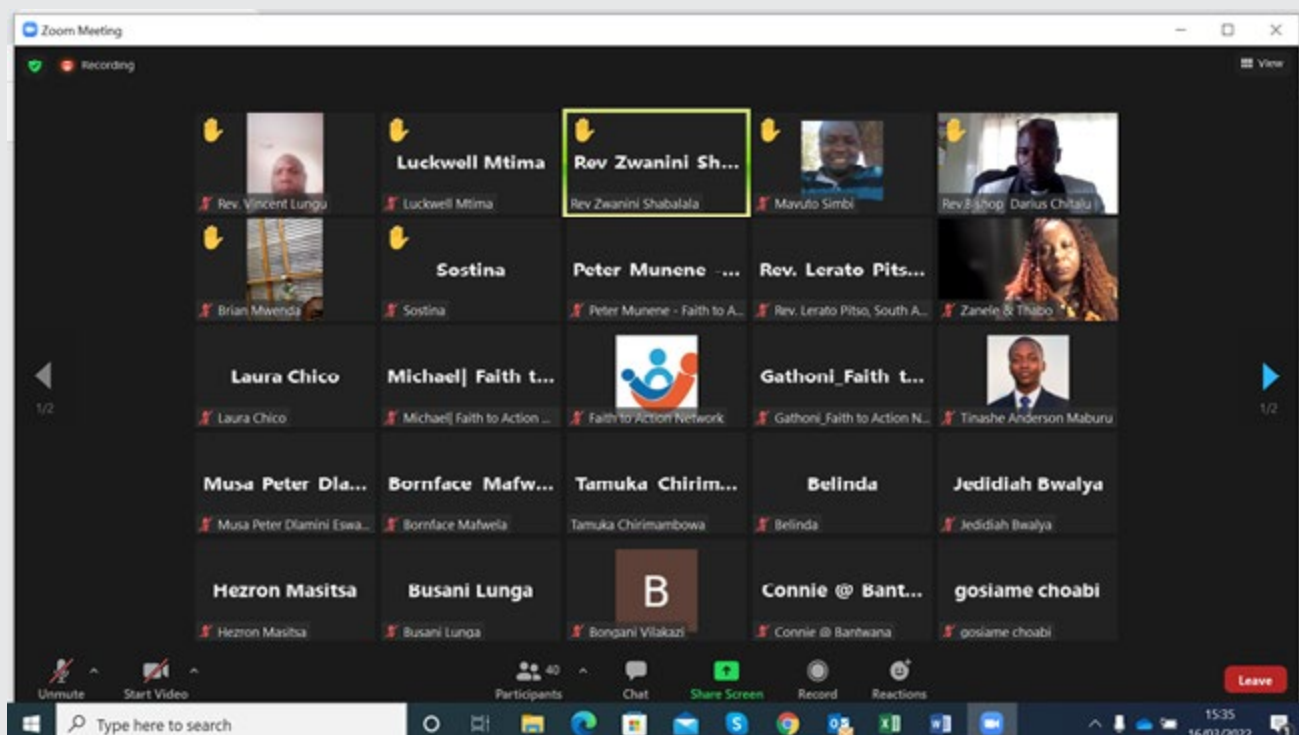
These dynamics are exacerbated by fears that “strangers” are bringing with them political agendas, enmities from conflict zones, and even weapons. Meanwhile, newcomers can mistrust the motivations of service providers and can be reluctant to accept legal or psychosocial help.

In Egypt, consultation participants spoke of the need to be sensitive to Syrian refugee’s sensitivities about preserving their identity – they saw themselves as Syrian and not Egyptian. This was particularly important for Christian faith organizations who reached out to Muslim refugees – they needed build trust and demonstrate that they were not trying to change or convert anyone, simply to assist with integration and resettlement.

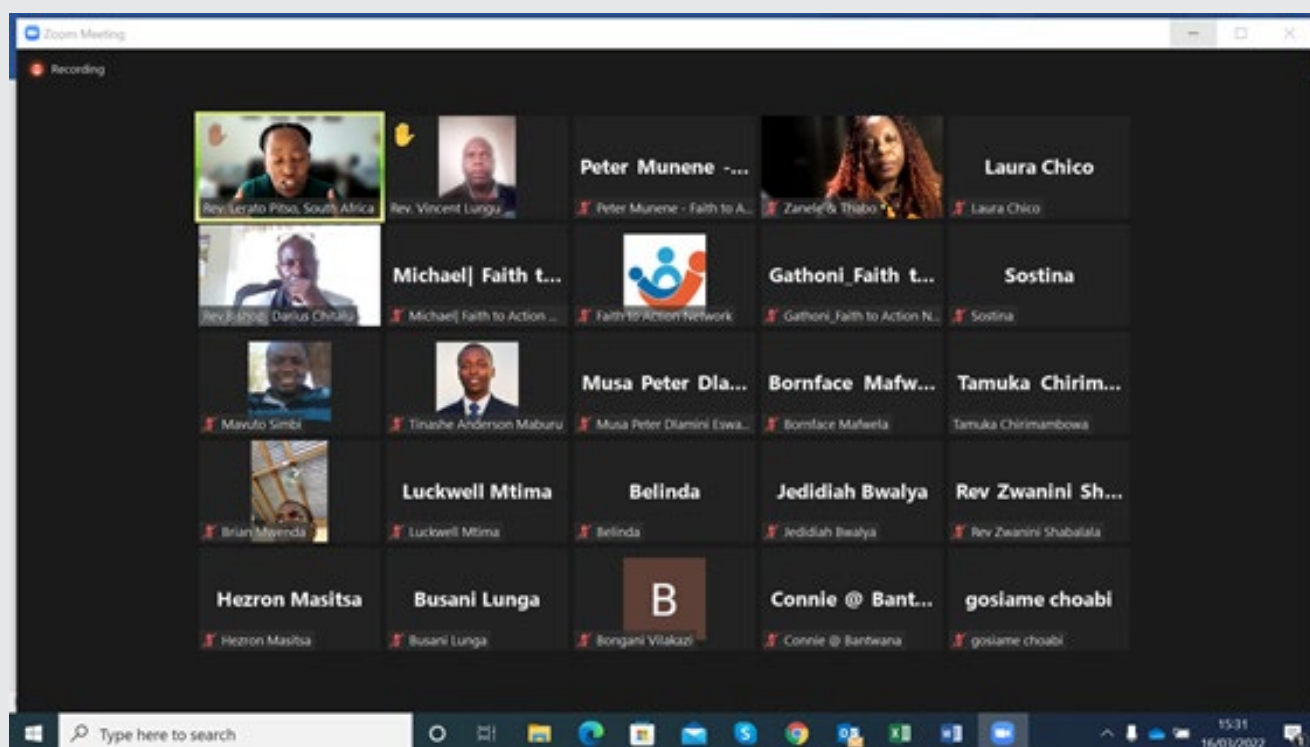
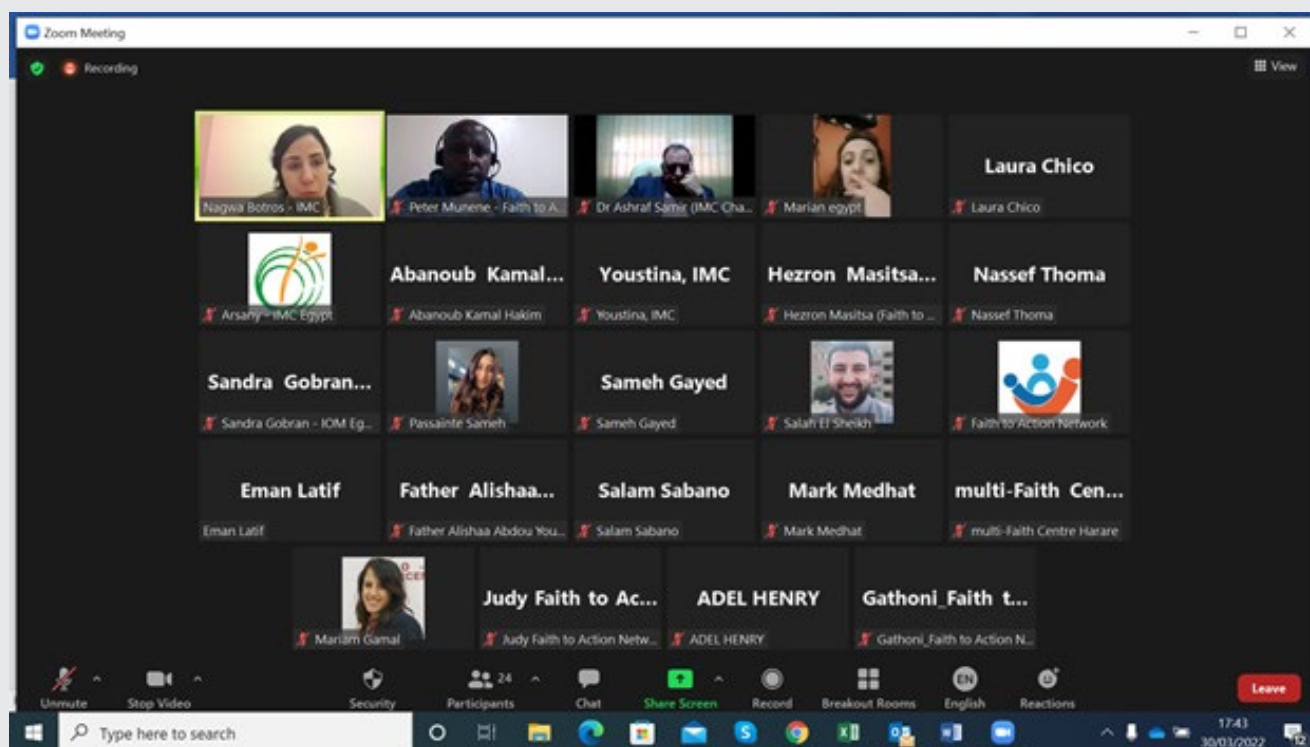
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## CASE STUDY 1:

