



## **“The Engagement of the Arab Regional Faith Based Organizations Network against Female Genital Mutilation Workshop”**

6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> August 2016  
Khartoum-Sudan

Report by:  
Dr. Wafaa Amin

## **Introduction**

Based on the recommendations of the FBOs network meeting in December 2015 in Djibouti, as well as the need to develop the FBOs future strategy for work in the region, UNFPA-ASRO, in collaboration with AUW, conducted a 3-day workshop to highlight and discuss the gains and achievements of the last declaration and establishment of the network, evaluate the current activities of the FBOs and develop future strategy for work in the region, in line with the applicable guidelines of work.

The faith based organizations (FBOs), both Muslim and Christian, met in Djibouti on the 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2015, under the auspices of UNFPA Arab States Regional Office (ASRO). The meeting declared the establishment of the Faith-Based Organizations Network for Fighting Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the Arab Region, to work towards eliminating all forms of FGM, activating the role of FBOs and calling institutions, organizations and governments for collaboration, exchange of experiences and resources for this purpose.

## **Aim and objectives of the workshop**

The main aim of the workshop was to operationalize the Arab Regional Faith based Organizations Network, highlight and discuss the gains and achievements of the last declaration, evaluate the current activities of the FBOs and develop future strategy for work in the region. The specific objectives of the workshop were:

- A shared dialogue and position to standardize the members' intellectual opinions against FGM
- The development of a standing committee and an interim program for the network in complete synergies with what UNFPA is undertaking at national level
- The development of a strategic plan for the network in compliance with UNFPA to be implemented on a regional level
- Identifying the identity, activities and key messages of the network
- A half-day tour by the participants to a religious area in Khartoum
- The creation of a promotional and/or advocacy video, addressing the abandonment of FGM, to be posted on YouTube GRACe and UNFPA's website.



### **Session one**

#### **Participant's registration & opening speech**

**Presenter: Dr. Yussra Mohamed**

The first day of the workshop started with the participants' registration, and then the workshop coordinator, Dr. Yussra Mahmoud, welcomed the participants from Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Egypt.

The workshop commenced with the first opening speech by Professor Gasim Badri, who started by introducing Ahfad University for Women to the participants as its commitment to women's welfare and rights through addressing Gender and Reproductive Health and Rights issues in its teaching and outreach programs, through a number of activities including capacity and skills building, awareness raising and research in the field. The University over the years has established strong networks and partnerships with several INGOs, NGOs, multiple UN agencies and a variety of national institutions from different states.

The second opening speech from Sheikh Hassan (Representative of Faith Based Organization Network, Somalia) was given and the third opening speech was delivered by Dr. Mohamed Lemine Salem (UNFPA-Sudan).

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Mrs. Enshrah Ahmed (UNFPA-ASRO), on behalf of the regional director, delivered the fourth speech. She welcomed the participants to the workshop and explained its objectives and expected outcomes.

Afterwards, the workshop facilitator, Dr. Elhakeem, handed out a piece of paper to all participants and asked them to describe who they are, what they like and dislike and what they believe in, through drawings, as an introductory exercise.



**Session Two**  
**Title: Regional situation of FGM**  
**Presenter: Dr. Ahmed Abdelmonem**



The second session of the day was conducted by Dr. Ahmed Abdelmonem, who started off by explaining to the participants that FGM is one of the most prevalent and harmful traditional practices practiced in Africa and the region. Using his powerpoint presentation, Dr. Ahmed also gave a general overview of the social, medical and psychological complications behind the practice of FGM. In his session, Dr. Ahmed also emphasized that in order to effectively combat FGM and yield change, there needs to be an institutional entity that ensures sustainability and is able strengthen the decision making process. The session was closed by a 10 minutes discussion in which the participants agreed on the need and necessity to conduct more qualitative studies to reflect the religious and cultural factor on the abandonment of FGM.

