

Negative Effects Of Terrorism On The Enjoyment Of All Human Rights

I welcome the Advisory Committee's call for additional recommendations on how to prevent the negative effects of heinous acts of terrorism on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, and how to redress, restore and protect these rights in the aftermath of such terrorist acts.

My submission comments upon the steps that can be taken to address the issue of terrorism where it has clear religious connotation and leads to religious persecution.

On August 3, 2014, Daesh attacked Yazidis in Sinjar, Iraq. In just one day thousands of Yazidis were killed or abducted; tens of thousands were forced to flee. As reported by the International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syria Arab Republic (the IICoISAR), more than 3,200 Yazidi women and children have been held in captivity in Syria ever since. The IICoISAR reported that 'men [were] being killed or forced to convert; of women and girls, some as young as nine, sold at market and held in sexual slavery by Daesh fighters; and of boys ripped from their families and forced into Daesh training camps.' Only a few days later, Daesh unleashed its genocidal campaign against Christians in Nineveh Plains and other religious minorities in the region.

Daesh has perpetrated crimes including 'murder, kidnapping, hostage-taking, suicide bombings, enslavement, sale into or otherwise forced marriage, trafficking in persons, rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence, recruitment and use of children, attacks on critical infrastructure, as well as its destruction of cultural heritage, including archaeological sites, and trafficking of cultural property.' The real scope of the atrocities is yet to be established and mass graves continue to be discovered.

Daesh atrocities will haunt the international community for years to come, not only because of the barbarity of the atrocities. The Daesh atrocities are one of the worst mass atrocities perpetrated by a non-state actor. A non-state actor that managed to gain the support of over 40,000 foreign fighters coming from 110 countries. It is indeed unprecedented. As the fifth anniversary of the Daesh attack on Sinjar approaches, it is crucial to consider how the international community responded to the atrocities. How did it act to stop them? How did it assist the victims?

The international community can and must do better in addressing such atrocities, and especially - to prevent them rather than always responding once hundreds of people are killed. Considering the ever-growing level of religiously motivated terrorism worldwide (especially where it amounts to religious persecution), the issue requires a systematic and structured approach. The affirmative steps to stop the perpetrators, to assist the survivors or to prosecute the perpetrators are crucial, but they cannot address the problem where there is a lack of cooperation with other states or among international institutions. Religious persecution must receive adequate international attention as an issue on its own and not in conjunction with other issues. An appropriate action plan to prevent or address religious persecution is urgently required.

One step in the pursuit of the plan would be to establish an official UN-led day commemorating the victims and survivors of religious persecution. Currently, there is no UN-designated day to focus on any aspects of religious freedom or religious persecution. While several states around the world mark October 27 as the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day, this is not a universally recognized annual day and it has no equivalent within the UN system. The proposed **International**

Day Commemorating Victims And Survivors Of Religious Persecution has a narrower scope than that of national commemorations of the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day as it does not focus on all aspects of freedom of religion or belief but has a targeted focus on the issue of religiously motivated persecution. Furthermore, as the very name suggests, the primary subject of the commemorations are the victims and survivors. While religious identity is the target (and so the violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief), the commemoration puts the victims and survivors at the center of attention. It is about their experiences, their stories, their lives: their past, present and the future. There is a lot that states, international institutions and NGOs can learn from victims and survivors of religious persecution to be able to respond to the challenges they face. Learning from their experience, states can also better understand religious persecution in general and so be adequately equipped to prevent it in the future.

The day could be used to raise awareness of the issue of religious persecution and to work on introducing positive steps to combat it, wherever and whenever it occurs. The day should be used to work towards an action plan to adequately address the religious aspect of such mass atrocities as those perpetrated by Daesh. Without acknowledging and addressing the religious character of such atrocities, there will never be an effective response. The day could be commemorated on August 3, the day the fate of the Yazidi community in Sinjar changed forever (together with the fate of other religious minorities in the region). The day should also be used to ensure that the victims and survivors of such mass atrocities should be put first. The survivors should play an active role in any decision making. The memory of the victims should motivate to achieve more clarity in the approach taken. And religious persecution should never be tolerated ever again, independently of the level of persecution, independently from the actor conducting the atrocities, whenever and wherever it occurs. Now is the time for action to prevent similar atrocities in the future.

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