

7th Meeting of the Istanbul Process, 18-19 November 2019:

Building tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies: preventing intolerance, stigmatisation, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief

Theme 1- Proactive approach: building tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies

Breakout groups 1 and 2 – Backgrounder

In line with the broad focus of the title (i.e. addressing root causes and addressing instances of incitement, intolerance and/or discrimination), the 7th Meeting of the Istanbul Process will cover two main themes:

1. Proactive approach: building tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies; and
2. Incitement to religious hatred and violence: pushing back.

Participants at the 7th Meeting of the Istanbul Process will be divided into four breakout groups (two to consider different aspects of theme 1, and two to consider different aspects of theme 2):

Theme 1 – Proactive approach: building tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies

- **Group 1** – Building tolerant and inclusive societies through inter-religious dialogue, social integration and education (paragraphs 5a, 5h of the 16/18 action plan)
- **Group 2** - Preventing negative stereotyping and discrimination in areas such as health, housing, education and employment, including through training of government officials, promoting dialogue with and within communities, awareness-building and media education (paragraphs 5c, 5d, 5g)

Theme 2 – Incitement to religious hatred and violence: pushing back

- **Group 3** – Implementation of paragraphs 5e and 5f of resolution 16/18, and the Rabat Plan of Action (paragraphs 5e and 5f)
- **Group 4** – Working with the media and social media companies (paragraphs 5a and 5g)

Theme 1 – Proactive approach: building tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies

In line with the widely accepted notion that ‘prevention is better than the cure,’ the two breakout groups under this first theme will look at effective national strategies and good practices to promote inclusive and tolerant societies, free from discrimination, stereotyping, hatred and stigmatisation based on religion or belief.

Theme 1 and the two breakout groups under it are premised on an understanding that divisions in society, the marginalisation of certain groups, and radicalisation do not happen overnight. Rather they may be caused by a steady drip of discriminatory/intolerant acts or words over time. Such ‘everyday’ human rights violations and/or abuses might include:

- Steady, daily acts of discrimination or intolerance on the part of public officials;
- Casual comments (especially on the part of government officials or public figures) designed to stigmatise or exclude certain religious or faith-based communities;
- The adoption of public policies that serve to compartmentalise or fragment society along religious (or racial) lines, either by actively discriminating against certain religious or faith-based communities, or by failing to proactively promote inclusivity and integration (e.g. in terms of access to housing, education, employment, health services, or public office);

- Misinformation about, and mistrust between adherents of, different religions or faiths – caused, *inter alia*, by a lack of structured contact and dialogue between different religious or faith-based communities, or by a lack of inclusive religious education; and
- Media coverage that plays to and perpetuates negative stereotypes.

Therefore, the best way to combat intolerance and hatred towards people because of their religion or belief is to take a proactive approach that prevents these daily human rights violations and injustices from happening in the first place.

That means, for example, enacting laws and policies that promote social inclusion, integration, and non-discrimination, including through equal access to public services; fostering greater understanding between and within communities as well as faiths; organising education and awareness-raising programmes that serve to confront misinformation and promote inter-religious understanding and dialogue; and human rights training for public officials and media professionals.

Such policies and practices also hold out the potential to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda ‘leaving no one behind’ (especially SDG16), and to the UN Secretary-General’s ‘prevention agenda.’

The two breakout sessions under this theme will provide a space for government representatives, religious community leaders, NGOs and UN experts to share experiences and good practices in the conception and roll-out of such policies and projects – designed to help build tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies.

Group 1 – Building tolerant and inclusive societies through inter-religious dialogue, social integration and education

Breakout group 1 will provide a space for the exchange of experience and good practice related to laws, policies and projects that take forward the implementation of paragraphs 5a and 5h of the 16/18 action plan:

- 5a. 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 outcomes, such as servicing projects in the fields of education, health, conflict prevention, employment, integration and media education.
- 5h. Recognizing that the open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels, can play a positive role in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence.

Group 2 – Preventing negative stereotyping and discrimination in areas such as health, housing, education and employment, including through training of government officials, promoting dialogue with and within communities, awareness-building and media education

Breakout group 2 will provide a space for the exchange of experience and good practice related to laws, policies and projects that take forward the implementation of paragraphs 5c, 5d and 5g of the 16/18 action plan:

- 5c. Encouraging training of government officials in effective outreach strategies.
- 5d. Encouraging the efforts of leaders to discuss within their communities the causes of discrimination, and evolving strategies to counter these causes.
- 5g. Understanding the need to combat denigration and negative religious stereotyping of persons, as well as incitement to religious hatred, by strategizing and harmonizing actions at the local, national, regional and international levels through, *inter alia*, education and awareness-building.