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**Seventy fifth session**

Item 72 (b) of the provisional agenda[[1]](#footnote-1)\*

**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[[2]](#footnote-2)\*\*

Report of the Secretary-General

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

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

2. The report is based on contributions received from 16 Member States[[3]](#footnote-3) in reply to a note verbale sent by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Section II presents actions and initiatives undertaken by States under headings that correspond to the points of the action plan outlined in paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 of the General Assembly resolution 74/164 on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence against persons, based on religion or belief (hereafter the Action Plan). Section III outlines activities undertaken by the United Nations (UN) in support of the implementation of this Action Plan. Section IV provides conclusions on the status of implementation and observations on the way forward.

II. Steps taken by Member States in the implementation of the Action Plan

A. Constitutional and legislative measures

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

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

5. While noting the significance of establishing domestic constitutional and legislative frameworks, ensuring their implementation is even more important, notably through practical actions by Governments and stakeholders to reach victims of discrimination and religious communities and to promote a culture of tolerance and peace domestically.

B. Measures to address violent extremism and radicalization

6. Azerbaijan reported that the State Committee on Religious Associations (SCRA) collaborated with international, regional and non-governmental organizations, as well as experts for the promotion of religious tolerance, the prevention of religious extremism and violence, and the fight against terrorism. It also organised, jointly with the International Organization for Migration Office in Azerbaijan, trainings for professionals on radicalization and violent extremism.

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

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

9. In previous reports,[[4]](#footnote-4) the Secretary-General encouraged States to increase awareness and understanding of violent extremism and radicalization. Measures taken should reflect the principles of inclusiveness and participation, as well as be fully consistent with States’ obligations under international human rights law. They should take into account gender and be adapted to the domestic context. Key concepts related to violent extremism should be clearly defined, particularly when they could potentially trigger measures that might impinge on human rights, for example when the terms “extremism” or “radicalization” are used to cover non-violent activity.[[5]](#footnote-5)

C. Creating collaborative networks to build mutual understanding, promoting dialogue and inspiring constructive action towards shared policy goals and the pursuit of tangible outcomes, such as servicing projects in the fields of education, health, conflict prevention, employment, integration and media education[[6]](#footnote-6)

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

11. Kazakhstan reported that the Ministry of Information and Social Development supported the project of the Association of Religious Associations of Kazakhstan and the US non-governmental organization “LYN Community” to hold round tables on religious freedom and inter-faith dialogue. Round tables were held in Shymkent, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Aktobe in November 2019 and a final round table in Nur-Sultan in February 2020. It added that the relations between the State and religion institutions relied on the model of “religious associations” by which the State seeks to develop a tolerance dialogue between representatives of all religions, while protecting freedom of religion or belief, through regional “Clubs of leaders.”

12. In Mexico, in September 2019, the General Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior launched the National Strategy for the Promotion of Respect and Tolerance for Religious Diversity aimed at promoting religious freedom based on the principle of the secular State. The National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) reported that it held four meetings bringing together representatives of numerous religious communities and participated in the Network of Churches for Peace and the Observatory Church formed by civil organizations of religious nature.

13. Romania reported that the Consultative Council of Religions worked towards the protection and the respect of human life and dignity, manifesting solidarity and cooperation between cults in the spiritual, cultural, educational and social fields. It was also involved in preventing and mediating inter-confessional and interreligious disputes, while rejecting and discouraging any form of extremism.

14. In Sweden, the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime was adopted in 2017, focusing on Afrophobia, Anti-Gypysism, Antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism against the Sámi. The Government agency “Living History Forum” was tasked with coordinating and following up on the National plan. Sweden reported that the Government had allocated SEK 10 million (1.1 million USD) per year in 2020 for the implementation of s the National plan.

15. Switzerland reported that, since 2006, the Swiss Federal Government has held regular exchanges with the Swiss Council of Religions, a platform for dialogue between the Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions. It added that several cantons were active in promoting interreligious dialogue and better mutual understanding between religious communities. At the national level, the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities carried out various activities to build mutual understanding, including interreligious dialogues, debates, forums and projects that brought together children and youth from different religions.

