



USIP's Work on Religious Engagement in Peacebuilding



With USIP support, former adversaries Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa of Nigeria mediated a peace accord in Yelwa-Shendam, resulting in a decade of peace. The work of these two leaders is highlighted in *The Imam and the Pastor*, a documentary film featured by universities and peacebuilding organizations worldwide. USIP created a manual to help educators and practitioners use the film to facilitate discussions about religious reconciliation.

STATE OF THE FIELD

With 84 percent of people worldwide identifying with a religion, faith influences local, national, and international decision-making. Across the globe, violent extremism often is couched in religious terms, and religious discrimination is on the rise. At the same time, people of faith and religious organizations frequently are on the frontlines of peace efforts, assisting communities affected by violence. Although religious considerations have been marginal to peace efforts historically, governments and peacebuilding organizations increasingly recognize the importance of religion.

USIP'S WORK

For more than 25 years, the U.S. Institute of Peace has been at the forefront of efforts to better understand religion in peacebuilding, harnessing the contributions of people of faith and religious leaders, practices, ideas, and institutions to promote inclusive societies and build sustainable peace. The Institute helps policymakers engage effectively with religious actors through its research, advising, and training. USIP also works directly with religious individuals and institutions during violent conflict to strengthen their peacebuilding skills and promote religious coexistence. Recent work includes:

Repairing Ruptures Within and Across Religions. USIP works to promote tolerance and collaboration that bridges divides within and between faith traditions. USIP's interfaith and intra-faith work includes:

- ▶ **Colombia.** The Institute helped establish the Ecumenical Women Peacebuilders Network, a nationally recognized group of Catholic and Protestant women church leaders who advocated locally for the 2016 peace accords. Now they help foster

reconciliation as former combatants return home.

- ▶ **Iraq.** USIP trained civil society facilitators in religious peacebuilding and supported them in implementing a series of local projects, including peace courses at sharia colleges and community discussions on religious violence and reconciliation.
- ▶ **Pakistan.** USIP partnered with the Renaissance Foundation for Social Innovation to organize dialogues across 20 university campuses about inter- and intra-religious violence and radicalization.
- ▶ **Sri Lanka.** The Institute worked with the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation to form a coalition of 200 faith leaders, women and men, from Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam who mitigate local conflicts.

Researching Religion's Influence and Shaping Policy. Through its on-the-ground research with local partners, USIP strengthens understanding of how religious ideas, practices, actors, and institutions influence both conflict and peace.

With its Initiative to Map the Religious Landscape in Conflict-Affected States, USIP has created a unique methodology for peace practitioners to track and analyze the impact of religion. Mapping has been completed or is underway in Libya, South Sudan, and Iraq. In addition to providing concrete data to help guide strategic engagement, such research helps policymakers determine the best approaches for establishing secure, sustainable peace.

Similarly, USIP's Religion and CVE Initiative has explored the complex relationship between religion and violent extremist movements around the world. Convening policymakers and religious actors from diverse settings, this global series of symposia has resulted in policy recommendations for those seeking to partner with religious actors in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

Developing Practical Resources for Training and Educating. USIP has developed a series of action guides focused on religion and conflict analysis, mediation, reconciliation, and gender-inclusive religious peacebuilding in collaboration with the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the Salam Institute of Peace and Justice.

The Institute also works with religious education centers to build knowledge, skills, and confidence in conflict prevention, mediation, and reconciliation. In Burma, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria, and Pakistan, USIP has supported peace studies curricula that resonate with local cultural and religious ideas and practices, helping to ensure that the next generation of religious leaders are prepared to build peace.

Examining Women's Roles in Religious Peacebuilding

Religious peacebuilding efforts have too often focused on male clerics while marginalizing or ignoring religious women who are actively building peace, often at the front lines of violence.

USIP's Women, Religion, and Peace Initiative—conducted with the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and the World Faiths Development Dialogue—highlights the peace efforts of women religious leaders and the role of religion in empowering women peacebuilders. This initiative resulted in a 2015 anthology of case studies that highlight the challenges and contributions of women religious leaders to peace worldwide.