



General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 July 2023

Original: English

Seventy-eighth session

Item 73 (b) of the provisional agenda*

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 [77/225](#), in which the Assembly called upon States to take actions to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief. The report highlights several efforts and measures taken in that regard during the period from 1 July 2022 to 15 July 2023, while observing that individuals and communities worldwide continue to face intolerance, discrimination and violence based on religion or belief. Hate speech, both online and offline, still fuels violence against vulnerable members of society, including religious or belief minorities. In that respect, the Secretary-General has reiterated his call to do more to support victims and examine the conditions that drive intolerance and hate.

* [A/78/150](#).



I. Introduction

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

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [77/225](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit at its seventy-eighth session a report that included information provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on steps taken by States to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief.

3. The report, which covers the period from 1 July 2022 to 15 July 2023, is based on contributions received from eight States in reply to a note verbale sent by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In addition, responses to a related call for inputs of 17 February 2023 were received from two national human rights institutions, 10 civil society organizations and 10 United Nations entities, including field presences, and United Nations human rights mechanisms. Section II of the report highlights steps taken to implement the actions set forth in paragraphs 7 to 10 of General Assembly resolution [77/225](#). Section III presents conclusions and observations in that context.

II. Steps taken to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief

4. The present section highlights information that OHCHR received from Australia, Azerbaijan, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Italy, Mexico and Saudi Arabia as well as from the national human rights institutions of Burundi and Hungary.² It also includes information received from civil society organizations and United Nations entities on implementing the 14 actions outlined in paragraphs 7 to 10 of General Assembly resolution [77/225](#).

A. Encouraging the creation of collaborative networks to build mutual understanding, promoting dialogue and inspiring constructive action towards shared policy goals and the pursuit of tangible outcomes³

5. Mexico noted that its National Institute of Anthropology and History offered an annual diploma course in the history and anthropology of religions aimed at providing theoretical and methodological elements for understanding the religious phenomenon

¹ The annual resolutions of the Human Rights Council and General Assembly as well as related reports are available from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/combating-intolerance-against-persons-based-religion-or-belief>.

² The original 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> (filtered by document category and “national level” and “State contributions”).

³ See General Assembly resolution [77/225](#), para. 7 (a), which provides, as examples, servicing projects in the fields of education, health, conflict prevention, employment, integration and media education.

from a perspective that allowed an approach to religious systems without prejudices or negative stereotyping. The diploma course is free of charge and is taught by academics who specialize in different religions and by practitioners of those religions.⁴ Twice a year, the National Institute of Anthropology and History also organizes national and international colloquiums or congresses, which seek to generate spaces for dialogue on the main problems involved in the analysis of religions and their transformations in Mexico.

6. The non-governmental organization (NGO) ARTICLE 19 referred to collaboration with its local partners Sisters in Islam and Komuniti Muslim Universal Malaysia to share experiences and best practices on upholding the right to freedom of religion or belief and countering hate speech among stakeholders from different countries, with a focus on those with a Muslim majority. Expert meetings with affected communities, groups and individuals in Malaysia as well as a public forum in December 2022 included discussions on how to operationalize the United Nations framework for tackling religious intolerance, including Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 and the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix). Furthermore, ARTICLE 19 and the Benjamin B. Ferencz Human Rights and Atrocity Prevention Clinic at the Cardozo School of Law published in February 2023 an implementation assessment framework, which provides a set of indicators to facilitate self-assessment by States and to encourage other stakeholders to analyse how best to implement the action plan contained in Human Rights Council resolution 16/18.⁵

B. Creating mechanisms within Governments to identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities and assisting with conflict prevention and mediation⁶

7. Guyana noted that its Ethnic Relations Commission performed work to promote harmony and good relations, eliminate all forms of discrimination and encourage respect for religious, cultural and other forms of diversity in a pluralistic society (article 212D of the Constitution). In addition, in 2021, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Services formalized its Support and Heal Network initiative. This partnership between the ministry and nearly 30 leaders of Guyana's religious communities aims to strengthen interfaith cooperation, increase tolerance and address social inequities within communities. Furthermore, Guyana pointed out that religious groups seeking to enter an Indigenous village for the purpose of proselytizing had to obtain permission from the Amerindian Village Council pursuant to the Amerindian Act 2006.

8. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) referred to its continued engagement with the Government of Iraq to provide technical assistance, review draft legislation for promoting social cohesion and support the Government's efforts to counter hate speech. The Supreme Committee to Counter Hate Speech at the Office of the Prime Minister of Iraq indicated that it was developing a strategy to counter hate speech in the country. Furthermore, on 27 December 2022, the Council of Ministers approved a legal decree to officially recognize Yazidis' land rights in Sinjar, granting land ownership and property rights in 11 collective townships (*mujamma`at*) in Sinjar District that had been allocated to the Yazidi minority in 1975 but never formalized. In the beginning of 2023, the Government of Iraq also started

⁴ See <https://www.enah.edu.mx/index.php/religiones>.

⁵ See <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/REPORT-23.2.23.pdf>.

