

# PLAN OF ACTION

for Religious  
Leaders and Actors

## TO PREVENT

Incitement to Violence  
that Could Lead  
to Atrocity Crimes



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Cover photo:  
Ryan Rodrick Beiler/Lutheran World Federation

# Foreword



We have all seen the tragic consequences of our failure to prevent serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and — in the worst case — atrocity crimes. These crimes cause immense suffering, undermine prospects for peace and development, and leave scars on communities and societies that can take generations to heal.

Atrocity crimes do not generally happen suddenly or spontaneously. The processes leading to them take time to unfold — time we should use to act on the warning signs.

One of the most common of these signs is the dissemination of hate speech — messages in public discourse and the media, including social media, which spread hostility and encourage people to commit violence against specific communities, often based on their identity.

There has been a disturbing increase in hate speech and incitement in recent years. The right to free speech is protected under international law, but speech that constitutes incitement to violence is prohibited. While states have the primary responsibility to prevent incitement and protect their people from atrocity crimes, we must all do more to stop hate speech and the violence it enables and encourages.

Religious leaders can play a particularly important role in influencing the behaviour of those who share their beliefs. Unfortunately, religion has sometimes been misused to justify incitement to violence and discrimination, and it is vital that religious leaders from all faiths show leadership.

This Plan of Action, the result of two years of consultations with leaders from different faiths and religions around the world, includes a rich and broad range of suggestions for ways in which religious leaders and actors can prevent incitement to violence and contribute to peace and stability. All religions teach respect for life, and recognize human beings as fundamentally equal. These principles summon us to show respect for all human beings, even those with whom we might profoundly disagree or whose cultures might seem most alien to us.

I urge the widest possible dissemination and implementation of this Plan of Action, which can help to save lives, reduce suffering, and realize our shared vision of peaceful, inclusive and just societies in which diversity is valued and the rights of all individuals are protected.

Let us work together to prevent and end atrocity crimes and all affronts to human rights and dignity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'António Guterres'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**António Guterres**  
United Nations Secretary-General

*Yazidi refugees in the Nawrouz refugee camp, approximately 40 kilometres from the Syrian border with Iraq.*

Photo: UNICEF/Razan Rashidi



# Executive Summary

Incitement to violence that targets communities or individuals based on their identity can contribute to enabling or preparing atrocity crimes, (genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity), and is both a warning sign and early indicator of the risk of those crimes. Monitoring, preventing and countering incitement to violence, particularly in societies divided along identity lines and in situations where tensions are high, can contribute to prevention efforts.

States have the primary responsibility to protect populations from atrocity crimes, as well as their incitement, but other actors can and should play a role. Religious leaders and actors can play a particularly influential role, as they have the potential to influence the behaviour of those who follow them and share their beliefs. Given that religion has been misused to justify incitement to violence, it is vital that religious leaders from all faiths show leadership in this matter.

The process that led to the development of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, known as the “Fez Process”, stemmed from the need to better understand, articulate and encourage the potential of religious leaders to prevent incitement and the violence that it can lead to, and to integrate the work of religious leaders within broader efforts to prevent atrocity crimes.

The “Fez Process” refers to a series of consultations, organised by the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect between April 2015 and December 2016, with religious leaders, faith-based and secular organizations, regional organizations and subject matter experts from all regions of the world. The recommendations contained in the Plan of Action were developed by the religious leaders and actors who participated in these consultations. They are relevant not only to situations where there is a risk of atrocity crimes, but also to other contexts, including

the protection of human rights, the prevention of violent extremism and the prevention of conflict.

As efforts to prevent atrocity crimes and their incitement are most likely to succeed when different actors are working in collaboration, the Plan of Action also includes recommendations for other actors, including States and state institutions and civil society, including new and traditional media. The Plan of Action is founded on human rights principles, in particular the right to freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of religion and belief and the right of peaceful assembly.

The Plan of Action contains three main clusters of recommendations that aim to **prevent, strengthen and build**. Each cluster includes recommendations that are organised according to thematic focus.



It is recommended that, under the stewardship of the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, this Plan of Action is implemented at regional, national and local levels. For a comprehensive implementation of the Plan of Action, it is recommended that all relevant stakeholders contribute, including state and religious institutions, secular and religious civil society organizations, new and traditional media, academia and education institutions, as well as regional and international organizations.

Implementing this Plan of Action could contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes worldwide, especially in areas affected by religious and sectarian tensions and violence. Its implementation will also enhance the respect, protection and promotion of human rights.

*Punakha Dzong, which houses Buddhist temples and the administrative offices of Punakha district, Bhutan.*

UN Photo/Gill Fickling



# Introduction

In societies that are under stress as a result of political, security or other forms of instability, one of the warning signs and powerful triggers of violence that can lead to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity (“atrocities crimes”) is the kind of messages in public discourse and the media that spread hostility and hatred and encourage or incite populations to commit violence against specific communities, often on the basis of their religious or ethnic identity. In recent years there has been an alarming spike in online and offline hate speech and incitement, both in conflict and in peaceful situations.

Finding the means to diffuse incitement to violence and prevent it from reaching its intended audience, “immunizing” the audience from the effects of incitement and presenting alternative messages, can help to prevent and curb the violence that can lead to atrocity crimes.

## What is incitement to violence?

The term “incitement to violence” is included in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which in article 20 (2) prohibits “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.” Acts that constitute incitement to violence can include any communication that encourages violence against an individual or group. Incitement can take various forms, including political speeches and flyers, media articles, social media communications and visual arts products.

For acts of incitement to result in violence, specific elements need to be present, including a context conducive to violence, an influential speaker, a speech act that is widely disseminated, a receptive audience and a target. The target is usually individuals or groups with a specific ethnic, national, religious, political, sexual

orientation and gender identity<sup>1</sup>. In order for an act to constitute incitement to violence, there must be intent<sup>2</sup> on the part of the speaker to engage in advocacy for and cause violence. There also needs to be a certain degree of likelihood that the act may result in the violence that it calls for.

Incitement to violence is different from “hate speech”. While there is no legal definition of “hate speech”, and the characterisation of what is “hateful” is controversial, hate speech is normally defined as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that denigrates a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race or other identity factor. Hate speech may suggest that the person or group – it is usually groups – is inferior and that they should be excluded or discriminated against on this basis including, for example, by limiting their access to education, employment or political positions. While all incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence is hate speech, not all hate speech constitutes incitement.

## What is the legal framework for the prohibition of incitement to violence?

The prevention of incitement to violence is rooted in international human rights standards, including the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; the 1965 International

<sup>1</sup> Prohibiting Incitement to Discrimination, Hostility and Violence, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/3572/12-12-01-PO-incitement-WEB.pdf>, and Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix, para. 29.

<sup>2</sup> “A person has intent where: (a) In relation to conduct, that person means to engage in the conduct; (b) In relation to a consequence, that person means to cause that consequence or is aware that it will occur in the ordinary course of events.”, The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 30(2,a,b), [https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9aeff7-5752-4f84-be94-0a655eb30e16/0/rome\\_statute\\_english.pdf](https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9aeff7-5752-4f84-be94-0a655eb30e16/0/rome_statute_english.pdf).