### **Session Three**

**Title: Medical Aspects of FGM**

**Presenter: Dr. Ahmed Ragaa**

Dr. Ahmed Ragaa, an Obstetrics and Gynecology consultant, presented on the medical aspects of FGM. The participants were introduced to the basic anatomy and embryology of both the female and male genital organs, and the main similarities and differences between the female and male brains. Towards the end of the session, Dr. Ahmed elaborated in detail on the short and long term consequences of FGM. It was also mentioned by the facilitator that, FGM in Egypt is considered a violation of rights and that professionals conducting the practice are often criminalized. The session was then followed by a 10-minute discussion where the participants, together with the facilitator, discussed reinfibulation and the modern vaginal design surgeries.

### **Session Four**

**Title: Social Aspects of FGM**

**Presenter: Dr. Nafisa Bedri**

Dr. Nafisa Bedri, an expert in reproductive health issues from Ahfad University for Women, started off her session by giving a quick overview on the latest FGM statistics in the region. Using her power point presentation, Dr. Nafisa highlighted that FGM exists all over the world and is spread (due to migration) to some western countries such as Australia.

Moreover, Dr. Nafisa talked about the main FGM performers in the region and pointed out that the continuation of the FGM practice is greatly due to:

- Traditions and culture
  - Monetary gain for practitioners
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## **Session Five**

**Title: Best practices of FBOs in combating FGM (UNFPA Cos)**

**Presenter: Country Office Representatives**

This session was led by Dr. Alhakeem, who facilitated the session by encouraging the participants to share their experiences and best practices in combating FGM. Dr. Alhakeem divided the participants into 4 groups, according to their countries. Each country was given approximately 20 minutes to deliver their presentation. In order to assist the groups with their presentation, a paper with the following questions was distributed.

- What are the achievements?
- Why did we succeed?
- What are the things we did not succeed in?
- What are some of the challenges faced?

### **Group Presentation: Group (1)**

**International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research (Egypt)**

The first presentation was given by Dr. Mervat Mahmoud, professor of biomedical research at the International Islamic Center, Al-Azhar. She spoke briefly about the historical background of female circumcision and the activities carried out by the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research. Some examples include:

- Conduction of training workshops for different groups of Imams to eradicate and to correct the erroneous medical assumption of FGM.
- Conduction of many seminars about FGM for students of the final years in Al-Azhar University and media professionals.

### **Recommendations:**

- Repeat and expand on these seminars by providing access to all the provinces, villages and hamlets.
- Increasing the duration of the training and provide greater opportunities for discussion on the work of the working groups.
- Encourage students to conduct research and provide them with references from the publications center.

- Mobilize young people of both sexes and build their capacity to work on the issues of violence and anti- harmful practices.

**Challenges were:**

- Sexual health topics are considered a taboo in the Arab states.
- Differing interpretations of religious provision and fatwas on the subject among scientists.
- Conspiracy theories.
- Lack of information on reproductive health among religious scholars.
- Spread of extremist views and radicalization.

**Group (2)**

**Public and Social Services-The Coptic Church (Egypt)**



This presentation was conducted by Dr. Nahed Talaat, Family Empowerment Programme Director at the Coptic Orthodox Church. The presentation began by emphasizing the Christian perspective on FGM:

- There is no mention of female circumcision in the Bible.
  - God created man in good shape
  - Christian families, just like Muslim families, practice FGM because of the wrong social ideas and beliefs.
  - Christianity considers the human body (women and men) sacred, and prohibits harm.
  - Christianity respects women's rights and sexuality
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Dr. Nahed also mentioned that the Coptic Church has a wide network and is collaborating with: Holy Azhar, United Nations for Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund, National Population Council, International Population Council, National Council for Women and The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood.

Moreover, she explained that the Coptic Church supported the implementation of different strategic plans and produced some of the materials raising awareness against harmful practices, especially FGM.

### **What did the Coptic Church do?**

- The church conducted many workshops for the Christian clergy.
- They implemented 364 initiatives through many seminars and activities.
- Private seminars for primary and secondary schools
- Increased the students' awareness, both males and females, on FGM.
- Establishment of a page on Facebook combating FGM

### **Challenges that faced the Coptic Church were:**

- Customs, traditions and cultural heritage.
- The existence of inactive and non-effective laws.
- The continuous Conflicts between religious leaders on the concept of FGM

### **Group (3)**

#### **United Nations Population Fund, Sudan**

This presentation was given by Elhabib Hamdok, who explained to the participants what UNFPA Sudan Country Office has achieved during the last period:

- Training and awareness raising for 800 Imams (10% of them were females).
- Trainees work all over Sudan in the mosques and other social gatherings

He mentioned that they succeeded because they engaged different sectors and coordinated between them using different approaches, such as: Mawada and Rahma, Saleema and community dialogues.