⁶ General Assembly resolution 77/225, para. 7 (b).

to distribute payments to survivors eligible to receive compensation under the Yazidi Female Survivors Law. A total of 24 survivors (21 women and three men, all Yazidis) received the first of their regular financial instalments on 1 March 2023, and each survivor is to receive 7 million Iraqi dinars (approximately \$5,000).

C. Training government officials in effective outreach strategies⁷

9. Azerbaijan noted that it had organized several training courses, including compulsory training at the Academy of Justice for candidates who had succeeded in the competition for recruitment to the judiciary, as well as an initial training course for candidates for judges and employees of the Centre for Legal Expertise and Legislative Initiatives of the Ministry of Justice. In addition, new employees of the Medical Service followed a distance-learning curriculum on the prohibition of discrimination on grounds such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

10. The World Jewish Congress noted that, together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the permanent delegations of France and Germany to UNESCO, the permanent representation of the European Union to UNESCO, the French Jewish community and the Shoah Memorial, it had organized a training session on the fight against antisemitism and on Holocaust remembrance for UNESCO high-ranking diplomats in January 2023. Attending diplomats expressed their wish to cooperate further with the organizers and develop their own strategies in combating antisemitism. In February 2023, the World Jewish Congress held its third training session for diplomats on Holocaust remembrance at Maison d'Izieu, a former Jewish children's orphanage in France where 44 children had been detained and then deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in April 1944. Jointly organized with the permanent missions of France, Germany and Israel and the permanent delegation of the European Union to the United Nations at Geneva, the event included a presentation by a Holocaust survivor who had spent time at the site as a young boy and an educational presentation on the forms of contemporary antisemitism and methods of prevention and education used at Maison d'Izieu.

D. Encouraging the efforts of leaders to discuss within their communities the causes of discrimination and developing strategies to counter those causes⁸

11. OHCHR noted that since December 2022, through the Gandhi-King Global Academy, a series of monthly conversations on religions, beliefs and human rights⁹ had been facilitated for the general public by Religions for Peace, the University for Peace, the United States Institute of Peace, United Nations human rights mechanisms and OHCHR. The series has created a community of practice and peer-to-peer learning with a view to promoting the universality and indivisibility of all human rights, without discrimination on any ground. It included a parallel event during the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in March 2023, at which Bishop Munib Younan, the Honorary President of Religions for Peace, stressed that religious leaders must develop a joint curriculum that allows for a holistic understanding of the similarities and differences of each religion's teachings on

⁷ Ibid., para. 7 (c).

⁸ Ibid., para. 7 (d).

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

gender equality and gender justice, in order to enhance interreligious and intercultural knowledge of gender equality.¹⁰

12. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect referred to its continuing work with religious leaders to support the implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (Fez Plan of Action).¹¹ In July 2022, it held, jointly with Morocco, a high-level event in Fez to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Fez Plan of Action and take stock of its implementation. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and her Office also continued to raise awareness on the dangers of hate speech. For example, on 6 April 2023, the Special Adviser briefed the African Union Peace and Security Council on the importance of tackling hate speech as well as Holocaust and genocide denial during an open session on the prevention of the ideology of hate, genocide and hate crimes in Africa.

E. Speaking out against intolerance, including advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence¹²

13. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect continued to support the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech,¹³ including through engagement with relevant stakeholders and through policy development. On 9 December 2022, the Office launched the Plan of Action to Counter Hate Speech Through Engagement with Sport: The Game Plan,¹⁴ which stems from a partnership with the Eradicate Hate Global Summit Sports Working Group. The Plan of Action is focused not only on addressing incitement to violence and hatred on the basis of religion or belief, but also on positive actions that individuals and sports representatives can take to counter it. The Plan of Action was officially launched by the Secretary-General on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of Genocide and of the Prevention of This Crime. The first regional follow-up summit on the use of the Plan of Action for local actions to counter hate speech was held in Liverpool, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 25 April 2023, hosted by the Liverpool Football Club. In April 2023, the Office, together with the World Jewish Congress, convened a round table for smaller technology and social media companies to engage on the Plan of Action and its implementation. This builds on the annual round tables that the Office has organized with larger social media companies since 2020.

14. During the reporting period, OHCHR worked with various social media platforms to step up efforts to meet their human rights responsibilities under the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. OHCHR 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. On 5 November 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights sent an open letter to the Chief Executive Officer of Twitter, in which he emphasized that freedom of expression stopped at hatred that incited discrimination, hostility or violence. Furthermore, the High Commissioner stressed that Twitter's

¹⁰ See <https://www.rfp.org/religions-for-peace-and-partners-hosted-working-multi-religiously-for-gender-equality-reassessing-the-role-of-education-and-knowledge-in-the-digital-age-during-csw67>.

¹¹ See https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Plan_of_Action_Religious-rev5.pdf.

¹² General Assembly resolution 77/225, para. 7 (e).

¹³ See <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/hate-speech-strategy.shtml>.