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Article 3 of the Genocide Convention includes “direct and public incitement to commit genocide” as one of the acts punishable under this Convention. Article 4 of ICERD requires States parties to “declare an offence punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin, and also the provision of any assistance to racist activities, including the financing thereof”. In addition, as stated earlier, article 20 (2) of the ICCPR requires States parties to prohibit by law “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence”.

The jurisprudence of ad hoc international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, also include definitions of incitement to genocide and other atrocity crimes.

The Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit linked the prevention of incitement to violence to the prevention of atrocity crimes. In paragraphs 138 and 139, all heads of State and Government committed to “protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” and agreed that this responsibility “entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement.”<sup>3</sup>

### Why is the prevention of incitement to violence a crucial element of atrocity crimes prevention?

Incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence is both an early warning indicator and a trigger of atrocity crimes. Most, if not all, have been preceded and accompanied by this phenomenon. In situations when communities are under stress and tensions are growing,

<sup>3</sup> 2005 World Summit Outcome document, para. 138 and 139, A/RES/60/1, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/60/PDF/N0548760.pdf?OpenElement>.

incitement contributes to sowing the seeds of suspicion, mistrust and intolerance. Increased hate speech targeting communities or individuals, based on their identity, contributes to enabling or preparing atrocity crimes, and is thus an indicator that those crimes may be committed<sup>4</sup>. Of note, atrocity crimes and in particular genocide and crimes against humanity, are processes that take time to plan, coordinate and implement. They are not isolated or spontaneous events. Paying attention to the presence of hate speech and incitement to violence in societies divided along identity lines, and in situations where tensions are high, can contribute to early warning and prevention efforts.

### The role of religious leaders and actors in preventing incitement to violence

In seeking to prevent incitement to violence, it is important to consider which actors are most influential. The State has the primary responsibility to protect populations. However, many other actors can play an important role. Religious leaders, in particular, have a strong potential to influence the lives and behaviour of those who follow their faith and share their beliefs. When they speak out, their messages can have a strong and wide-ranging impact.

Religious leaders can use their influence in either positive or negative ways. Some have used their position to spread messages of hatred and hostility that have incited violence. Many others, however, have been responsible for preventing violence and its incitement by spreading messages of peace, tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect, and by taking action to reduce tensions between communities.

The Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence<sup>5</sup> recommended that “religious leaders should refrain from

<sup>4</sup> Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect: [http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/framework%20of%20analysis%20for%20atrocity%20crimes\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/framework%20of%20analysis%20for%20atrocity%20crimes_en.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix, para. 29, [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat\\_draft\\_outcome.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf)



using messages of intolerance or expressions which may incite violence, hostility or discrimination; but they also have a crucial role to play in speaking out firmly and promptly against intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech. It should be made clear that violence can never be tolerated as a response to incitement to hatred”.

Religious leaders and actors can be strong partners in the prevention of atrocity crimes and their incitement and, for this reason, national, regional and international institutions, civil society and the media should engage and cooperate with religious leaders in the context of efforts to prevent atrocity crimes.



*Nuns at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Prizren, Kosovo.*

UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes



## The Fez Process

The “Fez Process” refers to a unique, informative and timely series of consultations, primarily with religious leaders and actors but also involving government officials, United Nations entities, civil society organizations and subject experts working on conflict prevention, peacebuilding and human rights and development. This was the first process of its kind dedicated to engagement with religious leaders and actors to develop strategies to prevent incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes.

These consultations took place between April 2015 and December 2016 and were organised under the leadership of the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (“the Office”). A number of organizations, including the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), the World Council of Churches and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers supported the Fez Process. In addition, the Governments of Ethiopia, Morocco, Italy,

Jordan, Thailand and the United States also supported the process by hosting the consultations.

Of note, in this process, ‘religious leaders’ were identified as those who were or are formally assigned leadership roles by their respective religious institution or communities and/or hold formal religious qualifications. ‘Religious actors’ covers those who work in/with legally registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in interreligious affairs, or religious development and humanitarian entities; and those who teach religion in academic contexts.

Building on the Rabat Plan of Action, the Fez Process was initiated to analyse and discuss in depth the specific role that religious leaders and actors play in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.



In this context, the Fez Process responded to a recommendation made in the Rabat Plan of Action to go beyond legal responses and focus on less obvious but nevertheless very influential actors in the prevention and countering of hate speech.

The first consultation of the Fez Process took place in April 2015 in Fez, Morocco, with the support of KAICIID and the Government of Morocco, and included senior religious leaders from different faiths and religions from around the world. The constructive discussions that took place at this meeting led to the development of a draft declaration of principles (also called the “Fez Declaration”) and a draft Plan of Action for religious leaders and actors to prevent incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes (also called the “Fez Plan of Action”). The regional consultations<sup>6</sup> served to develop context specific regional strategies for religious leaders and actors to prevent incitement to violence – also called regional plans of actions – and served to refine the Fez Plan of Action.

A total of 232 religious leaders and actors from 77 countries<sup>7</sup> took part in the consultations. Participants included Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Sikhs from different groups and denominations, as well as representatives from various religious minorities, including Baha’i, Kakai, Yazidi, and Candomblé, as well as humanists. At least 30 percent of participants at all meetings were women.

<sup>6</sup> Fez (Morocco), April 2015; Treviso (Italy), September 2015; Amman (Jordan), November 2015; Washington D.C. (United States of America), February-March 2016; Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), May 2016; Bangkok (Thailand), December 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Zimbabwe.



11–12 November 2015

*Regional meeting of religious leaders and actors, Amman, Jordan.*

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

## The Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

The Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (“the Plan of Action”) captures the recommendations of all the regional consultations that took place within the Fez process. These recommendations, in the form of regional plans of actions, are included as an annex to this Plan of Action.

This Plan of Action integrates respect for and promotion of international human rights standards, in particular the right to freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of religion or belief and peaceful assembly. The recommendations contained in the Plan of Action are relevant to a range of situations and can contribute to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses, violent extremism, conflict and different forms of violence.

While this Plan of Action is intended primarily for religious leaders and actors, it also includes detailed recommendations for other relevant actors, including States and state institutions, secular civil society organizations, and new and traditional media. Preventing atrocity crimes and their incitement is a multilayered endeavor that is most likely to succeed when different actors are working collaboratively with the same objective.

The Plan of Action is intended to be a programmatic tool. It aims at informing and advising the work of religious leaders and actors, as well as other relevant players, and providing options and recommendations for ways in which they can contribute to preventing incitement to violence.





28 Feb-1 March 2016

*Regional meeting of religious leaders and actors, Washington DC, United States of America.*

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect



9-10 May 2016

*Regional meeting of religious leaders and actors, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

The Plan of Action consists of nine groups of thematic recommendations which are organised into three main clusters.

