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**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

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

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 52/38, in which the Council called upon States to take a number of actions to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief. The present report contains information provided by States and other stakeholders on the efforts and measures taken for the implementation of the action plan and views on potential follow-up measures for further improvement of its implementation. It also contains recommendations with regard to implementing the action plan, including through training initiatives for law enforcement officers, members of the judiciary, faith-based actors, teachers and media professionals on combating religious hatred. States should effectively counter religious profiling, act expeditiously on hate crimes and protect religious or belief minorities, including their places of worship. States must also uphold their international obligations to enact and enforce comprehensive anti-discrimination laws.



I. Introduction

1. In 2011, the Human Rights Council, in its resolution 16/18, and the General Assembly, in its resolution 66/167, called upon States to take a number of actions to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief. The suggested action plan provides for complementary measures to be taken at the national level in policy, law and practice.

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 52/38, in which the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a comprehensive follow-up report with elaborated conclusions on the efforts and measures taken for the implementation of the action plan and views on potential follow-up measures for further improvement of the implementation of that plan.

3. The present report, which covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023, is based on contributions received from 17 States in reply to notes verbales sent on 21 July and 26 September 2023 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and responses to related calls for input from national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and United Nations entities. In section II of the report, the High Commissioner highlights efforts made and measures taken for the implementation of the action plan. In section III, he elaborates conclusions with regard to the action plan and observations on potential follow-up measures to accelerate its implementation.

II. Efforts and measures taken for the implementation of the action plan

4. The present section of the report highlights information that OHCHR received from Australia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Romania, the Russian Federation, Spain and Tunisia and the national human rights institutions of Azerbaijan, Mauritius, Mexico and Türkiye.¹ It also includes information received from 18 civil society organizations and 12 United Nations entities, including OHCHR field presences. The efforts and measures taken for implementing the action plan are presented under headings that correspond to the points outlined in paragraphs 7, 8, 10 and 14 of Human Rights Council resolution 52/38.

A. Encouraging collaborative networks to build mutual understanding, promoting dialogue and inspiring constructive action towards shared policy goals and the pursuit of tangible outcomes

5. In its resolution 52/38, the Human Rights Council provided, as examples of such collaborative networks, servicing projects in the fields of education, health, conflict prevention, employment, integration and media education. Chile noted that the National Office of Religious Affairs aimed to ensure that there was no arbitrary discrimination for reasons of religion or belief, to promote effective equality and religious freedom in Chile and to encourage interreligious dialogue. In that context, the National Office of Religious Affairs had promoted the creation of communal interreligious dialogue councils, by using methodologies of rapprochement, whose general objectives were to foster dialogue by seeking to generate openness towards the other and searching for mutual recognition in order to advance from tolerance to understanding and acceptance.

6. Ecuador noted that the Undersecretariat for Nationalities, Peoples, and Social Movements had created spaces to promote interreligious dialogue in the country. Between June and October 2023, it had organized three interreligious dialogues with various faith-

¹ The texts of the submissions from States and national human rights institutions, including those sent after the deadline, are available for consultation at <https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/SitePages/Anti-discrimination%20database.aspx>.

based organizations and nine technical round-table discussions, which had led to forming a support network to follow-up on the proposals made during the round-table discussions and to elaborate public policies. It had also held events open to the general public on the importance of religious tolerance and freedom of worship in Ecuador. The Undersecretariat had also organized a national meeting in October 2023, during which a national pact for freedom of religion was launched, with the participation of more than 100 representatives of religious organizations.

7. Romania noted that the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs had organized national and international activities aimed at promoting interreligious and interconfessional dialogue and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms. The State Secretariat had supported, and would continue to financially support, the events organized by religious organizations in Romania and meetings on interreligious dialogue. To prevent religious conflict and to promote dialogue between religious denominations, they had set up the Consultative Council of Religious Denominations, which was a non-political autonomous non-governmental organization. Its main objectives included defending and promoting human dignity, facilitating discussion on important issues in society, manifesting solidarity and cooperation between cults in the spiritual, cultural, educational and social fields and preventing and mediating intrareligious and interreligious conflicts.

8. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs provided operational support to enhance capacities for interfaith networking and to strengthen the mediation skills of leaders of Anglican Communion churches in selected contexts. In South Sudan, the Department's strategic advice contributed to the redesign of the Episcopal Mediation Advisory Team and ensured that its new action plan prioritized inclusion and interfaith collaboration. The Department continued to offer operational guidance to implementing the strategy of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers for the period 2020–2025.² Through that support, the Department contributed to enhancing capacities for conflict prevention of the Network, which comprised over 50 faith-based organizations from around the world.

B. Mechanisms within Governments to identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities and assisting with conflict prevention and mediation

9. Mexico noted that the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination had implemented the national programme for equality and non-discrimination, 2021–2024, which sought to promote alliances with the media, cultural and sports centres to counteract discriminatory practices in society, among other goals. The related support network included the Mexican State News Agency, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Public Education, the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, the Public Broadcasting System, the Ministry of the Interior, the National Institute for Women and the Ministry of Welfare. The National Council also held meetings for the inclusion and promotion of interreligious dialogue and the prevention of tension between the different religious communities, including with regard to celebrations of their religious holidays.

10. In her 2023 report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stressed that local governments had remarkable opportunities to strengthen social cohesion and solidarity, owing to their proximity and accessibility to the daily lives of rights holders.³ She referred to such positive examples as the inclusive, cross-sectoral and pragmatic approach to deradicalization employed by the city of Aarhus in Denmark⁴ and the district-level interreligious committees working to promote interreligious harmony in Sri Lanka.⁵ The Special Rapporteur commended Indonesia for the setting up of religious harmony forums at the local level, with a consultative and mediation role on interreligious

² See <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/>.