**Best practices were:**

- Alkawada wa Alrahma (Mercy and Affection Approach) and Saleema)
- Using of religious leaders as entry points in closed communities.

**Group (4): Djibouti**

This presentation given by Dr. Abdelraman Mohamad, Head of the Supreme Commission for an Advisory Opinion in the Republic of Djibouti. He started by describing the growing medicalization of FGM among women in Djibouti. Djibouti's Penal Code (1995) strongly punishes those who practice FGM, regardless of the state of the perpetrators of this practice.

They achieved the following:

- Exchange of experiences
- Trained large group of people from communities
- Coordination and communication
- Continuous workshops and activities for abandon FGM in Djibouti.
- Created capacity building between members

The main challenge faced is existence of opposition groups, which is why a Fatwa is needed to be issued in Djibouti to condemn the practice of FGM, with help from Egypt and Sudan.

**Group (5): Somalia**

This presentation was given by Mohamed Mursal, who started by providing brief information on what the UNFPA Somalia Country Office has done. He stated that 98% of Somalia practiced FGM, which is the highest prevalence rate in the world. The main activities in Somalia focused on engagement of religious leaders who have a big role in combating FGM. He discussed in detail the fatwa by Somaliland Sheikhs and scholars of different groups of communities to eradicate FGM, so they could involve the religious leaders in the network. They did a consultative meeting for the religious leaders, conducted a public declaration through Facebook and Twitter, mainstreamed FGM in the high school curriculum, engaged the health sector because the mortality rate in Somalia is very high and it is necessary to train the health staff.

**Challenges were:**

- The culture of Somalia; Somaliland people restricted to their cultures.
- Incorrect religious prospectation of the Somalis on FGM.

**Why they succeeded?**

- The fund from UNFPA
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- Efforts in combating the practice of FGM in all areas in Somalia
- Engaged the Quran, *Khalawi* teachers, social media and religious leaders to stop FGM and child marriage.

### **Session Six**

**Title: Advocacy, community dialogue skills, capacity building and strategic planning**

**Presenter: Dr. Mohamed Elhakeem**



This session was conducted by Sheikh Alhakeem, who started by defining the strategic planning as it is one of the essential processes of engagement between different countries, because there are a lot of countries now practicing FGM. Therefore, he stressed on the need to operationalize the regional FBOs Network and putting a strategic plan for it in place

Dr. Elhakeem explained to the participants that planning involves thinking about the future and identifying the roles and responsibilities of each member of the network. The concept of strategic planning is to develop a plan based on the economic, financial, and human resources situation. Dr. Elhakeem also stressed on the importance of being aware of and identifying the threats and challenges that the Network may face, in its efforts towards accomplishing its goals. He focused on reasons why this Network (Shamikhat), was established and what are the steps for strategic planning.

### **Strategic planning steps:**

- Preparation
- Definition of the organization's mission
- Situational analysis; SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)

- Future expectations

**Strategic goals of the network include:**

- Realistic vision that can be worked on
- A strong network with branches in all states
- Effective network
- Better cooperation within the Network for the elimination of FGM
- Targeting loopholes in existing laws related to FGM and ensuring the implementation and strengthening of existing laws.
- United network in all countries of the world

Afterwards, Dr. Elhakeem emphasized that the main purpose of this network is coordination of religious efforts working on abandonment of FGM among all communities.

Sheikh Alhakeem concluded his session by encouraging the participants to Brainstorm on the SWOT analysis of the Shamikhat network.

