

Interfaith partners advocate for health at UN summit

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Prayer for the Millenium Development Goals at the WCC offices in Geneva

A new inter-religious partnership for health will be kick-started at the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Review Summit in New York, 20-22 September.

A small delegation of six faith-based leaders representing a wide spectrum of religious practice and public health experience will convey their collective concern for the well-being of society and their support for the UN-sponsored Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health.

Their presence at the summit and at a two-day side event on Religion, Faith and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which will take place on 20-21 September and is organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in partnership with Religions for Peace and the UN Millennium Campaign, will mark the beginning of a 5-year effort by the WCC and inter-religious partners to promote women's and children's health in various countries.

Ahead of the MDG summit, the WCC is co-sponsoring activities related to the Global Call to Action against Poverty, including a 19 September rally at the Lincoln Centre in New York city. During the rally, Dr Manoj Kurian from the WCC will read a statement affirming the inherent value of human life to all religions and the crucial role that faith-based organizations play in ensuring that human beings, irrespective of gender or age, to be protected and nurtured.

Rev. Dr Bernice Powell Jackson, WCC president for North America, will be representing the delegation at the final day of the MDG summit on 22 September, when the UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon will officially launch the Global Strategy on Women's and Children's Health along with commitments made by governments, the private sector, academic institutions, philanthropic foundations and civil society organizations.

In the coming years, the WCC will work in cooperation with the All Africa Conference of Churches, African Christian Health Association Platform and the African Council of Religious Leaders, as well as inter-religious partners in 11 countries (Afghanistan,

Burkina Faso, Bolivia, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Moldova, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Africa and Tanzania) to raise awareness on the issue of women's and children's health.

Consultations between senior religious leaders, technical experts and civil society advocates will be among the tools that will strengthen the partnership between religious communities and other stakeholders in building the necessary political support for the MDG.

Faith-based organizations will also be mobilized in support of health promotion at the community level, as well as to secure effective monitoring and to promote transparency and accountability in government efforts.