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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

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

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/164](#). It provides information on steps taken by States to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief. It also outlines activities undertaken by the United Nations in that regard. According to information received, some States have put in place legislative, institutional and policy measures and taken initiatives, such as interfaith and intercultural dialogue and exchange and educational and awareness-raising activities. Increased efforts continue to be needed, notably in terms of combating religious profiling, encouraging the efforts of leaders, speaking out against religious intolerance, training government officials and protecting places of worship and religious sites.

* The present report was submitted after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/164 on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit at its seventy-fifth session a report that included information provided by the High Commissioner on steps taken by States to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief.

2. The report is based on contributions received from 16 Member States¹ in reply to a note verbale sent by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In section II of the report, actions and initiatives taken by States are presented under headings that correspond to the points of the action plan outlined in paragraphs 7 to 9 of General Assembly resolution 74/164. Section III outlines activities undertaken by the United Nations in support of the implementation of the action plan. Section IV provides conclusions and observations on the status of the implementation and observations on the way forward.

II. Steps taken by Member States in the implementation of the action plan

A. Constitutional and legislative measures

3. OHCHR received information from Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Pakistan, Romania, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey in relation to constitutional and legislative frameworks present and/or being amended in the countries pertaining to combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief.

4. Ireland reported that the constitutional and legislative provisions that had formerly made blasphemy a criminal offence were abolished following a referendum of October 2018 and the subsequent enactment of the Blasphemy Act of 2019.

5. Although it was significant to establish national constitutional and legislative frameworks, ensuring their implementation was even more important, notably through practical actions by Governments and stakeholders to assist victims of discrimination and religious communities and to promote a culture of tolerance and peace nationally.

B. Measures to address violent extremism and radicalization

6. Azerbaijan reported that the State Committee on Religious Associations had collaborated with international, regional and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as with experts, on the promotion of religious tolerance, the prevention of religious extremism and violence and efforts to combat terrorism. It had

¹ Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. The original texts of all submissions, including those sent after the deadline, are available for consultation on the website of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) at <https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/SitePages/Anti-discrimination%20database.aspx>.

also organized, jointly with the International Organization for Migration office in Azerbaijan, training for professionals on radicalization and violent extremism.

7. The Russian Federation reported that its Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with relevant departments, had implemented preventive and operational steps, as well as administrative and criminal measures, to counter all forms of extremism. Special attention had been given to identifying, preventing and disrupting the activities of radical youth associations, as well as preventing the dissemination of information promoting violence, criminal subculture and nationalistic and extremist ideologies in educational institutions and on media digital platforms. In addition, the law enforcement authorities had taken measures to counter organized forms of extremist manifestations.

8. Sweden reported that the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention had created the Swedish Centre for Preventing Violent Extremism in 2018 to further strengthen efforts at the national, regional and local levels. Since 2016, the Swedish Defence Research Agency had been mapping and analysing violent extremist propaganda in digital environments.

9. In previous reports,² the Secretary-General encouraged States to increase awareness and understanding of violent extremism and radicalization. Measures taken should reflect the principles of inclusiveness and participation, as well as be fully consistent with States' obligations under international human rights law. They should take gender into account and be adapted to the national context. Key concepts related to violent extremism should be defined clearly, in particular when they could potentially trigger measures that might impinge on human rights, for example when the terms "extremism" or "radicalization" are used to cover non-violent activity.³

C. Creating collaborative networks to build mutual understanding, promoting dialogue and inspiring constructive action towards shared policy goals and the pursuit of tangible outcomes, such as servicing projects in the fields of education, health, conflict prevention, employment, integration and media education⁴

10. Bosnia and Herzegovina reported having established bilateral agreements with the Holy See and the Serbian Orthodox Church. A similar agreement with the Islamic community was being prepared. It added that a joint commission had been established in 2008 to monitor the implementation of the agreement with the Holy See.

11. Kazakhstan reported that the Ministry of Information and Social Development had supported the project of the Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan and the NGO Love Your Neighbor Community of the United States by holding round tables on religious freedom and interfaith dialogue. Round tables had been held in Shymkent, Oskemen and Aktyubinsk in November 2019 and in Nur-Sultan in February 2020. It added that relations between the State and religious institutions had relied on the model of religious associations, according to which the State sought to develop a dialogue on tolerance among representatives of all religions while protecting freedom of religion or belief through regional leaders' clubs.

12. In Mexico, in September 2019, the General Directorate of Religious Associations of the Ministry of the Interior launched a national strategy for the promotion of respect for and tolerance of religious diversity, aimed at promoting

² A/74/229 and A/73/153.

³ For additional guidance, see A/70/674 and A/HRC/33/29.

⁴ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 7 (a).

religious freedom on the basis of the principle of the secular State. The National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination reported that it had held four meetings bringing together representatives of numerous religious communities and had participated in the Network of Churches for Peace and the Observatory Church, formed by civil religious organizations.

13. Romania reported that the Consultative Council of Religions had worked towards the protection of and respect for human life and dignity, manifesting solidarity and cooperation among religions in the spiritual, cultural, educational and social fields. It had been involved in preventing and mediating interconfessional and interreligious disputes while rejecting and discouraging any form of extremism.

