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Agenda item 15
Culture of peace

Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

      In the present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 74/21 and 74/23, the Secretary-General presents an overview of actions undertaken by Member States and the United Nations system to promote a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, indicating the main trends and issues, scaled-up activities and progress made during the period from May 2019 to April 2020.

I. Introduction

1.   In its resolutions 74/21, on the follow-up to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, and 74/23, on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its seventy-fifth session on the implementation of the resolutions across the United Nations system. The present report was drafted on the basis of inputs received from 27 United Nations entities. [1]

2.   More than two decades since the designation by the General Assembly of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and 2001–2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, followed by its proclamation of 2013–2022 as the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures, the United Nations system remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting a culture of peace.

3.   The concept of a culture of peace provides an intellectual frame and political impulse for action. It is grounded in the understanding that peace is fragile and that the pursuit of peace has to be a constant process. Since the founding of the United Nations, this idea has expanded from traditional notions of security to accommodate new challenges to forging peaceful societies, including increased social injustice, the exponential speed of communications, violations of human rights, the normalization of hate speech, the climate crisis, the threat of terrorism, the potential disruptive influence of artificial intelligence and, most recently, particularly stark pandemics like the one related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). A culture of peace is inseparable from human rights, respect for diversity and fairer societies. As societies become more multicultural, multi-ethnic and multireligious, greater investment is needed in social cohesion, recognizing that diversity is a richness, not a threat. Each community has to be able to feel that its identity is respected and that it at the same time fully belongs to society as a whole.

4.   This commitment to peace is also critical for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The decade of action and delivery for sustainable development entails pursuing more preventive and inclusive approaches that ensure the participation of women, young people and vulnerable, marginalized and non-represented groups. "Leaving no one behind" has to be a priority for peace.

5.   The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the final months of the reporting period brought existing deficits into sharp relief. Prevailing discrimination and structural inequalities have been stoked, laying bare the alarming extent of all forms of racism and xenophobia, exclusion and gender inequality, including increased violence against women, that continue to blight societies. Indeed, many of these issues were endemic even

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[1] Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat, Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, Development Coordination Office, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Environment Programme, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations University, United Nations Volunteers programme and World Tourism Organization.

before the coronavirus disease took hold. This human crisis is touching every area of life, destroying livelihoods and weakening the foundations of peaceful societies. The economic fallout of the pandemic weighs heavily on the most conflict-affected States, especially those which are enduring conflict or humanitarian crisis. As the devastation grows and spreads, it threatens to erode trust in public institutions and democratic processes, even in the most developed countries. COVID-19 is exposing and exploiting risks not only to people's health, but also to economies and societies, and to the world's future.

6.   The world's shared vulnerability reveals its common humanity. This message was central in the appeal of the Secretary-General for solidarity and hope across all faiths, recognizing the crucial role of religious leaders in responding to the pandemic. Amid this unprecedented crisis, there have been many inspiring acts of solidarity across cultural backgrounds, faith traditions, political systems and geographical borders, and of reaching out to the most vulnerable. New ways of connecting and forms of resilience have emerged that reflect the core principles of intercultural dialogue to build social cohesion, inclusion and resilience. Music has acted as a key connector between people in isolation, while young people around the world have created platforms to tackle misinformation, raise community awareness and support the elderly. These precious forms of dialogue have provided solace and interconnectedness. Moreover, they have reinforced the deep interdependence of a globalized world. They have shown not only hope, but also how to unite in recovering better. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue offers an opportunity to take forward this solidarity and work towards a culture of peace.

7.   Building on these examples of hope and solidarity, investing in a culture of peace as the essential foundation for global cooperation and action means an end to injustice and discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin, religion, disability or sexual orientation. It means tackling the deep-rooted inequalities that work against dignity and opportunity for all. It means a new impetus to strengthen social protection, including for the most vulnerable, based on universal health coverage and the possibility of a universal basic income in line with the central objective of the eradication of poverty. It means achieving universal access to quality education, which is one of the great enablers of progress and is crucial for nurturing new generations in understanding shared histories. And it means working together with the planet, not in opposition to it, recognizing its boundaries and everyone's responsibilities to each other and to future generations.

