

The Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Incitement that could lead to Atrocity Crimes

Fez, Morocco, 24 April 2015

Plan of Action

Following two days of open and constructive discussion between religious leaders, representing different religions and faiths, and representatives of faith based organisation, on actions that could be taken to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, and counter and respond to such incitement when it occurs, participants have proposed that the following actions be included in an Plan of Action.

This Plan of Action will now be discussed at five regional meetings of religious leaders, which will take place over the next year. These consultations will serve to strengthen this Plan of Action, which will be adopted at a plenary meeting of religious leaders, which is planned to take place in 2016.

1. Monitoring and public reporting of incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes

Objective: To reach an **evidence-based diagnostic** on: Who is inciting? When and where? How (medium of communication)? Who is listening? Who is reacting? Why did they react (or not react)? Who are the objects of incitement? What language and terminology is being used? Good diagnosis ensures stronger understanding of the mechanisms of incitement speech that may lead to mass atrocities and thus differentiated and effective response

Possible elements to take into consideration: Context; influence of the speaker; nature and extent of the audience; medium used to communicate incitement, etc.

Recommendations:

- Develop methodology and mechanisms for monitoring
- Develop mechanisms and platforms to monitor incitement
- Conduct research into the origins of hate speech and incitement
- Listen to “victims” of incitement and integrate their perspectives.

2. Developing, speaking out, circulating “alternative” messages or counter-speech

Objectives: (i) To denounce instances of Incitement against all communities, religions or individuals and express solidarity with victims; (ii) Refrain from uttering or disseminating messages of hatred and incitement; (iii) Provide alternative messages; (iv) Bust myths and refute rumours; (v) Plant seeds of doubt, (vi) Fill the communication space.

Types of alternative messages identified by participants:

- Reactive messages; during, before and after crises; during, before and after elections;
- Public symbolic statements/messages / gestures
- Alternative messages using the media, including social media
- Inter-faith alternative messages
- Foundational alternative messages
- Alternative messages formulated in the language of faith rather than generic or abstract narrative

Conditions for the development and delivery of these messages:

- Recognise the importance of personal courage; acknowledge and support individual or institutional courage
- Ensure the safety and empowerment of the leaders delivering counter-messages
- Provide training to religious leaders on nonviolent actions for those who are ready and willing to confront and stand up against incitement in their own communities. This type of capacity increases their legitimacy and credibility.

3. Engaging in dialogue with the speakers and the potential audience

Objectives: Engaging in dialogue with the speakers responsible for incitement and/or the audience tempted to respond to the call for violence that could lead to atrocity crimes;

Activities and recommendations mentioned by participants:

- Dialogues on the basis of religious texts using “superior” religious arguments; the socio-economic conditions of those tempted by or engaging in incitement to violence or acts of violence must be considered;
- Incentives for rehabilitation ought to be identified;
- Social media should be an avenue to approach and engage with those tempted by or engaging with incitement

4. Building and/or revising education, adult education curriculum and capacity-building

Objectives: (i) To instil knowledge and belief on tolerance and non-discrimination; equal citizenship; human rights; (ii) Provide sound/wise religious knowledge and understanding; (iii) Mainstream appreciation of all cultures/religions and an appreciate of the importance of civil co-existence; (iv) Strengthen the religious knowledge of “intermediaries” and gate openers within various religious communities; (v) Address through education and capacity-building cultural attitudes that underpin the use of violence, including sexual violence, and the stigma and shame associated with sexual violence

“Target”: Children and youth, including in religious and educational institutions (from early childhood onwards); religious or communities intermediaries, at community, national and international level; religious “leaders”, including the new generation of leaders.

Recommendations:

- Develop platform of experts at international, national and local level and construct a new kind of “philanthropy”;
- Develop programs on interreligious tolerance for early childhood and primary schools; develop “interfaith” education programs;
- Develop and implement capacity building programs, including on dialogue, peaceful co-existence, social media, media and information literacy

5. Engage in or strengthen inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue and activities

Objectives: Contribute to the culture of dialogue. Ensure inter- and intra-religious dialogue, mutual understanding and respect; develop an inter-faith ideology of communication

Examples mentioned by participants:

- Joint projects at community level e.g. communal social activities; educational exchanges;
- Joint visits to places of worship, joint peace prayers;
- Inter-faith celebrations; Organise inter-faith harmony week;
- Establish websites related to inter-faith activities;
- Build national and international alliances-coalitions between faith organizations who work on Incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes

6. Engage in dialogue on “grievances”

Objectives: Address topics that religious extremists monopolize, including through accurate and nuanced viewpoints, targeting those who may be particularly vulnerable to incitement to atrocity crimes; Address contemporary issues;

7. Strengthen clarity of thinking and messages

Objectives: Acknowledge and respect the right of all to freedom of religion and belief (article 18 of the ICCPR); Ensure impartiality of approach to responses to incitement;

Recommendation: Do not “choose” one’s targets based on their identity;

8. Engage with and seek support from political leaders

Objectives: Develop and maintain engagement between religious and political leadership, as the role of religious leaders is far more effective when it has political support. Religious leaders have an important role to play alongside the politicians and policy makers in resolving conflicts and reducing tensions

Recommendations:

- Advocate for appropriate legal and policy reform (as per the Rabat Plan of Action)
- Ensure participation of state representatives in future meetings related to the role of religious leaders in response to Incitement speech that may lead to mass atrocities

9. Other recommendations

- Ensure a gender perspective in all actions proposed and undertaken
- Undertake a mapping of religious leaders around the world who actively fight against incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes; Highlight their work to the media;
- Establish a network of religious leaders and others who work to prevent and counter incitement that may lead to atrocity crimes;
- Develop a code of ethics for religious journalists (religious media) on how to deal with incitement that may lead to atrocity crimes;
- Document the work of youth in inter-faith centers, engage youth with interreligious community projects.

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