¹⁴ See <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/countering-through-sports.shtml>.

content moderation policies should continue to bar such hatred on the platform and that every effort needed to be made to remove such content promptly.¹⁵

15. In September 2022, UNESCO launched a global multi-stakeholder dialogue on the regulation of digital platforms to safeguard freedom of expression and access to information while dealing with hate speech online. In February 2023, UNESCO held the Global Conference “Internet for Trust”, a key forum that brought together more than 4,000 participants from 138 nationalities to discuss the development of guidelines for regulating digital platforms.¹⁶ Since the beginning of this initiative, UNESCO had affirmed the need to ensure the engagement of the multi-stakeholder community in any regulatory process and the need for a rights-based and a risk-management approach to digital platform regulation. UNESCO received more than 4,000 comments and continued the consultations with the objective of launching the final document in the last quarter of 2023.

16. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs noted in its submission that the subject of online hate speech against persons based on religion or belief had been discussed in many sessions of the Internet Governance Forum held from 28 November to 2 December 2022. It added that the issue of freedom of expression in relation to religion, as well as attempts to express critical views on religion that do not constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, had become highly politicized, leading to attacks and threats both online and offline. Many countries referred to offences from general penal codes, laws regulating the Internet, including intermediary liability laws, as well as laws relating to sedition and laws that deal with national security and terrorism. The Department highlighted that the diversity of languages and cultures resulted in hate speech often being a local issue, making it difficult to establish standards for hate speech against persons based on religion or belief.

F. Adopting measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief¹⁷

17. In April 2023, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief underlined that legal provisions addressing incitement must be in line with articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and consider the guidance set out in the Rabat Plan of Action. Furthermore, she noted that the policy framework for combating religious intolerance, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief, outlined in Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 and its follow-up action plan in the Istanbul Process, would also greatly enrich the national laws and policies in this area and bring them in line with international standards.¹⁸

18. In August 2022, the Secretary-General, recalling that pending abolition of the death penalty, States must limit its imposition to the “most serious crimes”, that is, according to the Human Rights Committee,¹⁹ crimes of extreme gravity involving intentional killing, highlighted that the death penalty should never be imposed as a sanction for non-violent conduct such as apostasy and blasphemy (A/77/274, para. 61). On 15 December 2022, the General Assembly expressed deep concern

¹⁵ See https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/press/2022-11-05/22-11-05_Letter_HC_to_Mr_Elon_Musk.pdf.

¹⁶ The draft version of 27 April 2023 is available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384031>.

¹⁷ General Assembly resolution 77/225, para. 7 (f).

¹⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/religion/SR-FORB-CV-Tajikistan-EOM-Statement.docx>.

¹⁹ Human Rights Committee, general comment no. 36, CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 35.

about acts that could amount to extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions committed against persons exercising their rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression and against human rights defenders in all regions of the world (resolution 77/218, fifteenth preambular para.).

19. On 9 May 2023, 17 special procedures mandate holders strongly condemned several executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including of two men based on charges of blasphemy, insulting Islam and the Prophet and promoting atheism.²⁰ They stressed that expression – including criticism of religious leaders or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith that do not constitute advocacy of hatred or incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence – should never be criminalized, let alone result in State-sanctioned executions.

20. The NGO Jubilee Campaign noted that 10 States maintained the death penalty for either apostasy or blasphemy and that the legislation of two States considered criticism of or questioning Islam as apostasy.²¹ Jubilee Campaign also referred to the death sentences of the above-mentioned two men charged for blasphemy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as to the case of a journalist who had been sentenced in Saudi Arabia to 15 years' imprisonment for allegedly making blasphemous posts on anonymous social media accounts.

21. The NGO Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience referred to cases of murder and incitement to violence against Ahmadis in several countries as well as to the persecution of religious dissidents, members of religious minorities or converts through discriminatory laws. It recommended repealing all anti-blasphemy laws and ensuring that domestic laws, policies and practices comply with articles 2, 18, 19, 20 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and integrate the guidance provided in the Rabat Plan of Action.

22. The NGO Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement-UK highlighted concerns expressed by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan against the proposed Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2023, which would increase the punishment for using derogatory remarks against holy persons, noting that the amendments were likely to be weaponized disproportionately against religious minorities and sects, resulting in false first information reports, harassment and persecution.²² On 31 March 2023, four Special Rapporteurs sent a communication to Pakistan concerning rising incidents of incitement to violence against the Ahmadi religious minority, including a speech by a senior cleric in Punjab who allegedly incited physical violence against Ahmadi pregnant women and asserted that decapitation was the punishment for blasphemers.²³

G. Combating denigration and the negative religious stereotyping of persons, as well as incitement to religious hatred, through, inter alia, education and awareness-raising²⁴

23. On 6 March 2023, four Special Rapporteurs and the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide stated that recent incidents of religious intolerance in various countries around the world were a reminder of the need to respect human rights

²⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/iran-un-experts-condemn-recent-executions-urge-moratorium-death-penalty>. See also CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 48.

²¹ See <https://jubileecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/UNGA-Resolution-Proposal.pdf>.

²² See <https://hrcep-web.org/hrcepweb/amendments-to-blasphemy-laws-create-further-room-for-persecution/>. See also <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27980>.

²³ See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27923>.

