

II. The Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance

*“By acting together to end discrimination, we can lift humanity as a whole. As societies become multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural, we will need greater political, cultural and economic investments in inclusivity and cohesion in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. We can build communities that recognize that diversity is not a source of weakness, it is a source of strength and richness. Let us stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination.”*¹⁶⁴

Introduction

According to a study conducted in 2010, across the world, more than eight in ten persons reported religious affiliation.¹⁶⁵ Religious intolerance and social hostilities are on the rise, particularly against religious minorities.¹⁶⁶ For instance, in recent months, many Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar have been subjected to violence and ethnic cleansing, and have been forced to flee to neighboring Bangladesh in the hundreds of thousands.¹⁶⁷ The number of countries with incidents of religious intolerance towards minorities increased from 24% to 47% from 2007 to 2012, while those with instances of terrorist activities related to religious intolerance have suffered a sharp increase since 2007.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, the number of governments that have exerted force against different religious groups has also increased, from 31% in 2007 to 48% in 2012.¹⁶⁹ Many issues remain in mainstreaming the right to freedom of religion or belief.¹⁷⁰ There is a general lack of empirical data and understanding that the right to religion or belief is intertwined with other human rights issues, including linguistic and religious minority, and refugee issues.¹⁷¹

The protection of religious freedom enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948), is of priority for the vast majority of all persons.¹⁷² The United Nations (UN) General Assembly *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (1981) defines religious intolerance as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment of exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.”¹⁷³ Religious discrimination has been interpreted as “an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations... as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations.”¹⁷⁴

Both intra- and inter-faith religious conflicts pose a threat to peace.¹⁷⁵ Intra-faith tolerance is characterized as cooperation and amicable relations between different denominations of a religion, while inter-faith tolerance focuses on the relationship between different religions.¹⁷⁶ Growing religious intolerance and mistrust of multiculturalism, along with the increased trend in the securitization of human rights (limiting human rights in the name of state

¹⁶⁴ UN Secretary-General, *Remarks at the Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Racial Profiling and Incitement to Hatred, including in the context of migration*, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Pew Research Center, *The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Major Religious Groups as of 2010*, 2012, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ Pew Research Center, *Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High*, 2014, p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ UN General Assembly, *Address by H. E. Sheikh Hasina Hon’ble Prime Minister Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*, 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Pew Research Center, *Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High*, 2014, pp. 10-13.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2016.

¹⁷² UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

¹⁷³ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (A/RES/36/55)*, 1981.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ UNESCO, *Dialogue among Civilizations: Regional Summit on Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Dialogue*, 2004, p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt: Addendum (A/HRC/25/58/Add.1)*, 2013, p. 15.

security), pose serious threats to the international system.¹⁷⁷ Promoting religious tolerance, understanding, and peace, are important methods of eliminating all forms of religious intolerance and fostering sustainable peace.¹⁷⁸

International and Regional Framework

The UDHR protects persons from discrimination on the grounds of religion, acknowledges individuals of age should be allowed to marry regardless of religion or creed, and endorses the right to education that promotes harmony.¹⁷⁹ Article 18 enshrines the right of an individual to freedom of expression or belief, their right to change their beliefs, and “to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”¹⁸⁰ Following the UDHR, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), adopted by the General Assembly in 1966, states that Member States party to the covenant undertake the duty to respect and protect the rights of their citizens, without distinguishing on the basis of religion.¹⁸¹ The ICCPR enshrines the “right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,” including the right to choose and convert to a religion, children’s religious rights, religious rights of parents, and freedom from coercion that would affect an individual’s right to freedom of religion.¹⁸²

