

**7th meeting of the Istanbul Process, 18-19 November 2019:
Combating religious intolerance: Building inclusive and resilient societies, and
pushing back against incitement to hatred and violence**

The Hague, Kingdom of the Netherlands

Concept note

Background

The main intergovernmental policy framework for combatting religious intolerance against persons based on religion or belief is set down in Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 and its sister resolution at the General Assembly – GA resolution 66/167. Resolutions 16/18 and 66/167 were adopted by consensus in 2011, and hailed by stakeholders from all regions and faiths as an important step forward. After 65 years of often-difficult debates and negotiations at the UN, the twin resolutions elaborated the first and only universally-accepted global policy framework for preventing and combatting intolerance, discrimination, stigmatisation, incitement to violence and violence, on the basis of religion or belief.

The inclusion of an explicit plan of action to combat religious intolerance in the operative paragraphs of the twin resolutions (as well as in later iterations of the texts) is key to understanding their value and importance. What is more, States had the foresight to also put in place a dedicated mechanism of implementation for the action plan: the ‘Istanbul Process.’ Since the launch of the Process in Istanbul, Turkey in July 2011, there have been six expert-level meetings: in Washington (US), London (UK and Canada), Geneva (OIC), Doha (Qatar), Jeddah (OIC), and Singapore. In April 2019, Denmark and the European Union organised a ‘stock taking’ meeting in Geneva, to discuss progress over the course of those six meetings.

More than eight years after the adoption of resolution 16/18 and against a worrying backdrop of heightened religious intolerance worldwide (e.g. recent events in Pittsburgh, Christchurch and Colombo), and with relevant issues and debates (e.g. addressing incitement to hatred and violence, including online) never far from newspaper headlines, driving further progress with the implementation of the plan of action originally set down in Council resolution 16/18 (hereinafter ‘the 16/18 action plan’) is of the utmost importance.

6th meeting of the Istanbul Process, 2016

The 6th meeting of the Istanbul Process, held in Singapore in July 2016, offered an opportunity to bring the Process back to its founding ideals: namely to provide a space for practitioner-led exchanges of good practices, challenges and lessons learnt in the implementation of the 16/18 action plan. The Singapore meeting was also symbolically important because it was the first meeting hosted by a non-Western/non-OIC State. A report of the 6th meeting of the Istanbul Process can be accessed [here](#).

Istanbul Process 'stock-taking' meeting, 2019

In April 2019, the Danish Mission to the UN Office at Geneva, the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva, and the Universal Rights Group (URG) organised an Istanbul Process 'stocktaking exercise.' The meeting sought to, *inter alia*:

- Inform States and other interested stakeholders about the background of the UN's efforts to combat religious intolerance and promote freedom of religion or belief, about the action plan set down in resolutions 16/18 and 66/167, and about the Istanbul Process.
- Consider the current status of the Istanbul Process – opportunities and challenges.
- Look back on the 6th meeting of the Process, as well as on earlier meetings, and reflect on lessons learnt.
- Consider a number of case studies where States have brought changes in line with the 16/18 action plan.

During the meeting, participants encouraged all States to consider hosting future meetings of the Istanbul Process, and called on those meetings to emphasize introspection and self-reflection, implementation and impact, and the practical exchange of ideas and experiences. Potential future hosts were also urged to ensure that meetings of the Istanbul Process are as inclusive as possible, with the broad participation of States from all regions, civil society, relevant UN officials and experts, religious leaders, business representatives and journalists.

A report of the 'stock-taking' meeting can be accessed [here](#).

Concept for the 7th meeting of the Istanbul Process

The 7th meeting of the Istanbul Process will focus on the following broad theme:

Combatting religious intolerance: Building inclusive and resilient societies, and pushing back against incitement to hatred and violence.

In line with this broad focus, the 7th meeting of the Istanbul Process will cover two main subthemes:

- Pro-active approach: building tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies; and
- Incitement to religious hatred and violence: pushing back.

Pro-active approach: building tolerant, inclusive and resilient societies

This 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. It will be premised on the concept of prevention – i.e. on an understanding that it is the steady, daily acts of discrimination and intolerance, the casual comments designed to stigmatise, exclude or marginalise,

and the words and actions of politicians and public officials, that cause the fragmentation of society, marginalisation and, ultimately, radicalisation.

Therefore, the best way to combat religious intolerance and hatred is to take a proactive approach to address these phenomena and prevent human rights violations from happening in the first place, by promoting social inclusion, equality and non-discrimination, and by fostering greater understanding between and within communities as well as faiths. 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.'

This subtheme would take an inclusive look at government policies and strategies, NGO projects, the work of religious community leaders, inter- and intra-religious dialogue, education (including religious education and human rights education) and awareness-raising.