³ [A/78/207](#), para. 25.

⁴ Ibid. See also [A/HRC/34/50/Add.1](#), paras. 51–53.

⁵ Ibid. See also [A/HRC/43/48/Add.2](#), para. 17.

relations.⁶ She highlighted that making the aforementioned initiatives more accessible to a broader set of religion or belief communities and investing them with a mandate to uphold freedom of religion or belief would build on the existing record of local governments. The Special Rapporteur referred to positive examples wherein local authorities had actively engaged religious and belief communities in urban planning, leading to clarity concerning their needs for places of worship, which was effective in strengthening inter- and intracommunity collaboration as well as in upholding freedom of religion or belief.⁷

C. Training government officials in effective outreach strategies

11. Brazil noted that the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship had signed an agreement with the Federal University of Uberlândia on training public officials, focusing on the production of content and educational actions to promote religious freedom, foster respect for religious diversity, combat religious discrimination, strengthen State secularism and confront hate speech. Another agreement was signed with the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, aimed at addressing religious discrimination against people practising traditional religions of Brazilians of African descent. In that context, the Ministry had also collaborated with the National Network of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Health and Ilê Omolu Oxum. Specialized police stations were tasked with combating crimes of prejudice and intolerance in several states and federal districts, including to counter religious intolerance towards religions of Brazilians of African descent, such as Candomblé and Umbanda.

12. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) office in Brazil reported that black women and girls and *quilombolas*⁸ practising traditional religions of Brazilians of African descent and Indigenous women and girls that preserved and practised traditional spirituality and beliefs were disproportionately affected by religious discrimination. For racialized communities and peoples, who faced the consequences of colonization and development policies adopted throughout the twentieth century, UN-Women Brazil noted that traditional religion and spirituality was a form of community organization and mobilization for defending and claiming human rights. As such, religious racism was commonly intertwined with conflicts over land, the environment and access to basic social, economic and cultural rights, in which black, *quilombola* and Indigenous women often performed central and unacknowledged leadership roles. The women religious leaders, known as *Nhandesys*, the term deriving from *nhande* for our and *sy* for mother, were the guardians of ancient knowledge, culture, science and spirituality. While they represented the Guarani-Kaiowá people's traditional culture and spirituality and defended their ancestral way of living, their status as women environmental and human rights defenders was often not recognized, which further exposed them to threats, harassment and violence, including lethal violence.

D. Efforts of leaders to discuss within their communities the causes of discrimination and evolving strategies to counter those causes

13. The National Human Rights Commission of Mauritius noted that it had conducted several workshops, talks and public awareness-raising campaigns on human rights, including non-discrimination. The Equal Opportunities Act had reinforced the rights to protection from discrimination and to equal opportunities in various areas of life, such as access to employment and certain facilities and services, including education, by prohibiting discrimination against a person on the grounds of his or her status, including creed. Trust funds, cultural centres and heritage funds had also been established to allow Mauritians of

⁶ A/78/207, para. 25.

⁷ A/78/207, paras. 25 and 31.

⁸ The term *quilombolas* refers to the individuals and communities of African descent that descend from settlements formed by those who fled enslavement to live in self-governed, African-centred communities referred to as *quilombos*.

all cultural backgrounds the opportunity to participate in religious and cultural activities of their choice and to foster harmony and mutual respect.

14. Throughout 2023, Religions for Peace, the University for Peace, the United States Institute of Peace, United Nations human rights mechanisms and OHCHR facilitated a series of monthly conversations on religions, beliefs and human rights.⁹ Several of the hybrid meetings were held as side events during sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Human Rights Council and the Academic Council on the United Nations System and at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The series has created a community of practice and peer-to-peer learning opportunities on Faith for Rights, with a view to promoting the universality and indivisibility of all human rights, without discrimination on any grounds.

15. In November 2023, OHCHR and the National Human Rights Council of Morocco organized a workshop in Rabat with religious actors, women's rights experts, academics and parliamentarians from the Middle East and North Africa region, following up to the use of the Faith for Rights framework by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in dialogues with States parties and in its concluding observations.¹⁰ The pilot project under the knowledge hub on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was focused on advocacy and peer-to-peer learning in cases where culture, tradition or certain religious interpretations might impede the realization of equal rights for women and girls in all spheres.¹¹

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

16. On the occasion of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/254, the Secretary-General noted that, beyond structural and institutional discrimination and the wholesale stigmatization of Muslim communities, Muslims suffered personal attacks, hateful rhetoric and scapegoating.¹² On 20 July 2023, the Secretary-General expressed the determination of the United Nations system to fully implement Human Rights Council resolution 53/1, and he expressed solidarity with the Muslim community, condemning acts of intolerance, violence and Islamophobia which exacerbated tensions and contributed to discrimination and radicalization.¹³

17. In his public statements of 7 March, 11 July, 11 September and 5, 10, 16 and 26 October 2023,¹⁴ the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights referred to recent incidents of burning the Qur'an, and he strongly rejected those disrespectful and offensive acts, especially those which had had the clear aim to provoke violence and stir division.¹⁵ In view of further iterations of Islamophobia fed by similar irrational prejudices experienced after the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, the High Commissioner stated that entire communities were dehumanized, with Muslim women and girls often bearing the brunt of verbal abuse, physical intimidation, death threats or actual violence.¹⁶

18. During the urgent debate of the Human Rights Council held on 11 July 2023, the High Commissioner called upon States to combat the weaponization of religious differences for political purposes and stated that all societies, whatever their religious and cultural

⁹ See <https://www.usip.org/academy/catalog/religions-beliefs-and-human-rights-faith-rights-approach>.