²⁴ General Assembly resolution 77/225, para. 7 (g).

standards holistically.²⁵ They stressed that increased awareness and education about the indivisible and interdependent nature of international human rights norms was an important investment in prevention. Any advocacy of religious hatred that constituted incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence should be prohibited by law. Political and religious leaders had a crucial role to play in speaking out firmly and promptly against intolerance and hate speech. Pertinent international standards²⁶ clarified the threshold to distinguish between unlawful incitement and morally reprehensible speech, which was more necessary than ever with the amplification of hate speech on social media and the visible consequences of populism in hate speech targeting religious and other minorities. At the same time, the Special Rapporteurs and the Special Adviser recalled that the use of anti-blasphemy and anti-apostasy laws rendered religious or belief minorities, including atheists and dissenters, vulnerable to discrimination and violence.²⁷ Criticism and commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith should not be prevented or punished, as doing so would favour and discriminate between different religions and beliefs (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 48).

24. In December 2022, OHCHR and Equal Rights Trust published a practical guide on developing comprehensive anti-discrimination law at the national level, acting in support of Our Common Agenda (A/75/982, para. 34). The guide probes the interface between anti-discrimination law on the one hand and minority rights on the other, including a chapter on addressing discrimination against religious or belief minorities.²⁸ The guide stresses that international human rights law is intended to protect persons and communities from harm, but that it does not provide protection against ideas that may cause offence, and religions per se are not protected entities for the purposes of human rights law.²⁹ Expressions of intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of persons based on religion or belief should be addressed with positive interventions such as education, awareness-raising, support for victims to enable counter-speech and the dissemination of positive narratives, including through public information campaigns with positive, diversity messaging.³⁰

25. In March 2023, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and UNESCO launched a guide for policymakers on addressing hate speech through education.³¹ The publication is the direct outcome of the Global Education Ministers Conference on the same topic, which set out key recommendations to strengthen education policy and pave the way towards more effective long-term preventive strategies to mitigate the impacts of hate speech.³² The guide serves as a reference tool for policymakers and educators in ensuring that hate speech, online and offline, is effectively addressed and countered in and through education. In doing so, the guide seeks to uphold freedom of expression, through a gender-sensitive and human rights-based approach, with a specific focus on global citizenship education. It further builds on the know-how and tools developed by UNESCO and the United Nations on related topics, including digital citizenship, as well as media and information literacy.

²⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/use-human-rights-frameworks-promote-freedoms-religion-belief-and-expression>.

²⁶ See Human Rights Council resolution 16/18; A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix; and A/HRC/40/58, annexes I and II.

²⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/03/historic-consensus-freedoms-religion-and-expression-risk-say-un-experts>.

²⁸ See https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/2022-11-28/OHCHR_ERT_Protecting_Minority%20Rights_Practical_Guide_web.pdf, pp. 139–153.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³¹ See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384872>.

³² See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379729>.

H. Recognizing the positive role of the debate of ideas and interreligious, interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence³³

26. During the reporting period, the Faith for Rights framework and its peer-to-peer learning methodology were applied in workshops and webinars facilitated by OHCHR together with religious leaders and faith-based organizations, United Nations human rights mechanisms and other partners.³⁴ In October and November 2022, OHCHR and the Faith for Rights Academy organized four workshops with religious leaders and faith-based actors in the United Kingdom. In December 2022, the Gandhi-King Global Academy, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and OHCHR launched the online course “Religions, Beliefs and Human Rights: A ‘Faith for Rights’ Approach”³⁵ addressing the role of religious and faith-based actors in promoting human rights and how the intersection of religion and human rights can facilitate sustainable peace. In February 2023, the Sovereign Order of Malta organized a panel discussion during the Munich Security Conference, at which the speakers, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and OHCHR, encouraged the inclusion of religious leaders in the sphere of international politics in order to increase peace and security everywhere in the world with full respect for human rights.³⁶ In June 2023, OHCHR and the American University of Paris organized hybrid peer-to-peer learning sessions with a thematic focus on addressing gender-based hate speech and the instrumentalization of religion in politics and humanitarian aid.

27. In late August and early September 2022, the OHCHR Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa held a multi-actor, multi-activity advocacy week to raise awareness and stimulate dialogue on addressing hate speech in the region. This included a regional conference on the role of religious leaders and actors in combating hate speech, which brought together representatives of different religious institutions and faith-based organizations from across the Arab region and engaged them in an exchange of knowledge and experiences. The Regional Office also held a two-day youth forum that examined the rise in hate speech in the Middle East and North Africa region, including the root causes of intolerance among young people, as well as their key role in promoting peaceful, diverse and inclusive societies. The participants in the two events concluded that there was a need to increase dialogue among young people from across the region on the harmful impacts of hate speech and stressed the importance of creating safer online and offline spaces to address hate speech.

28. UNAMI reported that in December 2022, the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf, Iraq. They exchanged views on the importance of dialogue, including the Grand Ayatollah’s consistent appeals for mutual respect and unity to prevail in support of diversity and peaceful coexistence. The Mission also noted that it had organized, in the last quarter of 2022, a series of five round tables to promote peaceful coexistence, the protection of minorities and the safe return of internally displaced persons. Over 125 participants comprising various ethnic backgrounds, including Arabs, Armenians, Chaldean Assyrians, Faily Kurds, Iraqis of African descent, Sabeen Mandeans, Turkmens and Yazidis, shared their challenges and recommended solutions. The last round table, on 18 December 2022, also marked the thirtieth anniversary of the

³³ General Assembly resolution 77/225, para. 7 (h).

³⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights>.

³⁵ See <https://www.usip.org/academy/catalog/religions-beliefs-and-human-rights-faith-rights-approach>.

³⁶ See <https://www.orderofmalta.int/press-releases/the-order-of-malta-at-the-munich-security-conference-with-a-panel-on-religion-diplomacy-and-conflict/>.

adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

29. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs reported that the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, UNESCO and the Pan-African Youth Network for a Culture of Peace had implemented from 12 August to 25 November 2022 an initiative to strengthen the civic and political participation of young people in Gabon. Four regional consultations with youth and local opinion makers, and workshops with community radios, were held to create awareness and promote messages against hate speech ahead of the elections in 2023.

I. Ensuring that public functionaries do not discriminate against individuals on the basis of religion or belief³⁷

30. Australia noted that the anti-discrimination laws of most Australian states and territories prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion; however, there were currently no protections against discrimination on the basis of religious belief or activity in federal anti-discrimination law. Thus, the Government announced that it would introduce legislative amendments to prevent faith-based discrimination and vilification during the current term of Parliament. The Government was committed to changing the law to prevent discrimination against people of faith, protect all students from discrimination on any grounds and protect teachers from discrimination at work, while maintaining the right of religious schools to prioritize people of their faith in the selection of staff. In November 2022, the Attorney-General asked the Australian Law Reform Commission to review exemptions for religious educational institutions in federal anti-discrimination law and to consider what changes should be made to federal anti-discrimination laws to reflect the Government's commitments in a way that was consistent with Australia's international human rights obligations. In January 2023, the Australian Law Reform Commission released a consultation paper outlining a number of draft proposals.

31. Saudi Arabia noted that its Human Rights Commission had organized symposiums, workshops and training courses for judges as well as members of the public prosecution and law enforcement, with a view to raising awareness about the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and discussing its implementation. More than 98 training programmes had been held in accordance with the memorandum of understanding signed in 2012 between OHCHR and Saudi Arabia, represented by the Human Rights Commission.

J. Promoting the ability of members of all religious communities to manifest their religion and to contribute openly and on an equal footing to society³⁸

32. The Dominican Republic noted that its General Education Law 66-97 allowed public schools to offer religious and moral education, in accordance with their pedagogical ideology, while always respecting freedom of conscience. In that regard, the Ministry of Education had agreed since 2017 to assume responsibility for funding 134 Protestant evangelical schools, allowing them to continue offering classes on the Protestant evangelical religion in the Dominican Republic.

33. Ecuador reported that according to the Ministry of Women and Human Rights, its register of pastors, women pastors, religious leaders and ministers of worship

³⁷ General Assembly resolution [77/225](#), para. 8 (a).

³⁸ General Assembly resolution [77/225](#), para. 8 (b).

included information on the authorities of 1,522 religious organizations in Ecuador. The Government also indicated that a normative instrument would be issued to regulate more precisely the registration of religious, belief or conscience organizations, with a view to streamlining the process and facilitating registration.

34. The national human rights institution of Burundi (Commission nationale indépendante des droits de l'homme) noted the religious diversity in Burundi, where a total of 768 religious denominations had so far been registered by the Ministry of the Interior, Community Development and Public Safety. The Commission also referred to specific laws that had been adopted to ensure full enjoyment of the right to freedom of worship, including the recent law No. 1/30 of 16 September 2022. Furthermore, the official school curriculum included religious instruction on Catholicism, Protestantism or Islam, with interested pupils being given the opportunity to choose a religion course relating to one of those faiths or, alternatively, an ethics course.

35. The national human rights institution of Hungary (Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights) referred to its appeal to the Constitutional Court against decree No. 12/2014 (IV. 20.) by the Ásotthalom Municipal Council, which had prohibited the activity of a muezzin and the wearing of burqas, niqabs, chadors or burkini in public places. The Commissioner for Fundamental Rights drew the Constitutional Court's attention to the fact that freedom of conscience was a right closely linked to human dignity, which allowed freedom to choose one's ideological convictions. The Constitutional Court ruled that this decree by the Ásotthalom Municipal Council was contrary to the Fundamental Law and therefore annulled it with retroactive effect.

36. In his global update to the Human Rights Council in March 2023, the High Commissioner stated that deliberate provocations, such as recent incidents of burning the Qur'an, were intended to drive wedges between communities, which was dangerous.³⁹ At the Council's urgent debate on 11 July 2023, the High Commissioner noted that speech and inflammatory acts against Muslims, Islamophobia and antisemitism, as well as actions and speech that targeted Christians – or minority groups such as Ahmadis, Baha'is or Yazidis – were manifestations of utter disrespect – offensive, irresponsible and wrong.⁴⁰ He recalled that all people had an equal right to believe, or not to believe, which was fundamental to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He stressed that the limitation of any kind of speech or expression must remain an exception, in particular given that laws limiting speech were often misused by those in power, including to stifle debate on critical issues. Furthermore, any national restrictions to freedom of expression must be formulated so that their sole purpose and outcome were to protect individuals, rather than to shield religious doctrine from critical review.⁴¹

37. On the occasion of International Day to Combat Islamophobia (General Assembly resolution 76/254), the Secretary-General noted that beyond structural, institutional discrimination and the wholesale stigmatization of Muslim communities, Muslims suffered personal attacks, hateful rhetoric and scapegoating.⁴² On 17 March 2023, the Deputy High Commissioner stressed that political and religious leaders also had a crucial role in speaking out firmly against intolerance and making clear that

³⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/03/global-update-high-commissioner-outlines-concerns-over-40-countries>.