D. Creating an appropriate mechanism within Governments to, inter alia, identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities, and assisting with conflict prevention and mediation[[7]](#footnote-7)

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

17. In Italy, the government appointed Prof. Milena Santerini, Deputy President of the Shoah Memorial of Milan, as the national coordinator for the fight against anti-Semitism in January 2020.

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

19. In Mexico, the CONAPRED is the main governing institution to promote anti-discrimination policy and measures, including combatting discrimination based on religion. The National Discrimination Survey (ENADIS), a joint project of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography and the CONAPRED, generated statistical information on the magnitude, causes and expressions of discrimination, including on the ground of religious beliefs. It also provided information on the social areas, as well as related sociodemographic and cultural factors to inform the design of legislation and public policies.

20. Pakistan reported that the National Commission for Minorities drafted a National Policy on Interfaith Harmony, with special emphasis on safeguarding and promoting minorities’ rights. It added that Interfaith Harmony Committees, comprising members of religious minorities and chaired by high-level Government officers, were established at the district level to promote dialogue and understanding towards diverse perspectives of different communities.

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

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

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

24. Switzerland reported that, in 2018, the Federal Council created a service in the Federal Department of Justice and Police to improve coordination on issues pertaining to religion among relevant bodies, as well as to liaise with cantonal authorities and religious communities. The survey “Vivre Ensemble en Suisse” of the Federal Statistical Office provided information on attitudes towards persons of another religion and experiences of discrimination based on religion. According to the repository of legal decisions related to the criminal provision against racial discrimination, there were 18 cases of discrimination based on religion in 2019, representing 60 percent of total reported cases of racial discrimination.

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

E. Encouraging the training of government officials in effective outreach strategies[[8]](#footnote-8)

26. Mexico reported that the CONAPRED developed an online platform to sensitize, train and educate public servants on non-discrimination. Between February 2019 and April 2020, 2,133 women and 1,232 men completed the online course “Tolerance and diversity of beliefs”, including civil servants from the Federal Public Administration, State Public Administration, Municipal Public Administration, autonomous organisms and judicial and legislative institutions. The course aimed at improving knowledge and capacity of public service to apply the law on the prevention of discrimination, and formulate and implement anti-discrimination policies.

F. Speaking out against intolerance, including advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence[[9]](#footnote-9)

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

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

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

G. Adopting measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief[[10]](#footnote-10)

30. Azerbaijan, Italy, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Poland, Sweden, Pakistan and the Russian Federation submitted comprehensive information about domestic criminal frameworks prohibiting incitement to violence based on religion or belief. Many of the frameworks tackle issues of incitement to racial, national or religious hatred through speech or written media and publications and through the Internet. The laws also cover the establishment of, or participation in, organizations and public meetings that call on to violence or incite religious hatred; the denial of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity; and the linkages between incitement to violence and acts of terrorism. These frameworks provided for criminal processes and usually heavy sentences.

H. Adopting measures against hate crime

31. In Italy the Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination (OSCAD), established under the Ministry of Interior, encourages reporting of hate crime and works towards improving the action of the Italian police agencies in preventing and combating hate crimes.

32. Poland reported that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration in cooperation with the National Police Headquarters conducted monitoring of prejudice motivated crimes and coordinated the implementation of a countrywide “Training against hate crimes for law enforcement officers”. It added that the National Police Headquarters organized trainings for police officers involved in criminal investigation of hate crimes. The National Prosecutor’s Office was tasked with monitoring cases of hate crimes committed to the detriment of a group of people or an individual because of their religious affiliation, among other grounds.

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

I. Understanding the need to combat denigration and negative religious stereotyping of persons, and incitement to religious hatred, by strategizing and harmonizing actions at the local, national, regional and international levels through, inter alia, education and awareness-raising[[11]](#footnote-11)

34. Azerbaijan reported that, in 2020, two courses taught in high school to promote multiculturalism became a compulsory subject, and that dozens of educational activities were held with the participation of members of religious confessions, representatives of government bodies, youth, clergy, education staff, representatives of non-governmental organisations and media people.

