



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

## OVERSEAS RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

JUNE 27- 29, 2011

Course Facilitator:  
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Peacebuilding and Conflict Management efforts overseas increasingly involve the need to engage religious individuals, communities, and institutions. Course participants will learn about the challenges as well as the opportunities involved in working in this context, with an emphasis on religious and host-government sensitivities, church-state separation legalities, and the roles of religious individuals and communities as political actors and agents of change.

**Objectives:** By the end of this course, participants will gain:

- practical support to “demystify” the religious realm
- skills to navigate respectfully within religious spaces and with religious leaders, as well as how and when to implement programming in partnership with communities of faith
- guidelines for engaging with clerics/senior figures versus grass-roots communities
- insights on how religion impacts social, political, economic, dynamics
- understandings how religion affects and changes ideas of reconciliation, and attitudes toward conflict management
- guidance for ongoing consultations with religious communities, impact assessment of programs

### **Teaching Methodology and Structure:**

The course takes a two-fold approach to teaching. It is largely *elicitive* in nature, meant to draw out and utilize each participant’s professional experience. The class also has a *prescriptive* component: new concepts and analytical tools are introduced, but with the aim for each student to identify and articulate how these ideas can be *directly applied* to his or her work.

A number of *interactive exercises* will be used as learning tools: case studies, role-playing, simulations, guided discussions, etc.

### **Course Requirements:**

Students are asked to attend every session and to participate in all activities and discussions/debriefs.

Recommended readings can be accessed on-line in the USIP Distance Learning platform.

- Log on by clicking at: <https://academyonline.usip.org>
- Your user name is your first initial followed by your last name, for example, Adam Smith would use: asmith
- Your initial password is Usip!123 – this password is case sensitive. You may change your password after your first log-in.
- From the list of courses, choose “Overseas Religious Engagement”.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### **June 27: Defining the Actors and Issues**

##### 1) Discussion and Exercises: *Identifying Religious Actors as Partners*

How do we understand differences between religion and culture, and why does it matter? What are common perceptions and biases that International Affairs professionals have of communities of faith? How should we respond to uncomfortable questions?

##### 2) Discussion and Exercises: *Opportunities and Challenges*

How are we affected by US church-state separation legalities? How do we approach religious hierarchies or “gatekeepers”? Which religious leaders have legitimacy, and are we comfortable dealing with them? Whose voices are missing?

##### 3) Discussion and Exercises: *Religion and Politics: Differences in Practice*

Is it possible to have Judeo-Christian biases, even if we’re non-religious? How do religious traditions underpin and guide politics in Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic settings? How does secularism differ in these contexts? What can we, as outsiders, do to better maneuver and achieve our goals in these environments?

##### 4) Discussion and Exercise: *The Grass Roots and the need for Ritual and Symbol*

How is dealing with grass-roots communities of faith different from with working with clerics? What are the limitations of dialogue in this environment? How might we make use of ritual and symbol to enhance trust-building?

*Recommended Readings:*

David Smock, "Religion in World Affairs: Its Role in Conflict and Peace" USIP Special Report 201, February 2008.

Scott Thomas, "A Globalized God: Religion's growing Influence in International Politics" *Foreign Affairs* November/December 2010.

**June 28: Developing Partnerships**

1) Discussion and Exercises: *Working with the Religious "Mainstream," Countering Extremists*

What do we need to know about extremists and how and when can we counter them? Who is "mainstream," and who might be too progressive to work with? How might we engage with traditional and more conservative religious actors?

2) Discussion and Exercises: *Democracy, Development and Religious Actors*

Which political parties and movements should we know about? What is the standard of measurement for democratic and religious movements, if any? Is this just politics and diplomacy with religious language, or is it something different?

3) Discussion and Exercises: *Impact Assessment of Programs: Reproducing Best Practices*

Which programs are most successful? What can we measure and reproduce? How do we avoid issues of dependency funding?

4) Guest Lecture: "Traditional Means of Conflict Management in Religious Communities: Issues for the Practitioner"  
Qamar-ul Huda, USIP

*Recommended Readings:*

George E. Irani and Nathan C. Funk, "Rituals of Reconciliation: Arab-Islamic Perspectives" Kroc Institute Occasional Paper # 19:OP: 2, August 2000.

Chris Seiple, "Ten Terms NOT Useful to Engaging Muslims Worldwide" *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 March 2009.

**June 29: Engagement in Practice**

1) Discussion and Exercise: *Reframing Solutions*

How do we deal with issues such as promoting religious freedom when engaging with conservative religious communities? What can be done to reframe, not just rebrand, sensitive subjects?

2) Capstone Exercise: *Religious Engagement in Pashragan*

Can we remember it all under pressure?

*Recommended Reading:*

“Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding: An Introductory Programming Guide” United States Agency for International Development, September 2009.

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