On 25 November 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, which established a human rights framework for addressing the freedom of religion.¹⁸³ The declaration expanded on the ICCPR and reassured the right to freedom of religion or belief by calling upon Member States to rescind discriminatory legislation in order to protect the freedom of religion and belief.¹⁸⁴ The General Assembly also adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* in 1992, which focuses on protecting the rights of minorities, advocating that this protection be rooted in national legislation of Member States.¹⁸⁵ More recently, General Assembly resolutions 71/195 and 71/196, both adopted on 19 December 2016, address intolerance related to religion and freedom of religion or belief, which are inextricably linked to one another.¹⁸⁶ General Assembly resolution 71/195 on “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief,” notes the recent increase in hate crimes motivated by religious intolerance, and encourages constructive conversation and interfaith dialogue as a strong proactive measure to eliminate the root causes of religious intolerance.¹⁸⁷ Connected to eliminating religious intolerance is the right to freedom of religion or belief, addressed in General Assembly resolution 71/196, which strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and violence, discrimination and intolerance, and instances where state laws do not protect the freedom of religion.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (1988) acknowledges that attacks directed towards religious buildings constitute a war crime.¹⁸⁹

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) provides a roadmap for the international community to develop and enhance human rights, ensure greater and equal access to basic services, and build capacity for the development of inclusive societies.¹⁹⁰ While none of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly address

¹⁷⁷ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017, p. 12.

¹⁷⁸ UN General Assembly, *Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/RES/71/249)*, 2016.

¹⁷⁹ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (A/RES/36/55)*, 1981.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (A/RES/47/135)*, 1992.

¹⁸⁶ UN General Assembly, *Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief (A/RES/71/195)*, 2016; UN General Assembly, *Freedom of religion or belief (A/RES/71/196)*, 2016.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ UN General Assembly, *Freedom of religion or belief (A/RES/71/196)*, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ UN Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an ICC, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, 1998.

¹⁹⁰ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

religious intolerance, some of their targets note that progress should be made to advance the right to freedom of religion, such as the targets in SDGs 4, 10, 16, and 17.¹⁹¹ These goals, aimed at promoting inclusive education, social cohesion and inclusivity; reducing discriminatory laws and protecting fundamental freedoms, and enhancing state policy capacity by increasing access to high quality data, all play a role in eliminating all forms of religious intolerance.¹⁹²

From 28-29 March 2017, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) held an expert workshop on “Faith for Rights” (F4R), which resulted in the *Beirut Declaration*, outlining five principles for advancing human rights and the right to freedom of religion or belief.¹⁹³ The principles aim to translate international dialogue to local settings in order to combat religious intolerance, avoid the manipulation of faith, and promote F4R partnerships.¹⁹⁴ The *Beirut Declaration* recognizes the importance of religious institutions in protecting human dignity and human rights.¹⁹⁵ It also references the 2012 *Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence*, which focuses on the role of political and religious leaders in denouncing intolerance and violence.¹⁹⁶ The Rabat Plan of Action provides a concrete set of recommendations that cover legislative approaches to combat incitement to “discrimination, hostility, or violence.”¹⁹⁷ Likewise, UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 16/18 of 12 April 2011 titled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief” established the Istanbul Process, which allowed the international system to address religious intolerance through positive policy measures rather than the previous “defamation of religion” approach to eliminating blasphemy laws.¹⁹⁸ Blasphemy laws indicate religious intolerance in a state’s judiciary system and can be described as “the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God.”¹⁹⁹

Role of the International System

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief is mandated to help protect the right to freedom of religion or belief at the national, regional, and international level, to identify all obstacles to the freedom of religion or belief, to review instances where Member States do not uphold the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, and to inform the UN of all abuses of the freedom of religion or belief from a gender perspective.²⁰⁰ The Special Rapporteur’s recent report on the implementation plan for the Istanbul Process notes that many violations of the right to religion or belief are carried out by non-state actors, by terrorist organizations, and by those inspired to commit acts of hatred and religious intolerance.²⁰¹

