



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

16 June 2016

Excellency,

I have the honour to transmit herewith my summary of the key messages and recommendations from the High-Level Conversation on Religions for Peace, which I convened on 6 May 2016.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mogens Lykketoft'.

Mogens Lykketoft

To all Permanent Representatives  
and Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

## Religions for Peace

6 May 2016, Trusteeship Council Chamber, UN

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### President's Summary

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The President of the General Assembly convened a high-level conversation on Religions for Peace, on Friday 6 May 2016, in the United Nations headquarters in New York. The event included a high-level plenary segment and three interactive panel discussions with representatives of major world faith traditions, key UN and other inter-governmental actors, including the Alliance of Civilizations, UNESCO and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as civil society and academia. The programme is attached.

The main objective of this high-level conversation was to provide an opportunity for Member States and faith leaders, along with others stakeholders to recall the significance of maintaining respectful tolerance across diverse cultures and religions and to address violent extremism and terrorism. Furthermore, the event was an occasion for all concerned to contribute to the comprehensive stock-taking of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy during its 10-year review and further the consideration of the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

The following contains the key messages and recommendations arisen from the high-level conversation.

#### Summary and key conclusions:

Throughout the high-level conversation, numerous interventions underscored that the rise of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism are threatening international peace and security and constitutes an obstacle to human development. It was stressed that including the religious aspect as part of a counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism strategies should be seen as a part of the solution and not a problem. Many expressed a need for cooperation of the international community to unite across all religions, countries and communities in response to threats of terrorism and violent extremism.

These threats, it was underscored, must be tackled based on a holistic approach that seek to address the deeper causes that takes into account the necessity to respect the most basic of human rights so as not to exacerbate the challenge. There is a real need to establish a preventive policy in order to address the root causes, especially dedicated to youth, such as through education, which should be the focus of particular attention and preventive actions because of vulnerabilities. Many interventions also recalled the importance of Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals, in particular goals 4, 10 and 16, as key ingredients in the approach chosen.

A number of interventions stressed that fighting extremism is among the primary objectives of religious fora. Some recalled in this connection a number of national and multilateral initiatives to support, i.e., implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including initiatives that bring together faith leaders to promote interfaith harmony and dialogue, a culture of peace as well as a mindset of peace. The risk of nuclear conflict was equally recalled and support was sought from the international community and religious leaders for an anti-terrorism network, and to endorse a concept of a world free of the nuclear danger.

Speakers stressed that using violence in the name of religion is unacceptable and must be unequivocally condemned and further urged the international community to avoid making any relation between terrorism and religion. It was noted that some acts of violent extremism, acts of terrorism, and human atrocities are being committed in the name of religion against innocent civilians, including religious minorities within societies, and that all concerned must stand together to condemn, without reservation, all manifestations of intolerance, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism and all other forms of prejudice, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based, inter alia, on race, ethnic origin or religious beliefs.

Speakers underlined that the United Nations should explore ways to provide more support to initiatives and mechanisms aiming to address some of these complex and interconnected root causes and also that increasing dialogue among the United Nations, religious leaders, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders will be essential to that effect. It was suggested that United Nations Missions include baseline surveys of the tribal and religious societal fabric in which it is operating and also seek to engage local faith leaders. Structures such as the “Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers” exist who can assist in this endeavour.

It was recalled that religion is one among numerous components that need to be taken into account, including questions of inequalities in societies, poverty and other societal challenges. In that context, sustained economic growth and development, education, employment and jobs can play a role in addressing those critical challenges. Consequently, achieving human advancement and sustainable development called for a peaceful environment, social inclusion, stability and protection of human rights.

Participants further noted that communities must be actively engaged to address extremism and, furthermore, that activities of communities should be inclusive of all segments of societies, not least youth and women. Empowering local organisations at the grassroots level that favour interfaith dialogue could contribute, just like promoting peaceful conflict-resolution, acceptance of the other and reconciliation would support such collective efforts and build partnerships. Overall, it was stressed that governments and societies, through national plans to counter radicalisation, must combat the multifaceted determinants of extremism and that these national plans must be

comprehensive so as to remove any safe havens where grievances may linger. It was cautioned, however, that such plans and policies should not inadvertently lay the groundwork for future violence.