¹⁰ See https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/CEDAW_Excerpts.pdf.

¹¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/activities/2023-11-CEDAW-hub-PR.pdf>.

¹² See <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-03-15/secretary-generals-message-the-international-day-combat-islamophobia-scroll-down-for-french-version>.

¹³ See <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/readout/2023-07-20/readout-of-the-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-meeting-the-ambassadorial-group-of-islamic-cooperation>.

¹⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/countering-religious-hatred-constituting-incitement-discrimination-hostility-or-violence>.

¹⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/religious-hatred-turk-urges-renewed-social-contract-based-trust-and>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

backgrounds, must strive to become magnets for respect, dialogue and cooperation among different peoples.¹⁷ The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief highlighted the work of the special procedures to promote understanding, coexistence, non-discrimination and equality for all, stressing that no one should be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on the grounds of their religion or belief.¹⁸ She underscored that religions, beliefs or their followers should not be instrumentalized to incite hatred and violence, for example, for electoral purposes or political gains.¹⁹

19. In 2023, OHCHR continued to work with various social media platforms to step up efforts to meet their human rights responsibilities under the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.²⁰ OHCHR also collaborated with social media platforms, with a view to better protecting human rights defenders and responding to content that might constitute incitement to hostility, discrimination or violence. In June 2023, the High Commissioner called upon companies to ratchet up investment in efforts to combat hate speech in languages other than English, while detecting and pivoting greater attention and investment to fragile contexts or where early warning signs demanded.²¹ He recommended fostering expanded research into how to effectively combat hate speech through greater transparency, including through open or affordable access to the application programming interface. In November 2023, the High Commissioner strongly deplored the sharp rise in cases of antisemitism, Islamophobia and other hate speech, both online and offline, since 7 October.²²

20. The Oversight Board of Meta noted that hate speech created an environment of discrimination and hostility towards marginalized groups, which was often context-specific and coded and with harm resulting from effects which gradually built up over time.²³ In its decisions, the Oversight Board reviewed Meta's content policy enforcement action in the light of the company's human rights commitments and responsibilities under the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The Oversight Board had also relied upon the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence²⁴ in more than a dozen decisions it had taken to assess the necessity and proportionality of decisions to takedown content. For example, it upheld Facebook's decision to remove a post containing a demeaning slur, which violated Facebook's Community Standard on hate speech, while also noting that article 19 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights gives heightened protection to discussing historical claims, including as they relate to religious sites and peoples' cultural heritage, even where those claims might be inaccurate or contested and even when they might cause offence.²⁵ The Oversight Board also quoted the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, who had reported that social media platforms were increasingly exploited as spaces for incitement to hatred and violence by civil, political and religious actors.²⁶

¹⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/07/turk-calls-states-combat-weaponization-religious-differences>.

¹⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/2023-07-11-HRC53-UD-religious-hatred-SR-FoRB-statement.pdf>.

¹⁹ [A/HRC/40/58](#), annex II, commitment X.

²⁰ [A/HRC/17/31](#), annex. The Guiding Principles were endorsed by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 17/4.

²¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/06/un-human-rights-chief-hate-speech-has-no-place-our-world>.

²² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/un-human-rights-chief-condemns-rise-hatred>.

²³ See <https://www.oversightboard.com/news/543066014298093-oversight-board-announces-seven-strategic-priorities/>.

²⁴ [A/HRC/22/17/Add.4](#), appendix.

²⁵ See <https://www.oversightboard.com/decision/FB-QBJDASCV/>.

²⁶ See <https://www.oversightboard.com/decision/FB-515JVE4X/>, referring to [A/75/385](#) and [A/HRC/40/58](#).

F. Measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief

21. Australia noted that the Government had introduced a bill for a counter-terrorism legislation amendment (prohibited hate symbols and other measures) in 2023, which, if passed, would include new criminal offences for publicly displaying prohibited Nazi symbols or the flag of Da'esh, and trading in items bearing those symbols. In November 2023, however, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security had acknowledged the evidence submitted by Muslim groups that the words displayed on the flag constituted "fundamental principles of the Islamic faith" and the concerns expressed that prohibiting the flag could demonize or otherwise allow for the targeting of Muslims in Australia.²⁷ In its advisory report, the Parliamentary Joint Committee therefore recommended several amendments to the bill, including to remove the flag from the definition of a prohibited hate symbol and for the Government to consider establishing a new offence that would prohibit the public display and trade of symbols associated with terrorist organizations.²⁸

22. Denmark noted that, in August 2023, the Government had presented a proposal for criminalizing the improper treatment of objects of significant religious importance to a religious community. After a public hearing period, on 27 October 2023, the Government had introduced a revised bill on the prohibition of the improper treatment of scriptures of significant religious importance to a recognized religious community, which was adopted by the parliament on 7 December 2023.²⁹ On 8 December 2023, three special rapporteurs shared their observations and comments with the Government about the amendment, with a view to ensuring the obligations of Denmark under international human rights law, in particular the right to freedom of expression.³⁰

23. Egypt noted that the prohibition of incitement to hatred was clearly established at the international level in article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. However, legal precedents had shown that judicial mechanisms were rarely used in cases of incitement to religious hatred, which might be due to the absence of national legislation, the lack of legal aid, limited trust or a lack of awareness about the right to litigation. Egypt also referred to growing levels of incitement and hatred in political discourse and the high rates of opportunism to achieve narrow political and electoral interests, including by allowing the desecration and burning of the Qur'an in a number of European countries.