14. In Sweden, a national plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crimes, which was adopted in 2017, was focused on Afrophobia, anti-Gypsyism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism against the Sami. The government agency the Living History Forum was tasked with coordinating and following up on the national plan. Sweden reported that the Government had allocated SKr 10 million (\$1.1 million) per year in 2020 for the implementation of the national plan.

15. Switzerland reported that, since 2006, the federal Government had held regular exchanges with the Swiss Council of Religions, a platform for dialogue among the Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions. It added that several cantons had been active in promoting interreligious dialogue and better mutual understanding among religious communities. At the national level, the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities had been engaged in various activities, including interreligious dialogues, debates, forums and projects that brought together children and young people of different religions, to build mutual understanding.

D. Creating an appropriate mechanism within Governments to, inter alia, identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities and assisting with conflict prevention and mediation⁵

16. Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that the Interreligious Council had continued to be the main consultative mechanism to address issues of interest to traditional churches and religious communities regarding freedom of religion. In accordance with a cooperation agreement signed with the Council of Ministers in 2008, the Interreligious Council had received an annual grant from the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees to support activities related to building interreligious dialogue, religious tolerance and coexistence.

17. In Italy, the Government appointed the Vice-President of the Shoah Memorial of Milan, Milena Santerini, as the national coordinator of efforts to combat antisemitism in January 2020.

18. In Ireland, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is the main institution tasked with protecting and promoting human rights and equality and building a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding. The Standing Committee on Holocaust Education, Research and Remembrance, established in 2012, is composed of representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Justice and Equality, Holocaust Education Trust Ireland, the Irish Jewish Museum and members of academia.

⁵ General Assembly resolution [74/164](#), para. 7 (b).

19. In Mexico, the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination is the main governing institution promoting anti-discrimination policies and measures, including on combating discrimination based on religion. Through the National Survey on Discrimination, a joint project of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography and the National Council, statistical information was obtained on the magnitude, causes and expressions of discrimination, including on the grounds of religious beliefs. In addition, information was received on social areas, as well as related sociodemographic and cultural factors, that informed the design of legislation and public policies.

20. Pakistan reported that the National Commission for Minorities had drafted a national policy on interfaith harmony, with a special emphasis on safeguarding and promoting the rights of minorities. It added that committees on interfaith harmony, comprising members of religious minorities and chaired by high-level government officers, had been established at the district level to promote dialogue and an understanding of the diverse perspectives of different communities.

21. Poland reported that the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment had been tasked with monitoring compliance with the principles of equal treatment and taking action to combat intolerance and incitement to violence on the grounds of religion or belief. It was involved in preliminary ruling proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union in cases pertaining to intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination or incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief.

22. Romania reported that the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs had been tasked with receiving notifications concerning intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization and discrimination and incitement to violence against persons on grounds of religion or faith. It added that the National Council for Combating Discrimination was competent to issue sanctions against all forms of discrimination, including on religious grounds, and had reported 17 such cases in 2019. The Ombudsman was tasked with addressing complaints of discrimination on religious grounds by public administration.

23. In Sweden, the Equality Ombudsman monitors compliance with the Discrimination Act and works towards combating discrimination and promoting equal rights and opportunities. Sweden reported that budget allocations to the Ombudsman had increased in recent years and that anti-discrimination offices had provided support and legal advice to individuals on issues pertaining to discrimination at the local level.

24. Switzerland reported that, in 2018, the Federal Council had created a service in the Federal Department of Justice and Police to improve coordination on issues pertaining to religion among relevant bodies, as well as to communicate with cantonal authorities and religious communities. A survey of the Federal Statistical Office on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland provided information on attitudes towards persons of other religions, as well as on experiences of discrimination based on religion. According to a repository of legal decisions related to the criminal provision against racial discrimination, in 2019, there were 18 cases of discrimination based on religion, representing 60 per cent of total reported cases of racial discrimination.

25. Turkey reported that the Human Rights and Equality Institution had been established in 2016 with the mandate of preventing discrimination, including on religious grounds, and was competent to receive complaints from individuals and initiate ex officio investigations into allegations of discrimination, including on religious grounds.

E. Encouraging the training of government officials in effective outreach strategies⁶

26. Mexico reported that the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination had developed an online platform to raise the awareness of, train and educate public servants on non-discrimination. Between February 2019 and April 2020, 2,133 women and 1,232 men, including civil servants from the federal, state and municipal public administrations, autonomous organisms and judicial and legislative institutions, had completed an online course on tolerance and diversity of beliefs. The course was aimed at increasing the knowledge and capacity of public servants to apply the law on the prevention of discrimination, as well as at formulating and implementing anti-discrimination policies.

