

**Religious NGOs at the United Nations:
Reflections on initial research (2001-2004) and outstanding questions**

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Research Colloquium
Religious NGOs and Faith-Based Organization at the UN:
Theoretical and Definitional Problems
6-7 May 2010

I. Introduction

Religion and religious groups have been at the United Nations since the earliest days of the Organization. Over the last sixty years, the relationship between religious actors and the United Nations has evolved significantly – shaped by dramatic shifts in geopolitical realities and the increasing persistence with which religious groups have sought to inject their voice into public debate. The attacks of September 11th and ensuing world events forced a rethinking of questions of religion and international security and lent momentum to the growing and complex relationship between religious actors and the UN.

Until recently, the presence of religious groups at the UN has gone largely unnoticed by the academic community. Religious NGOs (RNGOs), despite their long history of widespread humanitarian and social justice work, and access to extensive networks of human and capital resources, have been largely ignored by scholars of religion, political scientists and sociologists alike.¹ This aide memoire—based on my initial research of RNGOs (in 2001), subsequent exploration of these organizations and my involvement in the field as a Senior Researcher at the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office (2004-present)—seeks to contribute to the discussion about (a) the concepts of 'religious' and 'faith-based' NGOs; and (b) the operation of these concepts at the United Nations.

II. Religion at the UN: the evolution of a relationship

The foundational documents of the UN bear the stamp of religion: both the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included contributions from religious organizations.² It should perhaps not come as a surprise that religious groups were drawn to the UN. The Organization's concern with the maintenance of peace, the affirmation of faith in the dignity and worth in the human person and of the centrality of justice and freedom to the maintenance of peace resonated with a theological impetus to work toward these ends. Indeed, religions and religious organizations are the precursors of today's NGOs and transnationally organized issue-based civil society networks. Many of the early humanitarian and advocacy activities, associated with today's NGOs, were carried out by lay religious organizations such as

¹ One of the earliest references to RNGOs occurs in a 1980 doctoral dissertation (Columbia University) titled, "Religious Groups at the UN: A study of certain RNGOs at the United Nations."

² For example, Lutheran theologian O. Frederick Nolde, Judge Joseph Proskauer and Jacob Blaustein successfully led efforts to lobby for the inclusion of human rights in the Charter and similar provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

the abolitionists, suffragists, and temperance advocates who drew the majority of their support from churchgoers.

The First Generation of NGO-UN relations (1945-1990)

The terms of the NGO-UN relationship were first defined in Article 71 of the UN Charter, which states that the Economic and Social Council, one of the principal organs of the UN, could consult with (primarily international) “non-governmental organizations,” which had expertise in issues relevant to issues before the Council. On this basis, the Charter succeeded in creating the necessary political space for interaction and association between the UN and civil society organizations. The first generation of NGO-UN relations, from 1945 to roughly 1990, was characterized by mostly formal, arms-length contributions by NGOs to UN deliberative processes. Of particular significance for Catholic organizations was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which sought to redefine the Church’s relationship with modern society, developed Catholic teaching on social justice issues, and profoundly impact Catholics’ understanding of their role in the international arena. In 1964, the Holy See was granted “Permanent Observer” status at the United Nations and became the first non-member state and religious body and to be granted such status.³ (Around the same time, the 12-storey Church Center for the United Nations was erected by the United Methodist Church and, today, serves as a central meeting point for religious and other NGOs and perhaps the most visible presence of religion at the UN.) Since the 1980’s, interstate conflicts, humanitarian crises, declining capacities of national governments, and rapid advancements in communications technology – have added further impetus to the expansion and increased participation of civil society at the UN.

The Second Generation (1990-2000)

Throughout the 1990’s, successive UN world conferences and summits, addressing gender equality, environment, population, and social development,⁴ raised awareness among religious and secular NGOs of the UN as an important stage for global decision-making. At this stage, NGOs sought to engage much more directly in UN deliberations, aiming to influence outcomes directly rather than at a distance as they had in previous years. The outcome documents of these global conferences bear the stamp of advocates for a religious and spiritual perspective—evidenced by references to “spiritual development” (1992 Earth Summit); initiatives that require a “spiritual vision” (1996 Conference on Human Settlements); addressing “spiritual needs” (1995 Summit for Social Development, 1995) and recognizing that “religion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men” (1995 World Conference on Women). Religious NGOs rose to full prominence during the 1994 Conference on Population and Development – drawing negative rather than positive attention. Informal alliances between the Holy See, a number of Catholic and Muslim organizations dominated the heated debate on reproductive rights and nearly brought deliberations to a standstill.

³ While the Holy See does not have the voting rights accorded to full Member States, it is able to participate in the deliberations of the General Assembly, holds full membership in UN specialized agencies and has voting rights at many UN conferences (allowing it to shape the language of conference documents and declarations).

⁴ Example: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro) 1992; International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994; World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995; Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995; Millennium Summit, New York, 2000; World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, New York, 2000.