24. Pakistan noted that the normative frameworks on racial and religious discrimination had evolved differently; the drafting and adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965 had progressed rapidly, whereas the norms on religious discrimination had culminated nearly two decades later in the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981. Pakistan highlighted that that uneven development of norms on racial and religious hatred had had unintended consequences, given that racial hatred could be cloaked as religious hatred, due to the perceived weaker normative framework for the latter. Pakistan referred to the chronic problem of underreporting in the case of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, which was often trivialized as mere "intolerance" or "insult", failing to trigger prohibitions under article 20 (2) or restrictions under article 19 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

25. The Human Rights Protection Group of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia noted that Somalia currently had no law prohibiting intolerance against persons based on religion or belief. The Penal Code of 1964 criminalized "stirring up hatred between

²⁷ See

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/HateSymbolsBill/Report, paras. 2.6–2.12 and 3.6.

²⁸ Ibid., para. 3.13.

²⁹ See <https://via.ritzau.dk/pressemeddelelse/13759880/majority-in-danish-parliament-adopts-ban-on-quran-burnings-we-must-protect-the-security-of-danes?publisherId=13560888>.

³⁰ See communication DNK 1/2023, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28623>.

the social classes” under crimes against public order (art. 321). However, hate speech had increased with the emergence of social media platforms, and incitement to violence using modern technology had become a tactic in the armed conflict in Somalia. It noted that Al-Shabaab had targeted regional and international organizations in lethal attacks in 2023, using hate speech and jihadi rhetoric, including calling the regional and international organizations infidels, mercenaries and crusaders.

26. With the support of the Peacebuilding Fund, OHCHR worked to provide training to judges, lawyers and prosecutors in the Republic of Moldova on the human rights-based application of new domestic criminal and misdemeanour law provisions banning hate speech. The training courses had been built on the basis of the practical guide published by OHCHR and Equal Rights Trust, entitled *Protecting Minority Rights: A Practical Guide to Developing Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation*,³¹ in particular the chapter on discrimination and expression.

G. Combating denigration and negative religious stereotyping of persons and incitement to religious hatred, through education and awareness-building

27. Qatar noted that the Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center in Doha had worked on changing the stereotypical image of Islam and Muslims in the minds of its visitors. The Center’s policy of introducing Islam, Qatari heritage and religious education to non-Arabic speakers of various nationalities, expatriates and visitors and communicating with the public was aimed at the prevention of intolerance and negative stereotyping towards any cultural group by encouraging dialogue, fraternity among people and equal rights.

28. Spain noted that one of the main factors for religious or other hatred was the internalization of stereotypes and prejudices against other religions or beliefs that were considered to be inferior. In the digital era, social networks and other online platforms could also act as catalysts for religious hatred, providing space for the propagation of hate speech and the formation of extremist groups that incited discrimination, hostility and violence. The Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration pointed to ignorance, stereotypes and false assumptions within society, including a lack of knowledge about Islam, Judaism and other minority religions or beliefs. In January 2023, the Government had approved a national plan for the period 2023–2030 for implementing the European strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life.³²

29. During the fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council, the World Jewish Congress, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Meta, presented “Tell me, Inge...”, an interactive and immersive education experience about the Holocaust revolving around the memories of Inge Auerbacher, who had survived the Theresienstadt Ghetto as a 7-year-old girl. Mixed reality technology, developed by Meta and Storyfile, combined conversational artificial intelligence and virtual reality, which recognized users’ speech and allowed them to ask questions and listen to Inge’s answers.³³ With the support of 22 States, the side event, held on 9 October 2023, reached a wide cross-regional audience and promoted the employment of modern technology to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.

30. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) continued to monitor and record incidents of online hate speech, incitement to violence and religious and racial discrimination targeting minorities for being “non-Libyan”. UNSMIL engaged with social media platforms to remove such discriminatory hate speech. It was also concerned about arbitrary arrests, the denial of due process rights and access to lawyers, ill-treatment in

³¹ See https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/2022-11-28/OHCHR_ERT_Protecting_Minority%20Rights_Practical_Guide_web.pdf, pp. 172–188.

³² See <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/resumenes/Documents/2023/310123-PlanNacionalAntisemitismo.pdf> (in Spanish).

³³ See <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/events/tell-me-inge> and <https://inge.storyfile.com/>.

detention and hate speech following arrests for allegations of apostasy. UNSMIL also documented several cases of Sufis abducted by armed groups and accused of witchcraft.

H. Debate of ideas and interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels to combat religious hatred, incitement and violence

31. Malaysia noted that the Inter-Faith Harmony Committee, comprising eminent leaders of religious institutions and various religious-based organizations, served as a discussion platform for believers of various religions to resolve issues related to religion and race. Through the committee, religious representatives had been able to highlight practical suggestions to strengthen mutual understanding and harmony and to discuss sensitive matters. Local leaders and communities, non-governmental organizations, higher education institutions and government agencies had collaborated on interfaith harmony programmes, such as “Harmony walk” which was aimed at cultivating awareness of the religions, traditions, customs and cultures in the country. At the international level, Malaysia organized events to highlight the effects of religious discrimination and to devise practical strategies to address them, including by hosting the International Forum on Islamophobia in February 2023 in Kuala Lumpur and by organizing a side event during the fifty-third session of the Human Rights Council, in July 2023, on the impact of religious discrimination on women and young people.

32. In September 2023, the Dharma Alliance, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the University for Peace jointly organized a panel discussion on the theme “Peacebuilding, the Sustainable Development Goals and Dharma cultures: applying ancient wisdoms to modern challenges”, held at the United Nations Office at Geneva. Panellists introduced and highlighted the core principles of Dharmic traditions, primarily Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and Sikh traditions, which encouraged global ownership of and adherence to the Sustainable Development Goals. Panellists included academics, members of civil society, politicians, religious leaders and speakers from OHCHR, the Alliance of Civilizations, UNESCO and the University for Peace.