It would cover the following parts 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Incitement to religious hatred and violence: pushing back

The issue of incitement to hatred and violence (often referred to as 'hate speech') has long been at the core of UN debates on religious intolerance and discrimination. Over the past decade, this centrality has been further confirmed by the growing use of the Internet and social media. Today, hateful expression or incitement to violence on the basis of religion or belief can and does spread rapidly around the world, sometimes with terrible consequences.

Yet addressing 'hate speech' is also difficult and complex, especially bearing in mind the importance of protecting freedom of expression, both online and offline, and avoiding undue restrictions. To identify workable solutions, it is important to bring together and work with all relevant stakeholders, including governments, companies (including social media companies), religious communities, journalists, civil society, academics and UN experts, to share different perspectives and exchange good practices. International human rights law, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and other relevant international documents such as Council resolution 16/18 and the Rabat Plan of Action, should be the basis for those discussions and exchanges.

This subtheme would also look at the importance of political and other leaders (e.g. religious community leaders) 'leading by example' by: a) not themselves inciting hatred and violence, and b) speaking out quickly and in a coordinated manner in response to acts of violence in the name of religion. Linked with this, the subtheme would also consider the importance of policymakers and social media companies working together to combat incitement to hatred or violence on-line; and of media professionals acting responsibly and not - wittingly or unwittingly - perpetuating stereotypes, repeating/echoing 'hate speech', or giving prominence to those responsible for acts of violence. Finally, this subtheme would also consider the progress made in implementing the Rabat Plan of Action, including the sharing of national experiences in removing so-called 'blasphemy laws' from the statute book.

The subtheme would cover the following parts of the 16/18 action plan:

- 5a. (See above).
- 5e. Speaking out against intolerance, including advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.
- 5f. Adopting measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief.
- 5g. (See above).

Participation

The 7th meeting will aim to be truly inclusive - bringing together all of those groups whose support and involvement will be crucial if we are to prevent and stamp out acts of religious intolerance and hatred. This includes:

- High-level government representatives from a limited selection of OIC, Western and other States with a key role in the process.
- High-level speakers from OHCHR, the Human Rights Council, the wider UN, OIC, EU, etc.
- Expert-level participants from interested UN member States (around 100 States to be invited based on list of countries that are currently, or have been, a member of the Human Rights Council, plus non-members that have engaged on this issue). States will each be invited to send a maximum of two participants

who are practitioners involved in domestic policies and practices. A 'practitioner' might be, for example: a capital-based government expert or relevant envoy, a representative of a national law enforcement agency, a religious leader, a community leader, a representative from a domestic NGO, an academic, or a member of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI).

- Relevant UN Special Rapporteurs (freedom of religion, freedom of expression).
- Faith and religious community leaders, covering all major faiths and, ideally, each world region.
- Civil society (especially domestic civil society) - NGOs involved in projects to combat religious intolerance, hatred, incitement, etc.
- Relevant businesses (e.g. Facebook).
- Journalists/media professionals (in their capacity as relevant stakeholders).

There will be around 200 participants in total. Please note that to allow for free-flowing and inclusive discussion the meeting will operate under the Chatham House rule.

Limited financial support (for travel, accommodation and travel insurance) will be made available to:

- representatives of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) – maximum one per country;
- representatives of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – maximum one per country; and
- expert speakers from civil society.

Programme

Day 1:

- 08.30-09.30 Registration
- 09.30-09.40 Welcome and introduction
- Introduction by the Chair, H.E. Mr. Jos Douma, Special Envoy for Religion and Belief
(5 min)
- 09.40-10.10 High-level Session
- Welcome remarks by H.E. Stef Blok, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
(10 min)
- H.E. Mr. Shafqat Mahmood, Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Pakistan
(10 min)
- H.E. Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
(10 min)
- 10.10-10.30 Panel Discussion on “Looking Forward: Building Momentum”
- Moderator: H.E. Mr. Jos Douma, Special Envoy for Religion and Belief
- Panellists: H.E. Mr. Stef Blok Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- H.E. Mr. Shafqat Mahmood, Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Pakistan
- H.E. Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- 10.30-10.45 Participants’ group photograph
- 10:45-11.15 Coffee break
- 11.15-12.30 High-level Session (continued)

H.E. Mr. Carlos Mario Foradori, Vice President of the Human Rights Council for GRULAC, and Permanent Representative of the Argentine Republic to the UN and other International Organisations in Geneva
(10 mins)

H.E. Mr. Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights, European Union
(10 min)

Ms. Karen Smith, in her capacity as a representative for the UNSG Strategy and Action Plan against hate speech
(10 mins)