The Third Generation (2000 – present)

Perhaps one of the most significant events from the perspective of religious presence at the UN – and the start of a ‘third generation’ of RANGO-UN relations was the Millennium World Peace Summit of Spiritual and Religious Leaders, hosted by the UN, bringing together nearly 2000 religious and spiritual leaders from all over the world. In his opening remarks to the Summit, the Vice President of the General Assembly spoke of a “spiritual awakening” and a “new partnership” between religious and political institutions working to “renew human compassion, end the desperation of hunger and poverty and secure greater peace.” Although the event was dismissed by many as a pageant lacking substance and concrete outcomes, it seemed to offer a cautious hope that a peace between religions was not out of reach.

In 2001, the events of September 11th pushed religion and religious organizations to the front of the international agenda. Movements and ideologies that had once appeared marginal were thrust center stage and the UN looked to civil society to help make sense of the beliefs and worldviews shaping these events.⁵ In the nearly 10 years following September 11th, UN- and member state-led initiatives concerning matters related to religion have proliferated and assumed a growing importance. To cite but a few examples: the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution outlining a ‘Global Agenda for Dialogue Among Civilizations (2001); UNESCO launched a flagship project on the promotion of interfaith dialogue (2004); a tri-partite coalition of Member States, UN agencies and religious NGOs organized a high-level UN conference on interfaith cooperation—exploring the role of religion in promoting intercultural understanding as well as strategies for interfaith cooperation for sustainable peace (2005)⁶; Secretary-General launched the “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative (co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey) (2005); UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) has begun partnering with and building networks of faith-based associations, recognizing their pivotal role in health care infrastructures in underserved regions⁷. The last decade has also witnessed the annual passage by the Human Rights Council⁸ of the controversial “Defamation of Religions” resolution.⁹

⁵ E.g.: The Committee of Religious NGOs organized numerous talks for the UN community on issues related to politics and religion; the UN Department of Public Information initiated a series of seminars entitled “Unlearning Intolerance,” that examined Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other manifestations of intolerance.

⁶ In his remarks to the organizing committee, Dr. Alberto G. Romulo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines commented that, “The mere mention of the role of religions in the work of governments was heretofore a taboo.” He noted that the 2004 Philippine-initiated resolution on the “Promotion of Interreligious Dialogue,” (UN Document A/RES/59/23) marked a change in the attitudes of governments towards religions. In its recommendations to the Secretary-General, the conference called for “an expansion and deepening of the United Nations and civil society, including religious NGOs.”

⁷ In 2008, the UNFPA Global Forum on Faith-based Organizations for Population and Development brought together over 100 faith-based organizations and religious leaders from all major faiths and regions. They discussed successful practices and ways to move forward in partnerships with UNFPA in the areas of reproductive health and rights, gender equality and population and development issues.

⁸ Formerly, the Commission on Human Rights.

⁹ Major criticisms of the “defamation of religions” resolutions include: the narrow focus on Islam, the protection of a religion (essentially an ideology) instead of an individual, the conflation of race and religion, the erosion of freedom of expression as a fundamental freedom, overbroad and unclear language, including in the use of the term “defamation.”

III. The community of RNGOs at the UN: definition, accreditation and membership

Definition

The first challenge of studying the field of RNGOs is at the basic level of definition: Which NGOs are ‘religious’? According to whom/what criteria? In what way is this category useful and meaningful?

The following is a sample of responses¹⁰ to the question “Are you a *religious/faith-based* NGO?” received from NGO representatives in the process of attempting to identify the subset of ‘religious’ RNGOs from the full list of UN-accredited NGOs.

- “I am not really sure how to respond to your question because it would depend on your definition of ‘religious.’ We are founded on the Jewish principles of ‘tikkun olam’ and we do observe the Jewish holidays and Sabbath.” *Jewish Women International*
- “we are incorporated as a non-profit, supporting ‘judeo-christian’ principles...we are non-denominational...I do not consider us to be religious.” *REAL Women of British Columbia*
- “...an affiliated organ of the OIC and represents the private sector of the 57 Member Islamic Countries. Our membership is comprised of the National Chambers/Unions/ Federations of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the member countries.” *Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry-OIC*
- “...since we came into existence in 1969 we never contemplated whether our organization sees itself as a religious/faith based, a spiritual or a secular one...we do believe that, as human beings, we would serve as better instruments if we were able to develop a spiritual outlook of the universe...” *International Association of Educators for World Peace*
- “Interesting question! We are a faith-based NGO working in a secular way. Since the members of our NGO belong to a ‘Subud’—a global, spiritual movement including people of all religions as well as people who have no religion, we do not consider ourselves a religious NGO. We do not proselytize as part of our social and humanitarian work...I define ‘faith-based’ as the concept that we have a common belief in a higher power.” *Susila Dharma International*
- “We are an NGO, a 501 (c)(3) faith-based organization.” *Strategic Pastoral Action Network*
- “We are Jewish but not religious.” *International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists*
- “...there have been some internal splits about how “religious” we might be. We describe ourselves as an organization with Catholic roots and have a strong sense of working with faith communities...Our sense of ‘religious’ is that of progressive or challenging rather than an acceptance of the institutional church’s position...We have no external authority structure in the church...Officially, I guess we represent our membership and other stakeholders.” *Catholic Institute for International Relations*

¹⁰ All responses were received between 2001-2002.

