

We Can't Wait: We Must Mobilize Religion and Belief to Advance Women's Rights

are to expand the circle of dignity to include every human being within and among the world's religions and traditions, textual and practical wisdom must consider women's voices. We are confident in the boundless capacities of our texts and traditions, for we know that religious traditions and teachings contain the wisdom to challenge the way the world is structured. We believe that in the teachings of religions can be found the courage to imagine the world as just, peaceful, and abundant.

The Challenge

The scourge of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence in the home, in public spaces, and in warfare and other forms of State-sanctioned violence, should not be accepted as a normal fact of life. Human society has evolved in many ways, and we must chart a path to nonviolence in all our affairs if we are to progress. In every part of the world, horrifying incidents should challenge faith communities to address how brutality can occur, and how faith communities and leaders can confront this failure of private and public morality.

After World War II, the nations of the world formed the United Nations with the commitment to advance peace and human rights as global norms. In parallel, ecumenical efforts have been waged to respond to the dehumanization of war. Despite these important developments, violence is becoming increasingly normalized. Nations and groups have too often chosen to wage war in place of dialogue to resolve conflicts; societies often resort to violent forms of punishment for crime in place of rehabilitation and compassion.

As a result of conflict within societies and between nations, religions, and other groups, fear has led many communities to turn inward, to yearn for an imagined past which reinforces regressive norms and honors the most conservative textual interpretations. Fear can lead to rejecting ties with others and can thwart progress, rational arguments, or emerging scientific insights.

Around the world, women and girls often do not have adequate access to health care specific to their bodies and their needs, including reproductive care, too often leading to preventable illness and premature death. Women and girls who bear children face particular risks and, for far too many, pregnancy is laden with risk and tragic loss.

Legal, social, and cultural norms applied to girls and women often do not offer adequate protection from violence or inequality in the family and in society, and leaders in the community best placed to advance reforms fail to challenge these situations and often

even support them.

In countries where religion is a source of law and public policy, particular interpretations of sacred text can lead to discriminatory and unjust rules which are presented as divine law, infallible and unchangeable; women's efforts at law reform to achieve equality and justice are demonized as an attack against religion or sacred text itself.

With the growth of global trade and international travel, the proliferation of human trafficking threatens the lives of millions of victims of this pernicious form of slavery.

Lack of access to education and independent economic opportunities feminize poverty and lead to premature marriage and trafficking of females, preventing women from realizing their God-given potential and from contributing their innate talents to society.

Girls and women are often excluded from leadership in religious, political, and other public roles, further marginalizing and subjugating them.

Reason for Hope

While these facts disturb us, we know that when religious and traditional communities and leaders, individuals, and associations take concerted action great progress is made.

Although the protection of human rights is fundamentally an ob

We call on religious and traditional authorities to guide their communities to align their spiritual and social lives with the promise of universal human rights, duties, and human dignity and to focus on religious traditions and texts that support this task.

We call on our colleagues in the human rights community to reach out to and engage people of faith as they bring religious wisdom and lived traditions to the task of