II. Coordination and leadership to strengthen the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue

8.   The scope of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue is broad and necessitates strong coordination by the United Nations, drawing on expertise across multiple pillars. Effective collaboration across peace and security, humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, including stronger analyses of the drivers of violence and vulnerability, enables more efficient ways of identifying and engaging actors and institutions that target structural factors and ultimately shape incentives, behaviours and capacities. There has been progress over time regarding how United Nations entities are joining up, based on their respective mandates and comparative advantages, to better prevent and resolve crises.

9.   The reform of the United Nations development system, in particular the introduction of a United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the new leadership role of Resident Coordinators, has created new opportunities to enhance coordination between pillars and ensure a more integrated United Nations response at the country level. This is especially important given the increasing

complexity and interconnectedness of crises and the centrality of the 2030 Agenda to addressing the root causes of crises and vulnerabilities. Within the offices of some Resident Coordinators, peace and development advisers are deployed to respond to country-specific challenges. They are at the forefront of joint analysis and efforts to help steer and adapt action and response appropriately in support of countries. These efforts also pave the way for greater national ownership and inter-agency collaboration at the country level.

10. Similarly, the work of the United Nations in peacebuilding is increasingly grounded in an integrated approach and is directly linked to the work on a culture of peace. It draws on expertise across the three pillars of United Nations work: peace and security, human rights and development, as well as humanitarian actors. It is aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. Moreover, it has sought to deliver a more agile United Nations response, strengthened by other strategic priorities, notably the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, the Global Compact for Migration and the global compact on refugees. Dialogue and respect for diversity are integral to these strategies and necessitate integrated cooperation and the joint expertise and resources of relevant entities.

11. In the context of a discernible pushback on human rights as well as emerging, complex human rights challenges, on 24 February 2020, the Secretary-General launched a call to action for human rights,[2] which underlined that human rights underpin the work of the United Nations across the entire United Nations system. The call to action singles out seven areas in which concerted effort is required in the near term, because there is either an opportunity for real progress or a risk of backsliding: (a) rights at the core of sustainable development; (b) rights in times of crisis; (c) gender equality and equal rights for women; (d) public participation and civic space; (e) rights of future generations, especially climate justice; (f) rights at the heart of collective action; and (g) new frontiers of human rights. The United Nations family is working to bring the call to action to life and thereby help to achieve the "highest aspiration" laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which remains a distant hope for too many people.

12. The reporting period also coincided with several significant benchmarks and milestones that catalysed inter-agency actions towards a culture of peace and highlighted the important role of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The year 2020 marks the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015), on youth and peace and security, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. The decade of action and delivery for sustainable development has provided further impetus to accelerate action in this area.

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[2] The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights", available at https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Asperation_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.

Box 1
Harnessing multi-stakeholder action to prevent attacks on religious sites

In the wake of attacks on mosques in New Zealand, the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites was launched in September 2019. Led by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the Plan of Action offers a multidimensional and multi-stakeholder approach to preventing, preparing for and responding to attacks against religious sites. Consultations with Member States and religious leaders have resulted in the sharing of best practices, which has highlighted the importance of prevention, solidarity, education and a multifaceted approach in safeguarding religious sites. In line with the Plan's recommendations, the Alliance of Civilizations has partnered with the Operational Satellite Applications Programme of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNOSAT) to develop a workplan for the mapping of religious sites around the world. Similarly, a global communications campaign targeting young people and the faith community is aimed at strengthening personal connection to religious sites, fostering respect and understanding, and nurturing the responsibility of all peoples for their protection, regardless of individual religion or belief.

13.   Efforts to engage and partner with young people are critical in creating a culture of peace at all levels. Across the United Nations system, there are promising signs that activities are progressively being focused on the priorities of young people in a range of areas, such as peacebuilding, education, heritage, the arts and sport. Nevertheless, despite young people being both participants and beneficiaries of a broad range of activities, they often remain on the margins of planning and decision-making processes (see S/2020/167). In taking forward the youth and peace and security agenda, encompassing Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020), there is scope to better harness the agency of young people and their positive and proactive contributions. Efforts are also under way to increase the meaningful participation of young people in peace processes.[3]

14.   Like young people, women face significant barriers to social and political processes that limit their opportunities. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women needs to be at the core of all approaches to conflict prevention, resolution and recovery efforts. This means not only exposing and tackling gender discrimination and bias in planning and decision-making, but also ensuring that there are solid building blocks for the inclusive participation of women. There is sufficient knowledge and good practice to build on, such as design approaches for inclusive peace processes that should be used and encouraged by mediators. The primary cause of lack of progress, however, is the absence of political will, particularly from parties to conflict, to fully realize the global commitments enshrined in the women and peace and security agenda across all stages of peace processes. By and large, global progress in realizing the right of women to equally and meaningfully participate in decisions concerning the future of their countries across all stages of peace processes remains inadequate. On the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), efforts to put women at the centre of the peace agenda need to be redoubled.

