

# on **LOCATION**

Zanzibar

Arigatou International - End Child Poverty  
January 2021



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## 'On the Journey Towards Social Cohesion'

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# STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION

An interfaith delegation from Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), and Sudan Interreligious Council (SIRC) undertook a learning and exposure visit to Zanzibar on 12<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> December 2020. The visit was facilitated by Arigatou International—Nairobi and hosted by Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC). This visit came under the Sudan Social Cohesion Initiative which is implemented by SCC and SIRC and supported by Arigatou International, the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), Hekima Institute for Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR) and the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) - under the Regional Peace Program (RPP).

The visit convened sixteen participants from Sudan, five from the above-mentioned supporting partners from Kenya and twenty one from Zanzibar representing both the Christian and Muslim faiths. Zanzibar was chosen because of its long history of religious coexistence.

The aim of the learning visit was to reflect on the practical models of community interaction aimed at building harmonious coexistence among people of different ethnic and faith groups. Some of the reflections and activities included: dialogue that emphasized on good practices and challenges of such work; visits to different religious and historical sites; and advocacy opportunities with senior government officials and religious leaders as part of supporting learning on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and strengthening social cohesion and the interfaith work and mission of ZANZIC, SCC and SIRC.

The Sudan Social Cohesion Initiative project-closing workshop was also held within the margins of the visit.





## ABOUT SUDAN SOCIAL COHESION



The Sudan Social Cohesion Initiative is a faith-led initiative aimed at strengthening and enhancing social cohesion between different faith groups; protecting and promoting the fundamental rights of faith minorities in the country.

The initiative promotes interfaith dialogue, interaction and cooperation of people belonging to different faiths, by using religious resources as tools for mobilization, building trust and positive relationships between key religious leaders/institutions and communities in selected sites in Sudan.



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We are learning about peaceful coexistence by listening to the 'other'.

– Fred Nyabera,  
Director, Arigatou International - End Child Poverty

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# An Overview of Interfaith Relations and Social Cohesion in Sudan and Zanzibar:

## Zanzibar:

### *Why Zanzibar?*

Zanzibar was particularly chosen for its rich history of religious foundations, especially the Muslim-Christian relations, and the fact that it strikes some symbolic similarities with Sudan:

Zanzibar has had positive interfaith relations over the years. Nonetheless, grievances around economic and political marginalization get mixed with religious overtones. These are especially more visible during the general elections.

Interfaith relations are sometimes increasingly strained in the face of more intolerant attitudes, many associate with conservative strands of Islam introduced from the Persian Gulf. Hence, more needs to be done to promote religious and societal tolerance as well as acceptance of religious and political differences in order to live with such differences in peace.

There was a general appreciation by the participants on the opportunity to visit Zanzibar.

## Sudan:

Religious freedom conditions in Sudan have improved significantly under the transitional government. However, the long history of state repression and direct marginalization of identity groups severely constrains the effective promotion of social cohesion in Sudan. In addition, the challenges to do with the implementation of the new favorable laws and the transformation of the social hostilities still remain.

Over the last thirty years, policies, laws and practices have systematically undermined the rights of marginalised communities in Sudan, particularly Christians, as well as Muslims who did not conform to what the former regime deemed to be permissible religious practice.

The transitional government and the other strategic actors-including faith actors have the colossal task of ensuring an end to these abuses.

## REFLECTIONS, OBSERVATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

### The Role of Religion in Social Cohesion:

It was highlighted that, in some cases, religious actors can be a significant resource towards peace and should be enabled. In others, they could be a source of conflict — hence, the emphasis must be on mitigating, containing or reversing their involvement in conflict escalation. Participants acknowledged that there are issues which divide the local religious communities that can be minimized through intra and inter - faith engagements. The need to learn the facts about religion from their authentic sources and not from the behavior of radical groups was also noted. The Sudanese delegation shared that education that promotes social cohesion and FoRB has not reached many Sudanese. To this end it was highlighted that faith communities in Sudan and Zanzibar should play an educational role, primarily toward their followers, to teach them about peace related values from within their own tradition and to encourage tolerance, coexistence and cooperation toward others.



### **Fundamental rights and freedom:**

The participants affirmed that the rights and fundamental freedom of all the people in both Sudan and Zanzibar are central to peace and stability in both countries and should be promoted and protected. This includes the need to respect the rights of minorities as well as those of the majority without any discrimination on gender, age, race, culture, ethnicity or religion.

### **Genuine and deep Interfaith dialogue:**

It was acknowledged that there are both differences and shared values within and between the Christians and Muslims. Hence, interfaith dialogue can be conducted without leaving differences at the door and yet strengthen what brings 'us' closer — connectors - and not what puts us apart — dividers. It was also noted that, dialogue is not a means for assimilation or conversion. Rather it is meant for understanding the 'other,' understanding self, understanding and engaging with differences. Cooperation around common interests and initiatives (Diapraxis) was highlighted as a proven interfaith dialogue strategy.

