



## Call for Papers

# Faith-Based Humanitarianism

The response of faith communities and faith-based organizations to people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration

21-23 September 2010

St Catherine's College, University of Oxford

The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford (RSC), in partnership with the Las Casas Institute on Ethics, Governance and Social Justice, at Blackfriars Hall in the University, are organizing an international conference on the theme of “*Faith-Based Humanitarianism: the response of faith communities and faith-based organizations to people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration.*”

The substantial senior academic and policy expertise of the two partners provides the basis of a conference that will stimulate creative thinking on how faith communities, faith-based organizations, policy makers, humanitarian practitioners and civil society actors might best together address the challenge of responding to conflict, crisis and forced migration.

The conference will convene a broad range of academic researchers, theologians, interfaith representatives, policy makers, and practitioners, including representatives of both the forced migration sector and human rights, developmental and political organizations.

### Aims

The central aims of the conference are:

- to provide a meeting ground and a space for dialogue for academic communities and practitioners concerned with the role of faith and humanitarianism;
- to outline and evaluate current faith-based responses to humanitarian crises and forced migration;
- to reflect more widely on current humanitarian responses to forced migrants and to identify opportunities for improvement;
- to involve Southern scholars, practitioners and forced migrants in debates on these issues which directly affect their work and lives.

### Conference themes

Faith communities and faith-based organizations are often at the forefront of humanitarian responses to people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration across the globe. Yet, little is known about the scale and nature of their intervention and their work has been inadequately evaluated.

Through a series of inter-related themes, the conference will consider the perspectives, role, impact and position of faith-based organizations in their responses to people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration. How faith-based approaches do or do not differ from the responses of those agencies which describe themselves as “humanitarian” or “secular” organizations will be considered, while exploring positive possibilities for partnership, collaboration and fresh analysis. The conference will discuss the role that religion, religiosity and concepts of faith do or do not play in the lives of forced migrants themselves. It will also consider the occasional use of religion, and of secularisms, in generating the conflicts which lead to forced displacement of populations as well as the role played by secularisms, faith communities and faith-based organizations in conflict mediation and resolution and in promoting peace and reconciliation. Discussion of the following questions will therefore also take place.

The questions the conference will seek to address include:

- *How extensive is the contribution made by faith communities and faith-based organizations to the protection of people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration – particularly refugees and internally displaced people– and what forms does this protection take?*
- *What factors impact upon the behaviour, values and theory of faith communities and faith based NGOs in their responses to refugees and forced migration?*
- *How do standards of performance within faith based humanitarian actors relate to International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law?*
- *How do competing conceptions of “justice” and “law” (for example those embodied in sharia law, canon law, the work of rabbinical courts and competing civil jurisdictions) add or subtract to the delivery and governance of humanitarian assistance?*
- *To what extent are questions in the sociology of religion regarding analyses of “institutions”, “communities”, “culture”, “believing”, “belonging”, “religion”, “varieties of secularism” and “belief” relevant to analyses in the humanitarian field?*
- *How distinctive are faith-based responses from other humanitarian responses and to what extent are they contested both within those communities and beyond them?*
- *How might the contribution of faith communities and faith-based organizations, and the engagement of other humanitarian and political actors with this contribution, be improved and enhanced for the benefit of forced migrants?*
- *What possibilities for partnership between faith communities and with other non-faith-based organisations could be envisaged?*
- *What systems (and interpretations) of accountability exist within faith-based humanitarianisms and to what extent are these compatible, enhanced or challenged by non-faith based humanitarianisms?*
- *What is the practical and psychological impact of faith, religious beliefs and/or belonging in the lives of forced migrants?*
- *How far are competing conceptions of religion and the secular responsible for creating the circumstances which lead to forced migration and what is the capability of religious communities and organizations in resolving conflicts?*