### HOST AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES: CONFLICT AND CO-EXISTENCE

#### A Case Study of Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi

Dzaleka Refugee Camp in central Malawi used to be a prison. Initially built for 10,000 people, it is now host to most of Malawi's 51,000 registered refugees. Malawi's encampment policy forbids refugees to integrate into the surrounding communities, although in practice some have been there since the early 1990s and have in effect made a life there. The majority come from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi.

Overcrowding and underfunding means that there is stiff competition for limited resources, not only among refugees but also between refugees and the surrounding host communities. Malawians initially expected 10,000 refugees at most, and now there are over five times that many, with people still arriving every day. Mutual suspicion and fear that refugees are bringing their political problems with them along with weapons fuels resentment and discord. This is exacerbated when aid is primarily funneled toward refugees. Host communities too were living in poverty, but they were not receiving the same assistance or development opportunities.

UNHCR runs the camp, with the help of local implementing and operational partners, many of which are faith-based organizations. At the prompting of traditional leaders in host villages in 2016, UNHCR agreed to implement guidelines that encourage all projects to include at least 40% of host community members among their beneficiaries. This policy has had a marked impact on relations. Rather than being viewed as people who

have come to steal their resources, many hosts have begun to see refugees as bringing new opportunities and investment in their communities.

Churches Action Relief and Development (CARD) has developed an innovative approach to building social cohesion and self-reliance. They have four education schemes in agriculture, livestock, vocational training, and small business enterprise. Local landowners are given the opportunity to join these schemes in exchange for lending their land to refugees to cultivate for a season.

CARD reaches out to local faith and traditional leaders to ensure that host community members understand the project; without this outreach, false rumors could spread that refugees are taking over community land. But instead, the aim of the project is carefully explained. Cultivating land for a season not only feeds their families in a context where food aid is not always sufficient for the numbers in need, but it gives participants initial capital that they can then invest in other business ventures. Meanwhile, landowners and refugees are working and learning together to build sustainable livelihoods.

The Moravian Humanitarian and Development Services (MOHDS) has a multi-tiered approach in the same refugee camp. Children make up more than 50% of the camp's population, and many of them were born in the camp and do not know their parents' home countries. MOHDS's Early Childhood Development Centre brings in 380 pupils per day. When the funding permits it, they give porridge flour for each pupil, so both village and camp children are keen to enroll, giving their parents





a chance to look for work while their children learn and play. They also set up one of only two primary schools in the camp, where children are fed a meal in addition to their lessons. A tailoring shop where women make school uniforms allows for income for the women participants and free uniforms for the children.

When Covid struck, Malawians were coming to be vaccinated, but many refugees from DRC were slow to trust the vaccines, having had bad experiences with vaccines back home. Meanwhile some hosts were blaming refugees for bringing Covid into the country, even though the refugees were being screened on arrival. MOHDS worked with the health department to launch an awareness campaign, showing examples of people who had been vaccinated and were healthy, and dispelling the rumors of how the disease was coming into the country.

Like CARD, MOHDS incorporates faith leaders into much of what they do. “We use them because they are looked up to,” said Belinda Mzembe, Project Coordinator. “If you use them, it makes our work easier...one cannot go to church hungry. For one to read the Bible, one has to go to school. We serve everyone of all faiths and denominations.”

CARD builds alliances between religious and traditional leaders, hoping that between them they will be able to influence political leaders to more actively enable self-reliance and livelihoods of both refugees and host communities.

In spite of its many challenges, the Dzaleka Camp model of considering both hosts and refugees in project design and aid delivery is a bold example of how to foster social cohesion even in the face of restrictive government policies and limited resources.

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## CASE STUDY 2: COMBATTING XENOPHOBIA AND SEXISM IN SOUTH AFRICA ESPERANDE'S STORY

When Esperande Bigirimana co-founded a support network for women survivors of gender-based violence in conflict, she never imagined that it would one day flourish into an early warning mechanism that would protect its members from xenophobic attacks.

“Come together as human beings. I think human beings, we are so special. We are created in the kind image of God and when we come together, we will find a solution. Even when we don't find a solution, we can see with our own eyes, there is that warm welcoming of each other, that warmth of love which keeps us going.”

– Esperande Bigirimana

Esperande Bigirimana fled the civil war in Burundi in the 1990s and after a long journey, found herself in South Africa where she began to build a new life for herself. She studied theology and got her Masters' degree. And during this time, she looked for ways to contribute to her new community in South Africa:

“Personally, I am a survivor of a rape in a conflict. Where I come from, it's not possible to talk about that. There is a lot of stigma and the more I got educated, the more I wanted to expose that evil. And the first place where I felt I would be supported was in the church. I was very active in the church in Burundi, and also when

I became a refugee in South Africa I was really very very very active in the church. But I discovered that the church is more full of stigma and [there was] not really justice in the church in our time, and [that they] just cover up the injustice. I had the feeling that the church was a place where I was supposed to feel healed, spiritually, and physically. So, I didn't get that kind of support, and I felt, you know what? I need to break the silence there. And challenge it. [My Master's degree gave me] that platform, that power, because I knew if I'm not educated...everyone will feel pity for me and not really focus on the real problem. When I was finished with my Master's then I started to open up and challenge the leaders of the church in that town. In 2013...they thought I was full of rubbish...[but] later on, I ignored the leaders. Then I just called women and I started a support group. Many many women came in and we have a support group of survivors.... We started using the platform of the church as our meeting...We invited the leaders of the church to join us ...and we started to share our stories, what happened to us and what we go through every day in a respectful manner. That's how I was empowered and up 'til now I'm still doing it.”