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[3] For example, the International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, held in Helsinki on 5 and 6 March 2019 and to be held in Qatar in 2021; see also Ali Altiok and Irena Grizelj, "We are here: an integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes" (April 2019).

Box 2
Strengthening global resilience against hate speech

Countering the growing spread and use of hate speech globally underpins the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech launched in June 2019 and spearheaded across the United Nations system by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. Developed by 14 United Nations entities, the Strategy and Plan of Action contains 13 commitments to address the root causes and drivers of hate speech and its impact on societies while upholding the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Since the launch, seven context-specific plans of action have been developed for implementation at the national level based on the technical assistance provided by the Office to eight United Nations field entities.

15. The scourge of hate speech online and offline has been alarmingly persistent, undermining the human rights of people around the world. Hate speech is a menace to democratic values, social stability and peace. It is often rooted in and generates intolerance, fear and violence. The impact of hate speech cuts across numerous existing United Nations areas of operation, including protecting human rights, addressing gender-based violence and enhancing the protection of civilians. Addressing hate speech requires a coordinated response that tackles its root causes and drivers, as well as its impact on victims and societies more broadly. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations, for example, are working together to deepen cross-pillar understanding of the enabling environment for hate speech, and United Nations entities such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have developed human rights-based action plans that harness their individual mandates to address key areas of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. Amid the rising rhetoric of hate speech and stigmatization during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in support of the appeal of the Secretary-General to religious leaders, the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide issued a joint call for solidarity, unity and compassion, reaffirming the need to strengthen interfaith and intercultural dialogue, as well as to stand up against stigmatization and polarization.

Box 3
Developing an ethical blueprint for artificial intelligence

The growth of artificial intelligence technologies is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. Such technologies can contribute to solving complex challenges and bring immense economic value. They also have the potential to address the digital divide, not only in terms of access to technologies, but also in shaping technological trends and ensuring that they contribute to a peaceful world. At the same time, artificial intelligence technologies create concerns regarding gender and racial biases, privacy and data protection, an increase in disinformation, digital exposure for populations at risk and protection of the environment. Artificial information technologies, developed by humans, are not value-neutral and have profound implications for the culture of peace. As such technologies represent not just a technological turning point but also an anthropological disruption, their clear ethical implications prompted States members of UNESCO to give a mandate to the Organization to develop an international normative instrument on the ethics of artificial intelligence in the form of a recommendation, to be delivered in 2021. Based on the full respect for human rights and gender equality, and drawing on the Secretary-

General's Road Map for Digital Cooperation to implement the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, the recommendation will outline shared values and principles and identify concrete policy measures on the ethics of artificial intelligence, addressed to Member States and other stakeholders. In so doing, it will aim to address the absence of an international framework in this field. The recommendation of UNESCO on the ethics of artificial intelligence are envisaged to promote more diversity and inclusion in the development of new technology.

III. Knowledge and evidence to bolster the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue

16.   The value of intercultural and interreligious dialogue is acknowledged as an integral component of crisis prevention and resolution, especially when identity-based grievances drive conflict. Additional analyses and thus evidence would support identifying how and under what conditions the explicit inclusion of intercultural and interreligious aspects contributes to dialogue processes. Such findings could also contribute to better utilizing the promotion of a culture of peace and intercultural and interreligious dialogue in supporting upstream efforts for peace as a foundation for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

17.   Several United Nations entities have been developing tools to help assess more systematically the existing gaps and the ways in which intercultural and interreligious dialogue can contribute to crisis prevention and sustaining peace. For example, in partnership with the Institute for Economics and Peace, UNESCO has been strengthening the evidence base on intercultural dialogue. To map conflict-sensitive social media content in regions of concern, particularly hate speech targeted at women and minority groups, the Innovation Cell of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, together with regional desks and United Nations country offices, has been pursuing research projects in partnership with computational scientists. This research will inform the strategic communications of country offices and common country analysis programming. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, through its Mediation Support Unit, has also collaborated with the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers to examine the various contributions of religious actors in preventing and resolving conflicts at the subnational level. In addition, the Mediation Support Unit organized a training course on religion and mediation to equip United Nations staff members with tools to intervene and analyse conflicts with religious dimensions.

