

**RELIGIOUS ACTORS & HUMANITARIAN NORMS COMPLIANCE IN ARMED CONFLICT:
ROLES, INFLUENCE, ENGAGEMENT**

Online conference, 8-10 December 2021

CALL FOR PAPERS

The [Generating Respect Project](#) hosted by the Centre for Applied Human Rights and York Law School invites paper submissions for the conference **Religious Actors & Humanitarian Norms Compliance in Armed Conflict: Roles, Influence, Engagement** that will take place online between 8 and 10 December 2021.

The conference will take stock of important developments relating to the engagement between humanitarians and religious actors aimed at generating greater compliance with humanitarian norms in times of armed conflict.

The conference seeks to serve as a platform for exchange and reflection among scholars from across various disciplines, humanitarian practitioners, and religious actors.

Theme of the conference

The effectiveness of international law in armed conflict faces challenges from different quarters. These can be linked to systemic and institutional reasons, such as the unwillingness of States to acknowledge that a situation of violence amounts to an armed conflict, the rejection of the applicable legal framework(s) by non-State armed groups (NSAGs), or the lack of appropriate organisational structures and resources enabling State and non-State parties alike to acknowledge, understand and implement their international obligations.

Generating respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) is therefore at the top of the agenda for both humanitarian practitioners and scholars. Against this backdrop, the humanitarian sector – broadly understood to encompass humanitarian organisations, United Nations mechanisms and agencies, and other intergovernmental organisations that operate in conflict and post-conflict settings – has usually pursued direct engagement strategies with States and NSAGs. This approach has prioritized the incorporation of humanitarian norms in the parties' internal rules and standards, in their training, and accountability mechanisms. Despite some success, violations of IHL and IHRL persist, showcasing the necessity to explore and reflect on novel avenues of compliance-generation.

In the last few decades, the humanitarian sector has increasingly engaged with other societal actors identified as having the potential to influence States and NSAGs, or having a central stake in compliance not just as objects of protection but as active subjects of it. Prominent in this development have been religious leaders and such engagements have at times involved reliance on (underlying) values, including religious ones, to underpin or legitimize humanitarian norms. Relevant initiatives are illustrated, for example, on the ICRC blog [Religion and Humanitarian Principles](#).

Thematically, the conference centres on *religious actors and humanitarian norms compliance* with three substantive foci:

Roles:

- What roles can and do religious actors play in relation to humanitarian norms compliance, in respect to their own compliance and relational to the conflict parties' compliance? (e.g. duty-bearer/right-holders; victim/accomplice/perpetrator; influenced/influencer; advocates/agents/spoilers of compliance/non-compliance).
- Are there specific humanitarian norms in relation to which religious actors assume more or less active roles, and why?
- How can the roles of religious actors be documented and assessed? (empirically; methodologically; theoretically)
- Do the roles played by religious actors depend on institutional or structural characteristics? Is our understanding of their roles influenced by the way we define religious actors/leaders, or shaped by other factors such as gender?
- Is there a correspondence between the roles played by religious actors in times of armed conflict with those played post-conflict?

Influence:

- How should the influence of religious actors on parties to armed conflict be defined and measured? (conceptually, methodologically).
- What factors explain or contribute to the influence/lack of influence of religious actors on parties to armed conflict? (e.g. relational aspects, such as shared religion, shared goals; geographical proximity or shared power structures; legitimacy; relationships with community)
- What motivates religious actors to seek to influence armed actors towards greater compliance or lack thereof?

Engagement:

- What strategies of engagement with religious actors have been spearheaded by the humanitarian sector? And vice-versa, by religious actors? (e.g. one-off engagements in relation to an incident, trainings, workshops, common projects, consultancies by religious leaders on broader humanitarian issues).
- How can past and present engagement between the humanitarian sector and religious actors aimed at norms compliance-generation be assessed? (empirically, conceptually).
- What strategies of engagement work best from the point of view, respectively, of humanitarians and religious leaders? What limitations exist?
- How can reflexive practice shape engagement between humanitarians and religious actors?

The above thematic foci are indicative – the organisers also encourage submissions of papers that develop aspects related to the general theme of religious actors and humanitarian norms compliance.

We encourage submissions...

... by scholars, humanitarian practitioners, and religious actors.

... from various disciplines and fields of practice, including international law and its branches, in particular international humanitarian law, international human rights law, international criminal law, law and religion, religious studies, international relations, political science, sociology, anthropology, political economy, political geography.

... with empirical, reflexive or conceptual/theoretical focus, including case study-based and comparative papers, those drawing on qualitative or quantitative fieldwork data (e.g. interviews, focus groups, surveys), relying on discourse analysis, or desk-based research. Reflexive papers written by practitioners and theoretical works embracing feminist, TWAIL and critical race theory lenses are particularly encouraged.

Format of the conference

The conference will take place online over three days between **8 and 10 December 2021**. It will consist of **interactive scholar-practitioner panels**, whereby each presenter will interact with one or two discussants during a 20-minute session, followed by a 15-minute Q&A session with all conference participants.

The event will be opened and closed by two high-level scholar-practitioner roundtables: the first on **civilian engagement as a strategy for generating compliance with humanitarian norms** and the second on **peer pressure as a respect-generating strategy**.

Submission guidelines & timeline

Please submit **paper abstracts of up to 500 words & a short CV with your current affiliation** to generatingrespectproject@york.ac.uk by **1 September 2021**.

Successful applicants will be informed no later than 10 September 2021.

Selected authors should submit **draft conference papers of between 2000-4000 words by 10 November 2021** to generatingrespectproject@york.ac.uk.

Papers will be shared with one or two commentators, and all conference participants.

Publication

The conference organisers plan to publish selected papers in an edited volume on *Religious Actors and Humanitarian Norms Compliance* with a major publishing house. Final papers are expected to be between 6000-8000 words and will need to be submitted by mid-2022. Further details will be provided after the conference.

Contact information

For any inquiries concerning the conference please contact Dr Ioana Cismas at generatingrespectproject@york.ac.uk

About the Generating Respect Project

The project **Generating Respect for Humanitarian Norms: The Influence of Religious Leaders on Parties to Armed Conflict** (the Generating Respect Project) is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and developed in partnership with humanitarian organisations. It aims to document the roles played by religious leaders in times of armed conflict with the aim to provide the evidence-base for the expansion of the interlocutors of humanitarian practitioners beyond the direct parties to an armed conflict to influential societal actors, in particular religious leaders. It therefore proposes a conceptual and pragmatic response to the necessity to generate greater respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) in armed conflict, with the ultimate aim to enhance the protection of communities affected by war.

Visit our [website](#) for more information about the Generating Respect Project.