

Ethiopian President Calls Interfaith Dialogue a Practical Force for Progress at G20 Interfaith Ethiopia Conference

Landmark two-day conference that places Africa's faith communities at the center of global efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals

ADDIS ABABA, UT, UNITED STATES, May 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) convened today at the historic Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa, launching a landmark two-day regional conference that places Africa's faith communities at the center of global efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the continent's pivotal role in the 2025 G20 process. The event, held in conjunction with World Interfaith Harmony Week and Golden Rule Day, has drawn religious and traditional leaders, policymakers, diplomats, NGOs, and youth from across Africa and beyond. The African Union, United Religions Initiative (URI), and the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia were co-sponsors to the event.



G20 South Africa 2025

The opening session set a tone of agreement and resolve, with the Ethiopian national anthem and the African Union anthem, prayers led by various religious leaders, and a Golden Rule recitation by youth representatives. Welcoming addresses underscored the urgency of interfaith collaboration in addressing Africa's most pressing challenges, including peacebuilding, sustainable development, and social justice.

“ To live in peace, we must bring justice into the topic.”
Sister Agatha O. Chikelue

A central highlight of the day was the keynote address by the honored guest H.E. Taye Atske Selassie, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. He acknowledged the work

that religions and people of faith do for their communities, their country, and the world. He gave interfaith organizations a call to action:

“In a world marked by division, eroding values, commercialization of human dignity, and political polarization, these kinds of gatherings present a vital opportunity to foster dialogue among faith communities. Interfaith dialogue is not merely a moral imperative. It is a practical force for progress.”

Throughout the day, speakers in plenary and breakout sessions tackled urgent issues:

- The transformative role of religious organizations in advancing the G20’s purpose in Africa, including the role their charter played in getting the African Union into the G20.
- The sacred imperative of peace with justice and inclusion, including peacebuilding’s links to climate change, democracy, and human rights.
- Sustainable finance, humanitarian needs, and Africa’s leadership in global development debates amidst a world of turmoil.

Sister Agatha O. Chikelue, Executive Director of the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, moderated a panel discussing how to live in peace. She pointed out that we must talk about peace in a more complete way, using the analogy of trying to drive a car without gas: Without justice, peace stays immobile.

“To live in peace, we must bring justice into the topic,” Chikelue said.

A focal issue of conference discussions was the importance of increasing the inclusion of women and youth at the discussion table. Women are often overlooked and become quiet partners in meeting Africa’s needs. In terms of youth, Africa is the youngest continent on earth with a population of 1.4 billion and 65% of that population is below the age of 35. Young adults and youth need to be invited to sit at the table as major participants, rather than silent attendees.

Ms. Azmaira Alibhai, Faith and Ecosystems Coordinator at the Faith for Earth Coalition, moderated a panel on leading Africa’s response to environment and climate challenges. Climate change poses a severe threat to Africa’s sustainable development, impacting various aspects of life from agriculture to water resources to the health and economic stability of communities and societies. Adaptation and mitigation efforts are crucial to address these challenges. Religious actors have practical examples of improving environmental issues. By sharing their best



H.E. Taye Atske Selassie, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

practices, religious actors and leaders can mobilize communities and raise awareness about this critical issue. These organizations can bring a moral and ethical framework that uses everyday language that is accessible to communities based on the relationships of the people in those communities with religions and their faith leaders.

Mr. Timothy Starford spoke as the G20 Interfaith Forum Representative and reviewed seven special strengths of faith communities in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development goals:

1. Faith communities encompass the vast majority of the world's population (>83% per Pew Research Center), especially in regions that are especially vulnerable.
2. They maintain deep roots in, understanding of, and credibility with local communities.
3. They are connected to global communities.
4. They spur insights and motivation based upon values shared for centuries that can transcend politics and other differences.
5. They often have access to considerable resources, especially in terms of volunteer manpower.
6. They organize non-governmental, locally-driven efforts, aided by international resources, often addressing problems more quickly, efficiently, and creatively than governments acting on their own.
7. They work together with other faith communities to address problems, which deepens harmony and builds a sense of community at the local level.

Concurrent sessions in the afternoon delved into climate challenges, religious freedom, humanitarian crises, and the commitment to “leave no one behind.” Faith leaders, scholars, and activists shared practical strategies for addressing corruption, hate speech, gender-based violence, and the needs of refugees and marginalized communities. The conference participants were encouraged to “think and do.”

The forum’s opening day reinforced the power of unity, dialogue, and community-led action. As Africa takes center stage in global policy discussions under South Africa’s G20 Presidency, the G20 Interfaith Forum is amplifying the message that sustainable peace and development must be rooted in inclusive, faith-driven partnerships.

The conference continues through May 14, with sessions focusing on women’s leadership, youth empowerment, and strategies for translating ideas into action.

About the G20 Interfaith Forum

The G20 Interfaith Forum seeks global solutions by collaborating with religious thought leaders and political representatives to help shape the overall G20 agenda. It draws on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting a rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. Through its extensive network of networks, it helps prioritize key global policy goals and point toward practical means of implementation at every level of society.

For more information, please visit www.g20interfaith.org

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