

IR contribute to Africa discussion document at UN Conference



In September Dr Muhtari Aminu-Kano, senior policy advisor, attended the UN's annual NGO conference from the 3rd-5th September in Bonn, Germany; the theme of the conference this year was 'Sustainable Societies: Responsive Citizens'. Islamic Relief policy unit participated because the focus of the meeting was poverty eradication and climate change- two areas that are high priorities and which we are now researching in detail.

The conference was in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference to be held in June 2012 in Brazil. Rio+20 will be a major event in the international calendar as it will deal with crucial issues on sustainable development. It will review the progress made since the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 were adopted in 1992. In particular Rio+20 will examine how the world can transit to a green economy and how the United Nations could be better structured to help achieve global sustainability in the use of resources. Although preparations for Rio+20 are at an advanced stage, the 64th NGO conference in Bonn hoped to influence the process by formulating a declaration which would be an input into the background documentation being prepared by UN agencies. The declaration will also be tabled by the Government of Germany at this year's UN General Assembly.

Muhtari interacted with other NGOs, UN agencies and academics working in the field of climate change and poverty reduction to build contacts, increase Islamic Relief's understanding of the issues and establish a presence and visibility for IR in these policy circles. The roundtables and workshop sessions were very rich and informative and provided opportunities for the sharing and exchange of experiences and ideas. Delegates at the meeting came from about 150 NGOs with many being INGOs engaged in development as well as from academia. Although some of the well known international players (Oxfam, CAFOD, WWF, Care, etc) were not represented; the Stakeholder Forum, IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), IUCN (the World Conservation Union), Greenpeace, Save the Children and the World Resources Institute participated actively as did several UN agencies. There was also a noticeable presence of local (sub-national) NGOs and indigenous peoples organisations. Other faith-based organisations present in addition to Islamic Relief were the Baha'i International Community, Friendship Ambassadors Foundation, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation and Brahma Kumanis World Spiritual University.

Muhtari joined the Africa experts group, where he was appointed to draft a discussion document which formed the basis for the Africa group's input. He was subsequently co-opted into the main drafting group; this provided a key opportunity to influence the document. The final conference declaration comprised of a range of general and also quite specific recommendations on poverty reduction and climate change. Interestingly the document discusses the non-viability of the current economic development model and called for a paradigm shift which largely coincides with the thinking in Islamic Relief's emerging conceptual framework. There are recommendations for the adoption of specific 'Sustainable Development Goals' at the Rio+20 meeting, seventeen specific goals covering topics such as consumption and production, livelihoods, climate change and energy, water, biodiversity and oceans, agriculture, health, cities, subsidies and investment, development indicators, participation, etc were proposed. The final outcome document of the meeting was not negotiated therefore it was developed as a Chair's text. It can be found at 64th UN Annual NGO Conference.