18.   UNDP also published social cohesion and insider mediation guidance in 2019 on what it takes to design, implement and measure the results of dialogue-based initiatives to foster a culture of peace at the community level. Reliable, disaggregated and accessible data were shown to have the twofold benefit of improving inclusive policymaking and empowering people to make informed decisions in their communities.

19.   As an integral part of such dialogues, the solid engagement and participation of beneficiaries in research activities can help better identify the specific needs of a country and the support required to foster and sustain peace. As a case in point, the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research is engaging with young people affected by war as part of its research in collaboration with other United Nations entities, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, and key donors to enhance the understanding of conflict transitions.

Box 4
Enhancing knowledge regarding indigenous peoples for dialogue and peace

An estimated 370 million indigenous peoples live in 90 countries. Their distinct languages, beliefs and knowledge systems are crucial resources for community vitality and well-being, peacebuilding and sustainable development. The engagement of indigenous peoples in research and dialogue platforms has increased in areas such as climate change, human rights, tourism and business. The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform Facilitative Working Group, established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat, launched a two-year workplan to strengthen the knowledge, technologies and practices of local communities and indigenous peoples in response to climate change. The Working Group is unique in the United Nations system in its composition; half of its members are representatives of indigenous people's organizations. Following on from recommendations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2019, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean scaled up regional studies and policy recommendations to bridge the gap between normative standards and the daily lives of indigenous peoples. As part of celebrations of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, an action plan was implemented by UNESCO and a range of other stakeholders, committing to preserving, revitalizing and promoting indigenous languages at the national and international levels. Throughout the International Year, nearly 900 events in 78 countries were registered on the dedicated online platform. On several fronts, indigenous peoples still face exclusion and marginalization, and the violation of their rights. As part of a Department of Economic and Social Affairs expert meeting on the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16, the increasing criminalization of indigenous peoples for defending their rights to their identity, culture and lands was highlighted as a grave concern in building a culture of peace.

20. Drivers of conflict are often multidimensional and can be interconnected with transboundary and/or regional issues, such as climate change, demography, urbanization, the economy, migration and natural resource exploitation. This understanding has anchored the research work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in developing a regional risk assessment framework with its partners to better understand drivers and risks, as well as forecast trends of violent conflict, humanitarian crisis and political instability in the Arab region. Similarly, as a result of the recent inclusion of multidimensional risk analysis in the common country analyses, specific challenges faced by ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in education, employment and the practice of their religious freedoms can be better identified, thus enhancing the knowledge basis to strengthen inclusive policymaking and support suitable action. This points to a shift towards a more holistic approach to identifying interlinked risks, as well as opportunities to strengthen the capacities of Governments to address them swiftly and effectively.

IV. Developing capacities to promote a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue

21. Given the diverse range of factors and stakeholders that enable the promotion of a culture of peace and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, capacity-building is an important activity of United Nations entities, including with regard to enhancing skills, technical knowledge and tools. Such efforts were targeted at a broad range of stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, women and young people.

22.   Dialogue as a valuable "soft tool" in conflict prevention and resolution can help ease tensions and address disputes. For example, in the run-up to the 2019 legislative and presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau reached out to interreligious groups under its good offices mandate and encouraged them to contribute to successful and peaceful elections. In October 2019, after holding a meeting on the political situation in the country, religious leaders issued a joint communiqué calling for peace, tolerance and collective participation in the democratic space and referencing their willingness to mediate among the political actors. Likewise, leveraging dialogue was a key feature of a series of ESCWA workshops held in March 2020 to promote cooperation on transboundary water resources and improve capacities and tools for cooperation in the Arab region.