33. At the end of her country visit to Sweden in October 2023, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief urged Sweden to strengthen its engagement and dialogue with faith communities to combat religious or belief intolerance in the light of numerous challenges, both nationally and globally, and in the context of the concerning and repeated instances of the burning of the Qur’an.³⁴ In her preliminary observations and recommendations, the Special Rapporteur took note of the judgment of 12 October 2023 of the Linköping District Court, in which the Court had found a 27-year-old man who had spread a video where he had burned a copy of the Qur’an guilty of incitement to hatred against a population group, and had referred to the specific circumstances of the case, such as the use of background music that had become popular in anti-Islamic circles.³⁵

34. In November 2023, OHCHR organized a peer-to-peer learning week on Faith for Rights,³⁶ bringing together religious leaders, faith-based actors, diplomats, treaty body members, special rapporteurs, academics, representatives of United Nations entities, regional organizations, national human rights institutions, and civil society and staff of Meta’s Oversight Board. More than 100 participants shared good practices and lessons learned among the network of facilitators for peer-to-peer learning using the Faith for Rights [toolkit](#) ([#faith4rights](#)).³⁷ A round-table brainstorming session at Geneva Academy focused on addressing religious hatred, in follow-up to the Rabat Plan of Action, the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights and Human Rights Council resolutions 16/18, 52/6 and 53/1.³⁸ Another

³⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/sweden-must-strengthen-dialogue-faith-communities-combat-religious-or-belief>.

³⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/2023-10-19-EOM-sr-religion.docx>.

³⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights>.

³⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/faith4rights-toolkit>.

³⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/Roundtable09-11-2023.pdf>.

meeting among religious leaders and faith-based actors linked the dots between the Geneva Spiritual Appeal, the Interreligious Platform of Geneva and the Faith for Rights network. Further workshops discussed collaboration with OHCHR minority fellows and follow-up to the guide *Protecting Minority Rights*.³⁹ Participants compiled a snapshot of peer-to-peer learning and action points with a view to enlarging the *Faith for Rights* “commUNITY of practice”.⁴⁰

35. Throughout 2023, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon engaged with representatives of different religious groups in Lebanon to promote interreligious dialogue. The Special Coordinator also encouraged interfaith actors to play a pioneering role in alleviating political tensions. The Special Coordinator also held a series of round-table discussions with intellectuals, youth representatives and entrepreneurs from different religious, cultural and professional backgrounds. The discussions provided an open platform for participants to exchange views and proposals on rebuilding trust in State institutions, including by countering hate speech and incitement of sectarian violence.

I. Ensuring that public functionaries do not discriminate against individuals on the basis of religion or belief

36. Australia noted that its police recruits and operational members were equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools to respectfully and effectively engage with members of the community, with training programmes focused on promoting understanding, scenario-based training and collaboration with experts, and were striving for continuous improvement. One of the tools available to operational members was the Religious and Spiritual Diversity Guide for Operational Police, developed by the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency together with religious organizations and community groups.⁴¹ The Guide provided police with a greater understanding of religious and spiritual diversity and enhanced services and interactions with the community, building on the commitment of Australian and New Zealand police forces to meet the needs of the religious and spiritually diverse communities that they serve.

37. Poland noted that public service agents, while performing public duties, were not allowed to discriminate against people on the basis of religion or belief. All applicants for international protection were covered with the same scope and type of assistance, including social and medical assistance, regardless of their nationality or religion. The relevant agencies dealing with refugees, such as centres for foreigners and the border guard, employed staff competent to work with people from different cultural backgrounds, including religions or beliefs. The relevant agencies dealing with foreigners regularly undertook activities related to counteracting discrimination, racism and intolerance by educating their officers and employees. Training for the border guard included courses focused on intercultural competences and religion and its impact on communication with people from other religious backgrounds.

38. Tunisia noted that the Code of Conduct for the Internal Security Forces of the Ministry of the Interior had been approved by order No. 240 of 16 March 2023. Several provisions of the Code of Conduct stressed the necessity of the internal security forces to carry out their duties within the framework of complete neutrality and without discrimination in the treatment of persons, regardless of their gender, colour, nationality, origin, social status, political affiliation or religious beliefs. The Code stipulated that the Ministry of the Interior should take practical mechanisms to ensure the proper implementation of the provisions of the Code, monitor its application and evaluate the performance of security personnel in adhering to its provisions and overcoming any recorded shortcomings.

³⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/protecting-minority-rights-practical-guide>.

⁴⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/faithforrights/Faith-for-rights-P2Pweek2023.pdf>.

⁴¹ Available at <https://www.anzpaa.org.au/homepage-announcements/religious-and-spiritual-diversity-guide-for-operational-police-4th-edition-released>.

39. The National Human Rights Commission of Mexico referred to several legislative initiatives in the Congress aimed at ensuring that public officials, in the exercise of their governmental responsibilities, acted impartially and respectfully towards all persons, without discriminating on the basis of religion or belief. The initiatives represented a commitment to equality and the protection of human rights, recognizing the importance of safeguarding the diversity of religious convictions and practices in a pluralistic and democratic environment. By promoting a public service free of religious prejudice, it sought to ensure that the decisions and actions of public officials were guided by the principles of equity, justice and respect for individual autonomy in matters of belief, thereby contributing to the construction of inclusive and cohesive societies.