Esperande co-founded a support group for women survivors of gender-based violence in conflict. Esperande used contextual Bible study with faith and community leaders along with women survivors. The women shared their own stories and used that Bible study to deconstruct traditional theology. Esperande started to notice that many of the men in her church were starting to change their behavior and see things differently. Men who had beaten their wives for years started to question themselves, and their families began to change.

The support group brought together women from Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Sudan and South Africa. Today, the network is 200 women strong, and they find themselves responding to a new threat in South Africa.

Since 2019, South Africa has seen an alarming spike in xenophobic attacks<sup>12</sup>, with beatings, lootings of foreign-owned shops, and threats being all too common. Competition over limited resources and nationalistic attitudes fueled by political rhetoric have resulted in scapegoating of the many refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants who have come to South Africa seeking a better life.

Esperande has felt the difference. She is afraid now to answer her phone in public, for fear that people will hear her Burundian accent and attack her. When she takes a taxi, she is sure to bring exact change, because she knows of other foreigners who have been beaten simply


for asking the driver for change. She is afraid of going to a public health clinic because she expects at best to be interrogated about why she is in the country – at worst to be given the wrong medicine. Her fears are well founded: her husband was given the wrong injection by a careless or malicious health care provider and he died while she watched.

Now this survivors' network has become an early warning mechanism, protecting its refugee members from attacks.

“We have a network which has South Africans and refugees, and we are supporting each other especially [against] xenophobia. Us, who are in that network of survivors, mostly we know what's going on, how our security can be compromised, because we have South Africans who are part of our network. When something is going to happen which is not good, they tell me. They say, 'you know what Espe, tell so and so not to come into town, or don't do this and that because it's not really right for you,'... We are like a network of 200, but in xenophobia or in Covid, we are still being united... We are aware of everything, what's gonna happen on Sunday and how bad it can be. ...When a South African who is part of the network will call one of the members and say 'Please. Don't come into town today.' Or whenever something happens, it's

12 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/south-africa>





a refugee in town and a South African says, 'Stay where you are. I'm coming. I will walk you home.' There are some places where refugees or people who are from outside of South Africa cannot really go...but us, who are part of the network, we have members who are South African in those areas. They are very scary areas, but they've made sure that we go to visit them and they don't hide that we know each other, you know? Before, we were very very scared when they invite us, but they said, 'No...come to us. We will protect you. Nothing will happen.'"

Esperande's network is now part of the Sema Network – an international network of survivors worldwide. They have developed a program manual for creative healing. They have connected with other organizations and are a part of advocacy efforts and education of young people in schools.

## Returnees

Several consultation participants work with returnees. They may be returning from a human trafficking situation, from a violent extremist or rebel group, or from economically driven migration. In all cases, stigma and shame marks many returnees as "strangers in their own communities."

In addition to professional trauma counselling, some consultation participants refer trafficking survivors to Christian and Muslim religious leaders to "help them be at peace with themselves, notwithstanding the pain and suffering that they have been through."

## Trauma and restoring human dignity

Whether "strangers" are refugees, forced migrants, or internally displaced, whether they are returning home after trafficking or failed economic migration, or fleeing conflict or natural disaster – a thread that runs through most experiences is trauma. Almost every consultation participant mentioned the toll that trauma took on those they were trying to help.

Those who are traumatized are often slow to trust and naturally wary of those offering help. Building trust was a theme mentioned by many participants no matter the type of services they were offering. Even providing basic health care or food aid requires a degree of trust between the giver and the receiver. It takes time and skill to build trust, and a faith-based perspective can often help find common ground.

Beyond that, many participants spoke to the need for mental health counseling and other forms of psychosocial support. In many ways, this is as crucial to restoring human dignity and self-reliance as livelihood programs and education. Participants had both stand-alone programs to address trauma, but just as often, they wove this trauma-centered approach into other forms of assistance. For example, in Egypt, a program designed to help integrate Syrian children into Egyptian society had trauma recovery and counselling as a key component of facilitator training as well as the curriculum.





### CASE STUDY 3:

## A STRANGER IN HIS OWN COUNTRY - A STORY FROM ETHIOPIA

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) works with people who are returning from poverty-driven migration. Many of them fell prey to human traffickers.

Kuleni Fikru, Project Coordinator for EECMY's Safe from Irregular Migration Project shared this story:

“I am working with young boys and mostly women who are returnees from the Middle East. We work together with [the] Interreligious Council-Ethiopia.

Those returnees, though they are returning to their origin, their home, they just feel like strangers to their community, to their families. They do not feel at home when they are returning. Immediately they want to go back, because they feel like strangers. This is the main challenge we face. The returnees go back again and go back again. It continues like this because they feel a stranger among their own community. Psychosocial support, counseling is very very important.

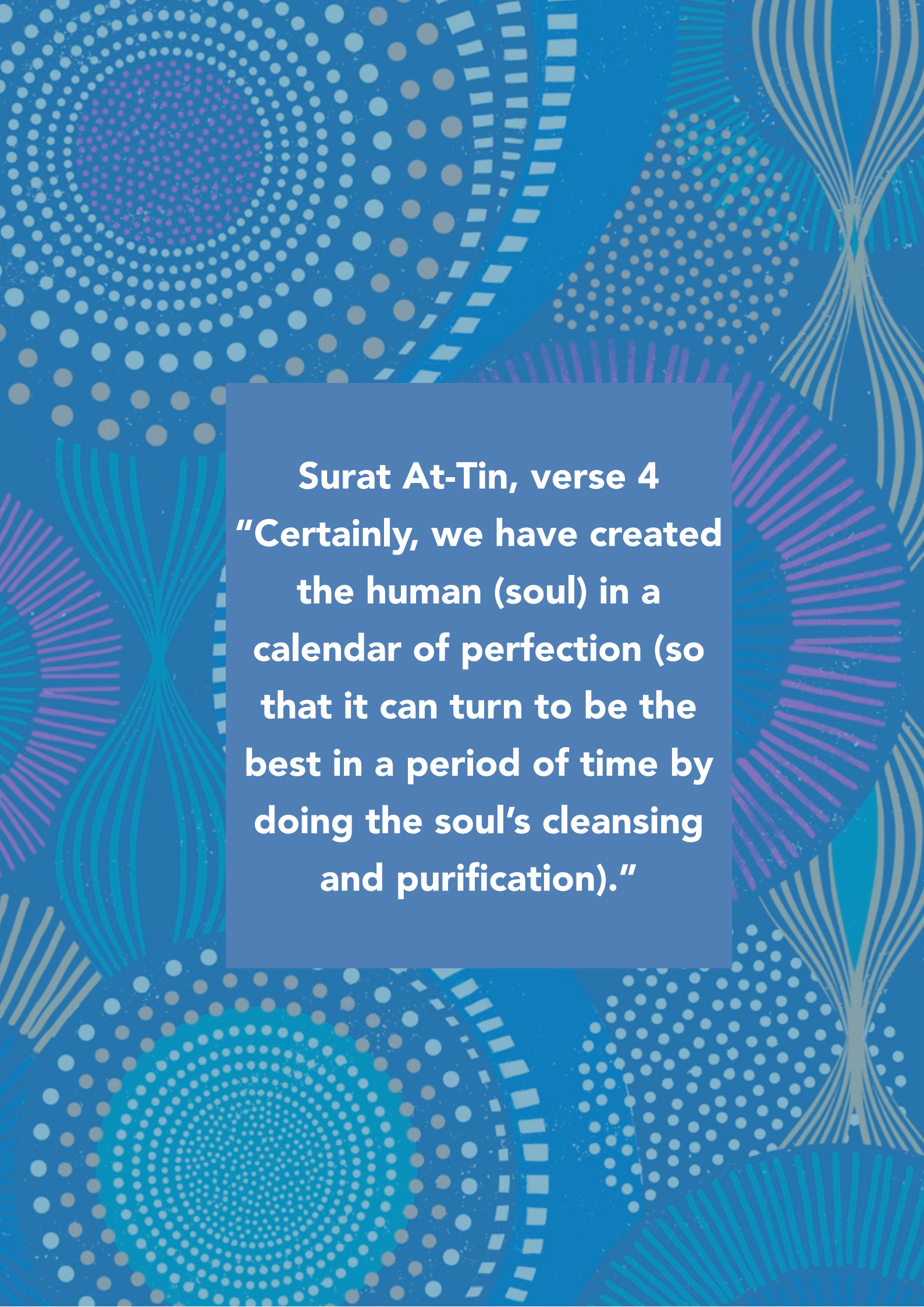
Among our beneficiaries, we have more than a hundred returnees, and most of them are physically and psychologically traumatized.