- “although secular, we have strong support from Christian peace activists varying from...historical peace churches (Quakers, Mennonites) to other protestant churches and Roman Catholics.” *Conscience and Peace Tax International*
- “It depends on what you mean by a religious or quasi-religious NGO. Do you mean any kind of NGO even if their primary purpose is to promote faith rather than do NGO-ish activities...or do you mean NGOs in their more commonly understood form (e.g. some version of Catholic Relief Services) who may have a religious basis but for whom promoting religion is not their raison d’être?” *World Bank Office in Jakarta*¹¹

This sample of responses demonstrates a slice of the complexity that arises in trying to conceptualize the ‘religious’ dimension of ‘R’NGOs at the UN. An interesting parallel challenge can be found in efforts of the US Internal Revenue Service to define a ‘church.’ Until the 1990s, the IRS relied on 14 criteria to determine whether an entity constituted a church. But after a 3 decade battle with the Church of Scientology (which concluded with it being accorded a ‘church’ status), the IRS recognized its inability to set forth authoritative definitions in this area. In fact, there is no universal consensus on what constitutes a religious organization and, as evidenced by the responses listed above, the classification of ‘religious’ is arrived at in different ways by different organizations and is conceptualized differently.

In my initial study, I relied primarily on two sources to determine whether the organization was ‘religious’: the reported self-identity of the organization and/ or publicly available information. I compiled two lists: (1) A list of 175 RNGOs in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (8.5% of ECOSOC-accredited NGOs), included in *Appendix 1*; and (2) A list of 184 RNGOs affiliated with the UN Department of Public Information (12.6% of DPI-accredited NGOs), included in *Appendix 2*.

In this initial study, I was eager to *define* RNGOs¹² and recognize now that this might have been premature and essentialist. Another way of approaching the intrinsic complexity and diversity of religious organizations would be to describe the characteristics of these entities and highlight the diversity of forms and functions; and, on the basis of this data, conclude something about the demarcation lines of the organizational universe of RNGOs. Given the parallel complexity inherent in the concept of ‘religion,’ I think it would be equally important to delve in the organizations’ understanding of this qualifier (e.g. ‘religious’)—sensitive to the differences between the etic and emic conceptualizations.¹³

Accreditation and Membership

NGOs wanting to enter into a formal relationship with the UN must do so either through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) or the Department of Public Information (DPI) (a branch of the UN Secretariat), provided they meet the requisite criteria (e.g. relevant expertise, size of membership, non-profit nature, capacity to conduct outreach, etc.). The critical issue for religious organizations is the stipulation against proselytization at the UN. If an accredited

¹¹ From correspondence regarding religious NGOs in Indonesia

¹² My working definition of religious NGOs, in the 2003 Article in *Voluntas*, was “non-profit organizations whose identity and mission are inspired by or based on one or more religious or spiritual traditions.”

¹³ In the 2003 paper, I defined ‘religion’ as “a system of belief and practice associated with acceptance of the reality of the divine, the sacred, the transcendent...”

organization fails to abide by this, they may have their accreditation and accompanying privileges removed.

Today, over 3,000 NGOs have been granted formal accreditation to the UN, granting them privileges to attend most meetings, monitor UN negotiations, make oral presentations, and advocate their positions with ambassadors and government delegations. In 2002, based on my (abovementioned) assessment, RNGOs represented approximately 8.5% and 12.6% of NGOs formally associated with ECOSOC and DPI respectively.¹⁴ Over the last several years, approximately 15% of NGOs approved for accreditation with ECOSOC were religious. The period from 1945-1994 saw an average of 1.4 new RNGOs accredited every year, while between 1995-2004, the figure increased to an average of 15.2 new RNGOs every year. At present, Christian NGOs represent over half of all RNGOs at the UN: of these, over 50% are Catholic, 40% are Protestant and 8% represent other Christian (ecumenical, non-denominational) organizations. Muslim NGOs account for 13%, Jewish for 9%, Spiritual for 11%, Multi-religious for 5%, and Buddhist NGOs for 4%. It is interesting to note that ECOSOC does not reference religious affiliation on its public NGO database¹⁵; the DPI accreditation form lists ‘religion, freedom of belief’ as one possible area of activity.

This (presumed) distribution of religious NGOs raises several questions: Why do Christian NGOs account for over half of RNGOs at the UN? Is this distribution representative of the worldwide body of RNGOs? What aspects of Christianity – organizationally and theologically—facilitate the proliferation of Christian NGOs and their presence at the UN? What factors hinder other faiths and believers from establishing RNGOs and seeking UN accreditation? The answers are likely a combination of ideological, political, and economic factors. It is possible that involvement with the UN and NGO creation is compatible with Christian culture and ideology, given the involvement of churches in the formative process of the UN, their desire to influence the secular polity, and their access to material resources. While a detailed discussion of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worthwhile to note the argument that certain religions, in their emphasis on charity, individual initiative, institution building, and autonomy, are more likely to encourage nonprofit formation than those in which these dimensions are not emphasized.¹⁶

Another set of questions is more interpretive in nature: What is the (religious and political) significance of a religious body assuming an NGO form and mission? If the selection of the form is a strategic tool, what is the aim of this strategy? Does the adoption of the form have a symbolic meaning beyond the political realm? What is the significance, for example, of the Augustinians (a Catholic order founded in 1244, with 3000 members worldwide) gaining accreditation at the UN?

