

Hugging guru Amma 'should join Bono, Michael D Higgins in a peace taskforce' - leading Irish aid agency

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Spiritual leader Amma hugging one of the thousands of people who queued at the Royal Dublin Society halls

Bono, President Michael D Higgins and Hindu hugging guru Amma have been suggested to lead a proposed diplomatic taskforce for conflict zones.

Aid agency Concern put forward the idea after calling on world powers to set up a new team of influential, global figures who could be deployed to broker peace.

Others suggested were Senator George Mitchell who chaired the Good Friday Agreement talks and Malala Yousafzai, the inspirational Pakistani woman shot by the Taliban on her way home from school.

Concern chief executive Dominic McSorley said the diplomatic mission is based on the idea of the Elders - a group of independent leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007 to work for peace and human rights.

"We need a robust mechanism like that of very senior, global influencers who would be deployed at the early stages of a crisis," he said.

"You could consider (US President) Barack Obama. It could be controversial but he's already won the Nobel peace prize, maybe he could start earning it. He didn't actually do anything to get it."

The suggestion of creating a rapid response, diplomatic mission was first mooted by Concern during the World Humanitarian Summit last May.

Others being put forward for the role are Mo Ibrahim, a Sudanese businessman who set up a lucrative award in his name to inspire transparency in African government, Michele Vachilet, the current President of Chile who lived through the Pinochet regime, and Christine Karumba, a renowned women's rights activist who heads Concern's work in Haiti.

Concern raised the prospect again as it listed its 10 disaster hotspots for 2017.

High on the list is Syria, where millions of people have been forced from the homes by war, and also Yemen which the charity says is on the verge of collapse in an deepening conflict with seven million people facing starvation.

Concern also warned of the potential for a humanitarian crisis in Lebanon where geologists have said there is a high risk of an earthquake.

Mr McSorley said Ireland could be doing more to take in refugees than the figure of 4,000 first promised in late 2015 and the commitment to have 1,100 here by next September.

"Should we be doing more to go out there and canvass and say to people Ireland is a safe haven? I don't think we should be waiting for people to choose Ireland.

"I definitely think we should be working harder to meet the commitments of the 4,000 that were coming in.

"But I do firmly believe that the focus has to remain on root causes."

Concern also highlighted crises in several other regions.

In Nigeria, Niger and Chad region millions of people have been displaced in the conflict involving Boko Haram.

Fighting in the world's newest country South Sudan is worsening, the charity said, while it also warned about the civil war in the Central African Republic which has escalated since 2013.

Concern said Haiti and Pakistan remain at risk from flood, earthquakes, cyclones or hurricanes and other natural disasters.

It also warned of the hundreds of thousands of people forced back into Afghanistan, while in Somalia an estimated five million people are affected by drought, food insecurity and conflict.

Press Association

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/news/hugging-guru-amma-should-join-bono-michael-d-higgins-in-a-peace-taskforce-leading-irish-aid-agency-35322799.html>