In 2017, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published the guide *Making textbook content inclusive: A focus on religion, gender, and culture*, which contains a special section on religion.²⁰² The guide acknowledges that education and textbooks can assist in promoting dialogue between faiths, contributing to a learning environment that fosters inclusivity.²⁰³ UNESCO has worked on improving textbook content since 1945, and has seen significant development since then.²⁰⁴ The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ UN OHCHR, *The Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on Faith for Rights: Report and outlook*, 2017.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁹⁶ UN HRC, *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/22/17/Add.4)*, 2013.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ UN HRC, *Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief (A/HRC/RES/16/18)*, 2011; Article 19, *UN HRC Res 16/18: Consolidating Consensus Through Implementation*, 2016, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016, pp. 13-14; United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Respecting Rights? Measuring the World’s Blasphemy Laws*, 2017, p. 1.

²⁰⁰ UN OHCHR, *Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief: Introduction*, 2017.

²⁰¹ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017.

²⁰² UNESCO, *Making textbook content inclusive: A focus on religion, gender, and culture*, 2017.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

Actors for Sustainable Development works with faith-based organizations (FBOs) and different UN organizations to advance development and human rights.²⁰⁵ Additionally, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) published a report titled *Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030*, which links the importance of FBOs within sustainable development, as actors that contribute to social and economic development.²⁰⁶ The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, which reports directly to the UN Secretary-General in an advisory capacity, has recently published the *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes*, a document that is the result of two years of engagement with religious groups.²⁰⁷ The document addresses the critical role religious leaders play in curbing the incitement to violence through hateful speech and provides a blueprint for building inclusive societies.²⁰⁸ Similarly, the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) brings together faith leaders for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and maintains that respecting diversity is essential to building peace.²⁰⁹

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and FBOs have a substantial role to play in promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief, as they are uniquely positioned within society to build networks of trust and promote intercultural dialogue.²¹⁰ The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), established in 2016, unites NGOs, governmental organizations, FBOs, voluntary organizations, as well as secular and non-secular actors, to further SDGs 3, 5, and 16 on health, gender equality, and peace and strong institutions.²¹¹

On a regional level, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has issued guidelines for reviewing legislation to protect the freedom of religion or belief as a measure to reduce religious intolerance.²¹² In 2015, the European Commission held a forum on “Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe.”²¹³ The outcomes of the forum comprised a variety of policy suggestions from participants, including a call for national action plans, increased public awareness, education on human rights and religious diversity, and quality disaggregated data on religion and discrimination on the basis of religion.²¹⁴ Furthermore, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has issued a Programme of Action until 2025 focusing on promoting intercultural dialogue and tolerance in an effort to eliminate discrimination against and misconceptions about Muslims.²¹⁵

State-Induced Religious Intolerance

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has noted a “global pushback on human rights,” some of it at the state level, which has only deepened the chasm of realizing the right to freedom of religion or belief.²¹⁶ For instance, in 2017, Russia’s Supreme Court banned Jehovah’s Witnesses from their country as an attempt to ban extremist religions.²¹⁷ In China, some religions are considered a threat to the state, and there is an increasing number

²⁰⁵ UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development, *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016*, 2016.

²⁰⁶ UNFPA, *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016*, 2016; UNFPA, *Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030*, 2016.

²⁰⁷ UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes*, 2017.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ UNAOC, *Who We Are: About Us*; UNAOC, *The Role of Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding in the Middle East*, 2017.

²¹⁰ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017, p. 20.

²¹¹ International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, *About: Mission Statement*; International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, *How PaRD Works*.

²¹² OSCE, *Guidelines for Review of Legislation Pertaining to Religion or Belief*, 2004.

²¹³ European Commission, “Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating antisemitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe”, 2015.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ OIC, *The OIC – 2025: Programme of Action*, 2016; OIC, *History*, 2017.

²¹⁶ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017.