### **The need to work with the government:**

Both delegations acknowledged the need to collaborate with the government without being co-opted or compromised. The Sudanese delegations narrated how this has contributed to both policy and social change in their country. Religious leaders in Zanzibar also talked about the work of the 'Joint Committee of Religious Leaders in Zanzibar' – a multi-faith body that was established to work with political officials to counter intolerant messages and quell violence in Zanzibar during times of political unrest.

### **Structures for enhancement of social cohesion:**

Strengthening or creation of faith-based structures to promote social cohesion and sustainable peace and the support for local capacities for peaceful co-existence was emphasized. To this end deliberate strengthening of institutional capacity of SCC, SIRC and ZANZIC was stressed.





## The Role of Women in Promoting Peace



The need to strengthen the participation and influencing power of women on (inter)faith structures and their contribution to policy changes and positive interfaith relations was highlighted. Women's inclusion in social cohesion processes is essential for long-term success. However, despite strong evidence in favor of their inclusion, women remain largely invisible in and sidelined from formal faith structures.

Participants visited Upendo(love) Centre, run by ZANZIC, where Christians and Muslims women engage in diapraxis through joint livelihoods projects. The delegation was informed that by participating in activities and solving problems together, the women create shared experiences that destroy stereotypes as they build positive attitudes towards each other. This was one of the highlights of a Sudanese delegation – who intend to contextualize some lessons within their own women empowerment initiatives.

## Youth and Children



Children and youth form an important part of the community and are a resource through which social cohesion can be built. The delegations from Sudan and Zanzibar exchanged ideas on their youth and children initiatives, peace clubs and networks and how they can bilaterally network with each other in these aspects in future. It is common knowledge that the future lies in the youth and children. Since young people are often manipulated into violence and extremism, there is need to direct their energy and innovation towards peace building and social cohesion.



### Dyapraxis – Economic Empowerment:

ZANZIC, works with mosques and churches to support income generation projects and activities at interfaith levels. These projects promote religious understanding, trust, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Diapraxis is an important means of intercultural, interreligious dialogue and harmonious co-existence.



# Field Visit to Historic, Cultural and Religious Sites in Zanzibar

*'Our History Molds Us'*



## **The Slave Market**

A location for selling of the captured Africans as slaves, a trade that went on for more than four centuries. At the end of the slave trade the Anglican Church built a church on this location in 1874, but retained the historic slave dungeons and marketing locations of the captured Africans.



## **The Catholic Cathedral**

The cathedral of the Catholic diocese of Zanzibar which stands peacefully in the midst of many other mosques, a symbol of peaceful coexistence between different religions.



## **The Hindu Temple**

Represents the history of Indians in the coastal region of Eastern Africa. The temple displays the different gods of the Hindu religion.



## **Spice Farm**

Has a variety of spices from different parts of Zanzibar, displaying the ancient spice trade that Zanzibar has been known for.



## **The Oldest Mosque in Zanzibar**

*(and probably in Eastern Africa)* – This mosque is located in Kimzikazi and dates back to the year 1107.



The learning and exposure visit allowed for a critical exchange of ideas and experiences between the Sudanese and Zanzibar faith actors. Specifically, it helped the participants to deepen their understanding on issues of social cohesion, peaceful coexistence and freedom of religion or belief.



## Promoting Social Cohesion Through Media

The need for conflict sensitive journalism was emphasized.

The participants exchanged experiences on how they have used the media as a voice for social cohesion. To this end the need to partner with the media, build the capacity of journalists and create exchange networks was underscored.



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Regular joint discussions and initiatives among Muslim and Christian leaders continue to help and unite Zanzibaris to carry out their social economic activities in harmony. In addition, the culture of trusting each other has taken roots among the Zanzibaris adding that Zanzibar varies from most African countries in maintaining peace and religious tolerance.

Mufti of Zanzibar,  
Sheikh Saleh Omar Kaabih

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## MOVING FORWARD

There are differences between SCC/SIRC and ZANZIC in terms of context, history and structure however there exist areas of possible cooperation that should be further investigated, initiated and or strengthened.

Arigatou International, FECCLAHA, HIPSIR and NCA will collaborate with SCC/SIRC and ZANZIC towards mutual objectives through the Regional Peace Programme and bilateral efforts.

Possibility of a reciprocal visit to Sudan by ZANZIC was discussed.

A participatory follow up plan of action to be drawn.







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Despite our religious 'differences' it is important to work together to discuss our challenges and the best way forward in peace building.

Bishop Alex Malasusa,  
ZANZIC CCK.

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