ENGAGING RELIGIOUS ACTORS TO COUNTER HATE SPEECH, PREVENT INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE, AND BUILD PEACEFUL & INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

إشارة الجهات الفاعلة الدينية لمواجهة خطاب الكراهية، ومنع التحريض على العنف، وبناء مجتمعات سلمية وشاملة
Freedom of expression, as well as freedom of religion or belief, are both universal human rights and cornerstones of pluralist, diverse and inclusive societies. Fostering understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief is essential for sustained peace and stability, while combatting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

#STOPHATESPEECH

Tعد حرية التعبير، وكذلك حرية الدين أو المعتقد، من حقوق الإنسان العالمية وحجر زاوية للمجتمعات التعددية والمتنوعة والشاملة. إن تعزيز التفاهم والتسامح واحترام التنوع في الأمور المتعلقة بحرية الدين أو المعتقد أمر ضروري لتحقيق السلام والاستقرار المستدامين أثناء مكافحة التحريض على التمييز أو العداء أو العنف.
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR]

Article 19 (2)

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

As enshrined in the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, discrimination between human beings on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms, and as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations. Discrimination based on religion and belief can also be an indicator of the risk of atrocity crimes – genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.
The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA), works to promote and protect human rights in the MENA region, including the fundamental freedoms of expression, and religion or belief. At the same time, ROMENA undertakes regional initiatives to enhance equality and counter discrimination, including through championing youth as enablers of change, and promoting gender equality. In particular, the status of women in the region, where discrimination is often enshrined in law and justified by traditional values.
and customs, is challenging from a human rights perspective. Sectarianism and social divisions increasingly divide societies, which makes work to address discrimination even more important. Persons belonging to minorities, including religious or belief minorities, as well as people living with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, remain subject to acute discrimination in the region.

The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect advances national and international efforts to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (atrocity crimes), as well as their incitement. In support of their mandates, the Office collects information, conducts assessments of situations worldwide and alerts the Secretary-General and relevant actors to the risk of atrocity crimes, as well as their incitement. The Office also undertakes training and technical assistance to promote greater understanding of the causes and dynamics of atrocity crimes and of the measures that could be taken to prevent them; to raise awareness among States and other actors about their responsibility to protect; and to enhance the capacity of the United Nations, Member States, regional and sub-regional organisations and civil society to prevent atrocity crimes and to develop more effective means of response when they occur.
While the right to free speech is protected under international law, advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence is prohibited. As explored in the #Faith4Rights framework,³ in terms of freedom of expression, the grey zone between free speech, hate speech and incitement to violence or discrimination is often difficult to grasp in real life situations.⁴ Distinguishing these three categories of speech is even more complex in the religious sphere. Religions can also be instrumentalized for electoral purposes and political gains.

Religious leaders play a pivotal role in promoting messages of peace, tolerance and inclusion. The 2012 Rabat Plan of Action articulates three specific core responsibilities of religious leaders: (a) Religious leaders should refrain from using messages of intolerance or expressions which may incite discrimination, hostility and violence; (b) Religious leaders also have a crucial role to play in speaking out firmly and promptly against intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech; and (c) Religious leaders should be clear that violence can never be tolerated as a response to incitement to hatred.⁵
تلعب القيادة الدينية دوراً محورياً في تعزيز رسائل السلام والتسامح والاندماج. وتوضح
خطة عمل الرباط لعام 2012 ثلاث مسؤوليات أساسية محددة لتلك القيادة: (أ) يجب على
القيادة الدينية الامتناع عن استخدام رسائل التبعية أو التعبيرات التي قد تتحريض على
التمييز والعداء والعنصفة: (ب) للقيادة الدينية أيضاً دوراً مهمّاً تضطلع به في التحدث بشكل
حاسم وصريح ضد عدم التسامح والقوالب النمطية التمييزية وبعض خطابات الكراهية؛ (ج) على القيادة الدينية أن تكون واضحة في تأكيد إنه لا يمكن أبداً السماح بالعنف كرد على
التحريض على الكراهية.

**PROHIBITION OF INCITEMENT TO HATRED AND DISCRIMINATION | حظر التحريض على الكراهية والتمييز**

**ICCPR**

**Article 20 (2)**

*Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.*

العهد الدولي الخاص بالحقوق المدنية والسياسية

المادة 20 (2)

تحظر بالقانون أي دعوة إلى الكراهية القومية أو العنصرية أو الدينية تشكل تحريضاً
على التمييز أو العدوة أو العنف.

**Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief**

**Article 4 (1)**

*All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eradicate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.*

**Article 4 (2)**

*All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or belief...*
Commitment VII

We pledge to publicly denounce all instances of advocacy of hatred that incites to violence, discrimination or hostility, including those that lead to atrocity crimes. We bear a direct responsibility to denounce such advocacy, particularly when it is conducted in the name of religion or belief.

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

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.
While religions are often susceptible to manipulation, faith actors can also be powerful agents of peace-building and reconciliation in conflict and post-conflict situations. They are particularly well placed to prevent or counter such manipulation in the name of their own religion or belief. Religious values and principles are common heritage of humanity and have inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They should be used by faith actors to bring people together and reconcile divided communities. Faith actors, like any other human rights defenders, are the custodians of shared values for all religions and beliefs – be they theistic, non-theistic, atheistic or other. Hence, religious actors should optimize this custodianship through concrete social engagement aimed at building peaceful, inclusive and just societies. This lies at the heart of their role as religious actors, and is not a deviation therefrom.

The fact that societies are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious is good. Diversity is a strength, not a weakness.

António Guterres
UN Secretary-General

حقيقية أن المجتمعات أصبحت بشكل متزايد متعددة الأعراق والثقافات والأديان أمر جيد. التنوع قوة وليس ضعف.

أنطونيو جوتيرس
الأمين العام للأمم المتحدة
As expressed by UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, in the Action Plan for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, there has been a disturbing increase in hate speech and incitement in recent years. While States have the primary responsibility to prevent incitement and protect their people from atrocity crimes, 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.

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.

UN Secretary-General, António Guterres

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

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Under the stewardship of the **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 contains three main clusters of recommendations that aim to: prevent incitement speech; strengthen prevention tools; and build peaceful, inclusive and just societies, where the rights of each individual are respected without discrimination. Implementation of this Plan of Action can contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes, especially in areas affected by religious and sectarian tensions and violence. It can also foster resilience, peace, respect for diversity, and the protection and promotion of human rights, including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion or belief, and peaceful assembly. The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is also responsible to implement the **UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech**. This strategy represents the commitment of the United Nations system to address and counter hate speech globally, in line with international human rights standards, and with freedom of expression and opinion in particular. Enhanced partnership, including with religious actors, is a key element of the implementation of this strategy.

The impact of hate speech on communities and on individuals can be devastating. Hate speech makes those targeted more vulnerable to violence, exposes them to exclusion and discrimination, which contributes to exacerbate underlying social and economic inequalities, and undermines social cohesion.

**Alice Nderitu**

*Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide*

يمكن أن يكون تأثير خطاب الكراهية على المجتمعات والأفراد مدمراً. إن خطاب الكراهية يجعل المستهدفين أكثر عرضة للعنف، ويعرضهم للإقصاء والتمييز، مما يساهم في تفاقم عدم المساواة الاجتماعية والاقتصادية الكامنة، ويقوض التماسك الاجتماعي.

#STOPHATESPEECH
The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA), continues to engage closely with faith actors, community members, policy makers, and civil society to promote dialogue on issues of freedoms of expression, religion or belief, equality, and non-discrimination. The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect also engages with the same actors on the prevention of atrocity crimes. ROMENA seeks to identify and address root causes of violations and conflicts through dialogue, awareness raising and training, including for and with faith actors, as a means to foster inclusive societies and sustainable peace. Similarly, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect also works closely with partners on the ground to identify the root causes, indicators and triggers of atrocity crimes and their incitement in order to advance the prevention thereof, and contribute to the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.
Violence against women in all its forms is a human rights violation. It is not something that any culture, religion or tradition propagates.

Michelle Bachelet
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

#STOPHATESPEECH
For further information, please contact:
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1. Article 3, Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, UNGA resolution 36/55 (25 November 1981).
3. The “Faith for Rights” framework was convened by OHCHR, and adopted by faith-based and civil society actors in Beirut in March 2017. This interfaith rights-based framework – since referred to as the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights” – has the aim of articulating a joint platform among all communities across all regions of the world. The 18 commitments provide concrete standards for collaboration among non-state faith actors and religious institutions in order to counter discrimination and violence committed in the name of religion (https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx).
5. Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx).
WORKING CLOSELY WITH COMMUNITIES TO COUNTER DISCRIMINATION AND FOSTER INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE
STAND UP FOR