

**Emerging Issues:**  
**Religion, Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding**

**Preface**

Over the course of the development of Peacebuild's five-year Strategic Directions Document (2008-2012), consultations with network members reaffirmed a strong interest in generating and articulating new evidence, analysis, and policy and programming options relating to the changing nature of armed conflict, and governance and democratization processes. Within these broader areas of interest, five priority themes were identified by Peacebuild's membership, one of which was *Identity, Communities and Conflict*.

This report on Religion, Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding represents a first step in a larger, ongoing process of identifying emerging issues, challenges and opportunities for action on this priority theme by the community of practice Peacebuild is a part of. The research areas and recommendations advanced in this report will be considered by Peacebuild's members, Board of Directors, staff and Working Groups when developing the network's future programming.

The methods used to generate this report were loosely modeled on the 'Fast Talk' process developed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). In January 2008, experts in the fields of religion, conflict and peacebuilding were identified by Peacebuild. Four experts, Alia Hogben, Brian Cox, Dr. Paul Rowe, and John Siebert submitted written contributions to a set of questions developed by Peacebuild (listed in Annex 1).<sup>1</sup> These were circulated to the seven experts listed below, who were then invited to participate in a follow-up discussion facilitated by Susanne Tamás. Brian Cox, Dr. John Dyck, Dr. Nathan Funk, Dr. Paul Rowe, and John Siebert partook in the discussion.

Anita Grace, a graduate student in the Conflict Studies program at St. Paul University, Ottawa, drew on both the written submissions and the oral contributions to produce the following report, which summarizes and expands upon all the previous inputs to identify conceptual frameworks, programmatic options, and areas for further exploration and analysis.

Peacebuild would like to extend its gratitude to all the participants who so readily lent their expertise to the development of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Written contributions submitted by expert participants are available on the Peacebuild Forum: <http://www.peacebuild.ca/action/?page=whatsnew&lang=e>.



Expert participants:

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**Executive Summary:**

Religion may be a factor in violent conflict in a variety of ways. It can be used to instigate or mediate, to polarize or transcend, to legitimize or condemn. Drawing on consultations with experts, this report addresses the role of religion as relates to both conflict and peacebuilding, and the engagement of religious actors in peacebuilding efforts.

In recent years, the term ‘religious fundamentalism’ has been commonly used to connect religion with violent conflict. However, this term may be inappropriate for peacebuilding discussions given its lack of clarity and its emotional and conceptual baggage. Whatever terminology is employed, expert participants agreed that conservative religious groups often need to be engaged in conflict resolution, and to label the members of such groups as ‘fundamentalists’ is likely to be counter-productive to peacebuilding.

We are reminded to consider the context of each conflict, the potential religious diversity within a conflict, and the different (legitimate) avenues of political engagement for religious groups. It may be possible to explain a particular conflict in terms of religious ideas, but this may reveal little about other underlying causes of the conflict such as historical, structural, political, and geographic factors. Religion may provide clarity about ‘self’ and ‘other’ and may offer solutions to keenly felt problems, suggesting that religious conflict is closely tied to issues of identity and governance. When religious and political leaders conflate religious identity with state sovereignty, territoriality, patriotism and nationalism, communities may be further polarized. Hence, the challenge is for intervening parties to uncover the underlying or motivating issues in a conflict, to disentangle the role of religion, and to find ways to address these while demonstrating respect for diverse religious perspectives and traditions.

Religious actors can play multiple roles in conflict and peacebuilding, such as through political engagement and inter- or intra-faith dialogues. Although governments and international organizations often fear engaging with these actors, perceiving them to be non-neutral, they can offer ways to approach and mediate conflicts which might not be open to secular groups.

Expert participants proposed guidelines for engaging religious actors in peace building processes, guidelines that are premised upon respect and active listening. Suggestions were also made for future research and actions, such as exploring the relation between human rights and religion, and mapping the activities of Canadian religious actors in peacebuilding.

**A. Key Points:**

***Unpacking ‘Fundamentalism’***

*Fundamentalism is usually used for groups of people who have particularly severe positions based on faith... and is often used as a pejorative or a way to silence certain people who have beliefs that differ from the mainstream.*

*Dr. Paul Rowe*

The term ‘religious fundamentalism’ is commonly used in discussions about connections between religion and violence. However, there is much debate about the appropriateness of the term given its emotional and conceptual baggage.

