

UN Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion decry rising Antisemitism and Islamophobia around the world

GENEVA (21 December 2023) – Urgent action must be taken by all to ensure members of religious minority communities are able to enjoy their rights on an equal basis and receive effective protection, UN experts said today. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of Religion or Belief issued the following statement:

“All stakeholders, including States, media, social media and technology companies, and universities should respond promptly to sustained and widespread reports of incidents reflecting Antisemitic and Islamophobic hatred in countries around the world in a manner consistent with international human rights standards.

Acts of harassment, intimidation, violence and incitement based on religion or belief across the world, which have been sharply rising in recent months and have spiked to alarming levels in recent weeks, have shocked our conscience and created a climate of fear and deep distrust across many societies. In some countries, national authorities and civil society organisations have reported a dramatic increase in Islamophobic and Antisemitic incidents. Other religious minority communities are also experiencing acute and unprecedented insecurity.

Mosques, synagogues, other places of worship and cemeteries have been attacked, desecrated, and vandalised in many countries; so too have schools, cultural centres, and memorials; even private homes and properties belonging to Jews and Muslims; whilst other religious and belief communities too have not been spared.

We have credible reports from different regions of the world that document physical attacks, including killings, verbal attacks and death threats that appear to be motivated by the perceived religious affiliation of the victims. Other reports appear to indicate that actors, including governments, may be exploiting these painful times as cover and distraction for dramatically increasing the oppression of religious or belief minorities, assaults on vulnerable populations, and the suppression of other rights in misguided attempts to address societal polarisation.

People have been killed, and many have been threatened and harassed, even children and students in schools and universities. Expressions of religious hatred and incitement to violence are proliferating rapidly on social media.

At a time when conflict is fuelling great political tension, it must be recalled that such tensions never justify expressions of identity-based hatred, and that the humanity of all must be respected and equality and justice ensured.

We strongly condemn all harmful acts and expressions of religious hatred and intolerance that engender deep hurt and fear at individual and community levels. Nobody should suffer fear for having or manifesting their religious or belief identity. Everyone should be able to feel safe, and should benefit from the equal protection of their human rights, which should be guaranteed by the State.

We urge States to record and investigate all reported acts of violence, discrimination, harassment and intimidation, taking due consideration of possible religious or belief motives. States should take action to prevent such acts in compliance with all relevant standards of international human rights and, where applicable, international humanitarian law. They must also take concerted action to ensure that Muslim and Jewish individuals, communities, and religious, educational, and cultural sites are receiving adequate protection, and should consult with affected communities to understand their needs in this respect.”

We call on all stakeholders to urgently speak out against rising Antisemitism and Islamophobia and stand in solidarity with all targeted persons and communities. Social Media companies must act decisively against hate speech and incitement to religious violence, discrimination and hostility online.

States, religious or belief representatives, leaders and groups, and civil society at large, all have crucial roles to play in this darkness in particularly in fostering allyship and social trust. Amid the proliferation of hate, it is heartening that on numerous events people from different faiths have come together to affirm their shared humanity. Such efforts must be supported, celebrated, and multiplied, and States must create enabling conditions for such efforts to thrive and have greater impact.”

ENDS

***The experts: [Nazila Ghanea, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Under-Secretary-General Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Miguel Moratinos, Under-Secretary-General, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations \(UNAOC\) and the UN Focal Point to monitor antisemitism & enhance a system-wide response.](#)**

The [United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide](#) (OSAPG) is responsible for advancing national, regional and international efforts to protect populations from genocide and related crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity) as well as their incitement. The Office alerts relevant actors, including the Secretary-General and the intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations, to situations where there is a risk of these crimes and mobilizes the international community to prevent or halt them; it works to enhance prevention, early warning and response capacity of the United Nations, Member States, regional organizations and civil society through training and technical assistance; and supports the normative development of the prevention of genocide and related crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity) through further conceptual refinement, research, and collaboration with academic and other civil society actors.

The [United Nations Alliance of Civilizations](#) is the UN entity mandated to advance interreligious and intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and understanding as well as address the root causes of polarization and intolerance. The High Representative of UNAOC is designated by the Secretary General as the UN Focal Point to monitor Antisemitism and enhance a system-wide response.

Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organisation and serve in their individual capacity.

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