J. Promoting the ability of members of all religious communities to manifest their religion and to contribute openly and on an equal footing to society

40. Costa Rica referred to the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice, in which it had stressed the duty of cooperation of the State towards various beliefs, by virtue of which the administration must abstain from acts that interfered with the exercise of religious freedom. The Constitutional Chamber pointed out that religious freedom must be understood as an individual subjective right that went beyond the traditional concept of “freedom of worship” to also include the right that the State abstained from discrimination and protected against attacks from other persons or entities. Article 75 of the Constitution of Costa Rica provided that the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion was that of the State, which contributed to its maintenance, without impeding the free exercise in the State of other beliefs that did not oppose themselves to universal morality or good customs. The Constitutional Chamber highlighted that the term “maintenance” in article 75 must not be understood in a restrictive manner, but referred to the other beliefs existing in the country.

41. The Russian Federation noted that, in early 2023, the Government of Ukraine had submitted to the Verkhovna Rada draft law No. 8371, which would prohibit the activities of religious organizations affiliated with influence centres, the management of which was located outside Ukraine in the country that carried out armed aggression against Ukraine. According to the Russian Federation, the draft law would provide for a significant simplification of the legal procedure to ban the functioning of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Russian Federation also noted that, on 1 January 2023, the Ukrainian authorities had terminated the lease agreement with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the use of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and had demanded that the monks leave the monastery, threatening to use violence against them.

42. In March 2023, OHCHR urged the parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to ensure that draft laws No. 8221, No. 8262 and No. 8371 fully complied with the requirements of articles 18 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.⁴² While noting that parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church still had access to premises to attend worship meetings in some of the buildings of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra as of 31 July 2023, it subsequently urged the parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to ensure that legislation or decisions affecting religious communities did not unduly restrict freedom of religion or discriminate against any religious community and to investigate and prosecute crimes committed against clergy or parishioners in a timely manner.⁴³ OHCHR urged the Russian Federation to respect and protect the fundamental rights of all individuals and groups in occupied areas of the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk regions, as well as in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, also occupied by the Russian Federation, including the rights to freedom of opinion and

⁴² See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2023/23-03-24-Ukraine-35th-periodic-report-ENG.pdf>, para. 134 (z).

⁴³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/23-10-04-OHCHR-36th-periodic-report-ukraine-en.pdf>, paras. 16, 114 and 145 (cc) and footnote 89 on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

expression, peaceful assembly, association, thought, conscience and religion.⁴⁴ In her briefing to the Security Council of 17 November 2023, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights called upon all parties, while the armed conflict and occupation persisted, to ensure that all people in Ukraine had full freedom to manifest and practice their religion or belief, in line with international human rights law.⁴⁵

43. In reaction to recurrent incidents of Qur'an burning in some European countries during 2023, the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations stated that those acts were disrespectful and provocative and stressed that violence was never an appropriate response to provocation.⁴⁶ Against the backdrop of the rise in antisemitism around the world, the High Representative, in his capacity as the United Nations focal point to monitor antisemitism and enhance a system-wide response, continued to engage with major Jewish organizations and with envoys and coordinators to combat antisemitism. He was vocal in condemning antisemitic incidents and hate crimes against Jews and their places of worship.

44. The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye noted that it was mandated to examine, decide on and monitor any discrimination, including on the basis of religion or belief, ex officio or upon an application. With regard to reports about a high school football team allegedly performing Nazi salutes during celebrations of goals scored at a match against the team of another school, the Institution emphasized that that behaviour had constituted prejudice, targeting Jews as an excluded community and subjecting them to hostile and inhumane treatment. In 2023, the Institution also published two press releases about provocative attacks against Alevi institutions and their places of worship in Ankara and about social media posts with hateful content directed at individuals belonging to the Alevi faith.

45. The Alevi Philosophy Centre noted that, in June 2023, the Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe had strongly urged the authorities to take the measures necessary to ensure that the Turkish education system fulfilled the State's duty of neutrality and impartiality towards various religions, denominations and beliefs, respecting the principles of pluralism and objectivity, and offered appropriate options for the children of parents who had a religious or philosophical conviction other than that of Sunni Islam to opt out of compulsory religious education, without pupils' parents being obliged to disclose their religious or philosophical convictions.⁴⁷

K. Representation and meaningful participation of individuals, irrespective of their religion, in all sectors of society

46. Iraq noted that article 2 of the Constitution guaranteed full religious rights to freedom of belief and practice for all individuals, such as Christians, Yazidis and Mandaean Sabaeans. Iraq highlighted that the national election laws ensured adequate representation for minorities by granting them their own quotas in the House of Representatives and local councils. The Ministry of Education worked to support religious and national specificity through the activities of the general directorates of Turkmen, Kurdish, Syriac and Christian studies.

47. In June 2023 in Marrakesh, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of Morocco, in cooperation with Religions for Peace and with the support of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Mohammadia League of Religious Scholars, hosted the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue on the theme "Working together for our common future". The conference concluded with the Marrakesh communiqué,⁴⁸ in which participants encouraged parliaments to ensure that all religions, beliefs and faith-based organizations were treated equally and without discrimination under the law and to include representatives of religions, beliefs and faith-based organizations alongside other civil

⁴⁴ Ibid., para. 144 (x).

⁴⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/11/asg-brands-kehris-briefs-security-council-ukraine>.

⁴⁶ See <https://www.unaoc.org/2023/07/press-statement-on-the-desecration-of-the-holy-quran-in-sweden-and-the-violence-in-iraq/>.

⁴⁷ See https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680ab822b, para. 6.

⁴⁸ See <https://www.ipu.org/file/17036/download>.

society representatives, in all their diversity, in ongoing efforts to secure the implementation of national legislation and international commitments. Participants also encouraged mapping best parliamentary practices, promoting inclusivity, fundamental human rights and gender equality within religious or belief communities, exploring avenues for the implementation of United Nations strategies and resolutions on interfaith and intercultural dialogue and addressing implementation gaps at the national level.