Historically, fundamentalism referred to conservative or evangelical Protestants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that advocated for certain fundamental tenets of the faith and embraced a literal interpretation of the Bible. These Christian fundamentalists were reacting to developments within Christianity, and to changes within a society that emphasized science and technological progress. Their loosely organized movement was characterized by religious devotion and fidelity, even an inflexible dogmatism.

Currently, the term ‘religious fundamentalism’ – often juxtaposed to ‘liberalism’ – may be popularly understood to cover a continuum of characteristics associated with strong religious world views. It spans from an emphasis on fundamental, core religious beliefs, attitudes of high religious devotion, and resistance to the excesses of modern society; to a lack of tolerance for those who do not share the same devotion or are seen as too liberal or compromising; to a political agenda aiming to bring society into conformity with religious beliefs; to a willingness to adopt violent means to achieve religious/political ends.

There are examples of religious fundamentalism that do not have political agendas or condone the use of violence. Any group, religious or secular, may be ‘fundamentalist’ singularly dogmatic in their convictions and behaviours or resolutely intolerant of other understandings of reality. And, as no religious community is homogeneous, it could be argued that fundamentalism could be applied to factions of any religion, but should not characterize the broader group. Fundamentalists are perceived as differing from the ‘mainstream’, yet such juxtapositions are culturally, geographically and historically dependent. Finally, fundamentalists are not necessarily luddites or traditionalists, but have diverse perspectives and approaches to modern technology, even embracing technology as a means to recruit new recruits or communicate with adherents across borders.

It has been argued that in recent years, especially post 9/11, the term ‘fundamentalism’ is more often used with reference to Islamic groups than to Christian ones. It has become imbued with the West’s emotional response to terrorism, but has also been described as the modern discursive substitute for ‘communism’, or may simply be used as a derogatory label

to the ‘other’ or the ‘enemy’.<sup>2</sup> Many Muslims resent the term in its application to them, especially when, as has been indicated, the term lacks clarity and often implies more than it describes. In fact, the contemporary use of ‘fundamentalism’ appears to convey more about the insecurity and fear underlying its deployment and less about the beliefs it attempts to frame.

How useful then is the term ‘religious fundamentalism’ in the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution? Other, perhaps less ambiguous terms could be used, such as extremism,<sup>3</sup> militantism or revivalism. One expert participant suggested that the Arabic term *usuliyya* is an approximate translation of fundamentalism that has some resonance in the Islamic tradition. Whatever terminology is employed, expert participants agreed that conservative religious groups often need to be engaged in conflict resolution, and to label the members of such groups as ‘fundamentalists’ is likely to be counter-productive to peacebuilding. Also, religious identities must be understood in the context of other categories of identity, such as culture, tradition, nationalism or ethnicity.

### ***Understanding the role of religion in conflict***

*What is important when considering violent conflict is not which religions are politically engaged, but what these religions or religious movements say and do with respect to politics, and more importantly with respect to advancing or countering violent conflict.*

*John Siebert*

Religion may be a factor in violent conflict in a variety of ways. It can be invoked to incite or support violence, or may be used to directly condone violence such as when adherents are forcibly coerced to adopt particular practices, or when one’s right to have or adopt a religious belief is directly impaired.<sup>4</sup> Often religion is used to draw boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and to define and polarize communities along lines of conflict. Similarly, it may be part of a communal identity among militants of a particular conflict, even if the goals of the conflict are not solely religious. At other times, a conflict’s expressed goals are explicitly religious, such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979 or the aim of some Al-Qaeda groups to ‘restore the glory of Islam’.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. P. Larson, (2004), *Understanding Religious Violence: Thinking Outside the Box on Terrorism*, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

<sup>3</sup> Special Report to the Human Rights Commission on Religion describes extremism as possibly motivated by religion which “adopts, provokes or maintains violence or takes on less spectacular forms of intolerance, [and] represents a violation of freedom and religion alike” (A/6/25/165).

<sup>4</sup> Special Report to the Human Rights Commission on Religion, A/60/399/A/2/50.

<sup>5</sup> Whether or not religious militants’ goals are actually religious is a point of debate. Tahir Abbas (2006) argues that “actions of these terrorists are almost entirely political and not at all theological” (p. xiii). While Cox, one of the expert participants, suggested Al’Quaeda’s goals are explicitly religious.