“I want to tell a story about a friend of mine. He is from a rural part of the country and with the blessings of his family, he started his journey illegally to go to Europe. With his six cousins, he tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea. He used our

northwest route and he crossed Libya and crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. But the boat sank and all his six cousins died. And he became mentally ill. He has been to the Libyan mental institution for more than one year. And finally, he got lucky and [was] deported here. He came to Addis. And we are giving him psychosocial support, counselling and also providing him with the necessary medications, but still he doesn't want to go back to his family, to reintegrate. He doesn't want to go to his family because it's bad luck. All his six cousins died, they don't want him. He's like a stranger in his own country.”

EECMY provides psychosocial and counselling support to returnees. They also help with reintegration – facilitating people's return to their original homes, reducing stigma and helping returnees with economic empowerment. This holistic approach has helped to reintegrate many returnees, attempting to interrupt the cycle of migration and return.





**Surat At-Tin, verse 4**  
**"Certainly, we have created  
the human (soul) in a  
calendar of perfection (so  
that it can turn to be the  
best in a period of time by  
doing the soul's cleansing  
and purification)."**





## CASE STUDY 4: INTEGRATING SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN INTO LIFE IN EGYPT

In 2012, Syrian refugees began arriving in Egypt. Salam was one of those refugees. Fleeing war in her home country, she was one of the first refugees to arrive. At first it was difficult – she was a novelty so people would notice her, point out that she was Syrian. It wasn't unkind, but it was new to her and she felt uncomfortable and homesick. "My body was in Egypt," she said, "but my soul was in Syria."

But little by little, Salam found ways to make the most of her time in Egypt. She enrolled in university and graduated with high honours. And as she gained her footing, she looked for ways that she could help some of the thousands of Syrians who were still flooding into Egypt.

At first, she got together with some of her university friends and her neighbours to help Syrian children in schools. "We played games with them," Salam remembers, "to help them forget the sadness, the war, the bad experience."

It was then that the Ibrahimia Media Center (IMC) reached out to her. IMC is a Christian organization that was founded in 2005. It operates under the evangelical fellowship in Egypt serving all sectors of Egyptian community. IMC wanted to implement a

holistic project that would reach 450 children in Egypt. The aim was to integrate Syrian children with their Egyptian counterparts through an 8-week project with an interactive specialised curriculum in:

- peacebuilding (peace with self and peace with others)
- environment
- democracy
- knowing your rights and roles
- gender equality and gender roles
- communication skills – how to know your feelings and express them
- sexual harassment – what it is and how to protect against it
- positive parenting (additional sessions for parents)

They wanted Salam to be one of 20 volunteer facilitators. As a Christian organization, IMC knew it had to be deliberate in building trust with the mostly Muslim refugees. The first step was to partner with three Muslim NGOS, each of which would be responsible for recruiting 150 children from their communities. Half of each group of children were boys,





and half girls; half were Syrian and half were Egyptian. Each group was facilitated by four facilitators: two men and two women, two Egyptians and two Syrians. In this way they challenged stereotypes – Syrians were not just needy refugees, but they were viewed by the children as teachers and role models.

The 20 facilitators were trained not only to deliver the curriculum, but also to recognize the impact of trauma. When needed, they could refer children to a specialised trauma therapist, who in turn would support not only the children but also their parents. For children who were having difficulty adjusting to Egyptian schools, the program found private tutors for them to help with integration.

Even though some children had been in Alexandria for three or four years, many had never been to the zoo, so the program took the children to the zoo. They played football matches together. At first the matches would be Syrians vs. Egyptians, but soon the teams blended. Egyptian children learned to speak in a Syrian dialect, and Syrians could sing songs in an Egyptian accent. The aim was integration, but never asked children to lose their cultural identity, traditions, or historical heritage. These were valued throughout the program.

The children developed their artistic abilities in singing, arts and drawing, culminating in a performance of an Egyptian Syrian song at the closing ceremony with key stakeholders. Building on its expertise in filmmaking, IMC highlighted the story of one of the participants. With the help of his parents, IMC produced a moving documentary following a Syrian boy's adaptation to life in Egypt.



Salam says:

“When the children come here, whatever they are doing, the memories of the violence are in their minds, and they never forget it. They want to go back to Syria to get their things. The most challenging thing is the memories in their head. They don't want to play with this doll – they want to play with their dolls and toys in Syria. But step by step, through playing and positive stories they begin to find happiness. I remember one child in the program who told me the workshops were like heaven, and they were the best days of his life. That encouraged me to continue.”



IMC collected many testimonials about the impact of this work. There was the example of “Malek”, who used to treat the doorman’s son poorly, but according to his parents, after the program he began to treat him with respect and decency. There was another example of a girl who spoke out against harassment in the streets by yelling “No!” and managed to prevent the harassment from continuing. There was the testimony of “Anas” whose severe stutter made him self-conscious and shy. But given the space and patience he needed to express himself, Anas found himself as the head of one of the group’s committees, and his mother also noticed how he was communicating more confidently at home. The stories go on, and now the parents are asking for a similar programme for their teenagers, because adolescence is a fragile and crucial time in life.

Meanwhile, these 450 children have bridged divisions, healed from trauma, gained confidence, and developed key life skills that will help them navigate the difficult realities of their current world.

## THE ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS AND FAITH

In every major religion, welcoming the stranger is a key teaching. Consultation participants talked about how faith informs and drives what they do:

“Prophet Mohammed says whenever a stranger comes to your home, he will bring everything good to your home. And whenever he leaves, he will take with him all the bad and evil from your home.” – Sulatan Ahmed, Ethiopia

Some institutions have Matthew 25 written into their charters; many Christian groups quote that as a mandate to care for the underprivileged and voiceless. Many

consultation participants mentioned how faith informs their inclusivity and drives them to help people no matter who they are and where they are from.