F. Speaking out against intolerance, including advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence⁷

27. Mexico reported that the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination was mandated to prevent hate speech, notably by preparing, disseminating and promoting relevant media content. It added that the National Council had been part of the global campaign entitled “No Hate Speech Movement”, promoted by the Council of Europe, since 2013. In a second stage, the Movement Against Hate Speech initiative was launched in 2016 to counter such speech and expressions used in physical spaces and digital media against various discriminated groups. The National Council also disseminated information on non-discrimination on social media in the context of international and national human rights days.

28. Pakistan reported that a strong public message had been sent and swift action had been taken against agitators in the wake of the verdict in the Asia Bibi case and that a sitting provincial minister had been dismissed on account of his remarks against a minority group. In 2018, Islamic scholars in Pakistan had issued a fatwa (a non-binding legal opinion on a point of Islamic law) unanimously that articulated a counter-narrative of peace, harmony, moderation and tolerance against extremism and radicalization. In the document, which held the status of a national code of conduct, the equal rights of women and minorities were upheld and hate speech, among other items, was strongly discouraged.

29. Turkey reported that Government officials had spoken out publicly and firmly against intolerance, discrimination, hostility and violence based on religion or belief while underlining the importance of social inclusiveness and the meaningful participation of individuals in all sectors of society.

G. Adopting measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief⁸

30. Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Pakistan, Poland, the Russian Federation and Sweden submitted comprehensive information on national criminal frameworks prohibiting incitement to violence based on religion or belief. Many of the frameworks tackled issues of incitement to racial, national or religious hatred through speech, written media and publications and the Internet. The laws also

⁶ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 7 (c).

⁷ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 7 (e).

⁸ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 7 (f).

covered the establishment of, or participation in, organizations and public meetings that called for violence or incited religious hatred; the denial of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity; and linkages between the incitement to violence and acts of terrorism. Those frameworks provided for criminal processes and, usually, heavy sentences.

H. Adopting measures against hate crimes

31. In Italy, the Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination, established under the Ministry of Interior, encourages the reporting of hate crimes and supports police agencies in preventing and combating hate crimes.

32. Poland reported that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, in cooperation with the national police, had monitored prejudice-motivated crimes and coordinated the implementation of countrywide training for law enforcement officers on hate crimes. It added that the national police had organized training for police officers involved in criminal investigations of hate crimes. It also reported that the National Public Prosecutor's Office was tasked with monitoring cases of hate crimes committed to the detriment of a group of people or an individual because of their religious affiliation, among other grounds.

33. Sweden reported that the Police Authority had increased efforts towards tackling hate crimes and others that threatened human rights and fundamental freedoms, including through the establishment of a national contact point and regional groups; additional funding for the strengthening of efforts towards bringing perpetrators to justice; and increased efforts to combat information technology-related hate crimes. It added that the Prosecution Authority had taken measures to enhance its work to combat hate crimes, such as the appointment of prosecutors with special responsibility for dealing with such crimes in local public prosecution offices. The National Council for Crime Prevention produced statistics on hate crimes, including on religious grounds.

I. Understanding the need to combat denigration and the negative religious stereotyping of persons, as well as incitement to religious hatred, by strategizing and harmonizing actions at the local, national, regional and international levels through, inter alia, education and awareness-raising⁹

34. Azerbaijan reported that, in 2020, two courses taught in high school to promote multiculturalism had become compulsory and dozens of educational activities had been conducted with the participation of members of religious bodies, representatives of government bodies, young people, clergy, educational staff, representatives of NGOs and media personnel.

35. Cyprus reported that education in public schools had been focused on acceptance of differences and tolerance of and the respect for other cultures.

36. Italy reported that an observatory for discrimination in the media and on the Internet had continued to monitor and analyse potentially discriminatory contents on social networks and in the media. The National Office against Racial Discrimination continued to address the phenomenon of discrimination on religious grounds through monitoring and enforcement activities and through its contact centre. It participated in a research project on hate speech, which was promoted by the Catholic University

⁹ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 7 (g).

of the Sacred Heart and the Centre for Contemporary Jewish Documentation, with the collaboration of the Shoah Memorial Foundation of Milan and the Association of Young Muslims in Italy. It added that, in 2019, the Office had promoted public initiatives, events and conferences on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust, as well as visits to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp throughout the year. The Foundation Museum of the Holocaust, jointly with the Office, launched the exhibition entitled “The enemy race: Nazi and fascist antisemitic propaganda” and organized a screening of the documentary film *Memory: The Survivors’ Narrative* for high school students. The Ministry of Education, University and Research, in collaboration with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, continued to promote educational activities to commemorate the Holocaust.

37. Ireland reported that Holocaust Education Trust Ireland had developed an educational programme, funded by the Department of Education and Skills, to expand knowledge of the Holocaust. Other outreach projects included public lectures, school programmes, teachers’ seminars and cultural projects, as well as the Crocus Project, through which 15,000 pupils planted crocus bulbs in memory of the children who had perished in the Holocaust. Ireland added that it was a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and that Holocaust Memorial Day was commemorated in the country with the aim of cherishing the memory of all of the victims and maintaining a constant reminder of the dangers of racism and discrimination.