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

36. Italy reported that the Observatory against Discrimination in the media and the Internet continued monitoring and analysing potentially discriminatory contents on social networks and media. The National Anti-Discrimination Office (UNAR) continued addressing the phenomenon of discrimination on religious grounds through monitoring and enforcement activities, including through its contact centre. It participated in the research project on hate speech promoted by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and the Centre for Contemporary Jewish Documentation, with the collaboration of the Shoah Memorial Foundation of Milan and the Young Italian Muslims’ Association. It added that, in 2019, the UNAR promoted public initiatives on the occasion of the Holocaust Remembrance Day, as well as several public events, conferences and the visit of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp throughout the year. The Foundation Museum of the Holocaust, jointly with the UNAR, launched the exhibition “The enemy race - Nazi and fascist anti-Semitic propaganda” and organised the screening of the documentary film “Memory: The survivors narrative” for high school students. The Ministry of Education, University and Research in agreement with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities also continued promoting educational activities on the memory of Holocaust.

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

38. Pakistan reported that the National Curriculum Council was reviewing the curriculum and suggesting material to educate children and youth about tolerance, human rights, civic education and democracy. Various initiatives were also undertaken at the provincial levels, including introducing new textbooks in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Sindh Assembly passed a resolution on inclusion of religious textbooks of Hindus in curriculum for Hindu minorities and a committee was established to conduct a third-party review of textbooks to identify negative stereotyping and biases against minority groups. In Baluchistan, the Bureau of Curriculum and Baluchistan Textbook Board were working on the incorporation of Life Skills Based Education concepts, including human rights, in curricula and textbooks. Under the National action plan to counter terrorism and extremism, reforms of Muslim schools were undertaken. The media also contributed to public awareness raising and advocacy towards fostering tolerance, peaceful co-existence and respect for pluralism.

39. In Romania, the broadcasting of programs comprising any form of incitement to hatred on national, racial and religious grounds is prohibited under the law no. 504/2002 on “Audiovisual media” and the National Council of Audiovisual Media is competent to withdraw on this ground the licence for audio-visual activity of media channels.

40. The Russian Federation reported that several activities were carried out, including regional programs for the formation of interethnic and interfaith relations, events promoting communication among young persons of different peoples and religions, and programs and projects of children’s and youth public associations for the of interracial, interethnic and religious harmony. It added that the state-owned print media “Rossiyskaya Gazeta” and the journal “Rodina” contributed to promote interethnic and interfaith relations and prevent conflicts.

41. Sweden reported that the Living History Forum continued carrying out education initiatives against racism and similar forms of hostility for school staff and other public employees. In 2018, it was tasked with promoting journeys of remembrance to Holocaust memorial sites funded by the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism. The Swedish Prime Minister was planning to host an international conference commemorating the Holocaust. It added that the Swedish Media Council worked to improve the skills of children and young persons as media users and to protect them from harmful effects of media; and ran the campaign “No Hate Speech Movement” to increase awareness of racism and similar forms of hostility on the Internet. It also noted that since 2016, the Swedish Research Council is supporting research on racism and discrimination in partnership with the Swedish Research Council for Health and Working Life and Welfare.

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

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

J. Recognizing that the open, constructive and respectful debate and ideas and interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels can play a positive role in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence[[12]](#footnote-12)

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

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

46. Kazakhstan reported that meetings of leaders and representatives of religious associations were held in the framework of the Clubs of leaders of religious associations to exchange on the universal values of faiths and measures taken to preserve and strengthen inter-religious and inter-religious harmony. Since 2003, Kazakhstan has held the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions every three years with the aim to foster a dialogue of cultures and civilizations.

47. Romania reported that the State Secretariat for Religious Cults organized and supported numerous national and international actions with the purpose of promoting interreligious and inter-confessional dialogue, as well as the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

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

K. Taking effective measure to ensure that public functionaries, in the conduct of their public duties, do not discriminate against individuals on the basis of religion or belief[[13]](#footnote-13)

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

50. Mexico reported that the CONAPRED addressed alleged acts of discrimination or omissions attributable to federal public servants in the exercise of their functions through an administrative complaint procedure. Six complaints files were classified as alleged acts of discrimination related to religion between January 2019 and March 2020.