IV. Analytical Framework

¹⁴ ECOSOC accreditation differentiates between three types of status: Categories I, II, and Roster, ranging from greatest to least privilege as determined by the expertise, documented achievements, and size of membership of the organization.

¹⁵ In 2005, when I last searched this database, ‘religion’ was listed as an option under ‘Fields of Activity.’

¹⁶ Anheier, H. K., and Salamon, L. M. (1998). Introduction: The nonprofit sector in the developing world. In: Salamon, L. M., and Anheier, H. K. (eds.), *The Nonprofit Sector in the Developing World: A Comparative Analysis*, St. Martin’s Press, New York.

In my initial research, I proposed an analytical framework by means of which describe and analyze the various dimensions of RNGO identity activity. The framework draws on the ‘NGO dimensions’ outlined by Leon Gordenker and Thomas Weiss¹⁷ and the Thomas Jeavons’ questions for ascertaining the religious dimensions of an organization.¹⁸ The resulting framework considers four dimensions of religious NGOs: religious, organizational, strategic, and service—and addresses itself to all RNGOs, not only those associated with the UN.

Framework for the Analysis of Religious NGOs

<i>Religious dimensions</i>	<i>Organizational dimensions</i>	<i>Strategic dimensions</i>	<i>Service dimensions</i>
<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Geographic Range</i>	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Orientation</i>
Bahá’í	Community		Relief
Buddhist	Sub-national	<i>Mission</i>	Social service
Christian	National	Single-Issue	Education/ information
Hindu	Regional	Multi-sectoral	Research
Jain	Transnational	Broad social	Salvation
Muslim			Mobilization of opinion
Spiritual	<i>Representation</i>	<i>Process</i>	
Multi-religious	Religious	Moral suasion	<i>Geographic range</i>
	Denominational	Dialogue	(see org. dimensions)
<i>Pervasiveness</i>	Ecumenical	Information	
Organizational identity	Spiritual	Modeling	<i>Beneficiaries</i>
Governance	Multi-religious	Advocacy	Members
Membership	Geographic	Monitoring	Non-members
Mission/Services	Political	Spiritual guidance	Combination
Resources			
	<i>Structure</i> ¹⁹		
<i>Relationship to Religious Leadership</i>	Unitary Corporate		
	Federation		
[Subordinate]	Confederation		
[Cooperative]	Autonomous		
[Independent]			
	<i>Resources</i>		
	Membership dues		
	Donations		
	Grants		
	Government		

¹⁷ Gordenker, L., and Weiss, T. (1995). “Pluralizing global governance: Analytical approaches and dimensions.” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (3), pp. 357-386.

¹⁸ Jeavons, T. H. (1998). Identifying characteristics of “religious” organizations: An exploratory proposal. In: Demerath, N. J., III, Hall, P. D., Schmitt, T., and Williams, R. H. (eds.), *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organization*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 79–95.

¹⁹ The initial sample contained the following organizational terms (in the names of RNGOs): union, diocese, committee, league, assembly, institute, confederation, mission, congress, alliance, coalition, movement, federation, congregation, council, network, order and society. In order to simplify this typology according to degree of centralization in decision making, I used the terms: ‘unitary corporate’ (centralized, e.g. Catholic Relief Services, Bahá’í International Community); ‘federation’ (mostly centralized/with member input, e.g. World Vision, Lutheran World Federation); and ‘confederation’ (decentralized/with some or no input from center, e.g. Catholic orders, World Jewish Congress).

This framework seeks to shed light on some of the ‘blind spots’ (in relation to religious entities) inherent in frameworks designed to analyze the dimensions of the entire universe of NGOs. The religious dimensions explore the organization’s *orientation* – religious affiliation/ identity as indicated by the NGO; *pervasiveness* (of the religious dimension)– the extent to which the religious affiliation shapes organizational identity and administration. The *religious authority* dimension addresses the degree of authority over the RNGO by respective religious leadership.²⁰ In terms of strategic dimensions, the ‘motivation’ element is highly salient in the analysis as reveals—most often in the NGO’s mission statement – the worldview and theological basis for the existence and work of the organization. While a secular humanitarian NGO might describe their relief efforts in terms of alleviating human suffering, a similar religious NGO may cast the same actions in terms of ‘ministry,’ ‘worship,’ ‘service,’ or ‘charism.’ This is also evident in the analysis of religious NGOs’ ‘processes’ (see framework) – or the means by which they accomplish their mission. Many religious NGOs view the spreading of their ideas in the context of moral suasion or ‘spiritual guidance’.

The above analytical framework represents one attempt to construct a map to guide the researcher through a closer examination of organizations in this field, to permit comparisons across diverse RNGOs and to identify characteristics that are unique to this group of organizations.