While any religion may have political manifestations, whether through the individual or collective practice of its adherents, or through specific political programs, one participant warned that it is dangerous to conflate religion with more complex identities. We are reminded to consider the context of each conflict, the potential religious diversity within a conflict, and the different (legitimate) avenues of political engagement for religious groups. It may be possible to explain a particular conflict in terms of religious ideas, but this may reveal little about other underlying causes of the conflict such as structural, political, and geographic factors.<sup>6</sup> For example, an examination of the Taliban should consider historical factors such as the Soviet occupation and resistance, as well as the Islamic framework which has been used to define the ‘adversary’. Similarly, analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood should look at how the group functions as a brokerage for conservative opposition to the Egyptian government. Analysis of Christian Zionism should include the influence of their political and financial support to American foreign policy and the Middle East conflict.

Western secular society, which perceives religion as a system of beliefs, a world view or a cognitive concept, sees the conflation of religion with ethnicity or nationality to be problematic. However, one attraction of violent religious factions is the clarity they may provide about ‘self’ and ‘other’.<sup>7</sup> Another is that they offer solutions to keenly felt problems. This suggests that religious conflict is closely tied to issues of identity and governance. Religion – especially when tied to ethnicity and other (threatened) aspects of the self or the group – can be a powerful motivation to engage in conflict. In conflicts with ‘outside forces,’ religion also provides a strong sense of group cohesion that derives from the claim to authenticity or ‘true values.’

### ***Approaches to religious conflict***

*“It’s not enough to take the gun out the man’s hands, you have to deal with the causes behind... a more compelling alternative has to be presented to him, and a ‘religion of peace’ is not a compelling alternative.”*

*Brian Cox*

In an environment of heightened threats to security and identity, religious and political leaders may conflate or harness notions such as state sovereignty, territoriality, patriotism and national identity with religion. Such dynamics fuel conflicts polarize communities, and challenge intervening actors who seek to disentangle the role of religion and other factors in a specific conflict, i.e. violent religious factions offer solutions to legitimate problems identifying and separating the grievances which may be motivating a particular conflict could provide a more constructive way to approach the conflict. Additionally, the focus should be on what is being said or done to advance violence, and how to make violent options less

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<sup>6</sup> Larson, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Jessica Stern, (2003), *Terror in the Name of God*, (New York: Ecco), p. 157.

appealing such as by suggesting and promoting non-violent alternatives for political engagement.

Conflicts may arise from the interaction between different religions, but can often be addressed with tolerance and through dialogue. When such conflicts become violent, it is important that intervening bodies (i.e. international civil society organizations) should be careful to not be seen as imposing a foreign standard. Their responses should draw from existing international agreements rooted in human rights and international law. Locally recognized adjudicating institutions, legal or customary, could be employed to mediate conflict, and processes such as fair trials and legitimate policing should apply to actors in religious conflicts as they would to other conflicts.

Additionally, inter-faith and intra-faith dialogues are approaches to be considered when addressing religious conflict. Where religion is a factor in a violent conflict there may be opportunities to support dialogue between moderate and extreme factions. Where the conflict is between different religions, opportunities for dialogue can be created by engaging with willing and legitimate leadership from both sides. However, dialogues are not helpful if they are arranged as debates or simply as opportunities for conversion. Constructive dialogues are those which signal intent to listen and become venues for mutual respect and problem-solving. They should move away from defining or debating religious convictions and move towards shared and practical responses to legitimate, identifiable needs (super-ordinate goals), such as humanitarian assistance.

It should be remembered that conflict arising from divergent religious perspectives is not the problem – it is the violent manifestation of such conflict that needs to be addressed. Religious adherents and leaders have the right to seek converts and propagate their views, as long as this is not done through violence or excessive coercion.

### ***The role of religion in peacebuilding***

*Religious movements are increasingly radicalized as they are excluded from the process. We need to make the [peacebuilding] process as participatory as possible and try to bring (in) people from diverse areas of traditions.*

*Dr. Paul Rowe*

All religions have teachings and practices that can contribute to peacebuilding. These should be identified and alternatives to violence could be sought in accordance with the tradition of the religion in question.

Religious peacebuilding is the “range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose for resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and

nonviolence.”<sup>8</sup> Local, national and international religious organizations may direct their singular, ecumenical, or multi-faith efforts towards building peace and resolving conflicts. As such, religious actors can influence at different levels – elite, mid-level or local. They offer unique strengths in peacebuilding, such as their ability to understand religious texts and contexts, to appreciate both the threats and opportunities presented by social change, and to deal with opposition to peace or justice positions from within religious communities. Project Ploughshares is one such example. An ecumenical agency of the Canadian Council of Churches, Ploughshares is charged with working with churches and related organizations, as well as governments and non-governmental organizations, in Canada and abroad, to identify, develop, and advance approaches that build peace and prevent war, and promote the peaceful resolution of political conflict.