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

52. Romania reported that the Ombudsman was seized *ex officio* with cases regarding discrimination on religious grounds. Following the registration of those cases with the National Council for the Combatting of Discrimination, appropriate sanctions were applied.

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

L. Fostering religious freedom and pluralism by promoting the ability of members of all religious communities to manifest their religion, and to contribute openly and on an equal footing to society[[14]](#footnote-14)

54. Azerbaijan reported that 942 religious communities were registered in Azerbaijan (907 Muslim, 24 Christian, eight Jewish, two Baha'i and one Krishnaite communities) and that the government had created favourable conditions to celebrate religious ceremonies for all religious communities. It added that 2250 mosques, 14 churches and seven synagogues were operating in the country, and that the Islamic religious communities were under the authority of the Caucasian Muslims Board whereas non-Islamic religious associations could be subordinated to religious centres in the Republic of Azerbaijan and outside. Through the reserve fund of the President, the State provided financial assistance to religious communities.

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

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

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

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

59. Mexico reported that the CONAPRED issued congratulation messages in the framework of religious festivities, such as during the month of Ramadan, to show support to religious communities and highlight their importance and contribution to the country's cultural and religious diversity.

60. Romania reported that the State Secretariat for Religious Cults continued supporting events organised by religious denominations, as well as meetings and conferences dedicated to religious dialogue. It added that the new Criminal Code protected religious freedoms through the prohibition of preventing or disturbing the rites of worship practiced freely, as well as of forcing a person to attend religious service or to perform an act related to practicing religious worship.

61. Senegal reported that the Government provided financial and material aid to religious organisations belonging to all religious groups, notably for the maintenance and restauration of places of worship and the organisation of religious events. The Government also provided financial assistance for religious pilgrimages. Remarkable religious events for Muslims and Christians were official public holidays.

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

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

M. Encouraging the representation and meaningful participation of individuals, irrespective of their religion, in all sectors of society[[15]](#footnote-15)

64. Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that concrete cooperation was established between the State and churches for meeting the religious needs of persons in public institutions, including in the armed forces and in prisons. While believers were able to conclude a religious marriage after conclusion of a civil marriage, a religious marriage was not recognized under civil law.

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

66. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that, since 2018, members of religious minorities could stand for Islamic city council elections and five parliamentary seats were allocated to religious minorities. At the level of the city council, it was possible to apply local regulations in accordance with religions of religious minorities in places where the followers of these religious have the majority. In the field of education, there were 93 special religious minority schools and children of religious minorities enjoyed the right to study in all schools. Higher education courses dedicated to the literature and cultural heritage of religious minorities were developed in universities.

67. Pakistan reported that affirmative measures to ensure equal participation of individuals belonging to minorities were in place. Minorities were provided 10 seats in the National Assembly, four in the Senate and proportional representation in the Provincial Assemblies. They have been provided employment quota of 5 percent in Federal Government services and quota proportionate to their population in Provincial Governments. In the field of education, the Government provided scholarships to students belonging to minority groups. Steps were also taken in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the protection of minorities.

68. Romania reported that law no. 504/2002 on audio-visual media provided for ensuring political and social pluralism, as well as cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in the media, in line with fundamental freedoms and human rights.

N. Adopting measures and policies to promote full respect for and protection of places of worship and religious sites, cemeteries and shrines and taking protective measures in cases where they are vulnerable to vandalism or destruction[[16]](#footnote-16)

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

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

O. Strengthening international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs[[17]](#footnote-17)

71. Azerbaijan reported that the SCRA cooperated with similar institutions of Muslim and non-Muslim countries from Turkey, Georgia, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Romania and Kazakhstan.

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

73. Mexico reported that the Director General of Religious Associations and the CONAPRED participated in the event “Creating Roots” of the Sikh Dharma Community of Mexico, supporting the inclusion of Sikhs in Mexican society. It added that the CONAPRED attended the celebration of the 2019 Year of Religious Tolerance at the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates.

74. Turkey reported that it contributed to the work of the UN, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, as well as by collaborating with other States, in efforts to combat discrimination based on religion or belief. On 22 March 2019, Turkey convened an Open-Ended Emergency Meeting of the OIC Executive Committee.