**Weaknesses**

- Ineffective coordination between network members
- exploitation of resources (mainly the fund)
- Lack of regulation between network
- Unclear network structure
- Lack of flexibility within the network

**Strength**

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- Highly motivated members within the network
- Unification of efforts and ideas
- Solidarity among the members of the network
- Trained staff members
- Support of religious leaders
- One goal
- Participation of many states
- Support from International organizations
- Consultation with different members of the network
- Spreading of knowledge and awareness
- Multidisciplinary
- Admission and entry of communities
- Partners' Support
- Exchange of experiences, best practices and coordination between network members

## Day Two

The day started by a brief recap of the first day, facilitated by Dr. Elhakeem, which was followed by the first session on strategic networking.

### **Session One**

**Title: Strategic networking**

**Presenter: Dr. Mohamed Elhakeem**

This session was conducted by Sheikh Alhakeem, who started the session by defining networking; networking is the cooperation between parties and civil society organizations or interested individuals, aiming to share experiences and information. Also it can be defined as alliance of individuals or organizations in order to achieve a common goal.

Afterwards, he explained to the participants the **Pros** and **Cons** of networking, obstacles and challenges. Dr. Elhakeem described the general principles of partnership, linkages and networking, which are: confidence, mutual respect and joint ownership. He emphasized the importance of networking among the members of the FBOs network, conducting meetings,

distributing tasks, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each member and identifying the network's structure.

Dr. Elhakeem concluded his session by explaining the two types of networking (progress and strategic networking), and encouraged the participants to support the continuity and success of the network.

## **Discussion**

A long discussion took place between the participants. Major points that were discussed included:

- Focusing on transparency and full conviction to eliminate the challenges
- Development of a clear structure for the network
- Increasing awareness and participation from the governments and civil society
- Developing a strategic plan
- Importance of the strengthening of existing laws and creation of new ones to help eliminate the practice of FGM
- Involvement of decision-makers

## **Session Two**

**Title: “Almwada w Alrahma” an umbrella to community response to FGM prevention**

**Presenter: Yousif Qurashi**

Mr. Yousif Qurashi started his session by giving information about Almwada wa Alrahma, its positive change campaign of faith and strong dimensions, aimed at eliminating the gender based violence against women and children. Moreover, he talked about the campaign's vision towards a world free from gender violence and discrimination. He focused on its message to change the behavioral patterns, traditional practices and wrong beliefs in society for eradicating the harmful habits and discrimination against women and children and the strategic goal of eliminating of all forms of violence and all forms of discrimination in society.

He explained



- Create community mobilization opposing all harmful practices and customs.
- Preservation of women's and children's rights through proper religious provision.
- Removal of all the wrong behavioral practices.
- Coordination of efforts of all activists in the women's and children's issues to take effective action.

The references of this campaign come from the Quran, Hadiths, Holy books, opinions of doctors and specialists, organized conferences and forums on these issues and local laws and legislation. He concluded the session by mentioning the partners of the campaign: United Nations Population Fund-Sudan, National Council for Child Welfare, Unit for Combating Violence against Women and Children, Federal Ministry of Health, states and localities and civil society organizations related to this field.

### **Session Three: Group Work**

This session was facilitated by Dr. Elhakeem. He started the session by a large group activity on the opportunities and threats of the network.

Threats	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opposition organizations and campaigns</li> <li>• Lack of interest in some communities</li> <li>• Lack of effective laws in some countries</li> <li>• The need for tangible support and funds</li> <li>• Exploitation of the resources</li> <li>• Lack of trust</li> <li>• Presence of social norms in all communities</li> <li>• Economic conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The involvement of all countries</li> <li>• Support from governments and organizations</li> <li>• The availability of funding</li> <li>• The existence of laws against FGM</li> <li>• The existence of civil society organizations that assist in the elimination of FGM</li> <li>• The agreement between the network members</li> </ul>

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- Political instability
  - Religious extremism
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#### **Session Four**

**Title: Suggested guiding principles, structuring, values, messages and role of the steering committee**

**Presenter: Elfatih Mukhtar**

Mr. ElFatih Mukhtar started his session by defining the different types of FGM practiced in Sudan. He talked about the opportunities, challenges and legislation of the network (Shamikhat).