⁴⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/07/turk-calls-states-combat-weaponization-religious-differences>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² 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>.

violence could never be tolerated as a response to provocation.⁴³ Furthermore, she provided examples of discrimination in employment, including evidence from several European countries that candidates who openly identified as Muslim on their curriculum vitae received fewer invitations to a job interview compared with other equally qualified candidates with a religiously neutral application.⁴⁴ Muslim women and girls were also subjected to verbal abuse, profanities, physical intimidation and death threats in public spaces, with 96 per cent of female respondents in an Australian survey reporting that they had been targeted while wearing a headscarf (A/HRC/46/30, para. 49). Moreover, the High Commissioner had flagged the widespread and systematic campaign of violence carried out by the Myanmar military that had driven more than 1 million Rohingya Muslims from their homes in Rakhine State in Myanmar to seek refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh.⁴⁵

38. On 11 July 2023, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief highlighted the special procedures' work 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.⁴⁶ She also stressed that religions, beliefs or their followers should not be instrumentalized to incite hatred and violence, for example for electoral purposes or political gains (A/HRC/40/58, annex II, commitment X).

K. Encouraging the representation and meaningful participation of individuals, irrespective of their religion or belief, in all sectors of society⁴⁷

39. In December 2022, the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities held a hybrid summit at the University for Peace in San José. In its outcome document, the summit recommended supporting the systematic inclusion and participation of minorities, including faith-based actors and minority rights defenders, in United Nations efforts aimed at addressing root causes of conflicts. The summit also recommended developing and implementing training of relevant United Nations staff on minority rights and peer-to-peer learning with communities using the Faith for Rights (#Faith4Rights) toolkit, to advance the comprehension of the specific needs, positive contributions and circumstances of minorities, especially in situations of conflict.⁴⁸ In January 2023, more than 100 United Nations personnel participated in a webinar on freedom of expression in the digital age and the Faith for Rights framework, with speakers from the United Nations System Staff College, UNESCO, OHCHR and ARTICLE 19. In March 2023, OHCHR organized a peer-to-peer learning session with staff members in Geneva and field presences, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and current and former minority fellows, who shared experiences on engaging with religious or belief minorities with a Faith for Rights approach.

⁴³ See <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k17/k175fxqbob?kalturaStartTime=1292>.

⁴⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/Islamophobia-AntiMuslim/Regional%20Institutions/EuropeanUnion.pdf>.

⁴⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/06/statement-michelle-bachelet-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights>.

⁴⁶ See https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/HRCDocuments/68/OTH/OTH_3422_87_7443af2c_3697_415c_8e37_14c2e95996a7.docx.

⁴⁷ General Assembly resolution 77/225, para. 8 (c).

⁴⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/un-network/outcome-document-7-december-2022-un-network-racial-disc-protection-minorities-times-crisis-summit.pdf>, pp. 5–6.

40. UNAMI noted that, at the request of political parties in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, it continued to assist in appraising the views of minority communities on the issue of their parliamentary representation. On 12 February 2023, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq engaged with a group of minority representatives in Erbil on issues pertaining to the delimitation and allocation of component seats for the forthcoming regional parliamentary elections.

41. At its fifteenth session, in December 2022, the Forum on Minority Issues recommended that States and the United Nations, through the General Assembly, adopt a resolution on the creation of a permanent forum for minorities as a consultative mechanism for national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and other stakeholders as a platform for building upon and strengthening the protection of the rights of minorities worldwide ([A/HRC/52/71](#), paras. 60–61 and 65).

42. In January 2023, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues invited States, the United Nations and the Human Rights Council to strengthen the Forum on Minority Issues by increasing the number of days on which it meets and the funding for its operations as well as to support the organization of regional forums ([A/HRC/52/27](#), para. 72). Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur urged the United Nations to mainstream and integrate in the training of United Nations staff, where appropriate, especially in its work at the global, regional and country levels, the #Faith4Rights toolkit and noted that its training modules made frequent references to and included strategies aimed at nurturing tolerance and inclusion of religious minorities and protecting their rights (*ibid.*, paras. 33 and 73).

43. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief remarked in her 2023 report to the Human Rights Council that multilateral organizations and States often limited those that they invited as representatives of religious or belief communities in international forums, national consultations, dialogues and ceremonial occasions. While the need to keep numbers manageable was understandable, she flagged that care needed to be taken so that discrimination did not influence the decisions on inclusion and exclusion. Sometimes, invitations were extended to representatives of those religions or religious communities that were the largest numerically, most established or considered the most politically or economically relevant, even if the rationale given was different. The Special Rapporteur stressed that the engagement of representatives of religions or belief systems, religious leaders and communities had to be carried out in an inclusive manner that upheld non-discrimination ([A/HRC/52/38](#), para. 46).