H.E. Ambassador Nassima Baghli, OIC Permanent Observer to the United Nations Office in Geneva, reading the statement of H.E. Dr. Yousef Al Othaimen, Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
(10 min)

Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa, Chairperson of the Islamic Religious Council, Singapore
(10 min)

Ms. Felice Gaer, Executive Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute, United States
(10 min)

12.30-14.00

Lunch

14.00 - 17.30

Breakout sessions

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)

Chair-rapporteur – H.E. Dr. Bahia Tahzib-Lie, Human Rights Ambassador of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands

Discussants - Dr. Ibrahim Salama, Chief, Human Rights Treaties Branch, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Mr. Guilherme Vilela Ribeiro de Carvalho, Director of Promotion and Education in Human Rights of the

Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights,
Brazil

Ms. Giuliana Natale, Director, Democracy, Inclusion
and Religious Freedom, Office of Human Rights,
Freedoms and Inclusion, Global Affairs Canada

Mufti Dr. Aziz ef. Hasanović, President of Meshihat of
Islamic Community, Croatia

Rabbi Lody B. van de Kamp, author and co-founder
of Saïd & Lody, Netherlands

**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)**

Chair-rapporteur – Imam Ani Zonneveld, Founder and President,
Muslims for Progressive Values and Alliance of Inclusive Muslims

Discussants - H.E. Ms Rita French, Deputy Permanent
Representative to the United Nations in Geneva and
International Ambassador for Human Rights, United
Kingdom

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on
Freedom of Religion or Belief

Dr. Mohammed Belekbir, Director of the Center for
Studies and Research in Values, at the Rabita
Mohammedia des Oulémas (Mohammadia League of
Scholars), Morocco

Ms. Myriam Sahraoui, Entrepreneur in Media and
Culture, the Netherlands

**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)**

Chair-rapporteur – Mr. Andrew Smith, Head of UN Advocacy,
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Discussants - Prof. David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on
Freedom of Expression

Mr. Knox Thames, Special Advisor for Religious
Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia,
Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S.
Department of State

The Rev'd Bonnie Evans-Hills, Anglican Priest and
member of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland
inter-faith Theological Advisor Group, UK

Mr. Ahmer Bilal Soofi, Founder and President of
Research Society of International Law, Pakistan

Mr. Farid Ahmed, Christchurch shooting survivor
and senior leader at the Deans Ave Mosque,
New Zealand

**Group 4 - Working with the media and social media
companies (paragraphs 5a and 5g)**

Chair-rapporteur – Ms. Gayatri Khandhadai, Asia Policy Regional
Coordinator, Association for Progressive Communications

Discussants – H.E. Mr. Jean-Christophe Peaucelle, Ambassador,
Adviser for Religious Affairs at the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs and International Development,
France

Ms. Louisa Klingvall, Team Leader, Fundamental
Rights Policy Unit, DG for Justice and Consumers,
European Commission

Mr. Adam Cowden, Policy Associate, Content Policy
Team, Facebook

Mr. Maziar Bahari, Journalist, Author and Filmmaker,
Iran/Canada

Ms. Jolyda Sou, representative of ACWAY (A
Common Word Among the Youth), Cambodia

*A coffee break during the break out group sessions will be held
between 15.15 – 15.45*

17.30 - 19.00 Reception for participants

Day 2:

- 09.00-09.05 Recap of first day by the Chair, H.E. Jos Douma, Special Envoy for Religion and Belief
- 09.05-10.00 Special Session: Connecting the Dots
- Dr. Azza Karam, Coordinator of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development and Secretary General-elect of World Conference of Religions for Peace
(10 mins)
- H.E. Mr. Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, Secretary General, Centre for Interreligious Dialogue (KAICIID)
(10 mins)
- Mr. Kishan Manocha, Senior Adviser on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)
(10 mins)
- Mr. Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Director of Anti-Discrimination, Council of Europe
(10 mins)
- Ms. Erin Morriss, Deputy Head of Mission, New Zealand Embassy to the Netherlands
(10 mins)
- 10.00-12.00 'Marketplace'
- Poster display and various presentations in separate rooms
- Morning tea will be available during the Marketplace
- 10.30-11.15 Side Event Presentation on Gender, Religion and Freedom of Religion and Belief issues: Dr. Azza Karam, Coordinator of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development and Secretary General-elect of World Conference of Religions for Peace
- Note: This presentation will take place in a side room. There will be a sign outside the room.
- 12.00-13.30 Lunch
- 13.30 – 16.00 Plenary
- Reporting back from the break out groups by break-out group rapporteur followed by an open discussion chaired by H.E. Jos Douma, Special Envoy for Religion and Belief

Coffee break in the afternoon as directed by the Chair

16.00 – 16.30

Concluding remarks from the Chair and next steps