## The conference will focus on these interrelated sub-themes:

### 1. Narratives of practice

Responses of faith communities and faith-based organizations to people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration take a range of different forms – from community-based involvement in conflict resolution, work in refugee or Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps and on development projects to capacity-building among displaced communities, advocacy for asylum seekers, pastoral care of individuals and financial backing for non-governmental organizations. They take place in countries of origin and in receiving countries, and across the global South and the global North. This conference theme will provide a broad picture of both the extent and nature of the support offered, by addressing the following questions:

- How have faith communities and faith-based organizations been involved with people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration, across space and time?
- What types of faith-based support are currently being offered?
- Is this support being offered at local, national, trans-national and/or global levels?
- What are the benefits and challenges of offering such support?
- How do forced migrants experience the support of faith communities and faith-based organizations?

### 2. Faith-based engagement: rationale, aims and theology

This theme seeks to explore the frameworks which inform and/or provide context to the contribution made by faith communities and faith-based organizations in this area. Questions to consider include:

- What ideas, ideological and/or theological themes within a variety of faith traditions impact on the conviction and actions of their affiliates with regard to support for people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration?
- Have the histories and experiences of faith communities encouraged an affinity with forced migrants?
- How do the rationales and aims of different faith communities and faith-based organizations impact humanitarian practices?
- Do these rationales and aims also differ according to the location of the community or organization?
- What are the pragmatic motivations for offering humanitarian support to forced migrants, such as financial or political incentives or the possibility of a growth in membership and resources or the advancement of a “modernizing secular agenda”?
- How significant are demographic variables in the determination of when a faith-based organization/faith community intervenes, encourages involvement or the allocation of protection/resources?

### 3. Improving responses: distinctiveness, partnership and professionalism

Seeking to acknowledge and review the particular value in different approaches, overlap and possibilities for cooperation and mutual learning, this theme is intended to open up debate on improving the efficacy of interventions. There are thus a number of key issues to explore:

- What, if any, are the benefits of faith-based engagements and advocacy in supporting people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration?
- Is “humanitarianism” a word which can be applied to the support and protection offered by faith communities and faith-based organizations? How do secularisms in humanitarianism relate to faith-based perspectives and practices?
- Does mutual suspicion between faith-based humanitarianism and secular humanitarianism and their practitioners hinder the effective protection of forced migrants in their countries of origin and receiving countries?
- How might partnership be envisaged, and in which arenas (practical support, governance, advocacy, finance etc.) and at what level (local, national, trans-national)?
- What elements need to be in place for partnerships between faith communities and between faith-based and other humanitarian organizations and policy makers to be successful? What changes in the approaches of these three types of actors need to take place?
- What might faith-based organizations learn from ‘secular’ approaches and vice versa, and how might both modes of response be improved?
- Are “transparency, “accountability”, “professionalism” and “management” more or less helpful concepts for faith communities and secular agencies?

### 4. “Using” faith, religiosity and spirituality: practical and psychosocial strategies in the lives of people affected by crisis, conflict and forced migration

Faith, religious conviction and spirituality often play a significant part in the experiences, practices and behaviours of forced migrants themselves. This theme will explore:

- How important are religious beliefs and/or belonging to a faith community to people affected by crisis, conflict and forced migration?
- What practical help do faith communities offer to people when they are thinking about fleeing and during the flight itself?
- In what ways does religiosity help people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration to cope with their experiences? And which role does it play with adaptation to a new context (e.g. resettled refugees)?
- What anthropological and inter-cultural tools might assist “secular” agencies to operate in “highly religious” settings?
- Is membership of a particular social group according to religion ever utilized as a strategy by forced migrants to seek support?