### PREVENT

1. Specific actions to prevent and counter incitement to violence
2. Prevent incitement to violent extremism
3. Prevent incitement to gender-based violence

### STRENGTHEN

4. Enhance education and capacity building
5. Foster interfaith and intra-faith dialogue
6. Strengthen collaboration with traditional and new media
7. Strengthen engagement with regional and international partners

### BUILD

8. Build peaceful, inclusive and just societies through respecting, protecting and promoting human rights
9. Establish networks of religious leaders

### Implementation

The community of actors engaged in the Fez Process, including participants in the meetings which took place within the Fez Process, were insistent on the need for this Plan of Action to be implemented at regional, national and local levels. For a fully-fledged and comprehensive implementation of the Plan of Action, it is also recommended that all relevant stakeholders, including state and religious institutions, secular and religious civil society organizations, new and traditional media, academia and education institutions, as well as regional and international organizations contribute to its implementation. The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, together with key United Nations and civil society partners and the faith-based actors who have committed to this process, will continue to steward activities related to the implementation of this Plan of Action, as well as the evaluation of these activities and the dissemination of good practices and lessons learned deriving from them.

Implementation of the Plan of Action could contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes, especially in areas affected by religious and sectarian tensions and violence. Its implementation will also enhance the respect, protection and promotion of human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion or belief and peaceful assembly.



14 July 2017

Launch of the Plan of Action, UN Headquarters, New York.

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect



# PREVENT

- **SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO PREVENT AND COUNTER INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE**
- **PREVENT INCITEMENT TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM**
- **PREVENT INCITEMENT TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes



*Buddhist monks are about to have their mid-day meal in a pagoda near Phnom Penh, Cambodia.*

UN Photo/Pernaca Sudhakaran



# The Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

## PREVENT

### 1. Specific actions to prevent and counter incitement to violence

**Objectives:** (i) Refrain from uttering or disseminating messages of hatred or hostility that could constitute incitement to violence; (ii) do not remain silent when other communities are targeted; (iii) monitor, denounce and respond to incitement to violence; (iv) provide alternative messages; (v) bust myths and refute false rumours; (vi) engage in dialogue with the speakers responsible for incitement and/or the audience tempted to respond to the call for violence that could lead to atrocity crimes; (vii) positively influence faith communities and support their preventive activities; (viii) express solidarity with victims of incitement to violence.

#### Target I: Religious leaders and actors

- ➔ React to incitement as soon as it occurs to prevent tensions from escalating;
- ➔ Learn how to differentiate between speech that merely causes offence and speech that could constitute incitement to violence;
- ➔ Monitor the media, including social media, to ensure that hate speech that could constitute incitement to violence is constantly identified and countered;
- ➔ Disseminate positive images and stories about faiths other than one's own;
- ➔ Speak out not only when one's own community is targeted but also when a religious community different from one's own is targeted;
- ➔ Support the initiatives of other religious leaders and actors who speak out in support of human rights and justice and of oppressed communities, in particular;
- ➔ Monitor, compile and circulate religious statements and decrees issued by religious leaders and authorities that incite to hatred and violence;
- ➔ Issue and circulate reports of religious statements and decrees by religious leaders and authorities denouncing incitement and/or offering alternative messages;
- ➔ Develop and share new and traditional media strategies to reframe narratives. In doing so, consult with experts, to make sure that messages reach the right audience;
- ➔ Disseminate positive and alternative speech online and offline;
- ➔ Disseminate success stories of preventing and countering incitement;
- ➔ Ensure that counter and alternative messages are disseminated in local languages, including in local dialects;

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

- Amplify through new and traditional media the stories of religious leaders and communities responding to hate with expressions of love and solidarity;
- Engage in dialogue with all communities and audiences, including those who are hostile or whose ideologies are discriminatory or extremist;
- Listen to “victims” of incitement and integrate their perspectives;
- Identify influential and committed religious leaders and actors who can be appointed to disseminate counter and alternative messages in situations where tensions are high;
- Where relevant, establish national interreligious observatories to detect causes and origins of hate speech and incitement to violence as well as to identify and analyse endemic, structural and cultural sources of violence.
- Map existing initiatives to prevent and counter incitement to violence so that they can be scaled up and supported, including by:
  - Academic institutions providing education and training for religious actors;
  - Social, print, television and other media companies;
  - Organizations responsible for community based initiatives;
  - Religious and secular institutions and organizations;
  - Institutions that carry out interfaith and intra-faith dialogue, education and training.

### Target II: Local communities

- Support religious leaders and actors when they speak out in relation to preventing incitement to violence, whichever faith they represent;
- Build robust multi-faith social action campaigns to prevent and curb incitement to violence. Ensure campaign leaders are diverse faith actors (women, young people, people of different professions);

- Organise community level initiatives such as “flash mobs” and form rapid response networks. Disseminate messages in various forms, including through press conferences, press statements, blogs, op-eds, videos, films, music and visual art;
- Appoint celebrity spokespersons and ambassadors;
- Build and sustain partnerships with government officials, including at local level, and journalists;
- Include youth representatives in faith-based campaigns (both junior youth, aged 11-15, and college and university students);
- Focus on obtaining specific and actionable policy changes in addition to long-term cultural change;
- Seek financial resources to address the financial disparity between hateful messengers and local communities’ coalitions;
- Refer to existing models and case studies that showcase positive examples of combating incitement to violence.

### Target III: Academic and education institutions, and civil society organizations

- Provide training to religious leaders and actors on human rights monitoring and reporting; the prevention of atrocity crimes and their incitement; the use of non-violent methods to confront and stand up against incitement to violence; and the development of effective communication strategies to curb incitement;
- Develop materials on ethnic, religious and gender diversity for religious leaders and actors;
- Encourage and foster research on incitement to violence, its origins and causes, as well as the role of the media in spreading it. Offer suggestions for ways to prevent and counter incitement to violence;
- Encourage and foster research on ways in which audiences can best be reached by alternative messages disseminated by religious groups.

#### Target IV: State institutions

- States that have blasphemy laws should repeal them, as such laws have a stifling impact on the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and healthy dialogue and debate about religion<sup>8</sup>;
- Ensure respect for freedom of opinion and expression while preventing incitement to religious hatred, in line with Articles 19 and 20 of the ICCPR;
- Acknowledge and support individual or institutional courage;
- Keep security officials updated concerning risks that religious leaders may face if they speak out or take action against violent extremism, radicalisation of youth, or in response to “hate speech”, xenophobia, racism or incitement to violence;
- If necessary, provide protection for religious leaders who may be at risk of retaliatory attacks;
- Disseminate information about activities aimed at promoting alternative narratives;
- Support the issuing/dissemination of religious messages, statements and decrees denouncing incitement to violence.

<sup>8</sup> A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix, para. 25.

*A boat off the coast of Myanmar's Rakhine province.*

Photo: OCHA



## 2. Prevent incitement to violent extremism

**Objectives:** (i) Confront ideologies that promote violent extremism and terrorism; (ii) Address topics that religious extremists monopolize, including through accurate and nuanced viewpoints; (iii) Provide counter narratives to those attracted by or who are part of violent extremist and terrorist groups; (iv) Build communities' resilience, and of youth in particular, to violent extremism; (v) Contribute to the creation of an alternative youth identity and sense of belonging; (vi) Address grievances.