38. Pakistan reported that the National Curriculum Council had been reviewing the curriculum and suggesting material through which to educate children and young people on tolerance, human rights, civics and democracy. Various initiatives had been undertaken at the provincial level, including introducing new textbooks in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Sindh Assembly had passed a resolution on the inclusion of the religious textbooks of Hindus in the curriculum for Hindu minorities, and a committee was established to conduct a third-party review of textbooks to identify negative stereotyping and biases against minority groups. In Balochistan, the Bureau of Curriculum and the Balochistan Textbook Board were working on the incorporation of life skills-based education concepts, including human rights, in curricula and textbooks. Under the national action plan to counter terrorism and extremism, reforms of Muslim schools were undertaken. The media contributed to public awareness-raising and advocacy with regard to fostering tolerance, peaceful coexistence and respect for pluralism.

39. In Romania, the broadcasting of programmes comprising any form of incitement to hatred on national, racial or religious grounds is prohibited under Law No. 504/2002 on audiovisual media, and the National Audiovisual Council is competent to withdraw the licence of media channels for audiovisual activity on those grounds.

40. The Russian Federation reported that several activities had been carried out, including regional programmes to build inter-ethnic and interfaith relations; events promoting communication among young people of different groups and religions; and the programmes and projects of public associations for children and young people, to foster interracial, inter-ethnic and religious harmony. It added that the State-owned newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and the journal *Rodina* had contributed to promoting inter-ethnic and interfaith relations and preventing conflicts.

41. Sweden reported that the Living History Forum had continued to undertake education-related initiatives against racism and similar forms of hostility with regard to school staff and other public employees. In 2018, it was tasked with promoting commemoration-related trips to Holocaust memorial sites, funded by the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism. The Prime Minister of Sweden was planning to

host an international conference commemorating the Holocaust. It added that the Swedish Media Council had worked to improve the media use skills of children and young people and protect them from the harmful effects of media. The Swedish Media Council had run the campaign entitled “No Hate Speech Movement” to increase awareness of racism and similar forms of hostility on the Internet. It also noted that, since 2016, the Swedish Research Council had supported research on racism and discrimination, in partnership with the Swedish Research Council for Health and Working Life and Welfare.

42. Switzerland reported that the Service for Combating Racism had supported awareness-raising projects on antisemitism and Holocaust denial for adults and in schools, as well as projects to prevent hostility towards Muslims, promote exchanges and dialogue with Muslim organizations and provide Muslim chaplainship in centres for asylum seekers. It added that, in the framework of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, Switzerland had established a group tasked with implementing awareness-raising activities, such as study tours.

43. Turkey reported that various amendments had been made to the national curriculum to include the teaching of fundamental values at all levels of education, including non-discrimination, respect for differences and inclusiveness, as well as on integrating an encompassing approach towards all religions. It added that eight *khutbahs* religious sermons delivered during Friday prayers and other regular sermons) on preventing discrimination and violence had been delivered in 2019, and that seminars and programmes on hate speech and the prevention of violence had been organized for students in State dormitories.

J. Recognizing that the open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas, as well as interreligious, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, at the local, national, regional and international levels, can play a positive role in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence¹⁰

44. Azerbaijan reported that several interfaith and intercultural events had been held in 2019, including the international conference entitled “From Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue to Cooperation,” the Second International Conference on Interreligious Dialogue and Radicalism and the Second Baku Summit of World Religious Leaders, hosted by Azerbaijan. It added that the Foundation of Moral Values Promotion had carried out several projects aimed at strengthening tolerance and multicultural traditions, including a project entitled “Our unity is our worth” and the Tolerant Azerbaijan project, and provided financial support to a number of projects implemented by Islamic religious communities.

45. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Platform for Peace, a declaration document promoting acceptance of peacebuilding and reconciliation processes among ethnicities and religious communities, was adopted by the House of Peoples on 27 July 2018 and has been approved by 54 mayors of municipalities and cities.

46. Kazakhstan reported that meetings of leaders and representatives of religious associations had been held in the framework of the clubs of leaders of religious associations to have an exchange on the universal values of faiths and measures taken to preserve and strengthen interreligious harmony. Since 2003, Kazakhstan had held

¹⁰ General Assembly resolution [74/164](#), para. 7 (h).

the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions every three years with the aim of fostering a dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

47. Romania reported that the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs had organized and supported numerous national and international actions with the purpose of promoting interreligious and interconfessional dialogue and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms.

48. Switzerland reported that most cantons and cities had interacted actively with the religious communities present on their territory, and that interreligious dialogue platforms or forums had been created and had held regular meetings.

K. Taking effective measures to ensure that public functionaries, in the conduct of their public duties, do not discriminate against individuals on the basis of religion or belief¹¹

49. Italy reported that training activities on the protection of human rights and preventing and combating acts of discrimination had been conducted as part of the basic training for recruited agents of the State police. Training courses for trainers in service at police schools were organized on issues related to preventing and eliminating discriminatory acts and modules on human rights-related issues were integrated into continuing education programmes, including online modules on the prevention and suppression of acts of discrimination and hate crimes and racial and ethnic profiling. On 21 January 2020, the Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination organized a conference, entitled “The victims of hatred”, to enhance the commitment of law enforcement to preventing and combating all forms of discrimination and promoting the values of tolerance and inclusion.