L. Efforts to counter religious profiling

48. In its resolution 52/38, the Human Rights Council defined religious profiling as the invidious use of religion as a criterion in conducting questionings, searches and other law enforcement investigative procedures. In her thematic report submitted to the General Assembly in 2023, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism referred to religious profiling as part of the “playbook of misuse”, such as overlapping administrative measures without procedural safeguards. The Special Rapporteur stressed that intrusive border measures and travel restrictions raised profound human rights concerns of racial and religious profiling amounting to discriminatory use of discretionary powers against certain groups in society.⁴⁹ She also highlighted that the misuse of counter-terrorism measures evidenced discriminatory aspects and was often directed against religious, ethnic and cultural minorities.⁵⁰

49. At the forty-third session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, in May 2023, France condemned all racial and ethnic profiling measures and stated that it prohibited all appearance-based identity checks, noting that training for law enforcement officers had been strengthened.⁵¹ In response to recommendations emanating from the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review, France indicated that it supported the recommendations to ensure that counter-terrorism laws and policies did not cause any racial, ethnic or religious profiling⁵² and to prohibit the use of identity checks based on racial, ethnic and religious profiling.⁵³

50. In its concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United States of America, the Human Rights Committee, in October 2023, noted that it remained concerned about the persistence of the practice of racial profiling by law enforcement officials, targeting Muslims and others. The Committee called upon the State party to prohibit racial profiling in federal, state and local legislation, taking into account initiatives like the End Racial and Religious Profiling Act.⁵⁴

M. Measures and policies to promote full respect for and protection of places of worship and religious sites, cemeteries and shrines

51. The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations continued leading the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, which explicitly refers to Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 and the Istanbul Process for Combating Intolerance, Discrimination and Incitement to Hatred and/or Violence on the Basis of Religion or Belief.⁵⁵ The High Representative delivered public statements concerning acts of violence against places of worship that were motivated by religious hatred, including Islamophobia, antisemitism and Christianophobia.⁵⁶ He invited the global community to take up the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations’ call to action to safeguard

⁴⁹ [A/78/520](#), para. 21.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2; see also https://defendcivicspace.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SRCT_GlobalStudy.pdf, p. 12.

⁵¹ [A/HRC/54/5](#), para. 27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, para. 45.111.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, para. 45.317, and [A/HRC/54/5/Add.1](#), para. 5.

⁵⁴ [CCPR/C/USA/CO/5](#), paras. 12 and 13, and [CCPR/C/SR.4050](#), paras. 73 and 80.

⁵⁵ See <https://www.unaoc.org/wp-content/uploads/Plan-of-Action-to-Safeguard-Religious-Sites-191219.pdf>, p. 9.

⁵⁶ See <https://www.unaoc.org/press-statements>.

religious sites and worshippers worldwide.⁵⁷ In 2023, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and the United Nations Population Fund continued jointly chairing the Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development and strengthened their cooperation with its Multi-Faith Advisory Council.

52. The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Ombudsman) referred to a joint fact-finding mission that it had conducted with a delegation of the Independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in early September 2023 to record the destruction of religious sites in the Fuzuli and Agdam districts. The Office of the Ombudsman noted its collaboration with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and that it was taking into consideration the recommendations addressed to Azerbaijan. According to the newly amended constitutional law regulating its activities, the Office would implement the independent monitoring mechanism on ensuring the right to equality and the prevention of discrimination, including based on religion.

53. In his public statement of 26 September 2023 on Armenia and Azerbaijan, the High Commissioner stressed the importance of safeguarding the rights of the ethnic Armenian population on the ground.⁵⁸ He recalled that States had an obligation not to deny ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion or to use their own language.⁵⁹ Each State should also protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within its territory and encourage conditions for promoting that identity.⁶⁰

54. The non-governmental organization Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement stated that the anti-blasphemy laws in Pakistan had been used disproportionately against Christians and other religious minorities and that, in August 2023, a mob had vandalized more than 25 churches and graveyards in Jaranwala. In September 2023, the High Commissioner expressed concern about the use of blasphemy allegations to incite violence against minority communities and stated that the passage of draft amendments to the already severe blasphemy laws in Pakistan would constitute a major step away from the changes that international human rights bodies had urged the State to make.⁶¹

55. The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe noted that the Muslim Turkish cemetery dating from the Ottoman period, located in the Petinos (Horozlu) village in Greece, had been demolished by construction equipment of the municipality. The Federation reported that, in September 2023, the Turkish cemetery in Polianthos (Narlıköy) in Western Thrace had been attacked by an unidentified person or persons, who had destroyed 20 gravestones.

N. Fostering global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religion and belief

56. In November 2023, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect held a global meeting on the role of traditional leaders and actors in countering hate speech and preventing genocide and related atrocity crimes. The Office and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations organized an event to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, showcasing stories of religious individuals and communities that had been

⁵⁷ See <https://www.unaoc.org/2023/11/message-international-day-for-tolerance>.

⁵⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/azerbaijan-armenia-comment-un-human-rights-chief-volker-turk>.

⁵⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 27.

⁶⁰ Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, General Assembly resolution 47/135, annex, art. 1.

⁶¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/09/turk-human-rights-are-antidote-prevailing-politics-distraction-deception>.

promoting, protecting and implementing the principles enshrined in the Convention.⁶² The Office launched the plan of action for women in communities to counter hate speech and prevent incitement to violence that could lead to genocide and related atrocity crimes⁶³ and circulated a policy paper on countering and addressing online hate speech.⁶⁴

57. In 2023, the Muslim World League, Pontifical Lateran University and the World Jewish Congress jointly sponsored the master's programme in religion, culture and peace studies at the University for Peace. The programme offered insights into interfaith dialogue as a way to achieve mutual understanding and peace and to counter hate speech in line with international human rights law. The University for Peace published the book *A Missing Piece for Peace: Bringing Together the Right to Peace and Freedom of Conscientious Objection to Military Service*,⁶⁵ in which the authors considered Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 and follow-up resolutions.