23.   Comprising 1.85 billion of the world's population, young people have an important role to play in establishing the foundations of peace and ensuring its sustainability in the future. Actions by United Nations entities have focused on instituting mechanisms to prevent the participation of young people in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia and discrimination. It is crucial that they be included as partners and key agents in promoting peace and intercultural understanding. For example, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, through its Young Peacebuilders programme in the Middle East and North Africa region and Spain, furthered participants' competencies related to their possible contributions to building sustainable peace in their respective communities. Similarly, the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for young people volunteering in Mexico demonstrated both broad participation of young people and strong political support at the subnational level in 15 States of Mexico in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 16.

24.   Education is a critical tool to nurture the values of understanding, tolerance and respect. Human rights education empowers young women and men to mobilize, advocate for and engage in conflict prevention and sustaining peace, thus placing them front and centre as potential changemakers towards more inclusive, peaceful and just societies. The fourth phase (2020–2024) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education aligns with target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals and therefore has particular resonance with regard to a culture of peace.

25.   Thus, in the long term, education helps build more equal and inclusive societies that are more resilient in the face of crisis. UNESCO continued its work on global citizenship education to equip learners of all ages with intercultural competencies and the skill set to be informed, engaged and empathetic citizens. In 2019, it produced a new analysis of national curricula on education for sustainable development and global citizenship education, demonstrating the cognitive, socioemotional and behavioural dimensions of learning at the pre-primary, primary and secondary educational levels in 10 countries around the world (Costa Rica, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Rwanda and Sweden).

26.   More specifically, throughout the reporting period, the prevention of violent extremism remained a focus of capacity-building programmes targeted at young people, notably in education and media and information literacy. UNESCO and UNDP, for example, pursued ongoing work in building skills in media and information literacy to enable young people to be a driving force in countering hate speech, detecting misinformation and disinformation, preventing violent extremism and building peaceful societies. To that end, activities aimed at young people were organized as part of the Global Media and Information Literacy Week, and capacity-building projects for young people and the training of trainers were conducted.

27.   Challenges also continue to impede efforts to include women in peacebuilding and decision-making. In many countries emerging from conflict, women face significant obstacles and resistance, and undergo great personal risk in guaranteeing their participation in processes to shape the future of their countries. An example of an innovative initiative to foster the role of women in peacebuilding is the Dimitra Clubs in Africa initiated by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, whose women members are playing a notable role as peace mediators in conflicts.

28.   Promoting gender equality is important in the overall context of prevention of violence, as the extent of gender inequality is indicative of broader levels of exclusion in a society and its tendency to use violence to resolve conflict.

29.   Deeply rooted in gender inequality, gender-based violence remains a systemic global challenge that cuts across age, socioeconomic, educational and geographical boundaries. More than one in three women worldwide will experience violence in some form during her lifetime. The alarming number of attacks, threats and harassment online and offline directed at women remains a cause for concern. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, there has been a steep increase in violence against women worldwide, with reports of increases of upwards of 25 per cent in countries with reporting systems in place. Impunity has also thrived in this context, which has been compounded by the lack of domestic violence protection laws in a quarter of countries around the world. The Secretary-General, in his appeal for peace in homes around the world, urged all Governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19.[4]

Box 5
Investing in peacebuilding activities led by women and young people

Through its Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative, the Peacebuilding Fund supports civil society organizations as direct recipients of funding for peacebuilding. The Fund requests all Initiative recipients to allocate at least 40 per cent of the requested grant towards national and local civil society organizations, especially organizations led by women and young people, including through direct subgrants, the building of capacities and direct payment for activities. The Fund also encourages Initiative recipients to actively engage and consult with local communities, stakeholders and civil society organizations during the design, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the projects. Between 2017 and 2019, the Peacebuilding Fund allocated over $33 million to 27 civil society organizations through the Initiative and its regular portfolio.

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30.   Close to 80 million people around the world are forcibly displaced. They are vulnerable to exclusion, stigmatization and discrimination. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, there can be tension between displaced persons and host communities. Conflict-sensitive efforts to advance durable solutions for the forcibly displaced, with a strong focus on livelihoods, education, dialogue between hosts and displaced communities and social cohesion, constitute important investments in peace.

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[4] United Nations, "UN chief calls for domestic violence 'ceasefire' amid 'horrifying global surge'", 6 April 2020, available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052.