50. Mexico reported that the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination had addressed alleged acts of discrimination or omissions attributable to federal public servants in the exercise of their functions through an administrative complaint procedure. Between January 2019 and March 2020, six complaint had been classified as alleged acts of discrimination related to religion.

51. Poland reported that a network of supernumerary proxies for human rights protection and equal treatment within the Polish Border Guard had been functioning since 2008 and that the Guard had been implementing an internal anti-discrimination procedure since 2014. It added that educational measures to promote respect for human rights and the prevention of discrimination had been in place throughout the professional training process of Guard officers, including in basic training for recruits since 2019 and in the higher-level courses for the Guard officers specializing in proceedings concerning foreigners. An online compulsory course on intercultural communication in the border guard was had been introduced in 2017. Poland added that issues related to religious and ideological intolerance had been part of the training programmes for future judges and public persecutors in that country, and that the National School of Judiciary and Public Prosecution had organized several events and trainings for judges on issues of cultural diversity and non-discrimination, including on religious grounds, in 2019.

52. Romania reported that the Ombudsman had been seized ex officio with cases on discrimination on religious grounds. Following the registration of those cases with the National Council for the Combating of Discrimination, appropriate sanctions had been applied.

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 8 (a).

53. Turkey reported that the Ombudsman had monitored the compliance of public institutions with the principle of prevention of discrimination.

L. Fostering religious freedom and pluralism by promoting the ability of members of all religious communities to manifest their religion and to contribute openly and on an equal footing to society¹²

54. Azerbaijan reported that 942 religious communities (907 Muslim, 24 Christian, 8 Jewish, 2 Baha'i and 1 Krishnaite) had registered in Azerbaijan and that the Government had created conditions favourable to holding religious ceremonies for all religious communities. It added that 2,250 mosques, 14 churches and 7 synagogues were operating in the country, and that the Islamic religious communities were under the authority of the Caucasian Muslims Board, whereas non-Islamic religious associations could be subordinated to religious centres in and outside Azerbaijan. Through the reserve fund of the President, the State had provided financial assistance to religious communities.

55. Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees had issued guidance on the implementation of the Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Status of Churches and Religious Communities in 2019.

56. In Cyprus, three religious groups, namely the Armenian group, the Maronite group and the Latin group, are recognized under the Constitution. The Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the protection of National Minorities provides for the safeguard of the rights of religious minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Language for the right to recognition of the special educational and cultural needs of the religious groups. Cyprus reported that the State had undertaken specific responsibilities for the protection of the Armenian language and the Cypriot Maronite Arabic language.

57. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that members of religious minorities in that country included 130,158 Christians, 23,109 Zoroastrians and 9,826 Jews. More than 250 churches were owned by Christian minorities, 78 places of worship by Zoroastrians and 16 synagogues by Jewish minorities. The State continued to allocate special budgets and financial contributions to centres dedicated to religious minorities and grant licence to social, civic and cultural religious minority associations, as well as to promote access to publications and exclusive press. It added that Sunni Muslims, like Shia Muslims, were considered as part of the majority and had more than 15,000 mosques in the country. The President appointed a Sunni adviser who specialized in affairs pertaining to the Sunnis, as well as Sunni Muslims in several senior positions, such as ambassadors, deputy ministers, judges and governors.

58. Kazakhstan reported that there were more than 3,800 religious associations representing 18 faiths and more than 100 ethnic groups. Muslims, Christians, Jews and representatives of small religious groups (Mormons, Hare Krishnas, Munits, Baha'is and others) could freely study religion, gather to worship, distribute religious literature and form charitable organizations.

59. Mexico reported that the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination had issued congratulatory messages in the framework of religious festivities, such as during the month of Ramadan, to show support for religious communities and highlight their importance and contribution to the country's cultural and religious diversity.

60. Romania reported that the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs had continued to support events organized by religious denominations, as well as meetings and

¹² General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 8 (b).

conferences dedicated to religious dialogue. It added that the new criminal code had protected religious freedoms through the prohibition of preventing or disturbing the rites of worship practiced freely, as well as of forcing a person to attend religious service or to perform an act related to practicing religious worship.

61. Senegal reported that the Government had provided financial and material aid to religious organizations belonging to all religious groups, notably for the maintenance and restoration of places of worship and the organization of religious events. It added that the Government had provided financial assistance for religious pilgrimages. Major religious events for Muslims and Christians are official public holidays.

62. Switzerland reported that the cantonal authorities were responsible for the regulation of relations with religious communities, including the legal registration of religious communities. Under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, Switzerland recognized the Jewish community as a national minority in 1998. Under an ordinance on measures to promote the safety of minorities with special protection needs, the country can provide financial support for measures aimed at protecting minorities.

63. Turkey reported that non-Muslim Turkish citizens had continued to be able to practice their religion, hold religious ceremonies and manage their properties, including places of worship, without any impediment.