“Faith has informed me that we are all strangers. One day, we shall go back home. Whoever comes through my door, even me, one day we shall go back where we came from and we will no longer be strangers.”

– Edward Kabongoya - Uganda

## Trust in faith leaders in a context of mutual suspicion and mistrust

In contexts where there are high levels of mistrust between refugees and host communities, faith actors are uniquely positioned to tap into the trust that parties put in their faith leaders and use existing faith networks and religious structures to build further trust and channel assistance. Some organisations have focused on raising awareness among faith leaders of migrant needs and issues of human trafficking. Faith leaders are encouraged to share sermons and messages of welcome and hope. Spiritually-based counselling has offered support to those who might be reluctant to seek out secular counselling. Across cultural and language differences, faith offers common ground between hosts and newcomers, with an understanding of shared values. Faith leaders can be more quickly viewed as credible brokers operating from altruistic motivations.

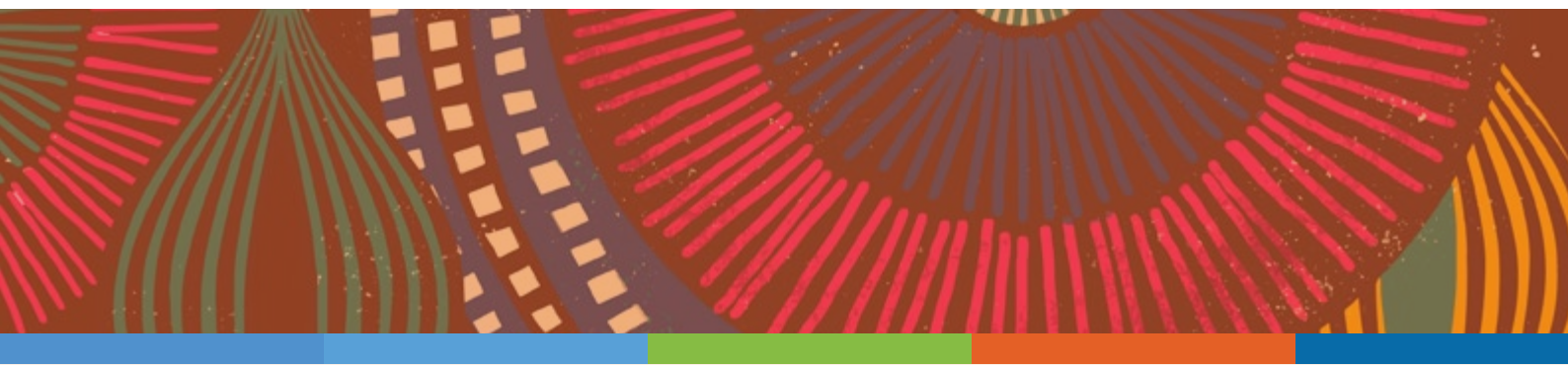
## Built-in networks

Faith groups have a ready network of volunteers. They are an organized community which can welcome people in, invite them to social events, house them and care for them. In situations where government systems are not responsive enough to meet the needs of the people, the church or the mosque often



steps in. Religious groups and centers are often the referral point for newcomers – people and other institutions will direct them to faith organizations for initial support.

This can become particularly effective when interfaith alliances are formed. For example, in Egypt a Christian group was offering services to Sudanese refugees, but they were not comfortable coming to a church. And so, this group forged an alliance with a local mosque who then provided the venue, while the Christian group offered the services.



## **CASE STUDY 5:** **ADVOCATING FOR MINORITY RIGHTS IN WESTERN UGANDA'S REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS**

### **WESTERN UGANDA FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS NETWORK**

Uganda is surrounded by conflict-torn neighbors. As a result, it is one of the largest refugee hosts in the world, with an estimated 1.58 million refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan<sup>13</sup>. Uganda's open-door and "self-reliance" policies allow refugees free movement and employment<sup>14</sup>. These policies are held up by UNHCR and others as a model, but there do continue to be difficulties and tensions with host communities.

The Western Uganda Faith Based Organizations Network (WUFBON) works across four districts and in several large refugee settlements. WUFBON is an

interfaith umbrella network of 86 faith-based organizations. Their mission is to improve the well-being of people in Uganda, especially marginalized people. They aim to eradicate poverty and bring about human rights respect and social cohesion using faith structures.

Part of WUFBON's work is focused on encouraging host communities to welcome their neighbors. They have run a series of awareness raising activities with both hosts and refugees, and with service providers in the camps. One of their interventions focused on training faith leaders and their wives; the wives influence their husbands, and are often the gate keepers of social, religious and cultural norms. The training looked at the root causes of forced displacement and the many needs of refugees coming into Western Uganda.

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR Uganda Comprehensive Response Portal <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>

<sup>14</sup> Betts, Alexander, "The Political History of Uganda's Refugee Policies," <http://refugeehistory.org/blog/2021/7/15/the-political-history-of-ugandas-refugee-policies>





As WUFBON did this work, they became aware of two minority groups who were particularly marginalized in the settlements and were not accessing services at the same rate as others. The first of these groups was Albino refugees and the second was LGBTI refugees.

### **Albino Refugees: Stigma and Sidelining**

Some of the refugee settlements of Western Uganda have “an unusually high Albino community, who have specific concerns and vulnerabilities<sup>15</sup>.” The community has grown in size over the years, as word spreads and people with Albinism move to find safety in numbers. But these refugees are the vulnerable among the vulnerable. Not only do they face specific health needs – with the strong Ugandan sun increasing problems with their eyesight and risk for skin cancer, but they also face enormous stigma and sometimes violence. It is not uncommon for mothers to be abandoned by their husbands when they give birth to an Albino child. Many myths surround Albinos – some seeing them as ghosts<sup>16</sup>, others as having magical properties which makes them vulnerable to sacrificial killings or even a market for their limbs. Research has shown that it is more difficult for

Albinos to get employment in Uganda<sup>17</sup> and where other refugees often farm for a living, Albino refugees need to seek indoor vocations to protect their skin and eyes<sup>18</sup>.

Identifying the need, WUFBON mobilized its network to provide sunscreen lotion, sunglasses and hats to protect Albino refugees, and to work with health and other service providers to destigmatize those with Albinism in order to increase their access to essential services.

### **Building Solidarity in a Hostile Environment: Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Refugees**

Uganda is one of 67 countries worldwide that criminalise same sex relationships. As a result, there is a flow of LGBTI refugees out of Uganda to neighbouring Kenya and elsewhere. Paradoxically, there is simultaneously a flow of LGBTI refugees into Uganda from Burundi (where it is also criminalised), DRC and Rwanda (where there are no constitutional protections)<sup>19</sup>.

In Kyaka II Refugee settlement, where WUFBON does much of its work, sexual minorities have been attacked, and some LGBTI refugees choose to leave the

15 Mbatha-Raw, Gugu, “Uncovering The Lives Of The Refugees Inside Uganda’s Rwamwanja Settlement,” June 2019 <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/albinism-awareness>

16 Larubi, Pat Robert “A Living Hell: The Plight, Hopelessness of Refugee Albinos inside Nakivale Camp” May 2018, <https://softpower.ug/a-living-hell-the-plight-hopelessness-of-refugee-albinos-inside-nakivale-camp/>

17 Olukya, Godfrey, “People with Albinism face Discrimination in Uganda” March 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/people-with-albinism-face-discrimination-in-uganda/2522547>

18 Mbatha-Raw, Gugu, “Uncovering The Lives Of The Refugees Inside Uganda’s Rwamwanja Settlement,” June 2019 <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/albinism-awareness>

19 Sinclair, David and Giulia Sinatti, “Re-Thinking Protection for LGBTI Refugees in Kampala, Uganda: A Relational, Trust-Based Approach”, March 2022, <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article/41/1/26/6377251>

<https://treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fUGA%2fQ%2f8-9&Lang=en>





settlements to avoid harassment, violence, and sexual assault by other refugees.