V. Advocacy and strengthening of shared values to promote a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue

31. Against a backdrop of threats to systems of shared values and commitment to human rights, communication and advocacy can support innovative outreach to strengthen awareness and commitment among all communities. During the period under review, the United Nations system employed a range of advocacy activities to bring to light contemporary challenges and promote shared values and human rights as the foundation of a culture of peace and intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Increasingly, advocacy work has demonstrated solid partnership with regional and subregional organizations and networks, and joint advocacy initiatives have generated a greater messaging impact. These efforts in shared messaging will be further built upon to ensure consistent positioning and unity among United Nations entities.

32. Cultural diversity is a resource for community vitality and well-being, and for exchange, innovation and creativity. Mutual understanding and respect for diversity, rights and equal dignity among different cultures are core elements for building sustainable and peaceful societies. Annual inscriptions on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, for example, provide illustrations of how numerous communities around the world contribute to a culture of peace, such as through practices based on solidarity among different ethnic groups. Other United Nations initiatives have leveraged the power of the arts as a conduit and platform for expression and resilience, including the UNESCO Art Lab for Human Rights and Dialogue, which joined with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in co-hosting a workshop in February 2020 that resulted in a workplan to mainstream arts and culture in development and humanitarian programmes.

Box 6
Broadening awareness of migration issues through film

The 2019 International Organization for Migration Global Migration Film Festival screened 32 films addressing different aspects of migration, with more than 700 screenings that attracted more than 60,000 people. Using the power of film to inform, entertain, educate and provoke debate, the Festival served as a platform to highlight social issues around migration and created safe spaces for respectful debate and interaction. The Festival is also an innovative creative avenue for normalizing discussions of migration through storytelling and for cultivating deeper empathy for migrants and understanding of their cultures and perspectives. Now in its fourth year, the Festival has more than 350 partners and hundreds of supporters worldwide, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations, and is growing in reach.

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33. The United Nations has remained resolute in its commitment to eradicating social injustice and to fighting against racism, prejudice and discrimination. As one example, in the framework of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024), OHCHR hosted two regional high-level events and 10 panel discussions that raised awareness about the shared values of diversity, racial equality and non-discrimination among around 1,000 people. As another example, in November 2019, UNESCO joined with the Musée de l'Homme in France to launch a series of master classes to build the capacities of young people in understanding racism and discrimination. The 250 student participants crafted specific commitments for action in their communities and classrooms and received a practical guide to train them as

trainers. To support the broader objective of sharing knowledge and good practices in promoting intercultural dialogue, the African Union Commission, UNESCO and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) co-hosted the first edition of the Pan-African Forum for a Culture of Peace in Africa (Biennale of Luanda) in September 2019, bringing together diverse African stakeholders.

34. The media can provide an important platform for amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and reaching a wide audience to raise awareness of key issues. As a result of the UN-Women "code 4 peace" competition held in June 2019 in the Bamyan Province of Afghanistan, which was the largest hackathon event ever held in that country, a mentorship programme was created for young women coders to continue their work in promoting peace. Enhancing digital skills in media can provide a prime equalizer for young women and strengthen their contribution to building peace in their communities. Under the Youth Solidarity Fund, the Alliance of Civilizations provided seed funding to five organizations led by young people in Eswatini, Kenya, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Uganda for projects promoting peace and pluralism through media, theatre and sports.

35. Around the world, limits on the flow of information and restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the press are further aggravating existing patterns of shrinking civic space. Restrictive policy environments can hamper the possible long-term benefits of efforts towards achieving a culture of peace. In advocating for freedom of expression, UNESCO supports journalism training and education in conflict-sensitive reporting, the safety of journalists and media self-regulation, and has been working with local associations in, for example, Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Syrian Arab Republic.

36. Moreover, the digital age has brought with it several challenges, including to online safety and security, which can undermine the shared values and a common commitment to human rights, as well as hinder progress on several of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Global Cybersecurity Index provides guidance and opportunities for countries to identify areas for improvement in cybersecurity and harmonize their practices with those of other countries, thus raising the global level of cybersecurity. The third version of the Index was published in 2019, with the active participation of 155 countries, representing a 48 per cent increase in participation since the first Index results were published in 2015.

37. The crucial role of human rights in the work of the United Nations has been brought to the frontline of efforts to combat racism and the rising tide of discrimination, hate speech, xenophobia, antisemitism, mistreatment of migrants, and sexual and gender-based violence, and has been emphasized in the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech and the guidance note on addressing and countering COVID-19-related hate speech, as well as the call of the Secretary-General to action for human rights. A specific example of a human rights-based approach is the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics, adopted by the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in September 2019, in which parties committed to tourism development and its contribution to peace, prosperity and human rights.