M. Encouraging the representation and meaningful participation of individuals, irrespective of their religion or belief, in all sectors of society¹³

64. Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that concrete cooperation had been established between the State and churches for meeting the religious needs of persons in public institutions, including the armed forces and prisons. It added that, while believers could have a religious marriage ceremony after the conclusion of a civil marriage, the religious ceremony was not recognized under civil law.

65. In Ireland, under the Education Act of 2018, a new framework was put in place to ensure greater transparency and equity in school enrolment, including a prohibition on the use of religion as a selection criterion in primary school admissions. The Act ensures that a child of a minority religion can access schools that provide religious instruction or religious education programmes consistent with his or her religious beliefs.

66. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that, since 2018, members of religious minorities had been able to stand for Islamic city council elections; five parliamentary seats were allocated to such minorities. At the city council level, it was possible to apply local regulations in accordance with the religions of religious minorities in places where the followers of those religions were the majority. There were 93 special religious minority schools, and children of religious minorities had the right to study at all schools. Higher education courses dedicated to the literature and cultural heritage of religious minorities were being developed at universities.

67. Pakistan reported that affirmative measures were in place to ensure the equal participation of individuals belonging to minorities. Minorities were provided with 10 seats in the National Assembly, 4 in the Senate and proportional representation in the provincial assemblies. They have been provided with an employment quota of 5 per cent in federal Government services and a quota proportionate to their

¹³ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 8 (c).

population in provincial governments. In the field of education, the Government provided scholarships to students belonging to minority groups. Steps were also taken in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with regard to the protection of minorities.

68. Romania reported that its Law No. 504/2002 on audiovisual media had provided for ensuring political and social pluralism, as well as cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in the media, in line with fundamental freedoms and human rights.

N. Adopting measures and policies to promote full respect for and protection of places of worship and religious sites, cemeteries and shrines and taking protective measures in cases where they are vulnerable to vandalism or destruction¹⁴

69. Pakistan reported that its provincial governments had developed legal and administrative measures to protect religious sites and places of worships. For example, in Punjab, a detailed security plan for the protection of places of worship was being implemented, and religious festivals and congressional prayers were protected by the Punjab Police. The Punjab Security of Vulnerable Establishment Act of 2015 provided for security advisory committees at the district level to identify vulnerable establishments. The Sindh Security of Vulnerable Establishment Bill of 2015 provided for the identification, categorization, notification and provision of full-fledged security to religious establishments and places. On November 2019, the Prime Minister of Pakistan inaugurated the Kartarpur corridor, a visa-free border crossing to Sikh pilgrims from the region. In 2019, the Government launched an initiative to restore and hand over more than 400 Hindu temples to the Hindu community.

70. In Switzerland, under an ordinance on measures to promote the safety of minorities with special protection needs, the country can provide financial support for measures aimed at protecting places of worship and religious sites.

O. Strengthening international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs¹⁵

71. Azerbaijan reported that the State Committee on Religious Associations had cooperated with institutions in Muslim and non-Muslim countries including Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Romania the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

72. Kazakhstan reported that the Ministry of Information and Social Development had hosted the first meeting of the Kazakh-American Working Expert Group on Religious Freedom in May 2019. The second meeting of the Working Expert Group was held in Washington, D.C., in February 2019. On 18 July 2019, the Minister of Information and Social Development took part in the second Ministerial Conference on the Promotion of Religious Freedom, convened through an initiative of the Secretary of State of the United States.

73. Mexico reported that the Director General of Religious Associations and the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination had participated in an event of the Sikh Dharma Community of Mexico entitled “Creating Roots”, which supported the inclusion of Sikhs in Mexican society. It added that the National Council had

¹⁴ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 9.

¹⁵ General Assembly resolution 74/164, para. 10.

attended the observance of the Year of Religious Tolerance at the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, in 2019.

74. Turkey reported that it had contributed to the work of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as collaborated with other States, in efforts to combat discrimination based on religion or belief. On 22 March 2019, Turkey convened an open-ended emergency meeting of the Executive Committee of OIC.

III. Actions taken by the United Nations in support of the implementation of the action plan

A. Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

75. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect continued to support the implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.¹⁶ The Office, jointly with the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, supported the development of an interfaith statement on the victims and survivors of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant that was signed by religious representatives of major faiths in Iraq and launched on 16 July 2020.

76. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide continued to serve as the focal point for the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and plan of action on hate speech,¹⁷ in cooperation with a working group led by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and United Nations field presences. In that context, the Office provided support to United Nations field entities to develop context specific action plans to combat hate speech. On 11 May 2020, the Special Adviser released a guidance note on addressing and countering coronavirus disease (COVID-19)-related hate speech,¹⁸ providing specific recommendations to the United Nations, Member States, social media and technology companies, media, civil society, religious leaders and other relevant stakeholders. From 2 to 4 June 2020, the Office organized a meeting with technology and social media companies that resulted in recommendations on addressing and countering online hate speech.

77. On 18 and 19 November 2019, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect participated in the seventh meeting of the Istanbul Process, entitled “Combating religious intolerance: Building inclusive and resilient societies and pushing back against incitement to hatred and violence”, held in The Hague, Netherlands, at which she called upon Member States to support measures to foster peaceful, inclusive and just societies and interfaith dialogue.