III. Conclusions and observations on potential follow-up measures to accelerate the implementation of the action plan

58. Peaceful dialogue and coexistence are increasingly hindered around the globe by intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief. Religious differences have been weaponized and manipulated for political gain, feeding off the dangerous claim that one group is superior to another.⁶⁶ Social media platforms continue to be vehicles for the spread of hateful messages, with unparalleled speed and reach, nourishing the echo chambers of ignorance and incitement to hatred against religious or belief minorities, with harmful repercussions both online and offline.

59. As illustrated in the present report, some States have taken measures to implement the action plan referred to in Human Rights Council resolution 52/38. Religious leaders and faith-based actors across the world have been making joint efforts to promote interreligious dialogue and multi-faith action, yet members of religious or belief minorities continue to face intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief. States and other stakeholders should redouble their efforts to implement the action plan, including through the Istanbul Process and strategic engagement with faith-based actors.

60. Training initiatives for law enforcement officers and the judiciary, faith-based actors, teachers and media professionals on combating religious hatred need to be part of a comprehensive approach that integrates faith literacy, better understanding and sensitivity. Clear measures should be taken to address discrimination against religious or belief minorities, for example, in the job and housing markets, within criminal justice systems and in national security responses. States should effectively counter religious profiling, act expeditiously on hate crimes and protect religious or belief minorities, including their places of worship. States must uphold their international obligations to enact and enforce comprehensive anti-discrimination laws.⁶⁷

⁶² See <https://www.unaoc.org/event/the-role-of-religious-communities-in-upholding-and-implementing-the-genocide-convention/>.

⁶³ See https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Napoli_women_Communities_Plan_Action_August_2023.pdf.

⁶⁴ See https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Countering_Online_Hate_Speech_Guide_policy_makers_practitioners_July_2023.pdf.

⁶⁵ Available at <https://www.upeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Wiener-and-Fernandez-A-Missing-Piece-for-Peace.pdf>.

⁶⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/07/turk-calls-states-combat-weaponization-religious-differences>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/religious-hatred-turk-urges-renewed-social-contract-based-trust-and>.

⁶⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/minority-rights-equality-and-anti-discrimination-law>.

61. Efforts to fight religious hatred in laws and policies must be tailored with care, employing proportionate measures that are applied in an equal manner. Where such laws are based on censorship, suppression and discrimination, they can silence legitimate criticism and debate, thereby harming rather than protecting fundamental freedoms. Any national restrictions to freedom of expression must be formulated with the sole purpose and outcome to protect individuals, rather than to shield religious doctrine from critical review. Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, except in the specific circumstances envisaged in article 20 (2) thereof. As noted by the Human Rights Committee, it would also be impermissible for such prohibitions to be discriminatory in favour of or against one or certain religions or belief systems, or their adherents, over another or religious believers over non-believers or to be used for preventing or punishing criticism of religious leaders or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith.⁶⁸

62. The United Nations has facilitated the development of several tools to provide human rights guardrails in this context. The Rabat Plan of Action can help to navigate the fine line between free speech and prohibited incitement, by assessing the context, speaker, intent, content, extent and likelihood of harm in each case.⁶⁹ The Faith for Rights framework facilitates cross-disciplinary reflection and action against incitement to religious hatred and other human rights violations.⁷⁰ In addition, the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech is aimed at supporting Governments, the private sector and societies in tackling hate speech together.⁷¹

63. Social media companies have an important role to play in containing the spread of hate speech. It is welcome that the threshold test of the Rabat Plan of Action has been used by Meta's Oversight Board in more than 12 decisions, which may have a significant impact for online content moderation affecting over 3 billion monthly active users of Facebook globally.⁷² However, more needs to be done to effectively address hate speech online, including by listening to those most affected by online hate speech and providing better channels for raising concerns and getting prompt action.⁷³ The online environment is not monolithic; some platforms have responsible policies in place to address hate speech, although implementation of those standards continues to be very problematic. Other platforms explicitly forego content moderation to address hate speech. In many cases, the level of staffing devoted to such important tasks has been reduced, despite the urgency and importance of this work.

64. Exchanges of lessons learned and promising practices should continue to be promoted, including through the "Faith for rights" framework.⁷⁴ Political and religious leaders have a particularly crucial role to play in speaking out clearly, firmly and immediately against disrespect and intolerance, not only of their own communities, but of any group subjected to attack. They should also make it clear that violence cannot be justified by prior provocation, whether real or perceived. Education initiatives, positive speech campaigns, research to understand and address root causes and efforts to promote inclusion and equal rights all play important roles. Peer-to-peer learning and awareness-raising may promote respect and understanding between individuals and communities, across religions and beliefs, and upholding the dignity of all.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 34 (2011), para. 48.

⁶⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/one-pager-incitement-hatred-rabat-threshold-test>.

⁷⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights>.

⁷¹ See <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/hate-speech-strategy.shtml>.

⁷² See <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k13/k13m8m5s4e?kalturaStartTime=1959>.

⁷³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/06/un-human-rights-chief-hate-speech-has-no-place-our-world>.

⁷⁴ A/78/241, paras. 59 and 60.

65. Greater tolerance and respect and recognition of diversity, including in terms of religion or belief, also help to promote international peace and security and ensure that economies and societies can benefit fully from the contributions of all their members. Further progress in implementing each part of the action plan referred to in Human Rights Council resolution 52/38 is needed. Such advancement will require the consistent involvement of States, national human rights institutions, United Nations entities, independent experts and members of civil society, including faith-based actors.