### Target I: Religious leaders and actors

- Encourage and promote respect for religious and cultural diversity as well as of peaceful interpretations of the tenets of own faith;
- Counter drivers of radicalization, such as feelings of oppression and hopelessness, using alternative narratives to those provided by violent extremists;
- Engage youth, including through inter-religious justice-focused initiatives, in tackling injustice in a constructive way;
- Listen to and address grievances of the youth, even when what they say is shocking or controversial;
- Develop and use alternative and creative methods of talking to young people, in addition to preaching. For instance, open place of worship to youth and involve youth in community, sport, cultural and interfaith work. Also, enhance dialogue with students and students' councils to improve intergenerational understanding;
- Increase awareness and understanding of the phenomenon of youth radicalization and de-radicalization, including their gender dimension;
- Identify violent extremist arguments and develop a compendium of counter/alternative messages, based on religious texts and principles;
- Engage, including online, in dialogue with those with political or religious extremist views. Understand, dismantle and counter their arguments using religious texts and messages. Target those who have the most questions as well as those who claim to know and interpret the religious texts and messages correctly);
- Educate young members of one's own community

to understand and interpret religious messages and teachings in order to be able to identify and respond to both positive and negative messages;

- Reach out within one's own communities to people who are potentially vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups, including marginalized youth;
- Offer spiritual counselling on-line and off-line, especially to those at risk of being radicalised or who have joined violent extremist groups;
- Provide expert support and spiritual counselling to youths who return from conflict areas; facilitate youth disengagement and de-radicalisation, including by providing psycho-social assistance and social services, such as advice on education and employment.
- Respect the right of families to mourn and carry out religious rites and duties to mark the deaths of family members who have died in conflict zones, including individuals considered to be "terrorists";
- Establishing networks of parents attached to specific religious places of worship;
- Promote dialogue with different sectors of the society to address issues related to violence against young people or carried out by young people;
- Advocate with state institutions and the private sector on the importance of providing youth with economic opportunities and vocational training.

### Target II: State and State institutions

- Implement a holistic approach to preventing violent extremism, rather than a security-based approach;
- Protect the rights of religious communities to

carry out religious ceremonies and rituals, while respecting the laws of the State;

- ➔ Support, including with financial means, religious leaders, actors and institutions that actively prevent and counter violent extremism and incitement to violence;
- ➔ Connect religious leaders with the local police to build trust and cooperation;
- ➔ Empower and ensure protection to religious leaders who engage with radicalised individuals and/or those who are at risk of radicalisation;
- ➔ Ensure that domestic laws criminalizing storage of violent extremist materials do not penalise religious leaders and others who collect violent extremist materials for the purpose of countering incitement messages.

### Target III: Civil Society

- ➔ Strengthen the capacity of faith leaders to engage with youths who are at risk of radicalisation;
- ➔ Develop comprehensive guidance for education stakeholders (including faith-based educators) on how they can take effective action to prevent youth radicalization and violent extremism within the broader framework of the Global Citizenship Education and Media and Information Literacy;
- ➔ Given their potential to notice and counter violent extremist influences, provide families, and

mothers and fathers in particular, with support and access to information to help them: recognize and react constructively to signs of radicalization in their children; dissuade their children from joining radical groups; and/or convince their children to dissociate themselves from such groups.

### Target IV: All

- ➔ Support the dissemination of information that undermines violent extremist arguments. Make sure such information is easily available, widely disseminated and used by young people and youth stakeholders to develop and improve local policies;
- ➔ Identify violent extremists who have changed their views and behaviour and, with their consent, make their stories public, including through online and offline media;
- ➔ Do not stigmatise but rather support the families of youths who have left their homes and joined violent extremist groups, including in conflict zones;
- ➔ Identify and train “youth ambassadors” to become dedicated actors and peer-educators in countering radicalization and violent extremism;
- ➔ Implement activities that bolster global citizenship education and critical thinking at the grassroots level, including through activities that promote religious and cultural diversity through arts and sport.

### 3. Prevent incitement to gender-based violence

**Objective:** (i) Address cultural attitudes that underpin the use of sexual violence, and the stigma and shame associated with it; (ii) Curb gender-based discrimination and violence, including their incitement; (iii) Create pathways or space to counter exclusion and discrimination of women and include active engagement in faith leadership.

#### Target I: Religious leaders and actors

- ➔ Contribute to changing discriminatory social norms and ideas relating to women and sexual minorities;
- ➔ Condemn and advocate against gender-based violence, in all its forms, including against the use of rape as a weapon of war;
- ➔ Increase and strengthen the profile of women, both religious and secular, who are working to prevent atrocity crimes and to counter violent extremism. Establish a women's faith leaders sub-group to help support female commitment to these causes;
- ➔ Promote a "healing of memories" approach to gender-based violence. Welcome back survivors of gender-based violence into their communities and encourage their re-acceptance and reintegration instead of isolating and stigmatizing them;

- ➔ Promote debates among religious organizations and with the wider society on gender equality;
- ➔ Partner with national governments and international organizations, including the United Nations, to advocate for enhancing gender equality.

#### Target II: Religious Institutions

- ➔ Encourage and support the advancement of women within religious institutions;
- ➔ Train religious leaders and actors, especially women, in faith-based counselling to support survivors of gender-based violence.

#### Target III: State institutions

- ➔ Implement international and national legislation to prevent gender-based violence;
- ➔ Repeal impunity for gender-based violence.



*Uzbek refugees after violent clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz.*

UN Photo/EPA



# STRENGTHEN

- ENHANCE EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING
- FOSTER INTERFAITH AND INTRA-FAITH DIALOGUE
- STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION WITH TRADITIONAL AND NEW MEDIA
- STRENGTHEN ENGAGEMENT WITH REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

*Mosque in Djenné, halfway between  
Timbuktu and Bamako, Djenna, Mali.*

UN Photo/John Isaac



## STRENGTHEN

### 4. Enhance education and capacity-building to prevent incitement to violence

**Objectives:** (i) Instil knowledge of and respect for “the other” and promote non-discrimination, equal citizenship and human rights; (ii) Mainstream appreciation of all cultures/religions or beliefs and the importance of civil co-existence; (iii) Provide sound/wise religious knowledge and understanding; (iv) Strengthen the religious knowledge of “intermediaries” and gate openers within various religious communities; (v) Address cultural attitudes that underpin the use of violence.

#### Target I: Religious leaders and actors

- ➔ Seek opportunities to strengthen own expertise, including on interfaith knowledge and dialogue, the use of social media and youth engagement;
- ➔ Address the lack of religious literacy and religious freedom literacy by providing followers with information about different religions and cultures as well as about freedom of religion or belief;
- ➔ Identify and share religious texts and influential theological writings and pedagogical materials that could be used to support the promotion of mutual respect and understanding;
- ➔ Educate members of own community to understand and interpret religious messages and teaching in order to be able to identify and respond to both positive and negative messages.

#### Target II: Religious institutions

- ➔ Promote critical thinking, respect for international human rights standards and the knowledge of the “other” to increase understanding and respect for other religions and beliefs and to ensure that religious identity does not become a source of division, tensions and violence;
- ➔ Include in education curricula for religious leaders and actors instruction on:
  - Different religions and beliefs;

- Intercultural and interreligious communication;
- International norms and standards on freedom of religion or belief;
- Global citizenship;
- Peaceful conflict resolution and management;
- The role of religion in fuelling or mitigating violence;
- The history and prevention of atrocity crimes — including on understanding the risk factors for violence and its incitement; their consequences and impact; as well as possible measures and strategies to prevent and/or counter violence;
- ➔ Develop profiles (or minimum qualifications) for religious leaders and actors;
- ➔ Lobby national education ministries to promote diversity and equality in schools curricula;
- ➔ Encourage the integration of religious leaders and actors who have received their religious training abroad, and support the development of local education programs, courses and curricula;
- ➔ Engage religious institutions to provide scholarships to train religious leaders locally;
- ➔ Allow and encourage seminaries to invite religious leaders and practitioners from other faiths to address students.

