

Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations: Discussion of Spirituality and Justice

Thomas G. Walsh
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United States -- On September 15, 2020, the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations held a web conference titled "The Role of Ethics, Education and Good Governance for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: Perspectives from Faith-Based Organizations." The conference had 82 attendees from 28 countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh (President, Universal Peace Federation) introduced the panel. The role of ethics, education and good governance in strategies to prevent crime and achieve justice are often not considered together, he observed. However, they build from promoting better individual decisions, to ways that the educational process can support ethical decision making, to building capacity and reducing corruption: All these factors can promote inclusive and effective governance. The purpose of this webinar is to discuss and address questions about the role of faith-based organizations in promoting better ethics, education and governance in our efforts to prevent crime and achieve justice more equitably and consistently.



Panelists

Dr. Jay Albanese (Professor of Criminal Justice, Virginia Commonwealth University) was the first panelist to present, stating that the most pressing problems in the world today were either caused or pushed to a crisis point by poor human choices and corruption. When addressing corruption, institutions tend to focus on structural factors without considering individual accountability. Structural barriers are insufficient; we should also work to make people more ethical. Civil society, including faith-based organizations, plays a role in this second undertaking.


Dr. Wendy O'Brien (Legal Officer, Violence Against Children, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) began by saying that there is a concept in legal scholarship called the implementation gap, the gap between the law as it is written and the law as it is upheld. Many protections that exist under the law are not completely effective; for example, there are places where victims of crimes cannot confidently seek help from the police. Another example is that in the COVID-19 era, many children are not receiving the quality education that is their legal right. Addressing the implementation gap requires addressing

discrimination and making the culture within institutions more ethical. Faith-based organizations are key players in this work, she concluded.

Can it be said that for every one of these “Largest Problems” in the world..



- We either created the problem, or it was pushed it to a crisis point, by the decisions of humans?
- These bad decisions resulted from ignorance, selfishness, or corruption?
- **Due to poor (often selfish) choices & decisions made worse by corruption?**

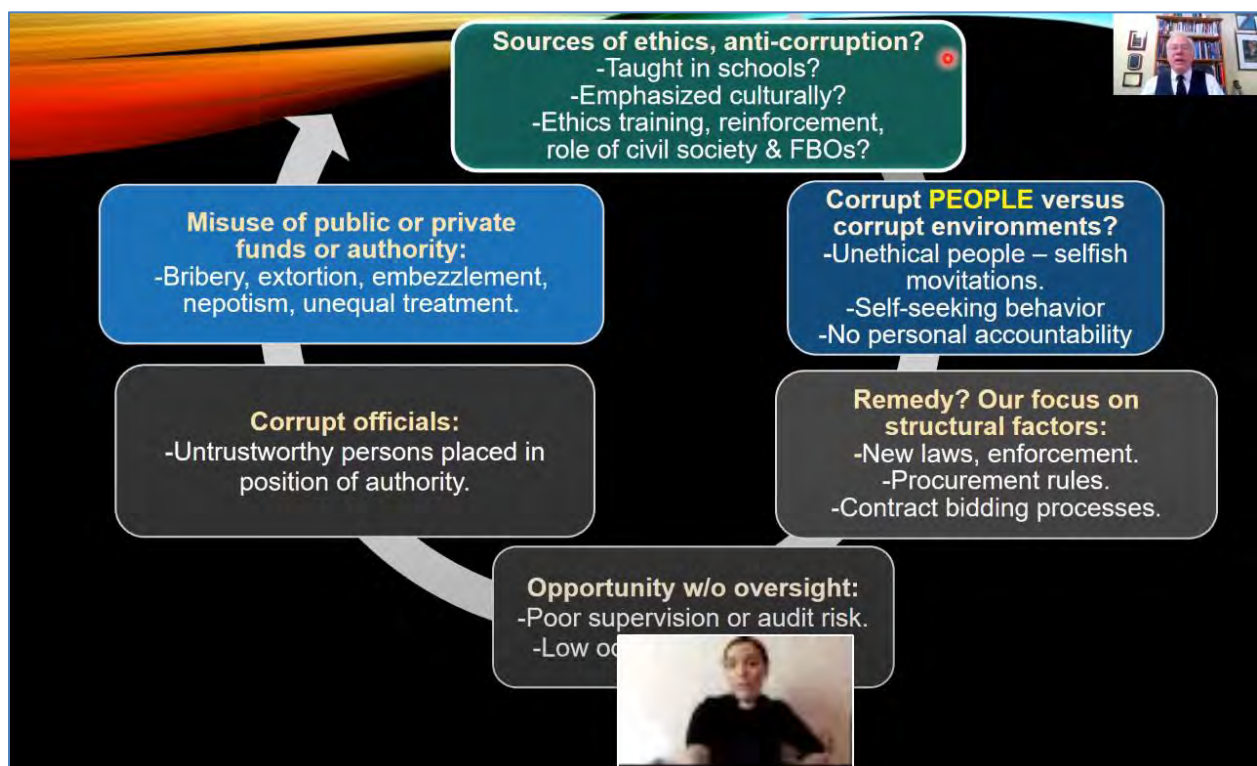


LARGEST PROBLEMS..

- Air pollution, climate change
- Conflicts
- Health, diseases
- Education
- Malnutrition and hunger
- Sanitation and water
- Access to work
- Subsidies and trade barriers
- Inequality
- Women and development

Rev. Elmar Kuhn (Roman Catholic theologian, Austria) recalled a recent street fight between Iraqi and Syrian youth gangs in Vienna. Youth crime is an indication of failures in the education system. Young people, he said, must receive education in tolerance and good citizenship both in public schools and in their community churches, mosques, and temples. Cooperation, anticorruption, and tolerance work for creating just and functioning societies, and faith-based organizations can play a primary role in fostering these values. Therefore, they must expand their activities, be more ambitious, and take responsibility for realizing a better, more peaceful society.

Rev. Darcy Roake (Pastor, Community Church Unitarian Universalist, New Orleans, Louisiana) asserted that religions across the world affirm the values of equity of justice, but in practice they often create ethical rules that dehumanize and that encourage rather than fight intolerance and discrimination. In the United States, fundamentalist churches often fight against progress and for policies that do not work. Reverend Roake described developmentally appropriate sex education for people at various ages. Teaching, for example, the concept of consent to young children can give them the language and framework to treat their peers with respect and report abuse when it occurs.



QandA followed. Dr. O'Brien cautioned against models of understanding crime and corruption that overemphasize individual decision making without considering the environments that constrain that decision making. Dr. Albanese re-emphasized the role ethical education can play in improving the functioning of society. Rev. Roake spoke of the role faith-based organizations can play in holding culture accountable, especially in the United States, where they are involved in the Black Lives Matter movement and policing reform.