¹⁶ www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20Copy.pdf.

¹⁷ www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf.

¹⁸ www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Guidance%20on%20COVID-19%20related%20Hate%20Speech.pdf.

B. United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

78. On 12 September 2019, the Secretary-General launched the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites,¹⁹ which provided an action-oriented framework to support relevant stakeholders in preventing attacks on places of worship and strengthening their preparedness and response. The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is leading the implementation of the plan.

C. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

79. OHCHR continued to work on the various dimensions of religious intolerance, including multiple forms of discrimination, xenophobia, freedom of religion or belief, religious profiling and incitement to racial, national or religious hatred. Through its field presence, it provided training sessions, workshops and advisory services and, upon request, reviewed draft anti-discrimination laws and amendments. As a member of the working group to operationalize the United Nations strategy and plan of action on hate speech, OHCHR developed its own strategy on hate speech.

80. On 22 June 2020, OHCHR issued a guidance note on racial discrimination in the context of COVID-19 crisis²⁰ that addressed manifestations of religious discrimination and recommended actions to be taken by States, leaders and civil society.

81. On 28 May 2020, the High Commissioner, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations opened the virtual consultation for a global pledge for action by religious actors and faith-based organizations to address the COVID-19 pandemic in collaboration with the United Nations. The High Commissioner urged religious leaders to speak out firmly against intolerance and hate speech, which have been aimed at multiple minority communities throughout the world.

82. OHCHR organized regional workshops and webinars on the implementation of the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on faith for rights²¹ and on enhancing civic space and addressing hate speech in social media. In January 2020, OHCHR launched the #Faith4Rights toolkit,²² which included 18 learning modules and offered peer-to-peer exercises. OHCHR, together with Religions for Peace, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, has been piloting the toolkit online.

83. On 18 November 2019, the Deputy High Commissioner spoke at the seventh meeting of the Istanbul Process, at which she reiterated the call of the previous High Commissioner to focus the Istanbul Process on implementation, discussing in an inclusive exchange with civil society what worked, and to put in place a solid road map.

84. On 22 August 2019, the High Commissioner addressed the Security Council in an Arria formula meeting on advancing the safety and security of persons belonging to religious minorities in armed conflicts, stressing that protecting minorities must begin before conflicts erupt and that it requires disaggregated data by religion and ethnicity.

¹⁹ www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/12-09-2019-UNAOC-PoA-Religious-Sites.pdf.

²⁰ www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/COVID-19_and_Racial_Discrimination.pdf.

²¹ www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx.

²² www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/faith4rights-toolkit.pdf.

85. OHCHR expanded its work on antisemitism. Since 2019, it has been taking part in meetings of the World Jewish Congress. On the most recent International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, the High Commissioner issued a press statement in which she stressed the importance of human rights education in protecting societies from the mindset that had produced the Holocaust. OHCHR facilitated the display of an exhibition entitled “Lest We Forget” at the Palais des Nations, in Geneva, which was launched on 24 January 2020. In December 2019, OHCHR co-organized, with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and the World Jewish Congress, a workshop for policymakers on the role of education in addressing antisemitism.

IV. Conclusions and observations on the way forward

86. States’ contributions show that a number of them have put in place constitutional and legislative frameworks pertaining to freedom of religion or belief and have enacted criminal and/or civil legislation to protect against discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief. Within many national constitutional and legal frameworks, incitement to violence is criminalized and often prohibited on several grounds, including on the basis of religion or belief. However, limited information was provided on the implementation of these frameworks.

87. In 6 of the 16 States that submitted contributions, collaborative networks are in place to build mutual understanding, promoting dialogue and constructive action towards shared policy goals. Relevant mechanisms have been established to identify and address potential areas of tension among members of different religious communities or contribute to the interreligious dialogue.

88. Religious intolerance, stigmatization, negative stereotyping and discrimination continue to be addressed through educational measures and cultural activities, dialogues, public information and media campaigns, including on online platforms. Interfaith and intercultural dialogue and exchange are taking place at the local, national and international levels. Ongoing and established dialogues among various faith communities provide important spaces to open debate, serving as forums for communication, discussion, networking, exchange and peer-to-peer learning.

89. Five States reported on training and other measures to ensure that civil servants do not discriminate against individuals on the basis of religion or belief in the conduct of their public duties, which represents an increase, compared with previous reports. Measures to encourage and secure the representation of religious minorities and meaningful participation of individuals in all sectors of society are in place in several countries.

90. Only a few of the States that submitted contributions noted that Government and political officials had spoken out against religious intolerance. Some States reported on measures to protect places of worship and religious sites.

91. As mentioned in previous reports, it is necessary to implement holistically all points outlined in General Assembly resolution [74/164](#) to address the complex, and often sensitive, issue of religious intolerance. In this regard, it would be important for States to take further steps with regard to training government officials in effective outreach strategies, encouraging the efforts of leaders to

discuss within their communities the causes of discrimination and addressing religious profiling.