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

### Target III: State and State institutions

- Promote a human rights-based approach to education;
- Embed critical thinking in youth education;
- Develop school curricula for public schools that include teaching about religions and beliefs as a subject that is inclusive of different traditions; promotes respect for diversity; and is taught by people of different faiths;
- Include in school curricula — from early childhood to university-level education — civic and peace education, as well as the history of atrocity crimes and how to prevent their future recurrence;
- Remove negative stereotypes from teaching materials in schools;

- Ensure that both civilian and uniformed Government personnel have basic knowledge of all religions and human rights standards, and are trained to rise above prejudice and discrimination and engage with sensitivity with religious or belief communities;
- If the State provides public funding to religious schools, it should make this funding available without discrimination;
- Create spaces where children and youth from different religions, beliefs and cultures can meet and interact.

### Target IV: Civil Society

- Map existing education resources for religious leaders and actors, as well as for youth, in order to avoid duplication of efforts. This mapping can also be carried out by other stakeholders.



*A Baha'i family in Iran.*

Photo: Baha'i International Community

## 5. Foster interfaith and intra-faith dialogue to prevent incitement to violence

**Objectives:** (i) Contribute to a culture of dialogue; (ii) Promote inter and intra-religious dialogue, mutual understanding and respect; (iii) Develop intra and interreligious media literacy; (iv) Develop an inter-faith approach to preventing incitement to violence.

### Target I: Religious leaders and actors

- ➔ Learn about religions and beliefs different from one's own, including by participating in exchange programmes between different faiths, especially during religious festivities;
- ➔ Build coalitions within one's own faith, with other faiths, as well as with non-religious and humanist groups;
- ➔ Promote inter-religious and inter-convictional cooperation on various social issues of relevance to communities, in particular through joint activities, to strengthen community cohesion and convey powerful messages of interreligious collaboration and solidarity;
- ➔ Establish open door places of worship. Invite religious leaders and actors from other faiths to address own faith community in own place of worship;
- ➔ Promote interfaith retreats and celebrations;
- ➔ Organise inter-faith harmony days/weeks;
- ➔ Encourage the development of an inter-faith code of conduct for preventing incitement to violence while preaching, based on human rights principles;
- ➔ Develop with other faiths shared alternative and positive narratives;
- ➔ Release interreligious press statements;
- ➔ Publicize joint, collaborative/solidarity efforts of inter-religious communities to the wider public;
- ➔ Foster intra-religious dialogue as a platform for all voices to be heard;

- ➔ Engage in persistent and ongoing dialogue with religious groups, including with those that hold extremist views within their own faith;
- ➔ Encourage youth religious leaders and actors to foster interreligious engagement;
- ➔ Collect and share positive stories of interfaith courage, engagement and social change;
- ➔ Use inter and intra-faith dialogue to exchange experiences and good practices for building social cohesion and preventing incitement to violence;
- ➔ Promote the development of an interfaith curriculum in schools;
- ➔ Encourage the development of interfaith seminaries.

### Target II: Religious institutions

- ➔ Strengthen religious academies that promote inter-religious understanding, by providing more financial and human resources;
- ➔ Develop training for religious leaders that promotes interfaith partnership and disseminate and make easily available related tools and resources, including online;
- ➔ Train resource persons, including trainers of trainers, specialized in interfaith dialogue and partnerships, and develop interreligious networks of resource persons.

### Target III: State and State institutions

- ➔ Encourage and support interreligious dialogue activities, in particular those with initiatives aimed at monitoring, preventing and countering incitement to violence.

## 6. Strengthen collaboration with traditional and new media to prevent and counter incitement to violence

**Objectives:** (i) Amplify the positive impact of alternative and counter speech; (ii) Contribute to enhance and promote ethical standards of journalism.

### Target I: Religious Leaders and actors

- Monitor the output of traditional and new media and encourage them to respect and apply ethical standards of journalism;
- Encourage the media to publicise positive stories of religious and secular actors who have countered violent extremist narratives, as well as news and information about initiatives aimed at enhancing respect and peaceful coexistence;
- Engage with traditional and new media organizations to counter prejudices and false rumours;
- Develop media content that could be shared with the media;
- Engage popular social media organizations, including Facebook and Tweeter, as active partners in advocacy to support counter speech and alternative narrative campaigns;
- Discuss with social media the creation of positive adverts vis-à-vis content that aims to disseminate hatred and incite violence;
- Create or strengthen websites offering religious and spiritual feedback on issues of contemporary relevance;
- Develop Facebook pages on/for specific crises or issues to rally people and create a network of support to coordinate action;
- Disseminate weekly digest of Twitter posts and feeds;
- Enhance collaboration with interfaith radio stations that broadcast messages promoting inclusiveness and social cohesion.

### Target II: Traditional and new media

- Apply ethical standards of journalism to prevent and counter incitement to violence, without undermining freedom of opinion and expression, and with full respect for articles 19 and 20 of the ICCPR;
- Acknowledge journalists' social responsibility and provide training opportunities in ethical standards of journalism;
- Develop a code of ethics for religious journalists/religious media on how to deal with incitement that may lead to atrocity crimes;
- Provide training opportunities to religious leaders and actors on how to use the social media and operate in a social media environment.

### Target III: State and state institutions

- Promote media pluralism, including the right of national, racial, religious and ethnic minorities to freely access and use media and information and communications technologies for the production and circulation of their own content as well as for the reception of content produced by others;
- Refrain from and stop financing online and offline media that advocate for national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, while fully respecting articles 19 and 20 of the ICCPR;
- Use the six-part threshold test<sup>9</sup>(considering the context, speaker, intent, content and form, extent of the speech act, and likelihood, including imminence) to identify speech that could constitute incitement to violence.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 7

#### Target IV: Civil society

- Provide training opportunities on strategic communication for lay leaders of religious communities with the aim of preventing and

countering incitement to violence with alternative narratives;

- Help develop an online platform of moderate religious leaders (“cyber force”) who could help to combat incitement to violence.



*Residents of Malakal welcome the visiting Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, Malakal, South Sudan.*

UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

## 7. Strengthen engagement with regional and international partners to implement this Plan of Action

**Objective:** (i) Build international partnerships, including with the United Nations, on issues related to the prevention of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes; (ii) Strengthen cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the prevention of incitement to violence, including States, religious leaders and institutions, civil society organizations and intergovernmental bodies; (iii) Link religious leaders and actors to regional and international organizations on issues related to the prevention of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.

### Target I: Religious leaders and actors

- Support international activities aimed at promoting peaceful, inclusive and just societies, including the United Nations “decade on statelessness”.

### Target II: Regional and international organizations

#### General

- Support religious academies that are promoting inter-religious understanding by providing financial and human resources;
- Help consolidate and strengthen ongoing multi-lateral interreligious programs;
- Provide support to non-governmental organizations working to introduce at the community level civic education and education in critical thinking through extra-curriculum activities.