III. Actions taken by the United Nations in support of the implementation of the Action Plan

A. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG)

75. OSAPG continued supporting the implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.[[18]](#footnote-18) OSAPG jointly with the UN Investigative Team to Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) supported the development of the Interfaith Statement on the Victims and Survivors of ISIL that was signed by religious representatives of the main faiths in Iraq and launched on 16 July 2020.

76. The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide continued serving as the focal point on the implementation of the UN Strategy and plan of action on hate speech, [[19]](#footnote-19) in cooperation with the UN Headquarters working group led by the OSAPG and UN field presences. In this context, OSAPG provided support to UN field entities to develop context specific action plans to combat hate speech. On 11 May 2020, the Special Adviser released a ‘Guidance Note on Addressing and Countering COVID-19 related Hate Speech’[[20]](#footnote-20), providing specific recommendations to the UN, Member States, social media and tech companies, media, civil society, religious leaders and other relevant stakeholders. On 2-4 June 2020, OSAPG organised a meeting with tech and social media companies that resulted in recommendations on addressing and countering online hate speech.

77. On 18-19 November 2019, the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect participated in the 7th meeting of the Istanbul Process on “Combatting religious intolerance: Building inclusive and resilient societies and pushing back against incitement to hatred and violence” held in The Hague, Netherlands, where she called for Member States to support measures to foster peaceful, inclusive and just societies and interfaith dialogue.

B. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

78. On 12 September 2019, the Secretary-General launchedthe UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites[[21]](#footnote-21) that provides an action-oriented framework to support relevant stakeholders in preventing attacks against places of worship and strengthening their preparedness and response. The High Representative for the UNAOC is leading in the implementation of the plan.

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

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

80. On 22 June 2020, the Office issued a guidance note on “Racial discrimination in the context of COVID-19 crisis”[[22]](#footnote-22) that also addressed manifestations of religious discrimination and recommended actions to be taken by States, leaders and civil society.

81. On 28 May 2020, the High Commissioner, the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the High Representative for the UNAOC opened the virtual consultation for a “Global Pledge for Action by Religious Actors and Faith-Based Organizations to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Collaboration with the UN”. The High Commissioner urged religious leaders to speak out firmly against intolerance and hate speech, which is targeting multiple minority communities across the world.

82. OHCHR organized regional workshops and webinars on the implementation of the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”[[23]](#footnote-23) and on enhancing civic space and addressing hate speech in social media. In January 2020, OHCHR launched the #Faith4Rights toolkit,[[24]](#footnote-24) which includes 18 learning modules and offers peer-to-peer exercises. OHCHR has been piloting the toolkit online together with Religions for Peace, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

83. On 18 November 2019, the Deputy High Commissioner spoke at the 7th meeting of the Istanbul Process where she reiterated the previous High Commissioner’s call to focus the Istanbul Process on implementation, discussing in an inclusive exchange with civil society what works, and to put in place a solid roadmap.

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

85. OHCHR also expanded its work on antisemitism. Since 2019, it is taking part in meetings of the World Jewish Congress. On the most recent International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, the High Commissioner issued a press statement in which she stressed the importance of human rights education in protecting societies from the mind-set that produced the Nazi Holocaust. OHCHR also facilitated the display of the exhibition “Lest We Forget” at Palais des Nations, Geneva, launched on 24 January 2020. In December 2019, OHCHR co-organised with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief and the World Jewish Congress a workshop for policymakers on “The role of education in addressing anti-Semitism”.