V. Who should be at the UN?: Contentious issues in the accreditation process

While the UN is struggling to reassess and democratize its relations with civil society, the accreditation process, by which an NGOs becomes formally associated with the UN and benefit from ensuing access and privileges, continues to be highly politicized. At present, the accrediting body for ECOSOC is the Committee on NGOs (composed on 19 members states), which considers applications for accreditation and reviews quadrennial reports of accredited NGOs. At numerous instances throughout its history, the complicated and often strained relationship between religious and political structures was borne out in Committee decisions. Jewish NGOs are one such example. Most Jewish organizations, showed strong support for the UN until the General Assembly passed a resolution declaring Zionism to be a form of “racism and racial discrimination” (which it rescinded in 1991). Some Jewish NGOs, such as Hadassah (a medical and relief organization nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize), have been subjected to special scrutiny by Arab and Muslim states in the process of trying to secure consultative status (which was eventually granted).

The Department of Public Information (DPI) in the UN Secretariat, a second accrediting body, has faced its share of complications vis-à-vis religious NGOs as well. For example, after a decade of relations with DPI, the Watch Tower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses) withdrew its formal association. DPI learned that most Witnesses had no knowledge of this affiliation and were scandalized to learn about this relationship. According to their theology, the UN is represented by one of the Beasts in the biblical Book of Revelation. The rationale for the clandestine association

²⁰ Jewish RNGOs are generally independent of formal Jewish religious leadership, as the Jewish faith does not have one doctrinal authority. Catholic orders are examples of “cooperative” RNGOs as they derive their direction from the teachings or the Catholic Church but do not answer directly to the Vatican. The Bahá’í International Community would be categorized as a “subordinate” RNGO in that its work is directly guided by the international governing body of the Bahá’í Faith.

with the UN may have been a strategy furthering the Witnesses' agenda with respect to their human rights struggles. There have been similar complications with organizations related to the Church of Reverend Sun Myung Moon, whose activities have been judged as illegal and which has taken objectionable position on the rights of women, and failed to meet the standards of fiscal transparency.²¹

In today's political climate, characterized by increasing tension between religious and State authorities as well as the increasing degree of civil society participation at the UN, many of the above complications are unavoidable. Indeed they are part of a larger, largely spontaneous process of testing and refining the global democratic machinery set into motion by the events of the last half-century. In an effort to review and improve existing mechanisms for UN-civil society cooperation, in 2003, the Secretary General appointed a High-Level panel to propose recommendations for overcoming assessed deficits. The resulting report titled, "We the Peoples: Civil Society, United Nations, and Global Governance," acknowledged the important role the NGOs have come to play in the deliberative and humanitarian work of the UN and put forward recommendations for streamlining and strengthening this relationship. Furthermore, the report singled out "religious and spiritual groups" as constituencies deserving of greater attention because of their, "explicit representational roles of wide membership," highlighting their role in providing community leadership, shaping public opinion, and calling attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.²²

VI. Rise of Conservative RNGOs at the UN

One of the central trends shaping RNGO participation in the last decade has been the rising influence of traditionally conservative RNGOs. This rise has signaled a major shift in strategy for conservative Christian groups, who have traditionally opposed the UN and have sought to exercise their influence from outside rather than from within the UN (e.g. using media to criticize the UN, calling on Congress to decrease funding to the UN). The momentum generated by the UN conferences of the 90's and the steady increase in civil society participation and influence in these arenas, led to a realization among conservative groups that deliberations at the UN had a tremendous impact on social issues and if they didn't get directly involved, decision impacting issues of greatest concern to them – such as women's and children's rights, family planning, population and development, as well as HIV/AIDS—would be made without their input. The 1994 Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in particular galvanized the participation of conservative RNGOs, who found themselves compelled to present their points of view.

This realization prompted a shift in organizing strategies, where conservative groups now looked to become directly involved in conference processes and began to seek formal accreditation at the UN. The U.S. Administration appeared to support this approach. In 2002, Ric Grenell, former spokesman to the U.S. Mission to the UN invited Representatives of minority religious NGOs to

²¹ Paine, H. and Gratzner, B. (2001). "Rev. Moon and the United Nations: A Challenge for the NGO Community." Global Policy Forum. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/analysis/1101moon.htm> [accessed 17 June 2005].

²² Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships. 2004. *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the UN and Global Governance*. United Nations, New York. UN Doc # A/58/817.

meet with him and share their concerns. It became clear that the Administration was committed to encouraging conservative and religious NGOs that previously may have had little or no interest in the UN to become more active in this arena. Since then, Christian Right organizations have significantly risen in prominence even being invited to join official government delegations to UN meetings. Examples of prominent conservative Christian organizations at the UN include: Concerned Women for America, United Families International (Mormon-based), Real Women of Canada, American Life League, and the Heritage foundation.²³

Conservative NGOs, traditionally a minority among the predominantly liberal population of RNGOs at the UN, have demonstrated highly effective and creative use of media and organizing strategies to accomplish their aims – often ‘out-organizing’ their more liberal counterparts. One strategy has been the strengthening of ties with social conservatives in other religions and denominations including Jews, Muslims, and the Mormon groups. Lending further impetus to their UN activities has been their development of a strong global network, extensive use of media to spread their message, the cultivation of a new generation of leaders, and an investment in think tanks rather than an exclusive focus on direct social services.²⁴

VIII. How effective are RNGOs in the new diplomacy?

Within the context of the UN today, the aim of RNGO activity is ultimately to influence thought and action among those in decision-making positions. That may range from influencing debate through the contribution of additional information or perspectives, pushing for the realization of stated commitments, bringing excluded voices to the table, or facilitating forums for NGO collaboration which lend impetus to the development and shaping of global public opinion on issues merit the consideration of the UN. Religious NGOs, often deeply connected into extensive networks of human and material resources, are uniquely suited to these tasks.

