

# WORLD FORUM ON GOVERNANCE

▪ BROOKINGS ▪

## Conference Notes: Faith Roundtable

### *Background*

The second Prague meeting of the World Forum on Governance (December 2012) initiated discussion about whether it would be possible to strengthen the role of faith-based organizations in the anti-corruption movement and in good governance promotion in the private and public spheres. As a follow-up to this conversation, on May 20, 2013, Brookings convened a three-hour, off-the-record meeting with a select group of diverse religious and secular leaders who are working on or interested in these issues. A participant list is attached in Appendix II. The December 2012 discussions in Prague and subsequent roundtable at Brookings helped inform a piece by Katherine Marshall entitled [“New Roles for Religious Leaders: Moving on Governance and Corrupt Practices,”](#) published by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs.

The agenda for the meeting, attached in Appendix I, sought to identify common ground, gaps in knowledge and action, and opportunities for leveraging strengths in global advocacy of integrity. Insights distilled from the candid discussions can help frame the agenda of the 2014 World Forum on Governance conference and add to options for action by other bodies. This memorandum (i) summarizes key observations surfacing in the session; (ii) highlights ideas and solutions raised by participants; and (iii) offers options for next steps. Since the Chatham House rule applied to the roundtable, no point below is associated with any particular participant or institution.

### *I. Key Observations*

1. Faith bodies, even when they wish to be involved in anti-corruption efforts, generally have limited awareness of or connection to the primarily secular campaigns on the subject. Their efforts are marginal and “mostly invisible” at international gatherings on anti corruption.
2. With some exceptions, faith groups are typically not connected to secular networks that could equip them with research, analysis, guidance and practical tools—including innovative social media or smartphone applications—to enable them to engage effectively with anti-corruption efforts.
3. Faith groups may be reluctant to be involved in anti-corruption movements in part because they “don’t have their own houses in order”, that is, they may not yet be governed by practices of openness and transparency themselves. Just as there is a rising social expectation of accountability among all organizations, so too is there a growing call for faith groups to adhere to these ideals. Yet transparency within many faith organizations remains, for the most part, a particular weakness.

4. Division between religious and secular movements is reflected in the fact that anti-corruption campaigns (and universal ideals generally) are rarely framed in faith terminology, theological principles or in the context of religious vision.
5. Grassroots religious heroes, including among women and youth, and not necessarily the established titled hierarchy, represent a special potential for addressing corruption from within faith movements. Religious organizations are not nearly as centralized as some may appear.
6. There is a link between governments that suppress religious freedom and those that restrict NGOs or that are identified by Transparency International as at the highest risk of corruption. Yet these correlations are often missed by critics. Faith groups in many settings tend not to defend civil society, and vice versa, even though their fates are intertwined.
7. There are pockets of hope and success in eradicating corruption that get drowned out by bad news. These success stories need to be profiled both to instill a belief that corruption is surmountable and to cross-fertilize techniques that succeed. In Cameroon, for instance, Catholic schools have introduced a powerful anti-corruption curriculum for schoolchildren. In Mexico, churches are working with law enforcement to combat drug trafficking. Religious investors banded together swiftly to propose solutions in the wake of Bangladesh factory disasters. These ideas may be adapted to other countries and sectors.
8. Faith groups along with secular bodies tend to spend less effort trying to counter petty corruption in comparison to higher profile challenges. This is due in part to lack of conviction in workable steps to address the problem, despite its large impact on poor communities.
9. An absolute abolition of corruption is beyond reach; but efforts to promote mitigation and substantial reduction of corruption most certainly are not.