VI. Partnerships for the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue

38. Fostering a culture of peace through intercultural and interreligious dialogue requires integrated and cross-pillar actions. Partnerships can play a crucial role in this regard by leveraging relevant resources and networks to advance common goals.

There are notable examples of how the United Nations is working to advance dialogue through cooperation with Governments, international organizations, regional bodies, civil society and the private sector. In the Sahel, a region increasingly affected by the rise of violent extremism, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has been supporting the efforts of the United Nations country team in Burkina Faso to establish a national infrastructure for peace, which is aimed at enhancing coordination between national institutions and strengthening local ownership of social cohesion initiatives. The mechanism is being developed through inclusive processes with stakeholders in government, civil society, women's groups, and religious and community actors.

39. Also, throughout the reporting period, 2,055 United Nations Volunteers served with 17 United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions and contributed to peacebuilding in their countries of assignment. Strategic partnerships will continue to be systematized to maximize their impact and ensure their long-term sustainability, as well as strengthen coordination at the national level.

40. At the national level, United Nations country teams are taking steps to scale up partnerships for the 2030 Agenda, as part of the repositioning process. Resident Coordinators now also carry the responsibility of ensuring a system-wide strategy for partnerships at the country level, bringing together assets and networks of various agencies to achieve scale. The new cadre of dedicated partnership officers in the Resident Coordinators' offices offer a "one-stop shop" for facilitating coherent United Nations engagement with development stakeholders and helping United Nations country teams to leverage partnerships in support of national efforts. The World Bank's new Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence has the potential to further strengthen strategic partnership with the United Nations at the country level based on the United Nations-World Bank Partnership Framework for Crisis-Affected Situations signed by the Secretary-General and the World Bank President in April 2017.

41. Inter-agency cooperation to leverage resources and mandates was also evident in the context of forced displacement. Providing economic opportunities for refugees and host communities to access decent work is fundamental for the protection and well-being of refugees and for restoring their dignity and purpose in life. In this regard, in Lebanon, for example, the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF and UNDP, with the support of the Peacebuilding Fund, implemented an employment for peace programme in which Syrian refugees and host communities from different religious and cultural backgrounds worked together on joint income activities. These economic opportunities helped nurture a climate of trust, civic education and peaceful coexistence. This link was also reiterated in an assessment by UNHCR and its partner, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, on the effects of cash-based assistance in the Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya, which found cash to be a key "connector" for refugees and their hosts, in particular by strengthening social cohesion in business relationships.

Box 7
Promoting gender equality and boosting opportunities for women and girls in the Sahel

From the inception of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) World Bank-funded Sahel Women's Empowerment Demographic Dividend project, the development of an interfaith network of religious leaders was perceived as a key factor in ensuring the project's success in promoting education for the girl child, including sexuality education, and family planning, as well as ending female genital mutilation and child marriage. The project was initiated at the request of the Governments of Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger and implemented with technical support by the UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office. The involvement of women's NGOs proved particularly valuable in overcoming challenges with regard to respect for the human rights of women and girls.

42.   Partnerships with technology companies, the media and social media platforms were increasingly evident. For example, UNDP, in partnership with Facebook and the Government of Bangladesh, supported a digital peace movement that has so far enabled more than 10,000 young people to take action to address violent extremism. Moreover, as violent extremists, terrorists and their supporters continued to exploit information and communications technology to communicate, spread propaganda, share instructional materials and carry out and publicize their attacks, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued to engage with technology companies and to support industry-led efforts to counter terrorist misuse of information and communications technology by terrorists and violent extremists.

