

Plan of Action for religious leaders/actors from the Asia-Pacific region to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes

INTRODUCTION

Atrocity crimes are usually preceded by incitement to violence that originates in the form of a warning sign and a trigger for atrocity crimes. Incitement can both be finding the means to diffuse hate speech, or preventing it from reaching its target audience and presenting alternative messages may help in preventing and curbing the violence that can lead to atrocity crimes.

With this objective in mind, the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, in conjunction with International Dialogue Center (KAICIID) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), held a meeting on 6-7 December 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand, on "The Role of Religious Leaders from the Asia-Pacific region in Preventing Incitement that could lead to Atrocity Crimes." The meeting brought together some thirty religious leaders and actors representing different religions and faith traditions, as well as representatives of faith based organizations from various countries from the Asia-Pacific region, including from India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to develop a regional strategy to prevent incitement, working individually and collectively.

The Bangkok meeting was the fifth and last in a series of regional meetings convened by the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect as follow-up to a meeting of religious leaders from around the world that was held on 24 April 2015 in Fez, Morocco. The outcome of this meeting was a Plan of Action for the prevention of incitement and the Fez Declaration, a declaration of principles. At the regional meetings, the input of religious leaders from across all regions has been sought on the Fez Plan of Action and religious leaders have developed context-specific strategies for implementing the Fez Plan of Action.

The consultations that took place in Bangkok clearly showed that a number of factors contribute to the spread of hate speech and incitement to violence in the Asia-Pacific region, including lack of knowledge and understanding of different religions, patterns of discrimination, and unresolved historic and current grievances. It was also clear from the discussions how much religious leaders and actors in the region are already doing to prevent hostility and hate speech and promote inter-faith cooperation.

Participants were encouraged to work individually and together to implement the recommendations in this document at the community, national, regional and global levels, and to integrate these recommendations in the context of existing activities, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, religious leaders and actors have a particular role to play in exposing corruption and bad governance and holding politicians and world leaders accountable. This constant engagement is essential.

Inter-religious collaboration on religious and non-religious issues

Interfaith and intra-faith dialogues should include all faiths, religions and beliefs, including those who subscribe to secular ideologies;

In the context of interreligious dialogue initiatives, religious leaders and actors should engage in persistent and ongoing dialogue with religious groups, including with those that hold extremist views;

Religious leaders and actors should organize national and regional exchanges of experiences and good practices, including in relation to justice and reconciliation processes;

Religious leaders and actors should support the initiatives of other religious leaders and actors who speak out in support of human rights and justice, and of oppressed communities, in particular;

Religious leaders from different faiths and religions should invite each other to address faith communities in their respective places of worship;

Religious leaders and actors belonging to different faiths and beliefs can come together on common human issues that transcend religion, such as economic and social justice, nuclear disarmament, and accessibility to education, health, water and sanitation. This can raise the quality of life of more humans and convey powerful messages of interreligious collaboration and solidarity, especially in contexts where religious tensions are high.

Preventing and curbing hate speech and incitement to violence

Religious leaders and actors should find ways to counter hate speech and incitement to violence by all actors, whether within and outside the country,

They can be more preventive than responsive in their approach and disseminate positive and affirmative speech to counteract hate and incitement speech;

Religious leaders and actors should engage with all communities and audiences, in

Religious leaders and actors should be trained in the use of social media to effectively contribute to the inclusion of constructive messages in public discourse.

Engaging communities, including youth

Building links with youth groups is essential to build trust with this important sector of the population. Therefore, religious leaders and actors should engage more with youth in general, including through sports and cultural activities, as well as through social media, universities and civic institutions. As open learning spaces, the latter contexts can play a central role in fostering interreligious understanding and dialogue and in building bridges among different cultures and religions;

Religious leaders, academics and social workers can challenge national authorities to tackle deep seated animosity and grievances in their communities;

They should also consider the important roles that both women and men can play in propagating or fighting prejudice and violence;

Creative initiatives that promote justice, peace, unity, mutual respect and harmony, such as the Walk of Hope ², should be supported.

Strengthening collaboration with traditional and new media

Religious leaders and actors should monitor the output of traditional and new media and encourage them to respect and apply ethical standards of journalism. The media should be challenged to act as agents of change for the common good;

Religious leaders and actors should work actively

States within the Asia-Pacific region could share good practices on engagement with religious groups ;