²¹⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2017 Annual Report: Key findings & Recommendations*, 2017, p. 1.

of regulations placing restrictions on religions.²¹⁸ Comparing these examples of religious intolerance at the state level reveals a host of causes for religious intolerance.²¹⁹

Understanding the root causes of religious intolerance is paramount to creating better policy to eliminate it.²²⁰ Root causes for religious intolerance by governments can be summarized into different categories: intolerance on the basis of religious interpretation; using religion (or secularism) to distinguish national heritage or privilege certain religions; the exercise of control of public and private life; government failure; and an imbalance of power.²²¹ Members of religious minorities are more vulnerable than religious majorities, as they may lack representation or protection and access to decision makers, and may experience discriminatory government policies.²²² The most pervasive form of state-induced religious intolerance is harassment and hostility of government employees towards certain religious minorities.²²³ These include overly burdensome government processes such as requiring special permits for establishing places of worship, or requiring registration or legal authority for religious communities in order for them to operate.²²⁴ Additionally, blasphemy laws, which exist in over 70 countries, serve to penalize the expression of religion or belief when considered blasphemous in nature.²²⁵ Many blasphemy laws contradict international law regarding freedom of religion, belief, or expression, and have been deemed by the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion or belief to be unlawful and unjustifiable in the context of human rights, particularly the right to freedom of religion or belief.²²⁶

The securitization of human rights is an ongoing problem for maintaining religious freedom, as it undermines certain human rights, particularly the right to freedom of religion or belief, through state laws.²²⁷ Some states make declarations that rights must be limited in the name of security, when, in reality, the limitation of those rights does not lessen a security risk, or when the relationship between restricting rights and security is weak or unfounded.²²⁸ General, vague statements made by governments about the restriction of religious freedom in the name of security or order may be in some cases a cover for wanting to halt religious criticism, to maintain control over public and private life, or to discriminate against minority groups.²²⁹

Judiciaries and legislative frameworks within Member States play an important role in the realization of the right to freedom of religion or belief.²³⁰ Defense of secularism in human rights cases has become ubiquitous in countries that have secular laws.²³¹ While the right to freedom of religion or belief is codified in international and human rights laws, the expression of such beliefs is often subject to limitations at the national level.²³² For instance, in the case of *Leyla Şahin v. Turkey*, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that a university in Istanbul had the right to ban headscarves from campus to protect individuals from attacks from extremist groups trying to undo Turkey's laws protecting secularism.²³³ In the case of *Lautsi and Others v. Italy*, crucifixes were allowed in classrooms in Italy by the European Court of Human Rights, while the House of Lords in the United Kingdom in *Begum v. Headteacher* came to the conclusion in 2006 that it was permissible to ban young women from wearing headscarves in a

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-13.

²²² UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017; UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016.

²²³ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Respecting Rights? Measuring the World's Blasphemy Laws*, 2017, p. 3.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*; UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017, pp. 12-13.

²²⁷ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017, p. 12.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016, pp. 9-13.

²³⁰ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017, p. 8.

²³¹ Bennoune, *Secularism and Human Rights: A Contextual Analysis of Headscarves, Religious Expression, and Women's Equality Under International Law*, 2007, p. 373.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 370.

²³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 370-371.

predominantly Muslim school, to ensure that the girls who did not wear headscarves were not threatened.²³⁴ In France, a country-wide ban on veils has been upheld in human rights courts, in order to promote France's religious neutrality.²³⁵ The cumulative impact of these cases may have serious effects for religious minorities and societies, where principles of secularism may be implemented differently in each secular country.²³⁶ In these cases and others, an analysis of the reasons for bans on religious symbols, national law, gender equality, security, human rights law, and other factors may be considered before a decision is made by a court.²³⁷

One of the biggest issues facing the international community is a general lack of quality data on religious intolerance that could be used to establish better policies in the future.²³⁸ The OHCHR published a guide in 2012 to help measure human rights indicators to assist the international community, NGOs, and Member States so that data can be disaggregated and used to develop better policy to address human rights issues.²³⁹ This includes the disaggregation of data by religion, supporting SDG 17 and policy capacity for governments.²⁴⁰