43.   In line with trends of recent years, the United Nations system continued to expand cooperation with faith-based organizations and networks to promote knowledge-sharing, system-wide guidance and oversight, joint activities and programming. For the present report, half of all respondent United Nations entities cited how faith and religious leaders and faith-based organizations were acting as crucial partners and interlocutors in areas ranging from the prevention of conflict and violent extremism, hate speech, democratic processes and gender-based violence, to improving reproductive health and environmental protection, to heritage management. International networks have expanded, such as the Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, which has grown to include 25 United Nations entities in the decade since its inception. The recently established United Nations multi-faith advisory council, comprising 40 high-level representatives from diverse faith-based partners, is providing strategic advice to the Task Force and engages in human rights-based policy advocacy and outreach. The United Nations Environment Programme's Faith for Earth initiative partners with the African Union, the European Union and the World Economic Forum, as well as intergovernmental organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, on integrating faith-based organizations in environmental work. The continued increasing trend of partnering with faith-based actors has been echoed at the national level. For example, in March 2020, an interreligious statement on the protection of the victims of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which was based on the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, represented the first time that religious communities across Iraq had jointly recognized the need for justice and the rights of victims and survivors of crimes committed by ISIL. The statement stressed the crucial role religious leaders could play in fostering a peaceful and inclusive society and noted their essential role in ensuring effective support for the survivors of ISIL, countering violent ideology,

mistrust and fear, and in bringing people together to find common ground on the basis of humanity.

44.   Faith actors have also been key outreach partners in COVID-19 response efforts by issuing public statements and providing health advice at the community level. For example, UNICEF and Religions for Peace launched a multireligious faith-in-action COVID-19 initiative in April 2020, bringing together leaders of the 12 major global spiritual traditions to raise awareness of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children.

VII. Conclusion

45.   Diverse forms of intercultural and interreligious dialogue have continued to play an integral role in promoting cultural diversity, advancing sustainable development and tackling the root causes of violence and conflict. COVID-19 has exposed deep fault lines in societies. Pre-existing grievances and vulnerabilities have become more accentuated and entrenched. This is why conflict sensitivity and respect for human rights needs to be at the centre of the recovery from COVID-19 and the prevention of future crises. As emphasized in the report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (A/74/976-S/2020/773) and his call to action for human rights, in times of crisis, the shared human condition and values must be a source of unity, not division.

46.   The United Nations system has continued to focus its support on preventing crises and addressing the drivers of conflict through analysis and knowledge-sharing, capacity development, support for dialogue, advocacy and the promotion of shared values and human rights as the foundation of a culture of peace. United Nations entities have also strongly rallied around the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech in the light of the rise in hate speech, including online. The United Nations system has also intensified engagement with religious and faith-based actors, including as interlocutors in programme implementation.

47.   Young people and women have been at the centre of United Nations action and engagement at the country level. Encouraging results can be seen, for example, in peacebuilding initiatives led by young people and in women's mediation networks. However, the participation of women, people with disabilities and young people in formal peacebuilding and decision-making requires further strengthening, as recognized by the Security Council in its resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), 2475 (2019) and 2535 (2020), and in its resolutions on women and peace and security. Positive narratives demonstrating their contribution to a culture of peace should also be promoted and made more widely visible.

48.   From an operational perspective, and in line with the United Nations reform agenda, the United Nations system continues to strengthen cross-pillar engagement, multi-stakeholder cooperation and partnerships. United Nations reforms in the areas of peace and security, development and management and the peacebuilding architecture are already delivering early results and showing the promise of greater collaboration across pillars. Efforts in this regard will remain a priority.

49.   The pursuit of peace is a continual process based on choices and decisions one makes every day. It is by fostering a culture of peace that one ensures dialogue with those who are different. Respect, empathy and the protection of human rights and dignity must guide the process, even in the most difficult circumstances. In doing so, it is important to ensure the creation of the necessary space for civil society and the media to play their full part.

50.   It is also important to make sure that digital communications contribute to peace and are not misused to spread hate, misinformation and extremism. Hate speech, including online, has become one of the most frequent methods for spreading divisive and discriminatory messages and ideologies. This is why the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech was launched: to counter this poison. The Strategy and Plan of Action responds to the worrying growth of xenophobia, racism and intolerance, including antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, around the world. Hate speech undermines social cohesion, erodes shared values and can lay the foundation for violence, undermining peace, stability, sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights for all.

51.   As the world emerges from the pandemic and works for a strong economic recovery, the Secretary-General urges all to redouble their commitment to making a culture of peace an everyday reality. There is opportunity to capitalize on the momentum of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures to strengthen United Nations cooperation and support for countries in tackling ongoing challenges in this area.

52.   Furthermore, the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development provides the international community with a strong basis to strengthen a broad-based culture of peace, guided by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

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