*The UN Secretary-General with Sheik Abdallah Bin Bayyah at the launch of the Plan of Action, UN Headquarters, New York, 14 July 2017.*

### United Nations

- Hold all Member States equally accountable for breaches of international human rights standards;
- Take a more prominent role in supporting the work of religious leaders as well as interreligious and intra-religious groups to prevent incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence as well as to violent extremism;
- Establish a world forum of religions and beliefs that would bring together an equal representation of religious leaders and actors, policy makers, educators and media personnel from all world regions. The forum would deliberate on the role of religions in enhancing peaceful, inclusive and just societies. The forum would have regional hubs.
- Strengthen the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and the Alliance for Civilizations as forums for fostering international norms of religious pluralism and religious tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect.





# BUILD

- BUILD PEACEFUL, INCLUSIVE AND JUST SOCIETIES THROUGH RESPECTING, PROTECTING AND PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS
- ESTABLISH NETWORKS OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

*Jews congregate for prayer at the Wailing Wall, Jerusalem.*

UN Photo/John Isaac





## BUILD

### 8. Build peaceful, inclusive and just societies through respecting, protecting and promoting human rights

**Objectives:** (i) Recognize that human rights principles are embedded in all religious scriptures and texts; (ii) Contribute to stemming the misuse of religion to drive violence and war through protecting human rights, preventing discrimination based on religion or belief, and promoting the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief; (iii) contribute to promoting peace and reconciliation, including in regions marked by religiously motivated violence.

#### Target I: Religious leaders and actors

- ➔ Seek common moral and theological ground, rooted in religious traditions and teaching, which confirms the principles and values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- ➔ Be a role model within and outside one's own community and move beyond tolerance;
- ➔ Discard ideas of superiority and exclusivity and encourage other religious leaders to do the same;
- ➔ Preach universal messages of peace and respect that are aligned with international human rights standards;
- ➔ Contribute to educating the believers on peace, social cohesion and the acceptance of "the Other", irrespective of religious or belief background, as per Article 18 of the ICCPR;
- ➔ Help fight all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on class, caste, race, ethnicity, religion or belief;
- ➔ Respect and protect all people – not only those sharing one's own religion or belief – from discrimination and violence;
- ➔ Accept that the public sphere belongs to everybody, whatever their religion or belief;
- ➔ Take public stances in support of religious groups other than one's own;
- ➔ Strive to dismantle walls and build bridges between communities;
- ➔ Disseminate religious messages, including from sacred texts, that are linked to and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- ➔ Use religious proclamations to reinforce positive values and human rights and prevent discrimination and violence;
- ➔ Monitor constitutions, laws and legal reforms for discriminatory content and advocate for its removal;
- ➔ Create awareness about; defend and support the right to nationality as a fundamental human right; and advocate with national authorities for this right to be included in national constitutions;
- ➔ When possible, engage in peaceful protests, rallies and demonstrations to expose, challenge, and eradicate discrimination and violence;
- ➔ Contribute to mediation, conflict prevention and conflict transformation processes. Act early to address tensions, before discrimination and violence are institutionalized, and take steps to remedy any measure that could lead to discrimination and exclusion;
- ➔ Support the role of local religious leaders and communities who are well placed to act as mediators of religious and cultural doctrines;

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

- Engage in activities that have a strong symbolic relevance to promote peaceful coexistence and inter-religious harmony;
- Engage with communities to address long-standing grievances, intolerance and scapegoating. Recognize the rights of “forgotten minorities” and raise their concerns/rights with national authorities;
- Support creative initiatives that promote justice, peace, unity, mutual respect and harmony, such as the “Walk of Hope”;
- Promote and disseminate good practices of peaceful coexistence and lessons learned, bearing in mind, however, that there are no “fix all” solutions and that every context is different.

### Target II: Religious institutions

- Review policies on proselytism and conversion. While missionary activities and the right of an individual to convert to a different religion or belief — if he/she so chooses — are protected, individuals must not be subject to coercion which would impair their freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice, as per article 18(2) of the ICCPR;
- Respect the right of each individual to practice their own religion;
- Include international humanitarian law and human rights standards in the education curricula of religious leaders and actors.

### Target III: States and States institutions

- Domesticated and apply relevant international human rights standards, including those relating to freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of religion or belief, the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association and those pertaining to religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities. Raise awareness about these standards and their relevance and ensure implementation at the national level;

- Repeal existing national legislation and policies that unduly restrict human rights, including freedom of expression and opinion; freedom of religion or belief; and freedom of association and the right of peaceful assembly;
- Enforce existing laws that prohibit discrimination and incitement to violence on the basis of religion, race or any other form of identity;
- Respect the right to a nationality and take steps to prevent statelessness;
- Encourage and support religious diplomatic engagement as a tool to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts;
- Use transitional justice mechanisms — such as historical memory and truth seeking mechanisms — as a way to process past violence and prevent future conflict;
- Engage with political leaders to organize at national level an annual day or week of mutual respect.



## 9. Establish networks of religious leaders to prevent and counter incitement to violence

**Objective:** (i) Link religious leaders and actors working on preventing incitement to violence in different regions; (ii) amplify counter messages and alternative narratives; (iii) share good practices and lessons learned.

### Target: Religious Leaders and actors

- Establish networks/coalitions of inter-religious leaders and actors from different regions whose main objective will be to prevent incitement to violence. These networks/coalitions could also serve as forum to address other human rights violations that are being justified in the name

of religion, such as early or forced marriage and sexual slavery. Members of the network/coalition should keep each other informed about any measure taken to prevent, counter and respond to instances of incitement; initiate joint statements/responses; and coordinate actions, including through social media.



*Asia-Pacific regional meeting of religious leaders and actors, Bangkok, 8-9 December 2016.*

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

*Internally displaced indigenous children  
in Rio Suchio, Colombia.*

UN Photo/Mark Garten



# Annexes

## Definition of atrocity crimes

The term “atrocity crimes” refers to three legally defined international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The definitions of the crimes can be found in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols, and the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, among other treaties. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (paragraphs 138 and 139), United Nations Member States made a commitment to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, a principle referred to as the “Responsibility to Protect”. In this context, the term “atrocity crimes” has been extended to include ethnic cleansing which, while not defined as an independent crime under international law, includes acts that are serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that may themselves amount to one of the recognized atrocity crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) requires States parties to prohibit by law “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence”. “Incitement” refers to statements about national, racial or religious groups which create an imminent risk of discrimination, hostility or violence against persons belonging to those groups. Incitement is therefore a very dangerous form of hate speech as it can trigger violence and, in some instances, atrocity crimes.

