

EXCERPT FROM THE REPORT ON UNHCR'S ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, 2011¹

THEMATIC SESSIONS

Strengthening protection: The role of faith-based organizations (FBOs)

This session explored the challenges faced by national FBOs, their unique strengths and protection potential, and how INGOs, UNHCR and national FBOs can maximize their collective field-level protection efforts. It examined FBO contributions to protection, their potential, and the prospects for developing strategic protection partnerships with FBOs. During the session, NGOs recognized the importance that faith plays in the lives of conflict and disaster affected communities, and the role and influence of faith communities and faith based organizations in protection. Faith helps people cope with trauma; it validates their humanity; informs their decisions and offers guidance, compassion, consolation and hope. Participants acknowledged that FBOs - while incredibly varied - have particular strengths and challenges unique to their protection work and a unique legitimacy to negotiate humanitarian access and engage in mediation and peace building. Participants also acknowledged differences when working as an FBO in the majority or minority faith. There was also discussion of the perception and/or misperception that FBOs link assistance to religious activities in a discriminatory way or proselytize and pursue 'hidden agendas'. Some FBOs may face obstacles in addressing issues such as HIV/AIDS, SGBV, and LGBTI rights. UNHCR recognized the unique protection strengths and challenges of FBOs, and expressed willingness to work more closely with FBOs and other stakeholders with the overall aim to lift obstacles and improve partnerships in line with humanitarian principles. The UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations took note of the recommendations of FBOs and stated that they would need review; some might be taken on; some might have issues which need to be resolved; FBOs are important because they are also national partners.

Recommendations:

- UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service review the role of FBOs in protection in order to develop a more concrete understanding within UNHCR and the wider humanitarian community of their protection strengths and challenges in complex and insecure environments.
- UNHCR develop a Strategic Framework for Engagement with FBOs in consultation with FBOs and other stakeholders, which a) recognizes the unique protection strengths and challenges of FBOs; b) the need for an institutional approach to partnership rather than a project-based approach; c); draws on the knowledge and experience of a wide range of FBOs and other stakeholders; d) draws on the example set by UNFPA and UNAIDS in developing strategic frameworks for engaging and partnering with FBOs, and e) links to wider efforts to improve UNHCR partnerships with national NGOs.

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *Report on UNHCR's Annual Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations* (28-30 June 2011, Geneva, Switzerland), pg. 13-14, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations/ngo-consultations-2011/Final-Full-Report-on-UNHCR-Annual-Consultations-with-NGOs-28-30June2011.pdf>