LGBTI refugees have sexual and reproductive health needs that are often not considered by health professionals. Discrimination and stigma often erect further obstacles to accessing health and other services. Sexual minority women have higher rates of mistimed or unintended pregnancies<sup>20</sup> and “lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, including refugees, continue to face extreme stigma, discrimination and violence and are subject to arbitrary detention and harassment by law enforcement officials.”<sup>21</sup>

WUFBON wanted to stop the discrimination they were seeing that prevented LGBTI from accessing services. They created ten LGBTI solidarity groups throughout Western Uganda. These solidarity groups not only provide a space for mutual support and increased protection; they also play a role in advocacy and create linkages to essential services. For example, WUFBON engaged fourteen district health management teams and nine district security committees in dialogue about LGBT needs and rights. As a result of these dialogues, they were able to install focal persons at health centers to advocate for the

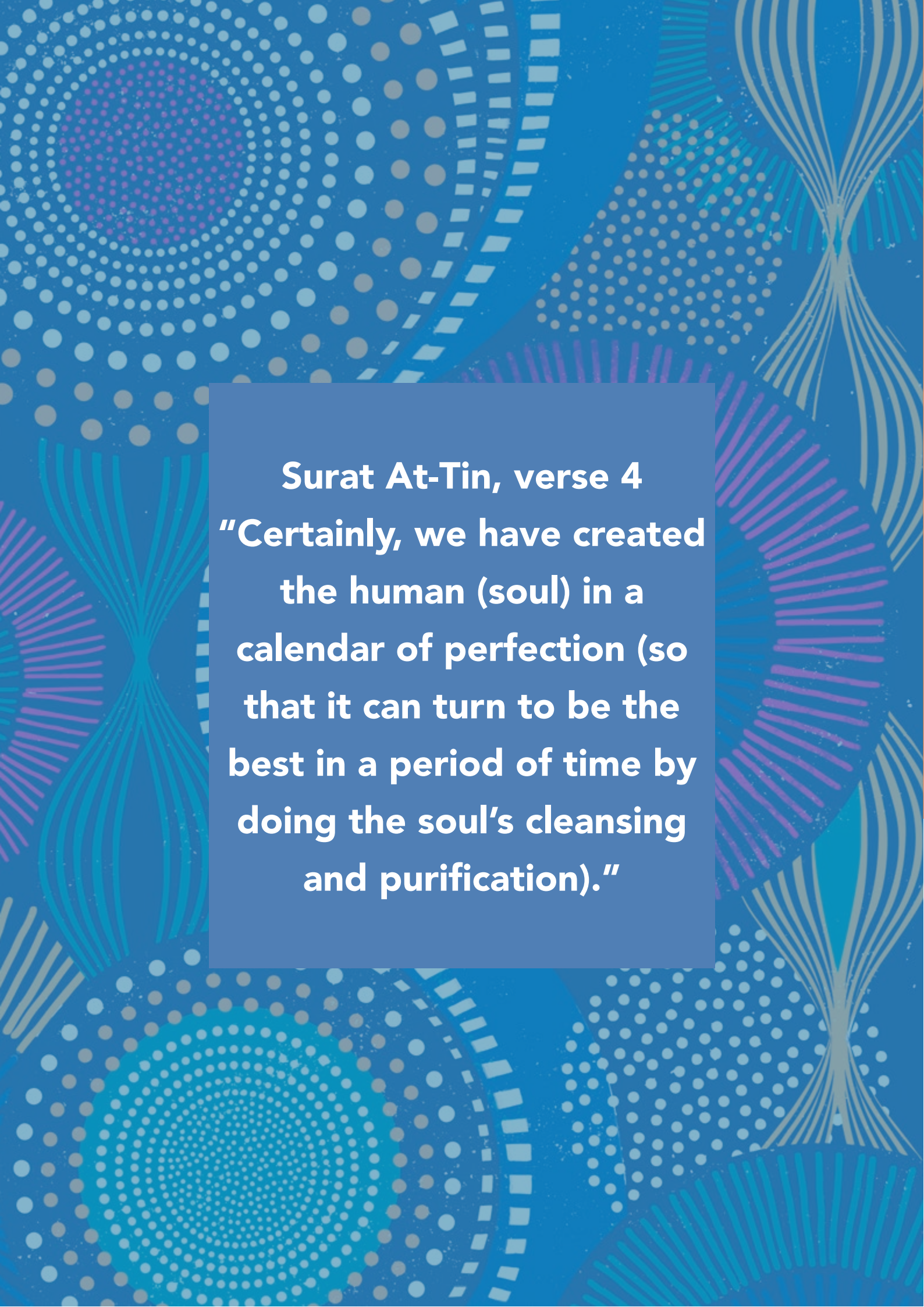
sexual reproductive health needs of LGBT patients. This has helped more transgender, sexual minority women and men who have sex with men access family planning and sexual health clinics.

The work carries significant risk. WUFBON’s Executive Director has been personally threatened, and their offices have been vandalized. As a faith network, they have had to work hard to bring on board key faith leaders and influencers in the communities in which they are working. As WUFBON continues its courageous campaign, there is a growing understanding among its members that their faith requires that they protect people’s basic rights no matter their sexual and gender identities.

20 <https://www.guttmacher.org/perspectives50/unintended-pregnancy-among-sexual-minority-women>

21 CEDAW (2021) List of Issues in relation to the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Uganda. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/)





**Surat At-Tin, verse 4**  
**"Certainly, we have created  
the human (soul) in a  
calendar of perfection (so  
that it can turn to be the  
best in a period of time by  
doing the soul's cleansing  
and purification)."**





# RECOMMENDATIONS





## TO PRACTITIONERS

- Increase collaboration among faith-based organizations
- Host consultations with government sector, donor organizations, INGOs and faith communities to develop a long-term, comprehensive, collaborative multisectoral approach to tackle issues
- Consider a consortium of faith-based organizations to address root causes of refugee and migrant issues, for both prevention and response.
- Sensitize faith leaders to their duty to welcome the stranger, and their duty of care
- Build capacity of faith leaders and actors in peacebuilding so that they do not inadvertently recreate the ills they are combatting
- Build capacity in advocacy to more effectively campaign for increased government responsibility in welcoming the stranger.
- Create awareness about respect for rights, privileges, or obligations when receiving/ hosting refugees
- Consider the entire family in project design, rather than projects that only benefit children, or only target mothers, for example.
- Document better what we are doing as faith communities; this will contribute to a baseline to learn from one another and to inform policy and research
- Consider marginalized people in the design and delivery of service (gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, etc)

## TO RESEARCHERS AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

- Increase networking between academic institutions and practitioners to better inform programming, fundraising and policies.
- Design research to illuminate the scope of the problems around identity documentation, harassment, insecurity, illegal detentions, and the rise of gender-based violence in camps.
- Build a greater evidence base on contemporary push factors and the political economy of migration, and their impact.