## 5. The culpability and capability of faith communities, institutions, religions and secularism in generating and resolving conflict

While the focus of the conference is on the responses of faith communities and faith-based organisations to people affected by conflict, crisis and forced migration, this theme will consider the role which religions and faith based institutions/networks, and secularism, sometimes play in generating the conflicts that lead to forced displacement. It will also consider the role played by secularisms, faith communities and faith-based organizations in conflict mediation and resolution and in promoting peace and reconciliation. Discussion of the following questions will therefore also take place:

- How much responsibility do religion and conceptions of faith have in the generation and sustaining of particular conflicts?
- Where there is responsibility for conflict, to what extent does this hinder the humanitarian efforts of faith communities and faith-based organizations? How does the culpability of faith-based institutions in situations of conflict affect subsequent interventions?
- Instances of persecution on the grounds of religion – are faith-based responses particular to these both in terms of the identification of “the persecuted” and the strategy by which to respond?
- Is there a difference between the kind of religion or conception of faith which generates conflict and the kind which seeks to support its victims and/or resolve conflict?
- How are faith communities and those in dialogue with them working to tackle the root causes of religious conflict? How should they be working?
- What is the role played by secularisms, faith communities and faith-based organizations in conflict mediation and resolution and in promoting peace and reconciliation?

## Call for papers

The conference will feature a range of keynote lectures, plenary discussions, expert panel debates, and thematic presentations.

Abstracts of proposed papers (or contributions) are welcome from all of those concerned with the question of faith-based humanitarian action, whether scholars or students, faith-based or not, practitioners or policy makers, advocates, activists as well as from those who have experienced forced migration.

Alongside presentations of an academic or theoretical nature, practitioners will provide presentations of their experiences undertaking faith-based and/or other humanitarian programmes and activities, with a focus on the best practices, challenges, complexities and lessons learned. Forced migrants willing to share their views from the perspective of lived experience are encouraged to participate.

Those wishing to present at the conference are invited to submit an abstract online by 31st May 2010 to [http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf\\_conferences\\_210910.html](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf_conferences_210910.html)

Abstracts should be 250- 300 words and should include:

1. name of the presenter, and name of panel members (no more than 4) in the case of an expert debate;
2. title of the presentation/ expert panel debate;
3. keywords (maximum 5)

Selection of abstracts will be made at the discretion of the organizing committee to ensure balance between themes and types of presentations.

### Conference publications

1. *Forced Migration Review* (FMR), the in-house publication of the RSC, will consider publishing articles based on papers from the conference;
2. An edited volume is planned, comprising key papers and synthesizing the main themes which emerge from the conference;
3. Participants should indicate if they are interested to have their submission published;
4. Presentations and papers will be posted on the RSC and Las Casas Institute websites shortly after the conference.

### Bursaries

A limited number of bursaries will be made available for academics and practitioners from the global South and Eastern Europe, contingent on the acceptance of completed papers submitted in advance.

To be considered, bursary applicants should submit an abstract online by 31<sup>st</sup> March to [http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf\\_conferences\\_210910.html](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf_conferences_210910.html) together with other requested information. Selected applicants will be required to submit a full paper before final bursary offers are made.

### Participation

The conference aims to stimulate close collaboration and dialogue between faith-based and other humanitarian practitioners, faith community leaders, academic researchers, policy makers and forced migrants themselves, and is open to participation by each of these groups.

While those who do not intend to present at the conference may register their interest in attending by completing the “expression of interest” form online, places for such delegates may be restricted.

**Conference Fee**

Registration and accommodation costs will be announced on the conference webpage in due course: [http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf\\_conferences\\_210910.html](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf_conferences_210910.html). Discounted rates will be offered to students, the unemployed and retired persons.

**Important dates and practical information**

- Expression of interest: “expression of interest form” can now be submitted online on the RSC conference webpage : [http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf\\_conferences\\_210910.html](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf_conferences_210910.html)
- Abstract submission deadline for bursary applicants: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010;
- Abstract submission deadline for all applicants: 31<sup>st</sup> May 2010;
- Conference: 21-23 September 2010 at St Catherine's College in Oxford.

Additional practical information will be made available on the conference webpage in due course: [http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf\\_conferences\\_210910.html](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/conf_conferences_210910.html)