

Azza Karam named as secretary general of Religions for Peace

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On August 21, Azza Karam was named as secretary general of Religions for Peace, becoming the first woman and first Muslim to lead the international interfaith coalition. She succeeds William F. Vendley, who served as secretary general for 27 years.

Karam is currently a professor of religion and development at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and the lead facilitator for the United Nation's Strategic Learning Exchange on Religion, Development and Diplomacy.

Previously, she served as the UN's Population Fund senior advisor on culture and as chair of the UN's Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development. She was also the head of Religions for Peace's Global Women of Faith Network from 2000 to 2004.

In an interview with the European media outlet DW News, Karam said the focus of her historic appointment should not be that she is a woman.

Instead, she said, "I think that we need to be focused on realizing that religious leaders of major religious institutions of all religions around the world are the ones who expressed and signaled their readiness to accept a woman as a leader of their joint collaborative effort and commitment towards building peace."

In a separate interview with DW News, Karam said the greatest challenge to interfaith peace efforts is the increasingly cozy relationship between political and religious institutions.

"Political leadership and religious leadership have to be seen as unique and distinct," she said. "When there is too much of an overlap between the political institutions and the religious institutions, it doesn't become so much about faith anymore for the religious—it becomes more about power politics."

Officially, Karam's term will last until the end of the next Religions for Peace world assembly, which will take place in either 2024 or 2025. However, secretaries general can serve more than one term. —*Christian Century* staff

