



The 5th Anniversary of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (Fez Plan of Action)

Tacking stock and planning ahead

Fez, Kingdom of Morocco, 20-21 July

Outcome document

Introduction

The Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (Fez Plan of Action) is the result of two years of consultations that began in Fez, Kingdom of Morocco, with leaders from different faiths and religions around the world, under the leadership of the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and the Kingdom of Morocco. It was launched on 14 July 2017 by the UN Secretary-General who urged “the widest possible dissemination and implementation of this Plan of Action, which can help 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 Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (Fez Plan of Action) aims at responding to increasing trends of incitement by engaging religious leaders and actors, including women and youth, and civil society representatives.

The Fez Plan of Action consists of a set of options and tools for actions that religious leaders and actors can take to prevent and counter incitement to violence in situations at risk of atrocity crimes¹ – including by engaging in dialogue with those who express radical views; countering hate speech, both online and offline, through unequivocal messages; as well as supporting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, education and activities that uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms and promote cultural diversity and values of moderation and acceptance. It is being implemented globally by many religious leaders and faith-based organizations and plays a paramount role in the prevention of atrocity crimes globally. The General Assembly took note of the Fez Plan of Action in two recent resolutions, namely A/RES/73/328 (2019) and A/75/ 309 (2021) that were presented to the United Nations by the Kingdom of Morocco. Both resolutions promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue to counter and address hate speech.

¹ Genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

General Assembly resolution 75/309, under the leadership of the Kingdom of Morocco, adopted by consensus on 21 July 2021 proclaimed 18th June as the **International Day for Countering Hate speech which is observed annually**. The resolution “invited all Member States, organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, other international and regional organizations and civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, individuals and other relevant stakeholders to observe the International Day for Countering Hate Speech.”

On 17 June, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and the Kingdom of Morocco held a joint **High-Level side event on the “Role of education to address the root causes of hate speech and advance inclusion, non-discrimination and peace”**. Speakers acknowledged the transformative power of education as a fundamental tool to address the root causes and drivers of hate speech, and to promote peaceful, inclusive, and just societies.

General Assembly resolution 75/309 is important as hate speech remains unabated, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, fueled by trends of dis/misinformation, both offline and online. Hate speech is particularly harmful in societies that have experienced or are at risk of violence. If left unchallenged, it can lead to genocide and other atrocities, as during the Holocaust, in Rwanda (1994), and in Srebrenica (1995). In recent years, social media platforms and news outlets have contributed to faster and wider propagation of hate speech, though the latter is not circumscribed only to online space. It has brought havoc in societies with limited or non-existent online control and guidance and is equally strident in traditional media, at community meetings, political rallies and in places of worship.

Hate speech, in all its forms and manifestation, and whether online or offline, is divisive and reduces the space for dialogue, coexistence, acceptance and social harmony. Thus, addressing, and countering hatred trends require inclusive sustained engagement through global, national, and local initiatives.

Conclusions of the meeting`

On 20-21 July OSAPG and the Kingdom of Morocco organized a High-level Symposium in Fez to celebrate the 5th Anniversary of the Fez Plan of Action. Participants included prominent national and international religious leaders and actors representing Islam, Judaism Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Humanism, and the Sikh and Bahai communities, high representative of Moroccan government institutions and senior United Nations officials. The consultations and sessions aimed at taking stock of the implementation of the Fez Plan of Action in the last five years, identifying good practices and lessons learned, and discussing the way forward. The main conclusions of the discussion are highlighted below:

The status of the matter

The Fez Plan of Action:

- Is a pioneering document, the first of its kind, stressing the role and contribution of religious leaders and actors to peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development. It is fully embedded in international human rights principals
- It calls religious leaders and actors to define atrocity crimes prevention strategies that are embedded in the specific contexts they operate and are connected to existing early warning and rapid response mechanisms as well as diplomatic and fact-finding efforts.
- Has proved to play a key role in developing and enhancing interdisciplinary and cross-cultural skills aimed at addressing specific social issues, including those related to politics, society, communication, education, and inter-faith dialogue.
- The Fez Plan of Action provides a space to encounter “the other”. By bringing together religious leaders and actors from different religions and faiths, it serves to break down stereotypes and overcome mistrust. It also serves to develop knowledge and partnerships that the different actors involved can benefit from.
- It contributes to enhance the civic responsibility and participation of religious leaders and to unite them to prevent and counter incitement to violence. Moreover, it helps to develop cross-sector and transnational opportunities for dialogue, experience sharing, and trust-building.
- It has been implemented across the five continents and continues to provide entry points for the prevention of atrocity crimes in the most political sensitive and challenging situations.

