Faith for Earth Steering Committee of Accredited Faith-based Organisations to the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA)

A Platform for Enhanced Coordination amongst UNEA-Accredited Faith-based Organisations:

Rationale: Building a Foundation to Foster Greater Collaboration

Accredited Faith-based Organisation (FBOs) within the NGO Major Group account for approximately 10% of the total accredited organisations, and a handful occupy the other nine Major Groups and Stakeholders (in total, 2 in 2019; 58 as at June 2022; and 80 as at June 2023; 82 June 2024).

At the 'Faith for Earth Dialogue at UNEA 5.2' held at UNEPs Global Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya and through the Regional Multistakeholder Consultations of Stockholm+50, FBOs called for greater integration and coordination among the growing list of accredited FBOs at the policy level, enhance FBOs as strategic partners at all levels, and promote greater dialogue between the eight other Major Groups and Stakeholders.

Faith for Earth was therefore requested to facilitate the effective engagement of accredited FBOs before, during, and after UNEA and to harness the collective power of FBOs in environmental sustainability. At the same time, FBOs are highly engaged through the mechanism of the three Interfaith Working Groups, on Climate Action, Nature Action, and Pollution Action, facilitated by the Faith for Earth Coalition.

This Steering Committee presents FBOs with **a highly networked and coordinated platform across the UN System**, noting that they are active in several civil society fora with specialised knowledge due to their longstanding participation in meetings and conferences, and established networks across civil society.

This Steering Committee invites an **efficient workplan** relying on the preparation of the Interfaith Working Groups throughout the year and over substantive thematic areas driven towards environmental-policy related matters discussed at UNEA and the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), combining policy advocacy with initiatives that drive knowledge sharing, and formulation of best practice.

Lastly, this Steering Committee is strategically placed to identify **interrelated and interconnected** environment and climate-related concerns drawing parallels with the support of the best available science.

The potential for interfaith and interagency cooperation through the Steering Committee presents an innovative approach to engaging stakeholders at the UN-level, and particularly at UNEP where environmental action requires a whole-of-society approach.

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Outcomes of the Steering Committee

- Leverage the Interfaith Working Groups facilitated by Faith for Earth and other interfaith networks to support advocacy with science-based evidence.
    - Leverage this platform to build strategic partnerships, ensure coordination of accredited FBOs at UNEA and across the MEAs.
    - Present the achievements and strategic engagement of the Interfaith Working Group, or interfaith networks, towards a coordinated and strategic approach to environmental governance at the global level.

- Coordinate with the larger group of accredited FBOs to strengthen engagement before, during, and after UNEA:
    - Maintain an updated list of accredited FBOs in collaboration with the Civil Society Unit.
    - Support FBOs seeking accreditation to UNEA in collaboration with the Civil Society Unit.
    - Build capacity of accredited FBOs fostering greater engagement in collaboration with the Civil Society Unit and other NGOs.
    - Leverage the respective capabilities of the Steering Committee in analyzing information on draft decisions, prepare an interfaith position to the draft text, prepare a set of thematic priorities, and form strategic partnerships to achieve the outcomes of the Committee.
    - Present the Faith for Earth Dialogue as the highest-level interfaith dialogue platform.

- Coordinate with the Major Groups and Stakeholders for enhanced and integrated interfaith engagement in the spirit of collaboration and partnership:
    - Strengthen relationships between FBOs and other Major Groups and Stakeholders
    - Increase FBO engagement in regional workshops and sessions
    - Enhance thematic engagement by FBOs, coordinating approaches, viewpoints, advocacy, and more across the MEAs.

The Role of Faith for Earth

Faith for Earth serves as a **convenor** of the Steering Committee and a facilitator of their Outcomes. The Initiative seeks to support the Outcomes of the Committee by providing FBOs with a specific thematic platform (faith and interfaith) ensuring that they are well informed and actively engaged of FBOs at UNEPs governing body.

To achieve this Faith for Earth seeks to mobilise available knowledge resources for capacity-building opportunities, facilitate peer-to-peer support, and harness the specialist advice of the Interfaith Working Groups in lobbying representatives of Member States at the national and global levels through the appropriate channels.

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Background: The Importance of Civil Society Engagement, particularly the Role of FBOs

Major Groups and Stakeholders play a critical role at UNEA and in shaping UNEPs Programme of Work through the Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2025) (MTS). Civil society engagement fosters transparency and inclusiveness in accordance with applicable rules and regulations.
Read: Why Civil Society Matters

The Agenda 21 adopted at the Earth Summit formalized nine sectors of civil society as the main channels through which broad participation is facilitated in the UN System. Faith, values, and ethics promote good governance, reconciliation, peace building, safe, inclusive, and peaceful societies, and strong institutions through the lens of environmental sustainability. In this context, the UNEP identifies Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) as critical players in eradicating poverty, improving people's health, protecting the environment, and working toward sustainable development.

The MTS highlights a distinctive role of faith actors, to strengthen the contribution of faith actors in policy dialogue through engaging with faith leaders, faith-based organizations, and faith communities (collectively referred to as faith actors) to promote far-reaching, value-based perspectives on environmental sustainability that speak to billions of people around the world. FBOs, during the discussion of the MTS, emphasized their commitment to strengthening collaboration with UNEP, at national, regional, and international levels.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Steering Committee

1. Coordinate with Faith for Earth and other FBOs on drafting, implementation and presentation of statements, declarations, calls to action, and strategic documents of UNEP and UNEA
2. Co-organise webinars/seminars to build capacity on technical and substantive matters relevant to accredited FBOs and the UNEA engagement process for Major Groups and Stakeholders.
3. Promote joint activities among accredited FBOs and others, especially through the Interfaith Working Groups
4. Provide advice to Faith for Earth on strategic issues including the Theory of Change and structure of the new project document.
5. Leverage the platform to coordinate efforts between FBOs engaged in civil society spaces across the UN System and MEAs to lift up key messages, priorities and opportunities to engage.

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Organizational Structure of the Steering Committee

The Steering Committee will consist of 5-6 members with an equal gender balance and diverse religious representation. In this regard, it should also include youth representatives, and others reflect the diversity of the faith network.

Likewise, it will establish formal and structured coordination with other major groups, ensuring that the voices of faith actors are included in civil society discussions and outcomes.

Terms of service

The Accredited FBOs Steering Committee shall serve for two consecutive years, or from one UNEA session to the other.

On the other hand, it is important to note that a membership is revoked if a member fails to attend two consecutive meetings without a compelling reason.

Code of Service

The Steering Committee must uphold the following values and principles:

- Commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Respect for all spiritual and religious beliefs.
- Adoption of the principles of “Leave no one behind”.
- Transparency in governance structure and decision-making.
- Interfaith collaboration with mutual acceptance and respect.
- Focus on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, mainly those related to the environment
- Building bridges between existing knowledge and experience scientifically and spiritually.
- Perform actions that respect individual and communal beliefs.
- Aim at Transforming people’s behaviors through their spiritual values.
- Respect the rules of the UN and do not cause harm to its reputation under any circumstances.
- Perform duties in accordance with the principles of the Faith for Earth Coalition.
- Understand that this is a limited assignment and might be withdrawn if an individual break any obligations.
- Commitment to be pro-active in advancing the agenda of the committee and the Coalition. If an individual is unable to actively engage, must inform the Secretariat of the circumstances for their review and consideration.

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