



Israel: Religious leaders bolster COVID-19 response with civil society and WHO/Europe support

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14-01-2022 “In a way, COVID-19 has been just another crisis for us,” says Dr Daniel Roth, Director of Mosaica – Religion, Society and State, an Israeli civil society organization (CSO) that specializes in interreligious dialogue and conflict resolution.

However, with the onset of COVID-19, it became clear that religious communities were also facing unique challenges in implementing preventive measures.

To strengthen and expand the capacity of religious and community mediators to respond to current and future emergencies, WHO/Europe supported Mosaica with the establishment of the Kavod/Karama Project, the name reflecting the Hebrew and Arabic words for dignity, emphasizing the religious value of advancing human dignity and well-being in response to the challenges of COVID-19. The project spans religious affiliations, combining scientific soundness and religious appropriateness.

Working towards a shared aim

“People were crying, ‘How can we close the mosques? It’s inconceivable!’ . So, I began to talk about the importance of protecting life,” said Sheikh Ra’ed Bader, senior Islamic scholar and preacher. His words made a difference in people’s acceptance of new religious rules during COVID-19.

Religious and non-religious actors recognize the shared objective of saving lives and preventing suffering. With WHO participation, the Kavod/Karama Project organized 5 dialogues between the most prominent religious leaders and health authorities in Israel, in order to increase their collaboration, and in turn the resilience and readiness of religious communities with regards to health emergencies.

The participants then worked together on a community engagement campaign, during which local rabbis promoted vaccination in advance of Jewish holidays and Muslim leaders addressed vaccine misinformation, prompting more than 12 000 people to get a COVID-19 vaccine. A declaration was also developed by religious leaders that called on health authorities, religious leaders and their communities to work together in response to the current and future emergencies.

Continued collaboration on health

“I believe in collaboration, because the thing at the centre of all faiths is people,” affirmed Archbishop Youssef Matta.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for collaboration between health authorities and religious leaders. Religious leaders have shown unprecedented unity by working together for health, and proved that they can be a bridge between health authorities and communities. They can also be mediators who reconcile science, policy and religious perspectives; health promoters who can identify and reach vulnerable groups; and credible influencers in their communities.

In recognition of these important qualities and with the support of religious leaders themselves, WHO/Europe is developing an implementation tool that offers practical advice on how national health authorities can engage with religious leaders and faith-based organizations. The document also acknowledges that religious leaders can help mitigate fear by helping people take preventive action, and by using religious teaching and their community standing to bring weight to scientific facts and help combat misinformation.

“The difference our cooperation with WHO has made is that it has enabled us to expand our capacity in a credible way, and be proactive on COVID-19 rather than just reacting to crises,” said Dr Roth.

The CSO initiative in the European Region

WHO/Europe’s CSO initiative is piloting new bottom-up approaches, in collaboration with governments, to give communities a say in plans that affect their lives and to ensure they are involved in policy-making processes. It is contributing to the COVID-19 response by strengthening community readiness and resilience to emergencies, connecting vulnerable communities to services and enhancing inclusive governance.

Israel is 1 of 8 countries in the European Region and 40 across the globe piloting such approaches.

Quelle: [World Health Organization](#) (WHO),