IV. Conclusions and observations on the way forward

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

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

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

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

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

91. **As mentioned in previous reports, it is necessary to holistically implement all points outlined in resolution 74/164 to address the complex, and often sensitive, issues of religious intolerance. In this regard, it would be important for States to take further steps with regard to training government officials in effective outreach strategies, encouraging the efforts of leaders to discuss within their communities the causes of discrimination and addressing religious profiling.**

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

93. **While legal sanctions may be necessary to ensure protection against incitement to hatred, discrimination or acts of violence, it is important to recall that three types of expression should be clearly distinguished: (i) expression that constitutes a criminal offence; (ii) expression that is not criminally punishable, but may justify a civil or administrative sanction; and (iii) expression that does not invoke any legal action but still raises concern in terms of tolerance and respect for the rights of others. Legislation prohibiting the incitement to racial, national and religious hatred should be specific and not overly broad in its scope and application to be consistent with the international standards on freedom of religion or belief and freedom of opinion and expression. States should ensure that there is no impunity where the prosecution and adjudication of such crimes are undertaken. Some useful guidance in this regard is provided by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**[[25]](#footnote-25) **and the Human Rights Committee.**[[26]](#footnote-26) **The Rabat Action Plan and its six-part threshold test also provides some guidance on how to identify the demarcation line between free speech and incitement to hatred.**[[27]](#footnote-27)

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

95. **Speaking out against religious intolerance at the highest level is essential in preventing discrimination and incitement to hatred. The Rabat Plan of Action underscores the collective responsibility of public officials, religious and community leaders and the media to ensure that acts of incitement to hatred are addressed with the appropriate measures, in accordance with international human rights law. The Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”,**[[28]](#footnote-28) **as well as the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes,**[[29]](#footnote-29) **highlight the role and responsibilities of religious leaders and faith-based actors in promoting human rights.**

96. **Further consideration should be given to the multiple forms of discrimination that may affect individuals and groups. As noted in previous reports, women suffer from discrimination on the grounds of both gender and religion or belief.**[[30]](#footnote-30) **It is important to consider how women are affected by issues such as religious profiling, whether they are participating and are meaningfully represented in all parts of society and whether they are able to manifest their religion and contribute openly and on an equal footing with other to society. States are encouraged to include in their future submissions further reference to the gender dimension of discrimination based on religion or belief and the steps taken to implement the Action Plan with respect to women and girls.**

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

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

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

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

101. **As noted in previous reports of the Secretary-General,**[[31]](#footnote-31) **States may want to consider reviewing the reporting process on the implementation of the Action Plan with the aim of reducing the reporting burden and encourage a greater number and geographically more diverse contributions. Given that there are two separate annual reports on the same Action Plan – to the Human Rights Council and to the General** **Assembly – States may wish to consider streamlining the two parallel reporting processes by adjusting the time frames to a biennial period for each of the reports or explore options to ensure that the reporting processes build on each other, either in terms of content or focus. In addition, adding a thematic focus to the report would allow for a more in-depth analysis on one or two elements of the Action Plan. States may further wish to consider inviting other stakeholders to report on the implementation of the Action Plan.**

1. \* A/75/150. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. \*\* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect recent developments. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey. The original texts of all submissions, including those submitted after the deadline, are available for consultation on the OHCHR website at <https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/SitePages/Anti-discrimination%20database.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A/74/229 and A/73/153. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For additional guidance, see A/70/674 and A/HRC/33/29. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A/RES/74/164, para. 7(a). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A/RES/74/164, para. 7(b). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A/RES/74/164, para. 7(c). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A/RES/74/164, para. 7(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A/RES/74/164, para. 7(f). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A/RES/74/164, para. 7(g). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. A/RES/74/164, para. 7(h). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A/RES/74/164, para. 8(a). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A/RES/74/164, para. 8(b). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A/RES/74/164, para. 8(c). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A/RES/74/164, para. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. A/RES/74/164, para. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20 Copy.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20%20Copy.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20 Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Guidance%20on%20COVID-19%20related%20Hate%20Speech.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/12-09-2019-UNAOC-PoA-Religious-Sites.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/COVID-19\_and\_Racial\_Discrimination.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/faith4rights-toolkit.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. General recommendation No. 35 (2013) on combating racist hate speech. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. General comment No. 34 (2011) on the freedoms of opinion and expression. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. A/HRC/22/17/Add. 4, appendix, para. 29. The threshold test and information on the international legal framework are available online in 32 languages: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomOpinion/Articles19-20/Pages/Index.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. A/HRC/40/58, annexes I and II. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20 Advanced%20Copy.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20%20Advanced%20Copy.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. A/74/164, para. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. A/72/381, A/73/153 and A/74/164. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)