Many speakers recognized that there are numerous ways in which to address these challenges, which – while they may be common to many Members – have different expressions depending on the many contexts in which they manifest themselves. All countries bring unique inputs and experiences, building on inclusive approaches, respect for religious diversity and human rights, to collectively combat global terrorism and violent extremism.

## Religions for Peace

6 May 2016, Trusteeship Council Chamber, UN  
Programme

<p>10:00 am – 10:30 am</p>	<p><b>Opening Segment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft</b>, President of the United Nations General Assembly</li> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Nassir A. Al-Nasser</b>, High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations</li> </ul> <p><b>Keynote speakers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Honourable Kevin Rudd</b>, President, Asia Society Policy Institute</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Frank La Rue</b>, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO</li> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Abdul Moiz Bokhari</b>, Ambassador, Senior Adviser to the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation</li> </ul>
<p>10:30 am – 11:30 am</p>	<p><b>High-Level Plenary:</b> Statements by High-Level Member States representatives, starting with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kazakhstan: H.E. Erlan Idrissov, Minister for Foreign Affairs</li> <li>2. Jordan: H.E. Hayel Abedel Hafeed Yousef Dahoud, Minister of Islamic Affairs</li> <li>3. Poland: Mr. Aleksander Stepkowski, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> </ol>
<p>11:30 am- 1:00 pm</p>	<p><b>Panel 1: Interfaith harmony – promoting inter-religious dialogue and tolerance, as well as a culture of peace</b></p> <p><b>Chair:</b> <b>Mr. Frank La Rue</b>, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO</p> <p><b>Panellists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza</b>, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN</li> <li>• <b>Rabbi Arthur Schneier</b>, Senior Rabbi, Park East Synagogue</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Sadia Faizunnesa</b>, Deputy Permanent Representative of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh</li> <li>• <b>Imam Mohamed Magid</b>, Executive Director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS)</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Rudelmar Bueno de Faria</b>, Representative, World Council of Churches</li> </ul> <p>Each panellist makes 5 minutes presentation followed by Q&amp;A/interactive discussion.</p> <p><b>Topic:</b> In terms of inter-faith dialogue, what are the concrete steps needed to reach individuals and communities beyond established networks, churches, temples etc? What roles c the UN play and what tools deploy to promote tolerance and entrench a culture of peace? What works and what does not work?</p>
<p>3.00 pm – 4.25 pm</p>	<p><b>Panel 2: National measures to address root causes to prevent violent extremism and terrorism</b></p> <p><b>Chair:</b> <b>Mr. Jehangir Khan</b>, Director, CTITF</p>

	<p><b>Panellists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Yerzhan Ashikbayev</b>, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan</li> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Gholamali Khoshroo</b>, Ambassador, Islamic Republic of Iran</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Antti Pentikäinen</b>, Executive Director, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers</li> </ul> <p>Each panellist makes 5 minutes presentation followed by Q&amp;A/interactive discussion.</p> <p><b>Topic:</b> How can the UN most effectively cooperate with faith leaders to address the root causes of violent extremism? Is there an established inter-face or a framework for UN peace operations, country teams and other field presence to engage with local and community religious leaders when seeking to prevent the spread of intolerance?</p>
4.25 pm – 5.55 pm	<p><b>Panel 3: International and regional cooperation and coherence in promoting religious tolerance and resilience across societies and communities</b></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Dr. William Vendley, Secretary-General of “Religions for Peace”</p> <p><b>Panellists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Arsalan Suleman</b>, Acting U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation</li> <li>• <b>Imam Shamsi Ali</b>, Chairman, Al-Hikmah Mosque</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Anju Bhargava</b>, Founder, Hindu American Seva Communities</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Andrea Bartoli</b>, Ph.D., Dean, School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University</li> <li>• <b>Rev. Geoffrey Shugen Arnold</b>, Abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery and the Zen Center of New York</li> </ul> <p>Each panellist makes 5 minutes presentation followed by Q&amp;A/interactive discussion.</p> <p><b>Topic:</b> How can faith leaders at international, regional, national, local and community level best and most meaningfully promote a coherent message of inter-faith tolerance and resilience, promoting a narrative of engagement and respect?</p>
5:55 pm – 6.00 pm	<p><b>Closing Remarks:</b>  <b>H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft</b>, President of the United Nations General Assembly</p>