

NATIONAL RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (NRASD)

A Division of the CDDC Trust

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Press Release

International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)

General Annual Meeting (GAM), from 8-11 November, 2021 [hybrid meeting], Stellenbosch, South Africa

Religion matters in global and developmental affairs

The founding of the international “Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development” (PaRD) in Berlin, Germany, in May 2016 was an acknowledgement that “religion matters”, that it is shaping the lives of many people, and that it plays a key role in advancing the aims of the United Nation’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

“Religion matters” – sometimes negatively and can be a source of prejudice; to justify conflict and even wars, and are sometimes misused for self-enrichment; but mostly it plays a very positive role – shaping fundamental human values, caring for Aids Orphans and vulnerable children, fighting for fairness and justice. This occurs on international forums, but also on local level. This was underlined by the meeting in March this year between Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, of Shia Muslims in Iraq – to strengthen Christian-Muslim relations and peace building in Iraq.

The recent meeting between Pope Francis and President Joe Biden (a member of the Catholic Church) of the USA - that preceded his meetings with G20 political leaders in Rome, and the COP 26 meeting in Glasgow (UK) is an indication of the special dialogue and trust between senior religious and political leaders.

In a publication of the EFSA Institute¹ a dialogue between the global North and the global South –challenges, obstacles and opportunities related to cooperation between religion and the state were explored. The international impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that started early in 2020 poses much more than just a health challenge – the economic, social, political consequences have accentuated the existing fault lines and disparities within countries, and between countries across the world.

Why are governments funding Faith-based Organizations (FBOs)

They have a footprint in “hard to reach” areas where government infrastructure and services are weak; they are rooted in local communities where they are trusted; they are sustainable, they are very efficient and cost-effective in the implementation of programmes; they have holistic programmes (integrating spiritual, health and

¹ In cooperation with Sunmedia, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Protestant Academy of Tutzing, “Religion and State: Development Cooperation - A German -South African dialogue on historical and current challenges”, Stellenbosch, 2020.

social needs) with an impressive rating from international development agencies (i.e. Global Fund) globally and in South Africa.

Why in South Africa?

It is the first time that this global meeting will take place in the Global South since its foundation in Berlin, 2006; This year's meeting will have a special focus on the challenges and programmes effecting Africa.

The South African non-profit "Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust" (CDDC Trust) under the leadership of Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) and its subsidiary, the "National Religious Association for Social Development" (NRASD) supported the founding of PaRD and is co-hosting the meeting in Stellenbosch.

What is unique about PaRD?

Its members include **governments** of G7 countries like Germany, USA, Denmark, United Kingdom, Canada - and their development agencies - who are the largest contributors to international aid programmes [(health programmes – including contributions to the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS TB and Malaria); emergency food programmes; emergency refugee programmes in conflict areas; educational programmes (especially Early Childhood Development); and ecological programmes (to save energy and water). The African Union is also a formal member of PaRD. Several UN Agencies play an advisory role to the work of PaRD

It also includes some of the largest, global **Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** that implement emergency, relief and development programmes. The full list of members (and their location) can be seen on the PaRD website [<https://www.partner-religion-development.org/>] – and it includes global networks such as the following:

- The World Council of Churches (WCC): it brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians.
- the ACT Alliance in Geneva: a global alliance of more than 145 churches and related organisations working together in over 120 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalized people.
- Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW): an independent humanitarian and development organisation, with an active presence in over 40 countries across the globe, with an active presence in over 40 countries across the globe.
- The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA): it is world's first initiative that is engaging the planet's many faiths as allies in efforts to create a world where every human being has access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation and proper hygiene.
- The King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID): it is an intergovernmental organisation whose mandate is to promote the use of dialogue globally to prevent and resolve conflict as well as to enhance understanding and cooperation.
- The Global Fund: it is a UN partnership organisation designed to accelerate the end of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria as epidemics – one of the largest supporters of South Africa's health programmes.

It also includes the **World Bank** – as a vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world – to reduce poverty and to promote shared prosperity and greater equity in the developing world. And finally, several **academic and research institutions of universities** are also members of PaRD.

National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD)

Chairperson: Fr Richard Menatsi (Catholic Church in South Africa) | Vice-Chairperson: Sheikh Achmat Sedick (Director, Muslim Judicial Council Halaal Trust)
Executive Secretary: Dr Renier Koegelenberg (EFSA Institute) | NRASD Secretariat: EFSA Institute | www.nrasd.org.za | www.efsa-institute.org.za

Focus Areas of this GAM in South Africa

- ***Food Security & Poverty Reduction***

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted people's livelihoods, health and exacerbated inequalities. The poorest and most marginalised communities have been hit the hardest. According to the World Food Programme, 41 million people are teetering on the very edge of famine in 43 countries. The global hunger crisis is being fuelled by conflict, climate change, and by the economic impacts of COVID-19.

- ***Vaccine Equity***

Many countries in Africa do not have access to COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccine inequity has a lasting impact on socio-economic recovery and health in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Especially the informal sector has been affected by strict lockdowns. Between the first to the second quarter of 2020, South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 51 percent. Large-scale vaccination programmes could help minimising further economic setbacks.

- ***Localising Aid***

The pandemic calls upon all stakeholders to scale-up efforts for building back better and achieving the 2030 Agenda. Multi-stakeholder partnerships - like PaRD - play a coordinating role, bringing together decision-makers from governments, religious and other key civil society actors, and academia.

- ***Climate Action***

Underscoring the potential of religious and faith-based communities for environmental protection, the annual meeting facilitates meaningful multi-disciplinary discussions on the contributions of religious actors.

Challenges and expectations

PaRD represents a wide spectrum of institutions (governments, FBOs, academia, etc.) with different expectations and expertise – but they all share a vision to advance and improve human dignity [Bishop Sipuka in his 2020 address to PaRD meeting]² and the realisation of the UN SDGs. Dealing with these different expectations, an honest dialogue on the problems and challenges facing faith networks in accessing funding, in being at the table where priorities and protocols are defined – reveals some of the tensions.

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba has raised the internal barriers (South African – where non-profits and faith communities have to comply with BEE guidelines) and external barriers (international agreements, bi-lateral agreements and multi-lateral agreements) – that hinders effective collaboration, prevention resources and funds to filter through to the local level where the real needs are, where inter-mediate structures absorbs a substantial portion of funding; where local NGOs competes against international NGOs – preventing the building of local capacity and sustainable local institutions.³

Apart from the approximate 65 members of PARD that will attend the meeting in Stellenbosch, the rest will participate virtually through the live streaming of meetings and events. There are many open sessions with speakers – that can be accessed by the public.

Dr Renier Koegelenberg, Stellenbosch, CEO of the CDDC Trust (renier@cddc.co.za)

On behalf of Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka (Chair)

² See his contribution in EFSA publication, 2020, *Human dignity and human development – our rationale for cooperation*.

³ See his contribution in EFSA publication, 2020, *Resilience and renewal – the role of faith in the response to HIV*.