## **B. Conceptual Frameworks:**

### ***Engaging religious actors in peacebuilding***

*States should seek to engage in dialogue and consult as widely as possible among the most important religious groups and leaders in a society so as to gain credible commitment from all elements.*

*Dr. Paul Rowe*

*In conflict situations, it's important to have an ear to the ground, to try to discern which constituencies may feel excluded... and who might have something to contribute to peacebuilding.*

*Dr. Nathan Funk*

At the outset, it should be acknowledged that the distinction between religious and secular actors is ambiguous at best. As one participant suggested, religion may be too narrowly defined, as secularism may itself be viewed as a religion with its own sets of beliefs. At a practical level, secular organizations may engage religious individuals to work within their organizations. At a conceptual level, it is important to acknowledge that religious identity is fluid and that adherents may at different times and in different circumstances emphasize some identifiers over others, privileging religion or class, race, gender or ethnicity or some combination thereof. Those of the same faith may also adopt practices or interpret religious doctrine differently. As to whether ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ actors are best placed to intervene in a conflict, the answer should be determined by the context of a particular conflict. The reputation, connections, and personality of an individual mediator may also be key.

People who consider themselves secular may view religious communities with some degree of skepticism, especially when dealing with politics and violent conflicts. Western governments may prefer to work with secular organizations, which are assumed to be more

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<sup>8</sup> David Little & Scott Appleby, (2002), A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict, in Harold Coward & Gordon S. Smith (Eds.), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (1-26), New York: State University of New York Press, 5.

neutral. However, faith based organizations (FBOs) may, in fact, be more sensitive to certain types of conflict issues and dynamics. Peacebuilding organizations can bridge some of the (real or imagined) divisions between ‘secular’ civil society organizations (CSOs) and FBOs by identifying commonalities and ensuring that both sides are informed about the agendas, functions and concerns of the other. In some conflicts secular organizations may be better suited to intervention.

Prior to engaging with religious actors in peacebuilding processes, a number of questions should be considered: Are the people who are being engaged actually representative of their religious groups? Which tendency within their religious group do these people represent? What is their legitimacy within their own community? One participant advocates for engaging self-constituting groups in a way that involves and speaks to the interests of local members instead of relying on the ‘big names’ or those who tend to be most vocal. This is likely most beneficial when attempting to build bridges within local communities, in instances where conflict is particularly acute. However, for the purpose of peacebuilding policy and research, another participant advocates for “...engaging those who are most articulate on matters relating to peace, and who have thought about it most deeply within the context of religious interpretation, history, and *practice*. They are usually not famous, but many not be local either.”

When engaging any group – ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ – in peacebuilding, attention should be paid to the strengths of the organizations and the role of inter-personal dynamics. Certain groups have established positions within a community from which they are well-placed to facilitate dialogues and interventions. Those who are able to articulate their traditions in ways that are conducive to building peace should be sought out. Mainstream or moderate religious leaders should be assisted in advancing peace discussions without compromising their integrity or in their own communities. Discussions should be pluralistic, participatory, and respectful. Additionally, efforts should be made to engage with and include youth and women. Religious organizations can play a positive role in resolving conflicts because they:

- demonstrate credibility as a trusted institution;
- possess a respected set of values or principles and moral warrants for opposing injustice on the part of governments;
- hold unique leverage for promoting reconciliation among conflicting parties;
- re-humanize enemies that have been dehumanized;
- mobilize community, national, and international support for peace;
- follow through locally on commitments; and
- possess a sense of calling that inspires perseverance in the face of obstacles.

However, for some participants, there will be situations when the involvement of religious groups in conflict resolution may only exacerbate tensions. While for others, the question is not whether or not to include, but how much to include religious groups, to what extent, when, at what stage, how, and to what purpose. History and trust are among the factors to

consider when engaging groups in peacebuilding efforts. CSOs seeking to involve themselves in conflict resolution should be aware of their position and credibility, and seek to establish relations of trust with local leaders who can vouch for them.

Participants suggested that Canadian politicians may be a source of information and advice as some have experience communicating and cooperating with religious communities in their respective electoral ridings. Partnerships with universities, including the convening of conferences, may also open up avenues of research and dialogue, particularly as these tend to be highly experienced at accommodating and, presumably, at enabling communication between a great number of communities of faith.