## TO HOST COUNTRY GOVERNMENTS

- Develop a framework of integration of refugees into host communities that protects equal opportunity, employment, dignity, due process, and human rights
- Enforce existing policies, laws and treaties that ensure the protection of stateless and undocumented persons
- Enact protective policies to prevent law enforcement harassment of both service providers and refugees
- Consider the voice and rights of local people when selecting sites for refugee settlements. Local people should not be evicted without consultation, fair compensation, and adequate alternatives.
- Develop guidelines for integrated settlement needs, bridging gaps between humanitarian and community actors that empower local communities
- Harmonize government and humanitarian interventions to avoid duplication of services



- Engage stakeholders to create clear and shared understanding of why we are welcoming refugees
- - Identify resource gaps
- - Consider Do No Harm principles in welcoming refugees
- - Facilitate and expedite the issuance of identity documents to allow movement and access to services
- - Implement more robust measures to integrate new arrivals into health and education systems
- - Integrate refugees into the economy. Merging talents can be fruitful economically and can lead to rich cultural exchanges.
- - Partner with humanitarian organizations to ensure emergency support and rapid response, including additional facilities to reduce congestion and overcrowding in refugee camps

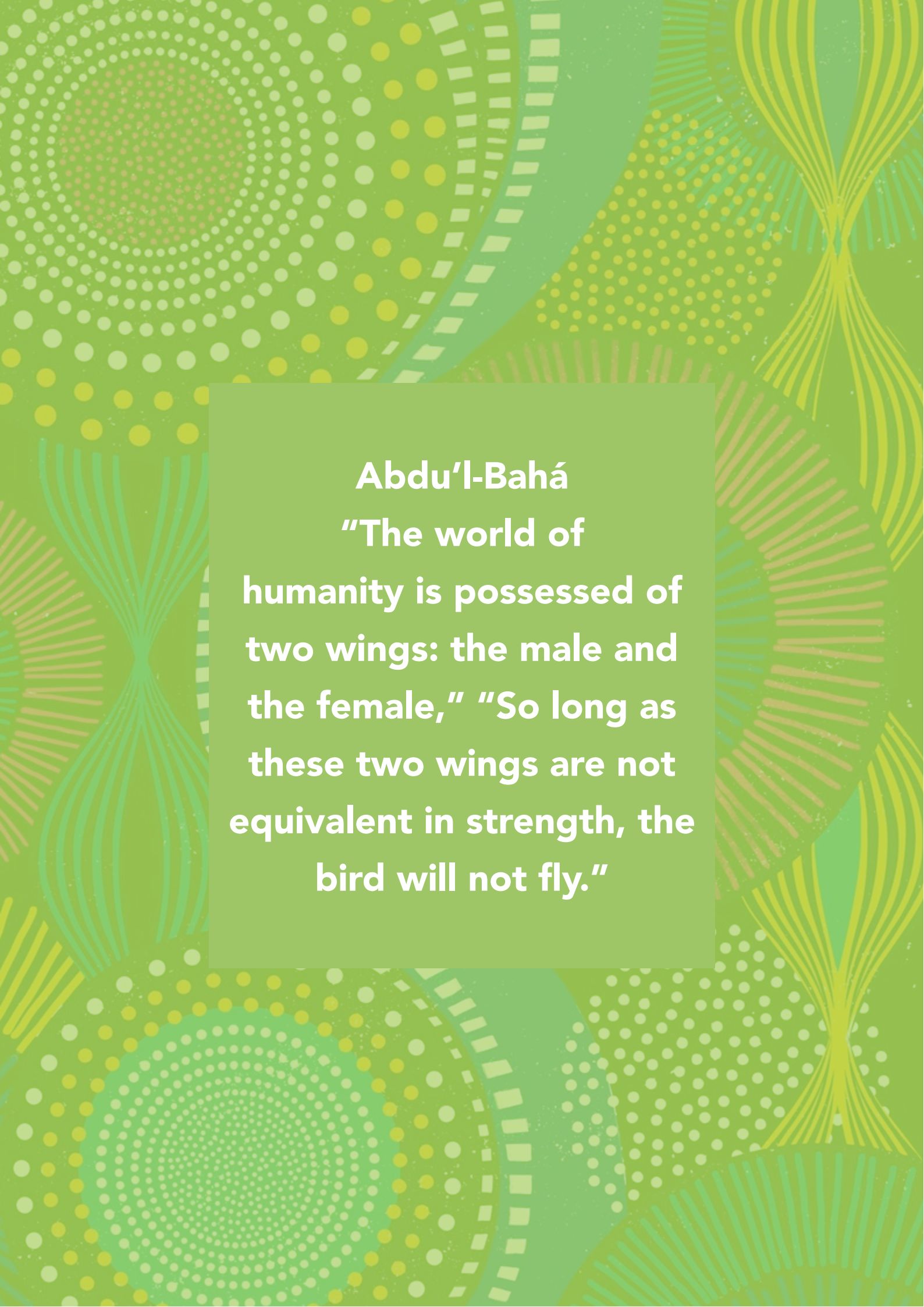
## TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENTAL BODIES

- Regional efforts should address root causes and not just refugee and migrant crises
- Regional bloc policies need to be integrated and streamlined
- Integrated regional frameworks are needed for protection of people traversing multiple countries and across multiple borders.

## TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Increase funding and attention for Internally Displaced People (IDPs) as a priority area of concern
- Involve communities as hosts in welfare of refugees, rather than services being donor-driven, as this causes tension with host communities
- Invest in long-term solutions – this also offers the opportunities for more established resettled refugees to help newcomers
- Invest in therapeutic programmes as well as material aid
- Strengthen peacebuilding dialogue programs – include religious and traditional leaders
- Fund needs assessments and research to inform service delivery
- Support coordinated and joined-up efforts to address the root cause of migration, human trafficking and refugees. We cannot talk about welcoming the stranger, without looking at we are doing to enable them to stay safely at home
- Include faith actors at the table to offer their unique perspectives – they have access to information and are seeing things secular actors may not see.





**Abdu'l-Bahá**  
**"The world of  
humanity is possessed of  
two wings: the male and  
the female," "So long as  
these two wings are not  
equivalent in strength, the  
bird will not fly."**





# **ANNEX - PARTICIPANTS**





## EGYPT

Name	Role
Fr. Eleshaa Abdo	Coptic Orthodox Church
Sandra Gobran	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Passainte Beshay	Mother of Mercy charity service
Nasef Alfy	Saint Maximos and Saint Domadios
Youstina Mikhael	Ibrahimia Media Center
Abanoub Kamal	Coptic Orthodox Church
Mark Medhat	Saint George Church
Dr. Ashraf Samir	Ibrahimia Media Center
Dr. Adel Henry	Evangelical Church
Salam Sabano	Syrian refugees community volunteer
Sheikh Salah	Imam of mosque at Qalyoubya
Mariam Gamal	Coptic Orthodox Foundation
Sameh Nessem	Ibrahimia Media Center
Arsany Adel	Ibrahimia Media Center
Samah Gayed	Catholic Church, Alexandria
Passainte Sameh	Interpreter
Nasef Thoma	Interpreter

## SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

Name	Role
Douglas Dziva	KwaZulu Natal Council of Churches
Nomvula Maneli	Kantu Women
Gosiame Choabi	South African Council of Churches
Esperande Bigirimana	Church of Christ in Nations
Rev Lerato Pitso	African methodist episcopal church
Rev Ruth Ndengwana Nhubunga	SANERELA+
Rosalie Mwepu.	Refugee and Migrant Project, focussing on Francophone refugees
Rev. Vincent Lungu	United Church of Zambia
Rev. Jedida Bwalya	United Church of Zambia
Rev. Brian Mwenda	United Church of Zambia
Rev. Bishop Darius Chitalu	United Church of Zambia
Bornface Mafwela	ACT Alliance
Rev. Chipasha Musaba	Synod



