

African religious leaders draw safe practices map to fight Ebola virus

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [December 24, 2014](#) issue

African church leaders, theologians, and health professionals have drawn up a road map to educate faith communities in the fight against Ebola.

The virus has killed more than 5,000 so far and has been declared a global security threat by the United Nations.

The road map, drawn at a three-day conference in late November in Nairobi that was attended by 70 religious and health-care leaders, highlights the role faith groups can play as part of the global response, according to church leaders.

“We were taken by surprise by the crisis,” Andre Karamaga, All Africa Conference of Churches general secretary, told participants at the gathering organized by the World Council of Churches.

The road map includes, among other items, actions to fight stigma, discrimination, and misinformation. It also offers a reshaping of burial practices to ensure that religious communities burying their dead are using safe practices to avoid infection.

Karen Sichinga of Zambia’s Churches Health Association said people from the affected countries are pleading with other nations to stop stigmatizing them because of Ebola. Such stigma has impeded travel and imposed hardships on children whose parents have died of the disease.

“If we continue with stigma, it will complicate the issue,” Sichinga said.

Participants also wanted to ensure that the faith communities have a voice in national and international platforms.

Susan Parry, program executive for health and healing at the WCC, said that while the international community has mounted a response to the virus, ensuring a united faith community response is critical.

“They are the gatekeepers to communities,” she said. “We will be strengthening interfaith relations because no one person can deal with this alone.” — Religion News Service