L. Making efforts to counter religious profiling⁴⁹

44. During the forty-first session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, in November 2022, the Kingdom of the Netherlands stated that it was working actively to combat ethnic profiling and had developed an operating framework for professional stop-and-search procedures defining the professional standard of objectivity that the police must meet ([A/HRC/52/16](#), para. 85). Benin welcomed the implementation of the “Police for Everyone” programme aimed at combating ethnic profiling in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (*ibid.*, para. 52). In response to its fourth universal periodic review, the Kingdom of the Netherlands supported the recommendation to scale up efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination and racial profiling as well as the recommendation to guarantee safeguards and judicial oversight in decision-making by public authorities to prevent

⁴⁹ General Assembly resolution [77/225](#), para. 8 (d), which understands religious profiling to be the invidious use of religion as a criterion in conducting questioning, searches and other investigative law enforcement procedures.

bias and discrimination, including racial profiling through the use of semi-automated systems (ibid., paras. 147.61 and 147.66; see also [A/HRC/52/16/Add.1](#), para. 1). Furthermore, the Kingdom of the Netherlands noted the recommendation to take appropriate measures with a view to preventing the practice of racial, ethnic or religious profiling by law enforcement officials and to combating hate-motivated attacks, hate speech and incitement to discrimination or violence on racial, ethnic or religious grounds ([A/HRC/52/16](#), para. 147.62; see also [A/HRC/52/16/Add.1](#), para. 2).

M. Adopting measures and policies to promote full respect for and protection of places of worship and religious sites, cemeteries and shrines⁵⁰

45. The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations continued to lead the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, anchored in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Alliance also continued to promote the global call to action for safe worship on its social media channels and dedicated website.⁵¹ The hashtag #forSafeWorship generated 1.4 million in social media reach in 2022, and the campaign website features videos about places of worship in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Italy, Iraq, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. By sharing these stories, the campaign highlights the universality of places of worship and the unique cultural and historical significance of religious sites across the globe, seeking to inspire greater respect and appreciation for the sites and to encourage communities to work together to protect places of worship and their worshippers from harm.

46. In September 2022, under the Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets, the module “Protection of religious targets against terrorist threats” was launched by several United Nations entities.⁵² Following an overview of key terrorism-related threats and vulnerabilities affecting religious sites, the module explores the specific role that individuals should play in a complex, and often volatile, security environment. It contains a selection of case studies illustrating how key security-related principles, including internationally endorsed recommendations, have been operationalized by Governments, private-sector actors, operators of religious sites and civil society organizations.

47. In the 2022 report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief initiated a critical conversation on obstacles and opportunities facing Indigenous peoples’ freedom of religion or belief ([A/77/514](#)). The Special Rapporteur noted that while “sacred sites” as per article 6 (a) of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (i.e. freedom to establish and maintain places of worship) seemingly applied to manufactured structures, experts argued that protections must also extend to traditional lands that were integral to Indigenous spirituality (ibid., para. 18). The Special Rapporteur recommended that States regularly review and revise their legal and policy frameworks in order to tackle discrimination, undue restrictions on

⁵⁰ General Assembly resolution [77/225](#), para. 9.

⁵¹ See <https://www.forsafeworship.org>.

⁵² United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Office of Counter-Terrorism, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. See <https://www.unaoc.org/2022/09/remarks-unocct-launch-of-5-thematic-modules-to-protect-vulnerable-targets-against-terrorist-threats>.

spiritual manifestations, and impediments to access and use of Indigenous Peoples' lands (ibid., para. 86 (a)).

N. Fostering 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 beliefs⁵³

48. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect continued to respond to several requests from United Nations field entities for support in developing context-specific plans of action on hate speech. In line with the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, the Office also began to provide support to Member States, upon request, on addressing and countering hate speech.

49. The University for Peace noted that its Master of Arts in Religion, Culture and Peace Studies, which was co-sponsored by the Muslim World League, the Pontifical Lateran University and the World Jewish Congress, included courses on promoting freedom of religion or belief and on countering hate speech. In 2023, it organized training sessions for diplomats from Armenia and Mauritania as well as students from Abat Oliba CEU University, including peer-to-peer learning sessions on Faith for Rights that were facilitated by OHCHR. Two books published in 2022 by the University for Peace entitled *Multilateralism, Human Rights and Diplomacy: a Global Perspective*⁵⁴ and *A Missing Piece for Peace: Bringing Together the Right to Peace and Freedom of Conscientious Objection to Military Service*⁵⁵ also considered the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and Human Rights Council on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief.

III. Conclusions and observations

50. **Individuals and communities worldwide continue to face intolerance, discrimination and violence, based on religion or belief. Hate speech, both online and offline, still fuels violence against vulnerable members of society, including religious or belief minorities. The Secretary-General reiterates his call to do more to support victims and examine the conditions that drive intolerance and hate.⁵⁶ Initiatives such as the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights⁵⁷ and the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech are tools that can be used to address these complex and pressing issues.**

51. **As illustrated in the present report, some Member States have taken several measures to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief. The General Assembly has also repeatedly recognized the valuable contribution of people of all religions or beliefs to humanity and the**

⁵³ General Assembly resolution 77/225, para. 10.