Challenges in implementation

- Structures and resources required to take implementation of the Fez Plan of Action forward are lacking in some contexts.
- In some situations, government institutions are weak or not supportive.
- At times, religious leaders and actors do not receive the support of their religious authorities and structures; in other circumstances, participation in this process can pose a challenge to religious authorities, structures, and popular opinion.
- Involvement in the process has made some religious leaders and actors vulnerable in their home communities. Indeed, diversity and inclusivity are easier to talk about at the global than at the local level, where grievances manifest themselves more easily and more is at stake.
- There is shortage of funds to implement the Fez Plan of Action

Way forward

- Allocate greater efforts and resources to directly support implementation of the Fez Plan of Action and uphold the role and work of religious leaders and actors in preventing and countering incitement to violence in situations at risk of atrocity crimes and therefore foster peaceful, inclusive, and just societies.
- Build on existing structures and initiatives, while investing in new ideas, aiming at strengthening and ensuring gaps are filled.
- Strengthen co-operation through working with a team that translates policies, structures, and in multi-track diplomacy of atrocity-prevention agendas and monitoring and evaluation.
- Work closely with international human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council and the Treaty Bodies, as well as with regional human rights mechanisms, to support implementation of the Fez Plan of Action.
- Work with the Human Rights Council to strengthen obligations to prevent Genocide, with particular focus on activities aimed at raising awareness of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the realization of educational programs and projects that contribute to the prevention of Genocide.
- Also strengthen collaboration with UN field entities, including political and peace keeping missions, as well as UN Country Teams to foster implementation at national and local level. Engage and fully support civil society actors and faith-based organizations to continue playing a paramount role in implementing the Fez Plan of Action.
- Encourage community participation and ownership of human rights agendas including by identifying religious leaders and actors who can be agents of positive transformation from within the society itself.
- Pay special attention to women and youth, as they bring on board different perspectives and experiences and are often more vulnerable to violence including in situations at risk of atrocity crimes or left out of peacemaking and peacebuilding processes. Women and youth are to be engaged and consulted in all activities, from inception to implementation.
- Keep United Nations Member States fully engaged and supportive of the Fez Plan of Action. General Assembly resolutions A/RES/73/328 (2019) and A/75/309 (2021) on “Promoting Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and Tolerance in Countering Hate Speech” demonstrate Member States’ commitments on engaging religious actors to address and counter hate speech, including forms thereof that could lead to atrocity crimes. The Fez Plan of Action offers a good basis for engagement in this regard.
- Map implementation efforts of the Fez Plan of Action.
- Document the Fez Plan of Action process through film, animation, case studies of good practices, and other methods for wider sharing and dissemination.
- Provide technical assistance and capacity building to tech and social media companies to strengthen their capacity in support of the Fez Plan of Action. The UN should also, strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) and and tech and

social media companies' capacity to work with each other so that CSOs with localized contextual understanding can support monitoring and safely promote alternative positive narratives on these online platforms.

- Translate widely the Fez Plan of Action (beyond available languages French, Arabic and Spanish, Slovenian, Hindi, Serbo-Croat, and Bangladeshi) and ensure accessibility to people with disabilities to increase the outreach and impact of the Fez Plan of Action in local contexts, where it is needed the most.
- Adapt tools and toolkits drawn upon and/or developed to implement the Fez Plan of Action to local contexts. Support the inclusion of the Fez Plan of Action in development of educational curricula for all educational levels, aimed at promoting a culture of mutual understanding and prevention from a young age.
- Support interreligious and intercultural as well Intra and inter-faith_dialogue, as all are equally important in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.
- Support the development of skills for religious leaders and actors on negotiation, mediation of identity-related conflicts, and disarmament of armed groups to provide contextual and sustainable solutions.
- Explore innovative interfaith approaches on implementation of the Fez Plan of Action.
- Organize meetings with regional groups of the General Assembly to increase understanding and knowledge of Fez Plan of Action.
- Revitalize the Group of Friends on the Fez Plan of Action in partnership with the Kingdom of Morocco.

Engagement and partnership must be based on trust with due diligence and contextual analysis at the core. Engagement and partnership frameworks must be meaningful and take into consideration the safety and unintended security risks of the efforts. For example, condemning extremist narratives and groups could make religious actors a target. Moreover, it is critical to not essentialize or co-opt these actors into positions beyond their traditional roles (such as a security actors) as this can have damaging impacts including loss of trust and legitimacy in the community they operate.