Afterwards, Dr. Elhakeem distributed the suggested papers prepared by Mr. Elfatih. The participants were divided into 4 groups by country, to discuss the vision, strategic goals, principals, structuring, values, messages and role of the steering committee of Shamikhat network in the last day, to add it in the Action plan for the regional FBOs network against FGM at national level.



#### **Study Tour**

The participants went to a half day study tour in one of the local religious areas in Khartoum, called Elsaïm Deema in Ombada locality. The participants were shown the different parts of the place; they visited the electronic library and attended the graduation of a number of

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students. The tour was also attended by the Minister of the Federal Ministry of Guidance and Endowment and the Mayor of the Ombada locality.

A number of speeches were delivered during the tour, where the Minister and the Mayor expressed their commitment to the national campaign combating FGM.





## Day three

The day started by a brief Recap of the second day from Dr. Elhakeem.

### **Session Two**

**Title: Action plan for the regional FBOs network against FGM at national level**

**Presenter: Dr. Mohamed Elhakeem**

This session was led by Dr. Elhakeem, who started by selecting five participants to form the committee of the network. The following were selected:

- Dr. Nahed Talaat, Family Empowerment Programme Director, The Coptic Church.
- Dr. Ahmed Abdelmonem, manager of PAPFAM, League of Arab States, Egypt.
- Sheikh Abdelrahman Mahmoud, Head of the Supreme Commission on Advisory opinion in Djibouti.
- Mr. Mohamed Mursal from Somalia.
- Mr. Elfatih Mukhtar from Sudan

### **Action Plan**

After meeting for one hour, the committee formulated an action plan for the network.

**Message:** to create effective Faith Based Organizations in the Arab countries to find an environment that advocates for the abandonment of FGM based on values.

### **Values:**

This network is based on the following values:

- Transparency and honesty.
- Justice and impartiality.
- Audacity and challenge.
- Originality and initiative.
- Cooperation and partnership.
- Rooting and dignity.
- Perseverance and continuity

### **References:**

- Tolerant values
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- supporting International conventions to safeguard the dignity and right of women and children.
- Scientific literature.

**Strategies:**

- Raising awareness of religious leaders and organizations
- Mobilizing energies
- Coordination and communication.
- Capacity building
- Exchange of experiences and best practices.
- Studies and researches.

**Vision:**

- Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in all its forms in the Arab Region.

**Specific objectives:**

- Activating the role of Faith Based Organizations and inviting institutions, organizations and governments to coordinate and exchange experience and resources to fight against FGM.
- Developing a strategic plan to abandon FGM.
- Mobilizing energies and expanding the advocacy circle to abandon FGM in communities.
- Coordinating the Faith Based Organizations efforts in Arab countries, according to a strategy of unified approach, based on reproductive rights.

**Network wide action:**

The Arab world and the Arab community, by focusing on areas that are still commonly practicing FGM; can be extended to include all Africa.

**Structure of the Regional Faith Based Network against FGM**

Name of the Network: <b><i>Shamikhah</i></b> (meaning pride; reflecting pride and happiness of girls who have not undergone FGM)	
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Description</b>
Advisory experts	Three experts from: Djibouti, Sudan and Somalia
Composition of the committee	Agreed to give Somalia three seats in the committee, for each zone and one each for Djibouti, Egypt and Sudan.  Djibouti: Sheikh Abdirahman Mohamed Ali; Egypt: Father Anthonios and Sheikh Wessm; Sudan: Mawlana Alfatih Mukhtar Somalia: South Central

	Zone, Mohamed Kheyrow Adan, Somaliland: Sheikh Almis Yahye and Puntland: Sheikh Abdirizak Hagi Aden
Chairman	Mawlana Alfatih Mukhtar
Vice President	Dr. Nahed Talaat
Advisors	Mr. Mohamed Alhakim (Sudan)
	Dr. Ahmed Abdel Monem (PAPFAM)
	Dr. Ahmed Ragab (IICPSR)
Secretariat and HQ	Djibouti, due to its strategic location and proximity to Egypt, Somalia and Sudan; meeting will take place in any country where feasible
Executive Committee Meetings	Bi-annual