92. Many of the States submitting contributions reported on actions taken against hate crimes, both online and offline. In this area, increased and improved monitoring, recording and reporting are needed. Collecting disaggregated data, in accordance with a human rights-based approach, is critical. Efforts need to be stepped up to establish or designate dedicated authorities to document, track and analyse hate crimes, identify trends and improve access to the information by justice officials. Services for victims should also be enhanced since States bear the primary obligation to protect victims of human rights violations and to prevent discrimination and violence against persons based on their religion or belief.

93. While legal sanctions may be necessary to ensure protection against incitement to hatred, discrimination or acts of violence, it is important to recall that the following types of expression should be distinguished clearly: (i) expression that constitutes a criminal offence; (ii) expression that is not criminally punishable, but may justify a civil or administrative sanction; and (iii) expression that does not invoke any legal action, but still causes concern in terms of tolerance and respect for the rights of others. Legislation prohibiting the incitement to racial, national and religious hatred should be specific and not overly broad in its scope and application to be consistent with the international standards on freedom of religion or belief and freedom of opinion and expression. States should ensure that there is no impunity where the prosecution and adjudication of such crimes are undertaken. Some useful guidance in this regard is provided by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination²³ and the Human Rights Committee.²⁴ The Rabat action plan and its six-part threshold test also provides guidance on how to identify the demarcation line between free speech and incitement to hatred.²⁵

94. Furthermore, the United Nations strategy and plan of action on hate speech complement actions taken at the national and international levels by focusing on how the United Nations addresses hate speech through its programmatic work, in line with international human rights standards. Through the strategy, the United Nations system works closely with States, civil society, the private sector and the media to address hate speech.

95. Speaking out against religious intolerance at the highest level is essential in preventing discrimination and incitement to hatred. The Rabat Plan of Action underscores the collective responsibility of public officials, religious and community leaders and the media to ensure that acts of incitement to hatred are addressed with the appropriate measures, in accordance with international human rights law. The Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on faith for rights,²⁶ as well as the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes,²⁷ highlights the role and responsibilities of religious leaders and faith-based actors in promoting human rights.

²³ General recommendation No. 35 (2013) on combating racist hate speech.

²⁴ General comment No. 34 (2011) on the freedoms of opinion and expression.

²⁵ A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, annex, para. 29. The threshold test and information on the international legal framework are available online in 32 languages; see www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomOpinion/Articles19-20/Pages/Index.aspx.

²⁶ A/HRC/40/58, annexes I and II.

²⁷ www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20Copy.pdf.

96. Further consideration should be given to the multiple forms of discrimination that may affect individuals and groups. As noted in previous reports, women suffer from discrimination on the grounds of both gender and religion or belief.²⁸ It is important to consider how women are affected by issues such as religious profiling, whether they are participating and are meaningfully represented in all parts of society and whether they are able to manifest their religion and contribute to society openly and on an equal footing with others. States are encouraged to include in their future submissions further reference to the gender dimension of discrimination based on religion or belief and the steps taken to implement the action plan with respect to women and girls.

97. States may also consider analysing the complex root causes of religious discrimination, violence and intolerance. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a solid foundation for tackling those issues. Further consideration could be given to how elements of the action plan, such as participation, representation and collaborative networks, could be leveraged to address these issues under the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goals 1, 5, 8, 10 and 16.

98. Consideration should also be given to the impact of the COVID-19 context on the situation of religious intolerance, in particular on minority communities throughout the world who are stigmatized as supposed carriers of the virus and who face discrimination and attacks.

99. States are encouraged to make better use of existing mechanisms for implementing the action plan. The strength and importance of this process lies in the fact that the action plan is accompanied by a dedicated implementation mechanism – the Istanbul Process. States are encouraged to ensure greater continuity between the Istanbul Process meetings, at which it would be important to focus on implementation at the national level, with an emphasis on sharing practical experiences and forging collaborative frameworks. It would be also important to envisage inclusive exchanges with experts and civil society.

100. States are also encouraged to make use of the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review process to promote the implementation of the action plan, report on progress and share examples of promising approaches. Concerned States could include the information in their national reports and use the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review dialogues to make relevant recommendations to their peers. National human rights institutions and civil society could also include specific analysis of implementation of the action plan in their reports under the review.

101. As noted in previous reports of the Secretary-General,²⁹ States may want to consider reviewing the reporting process on the implementation of the action plan with the aim of reducing the reporting burden and encourage a greater number and geographically more diverse contributions. Given that there are two separate annual reports on the same action plan – one report addressed to the Human Rights Council and the other to the General Assembly – States may wish to consider streamlining the two parallel reporting processes by adjusting the time frames to a biennial period for each of the reports or explore options to ensure that the reporting processes build on each other, either in terms of content or focus. In addition, adding a thematic focus to the report would allow for a more in-depth analysis of one or two elements of the action plan. States may also wish to consider inviting other stakeholders to report on the implementation of the action plan.

²⁸ A/74/164, para. 88.

²⁹ A/72/381, A/73/153 and A/74/164.