Their religious nature, in particular, however, raises important and often difficult questions for the UN. First is the issue of accreditation, as described above. Aside from this, having evaluated the capacity of an RNGO to contribute meaningfully to the work of the UN (that being the stated basis for accreditation), the deciding body must ensure that religious NGOs will not seek to engage in proselytization. (One measure of legitimacy in this arena is the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, which was developed in 1994 by the eight of the world’s largest disaster response agencies and includes a non-proselytization clause; many RNGOs at the UN are signatories.) The second set of concerns before the UN, which applies to all NGOs equally is that of representation and accountability: On what basis do the organizations represent their constituents? Are the election processes democratic? To whom are they accountable? Some fear that organizations which describe their mission in terms of carrying out a spiritual or Divine purpose will be less willing to ‘play by the rules,’ and may take extreme or exclusivist positions which undermine the deliberative ideals, underlying the UN-civil society relationship.

Interestingly, the ‘Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations’ (called for by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan) noted that,

²³ Butler, J. (2000). For faith and family: Christian right advocacy at the United Nations. *Public Eye* IX: 1–17.

²⁴ Ibid.

“...some civil society constituencies deserve greater attention by the UN because of their explicit representational roles or wide memberships...it is suggested that [the UN] explore secondments from those constituencies to provide focal points for the Civil Society Unit. Religious and spiritual groups...provide powerful community leadership, shape public opinion, provide advice on ethical matters, facilitate reconciliation between conflicting communities and identify the needs of vulnerable groups. These are important functions, but other types of civil society organizations also perform them. So rather than engaging with them in a special way, the Panel suggests ensuring that they are included alongside other actors when relevant.”²⁵

IX. Questions for further consideration

- The religious impulse continues to seek out new forms of expression and new avenues for carrying out the Divine plan in the world. RNGOs represent one such new form, embodying within themselves tremendous diversity. The matter of religious agency in the world is central to the task of understanding NGOs. How do representatives and members of RNGOs understand *religion* and their responsibilities as members of that religion.²⁶ (It may be helpful to explore how they understand the differences between a ‘religious’ vs. a ‘not religious’ NGO.)
- Almost all religious NGOs are part of larger religious entities/networks. The nature of the relationship between the RNGO and this entity (entities) is key to understanding the operationalization of the religious impulse mentioned above.
- In terms of working methods among NGOs at the UN (e.g. committees, organizing for participation in Commissions, etc.) —the religious is rarely part of the conversation (unless the event is specifically about religion). The focus, rather, is on the issues under consideration by the UN, such as the advancement of women, climate justice, human security, the protection of human rights, etc. The Bahá’í International Community, at various times, has been mistaken for a ‘women’s rights NGO,’ or a ‘human rights NGO,’ or now as an ‘environmental NGO.’
 - Interesting to consider that the NGO Committee for Social Development is largely made up of religious NGOs (see Appendix 3), yet is in no way viewed as a ‘religious NGO’ committee. Nor do their contributions to the UN focus exclusively on moral/ethical dimensions.
 - The membership of the NGO Major Group of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development is also made up mostly of religious NGOs. How does this shape the nature of the group’s discussions and contributions to the UN?
 - In some cases, the RNGO is the sole religious entity in their network or advocacy group (e.g. Bahá’í International Community often joins with other international

²⁵ UN Document A/58/817. Paragraph 156.

²⁶ It is interesting, in this respect, to consider the view in the Bahá’í Faith that: “Bahá’u’lláh [the founder of the Bahá’í Faith] has not brought into existence a new religion to stand beside the present multiplicity of sectarian organizations. Rather has He *recast the whole conception of religion as the principal force impelling the development of consciousness*. As the human race in all its diversity is a single species, so the intervention by which God cultivates the qualities of mind and heart latent in that species is a single process.” Bahá’í World Center (2005). *One Common Faith*. Haifa, Israel.

- human rights NGOs when addressing the human rights mechanisms at the UN, or working on the Gender Equality Architecture Reform campaign).
- What are the primary considerations driving RNGOs' decisions about the issues it engages in and the groups that it works with?
- The NGO structure is associated with a predominantly Western (and Christian) worldview. How does this perception shape the establishment and engagement non-Christian and non-Western NGOs with the UN? And, beyond the UN, in their respective countries?
 - In what circumstances is religious affiliation important/ relevant when engaging with the UN? How do RNGOs/ UN agencies answer this question?

