



Press Release: Ministerial Side-Event held during the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly: “Implementing the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes”

On 25 September the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, and the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, together with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, co-hosted a ministerial side-event during the opening of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The event focused on the role of religious leaders and actors in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes and on ensuring broad support for implementation of the [Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes](#) (the “Plan of Action”).

The event was opened by H.E. Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher of the Holy See, the United Nations Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, and the OIC Director and Chief of Profession Governance and Peacebuilding at the United Nations Development Programme, Mr. Charles Chauvel. Dr. Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, moderated the discussion.

Opening remarks were followed by an esteemed panel of speakers, which included the United Nations Population Fund Senior Advisor on Culture and Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, Ms. Azza Karam; the Deputy Secretary-General of the KAICIID Dialogue Center, Ambassador Alvaro Albacete; the Deputy Secretary General of Religions for Peace International, Rev. Kyoichi Sugino; the Director of Interfaith Peacebuilding at the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy & Conflict Resolution, Ms. Hind Kabawat; the General Secretary of the South Sudan Council of Churches, Father James Oyet Latansio; Secretary-General of the Global interfaith WASH Alliance and President of the Divine Shakti Foundation, Dr. Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswatiji; and the Director of the Institute of Semitic Studies of Princeton University and the Chair of the Board of the Ethiopian Peace and Development Center, Dr. Ephraim Isaac.

Mr. Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, discussed the importance of the Plan of Action, noting that, “This Plan of Action is a pioneering document. It is the first to engage with religious leaders and actors to develop context specific strategies to prevent incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes. I believe its dissemination and implementation could deeply contribute not only to the prevention of atrocity crimes but also to other key agendas of the United Nations that seek to prevent violent extremism, promote the inclusion of women and youth and build peaceful, just and inclusive societies.”

During the meeting, co-hosts discussed the unique contribution of religious leaders and actors to the prevention of incitement and mass atrocity crimes.

H.E. Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher asserted that, “a profound reflection on the nature of faith and on its consequences can be something good for the international community, for the implementation of humanitarian law, and for the promotion of human rights.”

Ms. Azza Karam emphasized the broad roles of religious leaders and actors in implementing the plan emphasizing, “Faith actors are critical peacemakers when they work as part of the broader civil society together with their secular counterparts. Their strength is in their ability to speak across the divides rather than as the only moral agents.”

While states have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from atrocity crimes, other actors can contribute to preventing these crimes and their incitement. In the context of today's event, Dr. Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, noted that, "Religion can be used to denigrate, incite and divide people, but religious leaders can also help end hate speech and intolerance. In keeping with the principle of the Responsibility to Protect, we recognize that religious leaders, faith-based organizations and community-based religious actors have an indispensable role to play in mediating conflict and preventing mass atrocity crimes."

On 14 July 2017 the United Nations Secretary-General launched the "Plan of Action" at an event in New York and urged its widest possible dissemination and implementation which he said "can help to save lives, reduce suffering, and realize our shared vision of peaceful, inclusive and just societies in which diversity is valued and the rights of all individuals are protected." The purpose of yesterday's meeting was to secure broad ownership and engagement from different actors at national, regional and international levels for the implementation of the Plan.