The Role of Non-State Actors

Some of the most brutal acts of religious intolerance are carried out by non-state actors.²⁴¹ For instance, some officials of UN Member States have determined that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has committed acts of violent extremism in the name of religion, ultimately constituting genocide.²⁴² According to the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, militant and terrorist organizations that commit atrocities in the name of religion thrive due to many of the same root causes as government-induced religious intolerance: a general lack of governance and mechanism to enforce laws prohibiting religious intolerance, segregated and splintered societies, systemic discrimination, and corruption.²⁴³

An issue that the international community has failed to address is the role of non-state actors in the wider issue of protecting and promoting human rights.²⁴⁴ Even though non-state actors may perpetrate acts of violence or religious intolerance, it is nonetheless the responsibility of the state to protect and uphold human rights.²⁴⁵ Societal contexts in different parts of the world may not be accommodating to religious diversity or multiplicity of religious interpretation, and governments may explicitly or implicitly endorse marginalization and social ostracism, or other acts of intolerance.²⁴⁶ In some countries, vigilante groups may patrol their neighborhoods at night to ensure compliance with religious norms.²⁴⁷ Non-state actors that engage in acts of religious intolerance may be endorsed, ignored by states, or states may have failed or may lack capacity to address non-state actors effectively.²⁴⁸

The Role of the International Community in Promoting Religious Tolerance

NGOs, FBOs, and broader religious communities have a role to play in promoting religious tolerance and eliminating intolerance, based on their unique position in society to work with communities and people from a place

²³⁴ European Court of Human Rights Press Unit, *Factsheet – Religious symbols and clothing*, 2017, p. 1; Bennoune, *Secularism and Human Rights: A Contextual Analysis of Headscarves, Religious Expression, and Women's Equality Under International Law*, 2007, p. 371.

²³⁵ European Court of Human Rights, *S.A.S. v. France*, Application no. 43835/11, 2014.

²³⁶ European Court of Human Rights Press Unit, *Factsheet – Religious symbols and clothing*, 2017.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016, p. 20; UNFPA, *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016*, 2016.

²³⁹ UN OHCHR, *Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation*, 2012.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016, p. 20.

²⁴² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2017 Annual Report: Key findings & Recommendations*, 2017, p. 1.

²⁴³ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016, pp. 17-18.

²⁴⁴ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (A/HRC/28/66)*, 2014, p. 13.

²⁴⁵ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016, p. 18.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.; UNFPA, *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016*, 2016.

²⁴⁸ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016, p. 18.

of trust.²⁴⁹ The Women’s Task Force of the Parliament of the World’s Religions helps to support women’s leadership in faith movements, and ensures women’s voices are heard in discussions relating to the promotion of human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.²⁵⁰ The UN has launched the “United Nations Free & Equal Campaign,” which seeks to celebrate love and diversity, and which is supported by religious leaders around the world.²⁵¹ This campaign helps contest messages of intolerance on the basis of religion or belief.²⁵² In 2016, the Special Rapporteur, in conjunction with the organization Muslims for Progressive Values, organized and facilitated a conference on the right to freedom of religion or belief and sexuality.²⁵³ The conference explored the intersectionality of diversity characteristics and attempted to maintain a holistic view of human rights and human dignity.²⁵⁴ The conference also explored the idea that religion is not static and unchanging, and that diverse populations must be respectfully brought into discussions on promoting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons.²⁵⁵ Muslims for Progressive Values calls on the international Muslim community to engage in critical conversations about their religion, the acceptance of diversity, and respect for universal human rights.²⁵⁶ If FBOs and religious institutions advocated for peace, acceptance of diversity, and human rights, this would have a significant impact on religious tolerance around the world.²⁵⁷