Name	Role
Lameck Nkhoma	Churches Action in Relief and Development
Mavuto Simbi	Churches Action in Relief and Development
Rev Francis Mkandawire	Evangelical Association of Malawi
Rev Mwawi Chilongozi	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
Belinda Gondwe	Moravian Humanitarian and Development Service
Rev Luckwell Mtima	Zambezi Evangelical Church
Douglas Tigere	Students Christian Movement
Gift Chanakira	Methodist Church in Zimbabwe
Sikhalo Cele	Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum
Junior Vutoyi	Methodist Dev and Relief Agency
Melody Gapara	UCCZ
Anderson Tinashe Maburu	Zimbabwe Council of Churches
Sostina Takure	ACT Alliance Zimbabwe Forum
Zanele Makombe	ACT Ubumbano
Tamuka Charles Chirimambowa	Session Facilitator
Musa Peter Dlamini	Council of Swaziland Churches (Coordinator)
Rev. Zwanini Shabalala	Council of Swaziland Churches (General Secretary)
Rev. Gideon Dlamini	Kukhanyokusha Church in Zion
Mncedisi Masuku	Anglican Church
Bishop Jose Luis Ponce de Leon	Roman Catholic Church
Rev. Constance Mamba	Lutheran Church
Rev Idiom Dammi Mussugugu	

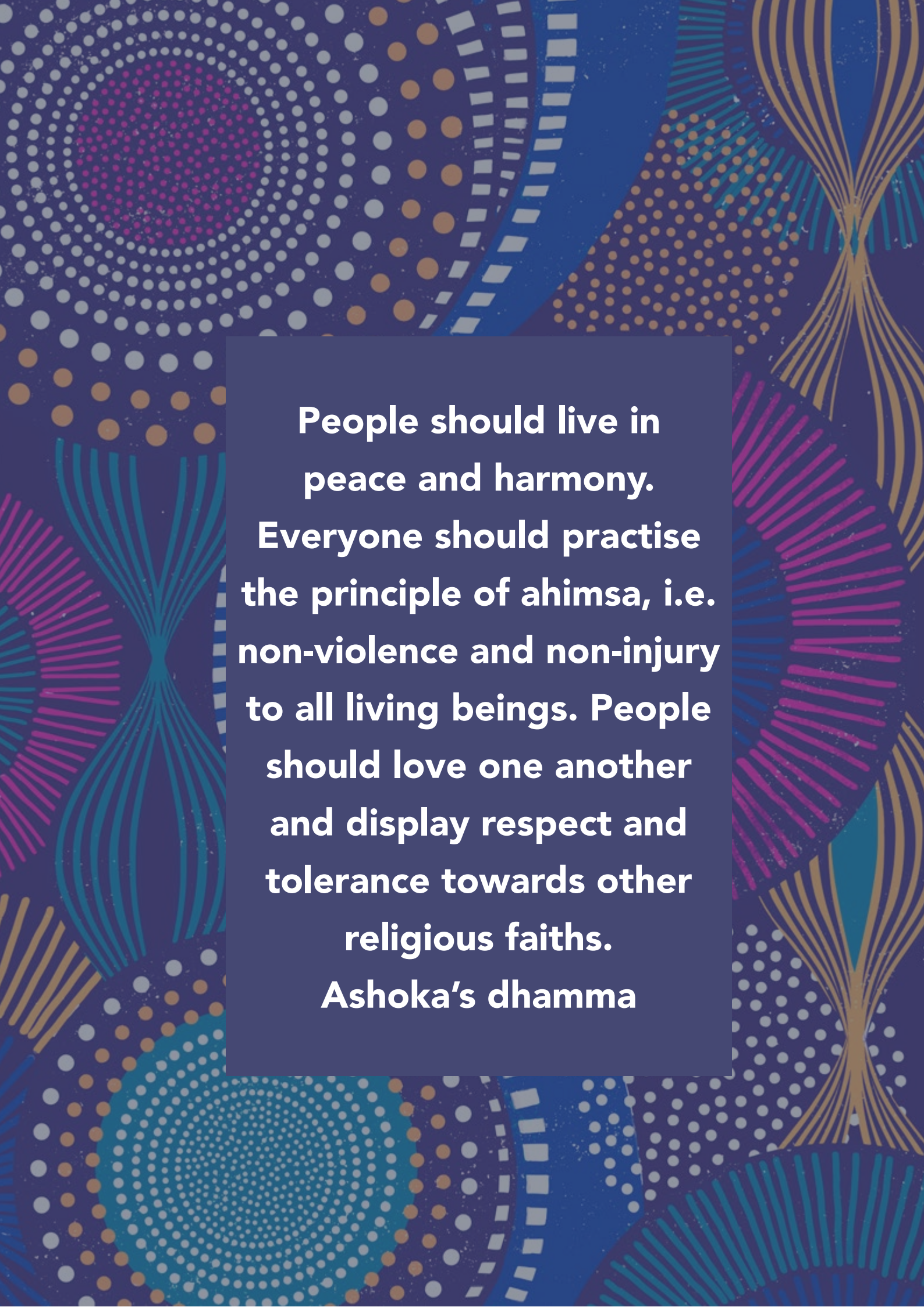
## EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA REGION

Name	Role
Mesay Mario	Ethiopian Catholic church
Sultan Ahmed	Ethiopian Muslims Development-faith
Mr. Alemayehu Lemma	EECMY-DASSC
Ms. Kuleni Fikru	EECMY-DASSC
Mr.Belay Negesse	EOTC-DICAC
Mr.TewodrosL.Seged	EOTC-DICAC
Mr.Abdulwehab Jeylan	EMRDA
Mr.Efraim Kebede	Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church Development Commission
Mr.Negasa Merdasa	MKCRDA
Mr. Eyob Abebe	Bahai Faith



Name	Role
Mr Haftu Woldu	EOTC-CFAO
Mr. Yohans Hailemariam	EMWACDC
Mr Yilma Hirpa/ Focal person	EIFDDA
Rev.Fr Santrina Agukwasibwa	Catholic
Ninsiima Phionah	Western Uganda Faith based organization
Irafasha Emma	Rwamwanja refugee camp
Rev. Kalyebara Stephen	Development Foundation For Rural Areas
Karungi Dorothy	Govt of Uganda, Min of gender and national development
Mwesige Moses	Kyenjojo NGO and CBOs Forum
Pascal Arukwera	Practitioner in Naruwanja Uganda
Rt Rev Fr. Mbonabingi Constantina	Uganda Joint Christian Council/ Uganda Orthodox church.
Kabongoya Edward	Makerere University
Pr. Victor Sunday	Executive Director, God's Care Ministries
Alice Basemera	Koogere Foundation Uganda
Rev Moses Atuhair / Focal Person	Western Uganda Faith based organization
Fr. Nyakirabo Deus	Ntoroko christian parish
Mweupe Khalfan	Hit my initiative- on CVE
Saumu Hamad	Changamwe youth network
P.N Onyango Adhoch	Trace Kenya
Amina Ainen	Researcher
Ali Rashid Mwabagizo	Kwale youth assembly
Gabriel Mukhwana Barasa	Trace Kenya
Farida Abdul Basit/ Focal person	Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance
Dr Kinyua Hassan Omari	University of Nairobi





**People should live in  
peace and harmony.  
Everyone should practise  
the principle of ahimsa, i.e.  
non-violence and non-injury  
to all living beings. People  
should love one another  
and display respect and  
tolerance towards other  
religious faiths.  
Ashoka's dhamma**





THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION



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