Appendix 1

Religious NGOs in Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (2002)

Category I

Adventist Development and Relief Agency
 Africa Muslims Agency
 African American Islamic Institute
 Al-Khoei Foundation
 Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University
 Caritas Internationalis
 Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (World Council of Churches)
 Congregations of St. Joseph
 Franciscans International
 Good Neighbours International

Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America
 International Association for Religious Freedom
 Muslim World League
 Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement International
 Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities
 World Conference on Religion and Peace
 World Fellowship of Buddhists
 World Muslim Congress

Category II

8th Day Center for Justice
 Advisory Commission of the Evangelical Church in Germany
 Agudas Israel World Organization
 American Jewish Committee
 American Life League
 Anglican Consultative Council
 Association of Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa, New Zealand
 Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
 Baha'i International Community
 Baptist World Alliance

Brothers of Charity
 Campaign Life Coalition

Canadian Council of Churches
Catholic Daughters of the Americas
Catholic Institute for International Relations
Catholic International Education Office
Catholics for Free Choice
Centre for Women the Earth the Divine
Chabad – International Jewish Educational and Cultural Network
Christian Aid

Christian Children's Fund
Christian Democratic International
Christian Peace Conference
Church World Service
Comite Catholique Contre La Faim et Pour le Developpement
Concerned Women for America
Conference of European Churches
Congregation of our Lade of Charity of the Good Shepherd
Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations
Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations

Couple to Couple League International
Covenant House
Elizabeth Seton Foundation
Edeavour Forum, Inc.
Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria
Fraternite Notre Dame
Friends World Committee for Consultation
General Conference of the Seventh Day Adventists
Gran Fraternidad Universal
Habitat for Humanity International

Haddassah, Women's Zionist Organization of American, Inc.
Hope International
Interfaith International
International Buddhist Relief Organization
International Catholic Child Bureau
International Confederation of Christian Family Movements
International Catholic Union of the Press
International Council of Jewish Women
International Council on Jewish Social and Welfare Services
International Fellowship of Reconciliation

International Islamic Charitable Organization
International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations
International Islamic Relief Organization
International Muslim Women's Union
International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation
International Shinto Foundation
International Union of Young Christian Democrats
International Young Catholic Students
International Young Christian Workers
Islamic African Relief Agency

Islamic Centre England
Islamic Heritage Society, Inc.
Islamic Relief

Islamic Women's Institute of Iran
Islamic World Studies Centre
Japan Fellowship of Reconciliation
Ladies' Charitable Society
Lutheran World Federation
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Inc.

Mennonite Central Committee
Mercy Corps International
Miramed Institute
National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales
New Humanity
Order of St. John
Pax Christi International
Pax Romana
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Prison Fellowship International
Publication and Coordination Centre of Islamic Ideology and Sufism
Religious Consultation of Population, Reproductive Health, and Ethics
Salvation Army
Schools Sisters of Notre Dame
Scouts Musulmans Algeriens
Simon Wiesenthal Center
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries

Servas
St. Joan's International Alliance
Susila Dharma International Association
Temple of Understanding
Teresian Association
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United Methodist Church - General Board of Global Ministries
Women's International Zionist Association
Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

Word of Life Christian Fellowship
World Alliance of Reformed Churches
World Alliance of YMCAs
World Evangelical Fellowship
World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women
World Jewish Congress
World Organization of Former Students of Catholic Education
World Student Christian Federation
World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
World Vision International

World Women's Christian Temperance Union
World YWCAs

Roster Status
3HO Foundation, Inc

Aliran Kesederan Negara National Consciousness Movement
Asian Buddhists Conference for Peace
Association Catholique Internationale des Services Pour la Jeunesse Feminine
B'nai Brith
Catholic Women's League Australia Incorporated
Centre of Concern
Church Women United
Fe y Alegria (Faith and Hope)
Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America
Food for the Hungry International
Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders
International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements
International Association for the Promotion of Democracy Under God
International Association of Islamic Banks
International Buddhist Foundation
International Catholic Rural Association
International Christian Union of Business
International Christian Youth Exchange
International Council of Catholic Men

International Federation of Catholic Universities
International Movements of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth
Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Pan African Islamic Society for Agro-Cultural Development
Park Ridge Centre
Planetary Citizens
Soka Gakkai International
Southern California Ecumenical Council
United Church of Christ – Board for World Ministries
United Methodist Church – General Board for Church and Society

United Nations of Yoga
Wainwright House
World Association for Christian Communication
World Christian Life Community
World Islamic Call Society
World Union of Progressive Judaism
World Movement of Christian Workers
YWCA of Canada

Appendix 2

Religious NGOs in Consultative Status with the UN Department of Public Information (2002)

3HO Foundation
8th Day Centre for Justice
Africa Faith and Justice Network
African American Islamic Institute
Aga Khan Foundation
Agudath Israel World Organization
Alianza Espiritualista Internacional
American Baptist Churches - USA National Ministries
American Jewish Committee

American Jewish Congress

American Jewish World Service

Americans for Peace Now

AMIT

Anglican Consultative Council

Asociacion Christiana Femenina de Buenos Aires

Association of American Buddhists

Aza Muslim Welfare Complex – Bangladesh

Baha'i International Community

Baha'i United States – National Spiritual Assembly

Baptist World Alliance

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

Bread for the World Institute

Brothers of Charity

Caritas Internationalis

Catholic International Education Office

Catholic Near East Welfare Association

Catholic Relief Services

Centre of Concern

Christian Children's Fund

Christian Embassy of Campus Crusade for Christ

Christian Mission for the United Nations Community

Christian Peace Conference

Christians Associated for Relationship with Eastern Europe

The Christophers

Church of the Brethern

Church Women United

Church World Service

Comision Catolica Argentina Para la Campana Mundial Contra el Hambre, Accion por Desarolle

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs

Congregation of Notre Dame

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Congregation of the Mission

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

Congregations of St. Joseph

Consejo Latinoamericano de Mujeres Catolicas

Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations

Dhammakaya Foundation

Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

Dominican Leadership Conference

Episcopal Church, Executive Council

Evangelical Covenant Church

Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs

Fellowship of Reconciliation

Food for the Hungry International

Franciscans International

Fraternite Notre Dame, Inc.

