

# UN Commission on the Status of Women #63 Side Event

## Unlocking the Power of Faith-Based Partnerships: Enabling the Right to Social Protection

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019 | 11:30 – 12:45 | Express Bar, United Nations Building

Our expert panel will discuss how faith-based partnerships are enabling the right to social protection, by challenging gender-norms, and stepping in when the state and society fail to deliver. Guests that do not have a UN ground pass, require a special ticket, please RSVP by 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

[>> RSVP CLICK HERE <<](#)

### Opening remarks:

**H.E. Ambassador Martin Bille Hermann**, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations  
**Rudelmar Bueno de Faria**, General Secretary, ACT Alliance

*Introduction:* **Dr. Elisabet le Roux**, Research Director at Unit for Religion & Development Research, Stellenbosch University (via video)

*Panel Moderator:* **Arelys Bellorini**, United Nations Representative, World Vision Global

**Axsa Charles Gabagambi**, Gender Adviser, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania & Side by Side

**Rabbi Diana S. Gerson**, Associate Executive Vice President, New York Board of Rabbis

**Suzy Ismail**, Founder and Director, Cornerstone

*Closing remarks:* **Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri**, Deputy General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Organised by the PaRD Gender Equality and Empowerment Workstream:

**PaRD** International Partnership on  
Religion and Sustainable Development

Co-hosted by:



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF DENMARK



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FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES



World Vision



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# Unlocking the Power of Faith-Based Partnerships: Enabling the Right to Social Protection

**Background:** Eighty-four per cent of the world's population self-identify as members of a faith/religious groups. Faith/religious actors play an important role in the formation of people's values, norms of acceptable behaviour and life roles.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, faith actors occupy a unique position to make transformational and sustained progress towards gender equality. The important role of Faith Based/Religious Organisations was recognised in the CSW 62 Agreed Conclusions § 46. To build on this success, this event aims to advocate the role of faith actors, given their influence in respective communities, in enabling the right to social protection and stepping in when the state fails to deliver.

While it must be acknowledged that faith/religious actors can be part of the problem of gender injustice, underpinning discriminatory practices, they are increasingly becoming, and seen as part of the solution. Firstly, faith/religious actors can contribute to building a value basis, which includes an inclusive approach based on human rights and equal access to social protection. Secondly, faith/religious actors are also advocating for governments' responsibility to provide effective, and inclusive, social protection. Where governments fail to provide social protection, faith actors can, and often do, fill the gaps with important interventions.

**Target audience:** Policy makers, national level delegates, intergovernmental organisations and civil society actors, including Faith-Based/Religious Organisations and faith/religious actors.

### Event Objectives:

- Share the findings from the Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) research conducted for the PaRD Gender Equality and Empowerment workstream on the current and potential role of faith
- Learn from current faith-based practices on gender equality and strengthen partnerships across faith/secular and NGO/government actors.
- Identify areas to foster faith/religious engagement in combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

## Speaker Biographies

**Rudelmar Bueno de Faria** (opening remarks) is the General Secretary for the ACT Alliance. He is a Brazilian national with over 20 years of experience working with national and international church-related organizations in humanitarian, development and advocacy programs. He previously served as the World Council of Churches Representative to the United Nations and Coordinator of the UN Ecumenical Office in New York.

**Dr. Elisabet le Roux** is Research Director of the interdisciplinary Unit for Religion and Development Research at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Dr le Roux's empirical research internationally is done with and for governments, global faith-based organisations, and development networks and organisations, and over the last ten years she has secured funding and delivered research projects across 21 countries on four continents. The majority of her work is within the Global South and in conflict-affected settings, and reflects on religion, religious leaders and religious communities as role-players within the international development arena. Dr le Roux has an interest in religion and various forms of social violence, especially gender-based violence, and her recent interfaith work has included Hindu, Islamic and Christian settings.

<sup>1</sup> Brabant, S. & Brown, J. (2018) *Advocacy Briefing: The Role of Faith Leaders in Achieving Gender Justice*, Side by Side: UK.

**Axsa Charles Gabagambi** is a Tanzanian aspiring to influence others towards attaining gender transformation. She is a coordinator of Adolescent Girls Empowerment Project, which is an initiative of Karagwe Diocese in partnership with Church of Sweden to fight against school pregnancies, gender inequality and early marriages. She graduated with honors from University of Dar es Salaam with a dual degree in Political Science and Philosophy and majored in International Relations. She further undertook diplomatic studies in Tanzania-Mozambique Centre for Foreign Relations and acquired a Post-Graduate Diploma in Management of Foreign Relations. Upon completion of her studies, she has dedicated herself to work in rural Tanzania by being a voice to girls, women and teen mothers against gender injustice in her local community. Axsa is a member of the Side by Side, which is a growing global faith movement for gender justice. Working together, as people of faith, Side by Side is challenging gender norms, breaking the silence on Gender Based Violence (GBV) and tackling the root causes of gender injustice.

**Rabbi Diana S. Gerson** is currently the Associate Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis. Since 2005, she has been successfully advancing the NYBR's leadership role in confronting family violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, in and beyond New York. A recognized authority in the field, Rabbi Gerson has reached across faith communities to provide family violence prevention education and training to over 4000 members of the clergy, community leaders, 3000 teenagers and adults. Rabbi Gerson has developed training programs for the New York City Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence and has educated faith leaders at the New York City Family Justice Centers. She currently serves as the interfaith liaison between the New York Board of Rabbis and the UNICEF USA, where she has worked collaboratively to develop an interfaith toolkit for the End Trafficking Initiative in addition to writing monthly newsletters and planning educational events for clergy and communal leaders, focused on child protection. In addition, she has served as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), where she was the chairperson of the Jewish Women's Caucus.

**Suzu Ismail** is the Founder and Director of Cornerstone, a non-profit, faith-based communication organization with several locations around the world that focus on youth, family, marriage, identity and relationship rebuilding. Ismail is the author of many books including "Modern Muslim Marriage," "9 to 5," "When Muslim Marriage Fails," and several other works. She specializes in educating and empowering women, youth, and vulnerable populations by presenting a range of workshops, lectures, and programs both nationally and internationally. Ismail has been interviewed on numerous media outlets and is often featured on talk shows, radio and television broadcasts and podcasts regarding her work. She has presented on the topic of marriage and family at many public and private universities around the world and at the World Meeting of Families during Pope Francis' first visit to the US. She has also travelled to the border of Syria to work with refugee women, families, and orphans and continues her work with the International Rescue Committee providing integration intervention and has served as an executive officer and director on several non-profit boards, commissions, and organizations. Her humanitarian work has been recognized with numerous awards including the Ambassador for Peace and Visionary Muslim Award. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Human Services focusing on Family Studies & Intervention Strategies.

**Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri** is the Deputy General Secretary for the World Council of Churches. A Malawian by nationality, Apawo Phiri was a professor of African theology, dean and head of the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, and director of the Centre for Constructive Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Apawo Phiri holds a Masters degree in religious education from the University of Lancaster, England, and a doctorate in religious studies from University of Cape Town, South Africa. Apawo Phiri's main responsibilities at the WCC is setting the direction for the council's programmatic work in the area of Public Witness and Diakonia, and strengthening relations with the member churches and ecumenical organizations. While she will lead implementation of programmes with member churches. Apawo Phiri has been engaged with the churches and the ecumenical movement for over a decade. From 2002 to 2007 she served as general coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. In 2006, she also presented a paper entitled "Called to Be the One Church: The Future of Ecumenism - A Protestant Voice" at the WCC 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil. She has also served as moderator of the WCC Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation.