

Why Religious Freedom Is an Economic Plus Worldwide

As the world's political and economic leaders met for the G20 Economic Forum in Turkey earlier this month, religious leaders also gathered in Turkey to highlight the major role that faith plays on the global stage. The G20 Interfaith Summit, held Nov. 16-18 in Istanbul, was the second time religious leaders had gathered on the sidelines of the main G20 meetings. The event brought together academics, public leaders and representatives from a broad range of faith groups, including Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus, to explore the role of religion and religious values in driving positive economic development.

Ganoune Diop, director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, represented the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the event and delivered a plenary address on the final day of the summit. His paper, "Moral Foundations for the Sustainable Development Goals: On Dignity, Freedom and Solidarity," explored, among other things, the importance of promoting freedom of religion or belief. Diop developed the argument that religious freedom is a pivotal human right—one that is central to all other freedoms, and which is essential in tackling the root causes of poverty, and nurturing sustainable development.

"Political and economic strategies are, of course, important in addressing issues of sustainable development," says Diop. "But faith and faith values play a tremendous and often unrecognized role in many different facets of human interaction. For this reason, religions should bring their best values to the world's economic challenges, and people of faith need to work together to alleviate suffering and promote the well-being of all."

Other speakers at the G20 Interfaith Summit included David Saperstein, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom at the United States Department of State; Rahmi Yaran,

the Grand Mufti of Istanbul; and Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at the United Nations. The terrorist attacks in Paris, coming just days prior to the start of the Summit, lent a particular urgency to discussions, says Diop, especially those related to building more harmonious relations between people of faith.

According to Diop, it's vital that Adventists be a part of the conversation at an international level. "When Jesus was on Earth, He mingled with people," he explains. "He engaged with their problems and concerns in practical, compassionate ways."

"As Jesus' followers, [we] cannot exist in isolation," says Diop. "We're connected with humanity, and we stand in solidarity with a world that aches with injustice and suffering of many different kinds." He adds that Adventists have unique contributions to make to any discussion about how religion can boost quality of life.

The International Religious Liberty Association, a non-sectarian NGO originally chartered by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1893 and still supported by Adventists, was one of 25 organizations, faith groups and universities that sponsored the G20 Interfaith Summit. For more information about the Summit program and goals, visit .

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