

## **International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, 22 August 2020**

GENEVA (21 August 2020) – *UN human rights experts\* today expressed alarm at a sharp rise during the COVID-19 pandemic of hatred directed at religious communities, who are often being portrayed as a threat to public safety and national identity.*

*They called on all governments to combat intolerance, discrimination and violence against individuals based on their religion or belief, and said States must do more to support victims of such violence to rebuild their lives and live free of fear of future incidents. This is their statement for the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief:*

“States must recognize the importance of providing victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief, and members of their families, with appropriate support and assistance in accordance with their obligations under the international human rights law. States must establish a comprehensive and inclusive community-based preventive approach, involving a wide set of actors, including civil society and religious communities, in protecting and supporting the victims who suffer from injustice and serious lack of recourse for remedy or redress.

We are alarmed at the continuing discrimination and violence based on or in the name of religion or belief, which disproportionately affects women and girls, persons belonging to religious, ethnic and racial minorities, non-believers, or individuals with dissenting religious or political views, indigenous peoples, LGBT+ persons as well as migrants and refugees. We also recognize that persons belonging to majority communities are also subject to acts of violence based on religion or belief from non-state actors and state repression.

We have seen the sharp rise in hatred directed at different religious communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, including worrying patterns of antisemitism. Minorities and persons facing intersectional discrimination are often portrayed negatively as undermining societal cohesion or as a threat to public safety and national identity and are frequently subjected to acts of violence.

We are concerned that States may also use religion as a means of shaping and reinforcing narrow concepts of national identity or violating other human rights and undermining gender equality. Not only does this destroy the space for rational

discourse, but it seeks to polarise and homogenise rather than foster respect for diversity and pluralism.

This trend is further exacerbated by the lack of respect for the right to freedom of religion or belief in many parts of the world. We recall that freedom of religion or belief guarantees every individual the right to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one's current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views, as well as the right to retain one's religion or belief.

We stress that freedom of religion or belief and all other human rights, such as the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right of peaceful assembly, are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. States must start the fight against all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief by protecting individuals against incitement to discrimination and violence.

On this International Day commemorating victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief, we stand in solidarity with the victims and survivors. States must do more to support them in rebuilding their lives through redress and rehabilitation processes, which include restitution, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-recurrence. Victims should have full access to public services while being ensured of their security.

We also stress that States must ensure that the victims' voices (and those of their families) are heard; establish a victim-sensitive criminal justice procedure, undertake all necessary steps to ensure victims' security and privacy where necessary; support victims' organizations and associations, and strengthen the protection of victims' rights, while always ensuring a gender perspective.

We call on all States to observe this International Day as established by [UN General Assembly Resolution 73/296](#) and to jointly combat intolerance, discrimination and violence against individuals on the basis of religion or belief."

ENDS

**\*The Experts: Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, [Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#); Mr. Fernand de Varennes, [Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#); Ms. Elizabeth Broderick (Chair), Ms. Melissa Upreti (Vice Chair), Ms. Alda Facio, Ms. Meskerem Geset Techane, Ms. Ivana Radačić, [Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#); Ms. Irene Khan, [Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); Ms. E.**

**Tendayi Achiume**, *Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*; **Ms. Agnes Callamard**, *Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions* and **Mr. Victor Madrigal-Borloz**, *Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity*.

Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the *Special Procedures* of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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