### ***Guidelines for Engaging Religious Actors in Conflict Resolution***

*There needs to be dialogue in which there is a commitment to listen to the other side.*  
*Dr. John Dyck*

1. *Show Respect:* Even if state officials are non-religious or secular, they should respect the role of religion in other people's lives. The language used by governments and intervening bodies should promote active listening. Beware of labels which come from one's own tradition (e.g. progressive vs. fundamentalist).
2. *Get informed:* Religions have observable and knowable manifestations. Understand a religion's basic practices and institutional expressions. Learn about the issues at hand. Encourage and facilitate inter-faith and intra-faith dialogues. Try to develop a feel for different interpretive tendencies within a religion (e.g., traditionalist, revivalist, reformist).
3. *Distinguish relevant factors:* Religion is unlikely to be the only identifier at play or, if it is determined to be a driver of conflict, it is unlikely to be the single cause.
4. *Recognize threats and address legitimate grievances:* Understand the concerns of religious communities. Respect the fact that traditional religious societies may see modernization or societal changes as a threat. Actual grievances should be addressed as a means to defuse the conflict and promote opportunities for dialogue.
5. *Appeal to common standards:* Draw upon frameworks which can address the issues and protect the interests of conflicting parties, such as human rights agreements. Employ mutually recognized mediating institutions. Where there is resistance, try to discover whether the issue is the standard itself (perception of cultural imperialism?) or the perception of unfair/uneven application (human rights applied advantageously for everybody but people like us). If possible, explore local narratives and elicit underlying concerns or grievances. 'Hear' the other even while adhering to what is recognized as an internationally legitimate position.

### C. Emerging Issues and Research Areas:

#### *Faith, State and Pluralism*

*I think we must not fall into the trap of 'either/or' such as 'secular versus religious.' There are no countries which don't have blurred lines between the two.*

*Alia Hogben*

In the 'West', the separation of church and state is historically rooted, and, according to one participant, religious positions are considered to be 'products of free choice'. However, such a view risks marginalizing religious groups or adherents who seek to dialogue with the state, or altogether fails to acknowledge how faith and state are inseparable in many parts of the world. Questions to be explored further include:

- How can a secular state dialogue and work with religious groups?
- What underlies the fear of governments to engage with particular religious groups? One participant identified the need for short courses and training for diplomats that enhance cultural competences and contribute to an ethos of respect and listening.
- Are there aspects of religious life which are 'out of bounds' to the state? Such boundaries should be clearly articulated and discussed. One participant suggested that engagement with conservative groups abroad requires an ability to articulate how many religious groups in Canada see and embrace the value of a neutral state and regard democratic process as a manifestation of things like the 'golden rule.' This would help break down some stereotypes about 'Western secular society' for secular does not necessarily mean 'unreligious.'
- What are the ways to cultivate reciprocity, including the protection of religious minorities?
- How can we ensure that all voices are heard and not just those that are most dominant or privileged within religious groups?

#### *Human Rights*

*Religion and human rights need to dialogue. There is a perception that the West uses human rights as a justification for war, as a value issue.*

*Dr. Nathan Funk*

Human rights are internationally recognized legal norms and frameworks. However, certain interpretations, meanings and applications of rights, particularly those that reflect the West's social and political development, are contested in many parts of the world. For example, debates may coalesce around perceived contradictions between individual and collective rights.

It is vital to recognize that, for many, the colonial era was rather recent. In order to work for religious freedom in a humble and circumspect manner, one must acknowledge past Western missteps and recognize ongoing fears of cultural imperialism. This is all the more true in the context of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where human rights are viewed as having lent themselves to their justification. This double-standard, especially in the context of the ‘war on terror’, is felt to be further demonstrated by the condemnation of select regimes when political efficacious.

Being neutral about religion in the policy domain need not presuppose refusing to talk about it, or not having a policy on it. Dialogue is key.

### ***Democratization and the Intersections of Politics and Religion***

While the utility of the term ‘fundamentalism’ is debatable, the more important question is how and under what circumstances politics and religion are co-joined. In other words, what is required is a deeply contextual understanding of ‘fundamentalism’ and to recognize that political, socio-economic and historical factors play into extreme politicized manifestations of religious groups. While some manifestations are deeply historical, some groups also reflect distinctly contemporary reformulations (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood’s role in opposition party politics in Egypt).

When emphasizing context in the co-joining of political and religious conviction, it is important to identify the motivations driving adherents’ willingness to embrace violent means. Grievances related to weak or abusive governance may give rise to various forms of radicalism so too might extreme impatience with the pace of democratic change or process. Yet, according to one participant, pushing democratization through a policy of destabilization is also counterproductive. Rather, regimes could be encouraged to enter into dialogue with the religious opposition and explore ways of opening political space.