## Fez Declaration, Morocco, 24 April 2015

We, representatives from different religions and faiths, assembled in Fez, Morocco, from 23 to 24 April 2015, for the “Forum with religious leaders on preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes”:

*Having* discussed the increasing risk of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity (hereinafter “atrocity crimes”), as well as their incitement, perpetrated against a background of religious tensions and violence committed in the name of religion and the need to intensify the fight against those crimes and their incitement at local, national, regional and international levels;

*Expressing* our abhorrence at the commission of atrocity crimes and the unacceptable levels of violence perpetrated against civilians on the basis of identity, including religious identity, and which include ethnic cleansing, killings, sexual violence, mass displacement, etc.;

*Emphasizing* that atrocity crimes constitute a global emergency and one of the most formidable threats to peace and security and social and economic development, as well as to the effective enjoyment of human rights by all, without discrimination;

*Deeply concerned* with the rise of extremist and violent ideologies that claim to identify themselves as part of specific faith traditions, beliefs or tendencies, or claim to speak on behalf of a part or a whole of a religion;

*Deeply concerned* as well with religious-based mass atrocities and the violent targeting of individuals and groups based on their religion or belief, perpetrated by violent and extremist groups;

*Mindful* of the increasing number of reports of “hate speech” and incitement to discrimination,

hostility and violence worldwide and, in particular, in regions where there are high levels of religious tensions and violence;

*Cognizant* of the role played by some religious leaders in inciting discrimination, hostility and violence and in disseminating “hate speech”, including in places of worship and educational settings;

*Cognizant* as well that “hate speech” and incitement to violence as well as violent ideologies, including on the basis of religion or belief, are often disseminated by and through the media, including social media and the Internet;

*Stressing* the necessity of a gender-sensitive understanding and approach to mass atrocities and incitement to violence;

*Recognizing* that in situations where tensions are high and populations are divided along identity or sectarian lines, religious institutions and leaders can play a paramount role in preventing and responding to atrocity crimes;

*Emphasizing* the important role and demonstrated impact of religious leaders in calling for an end to tensions, hostility and violence that could lead to atrocity crimes and in promoting peaceful coexistence based on equality, mutual respect and non-discrimination;

*Recognizing* that non-governmental faith-based organizations play a paramount role in monitoring and responding to discrimination, hostility and violence, advocating on behalf of the victims of discrimination, hostility, violence and atrocities crimes and in building societies that are based on peaceful coexistence and mutual respect;

*Reaffirming* that freedom of expression and association, and an independent and pluralistic

media, including social media, play an important positive role in addressing social tensions, promoting a culture of mutual respect and informing the public about all matters of public concern, including those related to atrocity crimes and their root causes, and efforts to prevent atrocity crimes;

*Insisting* on the primary role of the State in respecting and protecting human rights without discrimination, including the right to freedom of religion and belief, and in establishing an enabling legal and policy environment for religious leaders, civil society and the media;

*Acknowledging* that respect, peace and the sanctity of human life are essential ingredients of all religious teachings;

*Recalling and reaffirming* previous commitments to oppose violence in the name of religion, including the KAICIID Vienna Declaration (19 November 2014);

*Recalling and reaffirming* previous commitments by civil society and mass media to prevent and respond to incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, including the Amman Declaration, (18 November 2013);

*Recalling* and endorsing the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (Rabat, 5 October 2012) and in particular its six part threshold test for defining limitations on freedom of expression, for defining incitement to hatred, and for the application of article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);

*Cognisant* of relevant international standards, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the ICCPR, the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced

Disappearance, United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1624 (2015) and Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the UNESCO Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance;

*Adopt*, in Fez, the following declaration:

**We, representatives from different religions and faiths assembled in Fez, Morocco, from 23 to 24 April 2015 commit to:**

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- i. Publicly denounce all instances of atrocity crimes and acts of violence, including those perpetrated in the name of religion and belief (whether one's own or others');
- ii. Publicly denounce the intentional destruction or damage to cultural heritage or property, including of a religious nature;
- iii. Publicly condemn all instances of incitement to violence, and of "hate speech", including those uttered and disseminated in the name of religion;
- iv. Publicly condemn all instances of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief and commit to respect and promote diversity and the human rights of all individuals and populations, without discrimination, including their right to freedom of religion and belief;
- v. Refrain from uttering or disseminating messages of hate and incitement;

#### PREVENTION OF AND RESPONSES TO ATROCITY CRIMES AND THEIR INCITEMENT

- vi. Monitor and report on the dissemination of ideology that promotes hatred, and incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence including, but not only, on the basis of religion or belief;

to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

- vii. Monitor, report and respond to all instances of incitement to atrocity crimes on the basis of religion or belief, including when they are disseminated through places of worship and education or through the media, including the social media;
- viii. Monitor and report on all instances of hate crimes including by and against members of our own religious community;
- ix. Disseminate messages of mutual respect in places of worship, education and through the media, including the social media;
- x. Engage in dialogue with those attracted to, advocating or involved in extremist ideology and acts of violence that are justified on the basis of religion, with a view to preventing or curbing such violence or mitigate its effects;
- xi. Contribute to interreligious and intra-religious dialogue;
- xii. Engage civil and political leaders to increase political support for all of these actions;
- xiii. Implement this Action Plan in totality or in part;
- xiv. Ensure a gender-sensitive approach in implementing the Declaration;
- xv. Appeal to all people of faith, belief and good will who strive to build a more cooperative and peaceful world to adopt these commitments and work with us toward achieving our goal.



*Launch of the Plan of Action, UN Headquarters, New York, 14 July 2017.*

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect



Children studying in a Koranic school,  
Cairo, Egypt.

UN Photo/John Isaac



to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes

## Institutions and actors that contributed to the regional consultations

### Organizations

Al Azhar University, Cairo

Al-Wahid Mosque, Milan

All African Conference of Churches, Kenya

All Ceylon Hindu Congress, Sri Lanka

All India Imam Organization

All Myanmar Andhra Hindu Religious Society

American Jewish Committee

Anglican Church of Burundi

Anglican Church of Rwanda

Armenian Church

Armenian Prelacy of Lebanon

Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, Japan

Association of Muslim Scholars, Iraq

Association of Women of the Catholic Church, Côte d'Ivoire

Assyrian Christian community Iraq

Baha'i International Community

Bahrain Interfaith Center

Beit Emunah in Santiago, Chile

Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities

Catholic Comboni Sisters, Palestine

Central Islamic Organization of Guyana

Central Mosque, Bangui, Central African Republic

Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, Washington DC

Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, Sri Lanka

Centro de Diálogo Intercultural ALBA, Argentina

Century Entrepreneurship Development Agency International, Uganda

Chad Parliament

Christian Aid Program Northern Iraq

Church of Christ in Thailand

Columbia University of New York, Global Freedom of Expression Program

Community of Sant'Egidio, Rome

COREIS Islamic Religious Community, Italy

Cultural Affairs at Cultural Mission in London

Dhamma School Foundation, Myanmar

Divine Shakti Foundation, India

Diversity Development Centre in Lagos, Nigeria

Duhovnosti Kulture, Croatia

Ekta Parishad India

Ethiopian Jewish community

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Ethiopian Peace and Development Centre

