G20 Interfaith Forum Turns Faith into Action on Trafficking, Hunger and Mental Health, and Homelessness

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G20 Interfaith Forum

SALT LAKE CITY, UT, UNITED STATES, October 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Faith leaders, policymakers and practitioners at the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) took on human trafficking, hunger, mental health, pandemic preparedness and more in 13 concurrent "Faith in Action" sessions on Friday afternoon, then put their words into practice at a service project supporting Utahns experiencing homelessness.

In a session on preventing human trafficking and modern slavery, panelists stressed that prevention begins with education and strong families, noting that much trafficking happens within families. They pointed to a forthcoming international standard, ISO 37200, that will help organizations prevent, identify, mitigate, remediate and report trafficking and forced labor risks. The IF20 is again calling on G20 nations to fund and coordinate the fight against a criminal trade it estimates generates $356 billion a year. "Prevention begins long before trafficking occurs. And it can begin as early as preschool age," said Katie Boller Gosewisch, Executive Director of the Alliance to End Human Trafficking. "We do not need to wait until adolescence to teach the concepts that help protect children."

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> *Rev. Dr. David Beckmann, President Emeritus of Bread for the World*

University of Utah Health CEO Dr. Bob Carter, a neurosurgeon and brain researcher, joined a

panel on faith approaches to mental health moderated by David Huntsman, President and CEO of the Huntsman Family Foundation. Carter said healing requires both science and faith, and urged religious leaders to learn to recognize signs of mental illness in their communities. Dr. Elizabeta Kitanovic, CEO of IF20-Europe, said faith communities can guard against isolation, but warned that leaders who attach guilt to mental illness can make it worse. “We know faith is a strong anchor for people, especially experiencing severe adversity,” said Dr. Diana Rayes of Georgetown University’s Initiative on Faith, Trust, and Health. “Faith leaders in recent years have been better equipped by humanitarian actors — by public health doctors — to understand and recognize symptoms early on.”

In a session on poverty and hunger, Ambassador (Rabbi) David Saperstein urged investment in girls’ education worldwide as a long-term tool against poverty, and Luisa Banchoff of the World Faiths Development Dialogue said feeding the hungry is a duty shared by all of the world’s major traditions.
“There are lots of problems in the world we can’t solve, but we don’t have to have millions of kids in America who don’t eat enough. This is doable,” said Rev. Dr. David Beckmann, President Emeritus of Bread for the World.

A session on clubfoot highlighted one of the most treatable causes of childhood disability. Panelists estimated that 175,000 children are born with clubfoot each year, nearly all of whom can be treated without surgery using the Ponseti Method of casting and bracing. Representatives of Shriners Hospitals for Children, CURE India, Clubfoot Solutions, Rotary International and the Ponseti International Association discussed expanding access to the treatment worldwide. “With this Ponseti method treatment, you can help a person avoid having a disability,” said Dr. Monica Nogueira, an orthopaedic surgeon with the Ponseti International Association.

Building on Thursday’s signing of the Jewish–Muslim Declaration of Fraternity in Faith, a session on the Abrahamic family brought Jewish, Christian and Muslim participants together to study texts on love of God and love of humanity, drawn from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Talmud, the Quran and the Hadith. “In many cases, the more someone’s own identity is deep and solid, the more likely he or she will be able to open up and communicate with someone of a different identity,” said Rabbi Dr. Aharon Ariel Lavi, CEO of the Jerusalem Interfaith Center. “They don’t feel intimidated because their identity is strong.”

After the sessions, participants of many faiths worked side by side with volunteers and students at a service project organized by the Turtle Shelter Project, preparing the pouches that hold the organization’s warming vests for people experiencing homelessness. The Turtle Shelter Project, which partners with shelters and community organizations across Utah, had distributed more than 6,000 vests as of August 2025.

Other afternoon sessions included:
- Faith Engagement on Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness — Panelists from The Pandemic Fund at the World Bank, UNICEF, Islamic Relief Worldwide and other organizations explored how

the trust and grassroots reach of faith groups can provide early warning, counter misinformation and deliver care in health emergencies.

• Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief — Scholars and advocates, including Katrina Lantos Swett of the Lantos Foundation and Eric Rassbach of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, argued that religious freedom underpins peace, development and the protection of marginalized groups.

• Preventing and Addressing Gender-Based Violence — Leaders from United Religions Initiative, the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Women20 USA and the Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples called for prevention, culture change and faith communities that respond to survivors with care.

• Linking International Educational Initiatives to G20 Priorities — Leaders from BYU-Pathway Worldwide and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists discussed education that leads to real jobs, with a focus on Africa.

• Beyond Dialogue: Religion, Peace, and the Next Generation of Peacemakers — Fellows and leaders of A Common Word Among the Youth (ACWAY) discussed how to move young people from interfaith dialogue to community action.

• Educational Initiatives for Social Cohesion — Educators from Indonesia's Leimena Institute, Arigatou International and American University, joined by multiculturalism expert Dr. Ravan Hasanov, shared approaches to ethics education and cross-cultural religious literacy.

• Policy and Program Improvement through Systematic Evaluation — Researchers from Brigham Young University and its Ballard Center for Social Impact presented tools to help faith-based organizations measure their impact.

• Learning from G20 Interfaith Forums in South Africa — Panelists reflected on how the African principle of ubuntu, "I am, because we are," shaped South Africa's 2025 G20 presidency, the first hosted by an African country.

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