Members of religious communities may be asked to participate in the democratic process in ways that are prescribed or not felt to be transparent or meaningful. An important step can be to identify super-ordinate goals common to various groups and frame these in such a way as to create possibilities for constructive engagement. It is also important to identify why certain narratives are more conducive to violence or peace than others.

### **D. Opportunities for Action:**

#### ***Identification***

- Map the informal and formal collaborations taking place amongst FBOs in Canada. This would enable a clearer articulation of diverse traditions of peace, build on best practices, and support peacebuilding efforts. It is important to engage with, and support adherents who are articulate about their religious traditions and express these in a way that is constructive, ideally with support from their own community.

This mapping may be extended to identify collaborations occurring between FBOs and CSOs.

- Research could also explore the inter-cultural/inter-religious competence of religious and secular CSOs/NGOs. One discussant hypothesizes that, with regards to the ability to garner trust, religious groups may be at both ends of spectrum while non-religious groups are positioned in the middle.

### ***Meaningful Participation, Engagement and Dialogue***

- Explore if and how the concerns of religious actors feed into policy development.
- Develop a framework for engaging religious communities in international affairs, peacebuilding, policy making, etc.
- Enable and support the Government in its efforts to work and cooperate with religious organizations.
- Develop programs that aim to engage members of multiple religious traditions, and not just those in the most recognized positions of leadership. One discussant provided the example of a US-television program that brings together people of different faith traditions to discuss different issues. For the station it is an opportunity to expand their viewership. In Canada, Vision TV is a good example of the Canadian multicultural/pluralistic ethos that can be shared in a context of dialogue. Similarly, CSOs can expand their scope, depth and membership by reaching out to faith-based communities. In supporting constructive dialogue, civil society has an important role to play in building trust and minimizing the mutual skepticism that characterizes existing relationships between FBOs and CSOs.
- The Government of Canada may want to sponsor multitrack diplomacy round tables that can foster cooperation and understanding among faith-based actors. Although, as one discussant warns, when considering tracks one and two, intervening parties should be aware of the limitations of such approaches, especially when actors' goals are highly divergent.
- The Government of Canada may develop a policy framework that affirms the value of consulting voices from within religions. Such policy formulation and outreach could lend itself to a deepening of democracy, the enhancement of problem-solving and allow more scope for government to cultivate international relationships without the perception of privileging a particular religion at a given time.

### ***Legal Frameworks***

- Examine how general principles, such as freedom of religion, rights of assembly, etc., are relevant to specific religious groups. Are there specific ways in which general freedoms need to be defined or recognized? Can considerations be granted which do not violate the rights of the individual or of other groups but which better accommodate religious beliefs/concerns?

## Annex 1. Questions for Participants

### **Religion, Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding**

1. What is understood or implied by ‘religious fundamentalism(s)’? In what way does the use of such categories or constructs help or hinder attempts to understand and address the causes and results of violent conflict and build a stable foundation for peace?
2. What are some of the different varieties of politically engaged religious movements? To what extent do protracted conflicts feed fundamentalism and vice versa?
3. How should the international community respond to non-pluralistic expressions of religious sentiment and political influence? Are there grounds for secular-religious engagement?
4. How can governments engage with religious actors to promote the realization of conditions necessary for peaceful relations or to prevent conflict?
  - a. What is the best way for a state to engage with another state in which religious identity or affiliation is being politicized / polarized as part of a conflict? What approaches might the first state use to try to prevent the continued polarization / politicization of religious identity?
  - b. What is the best way for a state to engage with transnational actors or organizations that politicize / polarize religious identities, and contribute to conflict?
5. How can members of secular civil society engage with members of religious communities to promote the realization of conditions necessary for peaceful relations or to prevent conflict?
6. How can policy makers and civil society actors recognize the desire of many groups to have the religious aspect of their identity recognized, without furthering the agendas of particular organizations and movements that may have authoritarian or anti-pluralist tendencies? Given that all religious traditions are internally diverse, how can the potential of progressive religious movements be tapped without the appearance of undue external intervention in religious affairs?
7. What are the comparative advantages of secular and religious civil society organizations (CSOs) in conflicts that involve religious identity and culture?
8. What other critical areas or questions should be explored with regards to engaging religious identity in peacebuilding and the prevention and/or resolution of conflict?

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