Facebook

Family Welfare

Finn Church Aid

Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organization, Belgium

Foundation for Sustainability and Peacemaking in Mesoamerica

George Washington University, The Bridge Initiative, Washington DC	Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights
Google	Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values
Global Covenant Partners	Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam , Pakistan
Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, India	Jesuit Refugee Service, Cambodia
Groundswell Movement	Jewish Community of Fez, Morocco
Grupo Ecu�mico de Mujeres Constructoras de Paz, Colombia	Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington
Hillel International, Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Experience, Washington DC	Kaka'l community Iraq
Holy See to the United Nations	King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue
Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia	Koinonia
Institute for Strategic Studies and Democracy Malta	Liberian Council of Churches
Interfaith Center of New York	Libyan Institute of Advanced Studies
Interfaith Council, South West Connecticut	Lutheran Theological College at Philadelphia
Interfaith Mediation Centre of the Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Kaduna State, Nigeria	Lutheran World Federation
International Network of Engaged Buddhists, Thailand	Mahidol University Thailand – Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies
Inter-Religious Council of Liberia	Manav Ekta Mission, India
Inter-Religious Council of Thailand	Methodist University of C�te d'Ivoire
Islamic Center of Long Island	Middle East Council of Churches Lebanon
Islam Relief Worldwide	Minority Rights Group International
Islamic Community of Italy	Mongolian Muslim Society
Islamic Education Trust, Nigeria	Moravian Church in Nicaragua and part of Honduras
Islamic University Islamabad – Iqbal International Institute for Research and Dialogue	Moroccan Rabita Mohammadia of Ulama
Islamic University of Uganda	Mosaica Center for Religious Conflict Transformation in the Middle East
Italian Buddhist Union	Mosqu�e du Plateau, Abidjan
Italian Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights	Muslim American Veterans Association National
	Muslim Hands

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Muslim Public Affairs Council, Washington DC

National Association for Human Rights of Saudi Arabia

National Council of Churches of Kenya

National Council of Churches in the Philippines

National Muslim Council of Liberia

National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i

Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Newseum Institute, Religious Freedom Center, Washington DC

Office of His Holiness Baba Sheik, Iraq

Organization of the Islamic Cooperation

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Parish of Kimpton, Ayot St. Lawrence, United Kingdom

Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband Berlin

Peacemaker Tanenbaum

Permarth Niketan Ashram, India

Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue

Preah Sihanouk Raja Buddish University Cambodia

Prachakittisuk Church and Orphanage in Chiang Rai, Thailand

Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Washington DC

Princeton University

Qorvis MSL Group

Reconciliation and Integration National Cohesion and Integration Commission of Kenya

Religions for Peace Belgium

Research Center on Values and Research Unit on Risky Behaviors, Morocco

Richard Stockton University of New Jersey

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Europe, Italy

Roma Community, Romania

Roman Catholic Church, Nigeria

Roman Melkite Catholics, Jordan

Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies Jordan

Salvadorian Lutheran Church

Save Belgium

Serve2Unite

Seminari Theoloji Malaysia

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, India

Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign

Sitagu International Buddhist Academy of Myanmar

Sound Vision Foundation

South Sudan Council of Churches

Sudan Council of Churches

Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs

Supreme Islamic Council of Myanmar

Syrian Islamic scholar and Murshid

The Africa University, Zimbabwe

The Council of Christians and Jews, United Kingdom

The Interfaith Mediation Centre of the Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Kaduna State, Nigeria

The Nation's Mosque – Masjid Muhammed, Washington DC

Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations of Italy

Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics, Italy

Union Theological Seminary, New York

United Jewish Congregation in Hong Kong
United Kingdom Parliament
United Reformed Church in Southern Africa
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
United States Institute of Peace
United States Office of Peace and Dialogue
University Hospital Centre of Treichville, Côte d'Ivoire
University of Birmingham
University of Lapland
University of Liverpool
University of New Zealand
Walk of Hope "For the Oneness of Humanity"
Walpola Rahula Institute, Sri Lanka
Women in Islam
Women Without Borders
World Bank Group
World Council of Arya Samaj in India
World Council of Churches
Youth Parliament of Jordan
Zomba Theological College, Malawi

## United Nations

United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
United Nations Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force
United Nations Department of Political Affairs
United Nations Development Fund
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Sexual Violence in Conflict
United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect
United Nations Office to the African Union
United Nations Ombudsman and Head of Ombudsman and Mediation Services
United Nations Peace Support Unit
United Nations Population Fund

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**Maytham Al Salman,**

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Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

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Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

**Burton Visotzky,**

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*Hindu women at the Triyuginarayan Centre, India.*

Photo: Divine Shakti Foundation



*Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh of the Sikh organization Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha.*

UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

*Ephraim Isaac, representative of the Ethiopian Jewish community.*

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect



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## Links to useful documents

### *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention:*

[http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Framework%20of%20Analysis%20for%20Atrocity%20Crimes\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Framework%20of%20Analysis%20for%20Atrocity%20Crimes_EN.pdf)

### *Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief:*

(A/HRC/RES/16/18)

### *Prohibiting Incitement to Discrimination, Hostility and Violence:*

<https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/3572/12-12-01-PO-incitement-WEB.pdf>

### *Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence:*

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat\\_draft\\_outcome.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/SeminarRabat/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf)

### *The Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality:*

<https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/standards/the-camden-principles-on-freedom-of-expression-and-equality.pdf>

### *Preventing Incitement: Policy options for Action:*

[http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.10\\_of%20incitement.Policy%20options.Nov2013.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.10_of%20incitement.Policy%20options.Nov2013.pdf)

### *Regional Plan of Action for Europe:*

[http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.13\\_Europe%20Plan%20of%20Action.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.13_Europe%20Plan%20of%20Action.pdf)

### *Regional Plan of Action for the MENA region:*

[http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.14\\_MENA%20Plan%20of%20Action.FINAL.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.14_MENA%20Plan%20of%20Action.FINAL.pdf)

### *Regional Plan of Action for the Americas:*

[http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.15\\_Plan%20of%20Action%20for%20the%20Americas.FINAL.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.15_Plan%20of%20Action%20for%20the%20Americas.FINAL.pdf)

### *Regional Plan of Action for Africa:*

[http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.16\\_Plan%20of%20Action%20for%20Africa.final.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/our-work/Doc.16_Plan%20of%20Action%20for%20Africa.final.pdf)



***Regional Plan of Action for the Asia-Pacific region:***

[http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20for%20religious%20leaders\\_AsiaPacific.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20for%20religious%20leaders_AsiaPacific.pdf)

***Beirut Declaration on “Faith for Rights”:***

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/21451/BeirutDeclarationonFaithforRights.pdf>

***18 Commitments on “Faith for Rights”:***

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/21451/18CommitmentsonFaithforRights.pdf>

***World Bank Groups, Conflict and Violence in 21st Century:***

<http://www.un.org/pga/70/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2016/01/Conflict-and-violence-in-the-21st-century-Current-trends-as-observed-in-empirical-research-and-statistics-Mr.-Alexandre-Marc-Chief-Specialist-Fragility-Conflict-and-Violence-World-Bank-Group.pdf>



*A woman walks through the deserted streets of Bakara Market, Mogadishu, Somalia.*

UN Photo/Stuart Price

*Adama Dieng with a Yazidi family in Iraq.*

Photo: UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect



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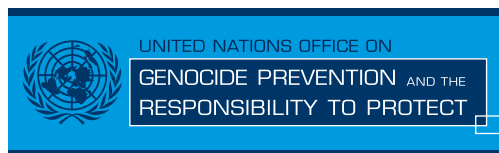
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The Network for  
Religious and  
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Peacemakers