## II. Blue Sky Ideas

1. There should be an *international online roster of faith leaders*, both within hierarchies and at the grassroots, and from as many faith traditions as possible, who stand out with reputations of integrity and as champions of citizens against corruption. Such a list could facilitate dialogues between faith movements and secular bodies on anti corruption. It would have to be regularly updated to remain current and useful. It would need to be carefully vetted to be credible.
2. There should be an online, curated *database of anti-corruption success stories* within faith communities. For instance, the Cameroon church initiative to create an anti-corruption primary school curriculum could be published, along with the syllabus. This resource could help inspire hope in the potential of progress, validate the work of innovators, facilitate faith-secular dialogue, and transfer knowledge.
3. There should be an online *inventory of anti corruption resources*—research, guidance, and practical advice—pitched to and promoted within faith communities.
4. Faith communities should aim to *participate in key global conferences*, particularly the 16<sup>th</sup> International Anti Corruption Conference (IACC), planned for Tunis in October 2014.
5. Faith-based financial institutions should continue to be involved with *collective investor initiatives*—such as the roadshow founded through the WFG and sponsored so far by the International Corporate Governance Network—to bring the voice of capital behind strong anti corruption policies in the public and private sectors.
6. Faith communities, either collectively or internally, officially or through lay initiatives, should develop *high-level principles addressing their own governance*. The aim would be to help reduce the tension between rising social expectations and internal culture.
7. Faith communities, collectively or individually, should *identify a single galvanizing theme* to capture imagination and enhance the prospects of support in the lay community. For

example, they could champion the UN Convention Against Corruption; adopt a common call such as “Corruption Makes People Poor” or “No Impunity”; or focus all religious sermons on the same day/weekend on corruption.

8. *Campaigns in the private sector can be narrowly selected* by faith movements to maximize focus, lay appeal and impact. Initiatives on extractive industries are a good model.
9. Religious and secular leaders should make conscious efforts to *reframe anti corruption campaigns in the context of theology*. This should take the form of a tangible exercise that brings together scholars and intellectual leaders and produces a usable product.

### *Next Steps*

The nine blue sky ideas that emerged at the May 20 roundtable provide a potential roadmap for part of the WFG 2014 conference agenda. Neither Brookings nor the WFG itself is best suited to take responsibility for implementing most of these ideas. But the WFG may be well positioned to broker progress on some of them, either through breakouts at the conference among appropriate delegates, convening additional interim roundtables, take up by one or more roundtable participants, or recruitment of an institution to ‘own’ the different projects and advance them.

## **Appendix I**

### **Faith Communities and the Global Struggle against Corruption**

**May 20, 2013, 10:00 am- 1:00 pm**

#### **AGENDA**

- I. Welcome, review of meeting purpose and flow, background on the World Forum on Governance
- II. Introduction of participants
- III. Briefing on the impact of corruption on development, democracy, social justice, education, health and happiness—and on progress achieved
- IV. Discussion on what faith communities are now doing on corruption issues in society; Examples of success? What are top worries? What is missing?
- V. Discussion on what, if anything, may be needed to advance good governance practices within faith communities themselves to enhance their standing as they advocate against corruption?
- VI. Blue sky discussion: what big ideas could galvanize and inject a prophetic voice into the global movement against corruption?
- VII. Summary of takeaways and possible next steps
- VIII. Conclusion

## Appendix II

### Faith Communities and the Global Struggle against Corruption

May 20, 2013

#### Roundtable Participants

Bill Aiken  
*Soka Gakkai International-USA Buddhist Association*

Laura Berry  
*Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility*

Anju Bhargava  
*Hindu American Seva Communities*

J. Mark Brinkmoeller  
*Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, USAID*

Galen Carey  
*National Association of Evangelicals*

Maryann Cusimano Love  
*Catholic University*

Stephen Davis  
*The Brookings Institution*

E.J. Dionne, Jr.  
*The Brookings Institution*

Claudia Dumas  
*Transparency International-USA*

Mohammed Elsanousi  
*Islamic Society of North America*

Rev. Seamus Finn  
*St. Mary's Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Project*

Marc Gopin  
*George Mason University*

Elaine Kamarck  
*The Brookings Institution*

R. Aura Kanegis  
*American Friends Service Committee*

Darryl Leedom  
*The Salvation Army*

Thomas Mann  
*The Brookings Institution*

Katherine Marshall  
*Georgetown University*

Paul Miller  
*Catholic Relief Services*

Norman Ornstein  
*American Enterprise Institute*

Rabbi David Saperstein  
*Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism*