

High-Level Thematic Debate of the United Nations General Assembly

Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism

21-22 April 2015

The President of the General Assembly in conjunction with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations will convene a High-Level General Assembly Thematic Debate on "*Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism*", to be held on 21-22 April 2015.

Background

The world is experiencing profound and complex challenges, including the rise of radicalization and violent extremism, against a backdrop of identity-based conflicts, cultural and religious tensions. Countering these challenges and the threat they pose to populations around the world call for the use of a wide range of approaches to promote tolerance and reconciliation, respect for cultural diversity and freedom of belief, thought and expression. Among these approaches, dialogue – including among religious leaders – is a critical tool for fostering peaceful, inclusive societies that reinforce shared human values and a sense of common humanity.

The United Nations General Assembly is ideally placed to serve as a platform for advancing international cooperation and intercultural dialogue to promote understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity. This high-level thematic debate can serve as a platform for Member States, faith leaders and other stakeholder to promote peaceful coexistence and reconciliation, and to counter the destructive narratives of extremists who thrive on simplistic explanations, mistrust, and fragmentation.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, as the lead entity of the UN Secretariat assisting countries to address global challenges with interfaith and intercultural dimensions, actively supports Member States in addressing rising tensions that appear through radicalization, violence and extremism with the tools of dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation.

Global efforts to promote tolerance, reconciliation and the values of diversity benefit immensely from collective and inclusive approaches built on trust, dialogue and collaboration and complemented by relevant national and regional efforts. Member States have, through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, set out a comprehensive framework which aims, *inter alia*, to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism through the means of conflict prevention and resolution, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, judicial settlement, rule of law, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Pillar I of this strategy focuses on addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism. Effectively addressing root causes by strengthening international dialogue and reconciliation can contribute to fostering peaceful and inclusive societies.

Addressing the drivers of violent extremism calls for a renewed focus on good governance, rule of law, respect for human rights, sustainable development, accountable institutions, the equitable delivery of services, the role of youth, women and marginalized and disenfranchised communities, education and inclusivity in the political process as well as economic and social marginalization. As Member States and stakeholders formulate a transformative post-2015 development agenda, promoting tolerance and reconciliation will be critical in efforts towards achieving peaceful and inclusive societies.

This high-level thematic debate is an occasion to strengthen the collective resolve of Member States and other stakeholders to counter the forces that fuel radicalization and violent extremism. The first day will provide Member States with the opportunity to discuss practical strategies to foster peaceful, inclusive societies and to counter the threat of radicalization and violent extremism.

The second day will be centered on interfaith dialogue, featuring high-level statements and interactive panel discussions with faith leaders on community engagement aimed at countering violent extremism. It will also focus on the role of faith leaders in promoting tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights.

Of the world's seven billion people, more than five billion identify themselves as members of religious communities. Having faith leaders from around the world represented at the United Nations will be a powerful demonstration of how diverse religious communities can address common challenges.

Objective

The main objective of the high-level thematic debate is to provide an opportunity for Member States and faith leaders, along with other stakeholders to share experiences and to address key issues and challenges relating to the promotion of tolerance and reconciliation with the aim of fostering peaceful and inclusive societies and countering violent extremism. These include:

- I. What practical strategies can be devised to counter the threat of radicalization through people-centered and inclusive measures and avoid exclusionary approaches at local, national, regional and international levels?
- II. What measures can be pursued to promote the importance of religious, cultural, gender and social diversity in positively fostering peaceful and inclusive societies?
- III. What roles can specific actors and sectors of societies, such as women and youth, education and the media, play in promoting inclusive approaches to tolerance and reconciliation and countering violent extremism?
- IV. How can the Member States, United Nations and other stakeholders effectively support means to promote tolerance and reconciliation, including through actions aimed at conflict prevention and early detection of human rights violations?
- V. What measures can be taken to stop extremists from recruiting individuals or groups to carry out terrorist acts?
- VI. How can religious and community leaders engage at the local level to reach people who might be vulnerable to radicalization?

- VII. How can specific actors, including faith leaders, take the lead in unmasking and rejecting the misuse of religion as a justification for violent extremism?
- VIII. How can religious leaders promote tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights?
- IX. How can religious leaders promote the sustainable development goals in local communities in order to address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism?

Format, Outcome and Participants

This high-level thematic debate will take place over the course of two days; the first day will consist of an opening session, a high-level plenary and an interactive panel discussion focusing on practical strategies for fostering peaceful, inclusive societies and countering violent extremism.

The second day will include high-level interventions from faith leaders followed by two interactive panel discussions, focusing on:

- a) reaching people at the community level; and
- b) highlighting a counter-narrative that emphasizes tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights.

The outcome will be a President's summary, which will be circulated to all Member States and stakeholders.

Member States will be invited to participate at the highest possible level, and are invited to include religious leaders in their delegations. Observers, UN entities, civil society, media, and other stakeholders will also participate.