Conclusion

There is a high interest from the international community and broader UN system to work alongside FBOs and NGOs to promote the freedom of religion or belief, human rights, and the SDGs in order to eliminate religious intolerance.²⁵⁸ While there is some information on the root causes of religious intolerance, and the mechanisms available to further understand religious intolerance around the world, it is impossible to capture every example of religious intolerance.²⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the international system has an opportunity to dedicate its efforts in a high-level strategy to address religious intolerance.²⁶⁰ Addressing religious intolerance is a primary concern for the new Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, as is operationalizing the implementation of positive policy measures, the Rabat Plan of Action, and HRC resolution 16/18.²⁶¹

Further Research

Moving forward with their research, delegates should consider question such as: How can the international community reinvigorate the implementation of the Rabat Plan of Action and HRC resolution 16/18? How can the UN leverage existing partnerships and networks to advance the SDGs and the right to freedom of religion or belief? What are the important intersections in human rights that are not properly addressed in legal and judiciary systems? How can measurements and data collection on religious intolerance be improved in order to support better policy development and implementation? How to best mainstream the right to freedom of religion and belief? How might the international community support education for all human rights?

²⁴⁹ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017, p. 20; UNFPA, *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016*, 2016.

²⁵⁰ Parliament of the World’s Religions, *What is the Parliament’s Women’s Task Force?*; United States Commission on International Religious Freedoms, *Women and Religious Freedom: Synergies and Opportunities*, 2017.

²⁵¹ UN Free & Equal Campaign, *About UN Free & Equal*, 2017.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Sonneveld, *Conference Summary: Freedom of Religion and Belief and Sexuality*, 2016.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

²⁵⁶ Muslims for Progressive Values, *About MPV: Collective Identity*, 2017.

²⁵⁷ UNFPA, *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016*, 2016; Pew Research Center, *The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Major Religious Groups as of 2010, 2012*, p. 10.

²⁵⁸ UNFPA, *Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030*, 2016; International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, *About: Mission Statement*; UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development, *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016*, 2016.

²⁵⁹ UN General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance (A/71/269)*, 2016.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

²⁶¹ UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*, 2017, p. 7.

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Article 19. (2016). *UN HRC Res 16/18: Consolidating Consensus Through Implementation*. Retrieved 19 September 2017 from: [https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38262/16_18_briefing_EN--online-version-\(hyperlinked\)-.pdf](https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38262/16_18_briefing_EN--online-version-(hyperlinked)-.pdf)

Article 19 is a registered charity and advocacy organization that works with organizations like the UN, OSCE, Amnesty International, and governments around the world to promote the freedom of expression. This briefing provides an in-depth analysis and explanation of HRC resolution 16/18 and its importance, as well as the key components for implementing the Rabat Plan of Action. Delegates will find this source useful when looking for recommendations for further action to reducing religious intolerance, and for furthering their understanding of the Rabat Plan of Action. This source also explains why limiting expression of opinions and beliefs should only be kept as a last resort for governments when limiting the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2017). *The Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on Faith for Rights: Report and outlook*. Retrieved 14 July 2017 from: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/Faith4Rights.pdf>

In March 2017, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights hosted cross-disciplinary and interfaith meetings on the relationship between the development of human rights and religion. During the Beirut meeting, the participants expanded on the Rabat Plan of Action and created the Beirut Declaration, along with 18 commitments to peace, harmony, and the development and advancement of human rights. This outcome document will help delegates understand the most current discussions related to human dignity, universal human rights, and religion. This source outlines the philosophy that the protection of human dignity is enshrined in religious beliefs, and acknowledges the importance of international human rights instruments to that end.