Friends World Committee for Consultation

Fundacion Habitat y Desarrollo

General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists

Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Hadassah
Institute for the Creation of Spiritual Consciousness in Politics and Economy

Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
International Association for Religious Freedom
International Association for Islamic Banks
International Association of Sufism
International Catholic Child Bureau
International Catholic Migration Commission
International Catholic Organizations Information Center
International Catholic Union of the Press
International Committee of Catholic Nurses
International Confederation of Christian Family Movements

International Council of Jewish Women
International Council on Jewish Social and Welfare Services
International Federation of Catholic Universities
International Kolping Society
International Mahavir Jain Mission
International Mission, Ministry of the Churches of Christ
International Religious Foundation
International Union of Young Christian Democrats
Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Islamic Council of Europe

Islamic Heritage Society
Islamic African Relief Agency
Jewish Braille Institute of America, Inc.
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Jewish Women International
Knights of Columbus
Lama Gangchen World Peace Foundation
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Legion of Christ
Life and Peace Institute

Loretto Community
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Lutheran World Federation
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic
Mennonite Central Committee
Mercy International Association
Messianic Jewish Alliance of America
MRA – Initiatives for Change
Mufid Humanity University
Muslim World League
National Baptist Convention of the USA
National Catholic Educational Association
National Council of Catholic Women
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
National Council on Islamic Affairs

North American Christian Peace Conference

North American Mission Board - Southern Baptist Convention
Order of Discalced Carmelites
Order of St. Augustine
Order des Chevalier Hospitaliers de St. Jean de Jerusalem
Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities
Pakistan Crescent Youth Organization
Pax Christi International
Pax Romana
Planetary Citizens

Presbyterian Church (USA)
Prison Fellowship International
Rissho Kosei-Kai
St. Joan's International Alliance
Salesian Mission
Salvation Army
School Sisters of Notre Dame
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Soka Gakkai International
Southern Baptist Convention – Christian Life Commission

Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship International
Sri Chinmoy Centre
Sunray Meditation Society
Susila Dharma International Association, Inc.
Tanzania Young Men's Christian Association
Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ
Unitarian Universalist Association
American Board for Foreign Missions
Justice Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church – General Board of Global Ministries
United Methodist Church – Genral Board of Church and Society

United Nations of YOGA
United Religions Initiative
United States Catholic Mission Association
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
Ursuline Sisters Congregation of Tildonk
Wainwright House
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's International Zionist Organization
Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Women's Missionary Society - African Methodist Episcopal Church
Won Buddhism
World Assembly of Muslim Youth
World Christian Life Community
World Conference on Religion and Peace
World Goodwill
World Islamic Call Society
World Jewish Congress
World Muslim Congress

World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries
World Peace Prayer Society
World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations

World Vision International
World Vision International Zimbabwe
World YWCAs
YWCA of Nigeria
Zimbabwe Council of Churches
Zionist Organization of America

Appendix 3

Membership of the NGOs Committee on Social Development

AARP
Africa Faith and Justice Network
Alhakim Foundation
Augustinian NGO
Baha'i International Community
Congregation of the Mission
Congregation of Notre Dame
Congregation of Our Lady Charity of the Good Shepherd
Congregations of St. Josep
Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace
Daughters of Charity
Diavona International
Dominican Leadership Conference
Economists for Peace and Security
Franciscans International
Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Georgian Association of Women in Business
Global Action on Aging
Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council
HelpAge International
Hong Kong Council of Social Services
International Association of Charities
International Association of Gerontology & Geriatrics
International Association of Schools of Social Work
International Council on Social Welfare
International Cure
International Federation on Ageing
International Federation of Social Workers
International Federation of University Women
International Federation of Women in Legal Careers
International Kolping Society
International Presentation Association-Sisters of the Presentation
International Movement ATD Fourth World
International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
International Peace Research Association
Ius Primi Viri
International Human Rights Education Association
Loretto Community
Marianists International
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic
Medical Mission Sisters
Mercy International Association
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
New Humanity
Passionists International
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary
Salesian Missions
School Sisters of Notre Dame
Service and Research Foundation of Asia on Family and Culture
Sisters of Charity Federation

Sisters of Notre Dame
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
Society for the Psychological Study of Soc. Issues
Society of the Sacred Heart
Soroptimist International
Tangue de Acción para el Desarrollo
Triglav Circle
UNANIMA International
United Church of Christ JWM/WCM,
United Methodist Church
Vivat International
World Christian Life Community
World Council of Churches
World Veterans Federation
World Youth Alliance