

Plan of Action for Religious Leaders from Africa to Prevent Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes

Introduction

While the protection of populations and the prevention of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity (atrocity crimes) is primarily the responsibility of States, it is a multilayered endeavor to which different societal actors can make an important contribution. Among them, religious leaders have a fundamental role to play, given their spiritual leadership and influence over their communities and the broader society. When they speak out, their voices are heard and their messages have the power to multiply.

This Plan of Action is the result of two days of consultations among religious leaders from different faiths from the Africa region, as well as faith-based organisations, subject experts, the United Nations and other inter-governmental organisations, to develop a strategy for religious leaders from Africa to prevent and counter incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.

The meeting revealed that incitement to hatred, hostility and violence is prevalent in Africa, as it is in all regions; incitement has preceded and accompanied violence and atrocity crimes in countries affected by conflict and violent extremism, as well as in countries considered to be relatively peaceful. The targets of incitement have included communities defined by their religious and ethnic identity or political affiliation, as well as women.

Through this Plan of Action, religious leaders and actors committed, among other actions, to respect and promote human rights; respond to and counter incitement speech; increase interfaith collaboration; and partner with traditional and new media, as well as with state authorities and education institutions, to prevent and respond to incitement to violence and build communities that support each other, across faiths, and are resilient to incitement to violence.

Recommendations for religious leaders

Protecting and promoting universal human rights

Even if religious leaders and actors adhere to what they consider to be absolute truths, they should

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- Identification and implementation of different prevention tools to be used to address violence and its incitement, including sensitization and mediation;
- Liaison with political, media and security officials on actions aimed at preventing/countering violence and its incitement;
- Periodical monitoring and evaluation of the work of the national observatories.

Education

Based on the belief that education, including education for religious leaders and actors, as well as youth, increases mutual respect, tolerance and understanding and diminishes the risk that individuals could be manipulated for political purposes:

Recommendations for enhancing the education of religious leaders and actors:

- Religious leaders and actors should be trained to diagnose issues related to violence and its incitement, including training on: understanding the risk factors for violence and its incitement; their consequences and impact; as well as possible measures and strategies to prevent and/or counter violence;
- Religious leaders and actors should be trained on intercultural and interreligious communication so as to be enabled

Religious leaders and actors should develop and use alternative and creative methods of talking to young people, in addition to preaching;
Religious leaders and actors should contribute to building the resilience of youth to violent extremism and narratives. In this context, they should engage constructively

that promote violent extremism;

When possible, they should personally engage, and engage early on, with radicalized youth or youth at risk of radicalisation and counter their arguments using religious principles and scriptures;

Religious leaders and actors should establish interfaith
councils to improve intergenerational understanding;

Religious leaders and actors should involve youth in community, sport, cultural and interfaith work;

Religious leaders and actors should identify and train influential youth who can contribute to spreading messages of tolerance and respect among their peers;

States should ratify, domesticate and disseminate information on international treaties relevant to preventing violence and its incitement; they, together with religious leaders and actors, should raise awareness about these treaties and their relevance;

States should ensure implementation of these treaties at the national level;

States should provide political and financial support for religious leaders to implement this Plan of Action at national and local level;

National and local authorities should publicly support, and provide protection for religious leaders who speak out against incitement;

States should support education curricula that include knowledge of world religions, and of their respective ethical frameworks;

State should encourage and support religious diplomatic engagement as a tool to prevent, manage and solve conflicts;

Consolidate and strengthen ongoing multilateral interreligious programs.

Programs conducted under the auspices of the United Nations, African Union and other international Organizations, such as the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and the Alliance for Civilizations, among others, provide a pathway to strengthen international norms of religious pluralism and high-order religious tolerance.

Implementation of the Plan of Action

This Plan of Action should be implemented at continental, regional, national and local level; its implementation should be monitored and evaluated.

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