United Nations, General Assembly, Thirty-sixth session. (1981). *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (A/RES/36/55)*. Adopted on the report of the Third Committee (A/37/590). Retrieved 14 July 2017 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/36/55>

In 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. The declaration clarifies the scope of rights related to religion and belief, and provides context for all subsequent resolutions on the freedom of religion or belief. Delegates will find this source useful as it is essential for understanding the responsibilities of the international community to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief, and to reduce discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Retrieved 16 July 2017 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>

Delegates will find the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development an excellent place to begin research on how human rights and sustainable development are complementary. Delegates will find SDGs 4, 10, 16, and 17 of particular interest for promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief. The SDGs provide a roadmap for sustainable development and set specific targets to be reached by 2030. Promoting the right to the freedom of religion or belief and eliminating all forms of religious intolerance will be essential for the realization of the SDGs.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-first session. (2016). *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance: Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (A/71/269)*. Retrieved 16 July 2017 from: <http://undocs.org/A/71/269>

This 2016 report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to the General Assembly outlines the importance of a universal approach to freedom of religion or belief. The report emphasizes inclusivity, the complex nature of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and the importance of equality. The report provides important context for the root causes of religious intolerance, as well as injustices and violations of the right to religion or belief. Delegates will find the discussion of state- and non-state-induced religious intolerance helpful in their research and in categorizing types of religious intolerance.

United Nations, Human Rights Council. (2013). *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Addendum (A/HRC/22/17/Add.4)*. Retrieved 19 July 2017 from: <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/22/17/Add.4>

The addendum to the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights contains an overview of the concrete actions established through the Rabat Plan of Action. Delegates will find this report useful, as the Rabat Plan of Action is cited often as part of a solution for eliminating religious intolerance due to its universality and clear plan for implementation at the state level. The report presents a succinct summary of OHCHR's regional expert workshop meetings, exploring legal and legislative barriers that enforce religious hatred, and the culmination of those findings. It also provides a legal and legislative background for supporting religious freedom that is essential in the prohibition of incitement to national, racial, or religious hatred.

United Nations, Human Rights Council. (2017). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief (A/HRC/34/50)*. Retrieved 14 July 2017 from: <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/34/50>

This report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief provides an overview of the new mandate holder's approach to his position as the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. The report focuses on modern challenges related to implementing the right to freedom of religion or belief. The Special Rapporteur proposes an agenda for implementing this right, as well as a comprehensive framework for how the Special Rapporteur interacts with other components of the UN system. Focusing on addressing common and damaging misconceptions about the right to freedom of religion or belief, and proposing solutions and future work methods, this report will provide a guide for navigating the current state of the right to the freedom of religion or belief.

United Nations Population Fund. (2016). *Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors in 2016: Report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved 28 August 2017 from: http://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge_Center/Annual_Report_IATF_on_Religion_and_Development_2016.pdf

Delegates will find this source useful when beginning their research, as it provides critical information on how UN bodies interact with FBOs to promote sustainable development, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Organizations for Sustainable Development represents an innovative UN body that is attempting to leverage non-state actors in order to pursue an agenda that promotes sustainability as well as human rights. This report compiles information about the involvement of UN bodies with FBOs, and provides references for exploring the international framework for religion, peace, and sustainable development.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedoms. (2017). *2017 Annual Report: Key findings & Recommendations*. Retrieved 28 August 2017 from: <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/KeyFindingsRecommendations.2017AnnualReport.pdf>

This report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedoms contains a broad overview of countries that have restrictions on the freedom of religion or belief, and catalogs countries according to their level of religious intolerance. Delegates will find this source to be useful when researching countries that struggle to promote the right to freedom of religion or belief. This report shows the evolution over time of Member States that have been placed on Tier 1 – the states with the most instances of intolerance – as states of particular concern.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedoms. (2017). *Respecting Rights? Measuring the World's Blasphemy Laws*. Retrieved 28 August 2017 from: <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Blasphemy%20Laws%20Report.pdf>

Delegates will find that this report contains definitions for and information on Member States that have blasphemy laws. This source also cites specific blasphemy laws. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief believes blasphemy laws to be restrictive and antithetical to universal human rights. By understanding blasphemy laws, delegates can assess whether the Member State they are representing has legislation that is restrictive of the freedom of religion or belief. Important sections for review are Part IV and the Annex, which detail the findings of the report.

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