Dear friends,

As COVID-19 continues to spread, there have been calls for global ceasefires from the United Nations, Pope Francis, and other major figures in the world. Unfortunately, these efforts at promoting ceasefires have seen limited success, particularly in contexts like Yemen and Syria, where enforcement continues to prove difficult. In order to ensure the greatest likelihood of success in maintaining ceasefires, it is vital that community leaders be empowered and supported in helping to negotiate the terms of peace.

While meaningful attention has been focused on the role and impact of negotiators in conflict spaces, very little has been done to examine the unique contributions of women of faith negotiators specifically. Statistics show that women have comprised only 2% of mediators in major peace processes, 5% of witnesses and signatories, 8% of negotiators. In contrast, peace processes have proven to be significantly more sustainable when they have included women.

In collaboration with United States Institute of Peace (USIP), ICRD is working to compile case studies and curriculum that highlight and support the impactful roles of women of faith negotiators. Martine Miller (ICRD) and Palwasha Kakar (USIP) have managed to distill a diverse array of key findings. Exploring real conflict dynamics in Afghanistan, Colombia, Kenya, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, Syria, and elsewhere, these case studies will contribute to an action curriculum that will be used to facilitate knowledge exchanges and skills development with women who are engaged in negotiating with violent extremists and communal conflict actors.

Importantly, this endeavor will foster a global network comprised of peacebuilders and women of faith. The network will function as a mechanism of support to women of faith negotiators at the community and national levels, while advocating for their vital inclusion in peace processes. In doing so, ICRD aims to rigorously promote the contributions of women of faith in peace negotiations and the resolution of violent conflict.

In Libya for example, ICRD and USIP are profiling the country’s nine-year, post-conflict transition process and the often-overlooked contributions of women. Research conducted in various locations throughout Libya revealed that the mediation and negotiations efforts of women of faith have carried a lot of weight. Focusing on five Libyan women in particular, the study raises the questions, “What were the main considerations that merited the mediation initiatives made by these women of faith, and what led to achieving partial or holistic benchmarks of success?”

One main factor that contributed to success across the Libyan cases was the service-oriented aspect of the negotiations and mediations. Each of the women profiled had a background in the country’s public service sector – whether working in relief and supporting internally displaced persons, as a medical professional in the state hospital, within the ministry of education, in civil mediation, or with local councils to facilitate service delivery. The study highlights that in Libya, service-
oriented women of faith negotiators and mediators are proving to have more legitimacy in gaining acceptance among society than other types of negotiators and mediators.

It is our hope that we can learn from these country cases and elevate the unique contributions of women of faith negotiators and mediators working around the world, as well as help advance research on the role of women in peacebuilding more broadly. Together, we can make faith part of the solution.

Warm regards,

James Patton

Formal peace negotiations have been delayed in Afghanistan. Yemen's health infrastructure is crumbling under the weight of the outbreak. Extremist groups in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia are calling on their recruits to capitalize on the situation. However, as conflict-impacted communities continue to wrestle with the spread of COVID-19, local faith and community leaders are still striving to prevent violence and maintain stability.

ICRD has been working hard over these last few weeks to adapt our peacebuilding and conflict mitigation strategies to the evolving situation. Please consider making a contribution to the Center today. While many of our lives have been put on hold, violent conflict persists. Together, let’s make faith part of the solution.