Combining Community with Faith

Nader Rahman

RECENTLY Ari Alexander, the Deputy Director of the Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) visited Bangladesh. He sat down and talked to Nader Rahman about what brought him here and what he hopes to learn from his visit.

As Deputy Director of the Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) at the US Agency for International Development (USAID), what brings you to Bangladesh?

Ari Alexander (AA): I came to Bangladesh to participate in a USAID-sponsored conference to bear witness to the extraordinary development work being done by religious and community leaders in Bangladesh and around the region. The Obama Administration has great respect for leaders who work together, across religious and ethnic backgrounds, to respond to their common challenges. Best practices shared at conferences like this one have the potential to be replicated in other places and improve development outcomes.

USAID provides large amounts of funding for various projects around Bangladesh and South Asia, will the CFBCI now look to help fund more faith-based community initiatives?

AA: The CFBCI is not an office that gives out grants. We do however advocate within USAID and beyond for the importance of partnerships with faith-based and community organisations due to the long-term commitment and trust built between these organisations and local communities.

You were Co-Executive Director of Children of Abraham an organisation dedicated to the promotion of dialogue between Jewish and Muslim teenagers around the world, could you tell us about your experience there and how that may have impacted your vision for the CFBCI.

AA: In my work prior to joining the Obama Administration, I had the opportunity to work with inspiring religious leaders and youth from around the world. I saw a commitment to overcoming prejudice, discrimination and hatred from Muslims and Jews. I witnessed the impact of stereotyping and ignorance in a variety of contexts. I learned that young people have the potential to lead their communities to view the "other" in a more constructive manner.

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