### **Session Three**

**Title: Commitment, declaration and recommendation**

**Presenter: Dr. Mohamed Elhakeem**

- Enhancement of continuous communication between Members
- Determining a date for an annual meeting to discuss the monitoring & evaluation process.
- Expanding the meeting's report to all countries on a regional level
- Creating a website for the Shamikhat network.
- Setting realistic targets to reach our goal.
- Activating the role of women leaders.
- Agreeing on the importance of capacity building and sharing of experiences between countries.
- Setting the outputs for implementation

### **Closing Ceremony**

After the presentations were all given and the comments and discussions concluded, the participants shared brief thoughts on the FBOs workshop, and thanked Dr. Elhakeem for his efforts. Afterwards, certificates were handed out by Dr. Nafisa Bedri, Mrs. Enshrah Ahmed, Dr. Nahed Talaat and Sheikh Elfatih.

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## Agenda

Day One: Saturday 06/8/2016		
Time	Session	Presenter
8:45-9:00	Participants' registration	
9:00-9:30	Introduction and welcome	Gasim Badri, AUW President,  Representative of FBO Network  Representative of UNFPA- Sudan,  Representative of UNFPA- ASRO  Representative of MoGE
9:30- 10:30	Regional FGC situation	Dr. Ahmed Abdel Monem
10:30- 11:00	<b>Break</b>	
11:00- 12:00	Islamic perspective on FGC	Sheikh Mergani Osman  Sheikh Mohammed Wisam
12:00- 12:30	Social aspects of FGC	Dr. Nafisa Bedri
12:30- 1:00	Medical aspect of FGC	Dr. Ahmed Ragaa
1:00-2:00	<b>Lunch</b>	
2:00-3:00	Best practices of FBOs in combating FGC (UNFPA COs)	Representatives of COs (15 minutes Each)
3:00-3:45	Best practices of FBOs in combating FGC (Religious Leaders)	Priest Antonious  Priest Antonious
3:45-4:00	<b>Break</b>	
4:00-5:00	Strategic analysis (SWOT)	Sheikh Alhakeem
Day Two: Sunday 07/8/2016		

9:00-9:15	Recap of day one	Sheikh Alhakeem
9:15-10:15	FGM advocacy, community dialogue skills and capacity building	Sheikh Alhakeem
10:15-11:00	“Al Mawada w Alrahma” an umbrella to community response to FGC prevention	Mr. Yousif Qurashi
11:00-11:30	<b>Break</b>	
11:30-12:30	Suggested guiding principles, structuring, values, messages and role of the steering committee	Mr. Elfatih Mukhtar
12:30-1:30	Strategic networking	Sheikh Alhakeem
1:30-2:30	<b>Lunch</b>	
2:30-3:30	Action plan for the regional FBOs network against FGC at national level	Working groups by country
3:30-4:30	Discussion of action plan	Sheikh Alhakeem
<b>Day Three: Monday 08/8/2016</b>		
9:00-9:15	Recap of day two	Sheikh Alhakeem
9:15-10:15	Role of Religious Media to Support FGM Abandonment	Sheikh Alhakeem
10:15-11:45	Commitment, declaration and recommendation Signing of public declaration	Sheikh Alhakeem
11:45-12:15	<b>Break</b>	
12:15-4:00	Tour visit	Sheikh Alhakeem

<b>Participants</b>
<b>ASRO</b>
Enshrah Ahmed
Menna El Shiati
Rania Atteya
<b>Djibouti</b>
Amina Mohamed
Sheikh Abdirahman Mohamed Ali
Zeinab Moussa Dawaleh
Yayo Osman Ahmed
<b>Egypt</b>
Mervat Mahmoud Mohamed Mahmoud
Ahmed Ragaa Abdelhamid Ragab
Father Antonios
Nahed Talaat
<b>Somalia</b>
Mohamed Yusuf
Mohamed Mursal Abdi
Sheikh Abdirizak hagi Aden
Sheikh PP Almis Yahye Haji
<b>Sudan</b>
Elhabib Hamdok

Mwalana Elfatih Mukhtar
Sheikh Yousif Gorashi
Sheikh Elhakeem