⁵⁴ David Fernandez Puyana, ed., *Multilateralism, Human Rights and Diplomacy: a Global Perspective* (Muslim World League and University for Peace, 2022).

⁵⁵ Michael Wiener and David Fernandez Puyana, eds., *A Missing Piece for Peace: Bringing Together the Right to Peace and Freedom of Conscientious Objection to Military Service* (UPEACE Press, San José, 2022).

⁵⁶ See <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-08-22/secretary-generals-message-the-international-day-commemorating-the-victims-of-acts-of-violence-based-religion-or-belief-scroll-down-for-french-version>.

⁵⁷ See https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.

contribution that dialogue among religious groups can make towards an improved awareness and understanding of the common values shared by all humankind. Religious leaders and faith-based actors across the world have been making joint efforts to promote interreligious dialogue and multi-faith action.

52. Yet, members of religious or belief minorities continue to be discriminated against and negatively affected because of their religion or belief. The Secretary-General urges all Member States to redouble their efforts, with the support of the United Nations entities, to ensure the equal protection of everyone from discrimination by adopting comprehensive anti-discrimination laws in conformity with international human rights standards.

53. As noted in previous reports,⁵⁸ women and girls suffer from discrimination on the grounds of both gender and religion or belief and it is important to consider how they are affected by issues such as religious profiling. 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 actions set out in General Assembly resolution 77/225 with respect to women and girls. Any related efforts should be based on a gender analysis of the underlying causes and impacts of intolerance and thus, the responses should be nuanced accordingly. Specific attention should be paid to the experiences, narratives and agency of individuals and groups facing intersectional discrimination based on several grounds, such as ethnicity, migratory status, sex, religion or belief.⁵⁹

54. States and other stakeholders should also advance their understanding and application of the Rabat Plan of Action and its threshold test⁶⁰ for clarifying the scope of speech that contravenes human rights law. Freedom of expression is a foundation for every free and democratic society. However, advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence is one of the exceptions where speech must be prohibited by law.

55. In this context, two concurrent issues require urgent attention, as both are used to silence and persecute people.⁶¹ On the one hand, cases that reach the level of prohibited incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence are often not prosecuted, in particular when marginalized groups are targeted. On the other hand, ambiguous national laws on hate speech have been used to improperly suppress what is perceived as opposition, dissent and criticism. Minorities, journalists and human rights defenders face compounded vulnerability owing to the impunity for incitement to hatred and overbroad national laws. These problems are heightened in electoral contexts.

56. Demonization of the other, disdain for diversity and disregard for human rights are not new challenges; what is new, however, is the speed and proliferation of hate speech online.⁶² The Secretary-General reiterates his call for stronger guardrails, clearer responsibilities and greater transparency in the digital world.⁶³ Embedding human rights guardrails will help to ensure that the

⁵⁸ A/76/164, para. 77; A/75/369, para. 96; and A/74/229, para. 88.

⁵⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/30th-anniversary/2022-09-22/GuidanceNoteonIntersectionality.pdf>, p. 3.

⁶⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/freedom-of-expression>.

⁶¹ A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix, para. 11; see also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/06/un-human-rights-chief-hate-speech-has-no-place-our-world>.

⁶² See <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21838.doc.htm>.

⁶³ See <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-04-14/secretary-generals-remarks-the-international-day-of-reflection-the-1994-genocide-against-the-tutsi-rwanda-%E2%80%9329th-anniversary>.

online space is open, free, safe and inclusive. Governments, regulators, technology companies and the media should counter hate speech while fully respecting freedom of opinion and expression. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Rabat Plan of Action and the Faith for Rights framework and toolkit, as well as general comments and recommendations of the human rights treaty bodies and recommendations of Human Rights Council special procedures mandate holders, provide clear guidance for addressing these issues (A/77/487, para. 61).

57. It is key to anchor strategies on countering hate speech in deep understanding of the local context. Technical fixes and algorithms alone will not suffice. For sustainable progress, all stakeholders need to build trust by addressing broader grievances around exclusion and discrimination and ensuring that the different communities have a say in shaping their future at all levels.

58. Every community, and each minority, must feel that their identity is respected and that they can fully participate in society as a whole.⁶⁴ Human diversity is not a threat, but rather an asset. We must appreciate the richness of our differences, holding fast to our common humanity and dignity.

59. Interfaith harmony and mutual respect should be promoted, in the interest of all communities. Exchanges of lessons learned and promising practices should continue to be promoted, including through the Faith for Rights framework. 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.⁶⁵

60. Education initiatives, positive speech campaigns, research to understand and address root causes, and efforts to promote inclusion and equal rights all have an important role. Peer-to-peer learning and awareness-raising may promote respect and understanding between individuals and communities across religions and beliefs, upholding the dignity of all.

61. Further progress in implementing the actions set forth in General Assembly resolution 77/225 is needed. Such advancement will require the consistent involvement of States, national human rights institutions, United Nations entities, independent experts, technology companies and civil society, including faith-based actors.

⁶⁴ See https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf, p. 3.

⁶⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/07/turk-calls-states-combat-weaponization-religious-differences>.